

MIND GAMES



AUSTRALIA'S WEAPONS INTELLIGENCE TEAM, URUZGAN CALLSIGN SCAVENGER

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PICS SERGEANT DAVE HARRISON, WIT AND BRIAN HARTIGAN



Sergeant Dave Harrison.

On my recent visit to Afghanistan, one of the most powerful and emotional interviews I did was with Sergeant Dave Harrison, a scenes-of-crime officer with WIT – the Weapons Intelligence Team.

WIT is a small team of just four Aussie servicemen, backed up by a handful of expert contractors, whose primary role is to forensically exploit incidents involving weapons, including – or rather, especially, IEDs – to build a picture of threat trends, with a view to defeating the threat.

They also gather evidence to be used in targeting and prosecuting perpetrators, which, in the case of Uruzgan, means insurgents and bomb makers.

In Uruzgan, the Australian WIT is the only entity of its type and thus investigates all weapons-related incidents in the province involving any coalition nationality.

Anyway, why don't I just step back and let you hear what Sergeant Harrison had to say about his job.

"There's four of us in the WIT. I'm the scenes-of-crime officer, and we have an EOD (explosive ordnance disposal) operative, an intelligence-corps person and our OIC is an arms-corps officer.

We had finished our handover with the previous team and I was in my second week in theatre the first time I went outside the wire.

Usually, I would go out with our EOD Op, but this first time out was unusual in that I deployed with an engineer EOD element, with none of my WIT colleagues. It was just a case of there not being enough seats.

It was a Sunday, which is usually a go-slow day around here. I had just got to work and was in the conference room when the boss came in and said there was an incident – "gear up".

At that stage I had no idea what was going on, but eventually, info started filtering in that it was a suicide bombing and there were two Coalition KIAs and at least nine badly wounded. Their interpreter died later from his wounds.

I jumped in the EOD Bushmaster, because we don't have our own wheels, and we rolled out, with Americans along for site security.

On the way out there, a thousand things were going through my head. A lot of it was fear and excitement. But mainly it was the unfamiliarity of going out without my teammates, because, up to now we had done everything together – we trained together, we certex'd (certification exercise) together, we live together, work together, we know how each other operates. So that was weighing on my mind quite heavily.

Another IED safely dealt with.



Main charge and UXO exploited by WIT and USAF EOD.



Sergeant Dave Harrison (left) and WOFF Rod Amos, the team's EOD operative.