

S.C. Air National Guard Goes to the Dogs

Story by Maj. Jim St. Clair and Capt. Cindi King

The SCANG's C-130 unit has a long and distinguished history. Whether they're providing lift support to the fighter squadron or disaster assistance, the C-130 and its crew are always on the go.

Recently, they added "K-9" to their mission log when they assisted local law enforcement pick up two very special passengers. On Mar. 18, the crew assisted the Batesburg-Leesville Police Department pick-up two drug and bomb detecting dogs from the Military Working Dog (MWD) program at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas.

Lt. Col. "Buck" Shuler, command pilot for the C-130, said their primary mission that day was to deliver a trailer of two F-16 smoke missile generators to the Naval Air Station Ft. Worth Joint Reserve Base in Texas. But when a support request came in from the Batesburg-Leesville Police Department, Shuler said they were more than willing to lend a hand. The B-L Police Department procured the dogs through the Department of Defense's Military Working Dog School where dogs are trained and donated to qualified law enforcement agencies. Police Chief Wallace Oswald, who also is a First Sergeant in the S.C. Army National Guard, flew out to pick up the animals accompanied by one of the department's dog handlers, Senior Airman Nick Carver, who serves in the 169th Security Forces Squadron.

"We are a unique asset as the only cargo aircraft in the South Carolina Air National Guard," said Shuler. "We not only provide mission essential lift capabilities for repairs to keep the F-16s flying, we're ready to support whenever and wherever needed."

Oswald, who has served in the B-L Police Department for over 30 years, said they did not have any drug or bomb dog assets, as they recently lost one to old age and the other to cancer. He said the department was very grateful for the S.C. Air National Guard's quick response and assistance in getting the dogs and supporting the community.

Carver, who has been a dog handler with the B-L Police Department for over two years said his new partner will be Sisko, a two year old, 79 pound German Shepherd. His duties will include patrolling and drug and explosive detection.

"Although they received training at the school the training never stops with a patrol and detection dog," said Carver. "You have to work with them everyday, provide different scenarios and keep them interested."

Carver said Sisko will be with him on the job and even live at his home. He said when a dog joins the police department, they are treated like a police officer and even receive a badge.

The B-L Police Department also picked up a two year old 49 pound black Labrador Retriever named Kkaplan. He is from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) puppy program at Lackland. The doubled first two letters in the spelling of a dog's name is the unique indicator of a TSA trained dog.

"Kkaplan is not only going to be a drug and bomb detection dog for the department, but also our community relations dog who travels to schools," said Oswald. "The kids just love when we visit and bring one of our dogs along."

Sisko and Kkaplan immediately warmed up to their new teammates, Oswald and Carver, with lots of enthusiastic tail wagging and generous licks to their hands. After loading the C130, the K9s quickly settled in their crates for the ride home.

"You can read a dog when you work with them for so long," said Carver. "These dogs have a lot of energy, which will make them good to train because they have that special drive."

The MWD program trains over 800 dogs at a time for all Department of Defense and government law enforcement agencies. Not every dog is going to meet all of the mandates in their rigorous 120 day initial training. The dogs they determine would perform better with more one on one and consistent interaction are adoptable by approved outside law enforcement agencies.

"Sisko and Kkaplan will get the first few days off to get acclimated," said Carver. "But after this it's going to time for them to step up and start earning their keep."

Carver said the relationship between a dog and his handler gets so tight, the dog eventually just knows when it's a

work day and when it's not. They routinely work 12 hour shifts and rotate every two weeks for day and night hours.

"I had one dog who knew when it was a day off as he'd still be asleep when I'd look for him," said Carver. "When it was a work day, he'd be up and ready to go as soon as he saw me."