



VA Veterans Day Parade Fact Sheet
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Lex Military Working Dog

Just a couple of weeks shy of his 21st birthday, Marine Corporal Dustin Jerome Lee was mortally wounded in a mortar attack in Fallujah, Iraq, in March 2007. Lee's partner Lex, a Military Working Dog, who was also wounded, was at his side to comfort him. Medics had to drag the 7-year-old German Shepherd Dog away so they could attend to Cpl. Lee, who died a short time later.

Cpl. Lee's parents, Jerome and Rachel, of Quitman, Miss., will walk with Lex in the parade.

Cpl. Lee, who was attached to the 3rd Reconnaissance Battalion, II Marine Expeditionary Force, was an extraordinarily skilled dog handler and, under his guidance, Lex dutifully searched for roadside bombs to keep the roads safe and open for American troops in Iraq. After Lee's death, Lex was reassigned to the Marine Corps Logistics Base in Albany, Ga.

Cpl. Lee's parents knew about the special relationship that existed between their son and Lex, and petitioned to adopt the dog, as a way of dealing with the loss of their son. Along the way the Lee family hit many dead-ends. An online petition was started on behalf of the family which caught the ear of John Burnam, a Vietnam War Veteran Scout Dog Handler and founder of the National War Dogs Monument. He wrote a touching and emotional letter entitled "My Partner Dustin," from the perspective of Lex.

Burnam took his story to Congressman Walter B. Jones of North Carolina. With the petition, Burnam's story, the help of Congressman Jones and many phone calls, the Lee family finally prevailed. On December 20, 2007, at a ceremony at Marine Corps Logistics Base, Albany, Ga., Lex was retired and adopted by the Lee family.

This early retirement for an injured canine was the first case of its kind and a first for the Marine Corps. Lex also is the first U.S. military dog to be adopted by the family of a deceased handler, according to military officials.

Since his retirement, Lex has been awarded a Commemorative Purple Heart and was recently named by the American Kennel Club as Law Enforcement Dog of the Year.

The Carl T. Hayden Veterans Affairs Medical Center, which is part of the Phoenix VA Health Care System, has been serving veterans in Maricopa County since 1951. We currently have 130 inpatient beds for medical and surgical patients, 80 beds for nursing home patients and 48 inpatient beds for mental health patients. We are honored to serve our veterans who have paid the price for us to enjoy our freedoms.