

Dog Talk

The official *unofficial* newsletter for FEMA dog handlers

February 2007

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Question and Answer

1) *Other than the standard required FEMA physical fitness test for "humans", does your team require handlers to do anything else to remain in "mission-ready" shape? (describe any programs you have, group fitness sessions, etc.)*

2) *Does your team have any requirements (or recommendations) for physical fitness for the search dogs? Is their stamina monitored in any way other than passing the test?*

There are 2 components to my response: what we did (and will probably do again in the next selection process), and my beliefs about fitness in technical search and rescue settings.

My biases: I can't believe that it isn't obvious that a harsh, high-risk environment makes fitness a compelling issue. Granted, a lot of times it isn't that physically demanding. But the next deployment could be different. And situations can change if environment changes or something goes wrong and adequate endurance and strength can make the difference between a difficult situation and one where problem cascades into other problems and a situation gets out of hand. The principle involved is having reserves both in member capacity and equipment.

I like our fitness test because it tests aerobic with a 1.5 mile run with the 25 lb pack and strength with the lifts (still wearing the pack). It is difficult (25 lb pack with several 65 lb lifts) but not excessively so, in my opinion. Time limit: 22 minutes, bonus points for each minute less down to 18 minutes. I think the fastest candidate was at about 12 minutes.

I think a 25 lb pack is a weight we should all be able to carry for hours or days. And occasionally having to lift or haul 65 lbs isn't out of line. The test did wash out several handlers who didn't even try due to personal health issues. A fitness test might lose some handlers or members but might also encourage people to raise the bar for themselves. (We have a pretty high bar for the dogs...)



If I was designing a test, I'd say that aerobic condition should be one factor. Also, just the ability to walk in steel toed boots in heat or cold for several hours, carrying the gear we need. Maybe one component could be the forest service pack test: 2 miles with 25 lb pack in 30 minutes (I think). It could be done in steel toed boots. That would give handlers some idea of what it takes to be searching hurricane style areas for a few days. Agility on the rubble is also essential. If you aren't in shape and/or athletic then risk of injury could be quite high. And you need the strength to help out or carry a dog if there's an issue.

K9: fitness equates to the ability to keep working when it's hot cause they have the stamina to work easily and don't have the stress of fatigue from the job. It's tough enough with the focus, rubble, heat or other extreme weather, etc. Just like people, if they are tired they won't be effective.

Mary Flood
UT-TF1

STAMINA

In Springfield we constantly monitor physical condition and weight of our dogs and keep them on the lean side. We all know extra pounds affect physical stamina.

The training sequence outlined below is motivating for the dog and will reveal deficits in both physical condition and search stamina.

The dog should be at the certified level or solid in searching, alerting and staying with the victim. Otherwise, confusion may result and/or incorrect behaviors may be reinforced (distractability, handler dependence, failure to alert or stay with victim).

All victims are concealed and inaccessible.

All problems are cold shots; no verbal or visual build up.

One pile and one victim can be used

One pile with multiple victims can be used

If available, multiple piles can be used.

One pile – one victim:

Select four or five victim locations (concealed and inaccessible)

Place victim in Location 1; send dog, reward alert, remove dog from pile, place dog down and out of sight (water and vet check if necessary).

Have victim relocate to Location 2; immediately send dog again and repeat process.

Have victim relocate and repeat process.

You may want to use variable reward system, (including victim reward, handler reward, no reward)
Start dog from different areas around pile to give dog different access and different wind direction.

This is a very motivating exercise for the USAR dog. He learns to relax (or at least wait/stay), then click into search mode again quickly. He covers the pile well because he will frequently check where the victim was last, then continue the search. By the fourth victim location, you are getting a good indication of the dog's physical stamina.

One pile – multiple victims:

Select multiple victim locations for each victim (concealed and inaccessible).

For instance, using two victims, select 2 or 3 locations that each victim will move to.

Follow procedure outlined for one victim, having both victims move after dog has alerted on each and been removed from the pile.

Multiple piles – multiple victims:

Simply place all victims; work each pile with minimal downtime between.

Ideally, have a spotter on the pile to help relocate victims, making sure they are concealed and inaccessible, and to inform handler of dog's actions, if necessary.

As with any USAR training, if the dog has problems, back up in your training.

Elaine Sawtell – 1/07



Questions from our readers

I was wondering how task forces are monitoring the progress of their K9 teams toward certification. I know TXTF1 has a checklist to follow from puppy to CE; but I'd like to compare some others as well.

One of the topics of our annual meeting was to adopt a method of monitoring a dogs progress (rather than using an FSA "testing" method) I'm hoping we adopt something that is out there and proven successful rather than trying to reinvent the wheel.

Please email me at PATF1K9@sympatico.ca if you have anything you could share on the topic.

*Thanks.
Rose*

Texas Training Update

We had a great time at our 3rd Annual Open Invitation Training at Disaster City, Texas, on January 27/28. Forty-five canine teams attended from 16 Task Forces and spent two days rotating through five training stations. We worked building props, three rubble piles (the wood pile is always a challenge, especially when wet), trains and an agility and directional station. My dog and I had twelve training runs on day 1 and ten on day 2 (I admit I was getting tired!). Aside from the obvious training benefit of working the dogs many times, we learn so much from the out of state handlers, their training techniques and ideas as well as new training set-ups on the training props we work all the time. And, if you're in Texas, there's always the rooster! The one we had this year was particularly bold, trying to attack Mark Moore's (FL2) big Mal, Ali. Mark's solution was to let Ali and the rooster go a few rounds but another FL2 handler, Brian Smithey, had another idea, so watch out, folks, for his new training partner, Robo-Rooster! Picture courtesy of Roger Picard, FL2.



Susann Brown



From the Editor

I put out the first issue of DOGTALK in March 1998. I was kidding around actually. Elaine Sawtell had asked me how the first Florida FEMA test had gone. It had been such an incredible experience that I wrote it up and sent it out. I sent it to probably 10 people and the next thing I knew handlers were writing and asking to be “put on the list”. There was no list – but I started one. Some of you old timers will remember the people I talk about in that first issue. And in those days it was Metro Dade, not Miami Dade...

FLORIDA UPDATE

I just rolled in from 5 great days in Miami watching Metro Dade’s first FEMA basic canine evaluation. The weather was incredible, the hospitality superb, and the facility top-notch. Ruben Almaguer is a dedicated Task Force Leader who commands great respect from his team and seems to be an all around good guy. They have done a fine job creating a state-of-the-art training center for their task force canines. Kudos goes to Jacquie Neetz for making it all happen there, as well as getting me hooked on those expensive sunglasses....

No complaints about the “officiating” here...Ed Stewart, Bob Schnelle and Patty Wood did an excellent, fair job of setting up and scoring the tests. (Patty’s first job as an evaluator and she took great notes for the handlers AND wore lipstick)

Of course in my usual style, I composed a small poem commemorating the event. AND...at the request of Bob Schnelle, I did it in song format:

(to the tune “These are a few of my favourite things” ... or sort of anyway..)

*Gold chains and tan lines and black beans and rice, really nice weather and boats that are nice.
Rubble with rebar and running red lights – What will we do with these warm Florida nights?*

Do the conga?

Drink margaritas?

Or maybe just hang by the pool??

*Old friends and new ones, and hanging with cops, chasing down Jacquie and not wearing socks.
Eating raw oysters and drinking cold beer, or going to South Beach is what they do here.*

(chorus)

Lots of dog testing and reaching new heights, watching my timer and getting bug bites.

(chorus)

*Put on your sunscreen and wear your dark shades, but soon you will realize how fast this tan fades.
Then we’ll go home and be sawing our logs – but just think we’ve got 4 more certified dogs.*

A big congratulations to Mike Kidd/Mizu (FL-TF1), Mike Conners/Jake (FL-TF1), Carlos Nunez/Bull (FL-TF1) and Mike Figurski/Aladdin (NY-TF1)

So.... That is page 1 from the first DOGTALK. (And thankfully my last attempt at song writing)

In November of 1998, Elaine Sawtell wrote a DOGTALK article titled “WHY A PRETEST?” which ended with this paragraph:

“Ultimately, the pretest demonstrates on the part of the task force and the handler **respect for the victim**. It is an awesome responsibility a handler assumes when he or she says their dog is ready to test and, by inference, capable of finding and alerting on a buried live victim in a disaster.”

DOGTALK has changed over the years, but Elaine’s message still holds true.

The December 2006 issue was the 40th issue of DOGTALK. As I start the 10th year of the official unofficial newsletter, I have to thank everyone who actually reads it, submits articles, and makes it successful.

Special thanks to Janelle Mackie, Teresa MacPherson, and Lynne Engelbert.



Foundation Training Weekend
03/31/07-04/01/07

The **K9 Search and Rescue Foundation Inc.** will be holding its' first **Foundation Training Weekend Seminar** 03/31/07-04/01/07 in Indianapolis, IN. This two-day seminar will cover the fundamentals of canine motivation and learning theory. Handlers in all disciplines of canine search and rescue are welcome and encouraged to attend. Spaces will be limited in order to provide hands-on instruction, so register early.

For more information, go to: www.K9SARF.org

If you are unable to attend the seminar and would like to support our mission, order your pre-release copy of the next edition to the best-selling book series *Wake up...Live The Life You Love: Finding Your Life's Passion*.

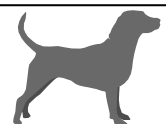
Proceeds from this inspirational compilation of stories benefit the K9 Search and Rescue Foundation, when the book is purchased from the store at www.K9SARF.org.

☆☆☆☆ Kudos to..... ☆☆☆☆

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

☆☆ Riverside, CA Results – January, 2007

Rob Cima & Ace (CA-TF7), Bryan Morgan & Jack (NV-TF1), Teresa Ortenburger & Remi (CA-TF7), Ron Weckbacher & Abby (CA-TF1), Jeff Ivy & Jakers (CA-TF7), Jason Cornell & Zoey (CA-TF7), Dave Mau & Lucy (UT-TF1), Nate Bogenschutz & Bandit (UT-TF1) and John Thomas & Mocha (CA-TF6)



In Passing

Jake

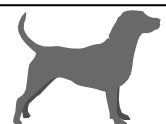
I had the pleasure of sharing almost 12 years of my life with Jake. As my first USAR K9, he taught me so very much... Together we passed two Type II evaluations, they were close but we certified. I think most importantly he taught me that simply passing wasn't enough. I didn't leave those successful tests with a "we nailed that one!" attitude. I left telling myself how much more work we had in front of us. I trusted him but always knew that we needed to be better.

Jake worked two train derailments, a parking garage collapse, the Pentagon and LaPlata, MD after a tornado. He worked my garden as well, year after year sneaking under the fence eating tomatoes and cucumbers. Two years ago he ate an entire bag of tomatoes and jalapeno peppers he found on my picnic table. You'd have thought after the first hot pepper hit his mouth he'd have stopped eating em. He must have had floppy eared blood his pedigree.

Jake - aka "Buddy Boy" inspired me to get involved, so I did. Somewhere he's hanging out with all of the other dogs, running and jumping again, sitting at that big table in the sky.... "Hey, pass the tomatoes."

RIP 02/01/95 - 12/05/06.

Sam Balsam
MD-TF1



Kinsey

I made the decision, yesterday (Sunday, Jan 7th), to put Kinsey down. She was in a training accident at Disaster City. Kinsey fell 15 or 20 feet off the top of a training structure, landing on her back and breaking it. The vet at TX A&M told us recent studies of dogs with this type of fracture had had 0% success of ever walking again. If I had elected to try, it would have been for me, not for her. Even if she walked with minimal success, it would never give her any quality of life she deserved...The odds were she wouldn't walk at all. The decision was easy. The pain is hard.

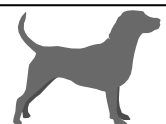
We as handlers are the most blessed group of human beings on the face of the earth. As I've often told my pet dog clients, "I'm a grown man and I get paid to play with dogs all day long! And...It doesn't get any better than that". Well, today is not one of the good days. My partner is gone. She deployed to seven federal deployments in her career. She also deployed on a large number of deployments as a volunteer. She did everything I asked and more. She taught me everything I know about how to handle a dog. I showed her the search and rescue game, but training and handling are not the same and she was ever patient until I finally figured out my roll. She helped train my task force and help show rescue guys from other parts of the world what a search and rescue dog could do. These last few years have been a blast. She knew her job and I knew to trust her. She was the picture you find by the definition of a search and rescue dog in the dictionary. She was my partner and friend. In New York, Kinsey was one of the recipients of the PDSA Dickens Medal for Gallantry (the highest gallantry award for animals in the world). Just this year, she got inducted into the Tarrant County Veterinary Medical Association "Hall of Fame". She remained brave to the end. When it was time, she kissed my hand, closed her eyes, and went to sleep. She didn't fight it. She was on to the next adventure.

There was a version of the "Rainbow Bridge" that came out after 911 about dogs greeting Fire Fighters and Police Officers that died at the World Trade Center, as they passed over the rainbow bridge. Well today, I hope they are there to return the favor. I pray they take good care of her. I was once asked by another handler, referring to Kinsey, "Do you know what you have, here?" I answered I was starting to understand. I didn't have a clue. I learned over time. I do know now.

Love your dog, love what you do, and remember it can go away in a heartbeat.



Bob Deeds, Forever "Owned" by K-9 Kinsey
Texas - Task Force One, FEMA
Search One Rescue Team



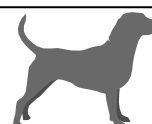
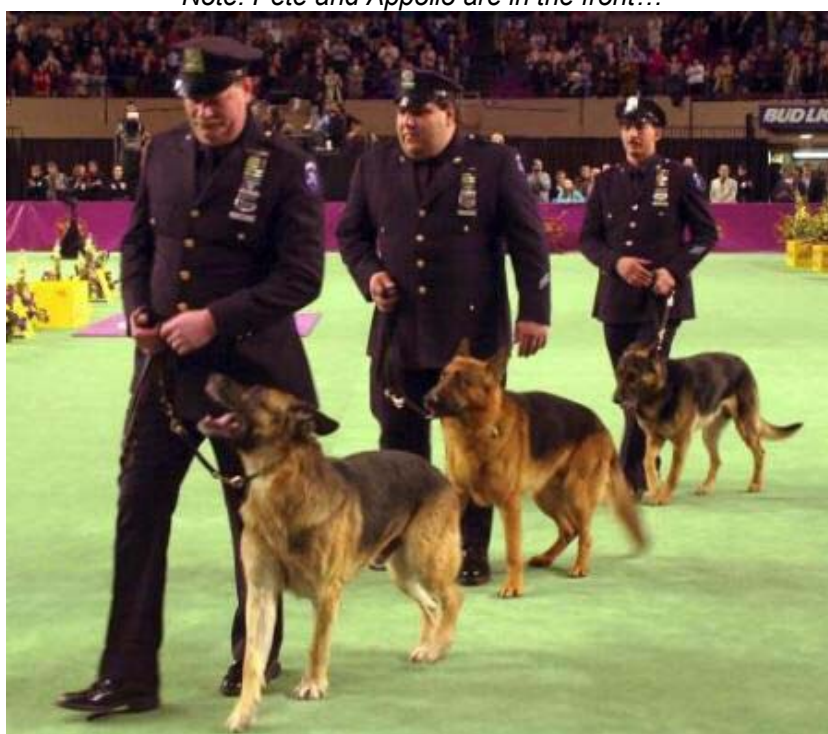
Appollo

Our thoughts go out to Pete Davis, NY-TF1 who lost his beloved German Shepherd Appollo in November 2006. Appollo graduated from NYPD SOD Canine in 1994. He was one of the original dogs to learn Search & Rescue and cross train a patrol dog in this field for the NYPD. He passed his Type II in 1997 in Florida. He was the first NYPD Canine Team to pass a Type 1 for NY-TF1, in Indianapolis in 1999. Pete and Appollo served in the Dominican Republic on a NYC Mayors Office Rescue Mission due to a hurricane. They were first responders @ WTC in 2001. Appollo also was winner of the AKC Ace Award in 2001.

Pete would like to say a thank you to all who helped and supported him and our team over the years.

Joe Caputo
NY-TF1

Note: Pete and Appollo are in the front...



A Cold Day in

Indianapolis. High reached a balmy 16 degrees (wind chill 5 below) and the morning low was in the single digits. An FSA was held at the newly remodelled Salt Mine on Saturday, 2/3. 12 dogs participated – 5 from OH-TF1, 3 from MO-TF1 and 4 from IN-TF1. Thanks to Athena Robbins, Gary Hay and Tony Zintsmaster who did a great job of evaluating under these conditions. Congratulations to all the handlers for having the tenacity to even show up!!



Hilda Recommends:

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