Honouring Infidel Man's Best Friend: Sparky, Former ADF Explosive Detection Dog, Joins Ulverstone Anzac Day Marchers, Tasmania

As reported by the local paper and by the ABC. Be sure to click on the links; the original stories have some delightful photos and video footage attached. She marched near the head of the procession and was honoured with the 'purple poppy' that commemorates animals who serve in war.

http://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/3865212/sparky-to-join-march/

"Veteran Detection Dog Marching on Anzac Day" (reporter, Lucy Swinnen).

'Sparky's service: receiving the puple poppy on behalf of the Australian War Animal Memorial Organisation'.

"Sparky the veteran explosive detection dog will march in the Anzac Day services at Ulverstone (Tas.), on Monday, but she almost did not make it back from Afghanistan where she served.

"She was nearly a POW", veteran Marty Ansell said.

"It was August 1 in 2011, and Sparky was serving in the Oruzgan Province in southern Afghanistan known for its heavy Taliban presence.

"She was called forward with her handler Mark Worthington as part of a lead patrol through an area believed to contain Improvised Explosive Devices.

"Mr Worthington remembers that at 10 am Sparky was searching in front of the formation when the patrol was ambushed by Taliban fighters.

"Pinned down in an irrigation channel, Mr Worthington said he was unable to call her.

"A short but heavy gun-fight occurred between the Australian forces and the Taliban, and a frightened Sparky fled into the nearby corn fields, Mr Worthington said.

"Startled by the sound and ferocity of the battle, Sparky vanished, and in the confusion no-one was in a position to even see what direction she went", Mr Worthington said.

'Although the diggers held their position for several hours, Sparky did not return.

'Mr Worthington said that despite being targeted by enemy mortars the patrol moved in a zig-zag fashion on their return to their vehicle in an attempt to cover as much ground as possible, hoping to find Sparky.

'A cash reward was offered to local villagers in case they found Sparky.

'Mr Worthington said that in the afternoon a call came through over the radio relaying that Afghan Army soldiers had spotted Sparky and she was seen heading back to the Patrol Base.

'At about 6 pm EDD Sparky topped the ridge surrounding the base and reunited with her handler Mr Worthington.

'Sparky had been missing for about eight hours and had covered nearly seven kilometres before she found her way back to base camp.

"She did a better job than the rest of us", Mr Ansell, who served two tours of Afghanistan, once with Sparky, said.

"She found heaps of stuff, the dogs sort of get washed over a little bit, they don't get mentioned that often, but she probably deserves to be there [at the service] as much as anyone of us."

'When she returned to Australia, Sparky was reassigned as a training dog at the School of Explosive Detection Dogs.

'However, after she nipped the ankles of a maintenance worker at the Sydney base, she was due to be adopted or put down before Mr Ansell put his hand up to adopt her, he said.

'Sparky now lives with Mr Ansell's mum and Dad in Ulverstone and has formed a bond with Rodney Ansell…

"The Australian War Dogs Association said that nine dogs were lost in Afghanistan during combat-related operations. Dogs like Sparky were crucial in saving the lives of hundreds of soldiers by detecting explosives, the Association said.

'Sparky was presented with a purple poppy by Ulverstone RSL member Tony Young, on behalf of the Australian War Animal Memorial organisation in Ulverstone on Thursday….".

And here's the report that appeared in the ABC, from Saliese Gibson.

http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-04-25/ex-explosives-dog-sparky-joins-ulvertsone-anzac-day-march/7356044

'Sparky The Retired Explosives Dog Joins Ulverstone Anzac Day Marchers.'

'A four-legged ex-digger has marched alongside other war veterans in Ulverstone in Tasmania's northwest, for the first time.

'Sparky the explosives detector dog spent nine months in the Uruzgan province in southern Afghanistan, from May 2011 to February 2012, an area known for its heavy Taliban presence.

The dog's role was to find explosive devices, ammuniton and weapons, track enemy fighters, and provide companionship to soldiers at the base.

'Sparky took part in the Ulverstone Anzac Day march and service this year, much to the delight of the 3000-strong crowd.

'Vietnam veteran Tony Young said the Ulverstone veterans were proud to march alongside Sparky.

"She's a brilliant animal, very intelligent, very aware, always on the go, always sensing what could happen, and what may happen around her", he said. "She's still got that ability to do what she used to do.

"The sacrifices animals have made is incredible, and they don't get the recognition so to have Sparky here makes people aware that animals are veterans."

'Sparky was recruited to the Australian Army in 2010 as an explosives detector dog.

'After several months of training and assessment in Australia, Sparky was deployed.

'Alongside handler Sapper Mark Worthington, Sparky spent nine months on the ground…

"During her nine months in Afghanistan, Sparky successfully detected weapons and explosives devices and saw many more days of conflict.

'After returning to Australia, Sparky spent several years as a training dog, and was retired in September 2015.

'Mr Young said Sparky now lived with an Afghanistan war veteran in Ulverstone.

"They have a farm where they take her… and she likes the wide

open spaces, chases the tractor around, and so she's not confined to a backyard", he said.

'Working dogs have been used by the Australian military since 1918, but it has only been more recently that dogs have been specifically trained to find explosives, ammunition, and weapons.

'They are highly valued for their sense of smell and hearing, which is far superior to that of humans…".

Click on the ABC link; at the moment the story includes video of the Anzac Day march, with Sparky in uniform, trotting proudly at the head of the line. – CM