



CORPORAL MEGAN LEAVEY

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR

Operation Iraqi Freedom

The Fox News Clip is one of her cherished souvenirs. Corporal Megan Leavey is shown after landing at JFK with her German shepherd Rex, after being reunited thanks to the efforts of Randy Levine, president of the New York Yankees, his wife Mindy Levine, and New York Senator Charles Schumer.

Finally, five years after her injury under enemy fire and Rex's retirement from the K-9 anti-bomb squad, the decorated Marine was allowed by the Corps brass to adopt her beloved canine buddy and bring him home with her from his kennel at Camp Pendleton, California to her apartment in Valley Cottage, New York.

"It took an army of people to make this happen," a radiant Corporal Leavey marvels, taken totally by surprise by her warm welcome at the airport replete with a fife and drum band furnished by a retired captain and television cameras and lights. Thanks to the caring generosity of the Yankees and Levine, who paid for their round trip flight to California and back, Corporal Leavey's quest had a happy two-year ending.

Megan Leavey was born on October 28th, 1983. She grew up in Valley Cottage, in Rockland County, New York. She attended a local Catholic school until the 7th grade, and then went to nearby Nyack High School. Some of her favorite activities during her high school years included cheerleading and softball. She enjoyed high school, making lifelong friends; however, she initially did not want to go to college. Her parents, knowing the value of college, persuaded her to go to SUNY Cortland. Unable to find motivation at a college far away from home, she convinced her parents to let her return home. Working full time, she began to sort things out.

Corporal Leavey's family has a proud heritage of service for their country. Both grandfathers were



on active duty, one in the Air Force, another in the Navy. Her Uncle Jimmy was an Army Green Beret in Vietnam.

The terrorist attack on The World Trade Center September 11, 2001 motivated her to volunteer to enlist. "I just couldn't sit on the sidelines as a spectator watching the fight for freedom unfold on television." And, "if I'm going to join the service, I'm going to aim for the highest and the best: the Marine Corps."

She was sworn in in August 2003. She did not want to worry her parents and at first kept her enlistment a secret, which was short-lived once her mother found the Marine Corps pamphlets in her room. She is now the proudest Marine Corps mom ever and her Teamster father is equally supportive.

She joined a Marine K-9 Unit, and was sent to Iraq. It was at Camp Pendleton in October 2004 where she first met Rex. Their first deployment was to Fallujah, Iraq, in May 2005. At first, she was not very confident, as she had no experience in real warfare. Only after months of working closely together did the Marine and her canine partner come to love and trust each other.

By the time of her second deployment in Ramadi in Anbar Province in May 2006, "I felt more confident with my dog...you learn to trust your dog. You have to entrust your life with him."

The enemy relied heavily on roadside bombs. It is not obvious where they are hidden or which object they encounter is deadly, due to all the rubble along



the roads. The dogs are trained to sniff out the presence of explosives. Her job was to walk with Rex ahead of the convoys or patrols to uncover buried Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's). The two of them were highly successful with this, and they exposed many previously hidden threats. Whenever they discovered a bomb, Corporal Leavey would call in to an Explosive Ordinance Disposal Team, or EOD, giving them the coordinates of the explosive. It often took a while for the team to arrive, so Corporal Leavey would mark off the spot with a glow stick, called "chem lights." This also ensured that the vehicles following the K-9 Unit would know where a bomb was hidden.

In September 2006 Cpl. Leavey was asked to do a patrol with an Army unit. The soldiers were to clear an area which had not been visited by our forces for a long time. The terrain was rural farmland criss-crossed with dirt roads, with tall reeds and streams on either side. It is a rugged country. Stray dogs ran loose everywhere between the cattle in the fields. It was a challenge to keep Rex under control. They had to walk ahead of the Army convoy to evaluate the safety of the road.

The road led to an intersection where several vehicles had passed by. In the distance she could see a few houses and farms. As she approached the intersection there was a violent explosion.

Unbeknownst to the two of them, insurgents had been watching from a nearby rooftop. The enemy had marked the spot of the IED with a large white boulder. The insurgents targeted K-9 teams for the obvious reason that they uncovered their explosives. The enemy used a detonator to set off the bomb, hurling Corporal Leavey and Rex backwards through the air. Luckily, neither of them perished, thanks to Megan's flak jacket. Rex was on a leash, attached to Megan's jacket. Both

of them were knocked unconscious. At first the Army soldiers couldn't find her. When she came to her first thought was for Rex. She couldn't see anything. She was bleeding from her ears, and had a severe concussion. She groped for Rex, found him and was relieved that he was alive and not too badly injured.

But they found themselves in the middle of an ambush. The insurgents were attacking with mortars, Rocket Propelled Grenades, and AK-47s. Other soldiers rushed to clear out the enemy firing from nearby rooftops. Her soldiers fought back, returning fire from the shelter of their Humvee. Hot shell casings flew all around. They urged her to return to camp but she insisted on forging ahead with them to the houses to finish the job, knowing that her comrades needed Rex's bomb-sniffing skill to ensure the houses they were entering were not rigged with explosives.

Upon receiving cover fire, the Americans eventually pulled back to their base. Megan was medevac'd to a hospital in Baghdad. Rex was sent to the military veterinarian. He had badly injured his shoulder.

Rex was not fond of veterinarians. Rex had a "very strong personality. He could be very scary if you weren't used to his character, a typical Alpha male." The veterinarian had his hands full treating Rex. Following his treatment, Rex was given physical therapy for one year.

In the hospital Megan called her parents and was able to assure them she was all right. She was discharged a week later and returned to Ramadi. Her head, neck, and knees still ached.

On her return to California she still had one year left to serve. She spent much of that time recuperating and undergoing physical therapy, and just as many hours helping to teach new

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Marine dog handlers the ropes. Training at camp is far different from the reality of war in the field. “Carrying 50 lbs of body armor, a heavy pack, your loaded M16 rifle, ammo, 9 mm pistol and helmet only add to the difficulty of handling a big, strong dog.” Megan had her trainees practice in full gear under simulated field conditions.

Megan received her honorable discharge from the Marine Corps on December 7th, 2007. She returned to civilian life, working for a private security company with a new canine partner, Patriot, trained to detect hidden explosives. She and Patriot would sweep Yankee Stadium, Madison Square Garden, Federal buildings, Times Square, and other crowded areas.

Megan made many friends during her time in the Marines, and for her the Corps will always be a part of her family, just as her fellow Marines will be her brothers forevermore. Megan today lives in Rockland County, New York, with Patriot, who is happily retired. Rex passed away at age 12, after living with Megan for only 8 months.

Megan is thrilled with her new career as veterinary technician. But, her first and last love, along with Rex, will always be the United States Marine Corps.

“I love the Marine Corps. I have made life-long friends there. I found my niche there. Playing all day with dogs is not a bad job to have...and the camaraderie of my Marine buddies will be with me for the rest of my life.

“I am proud to call myself a Marine.”