Welcome the Newest 68T Animal Care Specialists!

The Department of Veterinary Science, AMEDD Center & School Health Readiness Center of Excellence, welcomed the newest graduating class of Animal Care Specialists in September. The graduates, their family and friends, and fellow students and staff celebrated with guest speaker, a cadre member of the Senior Leaders Course at the AMEDD NCO Academy.
Congratulations to the Joint Pathology Center Staff and Residents. The final year residents achieved a 100 percent pass rate for the 2018 certifying exam as Anatomic Pathologists with the American College of Veterinary Pathologists!

The 64B Area of Concentration grew by leaps and bounds, with eighteen officers successfully completing the certifying board exam in Columbus, Ohio at the Ohio State University.

The Consultant for the 64C Area of Concentration congratulates the four Lab Animal Medicine residents who successfully passed the ACLAM certifying board exam.
Snapshots Around the Service

The 218th MDVSS soldiers train in Level 1 Combatives for Sergeant’s Time Training.

A 64th MDVSS soldier was recognized with a coin of excellence from the 30th Medical BDE CSM.

CJTF-HOA trains on CTCCC
Veterinary Services personnel assigned to Camp Lemonnier and Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa conducted Canine Tactical Combat Casualty Care training to joint-service medical and operational personnel at those sites.

The 64th MDVSS conducts an FTX.
The Commander of the 106th MDVSS promotes a VCO to Major

The 218th MDVSS participates in the Change of Command ceremony for the 47th Combat Support Hospital.

The Honor Graduate, the Distinguished Honor Graduate, and the Golden Thermometer Award winner from class 18-186 stand with the Class Advisor following graduation.

Three NCOs participated in the historic Nijmegen March. The Nijmegen is the largest multi-day marching event in the world. It is organized every year in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, in mid-July.
A Reserve Component Veterinary Corps Officer was invited to present her research poster title “Optimizing Mission-Specific Medical Threat Readiness and Preventive Medicine for Service Members” at the recent Military Health Systems Research Symposium (MHSRS) in Orlando, FL. The poster represented a synopsis of the publication by the same title, which appears in the current issue of the United States Army Medical Department (AMEDD) Journal.

Two Veterinary Corps Officers presented a poster on Global Health Engagements at the American Veterinary Medical Association’s annual convention. They are both assigned at the Army Public Health Center.

The Veterinary Corps Chief presented the 2018 LTC Daniel E. Holland Leadership Award to the winning VCO during the First Year Graduate Veterinary Education (FYGVE) Curriculum Meeting. This VCO served an instrumental and influential role as the 64B Public Health Cadre for the Fort Bragg FYGVE site. She is skilled as a mentor of junior Veterinary Corps Officers and transitioning them into Army culture. She co-developed the first Veterinary Clinic Management and Operations course to better prepare VCOs and clinic NCOs for the rigors of running successful veterinary treatment businesses.

The VCO has also been actively involved in several strategic level working groups, working on re-writing MEDCOM 40-13/40-28, AR 40-905, and developing the proposed Audit, Certification, and Education (ACE) guidelines.

Her nominator wrote, “[She] makes her commitment to the future of the Veterinary Corps clear through her thoughtful analysis of the current situation, vision of the future, and by taking action to reach that vision.”
The AMEDDC&S Commanding General had the opportunity to visit the Department of Veterinary Science, Animal Health Branch. The AHB provides training to 68T10 Animal Care Specialists, advanced training to 68T20 and 68T30 and Veterinary Corps Officers, targeted pre-deployment training for veterinary personnel, Captains Career Course, veterinary specific training to non-veterinary providers, and Expeditionary Combat Medics.

An Instructor/Writer (right) demonstrates for the CG the Animal Health Branch’s latest simulator the TraumaFX® Advanced Canine Medical Trainer (K9 Diesel), a full-body simulator for Operational Canine First Responders, Military Working Dog (MWD) handlers, Veterinarians, and Veterinary Technicians. Designed in partnership with the Department of Defense (DOD), K09Diesel is a state of the art skills trainer that includes active breathing, audio cues, and over 28 different features and medical intervention sites.

The Chief of the Animal Health Branch and a senior Instructor/Writer demonstrates for the CG the Animal Health Branch’s latest simulator the TraumaFX® Advanced Canine Medical Trainer (K9 Diesel).
The Surgeon General took time to take pictures with many Soldiers after she spoke at the 2018 Army Public Health Course. Here is TSG with several Veterinary Service Soldiers.

A junior Soldier reads a map under red light during the PHA-Fort Belvoir FTX at JB McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

Army Training! On FTX with the 218th MDVSS (above) and the 248th MDVSS (below)

During PCS season, 106th MDVSS say farewell to one of its Soldiers.
Military Working Dog
CASEVAC Training

**Mission:** 218th MDVSS train with 95TH MWD Detachment and 16th CAV IOT familiarize Soldiers with MWD care for serious combat-related injuries, stabilization, and emergency evacuation procedures (CASEVAC).

**Synopsis of Event:** Day 1: MWD teams and 68Ts conducted refresher emergency medical training for injured MWDs, including complete walk-thru of MWD CASEVAC scenarios and familiarization of MWDs to aircraft noise distraction. Teams trained on loading onto a UH-60 during the cold load and hot load while the aircraft was parked.

Day 2: MWD teams, Pilots, VCOs, and 68Ts conducted training scenarios with rescue teams executing emergency CASEVAC operations for injured MWDs. MWD handlers stabilized the MWD upon injury, called for 9-line CASEVAC, and transport the injured MWD onto the UH-60 at the pickup point at HTA 11. The dog team and veterinary personnel were flown around for 10 minutes. During this time, the MWD teams and veterinary personnel became familiar with flying in a helicopter. The teams were then dropped off at the pickup point. The 68Ts and VCOs simulated receiving the MWD from the aircraft and transport to a safe location for aftercare.

**End state:** 68T, VCOs, and MWD teams trained and familiarized with MWD emergency evacuations to standard and prepared to treat and transport injured MWD.

Photos (clockwise): the 64F providing hands-on instruction to MWD handlers and 68T; Cold-load training in the UH-60; a VCO providing refresher emergency care instruction; 68Ts and VCOs running the scenarios with MWD handlers; Loading the UH-60 prior to flight.
On March, U.S Army Public Health Activity - Guam, a Guam Naval Branch Veterinary Food Inspection Specialist Soldier visited a very popular tourist area in Naval Base Guam called “Spanish Steps”. Without knowing how to swim the Soldier took action to save the lives of two female adults and one toddler in need of help from drowning by the strong rip tides. Public Health Activity-Guam (HQ), Guam Naval Branch, and FBI personnel gathered at Boller VTF for the FBI to recognize the Soldier’s act of heroism with two coins, a Certificate of Appreciation, and addition to the Honorary Family of the FBI. The event provided the opportunity for the FBI to show the Soldier its gratitude for his actions of saving the lives of three members of the FBI family.
As the 438th Medical Detachment Veterinary Service Support (MDVSS) out of the 627th Hospital Center, Fort Carson, CO prepares to redeploy, the forward unit of personnel reflect on all the unique experiences and opportunities provided to this small team tackling a large Area of Responsibility (AOR). The unit, composed of two Veterinary Service Support Teams (VSSTs) and the HQs element had their work cut out for them as they covered all Train, Advise, and Assist Command (TAAC) areas within Combine Joint Operations Afghanistan (CJOA-A). The unit provided Role II veterinary support to over 100 Military Working Dogs (MWDs), contract working dogs (CWDs), and NATO dogs across the AO, while also performing food protection support consisting of receipt/surveillance inspections, serviceability inspections, commercial sanitary audits, field expedient presumptive and confirmatory laboratory testing, and food defense vulnerability assessments to facilities spread out over multiple US and NATO bases, camps, and FOBs.

The 438th MDVSS Veterinarians, along with their young 68Ts, responded to several 9-line MEDEVAC situations at all times of the night and conducted sick call visits as needed by our four-legged Warfighter. As opportunities arose, the teams used these visits to provide hands-on training and collaboration with human providers. They were also responsible for the ever important Rabies prevention program, which required all Vet Teams to conduct training with U.S. and NATO forces on Rabies control and prevention and humane euthanasia with Field Surgical Teams, Special Operations Teams, and Role I-III medical providers and medics. The veterinary teams trained medical personnel across the AO on the Joint Theater Clinical Practice Guidelines for care of Military Working Dogs.

The food inspection mission yielded big numbers during the nine month deployment. VSST A and B
food inspectors were responsible for inspecting subsistence, extended expired products, and condemned subsistence. Due to the unique nature and cost of providing subsistence into theater, the food inspectors conducted several serviceability inspections of Contract and Government Furnished Material (CFM, GFM) which supported the Subsistence Prime Vendor contract, Exchange Services, and NATO Subsistence Procurement Agency (NSPA). They were vital in safeguarding the Warfighter through a wholesome food supply chain. The food inspectors also seized the opportunity to provide food safety and food defense training food facility personnel, further encouraging long-lasting partnerships through valued support.

In all, the unit conducted air and ground movements throughout Afghanistan. The unit leadership would agree that not one Soldier complained about supporting any mission. This is a testament to their willingness to uphold the Army values. After long days of traveling throughout the combat zone to accomplish the mission, the unit embedded Leader Development and Professional Growth during times of low operations. The growth of the first time deployers, and young Soldiers made the Detachment NCOIC and NCOS extremely proud. These seasoned NCOs saw 6 of their Soldiers promoted to the next rank, which included three new Sergeants, and three reenlistments while deployed. Some of the proudest leadership moments included a SGT from VSST B winning the 3rd ID NCO of the month award, which was open to all NCOs within USFOR-A and Resolute Support, and a VSST A Soldier winning the 1st MED BDE, 1st Knight of the Week, beating out Soldiers across four theatres of operation in CENTCOM.

All 14 Soldiers of the 438th MDVSS spent months away from their families and friends, and had to overcome rough times. Everyone also recognized the importance of MWR events. The group participated in numerous 5 and 10Ks morale races, hospital-organized MWR events, USO events and team-building activities (combating some of the challenges of being away from home). But, they are all extremely happy to return to their loved ones, and most of all, returning safely with no one left behind.
A VSST A 68R is congratulated for winning the 1st MED BDE, 1st Knight of the Week award by 1st MED BDE Commander and CSM.

The forward command team congratulate an NCO on her winning the 3rd ID NCO of the Month award.

438th MDVSS (FWD) Commander salutes during the ceremonial Combat Patch presentation in CJTH Warrior’s Way.

(Top to Bottom) Two NCOs recite the Oath during their reenlistment ceremony.

UNCLASSIFIED
**Colombia Military Working Dog (MWD) SMEE**

**Mission:** In July, the members of the AMEDD C&S Animal Medicine Branch Chief, and the ARSOUTH MWD Program conducted a MWD Program Assessment SMEE with Colombian Army, Air Force, Navy, and National Police Veterinarians and Working Dog Handler personnel.

**Narrative:** Share lessons learned on working dog program and breeding management, medical readiness training and canine tactical combat casualty care, prevention and treatment of complicated zoonotic infectious diseases impacting working dog duty lifespan, and K9 handler working dog behavior management and training impacting force protection.
The Public Health Activity - Fort Lewis (PHA-FL) 2018 Annual Training Exercise (ATX) took place at Joint Base Lewis McChord in August. This training accomplished many team building fundamentals. The week began by solidifying the unit’s commitment to the first priority in the Army’s Big Six (Physical Fitness and Physical Readiness Training). Branches from the states of Alaska and Washington completed a 4 mile commanders run in under 36 Minutes, with all Soldiers calling cadence, adhering to the Army Standard, and promoting Esprit de Corps. Each scheduled training day consisted of challenging PRT sessions reinforced by the unit Master Fitness Trainers (MFTs). This was the first ATX that Soldiers incorporated both MTOE and TDA missions to target readiness on all fronts. Day 1 had Soldiers involved in a seminar format Introduction to Mission Command training class, hosted by the Mission Training Complex-Leader Development team based on JBLM. Other focus areas included fundamentals of AR 25-50 Army Writing and military correspondence. The evening activities included a 2-hour Combatives Level 1 task session, building on physical readiness and skills necessary to protect, fight, and win! On Day 2, 68R’s took the training outside with collaboration from the 218th MDVSS. They conducted realistic training with rations decontamination and MRE inspections in a field environment. CW2 Ann Alexander from the MTOE unit was an invaluable asset, integrating her teams’ real world experience from recent disaster response to Hurricane Irma in Portico. Not to be left behind, 68T’s partnered with the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) to conduct hands-on MWD Decontamination at the SOF kennels. Both sets of skills training highlighted the commander’s emergency management and disaster response initiative that has represented a unit priority for the past 12 months. The next 2 days consisted of classroom work re-establishing best practices for CEEP/CERP procedures, S1 finance actions, evaluation and award processing, an HRC Road Show presenting the latest on enlisted assignments, standards for counseling to include NCOER/OER changes, DTS instruction, and SharePoint management. For added value, the command team conducted an after-hours recall with mandatory urinalysis and SRP to ensure unit accountability. Day 5 began with a DAPFT, where unit MFT’s evaluated grading and technique for each of the Branches. Soldiers then progressed to the JBLM Confidence and Obstacle courses where all teams cooperated to navigate a series of challenging obstacles and timed challenges in a competitive setting. The culminating event was a farewell luncheon with the unit’s outgoing First Sergeant as she prepares for retirement and future endeavors. Overall, the PHA-FL ATX was a successful operation that improved technical and tactical competencies while building comradery.

Brick by Brick!
The US Army Veterinary Corps and the Department of Veterinary Science welcomed new Veterinary Corps Officers from two AMEDD Basic Officer Leadership Courses in a combined induction ceremony in July. The new VCOs were welcomed to the Corps by members of the Department of Veterinary Science, the Corps Chief’s Office, and two retired Veterinary Corps Chiefs.
Members of the 43D MDVSS (Ft. Hood, TX) deployed with members of the 21st Combat Support Hospital as the Veterinary Services team for Kosovo Forces 23 Task Force Medical (KFOR 23 TF MED) in support of Operation Joint Guardian. The team was responsible for providing Veterinary Service Support to U.S. and NATO personnel within KFOR Multinational Battle Group-East (MNBG-E) over a period of nine months.

Once in Kosovo, the first big training event was to work with the Detachment 1 Co C 1-169th Oklahoma National Guard air MEDEVAC team and Military Working Dog (MWD) handlers from the 18th Military Police Brigade on Camp Bondsteel to conduct canine hoist training. This allowed the VCO and 68T Animal Care Specialist to develop an initial relationship with the handlers, the MWDs themselves, and the air MEDEVAC teams. Being a part of this training allowed everyone to understand the skills necessary to conduct this training, ensure the safety of the MWDs, as well as have the confidence that this training can be accomplished in any environment.

The food mission in Kosovo was the busiest and most robust component for Vet Services. Task Force MED was responsible for multiple facilities across three camps resulting in over $2 million of food inspected, primarily by the 68R Veterinary Food Inspection Specialist NCO. To meet this demand, the Veterinary Services team inspected several trucks every week to ensure that all food and beverage products met contractual requirements and were properly received and stored. The weekly and monthly inspections also included identifying unsanitary conditions of food facilities, prep, and storage areas. The 68R NCO extended the storage life of more than $35,000 worth of food products to ensure maximum serviceability of all government-owned food.

While in Kosovo the team was also fortunate enough to work with many multinational partners. The 68R NCO worked with the TF MED Preventative Medicine team to help teach a Field Sanitation course to members of the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) Medical COY. The VCO and 68T NCO also worked with Ukrainian EOD working dog handlers to provide basic veterinary care for their working dogs.

The biggest event for the team overall though was the opportunity to support the KSF Search and Rescue (SAR), and De-mining working dog teams through global health engagements on topics related to training, animal husbandry, and medical care. The VCO and 68T NCO were also able to integrate the U.S. MWD handlers from Camp Bondsteel in order to share guidance and suggestions for training techniques with the KSF handler teams. The KSF handlers were incredibly eager to learn both the canine training and medical skills lessons. The medical training was tailored specially for particular situations most likely to arise for a SAR dog including paw pad injuries from working on rubble piles, bleeding wounds, kennel management, and general health and welfare.

The KFOR 23 TF MED Veterinary Services Team demonstrated multinational interoperability on this NATO mission and a potential sustainable effort that can be carried over to future rotations. It was an outstanding opportunity and great teaching experience for all involved to work with the KSF. By reaching out, we have established a foundation for future rotations that will continue to help further develop these young programs within the KSF. The U.S. involvement in the KFOR mission is not slowing down anytime soon and it was an honor for the 43D MDVSS to be contribute to this historic NATO effort to maintain peace in the Balkans.
U.S. Army Veterinary Services in Kosovo

Anti-clockwise from top right:
TF MED Veterinary team, 18th MP Brigade MWD handlers and KSF SAR dog teams
MWD bite training at Camp Bondsteel
VCO provides care for a Ukrainian MWD
Vet team validating KSF SAR handler on canine medical care
18th MP Brigade MWD handlers explaining the obedience course to KSF handlers
68R NCO conducting inspection of refrigerated goods on Camp Bondsteel
68R NCO teaching a section of the Field Sanitation course to KSF Medical COY personnel
**Event:**
21st Combat Support Hospital Kosovo Forces 23 Task Force Medical (KFOR 23 TF MED) Kosovo Security Force Canine Search and Rescue (KSF SAR) medical skills training and working dog training principles.

**Objective:**
To further enhance KSF SAR working dog training, animal husbandry, and handler medical care skills. In addition, help foster relations between the KSF and NATO forces, provide the KSF with additional knowledge necessary to successfully maintain a working dog program, and enhance the overall response capabilities of the KSF SAR.

**Activities:**
During the KFOR 23 rotation, TF MED Veterinary Services and Task Force Military Police (TF MP) MWD handlers conducted several training visits with KSF SAR working dog teams over a three month period of time. These visits included classes on basic canine medical care, kennel inspection protocol, and canine behavior. Classes were taught both in the classroom and at the KSF and TF MP kennel facilities. The MWD handlers observed KSF training techniques and offered feedback throughout each visit. Medical skills were tested by using a canine mannequin at the KSF training areas to simulate likely encountered injuries.

**Key Take-Aways:**
Involvement of TF MP MWD handlers was incredibly well received by the KSF. Combining medical training classes with mannequin drills in KSF training areas created an outstanding opportunity for check-on-learning. Finally, conducting kennel inspections with the task force led to several immediate and sustainable improvements to KSF husbandry practices.
Continuous Technological Improvement and Collaboration at its Best

Various personnel from the Combat Feeding Directorate (CFD) Food Protection and Innovative Packaging Team (FPIPT) at U.S. Army Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center (NSRDEC) along with personnel from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), US Army Veterinary Services Department of Defense Food Analysis and Diagnostic Laboratory (DoD FADL) and Sterling Foods in San Antonio, Texas collaborated in a joint prototype testing of food sanitation auditing tools.

The sonicating swab and spectral imaging were two prototype tools tested during this collaboration effort. The sonicating swab is an improved version of current swabbing tools used to sample surfaces for microbiological contaminants. The handheld sonicating swab was developed at NSRDEC and this marks the first time it is used outside the laboratory environment. Swab material type, sampled surface characteristics, and swabbing method are a few examples of factors that play a role in sampling efficacy. Previous studies have identified a more efficient and reliable cell recovery by the sonicating swab versus the standard swab method. The advantages of the sonicating swab over standard swabs are that the sonicating swab provides three simultaneous functions which are sonication, mechanical scrubbing, and suction. This high performance technique ensures bacterial release, capture and population estimation more accurately.

Spectral imaging is composed of a handheld high output LED near-UV wavelength light, a sensitive camera, and a smart device transmitter which relays the image in real time to an iPad. Various wavelengths can be used depending on what material you are trying to identify within the facility. During laboratory experiments and the site visit to Sterling, 425 nm, 530 nm, and 680 nm were wavelengths used to capture fluorescence emission of surface contaminants. The advantage of using near-UV excitation light (405 nm) during pre- or post-operation inspections is that it assists in identifying gross contamination naked to the eye. Thus, allowing facilities to take immediate corrective action prior to processing and preventing contamination of food and the spread of microorganisms throughout the processing line and facility.

The US Army Veterinary Services broad functions include food safety and security, animal care, veterinary public health, and research and development, and will continue to be essential as long as the need for military forces remain. It is inherent in their role to maintain their equipment and personnel ready and relevant for future challenges within the food safety arena both within the installations and in the approved source program. Partaking in this collaboration effort only strengthens their mission and maintains the unit’s relevance with current research developments. Demonstration of these tools and their capabilities was essential for
possible implementation into the Field Kits for deployable Soldiers and Veterinary Service units.

As an operational ration processing plant, Sterling Foods in San Antonio, TX provided their facility as a “real time” facility. Side-by-side samples were obtained by both CFD and Sterling personnel from a non-operating processing line. CFD used the sonicating swab while Sterling Foods used the standard swab and USDA took UV light readings, results of sampling techniques will be reported once all analysis have been conducted and data collaborated between all participants.

The authors wish to thank Sterling Foods in San Antonio, TX for allowing this collaboration effort to take place in their facility. What a better testing ground than that of an actual processing facility, it is greatly appreciated!

References:


http://veterinarycorps.amedd.army.mil/history.htm
Military Working Dogs play a huge role in the defense of the United States, and when one of them is injured, the Veterinary Medical Center Europe plays a huge role in getting them back in the fight.

Recently, while on patrol with his handler in Afghanistan, MWD Alex was injured in an attack by a suicide bomber. Following care in Bagram, Afghanistan, Alex was medically evacuated to VMCE for further treatment.

Like many of their service-member counterparts, when an MWD is injured while deployed, they are often medically evacuated to Germany. Service members are transported to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center for care, and MWDs are transported to VMCE for comprehensive veterinary care.

According to the VMCE Deputy Director and veterinary surgeon, when Alex arrived in Germany, he had a fractured left tibia—or shin bone, shrapnel wounds, and multiple other fractures below and above his tibia.

On the day he arrived, VCOs performed surgery to stabilize Alex’s leg, “which worked pretty well,” she said. “But his other wound, particularly the one over his ankle, started to get worse and worse every day despite appropriate medical therapy and pain management.”

Alex’s wound over his ankle was getting so bad that it would likely require up to six months of reconstructive and orthopedic surgery. And because of bone and tissue loss, he was also at a very high risk for infection.

In addition to this, the surgeon said that Alex was “not using the limb as well as he had been the first week or so after surgery—it was getting more painful. And he began to develop some behavioral problems, centered on some of the things we had to do when we were treating him.”

Some of the behavioral problems included aggression and snapping when the team would move him to the table to do treatments.

“I spoke to a behaviorist about it and she though he was having some [post-traumatic stress disorder]-type acute episodes,” the VCO said. “So we changed the way we were managing him, but he was still getting worse, so in the interest of allowing him to move on with his life and improve his quality of life, we went with amputation.”

According to the surgeon, had they not performed the amputation, in three to six months of care and management of his wound, it was likely he would have still ended up losing his leg.

“The risk was very high. It was a very guarded prognosis to begin with that he would ever have normal return of function to the leg, and I knew if I amputated his leg he would be functional as a pet or regular dog probably within a week—so it seemed like the best option for him.”
Alex was described as relatively calm by the surgeon, and during his time at the VMCE, the staff learned more about him, enabling them to cater to his needs and ensure he was comfortable.

“MWDs run the gamut from very high strung, very nervous and needing to be restrained because they have so much energy and are so anxious, to being very mellow,” she said. “Alex was sort of a strange combination, he was relatively calm, but there were things that you knew if you did them he was going to get angry, like touching his tail.”

At Alex’s home unit, the Kennel Master said to him, Alex always felt like an old soul.

“[Alex has] the experience of a career Soldier, and always carried himself in a way which always made trainer and handlers just believe he was focused on the mission at hand,” the Kennel Master said. “He carries the ability to simply be a fun-loving dog who values his rapport with his handler as much as he enjoys executing his duties.”

Even while recovering from his injury and going through surgery, Alex was teaching those around him some important lessons.

“It’s tragic what happened,” said a MWD handler who has been with Alex for his recovery in Germany. “But it just goes to show how selfless and resilient these animals are. For him to go through that blast and still be as strong as he is and kind and gentle towards people, it really amazes me that what they are capable of living through and surviving through. It definitely teaches me resiliency.”

But these lessons don’t just come when an injury happens, the relationship between MWD and handler is one that both benefit from.

“The relationship between handlers and their partners is a relationship I’ve always found difficult to put into words,” Kennel Master said. “It’s a familial bond, but it almost goes deeper in some ways. The co-dependent nature of the business puts handlers in a position where they have to give more trust to their canine than most put in fellow humans. It’s not always a comfortable or easy process, but once they reach the point where they independently trust each other while working in tandem, the connection the team develops is unparalleled.”

Another MWD handler, who has been a MWD handler for three years, shares similar sentiments.
“It is truly incredible how selfless one can be and I think it shows the true side and caring side of humans—how much compassion and care we can show another living being—it is really special,” he said. “It is really amazing how we interact and how we can combine to create such a strong and powerful team.”

Alex headed back to the states at the end of August where he will continue his recovery. Due to his injury, his home station kennel will submit a medical disposition packet to allow Alex to retire and be adopted.

“I've built a bond with Alex—not as deep as his handler's. But it is always hard to say goodbye. Dogs do come and go—that is part of the job, but I am just really happy I was able to come over here and help him recover and then get him back to the States and get him to see his handler.

“I've always heard the saying, humans don’t deserve dogs because of how kind they are, and I 100 percent agree. You could not ask for a more selfless companion.”
Some people's hobbies include reading, sewing, or even online shopping, but for one Veterinary Corps Officer, his hobby includes a 1500-meter swim, a 40-kilometer bike ride and a 10-kilometer run.

The VCO, who is the Veterinary Medical Center Europe director and a veterinarian, completed his first triathlon in 2002 and it was that race that he says was the stimulus for his addiction.

"I could barely run a 5K," he said, "I had just gotten a road bike and had done very limited training. But that race acted as a stimulus because afterwards, I thought, maybe I can do this - and I went back the following year to do the race again."

And while he didn't take much time to prepare for this first triathlon, over the last year, the VCO cycled 2,800 miles, ran 600 miles and swam more than 200,000 meters, with one goal in mind -- competing in the Armed Forces Triathlon, again, and beating his time from the previous year.

His first Armed Forces Triathlon, as part of the All-Army team, was in June 2017. Unlike other sports, members of the All-Army Triathlon team don't compete for a spot, they are selected through an all-paper process. Applicants submit information with the triathlons they have completed along with their times and other background information related to the sport.

Going into his first Armed Forces Triathlon, he said he had high hopes and aspirations for himself.

"But I got foiled by illness and anxiety," he said. "The month leading up to the race I had bronchitis and I knew as soon as I hit the cold water my lungs were going to tighten up. So I did not do as well as I would have liked."

But that attempt pushed him to try again.

"My goal was 2 hours and 12 minutes for 2018," he said.

He completed it in 2 hours, 12 minutes, and 40 seconds, and says he is happy with his results.

"I asked for clarity at the start this year, and I have never had a clearer moment than standing on that line this year. I knew I could do it. I knew I had put in the work, so I was going out there and just trying to push myself even harder."

The VCO's 2018 time put him in 5th place in the Master's category (the 40 and over category), two slots away from competing at the International Military Sports Council.
(CISM) Triathlon. In the CISM competition, military members from around the world compete for the top spot.

The VCO says he couldn't do the training and competitions without the support of his wife.

"She is actually the one who found the Armed Forces Triathlon, and encouraged me to go for it," he said. "I wouldn't be able to do it without her support."

In order to get in the hours of training, which was about 12 hours a week, he had to learn to manage his time and the hours in the day.

"Balancing it all can be tough, I've got two kids at home, I've got to make sure I have time for my wife -- and I have my job."

In order to fit it all in, the VCO said he would ride his bike to work, or would do his bike ride at 5:30 a.m. --while his family was still asleep. He would also get creative during the day.

"My soldier's all know I do [triathlons]," he said. "They see me go for a run during lunch, come back and eat my lunch at my desk.

"It's a challenge to balance it all, but it is my hobby," he said. "When I don't do it I am grumpy."

The VCO isn't the only one in his family competing in triathlons though - his 10 year-old son has already completed two kids' races.

"I just encourage him to go out and have fun," the VCO said. "That is the most important thing for me -- have fun, enjoy the people around you, be a good sportsman and do your best. If I can get him to have fun I will have someone to bike with for a long time!"

He also hopes he can share some of the lessons he has learned through the years.

"I've learned that I doubt myself, a lot," the VCO said. "And I sometimes undermine my ability to be where I want to be. But I've proved to myself I could do it -- it's about knowing yourself and knowing you can do it. Anybody can do what they put their mind to."

While the VCO doesn't currently have plans to try for a spot on the 2019 All-Army Triathlon team, he hasn't ruled it out. He says he is a little more focused on cycling right now and hopes to complete a 100-mile ride.

But right now, he said he is really proud of how he did the last two years and honored to have been able to participate.

"I am honored to have had the opportunity to represent the Army," the VCO said. "To meet and compete against [the other competitors] was a huge honor and it will be a highlight in my career."