



DOG TALK

The official *unofficial* newsletter for FEMA dog handlers

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From the Editor

Training a search dog is hard. Losing a search dog is harder. It has been 5 years since I lost my dog Mercedes to cancer and I still miss her terribly. My heart goes out to the following handlers who have recently lost their partners. This issue is dedicated to our *Partners Past*:

LOUIE

Amy Rising/NE-TF1 taught him directability on snow banks. They were hundreds of miles from the task force and hours from the nearest disaster search-training partner.

But she was an experienced wilderness search handler, and Louie had The Right Stuff.

They were a perfect match for each other, both carefree and always ready for a good time. He was Mr. December once on a calendar, dressed up as Santa. She wore BDU's patched with duct tape.

They did wilderness and water, disaster and cadaver, and did it all well. They went to the World Trade Center and the Salt Lake Olympics. They were one of a handful of teams deployed by FEMA as cadaver response to the Oklahoma City tornadoes in 1999.

But what we who knew Louie remember most about him was his penetration. In these days when some agonize over whether three barks is a "focused" alert, there was never any doubt when Louie found someone. Often as not, he was in the hole with the victim, barking his head off. In his Type 1 certification and all his recerts, Louie got in to the victims, sometimes more than one. He was canine search and heavy rescue combined, in a fur coat.

Louie was fearless. At his first Type 1 certification, Indiana, he scaled a metal pipe angling up a story or more in the air. As the evaluators held their breath and Amy raised her hand and said in a small voice, "Safety issue," Louie nimbly turned around at the top of the pipe and came back down, satisfied that there were no victims up there. We quickly erected a barrier to prevent any other dog from getting in the same precarious position. But I doubt it would even occur to another dog to go where Louie dared.

Their last FEMA deployment was the Columbia Shuttle crew recovery in East Texas in February 2003. In the words of our Task Force Leader for the Hemphill Command Post, Team Louie "kicked butt." It was well into the second week of searching before Louie began to look, well, a little tired.

In April 2003, Louie re-certified Type 1 in New Jersey. He was 8-1/2. And, yes, he got in to a victim.

Only another handler can know what Amy is going through—the loss of a partner, friend, companion. We understand the hole in her heart that only time will heal. Losing Louie. It's a body blow to our task force and the entire system.

Elaine Sawtell

For more on Louie, go to:

<http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/fire/usar/members/pdf/louie.pdf>

Jenner
9/22/92 – 6/8/04

Jenner by the Sea, handled by Ann Wichmann, Front Range Rescue Dogs, FEMA Colorado Task Force 1, City of Boulder Mountain Parks Ranger Service Dog.

Jenner was qualified as an operational air-scent search dog with Front Range Rescue Dogs at the age of two. At the same time, in a parallel training mode, we were working on certification as a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster dog. We achieved the Type II (Basic) standard in October of 1994, and Jenner was one of the early dogs in the country to achieve the Type I (Advanced) certification in August of 1995. He, with his friend Cayman, was one of the founding dogs of Colorado Task Force 1. Jenner continued both wilderness and disaster work for most of his life. Jenner also became an important “trainer” for new handlers, humbling many who thought they could hold onto that toy!

Jenner’s search career was compromised by his handler’s broken ankle and failing knees.... Nonetheless, he made several finds in both his wilderness and disaster work. Most noteworthy of these is his location of an elderly woman who had been lost 3 days in the Holy Cross Wilderness, and his find of a worker who had been killed in an explosion in the Great Western Sugar Plant in Scottsbluff, NE. Jenner experienced an amazing survival situation when he was swept into a large culvert while searching the Ft. Collins Flood in 1997, and was transported 1500 feet in an underground floodwater system. He showed great strength and a tremendous will to live, and emerged alive.

Jenner’s favorite activity was retrieving, and he achieved his Started Hunting Retriever (SHR) title with four straight passes at the age of eight, when his handler finally decided to let him pursue this activity. Jenner had a lot of attributes: excellent hips, great lineage, endless play drive, great temperament, and immeasurable courage. With these qualities, the decision was made to breed Jenner. At the current time, Jenner has 11 FEMA certified pups (and one grand-pup), as well as additional wilderness and retriever titled pups and grand-pups. Hopefully, his genes and spirit will enhance both search and retrieving lines for years to come.

Jenner had his 9th birthday on deployment in New York City, and his vast experience in searching, his great agility, and his courage and determination really came through at this most difficult of searches. Like many of the search dogs, Jenner worked a double duty at the WTC, locating the victims of the disaster, and providing incredible solace and grief therapy to the workers. Jenner had a presence and a quiet, open welcome that invited strangers to hug him and talk to him, and the most incredible eyes that totally engaged people in communication. Together, we presented programs to share our experience and our grief, always amazed and healed by the love and concern expressed by the people who came to hear.

In July of 2002, after collapsing on the trail on one of our favorite walks, Jenner was diagnosed with multiple myeloma and a weakened heart. His chemotherapy was miraculous, and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to all the fine veterinarians who allowed him to have a high quality of life. After struggling for a year with priorities, in June of 2003 I retired from my 28-year career as a Park Ranger/Manager for the City of Boulder, with much of the incentive being to spend more time with Jenner. We traveled from ocean to ocean, played and retrieved, and went on long walks and swims in his beloved Colorado haunts. On June 4th of 2004, Jenner had a great time on a three-mile hike and creek splash, retrieving logs, and wasn’t even stiff coming home. The next day he was fine, but on Sunday he didn’t want to get up. We spent two days trying to figure out a diagnosis, control the pain, and make things somehow work again.

In the end, he was strong, dignified, courageous and totally present... except that his spine had dissolved from the multiple myeloma. We both knew he had to go. I am so grateful for his lifetime with me, and that we had the chance to reminisce together about all our experiences, and that he died peacefully with his head in my hands. So many are not so lucky. Jenner was a gentleman, an inspiration, and a hero. He was friend, teacher, search dog, service dog, eager retriever – all at a whispered request - full of joy and love for life. He was a working partner and a dear friend, and I will always miss him.

Ann Wichmann



New York, NY, September 25, 2001 -- Colorado Task Force member Ann Wickman crosses the pile of rubble with her dog Jenner at Ground Zero.

Photo by Michael Rieger/ FEMA News Photo

Cholo

Cholo died on June 24, 2004 from an apparent aneurysm. He would have been 10 years old in October of this year. His death was sudden and came as a devastating shock. I wasn't ready for this and am having to deal with the reality and permanence of it all. He was type II certified (what a challenge that was :) and responded to disasters here in Texas, as well as ground zero. I could never put into words how much he was loved and how proud I was of him. Not only by myself, but also to those who grew to know him. He was a proud worker, who thought he was the best of the best. Sometimes I thought that he was too.... they are all the best of the best to each one of us.

My heart goes out to those other handlers who have recently lost their dogs as well. I understand the pain & permanence of it all. To those of you who haven't gone through this, condolences and kind words are a blessing to receive. As Anne McCurdy said regarding the loss of her own dog, even after 5 years, the devastation is still there. May we always remember & respect those fallen canines, as well understanding the grief of those who've been left behind.

Joanne Reitz

Libby

Libby passed away last Tuesday night, June 15, 2004. She was 9 years old. She had cancer that she likely got from her Dad. She was the same Libby you remember until her last day. She died quietly at home on her favorite couch with my wife and I at her side. In thinking back on my times with Libby, I remember many fun and rewarding hours of SAR training and being so proud of my girl. Libby had many friends -- human and canine -- the SAR community so I thought I'd send a note a mention it to you and let you pass it on at your discretion.

Barry Schwartz

From the Editor (again)

Pretty heartening stories, aren't they? I have proofread this issue three times and have gotten teary-eyed every time. I remember when Mercedes died, and I told Teresa MacPherson that I didn't know if I could ever train another search dog because it is so devastating when they die.

She said, "They are **so worth it** though". And she was right.

These dogs can do amazing things, and we are so lucky to have the opportunity to work with them. Our thoughts are with you Amy, Ann, Joann and Barry. You will be able to pass on all that information that your dog taught you, to your next dog.

Dog kisses to you- Anne



KUDOS TO.....



DOGTALK is pleased to announce that the following Canine Search Teams have recently gained certification (or **re-certification**) as FEMA US&R Type I or II Canine Search Specialists:

Sun Valley, CA Results – June 2004

Type I Certified: Sergio Morariu & Tammy (CA-TF4), Brian Marshall & Ross (CA-TF2) and Carol Herse and Rowley (CA-TF3)

Type II Certified: Carolyn Carlucci & Dakota (CA-TF6), Bud Souza and Kane (CA-TF4), Steve Brown and Echo (CA-TF6), Tom Shannon and Zlata (AZ-TF1) and Reeny Shannon & Everest (AZ-TF1)

The National Certification List of FEMA Certified Disaster Canine Search Teams is provided by Lynne Engelbert. (Lynne's e-mail: lengelbert@mail.arc.nasa.gov) It's attached below as an EXCEL spreadsheet. **PLEASE notify Lynne of any changes in address, status, etc!!!**



NatK9Cert6-04V2.xls

Canine Subcommittee Update

The Subcommittee met in Phoenix, AZ in May, many of the members meeting each other for the first time. After three days of discussing and composing recommendations, we came out with quite a lot of paperwork completed. We also reviewed our Mission Statement, updated our Position Description and created a Position Task Book. Be on the look out for these in the near future (FEMA-time).

For logistical reasons, FEMA has switched the October CSST course from Texas to VA. An announcement will be forthcoming. We will be polling to see how many handlers from each Task Force need this course. There will be another in April 2005.

The Subcommittee has reviewed the Evaluation Peer Reviews as to their value. The consensus was to make them available, but optional, at every test. But everyone should feel comfortable in delivering feedback, so if you have something to say, write it down and make sure the Chief Evaluator gets it. (Appreciative comments are welcome, too!)

The Operations Group meeting was held in June at FEMA Headquarters in Washington, DC. Rory Rehbeck and I presented the Canine Subcommittee's recommendations to all of the Chairs of all of the Working Groups.

Everything went through. (Whew!) I will briefly re-cap these, as there are some pretty big deals in the pipeline.

- 1) The Mentor Program is underway. Those of you who were submitted by your TFL will be receiving an application to complete and return. A list of mentors will be compiled from these applications. Task Forces will then be able to choose from this list a mentor(s) tailored specifically to their training needs.
- 2) Certification Preparation opportunities will be available in place of tests three times a year, one in each division. All of the resources for hosting an evaluation will be made available, but the event will be used for assessing and preparing handlers to test. All of the fun and no stress.
- 3) Given that most Type I re-certs are successful, the re-certification period will be extended to three years beginning 1-1-05. All current Type I certifications will be extended by one year at that point. The rationale is that money is saved and more test opportunities will be available for new teams.
- 4) The single-level certification process was accepted for implementation in 1-1-06. Any Type II team certified up to that point would retain their certification. Thus, there will be certified Type II teams until Dec 2007. Beginning 1-1-06 all certifications will be Type I only. The Type II will become the in-house, but administered by 3 rostered evaluators, all of which the Task Force may choose.

So...any questions?

(Did I mention I was going out of town?)

Teresa MacPherson, Chair
FEMA Canine Subcommittee
7/8/04

Please forward any news, scheduled events, letters to the editor, or other info you want disseminated via **DOGTALK**, the underground canine newsletter to Anne McCurdy: amccurdy@clarian.org
Mercedes **Please note that my email address has changed!!!!**