

Lions, Canines and the Australian Army

In early April, led by 1st Vice President Jason Zhang, a number of Sydney Chinese Lions and guests paid a visit to the Australian Army Steele Barracks at Moorebank, Sydney.

They were invited to observe a bomb disposal drill arranged by the School of Military Engineering. Major John Adam Riley, Officer Commanding the Specialist Engineering Wing and Lieutenant Colonel Mark A Coyle, Deputy Head of Corps - Training and Heritage gave them a warm reception. Prior to the drill, in the observation area, Major Riley provided a brief introduction of the drill. He forewarned that there would be loud explosion noises during the drill, just so the visitors were not caught unawares. This did not cause any concern nor diminish the interest of the visitors. Rather, it helped raise their curiosity and enthusiasm. They simply couldn't wait for the drill to begin.

The drill commenced with a member of the bomb disposal squad showcasing his best loyal friend - a detection dog - in a bomb search exercise. The dog searched in a compound lined with an array of vehicles, in one of which an explosive device was hidden. The canine cautiously went about sniffing at the vehicles one after another, eliminating the safe ones as it went along. Finally, it accurately identified the vehicle with the hidden explosive device. It stopped searching, squatted



Sydney Chinese Lions and guests with members of the Army Bomb Disposal Squad



**1st VP Jason Zhang exchanging souvenirs with
Lieutenant Colonel Mark A Coyle**

still next to the identified vehicle and signalled at its commander. The skilful and intelligent performance of the detection dog won loud applause from the audience.

Next, a bomb disposal robot, like the one seen in the award winning movie *The Hurt Locker* made its appearance. It looked fairly ordinary but in reality, due to its advanced functions, it is worth more than a fortune. The robot makes it possible for bomb disposal experts to perform their tasks at a safe distance thus minimising casualties. It is an indispensable tool and a reliable friend in the modern battlefield. One visitor asked the commander jokingly, "If you are to choose between this robot and a Ferrari, which would you like to own?" The commander responded wittily, "it depends on where I am!" It is so true that a bomb disposal robot is far more useful and essential than any other gadgets in the perilous fields infested with insurgents like Iraq or Afghanistan. Next, the commander demonstrated his skilful manoeuvring of the robot by remotely commanding the latter's mechanical arm to dispose of the bomb with the agility of a real human arm. Then the disarmed bomb was detonated with a powerful water jet from a hydro cannon. This perfect collaboration between the human soldier and robot is evidence of the excellent skills and capability of the Australian Army. Following the sound of the bomb explosion, the soldiers again won equally loud applause from an appreciative audience.

After the drill, the organizers kindly allowed the visitors some free time with the squad. After watching such a splendid show, many Lions members marvelled at the Army's advanced level capability and were very interested in their training and missions. They seized this very rare opportunity and chatted freely with the soldiers and officers. The visitors had always understood that the key responsibility of the Army is to protect the country, but now they further realised that the job of the bomb disposal squad is pitted with perils. Throughout the bomb disposal process, squad members have to unrelentingly demonstrate professionalism, prudence and concentration. The Lions also had the opportunity to come into closer contact with the detection dogs. They were also shown

some techniques on how to train the canines successfully. The seamless cooperation between the dogs and their trainers display the purest trust and harmonious coexistence between animal and human.

Sadly, the visitors also learnt that in the year before, one of the squad members unfortunately lost a limb while performing his task in the battlefield! They felt even greater respect and appreciation for the soldiers who secure our country, directly or indirectly, bringing about peace to us.

At the conclusion of the visit, both parties exchanged souvenirs and delivered speeches. 1st Vice President Jason Zhang of Sydney Chinese Lions maintained that the Australian Chinese community has always greatly recognised and appreciated the vast contributions made by the Australian Army to this country and to the world at large. He affirmed the valuable and long-standing friendship between the community and the Army. During the visit, the Lions felt very privileged because of the warm reception they received from the Army together with the rare opportunity of learning some of the trade secrets of the bomb disposal squad. They vowed to relay this memorable experience to the wider Australian Chinese community with a view to encouraging the younger generation to seriously consider taking up a career with the defence forces.

In the battlefield, the bomb disposal squad performs their tasks tirelessly, selflessly and professionally, serving their country and keeping world peace. This spirit matches the Lions' motto "We Serve". It is anticipated that further interactions and cooperation will occur between the Australian Defence Forces and Sydney Chinese Lions in the future.



Lions donning the outfit of the Bomb Disposal Squad



For those who wish to see more of the work of the Australian Defence Forces, they are welcome to attend their public Open Days held around the country throughout the year. Advertisements for such events will appear in the online Service newspapers below.

The Royal Australian Navy:

<http://www.defence.gov.au/news/NAVYNEWS/editions/4713/default.htm>

The Australian Army

<http://www.defence.gov.au/news/armynews/editions/1101/Default.htm>

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