

The K-9 Unit



Patrolman William Loux with his dog Duke, 1961
(Photo courtesy of William Loux.)

“Man’s best friend” has been used in law enforcement for generations. The first recorded use of a dog by the Cranston police dates to 1920, when Lieutenant H. Clay Debow used a black Irish Setter named Lady to track a fugitive through the woods near the State Institutions.

The department established its first K-9 unit in the summer of 1961. Mr. Dwight H. Owen, Personnel Director of the Cranston Print Works, had heard that Chief Fouchecourt was looking to acquire a dog for police work, so he donated a 26 month old German Shepherd named Duke to the department.

Duke was a good choice because he had already been through obedience training. Once the department acquired him, he was given additional training at the Providence police academy.

Training for a police dog is more involved than one might think. The dog is given 14 weeks of training which included basic disciplinary commands to control the dog, jumping and crawling through obstacles, guarding prisoners, protecting their handlers, searching buildings, tracking, and riot and crowd control.

Before any training began, all dogs for this unit were tested and examined. First they received a medical exam. If the dog was found fit for police work, he was tested for gun-shyness where a gun would be fired nearby to see if the dog would flinch or run off.

Next, the dog was tested for aggressiveness. This was done by seeing if the animal would respond to mild agitation. The dog would be struck with a rolled gunny sack or other harmless device to see if he responded by growling or barking or attempting to bite his tormentor. This may seem cruel to someone not familiar with police work, but a dog could be hit with objects at the scene of a disturbance, just like any officer.

Lastly, the dog would be tested for his ability to ride in a motor vehicle. A dog was considered "car-broken" when he would enter a vehicle upon command, stay quietly therein, and make no attempt to get out unless ordered to do so.

If a dog successfully completed this process he was assigned to a handler. The first officer assigned to the K-9 Unit was Patrolman William F. Loux. Duke lived with officer Loux at his home in Cranston. The city built a special kennel to the rear of the Loux home for Duke to stay in. The kennel measured 6 by 20 feet with a dog house to protect Duke from the weather. Officer Loux was responsible for feeding and grooming the dog.



Duke, Cranston first police dog, 1961
(Photo courtesy of William Loux.)

Officer Loux told this author that he enjoyed being a K-9 officer and apparently so did Duke. Mr. Loux stated that when he would go into his back yard in civilian clothes, Duke would hardly take notice, but when he went out with his uniform on, the dog knew it was time to go to work and he would get excited and anxious to get into the patrol car.

When the pair went on patrol they did so in a special police car which had the rear seat removed and a plywood floor installed for Duke's comfort and control. When the K-9 team wasn't answering calls, they would check industrial buildings throughout the city.

The cost of the K-9 program was not more than \$250 per dog per year. This figure represented the cost of food, equipment, veterinarian charges, and dog licenses. The cost of one highly trained dog was less than five percent of a patrolman's yearly salary.

Patrolman Loux and Duke quickly proved to be a valuable asset to the department so in 1962; Chief Fouchecourt added another officer and dog to the unit. It was at that time that Officer Warren D. Edman and Rex became the second K-9 team.



K-9 Officer William Loux with Duke, 1963
(Photo courtesy of William Loux.)

In May of 1962, Officers Loux and Edman gave a demonstration of their dog's abilities at the Cranston Stadium as part of National Police Week. The demonstration showed what the dogs were capable of doing from following simple commands to disarming an armed felon attempting to shoot his handler. The dogs were also shown to be friendly towards the general public, thus dispelling the myth that police dogs were vicious. The demonstration undoubtedly did a lot for public relations.

In 1963 the department bought a new Ford station wagon to be used exclusively by the K-9 Unit. The car was light blue with a single revolving red "cherry" style light on the roof, and a special K-9 emblem on the door. A year later the word "CRANSTON" was added to the door.

The wagon was equipped with room behind the front seat for two dogs to be transported at once. The car also carried a bull horn, a life saving ring with rope, three 12 gauge shotguns, and one Thompson .45 caliber machine gun!

Later that same year, Chief Fouchecourt expanded the unit again by adding four more officers and dogs to ensure 24 hour coverage by K-9 officers.

In 1964 a study of the department conducted by a Chicago firm recommended the abolition of the K-9 Unit. At the time, the department consisted of about 100 officers and it was felt that the manpower could be used more effectively in other areas. Due to this study, the police department was re-organized in 1965 and the K-9 Unit was disbanded.



Left to Right – Bill Loux and Duke, Warren Edman and Rex, 1963
(Photo courtesy of William Loux.)

This Ford wagon was Cranston's first blue police car.

The officers of the disbanded unit adopted the dogs as pets after paying the city a nominal sum and signing papers releasing the city from further responsibilities. The dogs could not be transferred to other police department because they were trained to respond only to their handlers.

The department was without a K-9 unit for the next 35 years. Then, in the late 1990's, there was renewed interest in establishing a new K-9 Unit.

In 2000, after much negotiation, the unit was reestablished and Officer John Lamantia became Cranston's first K-9 officer since 1965.



Cranston Police K-9 officer's uniform shoulder patch.

The K-9 Unit of the 1960's wore a generic round patch with a simple "K-9" in the center with no departmental designation on it. Today's K-9 officer wears the attractive emblem pictured above. It was designed by Officer Lamantia in 2001.