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California Soldiers loosen up with therapy dog

BOE

By 1st Lt. Caleb Christians
1st Bn., 185th Armor

CONTINGENCY OPERATING BASE SPEICHER, Iraq — Soldiers from 1st Battalion, 185th Armor, California Army National Guard, pet and hug their stress away with a little help from “Sgt. 1st Class Boe.”

Boe is a four-year-old English Labrador Retriever, donated to the Army by the Guide Dog Foundation, through the America’s Vet Dogs project. She lives on Speicher and works as a therapy dog.

Boe accompanies Capt. Cecelia Najera, occupational therapist, 528th Medical Detachment. Boe, who holds the honorary rank of sergeant first class, makes the rounds visiting the different units that reside on the base.

“Her purpose is to bring Soldiers a reminder of home and offer a sense of comfort and well being,” said Najera.

The use of animals for therapeutic purposes goes as far back as 1699 with the English

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philosopher John Locke suggesting the importance of children interacting with animals. The U.S. military began pushing for the use of therapy dogs in 1919 after success with “shell-shocked” Soldiers.

Today, therapy dogs fall under the category of animal-assisted therapy. Such animals are used as both physical and psychological therapy. Psychological benefits include the reduction of stress and anxiety, and the overall improvement of morale. On the physical side, therapy increases range of motion, strength and balance, and minimizes the need for preoperative medication.

The interaction between animals and humans has only been recently explored in the academic realm. In 1984, Harvard biologist Dr. Ed Wilson wrote “Biophilia: The Human Bond With Other Species.” Today, it is not uncommon to see therapy animals roaming the halls nursing homes.

For Soldiers of 1st Bn., 185th Armor, Boe provides a warm distraction from everyday life at Speicher.

“It’s fun to have her around,” said Pfc. Stephen Driedger.

Corporal Matt Brown, ammunition non-commissioned officer in charge, Delta Co., 1st Bn., 185th Armor, said that spending time with Boe helped him unwind.

“Petting Boe is very relaxing,” Brown said. “And it’s nice throwing her dog treats.”



Boe