

Unsung Heroes

Protecting The Protectors

(NAPSA)—Americans of all sorts are safer thanks to a trio of types of heroes. While the first kind is one most people would recognize as such—the nation’s military men and women—the others may come as somewhat of a surprise.

That’s because they’re dogs and people who can’t see them.

Many people aren’t aware of the amazing role Military Working Dogs play in supporting military and law enforcement personnel. There are an estimated 2,300 working dogs in the force. We’ve come a long way from the Revolutionary War, in which working dogs were first used to carry packs, and World War I, when they protected soldiers from rats in the trenches.

Today, Military Working Dogs are usually German or Dutch Shepherds or Belgian Malinois with high intelligence. They are strong, athletic and very loyal to their handlers. They save lives in many ways including tracking captured U.S. military personnel and sniffing out IEDs (improvised explosive devices).

Just as human troops require protective clothing and gear when they deploy into the field for active duty, so do the dogs.

That’s where the employees who are blind that work for the AbilityOne Base Supply Center Program come in. Employees at all 140 stores nationwide help provide mission-critical products and services to the U.S. military and federal government. The Focusworks BSC store at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona also provides the equipment that military dogs need, including booties, harnesses, goggles, collars, leashes and collapsible water bowls. The harnesses



The dogs that protect America’s military men and women get protective equipment themselves through a special program involving special people.

have Velcro strips, allowing the dogs to carry packs with their own food and water. When the dogs are deployed worldwide to support the war on terror, they wear infrared lights that let helicopters and planes identify where they are on the ground.

Focusworks’ unique item supplied by the Base Supply Center is a harness that the handler can use to carry the Military Working Dog during climbs or in the case of the dog becoming injured. No man (or dog) need be left behind.

No one knows whether the dogs like to “look cool” with their protective eyewear and striped vests, but the equipment certainly protects them in the field.

You can learn more about the AbilityOne Program, what it does and how you can be a part of it, from National Industries for the Blind. They’re online at www.nib.org or you can call (800) 433-2304.