

THE US SEALS SECRET WEAPON

The Dog That Cornered Osama Bin Laden

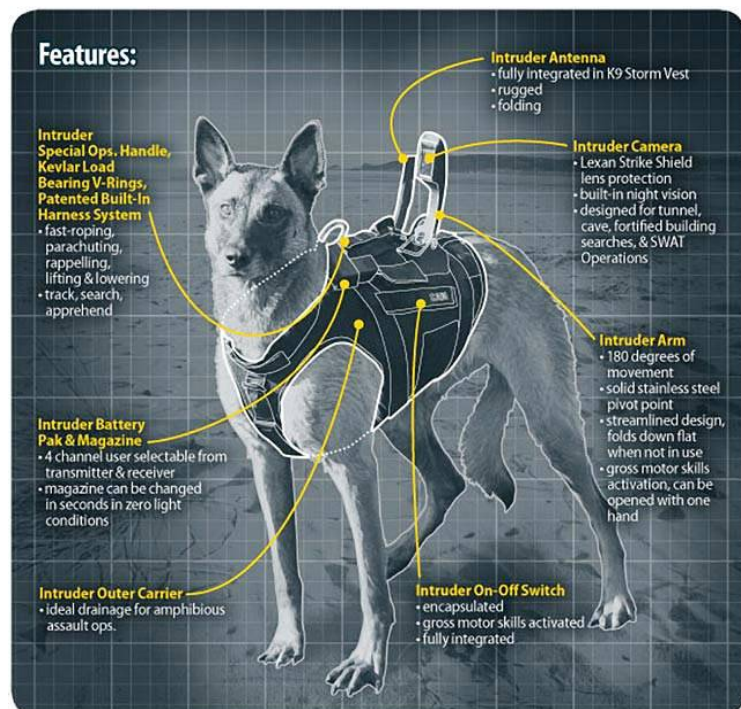
.... not your standard K9 dog
nor is the gear they wear

When U.S. President Barack Obama went to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, last week for a highly publicized, but very private meeting with the commando team that killed Osama bin Laden, only one of the 81 members of the super-secret SEAL DevGru unit was identified by name: Cairo, the war dog.

Cairo, like most canine members of the elite U.S. Navy SEALs, is a Belgian Malinois. The Malinois breed is similar to German Shepherds but are smaller and more compact, with an adult male weighing in the 30-kilo range.



German Shepherds are still used as war dogs by the American Military but the lighter, stubbier Malinois are considered better for the tandem parachute jumping and rappelling operations often undertaken by SEAL teams.



Like their human counterparts, the canine SEALs are highly trained, highly skilled, highly motivated special ops experts, able to perform extraordinary military missions by Sea, Air and Land (thus the acronym).

The dogs carry out a wide range of specialized duties for the military teams to which they are attached. With a sense of smell 40 times greater than a human's, the dogs are trained to detect and identify both explosive material and hostile or hiding humans. The dogs are twice as fast as a fit human, so anyone trying to escape is not likely to outrun Cairo or his buddies.



The dogs, equipped with video cameras, also enter certain danger zones first, allowing their handlers to see what's ahead before humans follow. As I mentioned before, SEAL dogs are even trained parachutists, jumping either in tandem with their handlers or solo, if the jump is into water. Last year canine parachute instructor Mike Forsythe and his dog Cara set the world record for highest man-dog parachute deployment, jumping from more than 30,100 feet up — the altitude transoceanic passenger jets fly at. Both Forsythe and Cara were wearing oxygen masks and skin protectors for the jump. Above right is a photo from that jump.



As well, the dogs are faithful, fearless and ferocious — incredibly frightening and efficient attackers. I have seen it reported repeatedly that the teeth of SEAL war dogs are replaced with titanium implants that are stronger, sharper and scare-your-pants-off intimidating, but a U.S. Military spokesman has denied that charge. I really don't know never having seen a canine SEAL face-to-face but I do know that I've never seen a photo of a war dog with anything even vaguely resembling a set of shiny metal-chompers.

When the SEAL DevGru team (usually known by its old designation, Team 6) hit Bin Laden's Pakistan compound on May 2, Cairo's feet would have been four of the first on the ground. And like the human SEALs, Cairo was wearing super-strong, flexible body armour and outfitted with high-tech equipment that included "doggles" — specially designed and fitted dog-goggles with night-vision and infrared capability that would even allow Cairo to see human heat forms through concrete walls. Working dogs in 15 countries around the world are currently protected by canine body armour.



Jim Slater was a canine handler on the Winnipeg Police Force when he crafted a protective jacket for his own dog, Olaf, in the mid-1990s. Soon Slater was making body armour for other cop dogs, then the Canadian military and then the world. The standard K9 storm vest also has a load-bearing harness system that makes it ideal for tandem rappelling and parachuting.

