



Hero dogs on canvas

Benton-area painter does free portraits of military, police canines for owners

By GARY PANG
Press Enterprise Writer

BENTON TWP. — Loreen Pantaleone paints portraits of military dogs that have served in war, and she donates her artwork to the canines' owners.

Many of the dogs sniffed out bombs in Iraq or Afghanistan. They provided friendship and comfort to soldiers amid daily violence.

She started the K9 Hero Portrait Project this year. People can nominate military or police dogs for a realistic portrait.

The handlers and their dogs build "an extremely strong bond — literally life or death, and sometimes more death than they'd care to share," she wrote.

"To have (the dogs) memorialized like this means everything to them," Pantaleone said.

"They're amazing animals, and so are the people who worked with them."

Numerous requests

Pantaleone had read about Gabe, an Army dog that completed 210 combat missions in Iraq and died in February.

Pantaleone painted his portrait with his owner's approval. She posted a photo of the portrait on a website for military dog handlers, then offered to paint their canines.

She received numerous requests.

She has completed 11 portraits and is painting nine others. Three additional portraits are on hold while she waits for photos of the dogs.

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Bomb dog 'kept me living,' handler says

Danielle Carawan was crying in her bed in Iraq one night, overwhelmed by the sound of explosions outside her base.

Suddenly, her dog Suzi jumped onto the bed beside the 22-year-old Navy canine handler.

Carawan hugged the bomb-

sniffing Dutch Shepherd.

"She kept me living," said Carawan, now 29, halting at each word.

The Philadelphia-area native spent six months at war. She battled not only insurgents but loneliness.

Suzi made her want to live

when she had stopped caring about surviving.

Carawan later adopted Suzi, who died in 2011.

Strong scent

Dog and master were stationed from 2006-07 near Tikrit, Saddam

Hussein's hometown, and then outside Bayji, a city with Iraq's largest oil refinery.

Insurgents often targeted the refinery, and Carawan and the 75-pound Suzi patrolled it for bombs.

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Dog comrade soothes traumatized vet

'I need him. He needs me'

By **GARY PANG**
Press Enterprise Writer

When Iraq veteran **Chris Campbell** feels panic at night due to post-traumatic stress disorder, a dog named Max calms him down.

The retired Air Force staff sergeant gets a "very peaceful feeling," knowing his German shepherd is patrolling their home and sniffing the air for signs of danger.



CAMPBELL

Campbell was injured in 2005 in a rocket attack. Max, now 9, worked as a bomb-sniffing dog in Iraq and Turkey.

Their friendship has brought a "happy-go-lucky" feeling to Campbell's household.

"I need him. He needs me," said Campbell, 37, of Danese, W. Va.

Campbell enlisted in 1994 and retired in 2012 due to health issues. His job was to ensure shipments moved smoothly.

Rocket attack

Campbell served in Balad, Iraq. A month into his deployment, he and a friend made plans to have dinner.

Campbell wasn't wearing his Kevlar helmet and flak jacket. "I was very complacent that day," he recalled.

As he left his trailer, a rocket landed 50 feet away from him.

Campbell fell and his head hit the ground.

Campbell saw "the brightest light I ever saw."

His ears were ringing

loudly, but he heard a siren. A comrade was yelling something at Campbell, who couldn't hear a word.

Memory loss

Afterward, Campbell figured he was fine. But he had suffered a traumatic brain injury.

He started having problems with his memory, balance and coordination. He was frequently tired, and became sensitive to light.

Campbell returned to the U.S. and did relief work in Gulfport, Miss., after Hurricane Katrina.

He was awarded a Purple Heart, his military records show.

'Never go away'

The incident in Iraq changed Campbell.

He became constantly nervous. He had panic attacks and migraines.

He used to be sociable, but he didn't enjoy talking to people anymore.

"You get stuck in a rut," he said.

Campbell never smoked. Yet, to his shock, doctors said his lungs were in as rough shape as those of a 70-year-old chronic smoker. He had to start using an inhaler. He still wonders if the blast had damaged his lungs.

He also hoped medication would cure the PTSD.

His hopes were dashed when a World War II veteran told him, "It'll never go away."

'Alpha male'

Campbell adopted the

80-pound Max in April, hoping the dog would improve his life. Another family had scrapped a plan to adopt the canine.

Max wanted to be in charge. The "alpha male" refused to sit near his new owner.

Military dogs are trained to be aggressive. When Campbell's two boys grabbed Max's rubber ball, the dog growled.

That worried Campbell's wife, Stephanie, who wondered if Max should stay.

The Campbells decided to give the canine a chance. But whenever he growled, they took away his toys for a day.

Laughing more

Max began growing close to the family. He began allowing the Campbells to scratch his belly.

He allows Logan, 6, and Wyatt, 3, to grab toys out of his mouth. He also searches the house for Campbell.

Mrs. Campbell noticed her husband was laughing more, he said. Max makes him "feel like a kid again."

Campbell and Max have been together seven months, but it feels like seven years, the owner said.

No crowds, elevators

Max makes Campbell feel safer and less anxious. When they stay at a hotel, Max stations himself near the room's door as if he were standing guard.

Still, Campbell plans his daily routine to avoid stressful situations.

He doesn't shop at Walmart on paydays so he won't encounter crowds of customers.

When he sees cars traveling close together on the highway, he'll exit as soon as he can to avoid traffic jams.



A portrait of Chris Campbell's dog, Max, is shown above. It was done by Benton-area artist **Loreen Pantaleone** as part of her K9 Hero Portrait Project. Campbell, West Virginia, is a veteran of the war in Iraq. Max was a bomb-sniffing dog.

A photo of Max is seen at left.

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He always books hotel rooms on the first floor. Max can't climb stairs with his bad hip, and Campbell dreads the thought of getting stuck in an elevator during an outage.

Fears losing friend

Campbell fears losing Max. He said the dog's death

will devastate him.

He even told his wife, "I hate the thought of having him now."

He derives comfort from a portrait of Max painted by Loreen Pantaleone, Stillwater.

After Max is gone, Campbell can look at the painting. "He's always there," Camp-

bell said.

Campbell misses being in the Air Force. In his free time, he travels and speaks to other soldiers and veterans about injuries and PTSD.

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Living

Continued from front page

If Suzi smelled explosives, she sat down. When the scent was very strong, she paced back and forth.

At night, they raided homes of suspected insurgents.

No 'girl talks'

Soldiers can usually rely on their unit for camaraderie.

Although Carawan was attached to an Army unit for administrative purposes, she didn't really belong to it.

There were female soldiers on the base, but Carawan had few opportunities to socialize with them.

That was tough and sometimes scary for her.

Carawan couldn't have "girl talks" with anyone. When she showered, she sometimes took Suzi along.

Carawan had two close male friends, both dog handlers.

Sniffing out big stash

One night in a palm grove, Carawan and Suzi found a big supply stash for bombers.

About 200 blasting caps and some mortars were in the stash. The soldiers with Carawan confiscated some and blew up the others.

Later, their convoy was returning to base when it suddenly stopped.

Someone with night-vision goggles had spotted insurgents in the darkness ahead. A helicopter fired Hellfire



DANIELLE CARAWAN is seen with bomb-sniffing dog Suzi during their military service.

missiles at them.

Cops in cahoots?

The next night, Carawan's convoy was passing by Tikrit University when a roadside bomb exploded.

The blast didn't hit any vehicle, but it rocked Carawan and Suzi's Humvee. A second bomb failed to detonate.

Some Iraqi policemen were stationed at a concrete shack across the street. They claimed they saw nothing, but Carawan suspected otherwise.

Soldiers' pet

Between missions, many soldiers asked if they could pet Suzi. They weren't al-

lowed to have pets, so she was their surrogate. "She loved it," Carawan said.

In contrast, many Iraqis disliked dogs, Carawan recalled.

Suzi's presence unnerved them and probably deterred some who wished to harm her handler.

While many people expect military dogs to be vicious, Suzi was sweet.

"She was a lover," Carawan said.

Suzi was so gentle, she later let Carawan's daughter lie on her back and pull her ears.

'Staged' show

Many handlers and their dogs get separated after their

deployment.

However, Suzi and Carawan wound up at the same base in Virginia. When the military put Suzi up for adoption, Carawan thought, "No one could take her from me."

Carawan had to prove Suzi was suitable for civilian life, that she wouldn't attack people even when ordered to attack.

So Carawan presented a video of Suzi ignoring commands to attack a man wearing a body-protection suit.

But Suzi had no incentive to obey, Carawan recalled with a laugh.

The man in the suit was actually a friend of Carawan's whom Suzi liked. A sec-



HERE IS Suzi's portrait done by Loreen Pantaleone, rural Benton.

ond friend distracted the dog with a toy ball. And Carawan ordered the dog to "get 'em" without enthusiasm.

Now a teacher

Carawan's friendship with the 10-year-old dog lasted five years. Suzi was finally put down due to health problems.

"I'm very blessed to have her in my life," Carawan said.

Carawan wanted a portrait to commemorate her friend. Although Carawan was willing to pay thousands of dollars, a Stillwater painter, Loreen Pantaleone, did it free of charge.

Carawan received the portrait around her birthday in September. Carawan looked

at Suzi's painting.

"She was sitting there, looking back at me," the handler said.

Carawan, formerly of Harbor, left the Navy and is now a fourth-grade special education teacher.

Carawan lives with her husband, Rona, 35, and their children, Madison, 4, and Brodie, 2, in Chesapeake, Va.

By Gary Pang

VIEWINGS AND MEMORIALS

HESS — Margaret E. Davis, 88, of Spring Garden Avenue, Benwick, widow of Jay Davis and Karl Hess, was stricken at her son's

BABY



Press Enterprise/Jimmy May

ARTIST Loreen Pantaleone talks about the stories behind four of the K9 portraits she is working on, which sit along a wall.

Dogs Painter focuses on canine's facial expressions

Continued from front page

their deployment — both the bad and the good.

Bomb-sniffing dogs were so good at finding explosives, insurgents started targeting them and their handlers.

For comic relief, some handlers take goofy photos of their dogs. In one photo, a canine wears headphones in a helicopter.

The dogs also helped soldiers who weren't their handlers.

Soldiers would go on missions and get shot at. When they return to their base, the dogs greet them there.

"Makes them feel human again," said Pantaleone, who had an uncle in the Army and grandparents in the military.

Facebook updates

Pantaleone posts photos of the paintings in progress on Facebook, so her military friends have something to look forward to.

Some are still serving overseas.

"This is what I'm coming home to," one eagerly told Pantaleone.

Those in places like Afghanistan can't stay online for long. They worry insurgents might track their locations, she said.

TO SEE MORE

Visit <http://www.pressenterpriseonline.com> to view a photo gallery featuring some of the military dog portraits by Loreen Pantaleone.

'Have to keep going'

Pantaleone was involved in a horseback riding accident in 2010 that damaged the nerves in one of her arms. She underwent more than a year of therapy before she could paint again.

She sometimes feels pain, but she thinks about her friends and keeps painting.

"I have to keep going," she said.

She's spent a "couple thousand" dollars to pay for

canvases, paint and shipping costs, she estimated.

Some of her military friends offered to pay for their dog portraits. She refused the offers.

'The eyes I saw'

Pantaleone said it typically takes her about 150 hours to paint a dog's portrait from a pixilated cell phone picture.

She said the most difficult details to recreate are the dogs' medals, patches and vests.

She takes pride in capturing a canine's eyes and facial expression.

She recalled one veteran telling her, "Those are the eyes I saw when I was deployed."

Animal lover

Pantaleone has been painting for 16 years. She worked full-time as an analyst at a payroll management company. She's now a part-time telecommuter.

Pantaleone, her husband and daughter moved to northern Columbia County in May from New Jersey. She's also lived in Bucks County.

They have two horses, three cats, one dog and a bird.

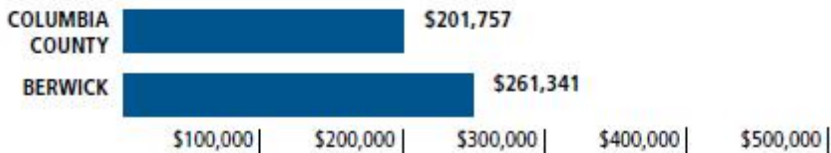
For more information about the project, visit <http://k9heroportraits.weebly.com>.

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CAMPAIGN UPDATE



Here is an update on area charity drives. Columbia County United Way's goal is \$515,000. Berwick's goal is \$400,000.





Special to Press Enterprise/Ryan Bellerby

ARMY DOG HANDLER RYAN BELLERBY, a native of Bensalem, poses with Rico, his first canine partner. Benton-area painter **Loreen Pantaleone** is doing a portrait of the "gentle giant" for Bellerby. Rico and Bellerby met in 2007 at Fort Myer, Va., and became partners assigned to a military police unit. "... he has always held a special place in my life," wrote Bellerby of the Belgian Malinois, who turns 11 on Dec. 5. "Unfortunately when we as handlers move to a different duty station, our dogs don't go with us. We get assigned a new dog when we get there, and our old dogs get assigned to new partners as they come in. I was fortunate enough to move back to the D.C. area after a few years away, and be reunited with Rico right before he was approved for retirement. ... I couldn't wait to get him home where he belonged!" Bellerby is serving a one-year tour in South Korea; his fiancée is watching Rico.