

Forces Command Canines Compete

By Sergeant First Class Melvin Avis

The battle lines were drawn as competitors entered the field for the third consecutive United States Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) Military Working Dog (MWD) Competition held at Fort Riley, Kansas, 24 through 27 April 2006.

On the first day of the competition, 15 MWD teams faced their first challenge—detection. Judges from across the Army evaluated each team's performance in vehicle, luggage, and warehouse searches during the event. The teams were challenged by distractions such as food and toys, as well as by Mother Nature's ever-changing weather, which tested the teams' limits. Points were awarded for the number of training aids detected, while points were deducted for mistakes such as false responses, failure to correctly read the dog's change of behavior, or failure to clear 100 percent of an area. In case of tied scores, finishing times decided the winners of events.

The second day of the competition showcased the handlers, who demonstrated the amount of control they had over their MWDs in tactical obedience while tackling different obstacles such as the swinging tunnel, stacked barrels, and other obstacles not typically found in day-to-day training. Here again, there were numerous distractors throughout the course. Immediately following tactical obedience was the handler



Top: Sergeant James Cooley and Zita (Fort Bragg) negotiate the obstacle during the tactical obedience phase of the competition.

Middle: Vasho (Fort Stewart) successfully negotiates the water barrier.

Bottom: Sergeant David Hill and Tarzan (Fort Drum) don their body armor and complete the gunfire portion of the special event.



protection phase of the competition. This exercise demonstrated a team's ability to overcome surprise situations, such as aggressive suspects or the requirement to make a "muzzle attack." A muzzle attack sends a muzzled dog to attack a suspect who is wearing no protective gear. It demonstrates that the dog is not equipment-oriented, looking only to attack the protective gear used in training.

The third day challenged teams with the building search and the scouting phase. During the building search, the teams had just seven minutes to clear a building by locating multiple suspects located within it. Scouting evaluated a team's ability to detect suspects and clear an outdoor area 100 meters square in five minutes.

On the final day of the competition, the teams attacked the "special event." This timed event consisted of a 3.1-mile course that included scouting, water aggression, an obstacle course with gunfire, and a test of the handler's ability to provide medical care to the MWD. Time penalties were imposed for incorrect performance.

The scores from each event were added, minus the special event, to decide the 2006 FORSCOM top patrol narcotic detector dog team, the top patrol explosive detector dog (PEDD) team, and the top kennels.

Special thanks go out to Captain Jack Rush, kennel master at Redstone Arsenal, Alabama, and Mr. David Reiter, MWD program manager for the Military District of Washington, for their assistance in judging the events and Captain Brett Taylor, Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for providing veterinarian care during the competition. The Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment of the 97th Military Police Battalion and the Fort Riley MWD section provided the support that made the FORSCOM 2006 MWD competition a great success.

Sergeant First Class Avis joined the Army in 1991 and has been an MWD handler for nearly 10 years. He has two associate degrees from the Community College of the Air Force and is working on a four-year degree in public administration from Wayland Baptist University. He is the kennel master for the 42d Military Police Detachment at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Competition Results

Explosives Detection (Tie for 1st and 2d place. Time used to decide placement.)

1. Sergeant Matthew Schneider/MWD Oori (Fort Hood, Texas)
2. Sergeant David Hill/MWD Tarzan (Fort Drum, New York)
3. Sergeant James Cooley/MWD Zita (Fort Bragg, North Carolina)

Narcotics Detection

1. Staff Sergeant Dennis Asher/MWD Shaman (Fort Stewart, Georgia)
2. Sergeant Matthew Fitting/MWD Tarzan (Fort Drum)
3. Staff Sergeant Fred Williams/MWD Ajax (Fort Polk, Louisiana)

Tactical Obedience

1. Sergeant Matthew Fitting/MWD Tarzan (Fort Drum)
2. Sergeant James Cooley/MWD Zita (Fort Bragg)
3. Staff Sergeant Patrick Hahnen/MWD Vasho (Fort Stewart)

Handler Protection

1. Staff Sergeant Patrick Hahnen/MWD Vasho (Fort Stewart) Perfect Score
2. Staff Sergeant James Ide/MWD Rex (Fort Hood)
3. Sergeant James Cooley/MWD Zita (Fort Bragg)

Building Search (Tie for 1st, 2d, and 3d place. Time used to decide placement.)

1. Staff Sergeant Skipper Green/MWD Llaw (Fort Polk)
2. Sergeant James Cooley/MWD Zita (Fort Bragg)
3. Sergeant David Hill/MWD Tarzan (Fort Drum)

Scouting (Tie for 1st, 2d, and 3d place. Time used to decide placement.)

1. Sergeant Matthew Fitting/MWD Tarzan (Fort Drum)
2. Sergeant David Hill/MWD Tarzan (Fort Drum)
3. Sergeant Corey McDonald/MWD Pit (Fort Riley, Kansas)

Special Event

1. Sergeant Jimmie Wise/MWD Zorro (Fort Bragg) 37:17
2. Sergeant James Cooley/MWD Zita (Fort Bragg) 37:45
3. Specialist Joshua Rose/MWD Iron (Fort Riley) 39:42

Top Patrol Narcotic Detector Dog Team

Sergeant Matthew Fitting/MWD Tarzan (Fort Drum)

Top Patrol Explosive Detector Dog Team

Sergeant James Cooley/MWD Zita (Fort Bragg)

Top Kennel

Fort Drum (2d consecutive year)
Sergeant Matthew Fitting/MWD Tarzan
Sergeant David Hill/MWD Tarzan