



## **Veterinary services to Mine detection dogs working with MAG in Iraq 2014**



JK Larsson

The author is a Swedish Veterinary surgeon with almost 20 years of experience in field work with MDDs in South East Asia, Middle East, Europe and Africa. He is working with several international organisations performing veterinary medical services, quality assuring the local veterinarians and runs education in the subject Veterinary services to MDD. The author is also the founder of Veterinarians Sans Frontieres-Sweden ( [www.vsf-sverige.org](http://www.vsf-sverige.org) )

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This mission headed out for northern Iraq , Kurdistan and the Client was the British organization MAG, Mine Advisory Group ( [www.maginternational.org](http://www.maginternational.org) )

MAG have been a major global actor in demining for many years and have included MDD ( Mine Detection Dogs) into the mission in Kurdistan, Iraq.

MAG have started up an international veterinary medicine support programme since 2012 when the author visited Shamshamal the first time.

The Shamshamal camp is situated outside the town of Shamshamal on the road to Kirkuk and Erbil. The Camp have been active for several years and is like a small society inside the walls.

MAG keeps a high security level due to previous domestic unrest in Iraq and now in connection to ISIS activities. However the security situation for the staff is stable and comforting.



### Day 1, Travel

This mission started as usual at the authors Homebase in Lulea, Sweden.

1 hour 20 minutes to Stockholm, 3 hours transit at Arlanda airport, 3 hours 30 minutes Stockholm to Istanbul, 2 hours 30 minutes transit at Istanbul airport and finally 2 hours 20 minutes from Istanbul to Erbil. Pick up at Erbil airport is virtually in the middle of the night and a short transport to MAG house in Erbil completes the journey.

Travelling is a piece of art in this kind of business. The first time You land at an new airport somewhere far away it might be a slight excitement, but soon it becomes a part of the job. Mines and MDDs are usually located far away, and then the job is far away.

### Day 2, Kurdistan

Initial welcoming procedures with security brief and handing out a local phone, and protective equipment and then travel from Erbil to Shamshamal. Due to the unrest in the country at this time the transport is done via a detour passing the city of Dokan, which means an extra hour in the car.



Installation at the Camp in the afternoon and an initial going through of the schedule for the mission Planning and preparation are essential activities. The MDD activity is built on strict processes and SOP (Standard Operational Procedures) and mistakes are not allowed. Also the veterinary services are shaped in the same way. Quality in all links of the chain is essential.

The high quality of work and the fantastic noses of the MDDs and the patience and the skill of the MDD staff have resulted in the fact that no MDD have been involved in an explosive incident by making errors or mistake during all the time the author have worked with these missions.

Really impressive !

### Day 3-4-5, Vet med services

The Veterinary medical services for the MDDs are focused on prevention. Any situation that can be prevented is good business, both health wise for the MDD but also for the MDD organization. Therefor the preventive measures for ecto- and endoparasites are evaluated and the drug supply is checked and examined. Also a wide range of viruses are subject for preventive measures.

The MDDs are vaccinated with DHPPI and Rabies vaccines according to a program, a bit more enhanced that most dogs receiving the vaccines, but the MDD are constantly changing environment and are confronted with all kind of stray animals so the need for a very high protection level is decided.

The initial general check up is starting up the way the as most people know them, the full veterinary examination. From the nose to the very tip of the tail, including “invasive” checks in mouth, genitals and rectum. Heart and lungs are listened to and the stomach is palpated. An examination journal is established, and in case of any disorder like wounds, infections etc. the MDD undergoes direct treatment.



The most intense focus during the veterinary services goes to the nose, the mucos systems connected to the smelling organs. Nose, eye, ear and throat share a joint mucos membrane system. An infection in the throat or in the ear can easily spread into the nose and affect the smelling organs. This is not a situation that a MDD wants to experience. The quality of the work is equivalent to the good health of the nose and the smelling organs.

The MDD is anesthetized with a cocktail of two neuroleptangetic drugs witch gives a good and secure anaesthesia. During this sleeping period the throat is carefully examined and the teeth are cleaned from plaque witch is a major problem with most dogs. Plaque develops from a combination of food, water and the environment of the mouth.



The plaque is removed with an Ultrasound device that vibrates and detaches the plaque. Some larger dental treatments where performed due to infection in the big cheek teeth (molars) Extraction and follow up with antibiotics is at this stage the only way to handle the situation Still under anaesthesia finally the claws are cut. Under anaesthesia we can cut them very short and also stop the small bleedings that can occur when cutting very short. Short claws is a very good protective measure against broken claws. A broken claw can result in a longer unnecessary stand down of work since a broken claw is very hurting and can make the MDD lose focus on the work.

After the anaesthesia the MDDs receive an antidote and after some minutes they walk away from the event, a little tired but quite fresh and awake. The day after this event the MDDs have a resting day where they are monitored and checked up, so an eventual effect or reaction from the anaesthesia or the treatment can be detected.

In this post operative period a general assessment of the kennels, the handling system and feeding principles is performed. Preventive medicine can also be good kennel hygiene and good processes in handling. A MDD is even thou a tough and sharp dog, a living creature that needs lots of attention and care. As the golden rule says...prevention is far better than care.

#### Day 6, final check up and contact with the local Veterinary College

This last day of the mission at the camp in Shamshamal a quick check up of the MDD's where performed and they where all in good shape, acting good, eating and eager to perform their important work.



This last day of the mission the author visited the Veterinary College of the University of Sulimania where last visit an initial contact was made.

Friendly reappearances met the MDD crew and we could note for a fact that the planning for starting up Pet education ( mainly referring to the dog) had taken its early steps and the classes had started up in a small scale. This means that MAG can after this visit connect with the veterinary College in Sulimania if any acute situation occurs with the MDDs

#### Day 7, Travel and summing up

Return from Camp and MDD life to "normal" life is like turning the clock backwards.

Erbil Airport in the middle of the night, Istanbul, Stockholm/ Arlanda and finally back to northern Sweden and Lulea.

Journals must be detail studied and finalized for the archive, a mission report to be written and last but not least an cleaning up and checking up of the used equipment, so everything will be in order when next mission comes...because there is always one more to come...

The work for the MDD veterinarian is if not endless, but have a long timespan exactly like the great and patient work of the MDD in various places on Earth.

A skilled manual Deminer can clear 50-100 sqm/day and a skilled MDD can clear up to 1000 sqm.

In combination with machines the mix of the 3 ways to clear areas and find mines, slowly and sqm by sqm clear mine scattered areas and allows people to reclaim their land for their kids to play and for the farmers to cultivate the land.

This is truly a mission to be admired and as a small part of the system to make the MDDs perform their important work I'm humbly grateful for being able to assist.

Lulea, some days after returning from MAG MDD mission in Schamshamal, Kurdistan, Iraq

Yours truly

**JK Larsson**

Lic vet surgeon

Specialist in the dog & cat medicine



## Letter of appreciation

As acting TFM (Technical field manager) and responsible for the MAG MDD team in Schamshamal, Kurdistan, I would like to express MAGs, my and the MDDs thanks for the donation of anaesthetic drugs, vaccines and the grooming equipment ( Furminators) that Veterinarians without borders of Sweden have provided.

I note the donation as a sign of Your appreciation of our work and will return our appreciation that the MDDs of MAG are subjects for Your work and donations.

Our special public relations MDD Arco and his handler sends their greetings to Sweden and the donors from Veterinarians without borders, and hope for a long lasting relationship.

Schamshamal October 2014

Kind Regards and once more Thanks

**Adnan Avdic**

TFM MAG Iraq

