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Working dog teams bring new resource to Georgian troops

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MANNHEIM, Germany — The road to war is never an easy one, and as a battalion of soldiers from the Georgian Armed Forces' 33rd Light Infantry Battalion prepares to join the mix in Afghanistan, they are preparing themselves not only for combat, but also for the unique challenges of international partnership.

Every military branch does things a little bit differently than the next, and as the Georgians near their deployment, that's where the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, the U.S. Marines and a team of dog handlers from the 18th Military Police Brigade come in.

Working with soldiers from around the world is no longer a foreign concept in today's age of multinational forces. Multiple nations working together toward a common goal has become the norm. Nowhere is this truer than in Afghanistan where the International Security Assistance Force is made up of nearly 120,000 troops from 47 countries.

But before this unit can join the melting pot of troops – and in order to set its soldiers up for success – there are hurdles that need to be jumped.

As one of the many pieces of the puzzle, a pair of dog handlers from the 18th MP Bde. – Spc. Scott Born, a patrol narcotics detection dog handler with the 527th MP Co., 709th MP

Battalion, and Spc. Paul Stevens, a PNDD handler, with the 230th MP Co., 95th MP Bn. – found themselves in a joint-service, international, JMRC-led training scenario in Hohenfels, Germany, to help the Georgians gear up for their down range missions.

Born and Stevens worked with a team of Marines under guidance from JMRC to assist the Georgian soldiers during their Mission Readiness Exercise Feb. 12 through March 4, which was their culminating exercise before deploying to Afghanistan.

Prior to the MRE, the Marines had spent six months in the Republic of Georgia training the battalion for their upcoming deployment. Their training is a part of the Marine Corps' Georgian Deployment Program, which is a "two-year, time-phased program, which helps prepare four battalions – one every six months – to integrate with ISAF in Afghanistan in a counterinsurgency environment," according to a U.S. Marine Corps press release.

The role Born, Stevens and their military working dogs have in this program came into play during the MRE when the Georgians learned to integrate down range resources into their missions.

"Our intent is to help the Georgians better understand how to use dogs (while deployed)," said Born.

Military working dogs will be a new asset to Georgian forces during their deployment. Much like the need to familiarize themselves with foreign weapons, the Georgians needed to familiarize themselves with the capabilities of MWDs.

The Georgians had a little more than three weeks to understand and begin to utilize this new resource – something that new dog handlers have nearly three months dedicated to at the MWD Handler Course.

But, with the help of a few translators and a nudge in the right direction, “It started to click and they started to use us more,” Born said.

“It’s definitely been an experience with these guys,” Stevens said, as he related humorous tales of miscommunication and overcoming the language barrier. “It’s probably something I’ll never forget.”

The same is probably true for the Georgians. When the working dogs arrived – along with their reputation as trained attack dogs – the Georgian troops were reluctant and wary of the dogs’ presence.

“It was like the parting of the Red Sea whenever we walked into a room with the dogs,” Born said.

But, once the Georgian soldiers familiarized themselves with the dogs, saw the level of obedience and training they had and were able to interact with them, there was a complete turnaround.

Many of the Georgians took advantage of a special training opportunity to engage in bite work with the dogs. They put on special bite sleeves and, under the guidance of Born and Stevens, were able to get a real feel for what MWDs are capable of.

Being chased by a military working dog while wearing a bite sleeve was a nerve-wracking idea to many soldiers at first.

“Will he want to bite me after I take off the sleeve,” one Georgian soldier asked through a translator?

“He will only bite the sleeve, right,” another asked warily?

It was a turning point for many of them. The working dogs performed exactly as they were trained. Visibly relaxed after their first few rounds of bite work, many soldiers went time and time again, wanting to see everything the dogs were capable of.

After this, the scene when the dogs enter a room is the exact opposite. Georgian soldiers now reach their hands out to pet them, kneel down to say a few nice words, take pictures with their favorite dogs and show a true bond with their new battle buddies.

“They know the assets they’re going to have once they get to Afghanistan, and I honestly think that, since working with us, they’ll be more inclined to try and utilize the K-9 assets down range,” Stevens said.

With that said, and in spite of the fun they had training with the MWDs, Born emphasizes how important it is in Afghanistan to make use of this resource.

“The dog is the best asset to find explosives down range,” he said.

The Georgians will leave for Afghanistan with not only the knowledge and experience they’ve gained from these dog teams, but a desire to utilize them to their full potential. With military working dogs rooting out the improvised explosive device threat and the vast drug trade in Afghanistan, they will undoubtedly assist in saving lives.



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A soldier from the Republic of Georgia's 33rd Light Infantry Battalion gets a warm welcome from Boris, a military working and patrol narcotics detection dog, assigned to the 527th Military Police Company, 709th MP Battalion, during the battalion's Mission Readiness Exercise in Hohenfels, Germany, Feb. 12-March 4. The 33d Inf. Bn. is preparing to deploy to Afghanistan to integrate with the International Security Assistance Forces there.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Adrienne Burns, 18th Military Police Brigade Public Affairs)



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Spc. Paul Stevens prepares a group of soldiers from the Georgian Armed Forces' 33rd Light Infantry Battalion for training, bite work and familiarization with his military working dog, Linda, during the battalion's Mission Readiness Exercise Feb. 12-March 4 in Hohenfels, Germany. U.S. Marines spent six months training the battalion prior to their MRE as a part of the Marine Corps' Georgian Deployment Program.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Adrienne Burns, 18th Military Police Brigade Public Affairs)



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Linda, a military working dog assigned to the 230th Military Police Brigade, 95th MP Battalion, focuses on her target—a bite sleeve—before latching on to a soldier from the Republic of Georgia’s 33rd Light Infantry Battalion during a Mission Readiness Exercise Feb. 12-March 4 in Hohenfels, Germany. The Joint Multinational Readiness Center worked along with the U.S. Marines to provide the Georgian soldiers with the resources they would have during their upcoming deployment to Afghanistan, including MWDs.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Adrienne Burns, 18th Military Police Brigade Public Affairs)



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Spc. Scott Born, a patrol narcotics detection dog handler with the 527th MP Co., 709th MP Battalion, watches as his military working dog, Boris, gets some bite work in with a soldier from the Georgian Armed Forces' 33rd Light Infantry Battalion during their Mission Readiness Exercise Feb. 12-March 4 in Hohenfels, Germany. Military police dog handlers from the 18th MP Brigade were brought in to train the Georgians on one of the down range resources they will have during their upcoming deployment to Afghanistan.

(U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Adrienne Burns, 18th Military Police Brigade Public Affairs)