

INTO DUDS

By Andy Rendle

our expensive donations in technology and equipment are maintained and the operators are kept proficient. For example, the US Air Wing in the jungle regions of Colombia makes sure the donated helicopters and Broncos (Coca spraying fixed wing) used in the war on narco-terrorism, are maintained. Yet the hundreds of bomb/landmine dogs we send out from North America or Europe to the rest of the world are often just left with “best wishes and good luck.”

Ask the K9 handlers in your unit and they will tell you that if dogs are not properly maintained, even in top quality North American or European facilities, the animals will soon become ineffective. This has a snowball effect. One or two misses, or inversely, false alerts, drastically reduces the confidence the handler and his/her colleagues will have in the K9 program. We can write this off as just unfortunate, but it has deeper repercussions. Our colleagues on the front lines in Latin American, South East Asia, or the Middle Eastern theatres come to the mistaken conclusion that dogs don't work. This leads them to think more technology is the answer as they look for a theoretically simpler solution to the problem. This can be a slippery slope. We try to convince our counterparts that “high tech” isn't the only solution. What we're also saying is that we are all on tight budgets. Yet if we rewind, we did have the opportunity to use the less expensive and more labour intensive (read budget appropriate for most theatres) K9 programs to save lives.

Some members of the Canadian Military working in Colombia with its military, have been designing a pilot project, for just this reason. IABTI Region III has also been quite supportive in this effort. We outline some ideas that our K9 colleagues and other members around the world could consider.

Many of us have learned to focus our energies on “soft aid” rather than “hard aid” helicopters and ammunition. It doesn't take the CO to understand, this means cost-effective. Inexpensive as it might be, in the dog world, simple tricks and tips can save countless resources and more importantly, keep a project going on its own. Remember the saying, “Give a man a fish and you feed



K9 handler trainers with author in Bogota. New Hard Aid dog kits donated by Region III, coordinated by IABTI member Karen Carten of Minnesota.

him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” Dog units around the world could grow on their own, with just a little help from some of us.

If you have any abilities in the following areas, read through and consider how easy it is to participate.

K9 EXPERTS: Teach Dog Selection

Can you film a video of green dogs being tested, showing bad dogs and good dogs with respect to ball drive and prelim hips and elbows physical checks? If so, keep a copy for your department, and donate a copy to the IABTI K9 Committee to give out to needy departments around the world. Or, if you travel to a country even for tourism and have a few extra hours, let us know, and we can set you up with a short presentation to local K9 units.

The present supply of third party vendor dogs has not been able to cover the need in volume. Those of us who know how to pick the “rescue” dogs, can teach our counterparts to do the same. We all know that most police departments consider the rescue and “SPCA” dog pool as a very good viable option to the more expensive top breed vendor. Why? Because we've trained our handlers to recognize a diamond in the rough. Can our counterparts in the third



Author (in black) with new K9 handlers in Colombia's Northern Amazon.

world, with a sliver of the budget we have, benefit the same way? Of course they can, and it just takes some of our best K9 experts to help them develop programs to recognize which of the hundreds of downtown “pound” dogs in Calcutta, Bogota or Harare may actually have the initial drive needed, and just as importantly will last the desired 8-10 years. Just a few minutes giving tips on ‘hips and elbows’ and ‘ball drive’ can go a long way.

K9 and CRIME SCENE EXPERTS: Teach Cross Contamination Avoidance

Many K9 programs take the rank and file out of the military, and expect them to understand the basics of contamination on the level of trained CSI’s. Rarely are the new handlers taught to understand what this really means. See evidence of this in the many dog training boxes around the world that have powders leaking out of the box, on the handles, on the dog’s own leashes, etc. Our suggested solution? Motivate the local country to use their own interagency support. Get local CSI’s who have theories of transference drilled into them to teach a few hours of Locard’s Theory to K9 handlers. It is especially important now for members in the Afghan and Iraqi theatres to encourage diplomatic missions to promote this free but very necessary basic training.

K9 HANDLERS & Any Member: Motivation

K9 handlers around the world are sometimes considered the ‘bottom of the rung’ in their units. Regular soldiers who use technology often look down on the K9 handler because they misunderstand the importance and potential of a K9 team. In a larger infantry unit for example, a K9

handler may feel isolated.

When you travel to a foreign country, even for a vacation, make a point of giving a gift to the airport K9 handler at your destination. This can make a huge difference in the motivation and confidence of that handler. Gift ideas include K9 equipment like leashes, a box of plastic sandwich gloves, medic kits, magazines with pictures of dog training, your department patches, and even safe-to-transport training aids.

VETERINARIANS

We cannot stress the importance veterinarians enough. Please ask your department vet to consider:

- a) Volunteering to be on a network email hotline for emergency questions from K9 departments around the world.
- b) Volunteering to visit a local K9 unit to offer insight while on vacation in a foreign country. (We would be very happy to coordinate such a valuable form of aid.)

If you plan on visiting a country that could benefit from assistance, consider helping out with one of the options above. Please don’t let language be a barrier. You can contact your own diplomatic mission or embassy in that country and tell them of your desire to give some free assistance, even if it’s only an hour of your time. If the embassy cannot help you, contact us at the IABTI K9 Committee and we will try to set up anything from a simple “meet and greet” to more formal assistance.



Andy Rendle, IABTI member from Region VII, assists with aid projects, training Military K9 in Colombia through liaison with Canadian Military. He is also a member of the K9Scope Network and cofounder of the National Detection Dog Association of Canada. He can be contacted at: K9Scope@aol.com. 🐾



Help our counterparts by providing the right equipment.

If more frontline troops are saved from injury or death by dogs then fewer troops will be sent overseas; it's easy math.



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