



Paws on Patrol

Alaska State Troopers acquire three new patrol dogs

Article by: Megan A. Peters

When B detachment command put out a solicitation for a new K9 handler it was the email that Trooper Daron Cooper had been patiently waiting for. He smooth-talked his wife, submitted all of the required memos and scores, then waited for an oral board interview. That was at the beginning of 2013. Soon after, he got the nod that would put a four-legged partner with him on patrol.

Even though Trooper Cooper was set to take on the program, his Trooper K9 was not on the force yet. In fact, the dog hadn't even been selected. In April AST would pick out its three new Belgian Malinois and bring them to Alaska from across the Atlantic. Becoming increasingly antsy waiting for the arrival of his dog from Holland, he got busy with the one necessary dog-related task he could think of and he needed help to do it. Knik Goose Bay Elementary school, which is a few miles from the Mat-Su West post that Trooper Cooper works at, would surely have creative enough minds to give the dog its moniker.

(Right) Trooper Daron Cooper poses with K9 Blazer after successfully making it through the Alaska State Trooper K9 Summer School in Fairbanks, Alaska. The academy began April 22 and ended June 28. At the academy were the following K9 teams:

Alaska State Troopers

- Sergeant Pat Nelson (Palmer Post) – K9 Helo
- Trooper Daron Cooper (Mat-Su West Post) – K9 Blazer
- Trooper Tim Wolff (Soldotna Post) – K9 Scout

Montana Highway Patrol

Sergeant Kelly Mantooth - K9 Tika

Fairbanks Police Department
Officer Rob Hall- K9 Stryker

Bones... Avalanche... Arctic... Blazer... Fischer... Hunter. The students came up with quite the list. The school's teaching staff helped pare it down to about 10 names for the students to vote on by classroom. The name with the most classrooms supporting it would be selected. At the end of the process, the yet-to-arrive canine was dubbed "Blazer".

Blazer arrived in Alaska on April 16. When Trooper Cooper put him on the lead for the first time he quickly realized this was not the type of dog most people have lounging around at home.

"He bolted out of the kennel and I could feel how powerful this animal was," said Cooper. "Blazer was only a 10 month old! I could see clearly that I wasn't dealing with a pet. Blazer was specifically bred, tested and selected to be brought over to Alaska to go out and work in some of the most dangerous situations."

A few days after putting his paws on Alaska soil, Blazer was in Fairbanks with his handler to begin training. Joining them for the AST K9 academy was Soldotna's new K9 team Trooper Tim Wolff and K9 Scout along with Palmer Sergeant Patrick Nelson with his new dog





K9 Scout takes to the air to catch one of the many training toys used by the handlers. K9 Scout is now posted in Soldotna and working the streets with his handler, Trooper Tim Wolff.



Sergeant Pat Nelson gets ready to release K9 Helo during an exercise. K9 Helo is named in honor of Trooper Tage Toll and Pilot Mel Nading who died in the crash of Helo-1 on March 30, 2013. Prior to K9 Helo, Sergeant Nelson was the handler for K9 Roelle. K9 Roelle retired just before K9 Helo came to Alaska from Holland with K9 Blazer and K9 Scout. K9 Helo is now patrolling in the Mat-Su Valley.

K9 Helo. (Helo was named in honor of Trooper Tage Toll and Pilot Mel Nading who perished in the Helo-1 crash March 30.) Two other law enforcement agencies had a K9 team receiving training and certification through the AST K9 training academy in Fairbanks.

“Going into this I knew there would be tests, but I had no idea that I would be required to know books of information verbatim,” said Cooper. “After two days of power points and highlighting every page in my 6 inch, three-ring binder we finally got to start the hands-on stuff.”

They started with controlled substances which proved to be a challenge. Learning to detect four controlled substances through a number of training methods and long days took about three weeks.

With Blazer being a younger dog it took him a little bit longer to grasp the concept of how the drug sniffing worked. To complicate it more, he didn’t like the smell of drugs!

“My wife said that’s because drugs are bad,” said Trooper Cooper. “But Blazer got the hang of it after a while and certified with no problems at the end.”

In addition to learning to seek out controlled substances, throughout the academy teams worked on patrol tactics such as suspect apprehension, tracking and article indication. Doing patrol work with a dog also meant learning to talk in a different way.

“One of the things they drill into your head is the phrase ‘high and happy’. This means praising Blazer for a job well done in a *very* high-pitched voice,” said Cooper. “It took me a while to let out my inner-child voice, but now that I found it I am comfortable speaking ‘high and happy’ around just about everyone— after all it’s for the dog, right?!”

With no actual bad guys at the academy, the new handlers also had to don a bite suit every day to give their dogs the practice they needed. Blazer seemed to treasure it. While he struggled a bit initially in scent detection, Blazer seemed to have a natural knack for patrol work.

“I enjoyed bonding with him to where I could trust him and he could trust me and forming a partnership,” said Cooper. “We both have had our good days and bad days but we both made progress daily and I look forward to many years of working with him while patrolling the Valley.”

