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Kennel honors fallen heroes

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FOR THE MARYLAND GAZETTE

When Joe Currier of Lee's Summit, Mo., remembers his brother Gordon, he reflects on his brother's courage and ultimate sacrifice.

"My brother was a shy person," Mr. Currier said. "He loved his family, baseball, popcorn, and his dog ... not a day goes by that I don't think of him."

Pfc. Gordon L. Currier Jr. and his German Shepherd K-9 partner, Satch, were killed in the Vietnam War while performing sentry duties at the Long Binh Military Post in January 1968.

Now the heroic partners are honored through the dedication of a new kennel facility at Fort George G. Meade.

During the ribbon-cutting ceremony, Col. Kenneth McCready, installation commander at Fort Meade, recognized Pfc. Currier's father, Gordon Currier Sr. and his son Joe, while presenting the family with a plaque commemorating the kennel's dedication.

"We hope that you know that your son and brother will be honored here always," Col. McCready said.

The new Gordon L. Currier Jr. Military Working Dog Kennel is now home to four military working dogs that patrol and support Fort Meade and, at times, support the U.S. president.

Designed by Fort Meade's kennel master, Sgt. 1st Class Chad Benansky, the kennel is a state-of-the-art facility made to support the training, comfort and health of its canine residents. The kennel has air conditioning, heated floors, a training area, obedience course and even a bathtub. A smooth floor coating protects the dogs' paws.

Completed in February, the project took more than a year to build. The kennel can hold up to 10 dogs, a capacity that will eventually be reached as more dogs arrive each year. The building, which costs \$1 million to build, is also de-



Photo by Karen McLaughlin — For the Maryland Gazette

Sgt. Scott Warner stands with Junior, a military working dog trained and housed at the new Gordon Currier Jr. Military Working Dog Kennel. The kennel, located on Fort George G. Meade, is now home to several First Responder canines.

signed to be added to if necessary.

Military dogs began living at Fort Meade two years ago. Dogs were housed in a temporary building that was little more than a storage area.

The new facility is no ordinary doghouse and these are no ordinary dogs.

"These guys are the first responders to the President of the United States," said Col. Arnoldo Claudio, chief of staff and Provost Marshal of the Military District of Washington.

Mostly German Shepherds or Belgian Malinois breeds, the war dogs are trained to patrol and detect explosives in support of anti-terrorism efforts and the Military District of Washington. Their mission, and that of their handlers, include protecting the president, vice president and chief of staff.

"We ask them to approach a bomb when nobody else wants to," Col. Claudio said. "That's a huge responsibility."

It was that responsibility

that the late Pfc. Currier, of Independence, Mo., knew well and gave his life to protect.

On Jan. 31, 1968, Pfc. Currier and Satch were sent on a detection mission when they were overtaken by some 20 to 30 enemy soldiers firing small arms in a skirmish that marked the beginning of the Tet Offensive in Vietnam.

During World War II, war dog training began under the Army Quartermaster Corps. In 1951, the Military Police Corps took responsibility for the training and use of the dogs who have served in Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm and Afghanistan. Today, approximately 150 dogs are serving Army-wide, with 108 dogs serving in Iraq.

Being a top dog isn't easy. Each day, the dogs receive obedience training and train on the obstacle course behind their kennel, with and without their handlers. They are taught special commands and how to negotiate different types of environments and terrain. Their rigor-

ous program is designed and overseen by Staff Sgt. Warren Bias Jr., who is plans and training NCO.

"The dogs exercise every day," said Sgt. Bias. "A lot of running, jumping, searching ... even water training."

Originally trained at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, military working dogs are given one rank higher than their handler to discourage any potential abuse by their handler. But if the handler is promoted, so is the dog.

Upon promotion, "He'll (the dog) get a big steak," Staff Sgt. Bias grinned.

During the dedication ceremony, Col. Claudio said he sees the kennel as more than just a home for the dogs.

"This is not just a kennel facility," he said. "This is a war camp ... it has to do with saving lives. Making sure we're ready and capable of doing our mission at the highest level of service."

One of the dogs at Fort Meade is Junior, a 3-year-old longhaired German shepherd trained to patrol and detect explosives. Despite all the tough training, there's a soft side to the loyal canine warrior. He often goes with his handler, Sgt. Scott Warner, to the Post Library summer reading program. During career day at West Meade Elementary, Sgt. Warner and Junior stop by for a visit. Sgt. Warner said it's good for the kids to learn about the dog and to not be afraid of him.

"Junior loves kids," Sgt. Warner said.

As Sgt. Warner and the other dog handlers at Fort Meade work in and around the new kennel every day, they will remember the sacrifices of Pfc. Currier and Satch.

"Pfc. Currier lives in each one of these dog handlers ... trying to do the right thing," Col. Claudio said. "By honoring him, we're honoring the entire K-9 community working here and around the world."