



Multi-National Corps – Iraq

Public Affairs Office, Camp Victory
APO AE 09342

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 11, 2008

Combat stress dog puts Bastogne Soldiers ‘At Ease’

Multi-National Division – North PAO

COB SPEICHER, Iraq – Ever had a Sergeant 1st Class lick your face?

For many Soldiers at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, this is not an odd event, but a regular occurrence.

Sgt. 1st Class Boe is the newest member of the 85th Medical Detachment Combat Stress Control unit at COB Speicher and is one of two K-9 therapists being used by the Army to help prevent and control the stresses of living in a combat zone.

Along with Staff Sgt. Mike Calaway, an Occupational Therapy Assistant with the Combat Stress Control unit, Boe is part of a new Army program, which encourages Soldiers to interact with dogs in order to help relieve the psychological stresses of war. The dogs, two Black Labrador Retrievers, were donated and trained by America’s VetDogs and are the first dogs to be used in a combat zone for therapeutic purposes. The organization is part of the larger non-profit group, Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, which has been helping provide guide dogs for the blind since the 1940s. Recognizing a growing need for specialized service dogs for America’s fighting forces; VetDogs recently initiated the therapy dog concept.

The dogs are intended to provide comfort and relaxation through physical interaction, whether it’s a game of fetch or just a peaceful few minutes of petting.

“I felt more relaxed after being able spend some time with her,” said Sgt. 1st Class Brenda Rich, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Medical Operations. “For a few minutes it was just me and the dog and nothing in this environment seemed to matter.”

Calaway spent two weeks training with Boe in New York City to develop a bond, before the pair was sent to Iraq to take on the challenge of helping Soldiers cope with a deployment to Iraq.

“She’s a very well trained and very intelligent animal,” said Calaway who recently introduced Boe to Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division at COB Speicher. “So far we’ve had an outstanding response from Soldiers,” he said, “whether they need help or not.”

Deployments can create several different kinds of stressors, said Calaway, and Boe helps to break the ice, allowing Soldiers to open up about ongoing issues in Soldiers lives.

The major types of stress deployed Soldiers must deal with include operational stress, homefront stress and sleeping issues, said Calaway.

“The Soldiers absolutely love her,” said Maj. Charles Kuhlman, 1st BCT Chaplain.

Often Soldiers on outlying bases will befriend stray dogs for companionship and to get a feel for home, said Kuhlman. “Dogs make a huge difference in morale.”



Staff Sgt. Mike Calaway and Sgt. 1st Class Boe, a therapeutic dog for Soldiers in Iraq, prepare to greet 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Soldiers stationed at COB Speicher, Iraq, Jan. 10, 2008. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Rick Rzepka, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) PAO)



Sgt. 1st Class Boe, a therapeutic dog being used in Iraq to help Soldiers relieve stress, greets Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Jan. 10, 2008 at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Rick Rzepka, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) PAO)



Sgt. 1st Class Boe, a therapeutic dog used in Iraq to help relieve stress, greets Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Jan. 10, 2008 at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq. Boe was donated by a non-profit organization, America's VetDogs to the U.S. Army. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Rick Rzepka, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) PAO)



Sgt. 1st Class Boe, a therapeutic dog being used in Iraq to help Soldiers relieve stress, greets Soldiers from the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Jan. 10, 2008 at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq. (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Rick Rzepka, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) PAO)



Sgt. 1st Class Boe, a therapeutic dog being used in Iraq to help Soldiers relieve stress, sits in the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) Tactical Operations Center, Jan. 10, 2008 at Contingency Operating Base Speicher, Iraq . (U.S. Army Photo by Spc. Rick Rzepka, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) PAO)