

Air Force Print News Today

Air Force news from around the world

Military working dogs: More than man's best friend

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7/12/2005 - **ALI BASE, Iraq (AFPN)** -- Dogs are known as man's best friend, but to Airmen and Soldiers here, military working dogs are considered a four-legged partner in the war against terrorism.

Security forces Airmen and Soldiers, along with their military working dogs, have partnered together to provide force protection on this sprawling air base that is home to thousands of coalition servicemembers and civilians.

In the eyes of the Air Force, the dogs are considered valuable property, like an F-16 Fighting Falcon, said Tech. Sgt. Terri Frye, 407th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron's kennel master who is deployed from Hurlburt Field, Fla. But to her and many of the handlers she works with, their dogs are much more than that. Although the handlers understand that the dogs are Air Force property, they cannot help but become attached to their dogs after years of working with them side by side, she said.

"Your dog is your best friend," Sergeant Frye said. "And you will always remember the dogs that you have worked with."

Staff Sgt. Gregory Long, a dog handler here deployed from Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, said he has always been around dogs, having grown up on a cattle farm.

Part of the job for Sergeant Long and his 4-year-old German shepherd explosive patrol dog, Doran, is to search vehicles that come onto base.

Although some searches net contraband, Sergeant Long said their mere presence also provides a deterrent to bad guys, especially when they see Doran's sharp fangs. He compared Doran's teeth to 42 bullets that can exert 350 to 400 pounds of pressure per square inch in a bite -- enough to break a man's arm. Nevertheless, the two share a close bond.

"Doran is my partner," Sergeant Long said. "He looks out for me, and I look out for him, and he is a partner that I would trust my life to."

Here, Sergeant Long has also struck up a partnership with his Army counterparts.

Army Staff Sgt. James Demaree said he thinks it is a good idea to have joint patrols with the Air Force not only because they foster a good working relationship, but also, and more importantly, because the job they perform benefits everyone here.

"The Air Force security forces and their dogs provide a service that helps us ensure that we can have a better level of force protection for our Soldiers and Airmen based here," Sergeant Demaree said.

The natural instincts a dog possesses contribute tremendously to their arsenal for deterring attacks, Sergeant Demaree said.

"The dog is definitely an important asset," he said. "He has keen senses like his smell and hearing that are well beyond ours and that definitely make him a combat multiplier."



SOUTHERN IRAQ -- Doran, a 4-year-old explosive patrol dog, searches the back of a civilian vehicle at a remote location as his handler, Staff Sgt. Gregory Long, directs him to potential hiding spots. They are assigned to the 407th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron at Ali Base. (U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. Lek Mateo)