

## ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE POLICE DOG SERVICE

### AVALANCHE SEARCH AND RESCUE

TERRY BARTER I.

The use of dogs to locate people is a concept which has been in use for many years and carried out in many different manners for different reasons. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police have formally utilized dogs in police work for fifty-three years, dating back to a small start in 1935. Through the years many breeds have been utilized and experimented with however the German Sheperd has proven to be the most suitable for our work and is used exclusively by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police today. Dogs used for detection in avalanche search and rescue are all general purpose service dogs which have been stationed in mountainous areas which would require this profile.

#### Training

After a need for avalanche - trained dogs was established for PARKS CANADA they trained their first service dog with the RCMP in fall of 1970. Following this, the RCM Police began to train teams for avalanche where a geographic need was demonstrated.

The dogs trained in avalanche searching are all seasoned teams acquainted with field operations, not new dogs. As all teams are trained in tracking and searching profiles already, the training is not commenced at such an elementary level, but rather an introduction to the dog locating persons under the snow, and the handler becoming familiar with safe methods of travel and route selection and other related areas of avalanche safety.

Candidates have already completed the RCM Police doghandling course. They possess valid First Aid Certification and must pass a physical standard. The training is conducted over three seasons to afford the candidate a chance to practice new skills before continuing to more advanced training. A Course Training Standard has been

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drawn up and candidates must meet the criteria of the CTS before receiving full validation. Initially teams were graded with the letters A, B, or C to denote levels of competency however this system adopted from European methods was dropped in favour of a Course Training Standard wherein a candidate team must meet all objectives before certification.

Following the certification of the team within the training standard, the team continues training at their location and each team is validated yearly to insure their competency

As in any type of work, considerable time must be spent by the trained team to continue their training. During the training periods as well as searching exercises, handlers must retain and sharpen their skills in skiing, route selection and other related areas and insure the equipment is up to date and in good condition.

#### DEPLOYMENT

Trained teams in avalanche search and rescue are maintained at the following locations:

Nelson, British Columbia.  
Cranbrook, B.C.  
Penticton, B.C.  
Vernon, B.C.  
Kamloops, B.C.  
Prince George, B.C.  
Fort St. John, B.C.  
Terrace, B.C.  
Chilliwack, B.C.  
Courtenay, B.C.  
  
Cochrane, Alberta.  
Banff, Alberta. \*  
Jasper, Alberta \*  
Glacier National Park, B.C. \*

\* PARKS CANADA DOGS

Any of the teams noted can be reached by contacting the RCM POLICE Detachment at the location. Should the request be for an actual avalanche occurrence be certain to specify the emergent nature and speak to someone else rather than the switchboard operator to eliminate the possibility of a written message being left for the doghandler, which may not be received for several hours or even days if the handler were to be out of the office on another case.

### USAGE

As the Provincial Police in most provinces of Canada, the RCMP are responsible for missing persons and search efforts for them. It is this broad category that avalanche search and rescue efforts fall within from a jurisdictional point of view. By having added the avalanche searching capability the RCM POLICE can utilize their dogs and resources in a quick manner, easily combining teams on occurrences if necessary. Parks Canada Service Dogs are also utilized in concert with RCM Police dogs when close by.

Generally, the teams function within an internal jurisdictional boundary which roughly conforms to geographic regions of the province. Should a large occurrence require additional teams, they can be quickly dispatched if the requirement is identified. Occasions have arisen where teams have functioned outside of Canada upon request. Searches have been carried out assisting agencies in Montana and Washington States as well as Alaska. In these circumstances permission must be obtained from the RCMP Headquarters however this process is not difficult and persons in areas nearing the Canada, U.A.A. border should not shy away from requesting these services as they are often the nearest trained team available.

### ASSISTANCE TO OTHER AGENCIES

The RCMP will assist other accredited Police Forces in training Service Dogs which may then be trained for avalanche searching. This formal training must be addressed to our national training centre which is located in central Alberta. Inquiries should be directed to:

OFFICER IN CHARGE  
RCMPOLICE TRAINING CENTRE  
POLICE DOG SERVICE  
INNISFAIL, ALBERTA  
TOM LAO

Interested persons in an area who wish to assist by providing trained dogs for searching purposes can be a help and a severe hindrance to operations. To overcome these ongoing difficulties the Province of British Columbia has adopted standards for privately owned dogs for use in search and rescue operations. Two standards exist, one dedicated to general search and rescue and one to avalanche search and rescue operations. Simply put, dogs not meeting the outlined criteria, and having passed a test involving same will not be used. This will insure competent teams and as well as it functions under the Provincial Emergency Program, will protect the team civilly and under Workers Compensation Regulations as well.

In these proceedings the candidate must first obtain a task number through a local search and rescue group and have the dog certified as to be a suitable breed. This definition is much broader than the one used for police work and almost any breed is deemed suitable, common sense being the measuring stick. When the handler feels he has met the Training Standard he can contact a local RCMP Police Dog handler who can set a test. Upon successful completion this team will be utilized by our Force in searches. This standard also requires a yearly followup validation to remain in effect. Whatever standards that an individual or group are training to must comply with the Provincial Emergency Program Standard to insure a uniform level of quality across the province of British Columbia.

#### AVAILABILITY

The teams involved in the program may be reached anytime through the office concerned. They are functioning on an "on call" basis and can respond quickly to an occurrence. Inquiries may be made regarding training procedures through the local office where the dog handler is stationed and duties permitting, they will be answered as soon as possible. For those involved in areas where gun control is used, the RCMP POLICE also has Service Dogs trained to detect explosives at certain locations should there be a requirement to locate undetonated shells or hand charges.

As the time element is so important, particularly in a large area such as that which we function in here in Western Canada, we can only urge you to call us immediately in order for the greatest chance of success for a live recovery. Calling of the nearest available trained dog is insuring that a valuable tool will be the shortest possible time to the avalanche and time can save lives.

With the development of new technology the use of a trained dog in avalanche searching has not diminished and a well trained dog is still proving invaluable in searches both in Canada and abroad. Our aim is to continue providing a valuable service in this changing field of search and rescue.