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Man's best friend

Soldier reunited with adopted Afghan dog



Staff Sgt. Edwin Caba was reunited with Sheba last week, a stray dog that his National Guard team befriended while serving in Afghanistan.

By Alexandra Spychalsky

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Staff Sgt. Edwin Caba has a new roommate this week, one who traveled 7,000 miles and through three countries to reach Long Beach.

Last week, a group of National Guard soldiers were reunited with a friend from battle — Sheba, a stray dog the team befriended while deployed in Afghanistan. Local animal rescue organizations arranged to bring Sheba, and her seven puppies, to the states for the soldiers to adopt.

Caba said that his group met Sheba while serving in western Afghanistan, and she

quickly made herself a part of the team.

“She’d walk out on patrol with us, bark at other dogs,” he recalled.

But things got difficult when Sheba had seven puppies. Caba said she was so thin and sick from caring for all of the dogs, that he and the other soldiers would feed Sheba their meal rations and beef jerky to try to nurse her back to health. Caba said their families and friends even started sending bags of food to help.

“The companionship was great, but it was so stressful,” Caba said of caring for the dogs.

After bonding with Sheba and her puppies, the soldiers decided that they wanted to try to bring the dogs back to the states with them. Caba was connected with two animal rescue organizations through a friend, Save-a-Pet and Guardians of Rescue, animal rescue organizations that run a program called Paws of War. The program helps reunite soldiers with dogs they adopted in battle zones, and also trains dogs to be service and companion dogs for veterans suffering from post traumatic stress disorder.

“There were a lot of legs to this journey,” said Dori Scofield, founder and president of Save-a-Pet, who took on the challenge of bringing Sheba and her pups to the United States.

First, she said, the dogs were brought to Nowzad, a shelter in Kabul, where they were prepared for their journey, given vaccinations and waited out the quarantine period. Meanwhile, on Long Island, Scofield was busy raising money to pay for the dogs’ journey.

Scofield said it normally costs between \$4,000 and \$5,000 per dog to bring them here. Luckily, she said, they only had to raise about half the amount it would normally take, because of some help they had in transporting the dogs. She said most of the donations that went to the rescue came from “lots of people giving a little bit.”

From Kabul, Sheba and her litter traveled to Dubai, and from there they flew to John F. Kennedy International Airport, where they landed last week. Last Wednesday, the dogs were brought to Save-a-Pet in Port Jefferson Station, and reunited with the soldiers.

“They’re our heroes,” Caba said of the three animal organizations that brought the dogs over. “We played such a small part, they did everything.”

The soldiers in Caba’s team took the puppies home with them, and Sheba will stay with Save-a-Pet for the time being. She may be trained as a service dog, but Scofield said she is shy, so she is still determining what role would be best for her.

Caba said that he brought Cadence home to Long Beach with him, the puppy that he felt an instant connection with in Afghanistan.

“When she was three days old, she was sleeping on her back, arms out, she just looked so comfortable,” said Caba. “I found love. She seemed like such a goofball.”

Caba, who returned home from his third, eight-month tour on Aug. 13, said that Cadence is adjusting well to life on the beach instead of in the desert.

“Everything’s so new to her,” said Caba, who said she enjoys going to the dog park and the boardwalk. “She ‘s really loving it.”

To find out more about the organizations mentioned in this article, or to donate visit, www.saveapetli.org, www.guaridansofrescue.org and www.nowzad.com