

Honoring Those Who Serve

Dogs of War—four-legged soldiers showing their patriotic heroism

Dogs in warfare have a long history starting in ancient times. From war dogs trained in combat to their use as scouts, sentries and trackers, their uses have been varied and some continue to exist in modern military usage.

The first official use of dogs for military purposes in the United States was during the Seminole Wars. Hounds were used in the American Civil War to protect, send messages, and guard prisoners. Dogs were also used as mascots in American World War I propaganda and recruiting posters.

During World War II, the United States Marine Corps used dogs, donated by their American owners, in the Pacific theater to help take islands back from Japanese occupying forces. During this period the Doberman pinscher became the official dog of the USMC; however, all breeds of dogs were eligible to train to be “war dogs of the Pacific.” Of the 549 dogs that returned from the war, only four could not be returned to civilian life. Many of the dogs went home with their handlers from the war.

During the Vietnam War, approximately 5,000 US war dogs served the war effort (the US Army did not retain records prior to 1968); about 10,000 US servicemen served as dog-handlers during the war, and the K9 units are estimated to have saved over 10,000 human lives. 232 military working dogs and 295 US servicemen working as dog handlers were killed in action during the war. It is estimated that about 200 Vietnam War dogs survived the war to be assigned at other US bases outside the US.

Dogs have been used for many different purposes. Different breeds were used for different things, but always met the demands of the handlers. Many roles for dogs in war are obsolete and no longer practiced, but the concept of the war dog still remains alive and well in modern warfare.



U.S. Army SP4 Bealock and German Shepherd scout dog “Chief” on patrol in Vietnam.

Contemporary dogs in military roles are also often referred to as police dogs, or in the United States as a Military Working Dog (MWD), or K-9. Their roles are nearly as varied though they tend to be more rarely used in front-line formations. As of 2011, 600 U.S. Military dogs were actively participating in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Traditionally, the most common breed for these police-type operations has been the German Shepherd; in recent years there has been a shift to smaller dogs with keener senses of smell for detection work, and more resilient



Stubby has been called the most decorated war dog of World War I.

breeds such as the Belgian Malinois and Dutch Shepherd for patrolling and law enforcement. All MWDs in use today are paired with a single individual after their training. While a handler usually won't stay with one dog for the length of either's career, usually a handler will stay partnered with a dog for at least a year, and sometimes much longer.

The latest canine tactical vests are outfitted with cameras and durable microphones that allow dogs to relay audio and visual information to their handlers.

Text and Image Source: Wikipedia and Wikimedia.

A Dog and his Handler

The strength of a working relationship can grow exponentially when, at the office, a co-worker jumps all around his cage recklessly wagging his tail, ready to cover faces with big, fat, slobbery kisses.

That is the reality for a military working dog handler in the 21st Security Forces Squadron.

Senior Airman Tariq Russell and his dog, Paul, rely on the relationship they developed with each other to create a safe working environment while protecting Airmen at Peterson Air Force Base.



Senior Airman Tariq Russell and his dog Paul.

Fallen, Dog-Loving Marine is Honored and Remembered

LACKLAND AIR FORCE BASE, Texas, Feb. 4, 2011 – “Whatever is mine is his,” Marine Corps Pfc. Colton W. Rusk wrote about Eli, his military working dog, in the final days of their deployment in Afghanistan.

The Labrador retriever was assigned to Marine Corps Pfc. Colton Rusk, who was killed in Afghanistan. Rusk, 20, was killed Dec. 5, 2010, in Afghanistan's Helmand province by Taliban sniper fire, Marine Corps officials told Darrell and Kathy Rusk, his parents, that Eli, the young Marine's infantry explosives detector dog, crawled on top of their son to protect him after he was shot.

Rusk's family helped to prove his words true when they adopted the black Labrador retriever in a retirement and adoption ceremony at the military working dog school at Lackland AFB.



Marine Lance Pfc. Colton Rusk
“Whatever is mine is his!”



Memorial dedicated to Police Service Dogs at Lakeland Pet Cemetery, Springfield, Mo.

Article Source: Department of Defense. Photos by USAF and Department of Defense.