



Bandit, left, gets a lesson in standing guard, while his partner, Scott Johnston, "frisks" fellow Transit Police Officer John Woodall. Top, Bandit "collars" Woodall during a lesson in how to subdue a suspect.

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The K-9 Corps' headquarters are housed at the Brooklyn Army Terminal in that borough's Sunset Park section.

More than 640 hours are needed to teach a dog how to track a missing person or fleeing suspect and to help his human partner apprehend a felon and stand guard while the officer conducts a weapons search. To date, 135 dogs have graduated from the program.

"The course involves classroom instruction, obedience and agility training for starters," said Benintendo. "A large portion of it also offers a combination of olfactory-building field training along with article (evidence recovery) search, and criminal apprehension.

"One of the most difficult exercises is the recall lesson where a dog is trained to stop his pursuit at the sound of a command and quickly return to his handler. It's a dog's natural instinct to pursue and catch his quarry. It can take as long as six weeks to train him

to learn otherwise."

Dogs are taught to go for the suspect's arm first because it is the least likely area of the body to have serious injuries inflicted upon it.

"Disabling the arm will prevent the use of a weapon. The object is to avoid serious injury wherever possible," said Benintendo, sporting several fang marks along his right arm and hand.

"I'm one of five trainers and we teach the dogs to hate us and to love their handlers. Even the protective wraps we wear on our arms don't always shield us from some surface wounds, but they do prevent more severe problems."

After a dog has been accepted into the K-9 program, it is built up nutritionally, or if need be, slimmed down. The animals are kenneled at the K-9 Training Center until they are assigned to a handler.

During the seventh week of training, the dog is bonded (paired) with his handler with whom he goes home to live. It is

no accident that man (or in some cases, woman) and dog become inseparable.

"I love Bandit; we're always together," said Mark Cain, 26, of Annadale, a New York state Mental Hygiene police officer assigned to the SIDSSO grounds. "We're on call 24 hours a day, regardless of whether we're needed in Staten Island or elsewhere in the state."

Cain is one of three police officers on Staten Island with a canine partner. It was his four-year-old dog who helped locate the body of an 11-year-old Boy Scout who drowned in a tragic swimming accident at Pouch Camp last month.

"Bandit picked up the boy's scent. He kept repeatedly circling around the woods in that area before he led us to the water. We were then able to narrow down the spot where the child was last seen," Cain recalled.

"Several hours later, the Police Scuba unit found him at the bottom of the pond."