

USAREUR Military Working Dog Programs Strongest Link

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US Army Europe's Military Working Dog (MWD) Program is one of the first lines of defense in detecting and deterring threats in Europe. Working with coalition partner working dog programs to ensure transparency and interoperability in working dog capabilities, the USAREUR MWD program is building one of the strongest coalition working dog collaborations in the world. However, this coalition is only as strong as its weakest link. Gaps were identified in training that must be addressed to ensure that the working dog coalition is operating at its maximum strength at all times.



The Military Police Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 31K Military Working Dog Handler is an Army career field in its infancy. After branching off of the 31B Military Policeman MOS with an additional skill identifier Z6 (working dog handler), this three year old MOS faces many challenges today. One of the biggest challenges is rebuilding the institutional knowledge in the MOS. During the conversion only 75-80 percent of the eligible MWD handlers in the Army converted to 31K. This brought a unique challenge because the 20-25 percent that didn't convert were some of the most experienced of the population. Taking that experience from the program produced a gap in training that is difficult to close.

Training for working dogs is unique to each animal. There is not a single regimented method to train by that is suitable for every working dog. Fortunately, the

USAREUR MWD program is in a position to train with some of the most experienced European working dog trainers. Europe has a long history of utilizing working dogs. Starting in the 1900s, the Germans developed the discipline of Schutzhund and Holland formed the discipline of 'Koninklijke Nederlandse Politiehond Vereniging' (KNPV). Both of these disciplines laid the foundation for working dog training, and many of the coalition partners are well experienced in these disciplines. This is important as the US Army Europe's MWD program is working to instill the foundation of training to all its handlers. One way to really understand working dog training is to teach the psychology

of why dogs behave as they do. This training foundation is being established through training seminars being taught by the program managers throughout the region on working dog psychology and behavior modification. These seminars focus on communication, reading behavior and understanding why dogs behave the way they do. Another initiative the

USAREUR MWD program is implementing is to take training back to its basics.

The USAREUR MWD program is accomplishing this with the help of the Belgium Federal Police Canine Division. There is an operational need for all MWDs in USAREUR to be trained on Home Made Explosives (HME). Due to strict regulatory restrictions in Germany, the US Army Europe's MWD program had to find alternate ways of training with HME in the European theater. Recent attacks have illuminated the lethality and ease of procurement of HME in Belgium. To counter those threats, the Belgium Federal Police started a robust training program specializing in defeating HME



threats. The Belgium Federal Police has a homogeneous relationship with the Belgium Royal Military Academy to assist in this endeavor. The Belgium Federal Police and the Belgium Royal Military Academy have become instrumental in assisting US Army

Europe's to ensure all MWDs are capable of defeating any HME threats.

The Belgium Royal Military Academy chemistry department produces the necessary HME for the Belgian Federal Police Canine Division. Then they begin to introduce target odor to their working dogs using several training techniques. Earlier this year, the US Army Europe's MWD program was invited to bring handlers to the Belgian Federal Police Canine Division Central training facility to begin the process of introducing their MWDs on HME. This was a perfect opportunity as US



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Army Europe's MWD handlers were able to see the beginning stages of how working dogs are taught to detect target odors. This is a stage of working dog training that many of the newer handlers never get to experience.

All United States MWDs are trained at Joint Base San Antonio, TX, where handlers and dogs are taught the basics of detection and patrol. The unfortunate part is that new dogs and handlers are taught separately, so the new handlers never see the initial stages of how dogs are taught to detect target odor. The Belgium Federal Police use a very similar process to what the US uses in imprinting working dogs on target odor. Starting with odor recognition, then gradually progressing to the target response to

odor. It is a very thorough process that must be executed with extreme attention to detail to ensure that the timing of training is at its smallest deviation and that safety is not compromised. There are many formulations of HME that are extremely volatile and dangerous to handle. This can make rewarding the dog a little more complicated. The delivery of reinforcement in dog training is the key of having a successful training session. However, due to the outstanding professionalism of the Belgium Federal Police and the US Army Europe's MWD Handlers,



training is conducted to the highest level of effectiveness without incident. Now that US Army Europe's MWD handlers are able to learn how MWDs are imprinted on target odor and how MWDs are imprinted on HME, there is no doubt that US Army Europe's MWD program is ensuring the safety of the Soldiers and family members of the US Army Europe's communities, as well as assisting respective host nations in countering terrorism.

The goal of the cooperation between the US Army Europe's MWD Program and the Belgium Federal Police Canine Division to assist the US and other European partner nations in opening dialog for best practices and procedures in order to ensure working dog interoperability throughout Europe, strengthening the cooperation between the US and its European partners. The US Army Europe's MWD Program managers attend both European Commission and NATO Canine working groups to provide subject matter expertise in working dogs, both in a combat environment and in a law enforcement capacity. The US Army Europe's MWD Program managers' constantly



strives to strengthen the link between NATO and their European Commission canine counterparts. US Army Europe's MWD Program Managers are significant contributors in assisting NATO development of standard agreements (STANAG) of working dog capabilities for all of NATO. The Program managers'

5 experience in developing the NATO STANAG for working dogs gave them the ability to assist the European Commission in developing working dog standards agreement within the commission itself.

US Army Europe's efforts have helped expand the interoperability efforts by requesting and attending working groups from other European countries in order to expand the conversation on their best practices with their efforts in defeating HME threats. Just recently, the program managers attended a HME working group hosted by the Portugal Police Special Units Canine Division. In attendance was the leadership from the Belgium Federal Police Canine Division and the Finland Police Canine unit. There were explosive ordnance disposal experts, canine experts, chemistry experts, and canine handlers from all delegations, who came together to learn and build on efforts to defeat HME threats. Many topics were discussed in this working group, but the major topic was the safe handling of one of the most volatile types of HME. The Portugal Police has been successful in creating and training with increased amounts of this dangerous substance in the safest manner possible. One of the biggest takeaways

of the working group was that although each country had minor differences in their programs, the major similarities gave everyone the confidence that the US and other European countries are committed to the detection and deterrence of HME threats in Europe.

In the near future, the US Army Europe's MWD Program will attend the NATO Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Expert Panel for Military Working Dogs, hosted by Spain and facilitated by the US delegation, as the chairman position of the panel. To further expand the chain and strengthen the links, the US Army Europe's MWD Program is also planning to expand its expertise to the Balkan region as well as working with our Israeli allies to discuss further partnerships and training. This effort is crucial to ensuring that the US and its allies in Europe are able to defeat any threat and is able to attack the networks that wish to cause harm to others.

By building the institutional knowledge of the US Army Europe's MWD program and building the unbreakable links and relationships with our European coalition partners, it is without a doubt that the European theater possesses one of the greatest assets in detecting and deterring threats in the region. Know that our weakest link is stronger than any threat in Europe and is a major focus of the US Army Europe Military Working Dog Program and its European allies.

Strong Europe



Photo Captions:

- 1- MWD Hella (T262) Awaiting commands from her handler
- 2- MWD Nninja (V672) Conducting Law Enforcement patrols
- 3- MWD Lex (R703) and PFC Jackson conducting homemade explosive imprinting at the Belgium Federal Police Canine Training Center.
- 4- Representatives from US Army Europe, Belgium Federal Police Canine Unit, Finland Police Canine Unit, and Portugal Police Special Units Canine Division at the European Commission Homemade Explosive Working group in Libson, Portugal.
- 6- Military Working Dog Certification in Garmisch Germany

All Photos by MSG Hardenio Abdon