

JOB
THAT CAN
KILL YOU!



Steady, boys – all you have to do is hit the snooze button

BOMB DISPOSAL EXPERT

It takes nerves of steel to become a member of the Australian Army Incident Response Regiment

PICTURE this: the police find a device. Although they have a bomb squad, they don't quite know what the device is. The Australian Army's Incident Response Regiment is called in. Their explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) technicians will know

what they're dealing with. And should they fail, the retrieval medics will go in, knowing that if one bomb has gone off, there may well be another...

Sergeant Rob (surname withheld) is capable of disarming explosives, or as he puts it, "rendering safe or disposing of conventional explosive ordnance – grenades, missiles, rockets, bombs – the sort of thing you find on a conventional battlefield".

The 34-year-old combat engineer has even branched into dealing with chemical, biological and radiological weapons. Radiological might mean a dirty bomb which spreads a bunch of fallout upon detonation

– as opposed to more conventional nuclear bombs, which make a great big f–k-off mushroom cloud.

"The idea of working on a bomb that could blow up and kill me doesn't weigh on my mind," he says. "The level of training and procedures we have in place are world-class. Besides, once I'm on the job, the tempo pushes the thought out of my mind.

Having said that, Rob acknowledges the level of risk – everything he deals with could kill him: "Sometimes you win; sometimes there's a chance you're going to lose ... Every device is different and therefore assessed on its own merits."

The most dangerous aspect of Rob's occupation is simply being

on the job. "Dealing with dangerous devices, you don't have to be sitting next to it to be in trouble. You just have to be in the same building."

Naturally, they don't let any old yahoo have a go at defusing bombs. "You need people who are reasonably technical, have common sense, and have a logical, mechanical way of solving problems. Essentially, EOD is problem solving."

Watching Rob play red-wire, blue-wire ["Sometimes it comes down to that"] is Private Ben, a 20-year-old retrieval medic. He's there in case the wheels fall off, to patch together and bring back what's left.

"We're stationed so we have visual contact and can see what's happening down-range. If it's dark or in a tunnel, we have to be within hearing contact. If a bomb detonates, we'll go down past the hot line [the line of perceived maximum extent of destruction] find the bomb tech who's been injured, do front-line treatment, then bring them back."

All this is done wearing two heavy chemical/biological suits, and carrying what Ben describes as "antidotes for different agents". He can't tell us what they are, but does say one of them will stabilise someone exposed to a chemical weapon.

"The job is very physically demanding. You get very tired, very fast. You get hot, sweaty and agitated, but you have to be able to take it. You've also got to be capable of putting others before yourself even though danger is on your mind."

Ivan Smith

But the pub crawl isn't over yet

