

Iraqi Police Dog Training

By Specialist Ry Norris

Iraqis use dogs mainly to protect their houses and sheep. “We do not feed them. We do not care for them,” said Mr. Emad Matlum, an interpreter with the Diyala Provincial Police Transition Team. “When we are praying and a dog’s saliva touches us, we have to go take a shower. Dogs are considered unclean. The *Koran* says so.”

Considering this attitude, the August 2008 establishment of the Diyala Provincial Canine Unit to help Iraqis target insurgents and detect drug and explosives caches is particularly remarkable. It demonstrates the willingness and progress of the Iraqi police in accepting combat multipliers and adapting to measures intended to help maintain security in Iraq.

To maximize the effectiveness of their working dogs, the Diyala Provincial Canine Unit conducts regular training. The training compound is surrounded by barriers, and there is a sign marked, “Danger: Military Dog Area” at the front entrance. The ground is covered with smooth, golf ball-sized rocks. On 5 January 2010, an Iraqi police sergeant and two of his fellow Soldiers sat at a picnic table at the far end of the compound, ready to take notes. They were joined by two U.S. military instructors and six assistants.

“We want to assist the Iraqis in understanding why they should provide proper medical care for their dogs,” said the officer in charge of the 51st Medical Detachment Veterinary Treatment Facility, which is under the leadership of the 248th Medical Detachment Veterinary Services, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, but is located at the training compound. “The health of the working dog must be optimized in order to protect their investment,” she added.

The officer in charge demonstrated the step-by-step techniques for treating soft-tissue wounds and stabilizing distal-limb fractures using a military police dog from the 51st Military Police Detachment, Fort Lewis, Washington. The two-hour training session also included instruction on recognizing and providing first aid for shock.

During the hands-on portion of the training, a canine handler from the 51st Military Police Detachment kept the working dog calm as the dog patiently allowed one of the Iraqi policemen to wrap his mock leg injury.



The Iraqi sergeant stated, “I’ve never learned how to give first aid to a dog in the 20 years I’ve worked with them. Whenever a dog was hurt, we would clean it up and slap a Band-Aid on it.” However, one Iraqi soldier who participated in the training event has worked with his dog for a year. He is aware of her capabilities and understands her value to the unit. With his dog’s help, he was able to locate an explosives cache during a previous mission. He indicated, “I have a very good relationship with [her]. I treat her like one of my own kids.”

Although the Diyala Provincial Canine Unit is new, the Iraqi soldiers have excelled in their training and have applied the information they have learned to their daily missions. A U.S. Army Soldier who coordinates the logistics and provides training assistance at the training compound said, “You can see their dedication and determination. Each time we train with them, they remember the things we’ve taught them. They may not have the same supplies as we do, but they work with what they have.”

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