

Victoria County Sheriff's Office K9, Rocky



By Lt. Thomas Eisman, Victoria County Sheriff's Office, Texas



On September 16, 2013, Rocky, a 9-year-old Belgian Malinois K-9 officer was lost to complications from a degenerative medical condition he had fought for over two years. Rocky was a dual-purpose K-9 who joined his handler and partner Corporal Craig Kirkpatrick at the Victoria County Sheriff's Office in Victoria, Texas in 2008. He was used for narcotics detection, tracking, suspect apprehension and officer protection.

During his service with the Victoria County Sheriff's Office, Rocky assisted Craig in the seizure of over \$7.3 million worth of illegal narcotics and US Currency. The team also made 136 arrests and captured many assault weapons, weapon accessories and body armor used by criminals. Rocky and Craig had also been recognized by the National Narcotic Detector Dog Association. In 2011 Rocky and Craig placed 1st at the NNDDA National competition in West Columbia, TX. Rocky also won 1st for Top Belgian Malinois, 1st for team competition and received the Bark, Bandit, Trooper award. In Vicksburg, MS in 2012, they placed 3rd at the NNDDA Nationals and 1st for Top Belgian Malinois.

Rocky's handler Corporal Kirkpatrick stated, "Rocky was not only a loyal partner and Officer, he was also able to deter many types of criminals while remaining a trusted and loved member of my family. He will be sorely missed and never forgotten."

Statistics

The statistics of Rocky's service from 2008 until End of Watch follow:

- Number of Significant Seizures: 33
- Sight Arrests: 136
- Marijuana: 2,280 LBS (Street Value \$1,824,000.00)
- Cocaine: 57.4 Kilos (Street Value \$3,726,235.00)
- Meth: 9.2 Kilos (Street Value \$770,000.00)
- Heroin: 1.44 Kilos (Street Value \$129,600.00)
- MDMA: 1500 Tablets (Street Value \$22,500.00)
- Crack Cocaine: 13 Grams (Street Value \$1050.00)
- US Currency: \$890,514.00
- Over 20 assault rifles, bullet proof vests and assortment of illegal accessories.

**Total of US Currency and street value of narcotics
\$7,364,399.00**

Memorial Service Planning and Execution

Soon after Rocky's passing, the Sheriff determined it would be best to cremate his remains. This was done for the Sheriff's Office at no charge by the Dorothy O'Connor Pet Adoption Center.

As soon as Rocky's death was announced to the community several groups/individuals stepped forward to provide donations for a replacement K9.

A local funeral home, Rosewood Funeral Chapels, was approached for input into the service but the staff there took it upon themselves to become active participants in this effort.

Before the ceremony was done, Rosewood and their staff had provided all of the following:

- A framed portrait of Rocky that was at the service and will hang in the Sheriff's Office as a memorial. Several smaller keepsake versions of this portrait were also provided to Rocky's handler for distribution at his discretion.
- 150 professionally developed programs for the event as well as specialty programs for the participants listing their cues to act.
- A memorial floral wreath from McAdams Funeral Florist, a local florist that specializes in funeral arrangements.

Excavation of the Burial Location

Jones Family Monuments was contacted for development and planning of the final monument to be placed over Rocky's remains. The planning went through several iterations and various configurations before the final plan was developed. This plan is to be carried out in similar fashion in any future K9 burials at the Victoria County Sheriff's office. It calls for:

- The cremated remains of the K9 Officer to be sealed in a vault that is then encased in cement under the memorial stone in a "green" area in front of the Sheriff's Office.
- The memorial stone is a 28"X18" cut grey granite laid level with the greenery. It has an opening in the center through which the urn was placed in the vault during the ceremony. Special care had to be taken to ensure:
 - The urn fit in the vault,
 - The vault fit in the excavation,
 - The urn could be placed and sealed in the vault through the opening in the stone, and
 - That the bronze plate would completely conceal the opening in the stone once set.
- The stone is then capped by a 24"X14" Bronze marker bearing:
 - The Sheriff's Office's seal centered.
 - Rocky's name and K-9 status listed at the top.
 - Rocky's dates of birth and death below his name but above the Sheriff's Office Seal.
 - Rocky's date of first watch and end of watch bracketing the Sheriff's Office Seal.
 - "Partner of Cpl. Craig Kirkpatrick" centered at the bottom.

Jones Family Monuments included both preparation of the site and final sealing of the site in their quote for the job. Those tasks included:

- Placing the vault in the burial plot on dry cement powder for the proper height.
- Placing the stone in a temporary fashion for the funeral service and having the bronze plate standing immediately to the rear of the stone.
- Returning after the service to:
 - Activate the dry cement under the vault.

- Set the vault and seal it, then encasing it in cement.
- Permanently setting the stone above the site.
- Permanently affixing the bronze plate to the top of the stone.

The ceremony took place at 1100hrs on 22 May 2014. The chronology of the event follows:

- 0900 hrs – Initial set up in front of Sheriff's Office began, including preparation of the burial site which had been excavated on 20 May.
- 1030hrs – Street in front of Victoria County Sheriff's Office was blocked so folding chairs could be set up in the street and guests could gather for the service.
- 1055hrs – Bagpiper, Dan Sheppard, began playing solemn hymn to set mood of service and prepare attendees for event.
- 1100hrs – Sheriff T. Michael O'Connor made opening remarks from the podium set in front of the Sheriff's Office.
- Retired Captain Abel Arriazola gave an opening invocation.
- Lt. Gary Lytle (the former supervisor of Cpl. Kirkpatrick and Rocky) was guest speaker and shared both poignant and humorous stories about Rocky.
- All Officers were called to Attention and Present Arms.

- The US and Texas flags that fly in front of the Sheriff's Office were lowered to half mast by two members of the VCSO Honor Guard. The flags remained lowered until morning of the next day.
- The Bagpiper played "Amazing Grace" as fellow K9 Officer, Randall Branecky, carried the urn containing Rocky's remains from a covered table in front of the service to the gravesite. There, he took a knee and placed the urn through the stone, into the vault and returned to his seat.
- Two members of the VCSO Honor Guard who had been standing on station behind the grave throughout the ceremony lifted the bronze plate and placed it over the opening in the stone.
- One of those Honor Guard members returned to post at the grave while the other took a pre-folded Texas flag from the table that had originally also had the urn on it and presented the flag to Cpl. Kirkpatrick before returning to post at the grave.
- As the bagpiper faded into the background, Taps was played live by Charles Hauboldt.
- All Officers were called to Order Arms and Parade Rest.
- Sheriff O'Connor shared a few personal stories of Rocky and made closing remarks before all attendees dispersed.

K-9 Burial Protocol – "The Rocky Protocol"

Purpose of Protocol

K9 units have been used in civilian, law enforcement and military applications for almost as long as dogs have been domesticated. Many who work with K9s in a variety of capacities understand that it is a tragic oversight that these selfless and loyal soldiers, officers, rescuers and partners are often overlooked by the communities they serve as well as the agencies and organizations that employ them. No human counterpart goes home with their partner, becomes part of the family or is expected to give up their life for their partner, but K9s do this daily, often without any more recognition than any other fixed asset. This document is an attempt to create a protocol to bring some level of uniformity in honoring these trusted companions when they finally end their vigilant watch over our lives and freedoms. These protocols are guidelines only.

If an agency chooses not to honor their fallen K9s, the memorial process could certainly be undertaken by the handler themselves, any interested group or the community at large. In all cases, the handler's wishes should be taken into consideration before a final plan is determined. In all cases, the public

should be made aware of the loss and the plans to honor the fallen. It is remarkable to note how much may be donated to the cause by members of the community who respect service animals and will contribute funds, supplies or services to aid in honoring a fallen K9.

Definitions

- Active Duty Death: When a K9 who is still a working asset dies outside of their normal duties due to injury or conditions not related to their assignment in any way.
- Line-of-Duty Death: When a K9 dies due to injuries sustained while actively performing their duties. This is regardless if the death is due to assaultive actions of criminals/soldiers or incurred accidentally due to the chaos of the situation sometimes called the "fog of war."
- Post Duty Death: When a K9 who has been formally retired from service dies for any reason.

Burial Types

- K9s may be interred intact or cremated as directed by either the handler or agency policy.
- All K9s should be interred (even if cremated) to reduce the likelihood of intentional or accidental desecration of their remains unless the handler or employing agency has determined an appropriate place to scatter their ashes.
- If cremation is chosen, this process should be handled as soon after death as possible. Veterinarians, Pet Adoption Offices or Animal Shelters may provide this service locally.
- If intact burial is chosen, the remains should be first enclosed in some form of casket and burial should take place as quickly as possible. If there is any question as to burial timeframe, cremation should be seriously considered.

Honors Bestowed

Honors bestowed on K9s are often comparable to their human counterparts. Any K9s suffering “Post-duty” deaths as defined above may be exempted by their agencies from receiving full honors, although this is discouraged. Any or all of the following guidelines may help in determining which is appropriate for your office, agency or organization:

Honor Guard

Honor Guard members shall be used if at all possible. Their roles may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Guarding the body/ashes until burial/scattering.
- Guarding the gravesite until ceremony conclusion (if applicable).
- All aspects of flag control, movement and/or presentation.
- Gun Salute duties.
- Taps or other music if this is normally handled by Honor Guard at your agency.
- Escort duties to the handler and/or their survivors if needed.

Pall Bearer(s)

Pall Bearer(s) are to be at the discretion/approval of the K9 handler or the handler’s survivors. Recommendations may be made by the employing agency.

It is recommended that the handler or their survivors not act as pall bearers unless they specifically request that responsibility.

If the choice is left to the employing agency, pall bearers will normally be Honor Guard members or other K9 handlers if possible.

Flags

Flags on a permanent flagpole at the main office and/or location of burial shall be lowered to half-mast during the ceremony, beyond that is at the discretion of the controlling party.

Flags not on a permanent flagpole shall be attended by an honor guard member unless presented to another for safekeeping.

The remains of the fallen may be draped in a flag or have a flag displayed near the remains during the ceremony to honor the fallen:

The flag shall be the flag of the state for local and state agencies or the flag of the country for all federal agencies.

This flag shall be folded properly by an honor guard either before or during the ceremony.

This flag shall be presented to the K9’s handler or the handler’s survivors by an honor guard member using appropriate protocols.

A shadowbox may be provided to the flag recipient at the discretion of those hosting the ceremony.

21-Gun Salute

A 21-gun salute is reserved only for those K9s who died “Line-of-Duty” deaths as defined above.

This salute is performed in a normal military fashion:

Seven Honor Guard members with rifles containing 3 blank cartridges each.

The Guard is near, but removed from the area of congregation during the ceremony.

On orders of the commanding officer, the Guard fires three volleys of fire.

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Taps

It is both permissible and appropriate at all ceremonies for a fallen K9 to have “taps” played live on a bugle or from a recording.

Ceremony Progression

1. Immediately upon death of the K9, local administrators should be notified to start this process.
2. At least two persons should be assigned to coordinate efforts for a memorial service.
3. Preparation of the body/ashes should begin as soon as possible (after any necessary investigative processes are complete).
4. The local media should be notified of the loss and plans for memorial service through a formal press release.
5. Funding budget and process must be decided before any substantive efforts can be completed.
6. Quotes must be obtained for both prices and time-frame for any supplies or services as soon as possible so the date of the ceremony can be set. These will include:
 - Flags (if need to be purchased)
 - Memorial site as needed. May include any or all of the following:
 - Permits/permissions if needed to scatter ashes.
 - Excavation permission (Also check with 811 well in advance of any excavation).
 - Burial urn or casket.
 - Vault or mausoleum location. (verify fit and size of all components).
 - Headstone or memorial stone and/or bronze plate. (verify style, fit and size of all).
 - Permits to block road, hold gathering or have procession (if applicable).
 - Floral Arrangements.
 - Clergy, Guest Speakers, Officials, Honor Guard members, Musicians (Bugler, Bagpiper, etc.).
 - Printing of Programs, Portraits or any other professional printing or artistry needed.
 - Sound system if needed for the event.
 - Additional seating if appropriate for the venue.
7. Once the preparation time of the above considerations have been established, the date can be set.
8. Considerable care needs to be taken to coordinate the efforts of all of the above so that items that have prerequisite steps are not delayed due to poor planning.
9. A list of employees, guests, media, etc. to be invited needs to be generated along with current contact information and a time frame set to notify all parties of the event. One person should be responsible to make sure that all parties are notified in a timely fashion. This notification shall include any dress code requirements.

10. On the day of the ceremony, the order of events is up to the hosting group. Traditionally, services such as this progress as follows:

- Welcome/Introduction
- Invocation
- Guest Speakers / Attendee comments
- Lowering, folding or presentation of flags
- Burial or commitment of remains
- “Gun salute” and/or “taps”
- Closing remarks

“K9 Promise”

My eyes are your eyes,

To watch and protect you and yours.

My ears are your ears,

To hear and detect evil minds in the dark.

My nose is your nose,

To scent the invader of your domain.

And so you may live,

My life is also yours.

Author-Unknown

