



Pawprint Special Edition

Christchurch Earthquake

February 22 2011



At 12:51 on Tuesday the 22nd February 2011 a magnitude 6.3 earthquake struck Christchurch, New Zealand killing 181 people.

Part of the national and international response to this disaster were the New Zealand USAR Search Dogs.

This special edition of PawPrint, the newsletter of the NZ USAR Search Dog Association will outline the role these remarkable dogs and their volunteer handlers played in the hours, days and weeks following this tragic event.

The team...

Craig Cuthbertson and Lewis

Kirsti Kay and Tommy

Tim Drennan and Boo

Janelle Mackie and Cairo

Sara Rad and Sasha

Linda Pike and Buk and Que

Brenda Woolley with Easy, Keepa
and Boss



The Day the earth shook...again

Earthquakes really are the *&^%\$ of the disaster family- they just sneak up on you- no warning then bang!

Tuesday the 22 of February 2011 started off as just a normal day in Christchurch. While the M7.1 earthquake on September 4 had caused some areas to be badly affected by liquefaction, and many houses were missing their brick chimneys there was a sense that things were returning to normal. The Christchurch based USAR dog handlers were pleased to hear that their fellow dog handler Graham had come through his surgery well the day before, Janelle had headed to Wellington for an emergency management conference, Linda was at work in the medical laboratories, Tim was at work at the Water treatment plant before heading into town for an eye test and Brenda was at the animal shelter preparing for the afternoon session.

At 12:51 all sense of normal was quickly lost when the magnitude 6.3 quake struck. On the scale of things, 6.3 doesn't sound that big but this quake was close to town and shallow, and the bedrock under Christchurch meant the force reverberated around under the CBD, bustling with lunchtime activity. The vertical and horizontal ground acceleration in the CBD of Christchurch was some of the highest ever seen in a modern city.

Christchurch is a very "English" city with some beautiful stone buildings, churches and cathedrals set around the winding Avon River. In the CBD there were also many unreinforced masonry or brick buildings, many with facades and/or verandahs.





Most of the initial rescue was done by members of the public - ordinary people doing extraordinary things to help their families, friends, workmates and other people caught up in the chaos which was the CBD.

When most people were doing their best to get out of town, the emergency services and rescue personnel were rushing in... this included Brenda with Boss, Keepa and Easy, Linda with Buk and Que, and Tim with Boo!. These three handlers did not actually see much of each other for the first few hours as they were tasked, normally with another member of USAR, from building to building searching for survivors.



As darkness fell on this first night the CBD was a very strange place to be- no street lights, army vehicles everywhere, smoke and building alarms. It was eerily silent at times, and then everything would shake and falling bricks would hit the ground as powerful aftershocks continued.



Taskings continued to come in for the dog teams, now including Janelle and Cairo, ex handler Malcolm and trainee handler Ben. Janelle caught up with Brenda at the Smith City Carpark building- as she was disappearing with Keepa on a Fire Ladder into the mangled mess of cars on the collapsed carpark building.

The USAR base had now moved into Latimer Square and a tent city appeared in no time. Some time in the early hours of the morning at Latimer Square the handlers all met up. They decided to take the opportunity to have a quick break as they knew once the sun came up they would be into it again. Janelle's house was closest and it seemed like a very bizarre slumber party with all the team lined up in their sleeping bags on the lounge floor for 1.5 hours with what seemed like constant aftershocks.

The search continues...

During the night Sara with Sasha and Kirsti with Tommy arrived with TF3 from Auckland and were put pretty much straight to work. We also got word that Craig was on his way home from work in Australia to pick up Lewis and join the search. It was decided that Sara, Kirsti and Craig should get rest during that day and then be on the night shift.

Some major sites were a priority during these first 24 hours- these included the Press building, CTV and the PGC buildings. These buildings tested the dogs and handlers to the limit but we are incredibly proud of how they coped with the smoke, tight spaces, crane rides, noise and other challenges these sites presented.



During the next 5-6 days the dogs got into a steady routine of working, moving to the next site and working again. New Zealand USAR dogs were split between day and night shift. At times the handlers rescue training came into play as they assisted clearing buildings where the dogs were not needed. This included several hotels and office buildings. As you went through these buildings you could not help but imagine the terror of the tourists and office workers, belongings scattered everywhere as they fled the buildings.

Teams were also sent to the seaside suburb of Sumner where rocks displaced from the hillsides caused some severe structural damage and unfortunately several people were killed.





Two major shopping malls were also searched in the first week. We had never really thought of the need to search piles of boxes, aisles of shoes boxes and mountains of boxed kitchen appliances!

Standing in a major retail store, up to our ankles in liquifaction, in the dark with clothes and other items all around is not something we will forget in a hurry



Got by with some help from our friends...

During the first week the USAR search dog numbers were boosted by the arrival of teams from Australia, Japan and Singapore. It was great to see these teams arrive as we were starting to really realise the scale of this disaster. Dog crates appeared in out of way corners of the Base of Operations and you could not help but have a wee look when you walked past. In the early days we had limited time or opportunity to talk with the handlers apart from brief exchanges if we ended up at the base at the same time.

We ended up working with the Singapore dogs on a site which was really interesting. The site was across the road from the Base of Operations and we had 3 of our operational advanced dogs give an indication in a void space. We decided to call the Singapore dogs to see what they found before we started to investigate further. The

were not told what we had found and worked

two dogs on the same site. They too also had a strong indication in the same areas.

The USA team then helped open are areas of the building up- nothing was found and after much discussion and about the collapse pattern, wind and weather we have come to the conclusion it was a scent pool from the 500 odd live people in a very close proximity at the base. Working together on this site opened the lines of communication with the Singapore team and we went on to have more of a chance to talk to them about training and deployments, with them having gone on several **international** missions. They visited our training yard here in Christchurch and we really hope we can catch up with them in the future. We also enjoyed meeting and talking with the Japanese team.



Back at base...

As the search work demand dwindled the handlers transitioned to their role as support staff for the USAR Taskforce. Having operational handlers at the base for the following couple of weeks also meant an operational team was available in case of secondary collapse at some of the many sites national and international teams worked on. Other member of USAR Search Dog Association had worked really hard in the support role and it was also nice to give them some relief. Brendon, Tania, Lois and Anne had done a fantastic job and really showed USAR dog handlers can do anything that they are asked to do...

Time at base also gave more chance for important vet checks and care of the dogs. Brenda bought her hydro-bath in and most of the dogs enjoyed a good bath. Others had their feet bathed in a converted cache box...

We also had a chance to catch up with some of the international USAR dog teams. We worked with the Singapore team at one site and it was great to see them finding the same things we were.

Latimer Square was like a small city with hundreds of USAR team members from New Zealand, UK, Australia, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan, China and the US. New Zealand will be eternally grateful for the international assistance we received - not just USAR but also Police, Engineers and other specialist teams. There were still members of the Japanese team in Christchurch when the devastating earthquake and Tsunami hit their home.



Messages of encouragement...

The service you guys provide is so valuable. Sarah -Waimate

Just wanted to say that your brave people and extraordinary dogs are doing a amazing job in Christchurch!!! Keep safe. Tess-Wellington

I'm sure you guys and dogs have had a rough few weeks, but I'm sitting here with tears in my eyes thinking thank god you're here, thanks so much for taking these dogs on and giving them a chance, training them and yourselves for a task I guess you never thought would happen on our own doorstep. I know you will have all seen things you would rather have not, and they may be etched in your brains for a long time. I wish I could erase them. Thank you all for doing what you have done. There will be some very grateful families. Kathryn-Christchurch

Please pass on my best wishes and hope that everyone is safe. Alicia-Auckland

I would like to convey my best wishes to all of the team working in Christchurch. I am in awe of your commitment, bravery and dedication. It is people like you who so willingly give up your own comfort and safety to help those in need, that restores all of our faith in humanity. Jane-Hamilton

I have been visiting your website for a while now and have been inspired by both your dogs and trainers. I was about to contact you when the Christchurch earth-quake happened and thought you would all be very busy.....and what a amazing job you all did!! Tess-Wellington

Thank you for the great job you've all been doing. Emily-Christchurch

Many thanks and keep up the fab work! Justine-Christchurch

Such a sad event for your city and your country. The world is watching and praying for all of you. From citizens to the SAR teams your efforts have been an inspiration. I just heard that almost 200 (so far) have been found and pulled, alive, from the rubble. Be safe. Be proud. Dave-Ontario, Canada

We have 3 dogs (the typical farm Lab and Foxy, and a beautiful retriever) so I really appreciate the work you are doing - and the hard work put into training! Deborah-Hawkes Bay

Keep up the awesome work you guys are doing in Christchurch. Alison-Temuka

You guys have done such a great job following the quake. Steve-Wellington



In summary

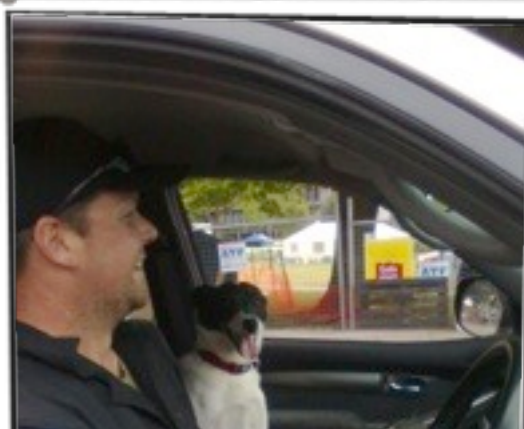
 7 handlers and 10 operational dogs deployed in Christchurch

 Over 80 sites searched

 A number of successful finds in very challenging situations

 Blood tests confirm all dogs healthy

 Lots of lessons learned



One handler's story

This account of her time in Christchurch was put together by Sara Rad, Canine Search Specialist, NZTF-3

It's what we have all been training for, the days that we actually put our dogs to the test - the test that really counts. The moment when everyone comes together as one to save lives. I can honestly say that all of our dogs exceeded the test of Christchurch's 6.3 magnitude quake, and gave it everything they had. The results have been recognized not only by NZ Taskforce and the public of New Zealand, but also from other K9 handlers around the world. To me that shows how valuable our training is, and all years of blood, sweat and tears has paid off. I am truly proud of all the dogs and handlers who represented NZ.

Kirsti, Tommy, Sasha and I arrived in Latimer Square, Christchurch in the evening of Feb 22 with TF3 and TF1. It had just started to rain lightly and we were unsure of what we would be facing. On the bus ride from the Air Force base to our BOO (Base of operations), we had heard that the TF2 USAR base was sitting under a pile of rubble (found later to not be accurate) and that there were mass amounts of people trapped in various buildings around the city's CBD.

It wouldn't be too long after we started unloading the cache that Sasha and Tommy would start their evening's work.

The first call for Sasha was to Colombo and St Asaph streets where we met with Tim and Linda. The area had already been searched by another team; however our squad was tasked to cover it again. The rain had stopped, the evening temperature was cool and there didn't seem to be much of a breeze. Behind the building there was a driveway that connected through to St Asaph Street which had quite a bit of rubble fallen from the side of a building. My search plan was to send Sasha down the driveway to clear that area from a distance and then bring her back up to the intersection and continue clearing the rubble on the street fronts on Colombo Street. Sasha worked the search plan nicely showing no signs of live scent. However as we continued searching down Colombo Street through the bricks and rubble Sasha gave a passive alert outside of a store. Once our technicians marked the area that we searched, along with our findings, our task was complete and we headed back to base for our next assignment.

Sasha and Tommy's next assignment was to the CTV building. When we arrived Kirsti and I were briefed on the areas of interest that a squad leader wanted us to search. It was our decision as to how we wanted to run the search and if we wanted all of the technicians to move out of the search area. I was a little nervous to start when I saw that the area was still on fire and how much smoke was coming out of the ground. I knew that the smoke would make it harder for the dogs to detect live scent.

Our search plan was to remove the technicians from the area as it wasn't very large. Because of the smoke we ran the dogs separately in order to give the greatest possibility of detection. The result: Sasha worked methodically, showing no signs of any live scent. Kirsti then sent Tommy in and the outcome was the same. I reported back to the squad leader that neither of the dogs had detected any live scent and detailed the area we had covered.



I was impressed by how Sasha and Tommy knew this was no longer a training session. They listened to our directional control commands and took their time searching all nooks and crannies. There were so many distractions and yet nothing stopped them from their task. I quickly realized that all of our training over the years had paid off and the bond and trust that we have with our dogs would make all the searches that we faced slightly easier.

The first couple of days started to blur into one as there were so many searches to do with little sleep. When Brenda mentioned Craig and Lewis would be joining the team on night shifts it was a relief. Having Lewis fresh and ready to work strengthened our team knowing how many searches were still to come. Predominately the night shift dogs were used to clear areas. So our dogs were doing exactly that, clearing areas and not finding any live finds. We noticed this was starting to take a toll on our dogs so in between our tasks we would set up easy live find searches to keep Sasha, Lewis and Tommy motivated.

Kirsti and I slept with the dogs in the dog tent that was an interesting experience as we were able to see that our dogs weren't getting the rest that they required. There was so much movement happening around the tent with carpenters building shelters etc. that we soon realized we needed to keep a close eye on the welfare of our dogs. With the support of our Medics and VERT we were able to do so. VERT was incredible; I truly believe they were angels protecting our dogs. Every shift change they came and checked our dogs: running blood work if needed, checking dehydration levels, giving them fluids and massaging the dogs to loosen up cramping muscles.

The welfare of our dogs was extremely important, but we soon noticed too how they also enjoyed playing with the technicians and support crew. This seemed to help lift the dogs and also brought smiles to those that played with them. It was then that I realised the extent of the incredible role our dogs played – not only were they critical in carrying out their job as trained search dogs, but in their down time they carried out a second equally important role – therapy and comfort for our team. They are truly noble and loyal creatures and absolutely deserving of the title - Man's Best Friend,



Only the best care...

Massey University Veterinary Emergency Response Team (VERT) is a specialist team of veterinary staff trained in animal disaster management, technical animal rescue as well as veterinary treatment and is the first of its kind in Australasia. The team is able to respond to local and national calls for individual animal rescue as well as national, and potentially international, disasters involving companion and production animals. Members are volunteer staff and students from Massey University's Institute of Veterinary Animal and Biomedical Sciences.

In an emergency, MU VERT is capable of performing veterinary and animal welfare disaster analysis needs assessments (DANA), assessing the veterinary infrastructure, establishing veterinary field hospitals, animal decontamination/HazMat, providing care for search and rescue dogs (USAR and Police), identifying potential public health issues as well as technical animal rescue. The team can deploy within 12-24 hours to a disaster area and are self-sufficient for 72 hours.

The team completed its initial training for technical animal rescue and urban search and rescue on Sunday 20th February.

On 22nd February 2011 1251pm a 6.3 magnitude earthquake caused considerable damage in Christchurch and surrounds. The Minister of Civil Defence declared a state of national emergency at 1030hrs on 23rd February 2011.

The VERT was deployed by the National Animal Welfare Emergency Management (NAWEM) Group and Canterbury SPCA on Friday 25th February to arrive in Christchurch late afternoon Sunday 27th February. VERT was informed that a local veterinarian offered his veterinary clinic in New Brighton as a triage centre for the team and the initial task would be going door-to-door to assess animal welfare and veterinary requirements.

On Saturday 26th February VERT commenced the journey from Palmerston North to Christchurch arriving in Wellington for a briefing with Wellington SPCA Animal Rescue Unit and to review USAR requirements.

The need for prompt veterinary treatment and prophylaxis for the USAR dogs was highlighted on Saturday when VERT was contacted by the NZ Urban Search And Rescue (NZUSAR) Dog team. One of the dogs was clinically depressed, not eating or drinking and had possible access to a contaminated food source. After establishing that functionality of the Christchurch After Hours Clinic, VERT put the NZUSAR Dog handler in contact with the clinic and the dog was admitted for treatment.





Two members of VERT met with Wayne Ricketts, Chairman of NAWEM, at the NZVA office in Wellington to discuss the deployment and what would be the best use of VERT's skills, knowledge and resources. VERT and Wayne Ricketts spoke to a local veterinarian, via telephone conference to discuss what he thought the veterinary needs were in Christchurch and how VERT could fulfil this need. He expressed his concern with the limited-to-no veterinary care available in the worst affected eastern suburban areas and suggested that a triage centre should be set up. Wayne Ricketts, and a local New Zealand Veterinary Association representative, Ross Blanks, discussed VERT's deployment and agreed that establishing the needs of USAR dogs was a priority.

Sunday 26th February 1600hrs – VERT arrived at SPCA Canterbury facilities for full briefing. It was agreed that VERT would perform a needs assessment of the police, NZ and international USAR team dogs in the CBD cordoned area on that evening and return to the SPCA Monday morning to begin the Disaster Assessment Needs Analysis (DANA) for veterinary care and animal welfare in the worst affected areas outside the CBD.

Sunday 26th February 1900hrs – 2400hrs - Assessment of police and USAR dogs, together with research from previous disasters, established that the dogs required daily assessment and treatment of dehydration, fatigue, injuries, eyes, nasal passages and foot pads as well as preventative veterinary advice. A daily treatment plan was devised which included subcutaneous fluids to correct then prevent dehydration, flushing eyes, nose and mouth to reduce irritation caused by dust, physiotherapy of tight/cramped muscles and treatment of any wounds obtained during the course of duty.

Generally all dogs were in good health considering the conditions they were working in. Whilst the dogs were receiving massage therapy a line would form of dog handlers and other USAR personal asking for their massage as well.

On one occasion VERT was out of the cordoned area when Tommy sustained a stick injury from playing fetch. It was quickly ascertained that it would be better for Tommy to be driven out of the cordon area to be assessed by the VERT at the nearest petrol station. This may be the first time a USAR dog has had a police escort and caused military police to be activated (but that is a story for another time). Tommy was stabilised (put on fluids and given pain relief) in the VERT vehicle before being transported to the local after hours practice. He made a quick and full recovery and was the ideal patient.

The VERT thoroughly enjoyed working with such a fantastic, committed team working towards the same goals. We look forward to working with you in the future and contributing to the goals of the New Zealand USAR search dog team.

Hayley Squance, Director and Lecturer Veterinary Nursing and Veterinary Technology, Massey University.

In the weeks following...



Our heroes...

Recognition was given to the NZ USAR Search Dogs that were deployed in the February 22nd Christchurch earthquake at the New Zealand Kennel Club National Show at Fielding on the 30th April 2011. This award is given annually to dogs that have performed a service or feat for their community/country within the previous year. The award is sponsored by Eukanuba.

Brenda Woolley (our national trainer) and her dog Easy and Linda Pike went up to accept the award on behalf of the deployment teams. Easy was chosen as the representative dog as he is the most senior and experienced dog, with many (dog) years service in both LandSAR and USAR. Mitchell Brown was also present representing the Fire Service and made an excellent acceptance speech on all of our behalf.

All of the operational handlers received a framed certificate in recognition of their dogs performance and a Eukanuba cargo bag.

www.usardogs.org.nz

Donations

Since the February earthquake and deployment USAR has become a household name to many people around the country. The images of injured people, broken and fallen buildings and our own search dogs have become images that have rallied support from around the country.

There have been many donations of goods and money. These donations have taken many forms including from many at the SBS Marathon held in Christchurch on Sunday 5th June. There was even a donation while we were having our National Training Dinner from a bloke having his “stag do” at the same restaurant.

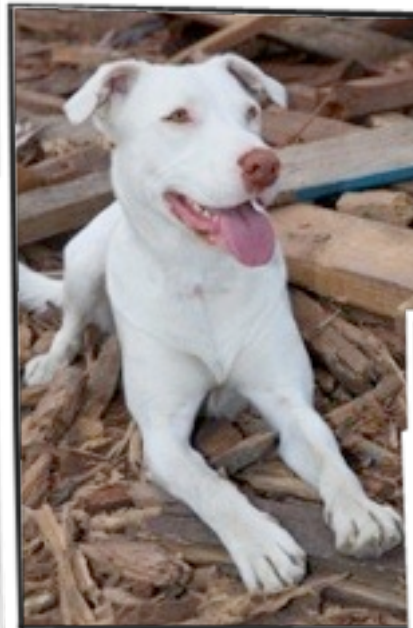
That some families of the victims of the Christchurch earthquake chose to collect money for USAR dogs at the funerals and memorial services is truly humbling.



The SBS Marathon...


In the weeks following the quake the USAR Search Dog Association was contacted by the organisers of the SBS Christchurch Marathon. This event has for many years been run from the CBD of Christchurch, and although initially it was thought it would be cancelled, a new course in Lincoln was quickly organised.


Brian Taylor, one of the previous race directors tragically died along with a large number of others in the CTV building collapse and we were honored to be asked to be the charity of choice for this event. This was also a great opportunity to meet and talk to many people in the community. ChCh based handlers and supporters were present for race pack pick up and throughout the event. Several dogs and handlers took part in events with Boo running the 10Kms with Matthew Mark from SBS





Final words of thanks...


We would like to take this opportunity to thank some people who directly and/or indirectly contributed to the success of this major deployment...


 Our families and friends who have supported us

 Every person who has ever come and hidden for us during training

 Mike and the other USAR techs who worked with us and helped keep us and our dogs safe

 Every site owner or manager who has let us have access for training

 Fay, Association Coordinator, and other members of the USAR SDA who supported us from behind the scenes

 Individuals, families and companies who have made donations of money or products- greatly appreciated

