To improve the detection of illicit substances being transported to remote / Indigenous communities utilising Police dogs

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Introduction:

The purpose of this Churchill Fellowship was to research and understand best practise in relation to training Police dogs in order to improve the detection of illicit substances being transported to remote / Indigenous communities utilising Police dogs.

I have already submitted a 5 year strategic plan to the Executive Leadership Group of the Northern Territory Police recommending the implementation of several training methodologies learned from my Churchill Fellowship.

This project would not have been possible without the contribution of the many experienced Police dog trainers that were interviewed. Many of the trainers, with 30 plus years of working and training Police dogs, were willing to share their invaluable knowledge. I thank them for their dedication, passion, patience, and understanding and for making me feel so welcome. From my experience with Australian Police dog handlers and trainers they are a unique blend of people with extreme passion for their job and this is no different overseas. The immense satisfaction of training an animal (Police dog) and harnessing their natural instincts to assist law enforcement agencies in the location of offenders, drugs, explosives, missing and or dead people is as fulfilling as any job could possibly be.

I wish to thank the Churchill Fellowship for this incredible opportunity. The memories and knowledge gained is invaluable. I would also like to thank the NT Police association for their support and a special “thankyou” to my family for their wonderful support in allowing me to follow a true passion of mine.
Executive Summary

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Project Description:

The purpose of this Churchill Fellowship was to research dog training methodologies in order to improve the detection of illicit substances being transported to remote/Indigenous communities utilising Police dogs.

Highlights:

- Visiting the Royal Canadian Mounted Police dog training centre in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada. The professionalism of all the training staff, development officers and the puppy development program. The timing of my visit in regards to all the training courses the training centre was running.

- Visiting the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Canine Program Headquarters in El Paso, Texas. The professionalism, commitment and dedication of all the training staff involved in such a large area of border control. Over 1500 dogs and handlers.

- Spending a training day with the New Mexico state Police dog squad. Watching their detection dogs and tactical dogs in action.

- Visiting the Surrey Police dog training school. A truly international dog training school as they were training dog handlers from Latvia and Lithuania to become Instructors. The success of their development and breeding program.

- Spending a day on patrol with the London City Police dog squad. Assisting the Met Police with the execution of a drug search warrant utilising the drug detection dogs.
Dissemination and Implementation:

Dissemination and implementation will be through a report covering a 5 year strategic plan for the Executive Leadership Group of the NT Police. This Fellowship report will be placed onto the NT Police website and emailed through to all the Officers In Charge of all the Australasian Police dog squads.
Program:

25th April – 8th May 2013

- Royal Canadian Police dog training centre
- Senior Sergeant Dave WILSON (OIC of the training centre) / Sergeant Tom SMITH (Head Instructor)

9th May 2013 – 17th May 2013

- U.S. Customs and Border Protection Canine Program Headquarters
- Gregory L. Kurupas – Assistant Chief Patrol Agent – CBP Canine program
- Rob LUKASON – Training Operations Supervisor and editor for the Police K9 magazine
- Carl Lorentzen – Course development instructor
- Miguel V. Mendez – Field Canine Enforcement trainer / instructor

19th May 2013 – 1st June 2013 – United Kingdom

- 20th May – 22nd May
  - Thames Valley Police dog training school
    - Paul Whitty – Training Manager
- 23rd May 2013 – 30th May 2013
  - Surrey Police Dog Training School
    - John Best – Training manager
- 31st May 2013
  - London City Police dog squad
    - Operational deployment in Tottenham assisting the Met Police
Main Body

Background

I have been involved with working and training Police dogs for 17 years now including almost 6 years in the Royal Australian Air Force as a Military Working dog handler. Up until 2004 the Northern Territory Police Force had never had a dog squad. In 2004 I was instrumental in commencing drug detection dog operations for the NT Police. Myself and Senior Constable Richard OBRIEN were trained by the Australian Customs Detection Dog instructors and hit the road running with Drug Detection dogs Monte and Scent. Our core business was to intercept illegal substances being transported to the remote communities of the NT.

Immediate success followed with significant drug seizures and the apprehension of criminals supplying drugs to the remote communities.

Within 3 years the NT Police expanded the dog operations unit to another 2 drug detection dogs and handlers in Alice Springs followed by another 2 drug detection dogs and handlers in Katherine a couple of years later.

The impact the detection dogs had on the supply of drugs to remote communities was amazing even to the extent that a bounty was placed on the heads of the dogs by outlaw gangs. Nothing ever happened but that definitely highlighted the impact the dogs were having.

The NT Police have now expanded to 8 drug detection dogs Territory wide and 7 General Purpose Police dogs Territory wide. I have obtained my instructors qualifications in both drug detection dogs and General purpose dogs. I have always been driven to succeed and improve the NT Police dog operations and to be involved as much as possible with the other Police dog jurisdictions Australia wide.
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) dog training centre.

My timing for this visit was impeccable. During my visit there were 2 novice General Purpose Police dog courses operating. Each course had 4 students and 1 instructor. An 85 day course that included training the dogs to track, criminal work, handler protection, building and bush searches, agility and basic obedience.

The course also trained the dogs to locate drugs or explosives. Already this was a different way of training compared to most Police dog jurisdictions in Australasia. The RCMP train all their General Purpose dogs to locate Cannabis, Hashish, Cocaine, Ecstasy, Methamphetamine and Heroin or an assortment of explosives. Australasian Police dog jurisdictions, in general, have a specialist dog for detection work eg Labrador, Springer Spaniel and German Shepherds as GP dogs.

Of note was the “wall” used for imprinting new dogs on the drug odours. The “wall” is exactly that, with pigeon holes where the dogs are directed to search. Behind a pigeon hole will be a quantity of drugs or explosives eg Cannabis. The dog indicates the presence of the drug and is rewarded by a remote control system that shoots a ball out of the hole the dog just indicated on. An excellent device for focusing the dog on the odour, for imprinting new odours and for teaching a conditioned response such at the “SIT”.

Other courses that were running included

- A re-train course. This course is designed for experienced handlers and new dogs. A minimum of 30 days is required to complete the course.

- A re-team course. This course is designed for an experienced handler and an experienced / already trained dog. There is no minimum time period for this course however assessment style levels must be reached before being deployed operationally. Operational handlers and dogs will also join this course to correct any perceived problems being experienced by the handler.

I was able to join all the courses at different stages. At one stage I was allocated a drug detection dog to work that had been returned to the training centre with some detection issues. I had the fortune of rectifying his issues and I believe he is now operational again.
The RCMP dog squad has a total of 140 operational General Purpose Police dogs. Their disciplines include

- Tracking
- Obedience
- Agitation work including handler protection
- Agility
- Drugs or explosives (of note is the fact that the RCMP dog squad isn’t allowed to use their dogs to search / screen people)
- Building and bush searching

**Breeding Program:**

The most important aspect of the RCMP that I noted was the success of the breeding program and the development of the dogs prior to training. This gives the RCMP an opportunity to assess the dogs abilities prior to commencing a full course. Any dogs that don’t make the grade are sold to respectable members of the public or other Police members. The benefit of this system is that money and time are not wasted on dogs that won’t make a Police dog.

**Handler selection:**

Generally for a new handler to have been selected into the RCMP dog squad they have gone through some rigorous testing. A fitness and psychologist test applies however the biggest test is their passion for becoming a handler. At minimum they must have raised and developed 3 to 5 pups from the breeding program. Thus taking the average applicant 4 to 5 years to be accepted. Positions are extremely sort after and in my mind if you are prepared to put 4 to 5 years of your own time into developing pups for the RCMP then you are certainly going to be a passionate and dedicated handler.

**Interdiction dogs:**

The RCMP, along with their General Purpose dogs, have trained approximately 15 interdiction drug detection dogs. These dogs are attached to the traffic units around the country of Canada. The traffic members that have these dogs are in effect part time handlers as their primary role is still traffic enforcement.
Overview – RCMP:

In my opinion the RCMP dog squad is an extremely well run, professional organisation. They have been in existence some 75 years and are no doubt are up there with leading the way for Police dog training across the world. My research here has given me some great idea’s for the NT Police dog unit in it’s quest to become bigger and better as a Police dog jurisdiction.

The RCMP dog squad also deal with very similar issues that the NT Police deal with in relation to illicit substances being transported and supplied into their indigenous / remote communities. Having a duel purpose trained dog (General Purpose dog trained to locate illicit substances) is a great idea when responding to Police related jobs in the communities.
**U.S. Customs and Border Protection Canine Enforcement Program**

Based in El Paso, Texas, right on the border of Mexico. Probably the biggest eye opener of the Fellowship. The Canine program is massive and I don’t believe their would be law enforcement agency in the world with the following figures.

- The U.S. Customs and Border protection has over 1500 operational Police dogs under its command. The majority of those are drug detection dogs however there is 15 patrol dogs (General Purpose dogs) and 5 Tactically trained patrol dogs.

- The canine enforcement program purchases between 300 and 400 potential Police dogs each year from vendors in Europe for between $8,000 and $16,000 US dollars each.

- The training complex can kennel in excess of 250 dogs at any given time.

- A recent study into the value of the operational dogs placed a figure of approximately 2.5 million dollars each

- Each drug detection dog is also trained to locate human concealments. At one Port of Entry alone there are between 800 and a 1000 people per day illegally entering the USA.

During my visit to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Canine Enforcement Program I was able to participate in the following courses and training days.

- Instructor student course. Two members, one from the New Mexico state Police K9 unit, were being trained as Instructors. Their primary role was to prepare dogs for the coming novice drug detection dog course and to assist in the delivery of lessons.

- A novice drug detection course comprising of 41 students, 10 instructors and 55 dogs.

- A training day with the New Mexico state Police K9 unit. The drug detection dogs were training on vehicles with 3 different odours to locate. All external searches of the vehicles. 1 dog was a duel purpose dog (Patrol dog also trained to locate drugs – similar to how the RCMP dog squad work) There was also several Explosive detection dogs training to locate 5 different odours around vehicles.
The U.S. Customs and Border Protection Canine Enforcement Program utilises the 4 in 1 method of imprinting their drug detection dogs. They also utilise the “wall” for imprinting odour and assisting with focus training. The 4 in 1 method is quite simply – four drug odours used at once. When the trainer is satisfied that the dog is indicating on the odours he will then remove three and train on one until all the drugs have been rotated and indicated on by the dog.

**Operational Deployments:**

I was extremely fortunate to join an operational dog deployment at the Port of Entry into El Paso from Mexico. Whilst I was there a dog indicated on a vehicle he and his handler were searching. Just on the indication alone the subject vehicle was seized and the driver apprehended. An examination of the vehicle located 84 pounds of Cannabis under a false floor under the driver’s foot rest and seat area.

I also participated in the people screening side of an operational deployment. Any person walking across from Mexico is subjected to be screened by a drug detection dog. There were no indications on this day however I was set up with drug odour as a training run for a handler and his dog. The dog successfully indicated in me and was rewarded accordingly.

2 days prior to this at the I 10 point of entry in New Mexico $240,000 cash was located by a drug detection dog inside a concealed apartment within a vehicle. Money was drug tainted and therefore had an odour on it that the dog was trained to locate. And on that same day 34 pounds of Cocaine was located inside the dash of a vehicle by a drug detection dog. The dogs are no doubt an invaluable asset to the protection of the USA borders from the drug cartel in Mexico. But it is estimated that only 5% of the drugs that are smuggled into the USA are actually located.

The dogs are extremely proficient in searching vehicles, buses and trucks. They are generally used in the primary search area for external searching. Once a dog has indicated the presence of an odour he is trained to locate the said vehicle, bus or truck is moved to the secondary search area. The dog will once again search the vehicle both externally and internally to pin point the source of the odour.
Quality Assurance:

As with any law enforcement agency operating with Police dogs it is essential that Quality Assurance measures are in place and adhered to all times. Regular training days and annual assessments are a part of the Quality Assurance measures placed on the dogs and handlers attached to the US Customs and Border Protection Canine Enforcement Program.

Overview – U.S. Customs and Border Protection Canine Enforcement Program:

In my opinion the U.S Customs and Border Protection Canine Enforcement Program is an extremely professional organisation. There is no doubt the dogs are worth their weight in gold and it is a credit to the training staff that the product they are producing is so successful. Once again is quite evident how important it is to develop dogs prior to a course commencing. The selection process of dogs and handlers for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Canine Enforcement Program is extremely rigorous as well. I was supplied with a copy of their training manuals including their selection processes for dogs and handlers.

Their drug detection dogs are extremely good at what they do. I have obtained a manual produced by Rob LUKASON (Operations Training Supervisor) covering all the possible concealment methods in a vehicle. I will disseminate this to all the Police dog jurisdictions with the permission of Rob.
United Kingdom – Thames Valley Police dog training school:

The Thames Valley Police dog training school wasn’t actually on my original agenda. But due to making some contacts along the way I made the effort to spend a few days at their Police dog training school and it was well worth it.

Besides being one of the most picturesque Police dog training schools I had ever seen, quite a large amalgamation was being implemented with the South Hampton Police dog squad. So in effect the Thames Valley Police dog squad went from around 70 dogs to 140 overnight causing some grief in relation to logistics etc.

Day 1 - after meeting the training staff I joined an initial explosives detection dog course in week 3. They were all experienced handlers training new dogs. During the day we also tested some new dogs in preparation for another training course later in the year. The UK use bricks instead of the “wall” for imprinting odours. Basically they are just bessa bricks lined up with the target odour placed inside the brick. The dog indicates on the odour and is rewarded by the handler or a third person. The bricks also create correct focus and a conditioned response such as the “SIT”

Day 2 - I drove to South Hampton and joined the refresher course. This course is a compulsory 5 day training course for experienced handlers and dogs. If they are only a single handler eg work one dog, the handler is required to attend two 5 day refresher courses per year. If the handler is a duel handler eg works two dogs with different disciplines the handler and dog are required to attend one block of 5 days per dog per year. A total of 16 training days must be achieved each year to go towards the annual accreditation. As a handler, if you haven’t reached your mandatory training days you cannot do the annual accreditation and then take the risk of being made non-operational.

Day 3 - I joined the initial General Purpose dog course at week 10. Training included tracking, building searches (passive and aggressive), stick attacks and property search. From there I was driven to Surrey.

Overview – Thames Valley Police dog training school:

I witnessed first hand what difficulties arise during the amalgamation of 2 Police dog forces without much forethought from the hierarchy. The logistics in such a move really needs to be well thought out. Having said that the training is very professional and the idea of the
mandatory training days and refresher courses is definitely an idea I intend on adopting in
the NT Police and disseminating that information to my colleagues in the other Australian
Police dog jurisdictions.

**Surrey Police dog training school:**

The Surrey Police dog training school has a reputation worldwide as an international Police
dog training school. I witnessed that on my first day when I joined the Drug Dog Instructors
Course. There were 2 dog handlers from Latvia, 2 handlers from Lithuania and 2 handlers
from the London City Police dog squad. All being trained up as drug dog Instructors.

We attended at the Gatwick International airport for passive screening (people screening
with drug detection dogs) There were 5 dogs being trained but 2 of those dogs had actually
being trained up for the NSW Police dog squad. So on behalf of the NSW Police dog squad I
did some training with their dogs.

During my time at the Surrey Police dog training school I joined the following courses

- Drug Dog Instructors Course

- Conducted an operational shift with a Surrey Police dog handler – John SALMON.
  John is a duel handler who handles a General Purpose Police dog and a victim
  recovery dog. Although the evening was relatively quiet we did attend a job where a
  body had been located in the woods, The body had been there for some time, approximately 2 years in the end, the result of a suicide. Only parts of the body
  were located so the intention was to send in a victim recovery dog the next day in
  hope of finding the other remains.

- Conducted training with a victim recovery dog

- Joined a General Purpose dog course at week 8

- Joined a drug dog initial course / instructor’s course where the new dogs on course
  were imprinted on Amphetamine utilising the besser bricks.
Breeding Program – Surrey Police dog training school:

The Surrey Police has an excellent, well established breeding program. A puppy raising scheme and a development scheme are in all in place as well. Hence the quality of dogs being produced by the Surrey Police is exceptional. Once again this outlines the major benefits of breeding for self sufficiency in producing top line, quality Police dogs.

Overview – Surrey Police dog training school:

I didn’t get to spend as much time as I wanted with the Surrey Police dog squad due to public holidays and their 10 hour roster which in effect allowed them to work only 4 days a week.

The time I did spend with the training staff was excellent. I was shown how all the training drugs are signed in and out of the drug vaults, the imprinting of new detection using the besser bricks, and even using the besser bricks for experienced / operational dogs to achieve better focus.

The Surrey Police dog raining school have also implemented the mandatory training days prior to sitting an accreditation. They also have the refresher courses and it is definitely the way to go as a quality assurance measure.
Conclusion:

The Winston Churchill Fellowship was truly an amazing experience. The Fellowship gave me an opportunity to expand my knowledge within the Police dog training world and to make international contacts. It also confirmed that all Police dog law enforcement agencies are in the same business of utilising dogs to locate offenders, lost people, drugs, explosives, victims of foul play – its just how we all get there that is slightly different. The principles of Police dog training are quite similar world wide.

There was quite a difference in which dog training equipment can be used by each country. For example the Canadians and the Americans can use electric collars for positive training purposes. In the UK you aren’t allowed to electric collars and or pinch collars for the training of dogs. If used correctly and under the guidance of experienced trainers all training equipment is safe and an invaluable tool. The UK is extremely strict on the use of certain training equipment and this has an effect on what dog they can train for the completion of a course. Credit where credit is due, they still produce excellent Police dogs in all disciplines.

The major outcome of my Fellowship was the importance of continuation training for Police dogs, documenting all evidence pertaining to training, mandatory training days including the 5 day refresher courses, annual accreditations (quality assurance measures) and expanding your dog’s detection parameters to aid in the success of their discipline.
**Recommendations:**

The following recommendations will be made.

- For the NT Police – a 5 year strategic plan to be implemented covering the increase of staff (handlers), Police dogs in both disciplines (General Purpose and drug detection), course / training time line, update policies and procedures, include a succession plan for the retirement, disposal of Police dogs, all based on my experience gained during the Churchill Fellowship.

- To implement mandatory training days (minimum 16 days per annum including a 5 day refresher course)

- To implement better quality assurance measures – annual accreditations.

- To submit a report identifying the requirement to train with other Police dog jurisdictions in Australasia – possible a secondment to another jurisdiction with your Police dog. Will aid in the understanding of how other jurisdictions deploy, the difference in legislative requirements and most important would expand the detection parameters and scent pictures of the dogs.

- The requirement for more detection dogs in the NT for better coverage.

With my involvement in the Australasian Police Dog Strategy and Development Group I will be able to share my experience at the next Australasian conference later this year.