

## K9 Demining Corp to Aid Clearance Efforts in Lebanon

**The Marshall Legacy Institute, with major contributions from the Humpty Dumpty Institute, is contributing six mine detection dogs to the Lebanese Army's mine clearance team.**

by Elizabeth A. Cramer, MAIC

A team of six mine detection dogs (MDDs), known as the K9 Demining Corp, has been sent to aid mine clearance efforts in Lebanon. The dogs will be a part of the Lebanese Army's extensive mine clearance throughout the country. According to the *Landmine Monitor Report 2000*, the U.S. Department of State has estimated that there are 35,000 mines in Lebanon, not including the previously Israeli-occupied area of South Lebanon, where the U.N. estimates there are another 130,000 mines causing immediate risk of landmine casualties.

The United States has already contributed \$2.3 million to humanitarian demining programs in Lebanon since 1998. In an effort to ensure the successful integration of the mine dog teams to

humanitarian demining, the U.S. Office of Humanitarian Demining Programs (HDP) has created a partnership with two NGOs to fund and deploy the K9 Demining Corp, and has provided funds for the training of Lebanese handlers and for infrastructure support. The HDP contracted RONCO Consulting Corporation to provide the MDDs, associated training and equipment for the Lebanese dog handlers.

The K9 Demining Corp was created with funding contributions to the Marshall Legacy Institute (MLI), a non-profit international humanitarian organization. MLI is leading a national campaign to increase the number of MDDs worldwide. By combining private tax-deductible contributions with U.S. government funding, MLI is able to help build humanitarian programs in mine-affected countries.

A major contributor to MLI is the Humpty Dumpty Institute (HDI), a non-profit NGO formed in 1998 by American business leaders to promote private-public partnerships to confront global problems. HDI focuses on programs to strengthen U.S. and U.N. relations and on the global clearance of landmines. William Rouhana, co-chairman of HDI, believes that dogs are among the most effective tools in mine clearance. Rouhana, also chairman of Winstar Communications, and his wife Amy Newmark are among the major contributors for the Lebanon project. Rouhana and Newmark requested that guests at their recent wedding contribute money to the HDI to aid in the training of mine detecting dogs, instead of giving traditional wedding gifts. HDI funding to MLI has provided for the purchase, training, certification, and transport of six dogs, each costing \$16,000.

At the time of the donation, it was planned to send a corp of dogs to Eritrea for humanitarian demining. Because of internal conflict in the country, the circumstances were later considered unfit to send the dogs, and a replacement country was needed. In



■ Dan Hayter with Peggy, Baltimore, and the National Demining Office's Maj. Mohammed Jamal El Kaakour, Lt. Col. Takieddine El Tannir and Gen. George Sawaya with Taz at the Global Training Academy, Texas. c/o MLI

June 2000, Perry Baltimore, president and executive director of MLI, conducted a feasibility study on the use of mine dogs in Lebanon. The study resulted in a request from Gen. George Sawaya, president of the National Demining Office in Lebanon. Sawaya asked that MDDs be integrated into the Lebanese mine clearance program to accelerate the pace of demining operations. The Lebanese Army is responsible for all current demining efforts and reports that in areas of difficult terrain, mechanical mine clearance methods are not viable but could be replaced by MDDs. At the time there were no MDDs in the country, and it was considered an exciting option for mine clearance efforts. Lebanon was chosen for the K9 Corp and the dogs were prepared.

The MDDs were first trained in Europe in obedience and socialization. They were then sent to the Global Training Academy (GTA) in Texas and there underwent 12 more weeks of training in explosive scent detection, odor, response, positioning and search patterns, under the direction of trainer Paul Brown. While in Texas the dogs became acclimated to the living and working environment, including the temperature, odors, soil and kennels. At GTA dogs are assigned a temporary trainer who takes them through scent training. The biggest challenge for the trainer is learning what motivates each dog and applying the motivating factor in the training. The trainer must teach the dog to associate a reward with a target scent. Baltimore believes that the training was successful, "The dogs have learned and responded well."

On Nov. 28, 2000 Queen Noor of Jordan, an MLI board member, announced the K9 Demining Corp program at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations during a deployment ceremony for the dog team. The ceremony was attended by officials from HDI, MLI, and the State Department. During the deployment ceremony Sally, a two-year old Dutch shepherd, was given the chance to display detection skills. Sally was able to detect an inactive APL that was buried among many large planters in the conference room. At the ceremony, HDP Director Pat Patierno stated that he is confident that the combination of trained dogs and local handlers can create what is possibly the most optimal demining technology for Lebanon. He explained that no one method is the answer to mine clearance difficulties, however, the challenging terrain limits the use of machinery, making dogs the most possible solution.

The dogs were prepared to depart with a series of vaccinations and were deployed to Lebanon on Feb. 12, 2000. Reliable air carriers delivered the dogs in good condition. Upon arrival in Beirut the dogs were happy to receive food, praise and play from a familiar face, trainer Paul Brown. The dogs then began a period of acclimatization, becoming accustomed to the new environment. During this period the dogs are rematched with local Lebanese handlers. To make the best matches of handler and dog several factors are considered about the handler, including their skill level, balance and coordination, hand gestures, adaptation

ability, use of commands, personality and temperament. The rematch takes some adjustment for the dog, but as the handlers care for, train with and nurture their dog they develop a strong bond.

Now in the mountains northeast of Beirut, the dogs will undergo three more months of training. The training is important for the dogs and their new handlers so they can learn to work as a team. During the training the dogs will learn to identify the types of mines that are common to the area, and the smells that are associated with the explosives of the mines. The dogs will eventually become exposed to actual mines.

In April 2001, the K9 Corp will be deployed for their first clearance mission. Baltimore and Brown believe that favorable environmental conditions, receptive leadership and a positive military working dog experience all support the indigenous MDD program. There is only one major concern, some sharp prickly bushes in Lebanese fields, which may make it difficult to keep the dogs' noses to the ground, and to the task at hand—making way for a safer Lebanon.

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■ Lebanese soldiers stand in a safe lane during a clearance operation. Operations like the one shown will soon be enhanced by the presence of mine detection dogs. c/o AP