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Retired patrol dog seriously hurts man, 83

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An attack Tuesday by a retired sheriff's patrol and bomb dog - which cost an elderly man his arm - was the second time the dog bit someone after escaping from an enclosure, an official said.

Alexander L. Dufour, 83, was taken to University Medical Center for treatment after the dog, Bronco, got out of a Northwest Side backyard and attacked him.

Speaking from his hospital room Thursday afternoon, Dufour said he was very weak and that his right arm had been amputated.

He declined to describe the attack itself, saying police advised him not to talk about it.

His daughter-in-law, Janette Dufour, also would not talk about the attack because her husband, she said, was talking to a lawyer. She did not know whether the family would file suit.

"It's sad. It's a nightmare," she said. "It's a nice, quiet neighborhood. There's a bunch of kids. I have two kids. I didn't even know there was a threat."

Bronco was involved in a similar incident in December 2001 when he was in active service for the Sheriff's Department but off-duty, according to the Pima Animal Care Center.

The dog, a 10- or 11-year-old Belgian Malinois, was euthanized Tuesday.

Bronco's owner was also his handler at the Sheriff's Department. When he adopted Bronco in December, he signed a form accepting full responsibility for any harm or injury the dog might do and clearing the Sheriff's Department and Pima County taxpayers of liability.

County Risk Manager Dave Parker said similar forms have been signed for three or four other retired law enforcement dogs whose ownership was transferred into private hands.

Whether such a waiver would hold up in court remains to be seen, Parker said. "It's not been tested yet."

Sheriff's Department officials referred questions about the case to the Tucson Police Department, which has taken over the investigation.

Sgt. Carlos Valdez, a police spokesman, would say only that the case has been assigned to the aggravated assault detail.

"We're not commenting at this time, until we have had the chance to review the documents in the case," he said.

Bronco worked with the Sheriff's Department from January 1998 to December 2004.

Sheriff's spokeswoman Lt. Deanna Coultas said he had reached the age of retirement and had no behavioral problems.

He was trained to sniff out explosive devices or components and to assist in searching for and apprehending suspects - what's known as agitation training, she said.

But in the previous biting incident, "it was the same thing, he got away and bit someone," said Mark Soto,

enforcement operations supervisor for the Pima Animal Care Center.

The victim in the 2001 incident was attacked in his yard along the 7500 block of West Summer Sky Drive, Soto said.

Bronco's owner, Sheriff's Deputy John Summey, was issued a citation for a biting dog and a leash law violation.

Records from Marana City Court show the state dismissed 2001 charges against Summey for having a biting animal and failing to remove waste.

Summey could not be reached Wednesday night or Thursday for comment.

On Tuesday, Bronco escaped from a yard surrounded by a slump block wall and a wooden gate, according to the Sheriff's Department incident report.

Summey told the responding officer he had let the dog roam out-of-sight in the back yard for three to four minutes while he went into the carport. When he returned to the yard, Bronco was gone.

Summey told the officer he drove through the neighborhood calling for Bronco with no response, returned home and then set off on foot. He found Bronco about a block away, outside a home in the 1400 block of West San Lucas Drive, biting an elderly man. The area is near West Orange Grove Road and North La Cañada Drive.

Summey ran to the area, took Bronco "off bite," tied him to a tree and called 911 for help.

The Pima Animal Care Center took Bronco into custody. Soto said Summey immediately signed the dog over to be euthanized.

Neighbors remain shaken.

"There were no concerns at all. I never saw the dog prior to this incident," said Monica Brito, who lives diagonally across the street from the Dufours. "You don't expect something like that to happen. Everyone is in shock."

Her 10-year-old son, she said, is traumatized. "He was crying. He was saying, 'I can't believe it.' " The boy is friends with the victim's grandchildren.

"You know how kids are," Brito said. "They want(ed) the dog to be put to death."

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