

Dogs trained at S.C. base help soldiers cope with injuries, PTSD

CHARLESTON -- Marine Sgt. Brian Jarrell said his new best friend trained at the Charleston naval brig is helping him cope with things he saw during combat in Iraq.

The Post and Courier reported that the first service dog trained by a prisoner at the Naval Consolidated Brig Charleston graduated last week. The program was relocated from the brig at Camp LeJeune, N.C.

Animals learn more than 70 commands and 350 tasks and help soldiers with all types of injuries - emotional and physical. Supporters of the program have said it provides a valuable skill to the prisoners in the brig by teaching them how to train the dogs.

Jarrell, 27, began showing signs of post-traumatic stress disorder when he returned from Iraq in 2005 and again when he returned from his second tour in 2008. His symptoms of loneliness and depression worsened to the point where he qualified for the service dog program.

At the brig, Jada and Jarrell will have about a week to get used to each other, but Jarrell said just their first night together made a difference.

"That was probably the best night's sleep I've had in years," he said of the comfort provided by Jada - who appears to be a labrador-boxer mix.

The demand for service dogs for wounded soldiers is increasing as more soldiers are returning from battle with all kinds of injuries.

"In Vietnam, they came back as fatalities," said Rick Hairston, president and CEO of Carolina Canines for Service. "Now they are coming back as casualties."

More than 240 wounded soldiers from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are on waiting lists for dogs. Most of the dogs in the program are rescued from local shelters.

"The unconditional love they provide wounded warriors is undeniable," Hairston said.