

# PRISON DOG BETTER OFF THAN INMATE IN NIGERIA, GETS N3, 000 DAILY ALLOWANCE, INMATE N800.

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From UBONG UKPONG

Most Nigerians are familiar with the fact that the Nigerian Prisons Service (NPS) has resuscitated its hitherto abandoned dog patrol team to enhance effective control and stability of inmates. The measure is aimed at tackling the growing incident of jailbreak in prisons nationwide. Perhaps, the most interesting aspect of the dog patrol story is that the dogs in the kennel of the (NPS) may be more esteemed than the prisoners they watch over, and to some extent, the jailors themselves.

That is the only way to explain the controversy over the feeding allowance given to the dog, vis-à-vis that of a prisoner. There are stories that NPS officials have placed each of the patrol dogs on an allowance of N3, 000 per day. Although the authorities have said only N800 is spent on the head of each dog per day, the amount still makes the dogs better off than a prisoner who subsists on N200 feeding provision per day.

The Controller-General of Prisons (CGP), Olusola Ogundipe, however, said that the wide disparity in the budget for the dogs and inmates was premised on the fact that that of the inmates was basically for feeding, while that of the dogs was for both feeding and medication. At the passing-out parade of the newly graduated dogs and their handlers at the Kuje Medium Prisons, Abuja, the CGP expressed joy at the breed of dogs the Service was graduating, expressing hope also that this was good for the dog patrol team of the Service and would go a long way to fulfill the Service's desire to ensure efficiency in the control and stability of inmates.

Daily Sun watched those dreadful and tough exotic dogs alongside their handlers perform excellently at the passing-out parade that was graced by the Deputy Controller General (DCG) in charge of Operations, Essien Nkang, who represented the CGP.

Dogs within the unit according to Nkang included rottweilers, german shepherds and boer bulls: "These breeds possess the size, intelligence, athleticism and temperament to work effectively in the jail environment, while also being physically hardy enough to endure our tropical environment after acclimatization for a period of one and a half years."

The dog handlers, who were beautifully and well kitted in a dark green combatant khaki, similar to that worn by men of the Service's arms squad, show-cased real intelligence and skills in the kind of sound commands dished out to their dogs, which also obeyed and reacted promptly in line with the commands.

The DCG said that the handlers were carefully selected and exclusively assigned to the dog unit training and patrol duties until completion of their dog handling training certification as was witnessed by all during the parade.

“They were trained in kennel management, intensive socialization program , agility, equipment training, security patrol, detection and tracking.” Displays by security dogs elsewhere had been witnessed but this particular one looked very different and unique. You needed to see how the dogs that were called by their names, ranks and Service numbers, were regimented as they marched side-by-side in unique steps with their handlers according to the rhythm of the band crew.

They also showed skill and excellence in all their performances, which led to the CGP showering diverse kinds of awards on them and their handlers. The handlers were reminded of the need to continue to bond with their dogs properly by continuing to be patient with them, make their commands and hand signals to their dogs unique, be consistent and know their dogs, vise versa.

While it is expected that prison dogs would mount surveillance in prison yards, Nkong is hopeful that in the nearest future, puppies from these highly sensitive dogs would be sent into the market to assist those who are interested in using dogs to complement the security around them.