

CANINE PROGRAMS EXPAND TO SAVE MORE TROOPS

From [The Army Times](#). By [Michelle Tan](#) - Posted : Monday Sep 12, 2011



U.S. troops in Afghanistan are relying more and more on the superior noses of military working dogs to sniff out deadly improvised explosive devices. These highly trained dogs landed in the spotlight recently when it was learned that Cairo, a Belgian Malinois, was part of the team that raided Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan. Cairo is the only member of the team to be identified so far, and even President Obama met with the famous dog when he visited Fort Campbell, Ky., to thank the team of special operators after the May raid that led to bin Laden's death.

The dogs have proven so valuable that two new programs — one in the Army and the other in the Marine Corps — will be funded for the next two years to put more dogs on the front lines alongside the grunts who patrol Afghanistan's treacherous hills and valleys. But the increasing reliance on the abilities of these highly trained dogs also means some dogs will be killed or wounded in the line of duty.

Since May 2010, 14 military working dogs have been killed in action. Six others have been wounded, and three are missing in action, according to Central Command. In addition, incidents of canine post-traumatic stress disorder are on the rise, said Lt. Col. Richard A. Vargus, chief of the law enforcement branch at CENTCOM. "Our biggest issue that we have with canines is canine PTSD," he said. "We've seen a significant issue with that because when you're standing 10 feet away from an explosion, the dog has emotions and the dog is affected as well."

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A look at military working dog teams:

- **14:** Military working dogs that have been killed in action since May 2010
- **6:** Dogs wounded in action
- **3:** Dogs missing in action
- **725:** Military working dog teams deployed in the Central Command area of operations. Of these: 40 are in Iraq. 300 are with civilian contract teams that do only force protection on the U.S. bases and do not patrol. (Source for numbers: Central Command.)

When a dog team is exposed to an IED, the handler and his dog return to their base and stand down for a couple of days, Vargus said. "But we can't tell until the team gets ready to go outside the wire again how the dog is affected," he said. If the dog is fearful, it may bite the handler, run and hide, or **cover** behind the handler if it thinks the team is preparing to go on patrol, Vargus said. To get a better handle on canine PTSD, the Army continues to work with dog teams stationed around the world to gather data and conduct more research.

If dogs exhibit canine PTSD symptoms, 90 percent of the time they'll undergo a **re-acclimation** period to see if they can be retrained and returned to duty, Vargus said. "It really is difficult, because once the dog experiences these traumatic explosions, it's the same as the troops," he said. "Some dogs move right through it and it doesn't affect them. Some dogs, it takes some retraining, and some dogs just refuse to work. Dogs that suffer physical wounds are first treated by veterinary units deployed to

theater, said Col. Kelly Mann, director of the Defense Department military working dog veterinary service. Some of the dogs can be treated in theater and returned to duty, said Mann, who also is the director of the Army-run Lt. Col. Daniel E. Holland Military Working Dog Hospital at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. More seriously hurt dogs are evacuated to Germany, where they are treated at Dog Center Europe in Kaiserslautern. If necessary, the dogs are then sent for further care or **rehabilitation** to the hospital at Lackland Air Force Base, the only veterinary hospital in DoD where they can get specialized veterinary medical and surgical care, rehabilitative therapy and **convalescent** capability

About 725 military working dog teams are deployed in the CENTCOM area of operations, Vargus said. That number has dropped from a high of about 1,200 teams during the height of the war in Iraq, he said. Most of the 725 teams are in Afghanistan; only about 40 teams remain in Iraq

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as the mission there winds down, he said. Included in the 725 teams are about 300 civilian contract teams that perform only force protection duties on the U.S. bases and do not go out on patrol, he said.

To boost the capabilities in Afghanistan, DoD is funding the **Tactical** Explosive Detector Dog program in the Army and the IED Detector Dog program in the Marine Corps, Vargus said. The programs will be funded for fiscal years 2012 through 2014. They come in response to a requirement from Gen. David Petraeus when he commanded all U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, Vargus said. Petraeus, who recently retired to lead the CIA, wanted more counter-IED capabilities because of the IED threat faced by the troops, particularly those on foot patrols, Vargus said.

Under these programs, infantrymen from deploying units are selected to **undergo** a minimal training cycle to learn how to handle a military working dog, he said. "It's different from our military working dog community because they're not professional handlers," Vargus said. Once the infantryman is paired with his military working dog, the team goes to Yuma Proving Ground, Ariz., for combat orientation training. Army TEDD teams must be certified before they can deploy. The Marine Corps requires only the dog, not the handler, on IDD teams to be certified, Vargus said.

Among the Marines, the IDD concept isn't new, Vargus said. The IDD program began when Marines were deploying to Iraq, but with this new requirement, the service has **enhanced** and ramped up the program to add more dogs and tailor the training to Afghanistan, Vargus said. The goal of these two programs will be to put more dogs out on patrol and potentially save more troops' lives, Vargus said. "In the military working dog program, the canine is expendable; that's why it's there," he said.

Vargus said he expects a need for strong military working dog teams regardless of the demand in Afghanistan or Iraq. "We'll always have a requirement to have canine assets to counter IEDs because IEDs are here to stay and, **obviously**, narcotics are here to stay," he said. "We need a solid, stood-up force to support the war fighter."