

TROOPER ACADEMY GOES TO THE DOGS

BY BETH IPSEN, PIO



Academy attendees are, from left, Sitka Police Officer Mark Hake and German shepherd, Justice; Instructor Capt. Keith Mallard; Anchor Point Trp. Greg Pealater and Belgium Malinois, Anchor; Palmer Trp. Pat Nelson and Belgium Malinois, Roelle; Instructor Sgt. Scott Johnson with German shepherd, Duncan; and Kenai Police Officer Aaron Turnage and German shepherd, Chevron. Not pictured is Fairbanks International Airport Officer Bev Moore and her yellow Labrador, Daisy.

Anchor, a trooper canine in training, knows more languages than many humans.

Besides knowing commands in German, the standard language for trained police dogs, the 3-year-old Belgium Malinois is originally from Holland and knows a few commands in Dutch.

His handler, **Trp. Greg Pealater** stationed in Anchor Point, discovered the other language as Anchor's training to be a dual-certified police dog progressed.

Pealater and other officers are learning

a lot about their four-legged partner as the nine-week Alaska State Troopers Canine Academy in Fairbanks goes along.

Others going through the training are Palmer **Trp. Pat Nelson** and his partner, a Belgium Malinois named Roelle; Sitka Police Officer Mark Hake and German shepherd, Justice; Kenai Police Officer Aaron Turnage and German shepherd, Chevron; and Fairbanks International Airport Officer Bev Moore and her yellow Labrador, Daisy. In addition, **ABADE Inv. Joe Hazelaar** attended the academy to not

only train a new canine, Duncan, but also learn how to become a canine instructor himself.

Roelle and Duncan were named after Hans Roelle and Troy Duncan, troopers



Anchor Point Trp. Greg Pealater and Belgium Malinois, Anchor, train at sniffing out drugs.



Palmer Trp. Pat Nelson helps his partner, Roelle, find a package of drugs hidden during training.

killed in the line of duty. Their names, and that of Anchor, were selected out of suggestions made by children living in the areas where they'll be assigned.

Alaska State Troopers and Anchorage Police Department conduct the academies for all police departments in the state on an as-needed basis. The last trooper academy was in 2005.

One of the numerous benefits of having a canine officer is dogs have six times the psychological effect over regular uniformed officers, said Academy instructor Capt. Keith Mallard.

But ultimately, it's to make the human officers safer, regardless if it's the handler or other troopers on shift.

They're more effective in building searches and can sniff out suspects in areas where humans can't go. Their noses are more sensitive and therefore more effective in drug interdiction.

Pealater is also learning its not easy keeping up with the highly energetic Anchor.

"He can run a lot faster than I can," Pealater said.

Pealater was a canine handler while he served in the Army at Fort Richardson before becoming a trooper four years ago. Like Anchor, his previous dog was energetic. In addition, his previous animal partner knew commands in Czech.

The only command Anchor and the other four-legged officers in the most recent canine academy know in English is "stand still." This command serves a dual purpose while ordering both the dog and suspect to stay put.

However, it's the high-pitched screeching, "That's a Good Boy" that is most noticeable to both humans and dogs.

The words are a way of rewarding the dogs of a good job.

That reward system is at the nucleus of a dogs' training. This connection establishes the task of detecting drugs as more fun than work for the dogs.

The four different types of drugs the dogs are trained to detect – methamphetamines, marijuana, cocaine and heroin – are first hidden in a toy to help dogs become familiar with the different odors.

That ability is then built upon as the training goes along. Drugs that were once left out in the open are hidden in more concealed places until dogs are detecting the illegal substances in more realistic places, such as in closets and cars.



Fairbanks International Airport Police Officer Bev Moore and her yellow Lab, Daisy, attend the academy.

All but one dog going through the training will emerge dual certified in both drug detection and patrol abilities. Daisy will be used strictly for drug detection at the Fairbanks International Airport.

Daisy was actually Moore's pet before enrolling in the academy. The yellow lab was first tested to see if she had the traits to become a detection dog before starting the academy.

The other dogs going through the training were purchased strictly for joining the law enforcement ranks. Like most canine officers, they were born in Europe.

Roelle and Duncan were purchased with funds provided by the Public Safety Employees Association and the money for Anchor came from drug seizures.

The other dogs will also be used for tracking people and suspect apprehension.



Duncan is in training to become a drug detection dog.

In tracking either suspects or even lost people, they measure ground disturbance from the last known point where the person was spotted. For example, the dogs will pick up a trail by gauging how much of the material, such as gravel or grass, has been moved by a person's step.

After graduation from the academy – which is scheduled for mid-July – the dogs will live with their handlers just like a normal pet. The only difference is when it's time to go to work.

"He's a very social dog," Pealater said. "He's just as affectionate as a house dog." ■



Roelle and Trp. Pat Nelson practice tracking.