

# **HAITI DEPLOYMENT 2010**



***An interview in the February Dog Talk with Steve Driscoll Canine Search Specialist, FL-TF1***

## ***How many people did your team save?***

Miami-Dade Fire Rescue FL-TF1 had 11 saves over 11 days. This was by far the most saves are team has had in a time period of less than 2 weeks. These lives were saved by searches conducted by our Task Force Members, Canine Teams, and Technical Search Specialist.

## ***Were the conditions tough for the dogs?***

Hot, dusty, and a very unstable environment made it extremely difficult for our Canines on a daily basis. Additionally, a very strong odor of human remains made it even more challenging. I believe the reason all of the Canine Teams faired so well was the realistic training we all participate in while at home. This continuous preparatory training paid off and made all of the countless hours worth it with just one save let along eleven that the team had. As for the human remains odor that our canines had to deal with on such a large scale, Teresa MacPherson stated it well when she compared it to background "white noise" that the dogs just had to eliminate.

***How did you feel when your dog had a live find?***

I think everyone that reads this and has a search dog knows how I felt. It is indescribable. It validates everything you have trained and prepared for over the years. I have been a Firefighter/Paramedic for 19 years and have had my fair share of saves while on the job. But I will always remember this deployment and our teams contribution as one of the highlights of my career. I only hope that all handlers have the opportunity to have that same feeling at least once in their career.

***Was decon a problem?***

Miami-Dade Fire Rescue FL-TF1 set up a very thorough Decontamination system for both the Task Force personnel and Canine alike. Once this DECON system was in place, all teams that were deployed used this station every day.

***Were the dogs utilized enough?***

I can't speak for all the US teams but for FL-TF1 the answer was yes. I started as a Handler in 1998 when Canine Teams were not always at the same level of training and capabilities. Since then, there has definitely been a positive change towards standardization of training and certification for the National Program. With this has come confidence in our Canine teams. As for FL-TF1, each and every member on this deployment believes in our Canines which was evident by our utilization. Even before we arrived in Haiti we knew of the commitment our Task Force has in our Canine Program. As it relates to this deployment, Not only did our Program Manager roster the 4 Canine Teams under the Search component but also added 3 additional Canine Teams that are cross trained and rostered in the support function to give FL-TF1 the capability of 7 fully certified teams at the ready. And all 7 were called upon and worked on a daily basis which increased our likelihood of saving as many people as possible.

***How was your team's morale?***

I think even with all the sadness, moral was very high because of all of the saves each and every team was making. We would either find another person, or hear of another team that just did and you knew there was still hope. I think our team was focusing on the positive impact we were making and the good that we were doing. I for one was very proud to be a part of such an organized effort.

***How did this disaster rank with previous disasters that you have been on?***

I thought I had seen it all but I was wrong. All disaster are horrific for their own reasons but this was the worst that I have ever seen. The human tragedy, suffering, and long-term implication are hard to fathom. I only hope that Haiti can recover from such a tragedy. They all need our thoughts, prayers and support for a better future. And to that end, if the people reading this have not yet contributed in one way or another, please do so now. This is the way we all can be there to help the Haiti people in one way or another.

***What were the details of the 2 year old rescue?***

It was exactly how the program is suppose to work. A true team effort. There was 13 Firefighters on our recon team. It was day 6. We were working in a depressed/devastated area. These residences were all connected to each other laterally and one on top of each other on the side of a mountain. It was a huge area of devastation. We were following a lead on top of the mountain which turned out to be a deceased person. This was an isolated area which I took advantage of. Blaze hadn't had a find since day 1. Thus no rewards for 5 days. There was so many people watching everywhere you went that you Couldn't stage a rescue. I utilized the Haitian that we were following to that lead, and explained to him the importance of keeping the dogs motivated. He was eager to help so we hid him next to HR. I sent Blaze and he alerted and was rewarded without any Haitians seeing it. We then were making our way down the mountainside. The team had stopped to regroup and one of the team members thought he had heard a knocking. Later we determined that this couldn't have been the case. However, thank God he had stopped and heard something because it was enough to send my dog. We had an odd number of dogs on our team so Blaze was working alone that day. There was too large of an area to run your dog on the entire community. With the heat and being day 6 we were working more off of leads from the Haitians. There was no lead at that time. I wouldn't have sent Blaze to that area without the Firefighters input. I sent Blaze on the search of the entire vicinity he ended up down below me on the mountainside out of sight and then started alerting very strongly with intent. It was difficult to gain access to Blaze but I finally made it down to him. While this was going on our team down below was locating and obtaining info from the mother and locals. The mother had arrived before we got the baby out and our medical specialist said she was singing and praying. I found him barking straight into a concrete wall. I called on the radio our team leader JRod and notified him that He needed to make his way down to our location. When he arrived I advised him

where to breach. Gave Blaze a well deserved reward, and the entire team went to work. Our search tech was preparing the search cam while the Rescue specialist were breaching a small hole in the wall. They completed their task and shined a flashlight into the hole and there was baby Carla, right where Blaze had alerted. They then were working very carefully to make the hole big enough to extract the baby. They pulled the baby out and immediately, transferred her to our Medical specialist and team Doc. There was no obvious signs of trauma, however she was dehydrated. They used an old ironing board to immobilize her and started a IV line. We then carefully passed her out of the area and made our way down the mountain to our team van. They transported her to a field hospital and she was released to her parents the next day. It was very cool seeing the whole recon group utilized. We all were emotional and that's a rescue I will never forget.

Steve Driscoll, FL-TF1



Above . . . 3 year old girl that K9 Chase, K9 Striker, PJ Parker, and my dog helped to find after she had been buried 5 days next to her dead grandmother and 2 dead aunts. The dogs pinpointed the exact spot on the collapse in less then a minute each. PJ ended up having to go down the hole we made because the little girl was afraid obvf the men and only after we lowered PJ by her ankles and she said baby in French would the little girl raise her arms up to PJ so she could pull her to the surface. What a great day for both the K9's and the team – Scott Mullin, FL-TF1