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# The Dogs of War Get Their Due in New Jersey

by [Katie Maloney](#) September 18, 2010

In Iraq and Afghanistan, the nature of war has changed, forcing the Pentagon to retool for unconventional foes. Amid the push for robotic IED detectors and aerial drones, however, is renewed investment in another, less techie counterinsurgency tool: war dogs. While they've served in every modern conflict, no other war has so closely matched their particular skills—which helps explain why their ranks have more than doubled since 2001, from 1,300 to about 2,800 dogs, mostly German Shepherds. “The capability they bring”—to track snipers, smell explosives, and sense danger—“cannot be replicated by man or machine,” said Gen. David Petraeus in February 2008, according to an Air Force publication. He went on to urge investment in the animals, noting that “their yield outperforms any asset we have in our inventory.”

That, coupled with the fact that most dogs serve multiple tours and dozens have died in the current conflicts, compelled the U.S. War Dogs Association, a New Jersey-based nonprofit, to lobby for an official medal for canine service. Last month, the Pentagon demurred, saying medals are only for people. So the association designed its own two-inch-wide medal for deserving dogs nationwide. It's shipped medals to about 30 dogs, including hounds at Fort Lewis in Washington state and Maryland's Fort Meade.