

Our four-legged heroes

British soldiers in Afghanistan use dogs on a daily basis to help save lives. Here are some facts about the use of dogs by British troops today:

- Arms-explosives search dogs can detect explosives and bomb-making equipment simply with their sense of smell. Springer spaniels are often chosen as they have particularly sensitive noses.
- A good working relationship between the dog and his/her handler is absolutely vital. The dog needs to know that he/she can trust the handler, so he/she is confident to go into any situation. The handler has to trust the dog's abilities to detect the explosives and give the alert signal, so that the area can be made safe.
- Dogs operate in front of the troops in Afghanistan. One of their tasks is to search the route of the supply trucks for improvised explosive devices (IEDs).
- Machines could be used to detect explosives, but they are nowhere near as reliable as dogs to keep working all day. It is also easier to take dogs in helicopters and up and down mountains – they can go almost anywhere without breaking down!
- The dogs work on a reward basis – when they detect something successfully, they are given a toy to play with for a while.
- Dogs can work for many years in different war zones before retiring. They are able to do this because they are looked after well and treated as part of the team.
- When military dogs are due for retirement, their handlers very often take them home and look after them as pets for the rest of their lives because they have grown very attached to them.
- These dogs save lives on a daily basis.