

Iraq pups flown to safety



As US troops extend their stay in Iraq, WSPA's US office has been receiving a flurry of E-mails from soldiers who are looking for a way to help some animals that have become very special to them.

"I've heard from several soldiers who have befriended homeless dogs as they traveled through Iraq. In some cases, the dogs and soldiers were together throughout the entire war," said USA Director Laura Salter. "They want to offer their new companions a safe life back home in the US, so we're finding ways to help them."

Transporting a stray dog out of war-torn Iraq is not a simple task. The dogs must be examined and vaccinated by a veterinarian in order to obtain travel permits. The next major

hurdle is paying for the transportation costs, which can run upwards of \$1,000.

"We try to put the soldiers in contact with groups or individuals that might be willing to donate toward the cost of a ticket," said Salter.

One lucky pup named Ratchet has already made the trip. Throughout the war, Ratchet rode next to Staff Sergeant Jason Cowart in the front seat of a Humvee. Together, they survived the war and under Cowart's care Ratchet was transformed from a malnourished little pup into a thriving young dog that could sit, shake paws and roll over.

In May, Cowart's stay in Iraq was unexpectedly extended by another six months. He feared that Ratchet might not be allowed to continue traveling with the unit, and he began to search for a way to get his friend home to the Cowart family in Texas.

After WSPA was contacted about Ratchet, it only took a few weeks to arrange the details of sending the homeless Iraqi dog to a loving family back in the states. International Projects Director John Walsh contacted Pat Fitzgerald, an animal lover who works for British Airways. Pat not only helped to arrange a flight for Ratchet, but paid all of the veterinary fees and shipping costs.

Carla Cowart, Jason's mother, says that Ratchet is adapting well despite never having lived in a house before.

"Ratchet came out to my house yesterday and seemed to be more at peace because we are in the country. He ran in the tall grass and tried to bite it as it swayed. He also tried to bite the buzzard that flew high in the sky! Thanks again for all your expertise."

More rescues...

While WSPA cannot cover the high fees associated with transporting these dogs to the US, we are helping a number of soldiers get the information and assistance they need to save these special dogs.

see next page for more rescue stories