

# K-9S OF THE WAR ON TERROR

By Michael Lemish

Like many medals, the K-9 Medal for Exceptional Service is unique and what shapes it should have a deep meaning for everyone. Measuring three inches in diameter it is designed for presentation to canines and meant to be hung from the collar. A slightly smaller version of the medal, in medallion form, is presented to the canine's handler.

Understanding the design components is very important and reflects the history of service dogs and also the attributes of the dog that it is presented to. In the center of the medal is the logo of the K-9s of the War on Terror, the presenting organization. This is surrounded with the wording "Medal for Exceptional Service" and "Presented for Excellence." The six-pointed black star with gold rays represents the day and night operations of the canine teams. The red border represents all the canines that have been killed in the line of duty.

The eighteen silver points represent the aggressive nature of the work that these canines perform as part of their daily lives. Connecting these points is

a gold border representing the security that canines provide American citizens in this ongoing War on Terror. Engraved on the reverse side of the medal is the name and serial number of the canine and the date of the award.

This award is presented in part to honor the special partnership that exists between a canine and handler. It is also meant to be a distinctive symbol for all Americans on the important role that canines provide for both our security and freedom and the work they do each and every day.

**In one respect, you might say the story started and ended 70 years ago,**

but it still remains a linchpin of events that take place even today. It involves the 30th Infantry Division, a component of Patton's Seventh Army as they made the largest amphibious landing to date at Licata on Sicily's southern coast. The assault was code name, "Beach Blue."

Among the men and material debarking was a German shepherd-husky mix named Chips (11A). About 300 yards inland at 0420 hours, Chips and his handler Private John P. Rowell, spotted what appeared to be a grass covered hut but was actually a camouflaged pillbox housing a machine gun nest. Chips broke free and charged the structure. What actually took place inside is conjecture, but it was indeed a fierce fight. This much we do know; Chips received powder burns from a fired pistol and he forced the surrender of three Italian soldiers.

Chips would soon receive both the Silver Star and Purple Heart for his actions, but the order would soon be rescinded and the medals returned.

Several people believed that bestowing medals intended for humans upon animals degraded their lofty purpose. It would be a decision that would haunt other dog teams in WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

Alan Driscoll, a Vietnam veteran sentry dog handler, did not believe this was right. A staunch advocate for military working dogs, he was involved in implementing Robby's Law, which paved the way for civilians to acquire canines deemed surplus by the United States. Indeed he would be the first civilian to officially acquire a MWD since WWII when he partnered with Baro (D134) in 2002.

The Japanese army in WWII recognized their canines, as did the Germans. The British had the Dicken Medal that not only recognized the valor of dogs, but horses, pigeons, and in one case even a cat. These awards were not handed out lightly. In the United States, individual awards for K-9 valor are awarded by several organizations but there is not one unifying group that can cross our great country and provide recognition to our K-9s that have served us so well - until now.

The events of 9/11 have changed the complex of warfare as we know it. Our enemy is now both domestic and foreign and does not wear a uniform. These terrorist forces are confronted by K-9 teams from the military, local police forces, and Homeland Security. Yet there has been no national award to recognize the K-9 contributions from these various resources. Driscoll was determined to change that and in 2010 formed the organization K-9s of the War on Terror (K9WT) as a 501c3 non-profit organization.

The core belief of K9WT is intended to honor canines that have demonstrated exceptional acts in the War on Terror with a medal that will be known as the "K-9 Medal for Exceptional Service." There are over 17,000 dogs serving our country on both a local and national basis in domestic locations and on foreign soil.

The medal will be awarded to those dogs serving in the United States military, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and law enforcement on the federal, state, and local level. The start date for consideration for this award is September 11, 2001. Canines that have made significant contributions since this date may also be honored posthumously.

All contenders for this medal must have distinguished themselves in actual combat, the detection of weapons or explosives, prevention of a documentable terrorist event or the detection of drugs used in the financing of terrorism, etc.

The following requirements must be met for a canine to be considered for the 'K-9 Medal for Exceptional Service':

1. The service performed by the canine must have been in direct support of this country's War on Terror, and must meet the accepted definition of terrorism as being, "An act that involves illegal activity, including the use of force or violence directed against the civilian population, and which is intended to coerce or intimidate a government, a civilian population, or noncombatants in furtherance of

terrorist political or social objectives."

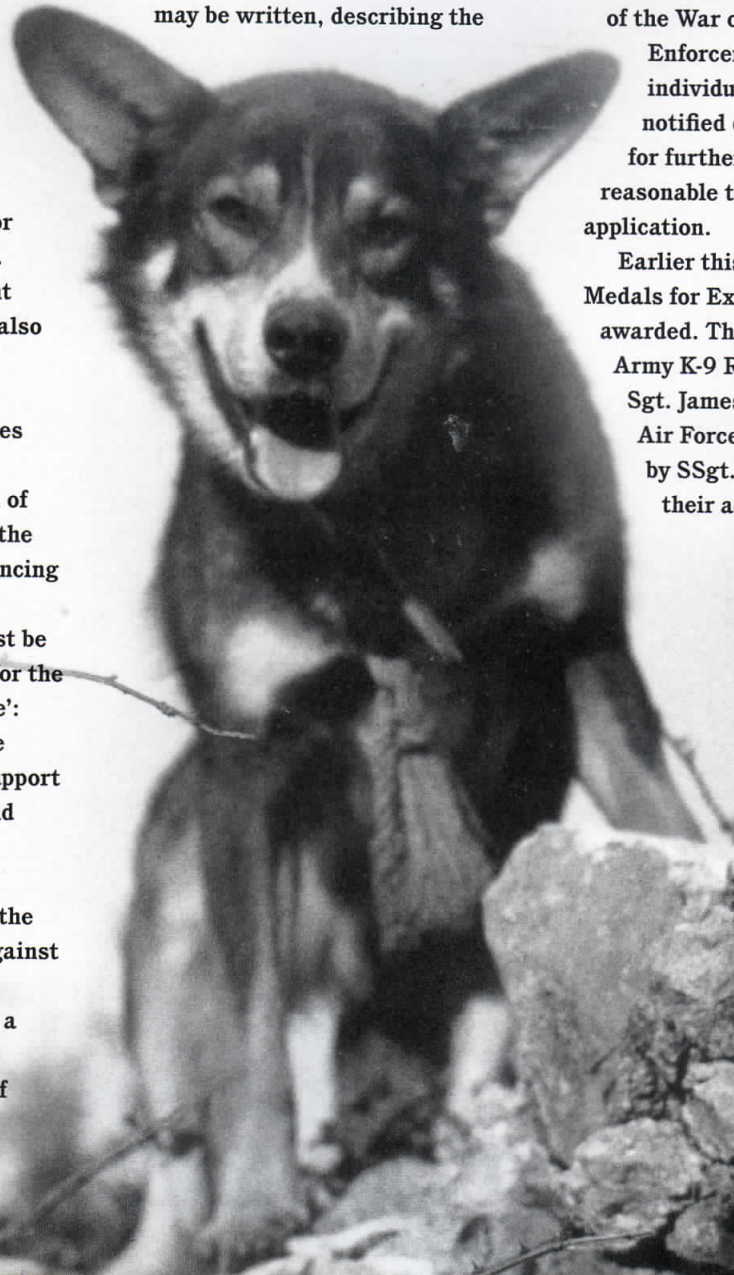
2. The act or service must have been documented by the canine's organization or department. This documentation should be included with the application for consideration for presentation of the medal. Should the act or service be of a classified nature, a letter from competent higher authority may be written, describing the

event but omitting sensitive details.

3. Application for consideration of this medal does not require the canine to be living. An application submitted for a living or deceased canine will be weighed equally.

4. Applications shall be reviewed by a Medals Committee, whose members come from within the K-9s of the War on Terror, Inc., Law Enforcement and professional individuals. Applicants will be notified of their status or need for further information within a reasonable time period after receipt of application.

Earlier this year the first two K-9 Medals for Exceptional Service were awarded. These were conferred to U.S. Army K-9 Ryky (L738) and handler Sgt. James Harrington, along with Air Force K-9 Besy (L444) handled by SSgt. Samantha Navarette for their activities in Afghanistan.



70 years ago Chips (11A) was awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart for his courageous actions. These awards were soon rescinded. The award of medals for canines has been rectified by the organization K-9s of the War on Terror.

Staff Sgt. Samantha Navarrete, 11th Security Support Flight military working dog handler, presents a 2012 K-9 Medal for Exceptional Service to her dog, Besy, during a ceremony April 18, 2013, at Joint Base Andrews, Md. Besy was one of only two honored in 2012 for demonstrating exceptional acts in the War on Terror. This is the first time an Air Force team has received this award. (U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Nesha Humes)

SSgt. Navarrete and MWD Besy, a German shepherd, distinguished themselves with over 1,250 hours of border patrols and checkpoint operations in Southern Afghanistan where they deterred IED and weapons trafficking and prevented foreign fighters from infiltrating the region. The K-9 team was specifically selected to support compound raids and searches in the Wanoke Valley and Lowy Kalay, Nangarhar, Afghanistan.

Sgt. Harrington and SSD Ryky have served together for four years and two deployments. On July 6, 2011 the team was part of a convoy of three vehicles. While in a hostile environment, the middle vehicle detonated an IED that resulted in two severely wounded personnel. Harrington and Ryky immediately exited the third vehicle and cleared a path for medics to get to the wounded. With temperatures hovering around 110F they then cleared an exit route for the vehicles and personnel. Ryky, a Belgian Malinois, although close to exhaustion, was spurred on by Harrington. They continued on their mission and cleared an area for a medevac helicopter to land.

Many handlers are thankful that finally an organization is in place to recognize their K-9 partners. To quote General David Petraus, "The



capability they (K-9s) bring to the fight cannot be replaced by man or machine. By all measures of performance their yield outperforms any asset we have in the inventory." To that end the "K-9 Medal for Exception Service" has been well received to honor those dogs that are in a war without borders. K9WT is also planning a future memorial to recognize and honor all canines that have contributed so selfishly their special talents to the war on terror.

To learn more about K-9s of the War on Terror, Inc. please go to the website [www.k9wt.org](http://www.k9wt.org). On the website you can nominate a dog, get involved, or provide a financial donation for support. Recognizing our K-9s is not only just, but reinforces for Americans the important job that is thrust upon them and the irrevocable bond between a handler and dog. Only through enlightenment and education can the public be made aware of the valuable resource that works on their behalf. ■