

# 'Serving Alongside These Pups is Truly a Privilege'

## After leaving the armed forces, former National Guardsman Christian Fritz's desire to serve remained, leading him to a new role

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VFW Life member, Christian Fritz is #StillServing as an Alamo Area Search and Rescue volunteer in San Marcos, Texas.

A former Pennsylvania and Utah Air National Guard member, Fritz was deployed twice to Afghanistan as an airborne intelligence collector.

After leaving the armed forces, his desire to serve remained, leading Fritz to a new role.

“One of the things I really missed when I left the military was the sense of purpose and doing something for the greater good,” he said. “I’ve been able to get some of that back through volunteering with search and rescue. There are a lot of different positions on the team, and a lot of military experience transfers well to them.”

That transfer of skills may be why veterans make up 60% of Fritz’s search-and-rescue group. But no matter how well qualified he and his human colleagues are, they can’t do it alone.

Dogs, including Fritz’s two German Shepherds, are an integral part of the team. Starbuck, a certified human remains detection dog, and Saul, a certified wilderness area search dog, are important volunteers.

After adopting Starbuck in 2013 and Saul in 2014, Fritz trained and worked with them to help communities in crisis.

“We started in Utah, where we assisted with lost hikers and hunters as well as with some criminal cases for the police,” Fritz explained. “Now, we work in Texas, mostly helping with criminal cases and some missing persons cases.”

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Fritz commends his dogs' search-and-rescue abilities but recognizes even greater value in them.

“Not only are the dogs incredible tools for detection work, but they make every single day of my life better,” he shared. “There have been days when I don’t even want to get out of bed, but I had my K9 partners to take care of me and keep me moving forward.

“I don’t think a day goes by when they don’t make me smile — sometimes scream,” he joked, “but more often, smile. #StillServing alongside these pups is truly a privilege.”