

Horrie, the Dinkum Rebel

In the children's area of the national Australian War Memorial in Canberra, is a curious hands-on exhibit—a small doghouse, soldier's pack, and photographs. It tells an amazing tale of comradeship, wit, resourcefulness, and rebellion.

By Brian Patrick Duggan



It was sheer luck that Private Jim Moody spotted the dog hunting lizards from his motorcycle in the Egyptian desert. Fifteen miles west of Alexandria, Moody was leading a 1941 version of a geo-caching chase to sharpen his skills as a dispatch rider for the Signals platoon of an Australian machine-gun battalion. The short-legged dog was white with a sandy streak down his back, perky ears, and an enthusiastic stump of a tail. Moody tucked the hungry dog into his overcoat for the ride back. Pets in camp were discouraged, and emphatically

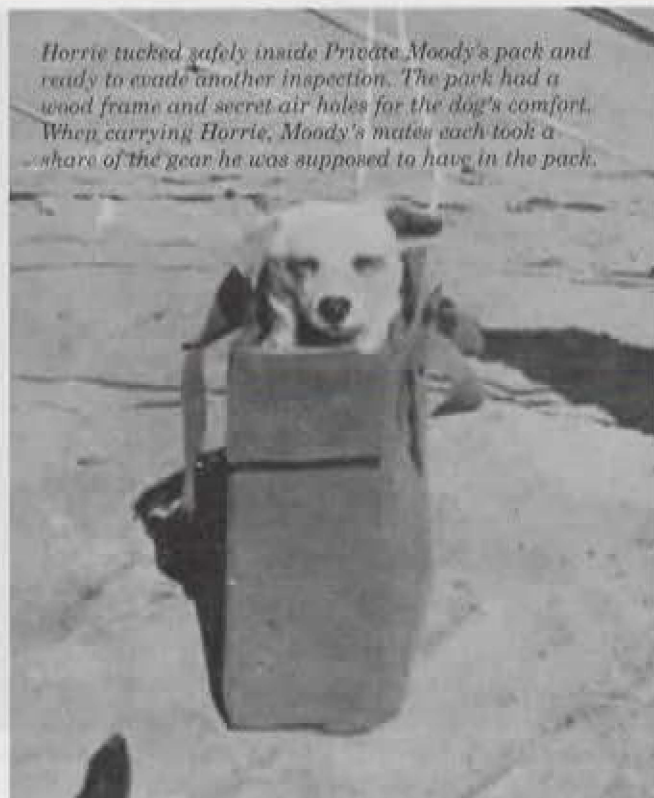
not permitted to accompany the troops on the move, but Moody's platoon was not called the "Rebels" for nothing.

Australian soldiers are renowned for their courage and tenacity but also for a relaxed, irreverent attitude toward authority. By their own account, the Rebels had an even higher standard of disobedience. With characteristic Aussie informality, everyone had a nickname in the Signals: They were Murchie, Mischief, Fitz, the Gogg, Feathers, and Poppa. Even their lieutenant was just Big Jim. Moody named his new mate Horrie, probably in honor of



two famous Australian footballers.

Horrie quickly became a dinkum (genuine) soldier. He delighted in spine bashing (sleeping) in his straw-padded wooden bed and guarded the tent against thieving locals. He loved marching at the head of the column alongside the bemused colonel and once, when the battalion was on parade, the excited Horrie raced over to lift his leg on the boots of the immaculate Corporal Feathers who was saluting Big Jim. A nearby mongrel followed suit and provoked roars of laughter from the ranks. Horrie became the bat-



Horrie tucked safely inside Private Moody's pack and ready to evade another inspection. The pack had a wood frame and secret air holes for the dog's comfort. When carrying Horrie, Moody's mates each took a share of the gear he was supposed to have in the pack.

talion mascot and in cold weather wore a handmade woolen coat complete with unit insignia, corporal's stripes, braid trim, and brass buttons nicked from Corporal Feathers's uniform.

Practicing to Deceive

Horrie's life after enlistment was all about deception. The word came that the battalion was to embark transport ships for Greece to fight the advancing Germans. Pets were to be left behind. Abandoning Horrie was unthinkable—but how to get him aboard and conceal him for the voyage?

The Rebels hit on the idea of fitting Moody's pack with secret ventilation ports and training Horrie to sit quietly inside. This dodge allowed Horrie to vanish during inspections, and that was how he boarded ship under the eyes of the officers. In camp, when it was too hot to disappear in the pack, Horrie was taught to wait in a trench dug under Moody's bedding. If the risk of discovery was too great, other battalion units would hide the little dog. Officers turned a blind eye to his presence and marveled at how he constantly reappeared despite orders.

Along the way, he earned quite the service record. On a dispatch mission in Greece, Horrie and Moody survived attacks by dive bombers. After that, he alerted the Rebels to incoming planes and they would dive for cover. Evacuating from Greece under fire, Horrie was dropped off a sinking ship onto a destroyer—and then nearly crushed by a lowering lifeboat. In Crete, he carried messages be-



A replica of Horrie's pack and civilian doghouse in the Australian War Memorial. There is a plush toy dog just barely visible inside the door. Children are encouraged to handle the pack and imagine Horrie's experiences.

"Horrie quickly became a genuine soldier"



tween patrols and was wounded by a bomb splinter during another ship evacuation. Horrie was in soldier brawls, emerged unscathed after fighting a Syrian wolf, and twice he went Absent Without Leave, hitching rides on trucks and showing up 50 miles away in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv.

Stowaway

In early 1942, the threat of Japanese invasion caused the Australians to begin another evacuation, this time to defend their homeland. Headquarters issued the sternest orders that all pets were to be destroyed.

The plot to save Horrie was deviously brilliant. First, the Rebels (including Sergeant Poppa) swore that no one, not even their kindly lieutenant, Big Jim, would know of the *ruse de guerre*. Horrie's "quiet training" was intensified and he was taken to a veterinarian in Tel Aviv to be certified free of disease (rabies being a real fear in Australia). Then, a big show was made of giving Horrie to an Englishman in the Palestine police. Moody retrieved Horrie that night and put him into hiding in the bed-trench for eight days. The battalion was sad to see Horrie go and several soldiers hinted that Moody had not done right by his mate, as they would have at least tried to sneak Horrie home.

For his dog's sake, Moody took the insults. The old pack trick got Horrie onboard again and the Rebels grabbed a compartment. They set a schedule so that a Rebel was always with Horrie and ready to stuff him into the pack if someone entered without the secret knock. Poor Horrie

was used to the desert and it was three days before the fastidious little dog reluctantly relieved himself on the shower drain.

The voyage home through the Indian Ocean took about 10 days and Horrie remained safely hidden. When the western shore of Australia came into sight, the ship stopped dead in the water. The captain ordered that all contraband pets be surrendered or the ship would go no farther. The Rebels braced it out and after 12 hours a smuggled cat was found and thrown overboard. Believing that to be the only pet, the captain had the engines started. The unlucky cat's fate now made the Rebels genuinely fearful for Horrie's life.

Setting foot on the docks of Adelaide with Horrie in his pack, Moody felt a surge of relief at getting his dog home against all odds. At a party thrown by the Rebels, Horrie "magically" appeared before Big Jim—who was delighted to see the new Australian citizen. Moody got Horrie to his father in Melbourne and instructed him to keep the dog's origin a secret. With hopes for a happy reunion after the war, the Rebels were shipped off to Northern Australia and New Guinea.

No Surrender

When Jim Moody was discharged from the army in February 1945, he collected Horrie and moved to Sydney. All was well until he offered Horrie's appearance to aid an Australian Kennel Club fund-raiser for the Red Cross and word leaked out about the illegal immigrant. The Com-

LEFT: COURTESY, BRIAN DUGGAN; RIGHT: COURTESY, AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL



Horrie and his mates on the H.M.S. Defender after the evacuation of Crete, 1941.

monwealth Director of Veterinary Hygiene, Mr. R.N. Wardle, threatened Moody with legal action if the dog was not surrendered. The fact that Horrie had been certified as disease-free before and after his arrival in Australia and had remained healthy since then was irrelevant. The Quarantine Act had been violated.

The public got wind of the situation and took up Horrie's cause, but all protests and pleas were in vain. Moody finally agreed to give up Horrie but the dog was in Melbourne with his father, so he asked for seven days travel time to bring the dog to Sydney. At the week's end, Horrie was taken to the quarantine office through a crowd of well-wishers. Supposedly, this was only for a health examination, but Moody suspected otherwise. Three days later, on March 12, 1945, he was informed that Horrie had been euthanized with a fatal dose of cyanide.

Jim Moody's grief was profound, as was that of the Australian people. Politicians were assailed by their constituents, and letters in newspapers and editorial cartoons decried the red-tape execution of a soldier's dog. The vilified Wardle would later admit that Horrie's death was preordained as a warning to potential quarantine violators.

And that was the end of the valiant Horrie.

Or so Australia thought ...

The Switcheroo

Nearly 60 years passed before Moody's family revealed that Horrie did not die in 1945. Once again, Rebel guile beat authority. In that week of grace, an underground

railroad of friends and family secretly transported Horrie from one safe house to another, and finally to a farm in a neighboring state. While this was going on, Moody combed animal shelters until he found a Horrie look-alike who was scheduled for euthanasia. He bought the dog for less than a dollar in today's money and, in a canine version of *A Tale of Two Cities*, surrendered that dog for execution. Moody was a true dog lover and genuinely sad that sacrificing the shelter dog was the only way to save his mate. The public grief of Moody and Sergeant Poppa was a further subtlety to complete the charade.

Horrie lived out a full, happy life as a country squire. Today, the Australian War Memorial cherishes his ventilated pack and brass-buttoned coat, and tours of school-children are told his story.

In the days before the Rebels left Egypt forever, Moody said of Horrie, "All Hitler's armies could not prevent our taking him away." Ultimately, neither could the Australian Army and government.

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