



# Sniffing out success

## Canine teams are contributing to the safety of airports around Australia and to the fight against illicit drugs.

Dogs have been part of law enforcement for almost as long as police officers have been on the beat. While their abilities to subdue and help capture criminals are well recognised, their capacity to single out particular odours is increasingly being used to investigate crimes.

The AFP has introduced a range of detection dogs in recent years, and they are proving to be an invaluable asset in solving crimes. The latest additions follow the scent of money.

Australia's first law enforcement currency-detection dog, Atlas, has had many operational successes since graduating from law enforcement training. To date, he has located currency and currency-based evidence in excess of \$1 million.

Just a month after completing the pilot course at the AFP's National K9 Centre in Canberra in 2008, Atlas and his handler, Constable Craig Unwin, assisted in the execution of five search warrants in 18 hours in support of Operation Inca. Constable Unwin said this experience so close to graduation was very rewarding.

"You come out of training with a good product, but it's the handler's job to keep building on that," Constable Unwin said.

"You have to come up with more complex training scenarios to turn the dog into something really special. This can involve things like hiding items in more obscure places, and using various environments and locations to hone the dog's skills."

Atlas and Constable Unwin were recently called on at short notice to assist the Victoria Police Drug Task Force to execute a search warrant in a suburb of Melbourne. Atlas located more than \$3,000, and \$US1,900 in a bag that was concealed in the back of a wardrobe. Then he surprised the task force members by indicating strongly at a sound-system speaker. The team dismantled the speaker and found \$20,000 cash hidden inside.

Although the currency and drug detector dogs are trained to detect amounts of cash of more than \$10,000, the smaller amount that Atlas located in the handbag during the execution of this search warrant proves how powerful a dog's sense of smell can be.

The AFP uses dogs for firearms and explosives detection, currency and drug detection, and also has general purpose tactical dogs. Labradors are the preferred breed for detection purposes, and German shepherds are the most common tactical dogs.

Dogs used for detection work are chosen for their temperament and hunt-drive, which is the dog's willingness to search for, follow and find the target. They must also have a strong instinct to play, as their training is based on a seek, find and reward system. The reward is a game, such as tug-o-war, and much praise from the handler. Around 60 per cent of the dogs that undertake detection training graduate successfully. Dogs that are unsuitable for operational purposes are placed in new homes, usually as a family pet.

Detection dogs are trained to search for currency and drugs, or firearms and explosives. The currency and drug dogs are used for operational purposes, such as executing search warrants. The firearms and explosives dogs are on duty at 11 major airports around Australia and are one of many layers of screening processes that ensure no dangerous material is placed on-board any aircraft. The dogs work tirelessly every day to ensure the safety of airline passengers and staff.

The ongoing success of this operation can be attributed to the handlers, who make sure that the dogs are not bored with performing the same duties day after day.



Constable Craig Unwin with Atlas  
Top: Atlas as a puppy



The indoor kennels at the Majura facility

The tactical dogs are chosen based on their temperament and aptitude for the work they are required to undertake. The International Deployment Group's Operational Response Group will have tactical dogs and handlers based in Canberra and Brisbane to assist in the resolution of incidents in both national and international deployments. These dogs can control an offender on command, provide crowd control and conduct rural and urban searches for people.

Twenty-four firearms and explosives detection dogs were deployed to assist NSW Police at the APEC meeting in Sydney in September 2007, and eight dogs were deployed to the World Youth Day event held in Sydney in 2008. These dogs have also been deployed to help other State police forces successfully execute search warrants over the past three years.

The AFP's dogs are housed in a state-of-the-art facility at Majura. The Majura kennel facility was completed in late 2007 and has 62 indoor kennels, all of which have heated slab floors to keep the dogs warm in the harsh Canberra winters. Each dog also has a large outdoor run to allow them plenty of room to run around during the day.

The AFP has a dedicated team of trainers, handlers and kennel hands to look after the dogs. There are seven full-time instructors and, occasionally, external instructors are employed to impart fresh ideas and methods and broaden the knowledge and skills of the AFP staff.

Sergeant David Treleaven is an instructor at the facility.

"The dog handlers are all either sworn police officers or Protective Service Officers, depending on the requirement for police powers," Sergeant Treleaven said.

"Each officer has to pass a fitness test, and is also tested on interaction skills with the dogs before he or she can join the K9 team."

The dogs are fed a premium dog food, as well as fresh bones to maintain their health and fitness, and each dog's diet is formulated to meet the individual animal's needs. The dogs are bathed regularly and, just like most pet dogs, bath-time is not popular.

Six hand-picked AFP dog handlers and their canine companions began the first currency and drug detection course at the National K9 Centre in February and graduated on 12 June.

Two days before graduation, the training proved its worth. Atlas and the six near-graduates assisted in the execution of search warrants in Melbourne as part of Operation Ponorse, which is investigating tax fraud and other related matters. The dogs helped uncover more than \$75,000 in cash.

The eight-week currency detection component of the course involves searching for hidden currency in premises, vehicles and baggage, or for currency that is buried. The dogs are trained to sniff out amounts of \$10,000 or more in new and used Australian and American currency and they can also detect other currencies, including those from New Zealand, Thailand and Malaysia.



Jackson in the bathtub





The outdoor runs at the Majura facility

The currencies that the dogs can detect are all produced by standardised printing processes.

National Manager Aviation Roman Quaadvlieg said the course was demanding, but the detection dogs helped bring about successful operational outcomes.

“When drugs are being moved around the country, so is money,” Assistant Commissioner Quaadvlieg said.

“The detection dogs are proving their worth, helping us to uncover these crimes by unearthing the proceeds of the crime as well as the products.”

The currency and drug detection dogs will work in domestic and international airports, seaports, Australia Post premises, designated freight areas, during the execution of AFP search warrants, and they will also assist other State police and AFP partner agencies.

The AFP intends to have a currency and drug detection dog and handler deployed in every State and Territory of Australia by 2010.



One of the specialised trailers used for transporting the dogs.