

**November 14, 2018**

## **DETECTION DOGS ARE SNIFFING OUT MINES AND SAVING LIVES IN IRAQI KURDISTAN**

*BUSINESS AND CORPORATE SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO SPONSOR LIFESAVING DOGS*

*By Bill Outlaw*

Karzan Khalid's grandfather stepped on a buried landmine near Erbil, Iraq in 1991 and tragically died from his injuries six months later. At a very young age, Karzan learned from his father of the horrible accident that killed his grandfather, and decided that his life's mission would be to find ways to keep others from losing their lives and limbs. Landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) have maimed or killed thousands of men, women and children throughout Kurdistan and other areas of Iraq.

"When my beloved grandfather lost his leg and died after stepping on a landmine, I thought that this should not happen. We must find a way to prevent it from happening to others," Khalid said.

Karzan found a way to help. He began working as a dog handler as a young teenager, and Karzan, now 32, has worked his way to become the Team Leader of the K9 Unit within the Peshmerga's Engineer Regiment. Upon request of the Ministry of Peshmerga, the Marshall Legacy Institute (MLI), a U.S.-based non-profit organization, has established a Mine Detection Dog Partnership Program to address the landmine threat. With contributions from private American donors, MLI has provided 18 highly trained explosive-sniffing dogs to the K9 Unit, and with support from the US Department of Defense, MLI has trained Kurdish handlers to employ the dogs safely and effectively in the field.

Brigadier General Ahmed Zebari, Engineer Regiment Commander, says MLI's donated dogs "help save and improve lives every day." The newly formed K9 Unit uses 12 Explosive Detection Dogs (EDDs) to search vehicles at checkpoints and buildings along the lines of confrontation. Six Mine Detection Dog (MDD) Teams soon will complete certification testing administered by the Iraqi Kurdistan Mine Action Agency (IKMAA) and will begin their lifesaving work in the field. General Zebari says the dog teams will facilitate the safe return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to areas formerly controlled by the Islamic State, which left thousands of landmines, IEDs and booby traps in its wake. The KRG Representative to the U.S., Ms. Bayan Sami Abdul Rahman, states that the Peshmerga's fight against ISIS has been heroic but that "tragically, we have lost Peshmerga in this fight and many have been wounded." She noted that 60 to 65 percent of the casualties were a result of IEDs, mines and unexploded devices.

Two of MLI's 18 donated dogs are still unsponsored, and MLI is seeking corporate sponsors to cover the cost of training and delivering the two lifesaving dogs to Kurdistan. These amazing dogs enable children to play, people work, and communities grow without the fear of landmines. The cost of sponsorship is \$25,000, for which a donor may name his/her dog, receive quarterly progress reports, participate in donor recognition events, observe the sponsored dog at work in the field, and, perhaps most importantly, know that countless lives will be saved and thousands of livelihoods enhanced because of the living gift of a mine detection dog. Should a company with business interests in the region choose to learn more about this opportunity to save and improve lives in Iraqi Kurdistan by joining MLI's generous dog sponsors, including General Dynamics Corporation and Hillwood International Energy, additional information may be found at [www.marshall-legacy.org](http://www.marshall-legacy.org).

Maria Hubbard, a director at General Dynamics Corporate Headquarters, stated that "General Dynamics is pleased to support the Marshall Legacy Institute in this worthy endeavor. This program is

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saving lives as Iraq works to restore its security and self-reliance in the wake of their defeat of ISIS. These special dogs and their brave handlers are helping save lives in some of the world's most dangerous spots.”

In 2016, the Landmine Monitor reported that IKMAA registered 2,711 confirmed hazardous areas and 491 suspected hazardous areas over 240 square miles throughout the region. In Mosul, a city in northern Iraq, three booby-trapped houses exploded in June killing 27 people. The victims had recently returned to their houses which are believed to have been booby-trapped by ISIS militants before their defeat in Mosul. The bomb disposal teams had not yet cleared the houses.

The Peshmerga K9 Unit already has searched nearly 20,000 cars, 80 houses, and many acres of hazardous areas, and their work really has just begun. MLI President Perry Baltimore spoke about the perils Peshmerga fighters encounter as they search for dangerous explosives. “The threat is real, and for every dog, there’s a highly skilled, well trained, motivated handler. That’s what Karzan Khalid and his brave dog teams do every day — risk their own lives, limbs and paws to make Iraqi Kurdistan a better and safer place for children to go to school and people to work and farm the fields by getting rid of these mines and IEDs.”

“I had the opportunity to visit the K9 Unit at the Ministry of Peshmerga in October and was impressed by the professionalism and dedication of the Peshmerga dog handlers. The Explosive Detection Dogs appeared motivated, highly-trained and well-bonded to their handlers. I’m pleased to see the fruits of my investment as these courageous dog teams search for dangerous explosives and render areas safe and economically viable,” – Ross Perot, Jr., Chairman of Hillwood International Energy.

“The people of Iraqi Kurdistan suffered enormously throughout the Islamic State crisis and recovery has been slow, largely in part because of the deadly legacy of landmines,” says Colonel Baltimore. “The Peshmerga fought bravely and valiantly in the counter-ISIS battle, and MLI is committed to helping the Iraqi Kurds help themselves in post-ISIS Iraq.”

Bill Outlaw is a free-lance writer based in Washington, DC. He previously covered foreign affairs for the Washington Times and also worked for the Associated Press.



MLI corporate donor, Ross Perot Jr. (second from right), visits the Peshmerga and one of his sponsored dogs, EDD *Bob*, in Kurdistan, October 2018