

Bullet-proof Dogs?

By Suzanne Stoltz, National Communications Services, RCMP HQ

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The RCMP has its first bullet-proof dog! At least that's what RCMP Constable Joel Mackown and his canine partner, *Brit*, are hoping. *Brit* is the first dog in the RCMP to sport the K9 Storm Vest to help stop bullets and other on-the-job dangers.

Cst. Mackown and *Brit* are posted to the Edmonton International Airport Police Dog Service and are active members of the ERT (Emergency Response Team) and Tactical Troop in Alberta. The vest provides dogs 'on the front-line' with potentially life-saving protection. Similar to the external soft body armour carrier for humans, the key to protection is in the ballistic panels made of Kevlar. These protect the dog's vital organs (heart, lungs, kidneys) and back. The patented design was developed by 10-year Winnipeg City police canine unit member, Constable Jim Slater. He designed the vest to provide his canine partner *Olaf* with better protection during tactical operations. They now use it on every call.

Last year, Cst. Mackown was approached by Ms. Lois Friesen, owner of Woodsvail Dog Grooming in Leduc, Alberta. She was interested in raising money to purchase body armour for police dogs after an Edmonton City canine (Caesar) was shot and killed in the line of duty in 1998. Cst. Mackown says, "I didn't know much about the vests but told her I wouldn't turn down anything that might save my partner's life." Together they

researched what was available and chose the K9 Storm. Similar vests are marketed in the U.S., England and Europe.

In an ironic twist of fate, Cst. Mackown and *Brit* were both shot in the line of duty before the fundraising campaign was finished. While approaching a house to make an arrest, they were ambushed from behind with a single shotgun blast. Cst. Mackown explains, "The suspect yelled, 'Don't move or I'll shoot!' I stopped. *Brit* kept moving forward. That's when the shot occurred. If *Brit* hadn't moved at the last second he would have taken the majority in his left side, which would have killed him." Instead, the shot struck *Brit* in his tail and Cst. Mackown in the back of his legs/buttocks and left hand. The vest was later purchased with the money raised by Ms. Friesen through donations and sponsorship from pet food companies to the tune of \$1,500 dollars. "*Brit* and I received the vest in November and have since returned to work this January."



Ms. Lois Friesen, owner of Woodsvail Dog Grooming in Leduc, Alberta, helped raise the money that went toward the purchase of a vest for Cst. Mackown's partner, Brit.