



Dog handler team loses an 'Airman's worth of weight'

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8/18/2009 - **BAGRAM AIRFIELD, Afghanistan (AFNS)** -- The 455th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron security forces dog handler team have lost an Airman, or at least the 134-pound equivalent of one.

"That's the funny thing; that's about what one of our guys weighs," said Tech. Sgt. Drew Odell, the NCO in charge of the team.

Collectively the eight-person team has lost 134 pounds since their deployment began in the spring. They're here as part of the 455th ESFS, and in addition to patrols, the dogs search for drugs and explosives on the base.

When they're not training with their German shepherds or making improvements to their compound, they spend their time staying fit. For fun, they go on group runs, sometimes up to eight miles at a time.

"Patrolling the base and keeping it secure are our jobs," said Sergeant Odell, deployed here from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz. "But the dogs have to stay in shape too, so they run with us."

Staying in shape is an important aspect of the defenders' everyday mission, said Chief Master Sgt. David Makowski, the squadron superintendent also deployed from Davis-Monthan AFB.

"Fitness is one of my top three priorities for all my Airmen," the chief said. "And for the dog handlers, if either they or their dog is out of shape, their performance suffers. It gives me a great sense of pride to see what they've done not only on duty, but off duty as well. Especially Sergeant Kitts."

Staff Sgt. Justin Kitts, deployed from Luke AFB, Ariz., has lost almost 50 pounds since the start of his deployment back in March. Like the other handlers, the eight-year Air Force veteran regularly exercises with his German shepherd, Mayo.

"I knew when I came here I needed to lose weight," Sergeant Kitts said. "I was living an unhealthy lifestyle before I came here, and one of my goals was to change that."

Sergeant Kitts said he and his wife were eating a lot of fast food since she was pregnant and it was easier to make those kinds of compromises after he'd come off a 12-hour shift. But after seeing his newborn daughter, he's "got something more to live for now."

"I don't want to just be fit to fight for my team, I want to live a long and healthy life so I can see my little girl grow up," he said. "I'm eating better, exercising regularly and also working to become a certified personal trainer. I had a lot of people motivate me, so this will be a way to give back and help others stay fit to fight."



Staff Sgts. Justin Kitts and Scott Carpenter carry their dogs, Mayo and Kane, through the last leg of a training run Aug. 9 at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan. Sergeants Kitts and Carpenter are dog handlers with the 455th Expeditionary Security Forces Squadron and deployed from Luke Air Force Base, Ariz., and Peterson AFB, Colo., respectively. K-9 units patrol the base and inspect mail, luggage, and vehicles. (U.S. Air Force photo/Staff Sgt. J.G. Buzanowski)