

Soldiers' Dogs Rescued From Iraq

SPCA International helped transport 24 dogs out of war zone and arrive safely on U.S. soil.

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The 24 dogs who have been rescued out of Iraq as part of Operation Baghdad Pups put their first paw safely on U.S. soil Thursday, according to Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals International.

The animal welfare group helped transport a total of 26 animals, including two cats. This event marks the rescue mission's largest effort to date, according to SPCA International spokeswoman Stephanie Scroggs.

The goal of Operation Baghdad Pups is to provide medical care, clearance, and transport for soldiers' companion animals out of the war zone. Because of heat restrictions on animal airline travel imposed in the summer months, these 26 animals were facing life or death, Scroggs said.

"Thanks to SPCA International and numerous supporters including FedEx, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey elected officials and sponsors, the animals will be saved in the nick of time," she said.

The emergency rescue mission culminated with a welcome home ceremony at Newark International Airport. The animals were greeted by the partners and groups that worked to make this rescue a reality, including the mother of an active duty U.S. soldier, who claimed her daughter's pup, named Iraqi.

Iraqi's owner, Army Spc. Alishia Leiteiser, told the SPCA, "While being over here, stress is dumped on each soldier every day, but when there is a piece of home somewhere nearby, it makes every day better. Iraqi has been that piece of home for me."