

# A Brief History of the Dogs for Defense Program

## The War Dogs of World War II

By Mark A. French

***The Purpose of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America:***

*"... 4. To promote its most conspicuous characteristics as Police Dog, War Dog, Red Cross Dog, and Herding Dog..."*

<https://gsdca.org/join-the-gsdca/purpose-of-the-gsdca.html>

***The Bylaws of The German Shepherd Dog Club of America LAST APPROVED BY AKC – January 2020:***

*"...To aid with every possible means in demonstrating the German Shepherd Dog's ability as a companion, military, police, drug and explosive detection, security, herding, search and rescue dog, therapy/assistance dog, and guide dog for the blind..."*

<https://gsdca.org/join-the-gsdca/bylaws.html>



On December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked and the United States quickly entered World War II. The U.S. government had about 40 dogs – sled dogs used in Alaska. The United States was the only world power not having a formal military dog training program at that time. The value of dogs in the military in other countries had been proven many times during WWI. Dogs were used by European armies as sentries, patrol, message-carriers, medical dogs for finding wounded soldiers, and tunnel and fox-hole clearers of rats and other vermin.



A bill providing for a contingent of war dogs was introduced in Congress, but failed to pass during World War I. It was then believed that American dogs could not be trained effectively to go to war and public support would be nonexistent.

Mrs. Alene Erlanger, a well-known, highly respected poodle breeder based in New York believed in and promoted the idea of dogs being used by our government. She recognized the success a canine corps would help the United States on the battlefield and domestically at home. She had promoted the use of American dogs during World War I, but her requests were denied. Enlisting the help of other prominent figures in the dog world, Erlanger founded the "Dogs for Defense" organization in January of 1942. On March 13, 1942, the Army named "Dogs for Defense" the authorized agency for canine recruitment and training. It would be the first time War Dogs were recognized by the United States military.



*The Quartermaster General, Major General Edmund B. Gregory, accepts an American Kennel Club offer to give guard dogs to the Quartermaster Corps from Mrs. Milton Erlanger, Member of the Board of Trustees of the Dogs for Defense, Inc. March 13, 1942.*

Funds to finance the operation of Dogs for Defense were to be obtained through member clubs of the American Kennel Club, and by donations from individual financiers and private businesses. The animals were to be acquired by donation, trained under the supervision of Dogs for Defense, and distributed for use where they were most needed. Regional offices conducted most of the work required in connection with procurement and training. The organization was met with overwhelming support. Citizens with their completed Dogs for Defense questionnaires were ready to donate their dogs and exercise their patriotic duty to the war effort. Estimations on the exact number of dogs that were enlisted and served during World War II are unknown.



## Wanted by the Army, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines!

Now serving with all of the U. S. armed services . . . War Dogs have proved themselves a valuable weapon for our fighting men. Keen of sight, hearing and scent . . . the K-9 Corps has distinguished itself by good work on sentry, communications, sledge and scouting duty. Today the Army, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines are all asking for more of these 4-footed fighters!

### Your Dog May Serve His Country

It's not too late to enlist your dog for vital war work. Check

these requirements to see if he can qualify: Dogs may be pure-bred or crossbred of breeds specified by the Armed Services; must be at least 20 inches high at the shoulder and weigh at least 50 lbs.; must not be storm shy or noise shy; must be at least 1 year old and not more than 5. Enlisting dogs for War Work is the duty of Dogs for Defense, Inc., a volunteer civilian organization. For complete information on enlisting a dog, send the coupon below.

**ENLIST YOUR DOGS AND YOUR DOLLARS**



DOGS FOR DEFENSE, INC.  
 PURINA MILLS, 1212 Chestnut Street, St. Louis 2, Mo.  
 Please send me  the official Dogs for Defense questionnaire for dog volunteers,  A Dogs for Defense War Fund pledge and complete information about dogs in war work.  
 Name.....  
 Address.....  
 City.....State.....  
 No. of Dogs.....Breed.....

PUBLISHED IN THE INTEREST OF  
**DOGS FOR DEFENSE, Inc.**

by Purina Mills, Makers of

**PURINA DOG CHOW**



## Change from Canine Donations to Canine Loans to the Government

Later the program evolved from citizens donating their dogs, to citizens loaning their dogs to the government. An application questionnaire was developed requiring owners to list their animal's breed, sex, shoulder height, call name, sex, and American Kennel Club registered name registration number if applicable. Questionnaires also allowed for information regarding health, temperament, and if a dog was fearful of loud noises such as explosions, guns or storms.

Approximately half the dogs donated were deployed into service. Some estimate as many as 20,000 to 40,000 dogs were actually deployed. The Dogs for Defense initial application questionnaire also made note owners were not to receive their dogs back unless they were deemed unfit for service. Then a provision was made in later questionnaires asking each owner if they would like their dog back following the end of the war effort.



*Dogs for Defense deployed in the United States Navy in the Pacific Theatre*

Dogs were initially obtained by civilian donations with no breed or sex being turned away, but standards for breeds and sex were adopted during the middle of the war. Every state had a recruitment branch and a recruitment officer to help facilitate donations for Dogs for Defense.

Patriotism and love of country compelled many owners to donate their dogs into service. This act of patriotism gave dog owners comfort in donating their beloved animals. Military historian Fairfax Downey in his book, *"Dogs for Defense: American Dogs in the Second World War 1941-1945"* wrote: *"Givers of dogs received a certificate expressing the gratitude of the United States Government, an impersonal thing. The real recompense, of course, was the knowledge that they had performed an act of patriotism, an act the more deeply patriotic as it meant the sacrifice of something cherished."* Dog owners were doing a service to their beloved country by donating their beloved animals into military service.

In the foreword to *"Valiant Comrades: A Story of Our Dogs in War"* by Ruth Adams Knight, Henry I. Caesar, president of Dogs for Defense, wrote: *"It has been my fine privilege... to enjoy a close-up view of the War Dog in training and at work, and to know the patriotism that has been the force behind those thousands of Americans—men and women, boys and girls—who have given—and every day are giving—their fine animals to their country."*



Cherished pet dogs were donated in the patriotic flurry that captivated America during World War II. The act of donating their beloved pets allowed citizens to feel more patriotic in donating something that was cherished, in this case their loyal dog. Their actions showed their loyalty and love of country were powerful in times of war.

Multimedia publicity as advertising, literature, comic books, songs, and music, movies, and radio programs were inspired or created by the Dogs for Defense program. Publicity encouraged Americans, both young and old, to donate their personal prized possessions. Donation of their beloved pets, were considered individual acts of patriotic citizenship. The program also utilized posters, children's books, songs, movies and radio to convince owners their dog needed to be donated or loaned to fulfill their patriotic duty to the United States during wartime.

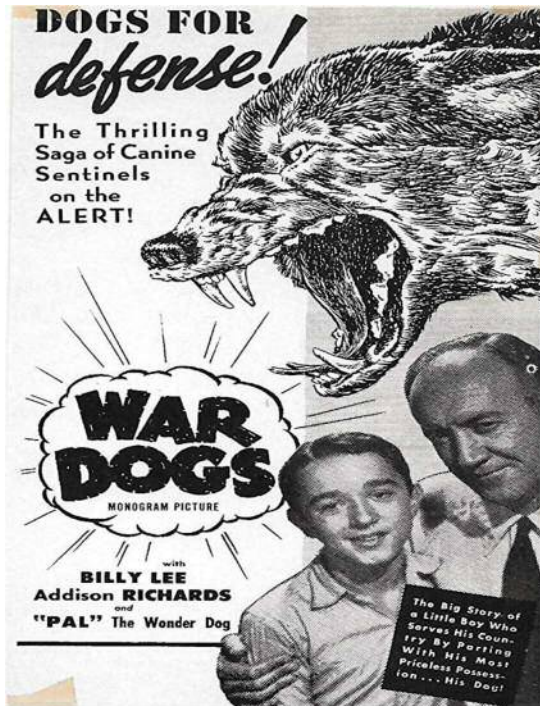
Dog Shows included Dogs for Defense to promote the donation of dogs. Newspaper articles highlighted local dog shows urging donors to buy Dogs for Defense Bonds. The media publicity towards the Dogs for Defense program asserted that public involvement may mean the difference between success and failure of the war. *"We will try to get pictures of dogs, already trained and in use for publicity for the local shows. Every dog show is going to have to do its part."*

For many, dog show competitions highlighted not only the Best of Breed, but an opportunity to view a real-life war dog up close. Dog fanciers understood that having war dogs, either on site or viewable by photograph, allowed citizens to understand the war dog project more in depth. If citizens understood how the dogs were trained and to what purposes these dogs were serving, they would be more inclined to donate their own animals or purchase war bonds to support the Dogs for Defense program.

In 1942, a famous radio program *"All Out for Davey"* by Shirley Wade aired. The program focused on the story of a young boy who donates his dog "Rusty" to the war effort. Davey tells the audience, *"If I can't do anything you can go and fight in my place, can't you, fella?"*

Davey understands that he cannot serve in the war because of his age and that donating Rusty will help win the war. The captain who received his letter is reluctant to allow Davey to donate his dog, but a sergeant says: *"Oh, he wants to give it... Please let his dog serve because he's too young to do anything himself and we've got to win this war..."* This sergeant then reiterated that Davey is too young to serve in the war effort and donating his dog is his best course of action. Further along in the program, although concerned about donating Rusty, Davey continued to remark how donating Rusty would help win the war effort: *"I got to do something,*

*Mom! We got to win this war! They say everybody's got to help—and I guess I'm part of everybody and—well—I got a dog."*



Publicity often emphasized what everyone, including children, needed to do for their part to secure a victory for the United States. In addition to collecting scrap metal or tending to victory gardens, children were encouraged by the program to donate their dogs.

Through trial and error, it became clear that the best age to train a dog was around 18 months old. The most trainable breeds were German Shepherds (excellent nose, strength and courage), Belgian Sheepdogs (exceptionally alert, intelligent and loyal), Collies (alert, fast and able to endure), Siberian Huskies and Malamutes (feet well adapted for ice), and Doberman Pinschers (like the German Shepherds, powerful nose, speed, power and agility).

In total, the Quartermaster Corps operated six War Dog Training and Reception Centers: Front Royal, Virginia; Fort Robinson, Nebraska; San Carlos, California; Cat Island, Mississippi; Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; and Camp Rimini, located in Helena, Montana. Both dogs and men were trained by following the training program designated by the Technical Manual 10-396: War Dogs (TM 10-396,) published in July of 1943.

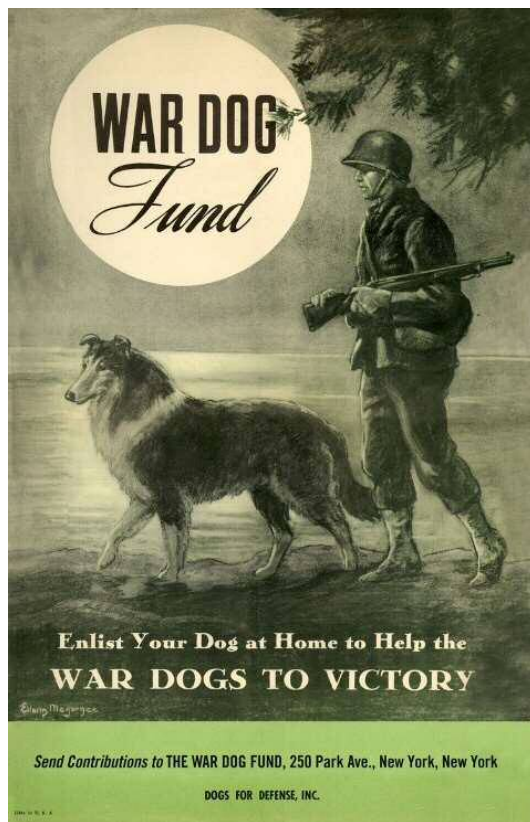
Both handlers and dogs went through basic obedience training. Handlers learned general care for military dogs before beginning specialized training as messenger, sentry, scout, attack, search, scout or guard dogs. The training took anywhere between 6 to 8 weeks. At the conclusion of training, dog teams were shipped to their destinations, either the European or Pacific theaters, or remaining Stateside to guard munitions factories, borders and coastlines.





The dogs were trained in these categories:

1. **Sentry Dogs:** Helped with guard duty at arsenals, ammunition and fuel dumps, ration depots, and water works. Their main job was to warn of intruders.
2. **Attack Dogs:** Used by the Coast Guard for the capture of trespassers.
3. **Tactical Dogs:** Accompanied soldiers in combat situations. Different than the other training categories, this was experimental, using camouflage and gas masks.
4. **Silent Scout Dogs:** Trained to detect scent on the wind, and give a silent warning when enemy troops were approaching.
5. **Messenger Dogs:** Delivered messages on the battlefield, and were trained by two trainers, who used the dogs' innate desire to please both by running from one to the other.
6. **Casualty Dogs:** Aided the medical corps in finding wounded soldiers.
7. **Sledge Dogs:** Located downed airmen in the Army Air Forces in deep snow areas.
8. **Pack Dogs:** Transported up to 40 pounds of gear such as small machine guns, ammunition and food. Only a few were trained and it is unclear whether any carried out their duties in war.
9. **Mine Dogs:** Called the M-Dog or mine detection dog they were trained to find trip wires, booby traps, metallic and non-metallic mines.



## I Would Like to Give My Song to Uncle Sam

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AD-67T\\_LZIs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AD-67T_LZIs)

*This song is about the sacrifice of a blind boy who gave his dog "Rover" to Dogs for Defense*

Newspapers continuously ran articles featuring Dogs for Defense and War Dogs. They often focused on dogs being donated into the service by family members, the family's sacrifice of donating their pet, but occasionally focused on individual canines themselves. The Indianapolis Star ran an article about a dog named Towser who was enlisted in Dogs for Defense in May 1943. Towser, a spitz and shepherd mix, was from New Castle, Indiana and was three years old at the time of enlistment. The article mentioned that Towser was joining the service to "avenge the capture by the Japanese of his master, Chief Petty Officer Lawrence Corum of New Castle."

In the film "Sergeant Mike," a dog is donated by his young owner to seek revenge for the boy's father being killed in the Pacific Theater, but it is the boy's desire for revenge that motivates him to donate his dog. Another movie, "War Dogs" is the story of a little boy who serves his country by parting with his most priceless possession - his dog.

A comic book was published about a real-life dog named "Chips" in 1944 which became a media sensation after biting the hand of Dwight D. Eisenhower who stopped to pet him in 1943. Chips also continued to fascinate the public well after his passing, being the subject of novels and media for children and young adults.

Chips received the Silver Star and Purple Heart for his courageous actions in Italy in 1943. It was later decided that dogs should not be awarded Purple Hearts or Silver Stars, as those awards were meant for humans. Those awards were then taken away from Chips. After the controversy, it was deemed that war dogs would receive a special citation for their bravery in times of war. A medal for a war dog's service was urged, but never implemented.





# ..IF A WAR DOG CAME Home on Furlough



... Canine Hearts Would Beat faster along the avenue, for our War Dogs are heroes, too, in their own right. Take the case of Shep who has been in the K-9 Corps for almost two years ... here's what he'd have to say if he could get home on furlough.



"IT'S PLENTY TOUGH," he'd tell the Boss and Billy, "but it's a great life. We're treated swell—good kennels, good food, and a prince of a soldier to work with."



"GUESS I'M SORT OF A HERO with Billy's friends. I know he misses me, but he's plenty proud now because he's the envy of every kid in the block."



"PRETTY NICE BEING AT HOME, but I'm anxious to get back on the job. With more dogs here at home would get into the K-9 Corps. We really need 'em."



"FURLOUGH'S OVER and I'm back on the job with Sergeant Joe. I'll have a lot of good chances to prove that in wartime, too, a dog is man's best friend!"

## Enlist Your Dog Now WAR DOGS NEEDED AT ONCE



Dogs in the K-9 Corps must be purebred or crossbred, at least 20 inches high at the shoulder, weigh at least 50 lbs, not skinnish or noise shy, and between 1 and 5 years old. If your dog qualifies, mail coupon below.

ENLIST YOUR DOGS AND YOUR DOLLARS



PUBLISHED IN THE INTEREST OF  
**DOGS FOR DEFENSE, Inc.**

by Purina Mills. Makers of

**PURINA DOG CHOW**



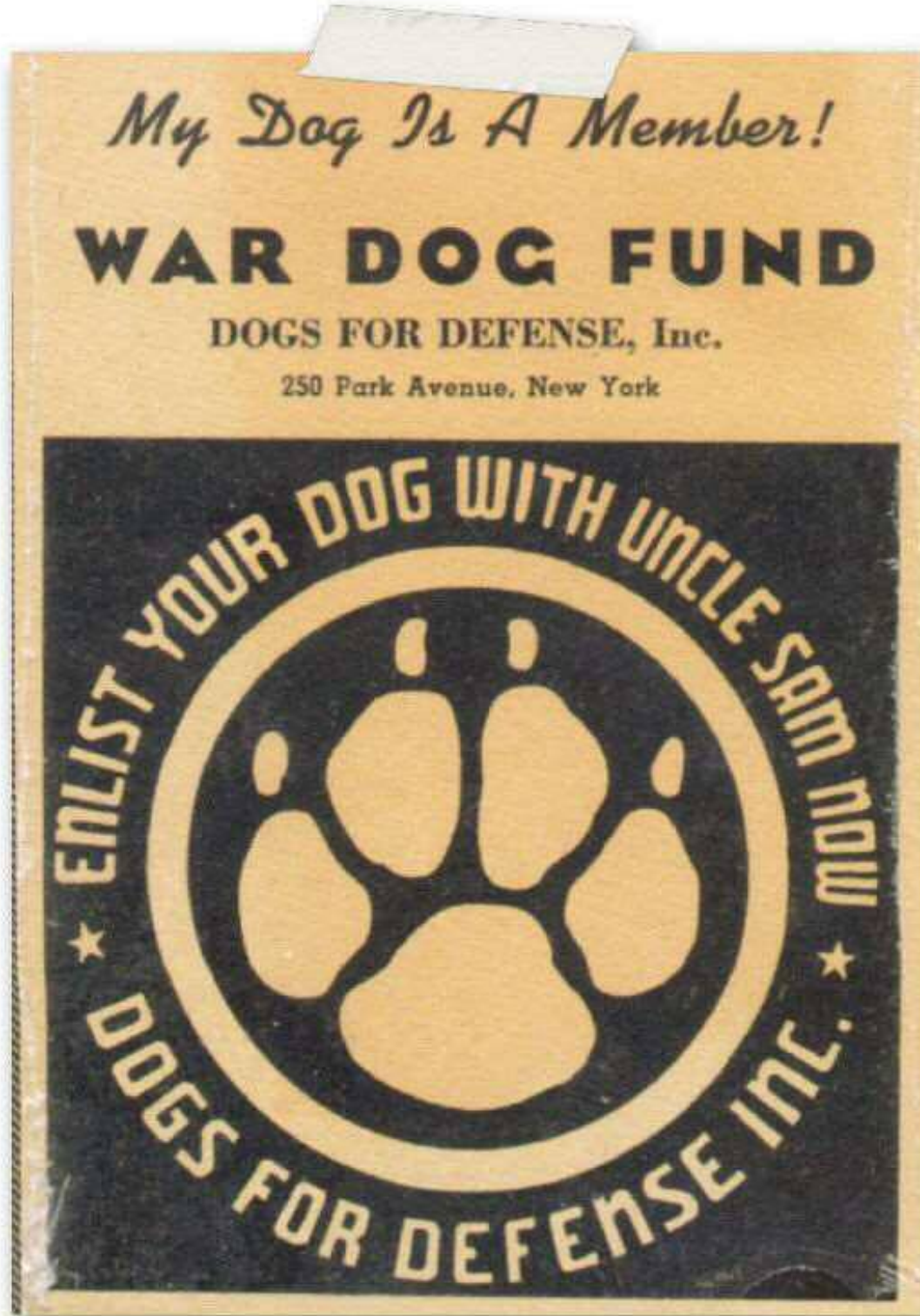
DOGS FOR DEFENSE, INC., PURINA MILLS, 1206 Checkerboard Square, St. Louis 2, Mo.  
Please send me  The official Dogs for Defense questionnaire for dog volunteers.  A Dogs for Defense War Fund pledge and complete information about dogs in war work.

Name.....  
Address.....  
No. of Dogs..... City..... State.....  
Breed.....

PAGE 4

AMERICAN KENNEL GAZETTE

Below is a poster sign given to every American who donated Dogs to the Dogs for Defense Program. Americans proudly displayed the poster in an outside window or on the doors of their home for anyone to view.



Each and every dog deployed in the Dogs for Defense program was awarded a Military Certificate of Faithful Service and an Honorable Discharge. Dogs for Defense owners received a Certificate of Merit/Death Certificate for their dogs that died in service to our country.

**Wanted WAR DOGS**  
BY **DOGS FOR DEFENSE!**  
**Enlist Your Dog-Now!**

**... Hope My Boss Signs Me Up!**

**There's right, too ... there's a good job to do for dogs that can meet the requirements for service with the United States Armed Forces! There are duties that the K-9 Corporal performs even better than men ... sentry duty, pack work, messenger and communication work and other work are some of the jobs many dogs are already doing for their country. And more dog volunteers are needed!**

**Your Dog May Serve His Country**  
Dogs for the armed forces are being selected from dogs volunteered by patriotic dog owners the country over. The requirements are simple: Dogs may be purchased or cross-bred, must not be less than 22 inches in height at the shoulder, not more than 18 months old, not less than 1 year or more than 5 years old. Your dog will be well-trained, well-fed, and well-cared for while he's serving Uncle Sam.

Enlisting dogs for war work is the function of Dogs for Defense, Inc., a voluntary civilian organization authorized by the American Kennel Club and officially approved by the War Department. If you are interested in enlisting your dog or in making a cash contribution, send the coupon below for a dog questionnaire and complete information.

**ENLIST YOUR DOGS AND YOUR DOLLARS**

**DOG FOR DEFENSE, INC.**  
1114 1/2 Commercial Highway, St. Louis, Mo.  
Phone BR 1-1114  
Branch Office: 2114 1/2 Commercial Highway, St. Louis, Mo.  
Phone BR 1-1114  
Branch Office: 2114 1/2 Commercial Highway, St. Louis, Mo.  
Phone BR 1-1114

**PURINA DOG CHOW**

**DOG FOR DEFENSE, INC.**  
1114 1/2 Commercial Highway, St. Louis, Mo.  
Phone BR 1-1114

**DOG FOR DEFENSE RECRUITING ADVERTISEMENTS**  
These various magazines printed during WWII. These advertisements were sponsored by dog food companies during collection.

The war dogs of World War II would not have existed without the organization of Dogs for Defense. By appealing to American's patriotic fever in the wake of World War II, this organization successfully recruited and trained thousands of dogs for military service. The donation of civilian animals would continue into the Korean and Vietnam wars, but donations never amassed the amount that occurred during World War II. Dogs for Defense is responsible for military dogs Americans are familiar today.



*Military Working Dog National Monument at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas*

## **Standardization to One Breed – The German Shepherd**

The Dogs for Defense Program was the most successful canine program in United States history. The quotation below is directly taken verbatim from the book, *“Dogs and National Defense”* by Anna M. Waller page 59:

*“In World War II, almost every breed of dog, large and small, was procured by “Dogs for Defense” for military service. During the war years the dogs were utilized in every theatre of operations, which encompassed every type of climate from Greenland’s perpetual ice to New Guinea’s steaming jungles. It was soon determined that breeds had shortcomings which limited their serviceability. However, at that time, “beggars could not be choosers” and the animals received were utilized to the best of their ability.*

*A few examples of the shortcomings were that sporting breeds were unsatisfactory for scouting patrols because it was too difficult to overcome the game instinct which had breed into them for generations; Collies on the whole did not have the stamina to withstand the rigors of combat, especially in the tropical climates; and Doberman Pinschers were “temperate” climate dogs which could not be used satisfactorily either in the tropics or in the Arctic. It was decided to select one breed which would be the best for training and service throughout the world.”*

***“This breed had to meet three basic requirements: (1) have the ability to perform all types of service demanded by the armed forces; (2) be suitable for duty in all climates; and, (3) be bred extensively enough to meet all possible demands. The breed selected was the German Shepherd.***

***The German Shepherd fulfills the requirements because of the natural uniformity within the breed and ready availability of supply. These dogs also exhibit suitable***

*temperament for the various types of work that might be demanded, good working ability, adequate size and ruggedness. Physically, the German Shepherd is ideally adapted to all climates. This breed has a short dense undercoat which grows profusely in a cold climate and is shed readily in a warm one. The outer coat is harsh and provides adequate protections against insect bites and sunburn.*

*The choice has proven to be a very satisfactory one not only for routine duty in the United States and Germany, but also in combat in Korea. In every instance, the dog's performance has been superior."*



*The Military Working Dog Tribute at Highground Veterans Memorial Park in Neillsville, Wisconsin*

Following the surrender of Japan on August 14, 1945, dogs and handlers began the process of demobilization and demilitarization. Dogs were sent to Fort Robinson, Nebraska where they were processed and demobilized for their return to civilian life. These animals were reconditioned to different stimuli including fire trucks, police cars, construction equipment, and with many other common sounds and noises encountered in civilian life.

Barring illness or aggressive behavior, the vast majority of dogs were returned to their original owners, or often adopted by the handler they faithfully served with. For those dogs who were unclaimed or unwanted, Dogs for Defense took on the responsibility of finding the animals a loving home. Applicants were screened for suitable matches and every effort was made to carefully assure that the retired K-9 veteran would go into a loving home. Most of the dogs surviving the war came back home to live with either their original owners, or retired with their human soldier handler partner.

The War Dogs of World War II would not have existed without the organization of Dogs for Defense. By appealing to American's patriotic fever in the wake of World War II, the organization successfully recruited and trained thousands of dogs for military service. The donation of civilian animals would continue into the Korean and Vietnam wars, but donations

never amassed the amount that they did during World War II. Dogs for Defense is solely responsible for the military dog programs Americans are familiar with today.

## Post-World War II Dog Program

The World War II method of acquiring dogs, on a loan basis from patriotic citizens, was deemed to be impractical and uneconomical due to the large percentage of animals returned when found unsuitable for service. It was decided in 1956 that selected dogs would be purchased, thereby becoming the sole property of the Government. In the Korean War, the Army used about 1,500 dogs, primarily for sentry duty. During the Vietnam War about 4,000 dogs were deployed and 281 were officially killed in action. Dogs have since been deployed to Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf war zones.

Today for the vast majority of working dogs, procurement determinations and individual screening can more easily select each canine's suitability. Selections are based on each dog's individual assessments and test measurements, titles and training, pedigree analysis, and modern health and genetic testing. Today, numerous breeds of dogs are used by the military. Special Forces utilize 3 breeds: Belgian Malinois, Dutch Shepherds, and German Shepherds.

Military dogs are so important they sometimes hold ranks themselves. Although merely formal and not official, those dogs are ranked higher than their handlers. Additionally, military working dogs whose units allow, sometimes hold ranks as Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs). While the military working dog's rank is a formality (not an official rank like humans have), it's meant to encourage handlers to treat their dogs with honor and respect.



*"Chopper" the famous Navy SEAL Multi-Purpose German Shepherd "Frog Dog"  
and his handler former Navy SEAL Trevor Maroshek*

# Bibliography and Online Resources

## Printed Books:

**Dogs for Defense: American Dogs in the Second World War 1941-1945** (New York: Trustees of Dogs for Defense, 1955) by Fairfax Downey

For more books focused on the Dogs for Defense see: John M. Behan, **Dogs of War** (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1946), Clayton G. Going, **Dogs at War** (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944), Thomas Young, **Dogs for Democracy: The Story of America's Canine Heroes in the Global War** (New York: B. Ackerman, Inc., 1944) and Anna M. Waller, **Valiant Comrades A story of our dogs of war** (1943 by Ruth Adams Knight), **Dogs and National Defense** - Washington D.C: Department of the Army, Quartermaster General, 1958 (Google eBook Link Below)

## More Online Information:

<https://gsdca.org/>

<https://armyhistory.org/the-dogs-of-war-the-u-s-armys-use-of-canines-in-wwii/>

[Dogs and National Defense – Public Domain Google eBook](#)

[https://www.google.com/books/edition/\\_/sdGgAAAAMAAJ?gbpv=1](https://www.google.com/books/edition/_/sdGgAAAAMAAJ?gbpv=1)

[https://www.petmd.com/news/care-safety/nws\\_dg\\_world\\_warII\\_dogs\\_for\\_defense-11924](https://www.petmd.com/news/care-safety/nws_dg_world_warII_dogs_for_defense-11924)

<https://www.dogsforddefense.com/wwii-dogs-for-defense>

<https://nursingclio.org/author/h-palsa/>

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/dogs-defense>

<https://armyhistory.org/the-dogs-of-war-the-u-s-armys-use-of-canines-in-wwii/>

<https://www.quartermasterfoundation.org/article/quartermaster-war-dog-program/>

<https://www.eisenhowerfoundation.net/sites/default/files/2020-05/Dogs%20For%20Defense-%20K-9%20Corps%20%28full%20version%29.pdf>

*For more information and pictures, simply perform an online search for "Dogs for Defense"*



2019 U.S. Postal Stamp Commemorating Military Working Dogs Used Today