Canine Duty: A Day at the Kennels

Posted on



Canines at a pose – KC, Bush, Scooby, Pako, Jena, Lada and Lady enjoying the attention

Alert watchful eyes glistening with anticipation… Ears twitching and tails wagging to a frantic rhythm… Listening and watching intensely for their next command, the surrounding atmosphere shimmered with their adorable fervour. We were at the Head quarters of the Police Kennels situated in Asgiriya, Kandy and off we went to join in their doggy adventures.

WordsKrishani Peiris **Photographs** Damith Wickramasinghe

Due to the drizzle that engulfed Kandy, the surrounding air held a feeling of calmness. ‘Woof’, ‘Woof’… – the calmness was shattered at once as we heard the frantic barking of a dog, which was followed by countless other voices.

A journey through history

The concept of using canines for Police service, especially for crime detection, was first suggested by O N O Shokman who was the Officer in Charge of Wellawatte area in 1948. Accordingly the idea was implemented at Echelon Square, Colombo on December 1, 1948. The first dogs, two German Shepherds named Rex and Sheeba were bought at 175 and 200 rupees respectively from foreign expatriates and three Police Constables named Burtress, Armstrong, and Devanayagam were appointed to manage them.

However, as Kandy exhibited perfect environs – weather conditions and Sri Lanka's only veterinary faculty being situated in Kandy – for training and rearing dogs, the Police kennels were established in the current premises in 1949. After moving to Kandy, 14 kennels were built and by 1959 there were eight members in the Police canine service.

Through out the years the employment of dogs in crime investigations showcased much increase and due to this the Police Kennels were established as a special division on January 12, 1960 and went onto become a separate division in the Police in February, 1990.

Police Kennels: behind the scenes

The employment of dogs in Police services could be mainly attributed to their acute sense of smell that allows them to separately identify different odours. However, besides this there are many requirements that dogs have to fulfill.

The timetable of the dogs involve strict discipline though they are given much attention and love

The selection process is named 'police dog selection test' and it focuses on two age groups. One called puppy selection focuses on puppies between the ages of three to five months and the next group encompass dogs of nine months to two years of age. During the test, 22 drives or characteristics are tested and those who obtain the necessary averages and fall into the working dog category are selected for further training. The next step involves finding a Police dog handler for the selected canine. Selection criteria for officers include two main criterion, feelings and voice. The officer must exhibit a kind and caring nature while his voice must include what is termed as CCPPA – command, correction, praise, permissiveness and

agitativeness. Together the dog and the handler forms a pack or unit and will be employed in the four main subject areas currently handled by the Sri Lankan Police Kennel division – crime investigation, explosive sniffing, narcotic detection and canine patrolling. The bond between the handler and the canine, in this pack, is that of lasting trust, love, loyalty and companionship.

The timetable of the dogs involve strict discipline though they are given much attention and love. They start their day at about 6.30 in the morning and the handler checks the condition of the dog by observing their behaviour. Then they lavish in a grooming session and at 7.30 sharp report to the grounds where they are assigned to different locations for training. Until 11.30 they train outside the premises and again head to the Police Kennel headquarters around 12.30. Then at about 2.30 in the afternoon, they undergo a special training that involves a dog's favourite activities such as barking, biting and jumping. This concludes at 4pm and they are fed and kennelled for the rest of the day. Here they enjoy a quality time of rest in a comfortable kennel that is equipped with a sheltered dark room and a runway that is open to the elements.

An Outing

As we stepped into the grounds, the dogs were already engaged in their training. Here we watched them do various activities exhibiting their litheness. We also witnessed the strength of the bond between the dog and handler as their little doggy eyes and little doggy world followed and encircled the handler relentlessly. Not only that they intently listened to their handlers every word and loyaly shadowed the master without a moments hestiation.

It was a sight to behold and their engaging acts kept us bewitched for a long time… It was as if they were trying to show off their incomparable skills

We observed as one dog, Jena, underwent a training in narcotic detection. Excitedly she went around the periphery searching high and low at the prompting of her handler. Once she found the location she kept on pawing excitedly until the handler praised and removed the narcotic substance. Then we were distracted by another dog, named Pako attacking an officer dressed in a padded uniform. As we watched, the officer provoked him and until the handler told Pako to stop, he went on attacking showcasing his aggressive yet disciplined nature. Yet another time we were taken in by the playful
frolicing of the puppies who were unable to hold still. It was as if they were trying to

show off their incomparable skills to get their masters praise and to make them happy. It was indeed a sight to behold and their engaging acts kept us bewitched for a long time. When the time came to kennel them, we followed along and watched as they were fed and petted to their little hearts content by the handlers. There we left the dogs and the handlers to enjoy their little chit chat before it’s time to say good bye for the day.

KC
5 years
(Cocker Spaniel)
Employed at the airport and harbours and many places for narcotic detection.

Kelsey
2 years
(Rottweiler)
Crime – Robbery
Method – After sniffing a knife left by the suspect she found the suspect 1 1⁄2 km from the crime scene.

Scooby
6 1/2 years
(German Shepard)
Crime – Murder
Method – Helped to uncover important clues after sniffing the shard of a bottle at the crime scene.

Sanju
4 years (Alaskan Malamute)
Specialised in Narcotic detection

Bush
5 years
(Doberman Pinschers)
Crime – A robbery in a house.
Method – When we looked around, the suspect had left the camera pouch and through that we were able to find him.

Oshin
6 1/2 years (Dalmatian)

Crime – the breaking of temple’s donation box.
Method – After sniffing a screw driver left at the location he found the suspect 50 metres from the crime scene.

There are 54 Kennel Divisions in Sri Lanka with 262 dogs, both imported and locally bred. Kandy Kennels have about 56 dogs and the breeds include German Shepard, Doberman Pinschers, Dalmatians, Cocker Spaniels, Rottweilers, Belgian Malinois, Alaskan Malamutes and more. There are five Kennels by the names of Rockview, Manel, Nelum, Udavadiya and Kadupul. Kadupul is dedicated for mainting the puppies that are selected for training. During 2012 the dogs in Kennel Divisions has participated in 15,238 sweeps (VIP protection services), 1,608 crime investigations and 913 cases related to narcotics. Currently SSP E M M Ekanayake and SP Sisira Weerakoon are the only qualified officers who are able to select canines in Sri Lanka.

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