

Off the Leash:

Military Working Dogs

Search for Recertification

By Specialist Cody A. Thompson

Detecting bombs, locating narcotics, chasing “bad guys,” and saving lives are “all in a day’s work” for military working dogs and their handlers. Such demanding jobs require constant training—punctuated by annual certification courses, such as the one held at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 10–14 January 2011.

According to Sergeant First Class James Bockelmann, kennel master, 42d Military Police Detachment, 16th Military Police Brigade, Fort Bragg, “A new dog is like a private right off the street.” All military working dogs begin their training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, where they take a course that is “like their basic training and [advanced individual training].” Training continues upon assignment to a unit, and recertification is required on a yearly basis.

Teams from Fort Stewart, Georgia; Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Riley, Kansas; and Fort Bragg completed the annual certification course. The course included training on patrol, obedience, suspect retention and apprehension, and explosives and narcotics detection.



The course began with obedience and suspect apprehension training, which was held at the main office of the canine (K-9) unit. Then the teams traveled to a nearby skating rink, where the dogs were expected to use their keen sense of smell to locate an explosive training aid or narcotics aid. Their sense of smell was tested once again when they were required to locate narcotics inside a terminal at Pope Air Force Base and explosive training aids in the woods next to McKeller’s Lodge.

“As a handler, you don’t want to go where your dog hasn’t been,” said Sergeant Jeffery Smith, a patrol explosive detector dog handler with the 16th Military Police Brigade, Fort Bragg. Staff Sergeant William Taylor, a patrol narcotics detector dog handler with the 385th Military Police Battalion, Fort Stewart, added, “The most important part is that the dog maintains proficiency because [it is] a psychological deterrent. Someone would think twice about messing with ‘the guy standing next to a big dog.’”

Regardless of how many times the military working dog teams complete annual certification training, they arrive trained and ready to go to work to search, find, and seize contraband that endangers the lives of everyone. The successful completion of certification training will benefit the military working dog teams in real-world situations.

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