



# The Paw Print

The Voice of the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum  
& Handler Center



Volume 2 Issue 6

June 2022

## Special points of interest:

- An early look at the Fort Benning Event. What an absolutely stellar time we had. Thanks to everyone who joined us for the weekend.
- With baby goats in the battle for Kunar province.
- Check out some of our sponsors and thank them for their support.

## Fort Benning Event: Four Generations of Handlers Come Together



Marine MSgt. Chris Willingham (Ret.) smiles at meeting Army SFC Jesse Mendez (Ret.) at Military Working Dog Heritage Museum's Fort Benning Event. The event included four generations of dog handlers: Jesse Mendez (served in WWII/Korea/Vietnam), Vietnam-era, Global War on Terror, and current. The bond of K9 surpasses era and branch, as shown by the expressions on both men's faces. K9 leads the way!  
Photo credit: Rob Schnell

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When attendees think about the Fort Benning event, adjectives that come to mind include fun, fantastic, and even magical. One of the more magical moments occurred when SFC Jesse Mendez (Ret.) arrived at Sacrifice Field to the surprise and joy of everyone.

At 94, some days are better than others. Still, on this particular day, Jesse

beamed, watching younger men and women rededicate the monuments he helped shepherd onto Fort Benning. He radiated with pride as the handlers of the current generation ran their dogs through the paces on the grounds of Doughboy Stadium. Mere pixels cannot contain the honor of the younger generations who were able to meet this leg-

endary man, thanks to his daughter, LTC Monica Mendez (Ret.)

Thank you to SGM Viridiana Lavallo, SFC Gloria Greenidge, SFC Weston Reeves, SSG Joseph Snodgrass, and the talented Fort Benning and Fort Rucker teams for assistance in shaping our first big event! We appreciate you!

## From the President's Desk



President, Albert Johnson



Wow! What an incredible weekend and a whirlwind of emotion! The Fort Benning War Dog Rededication ceremony came together so well. Thanks to Mr. Jeffrey Bennett and the professional cleaners he hired to ensure the memorial gleamed for the ceremony. Determined supporters showed up on the humid, warm day at Sacrifice Field.

After the rededication of the pedestals, a spontaneous standing ovation erupted for SFC. Jesse Mendez (Ret.). The love overflowed for the man who brought so many people together and made the monument possible. After so many years of hearing stories about him, I was finally fortunate enough to meet him.

The gala fundraising dinner for the museum saw current and former handlers coming together to break bread with civilian supporters. Mr. John Meeks, Mr. Johnny Mayo, and SGM Lavalle gave entertaining and informative speeches. The subjects included:

- The importance of military working dog history.
- Honoring those who came before us.
- Educating and preparing

the new handlers through shared experiences.

The organization received donations of two significant historical artifacts you will see later in this issue.

The kennels honored the Heritage Museum with a flag signed by all the active-duty handlers. Sunday dawned to the bittersweet realization that time had arrived to pack up, knowing our time with these great handlers was ending.

I arrived with hopes of connecting faces with names of handlers I had been in contact with via social media, and I left with much more than that. I went with new heroes and, even more important, the friendship and love that only fellow handlers could give. Our team of volunteers made molehills out of mountains. These folks put in staggering hours to ensure the course of events stayed on track. They answered attendees' questions and did everything possible to ensure everyone was enjoying themselves.

Monday, we held a fundraiser and outreach at Semper Fi Bar and Grill in Woodstock, Georgia. We

met so many beautiful veterans and civilian supporters; Chris Willingham signed books and educated the public on the importance of military working dog history. We all enjoyed meeting the establishment owner, (Ret) Marine MSgt. Ralph Roeger.

The addition of the two new artifacts reminds me that we are always on the lookout for artifacts to share the history of the military working dog program. We're also seeking vibrant volunteers; reach out to us if you have an interest.

Until the next event, we wish everyone good health and hope you all stay in contact with each other and our organization.

Before I end this month, please remember to honor the fantastic fathers connected to the K9 family on Father's Day. Many of them were with us at Fort Benning.

We also celebrate the Army's 247th birthday, and much of the June issue of *The Paw Print* features stories and information on Army teams. Hooah.

*Albert Johnson*

## Four Generations Devoted to K9

by Dixie Whitman

The Fort Benning event didn't go as planned.

Planned is a word indicating a corporeal initiative conceived and guided by our volunteers. Instead, an overarching spirit of unity, hope, and courage directed the weekend despite a few hiccups, like one box of event T-shirts shipped to some far-off location.

Good fortune painted our event using pigments of appreciation, enthusiasm, and motivation to trace stirring impressions. Emotions and awe elbowed their way to the forefront with true icons and legends in our midst: SFC Jesse Mendez (Ret.); John Meeks, II; Johnny Mayo; SGM Viridiana Lavalle; and MSgt Chris Willingham (Ret.). Echoing words found in the German shepherd dog standard, "the event was stamped with a look of quality and nobility - difficult to define, but unmistakable when present." The elusive "look of eagles" perched among us.

We are thankful for the courage and uplifting leadership of SGM Viridiana Lavalle and the Vietnam-era handlers, who rose beyond their sorrow and loss through their steadfast spirit and love of their brothers and sisters. We are equally grateful for today's handlers, who create their unique paths through diligence, determination, and devotion. These young men and

women remind us of where we've been and where we're going.

And we are genuinely motivated daily by the depth and focus of our organization. Our team executed the rededication with verve —our sincere thanks to Lane for his brilliant job as an MC, our Keynote speaker, MSgt Chris Willingham (Ret.), and Mr. Jeffrey Bennett, who shared their insightful words.

At the end of the ceremony, the chaplain, CPT Warren Powell, nailed the benediction. "Receive the benediction. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May he shield you as you walk through the wall. May he keep eyes keen, ears alert, teeth sharp, and noses wet. Amen."

As CPT Powell finished, Lane turned to him and said, "I think that's the best benediction I've heard. Outstanding."

Four score handlers, veterinarians, and vet techs approached the monument in single file. Flanking them, a K9 Honor Guard assembled by SGM Lavalle provided a moving tribute honoring the heartbeat of our history.

Shortly, the mood turned from somber and reflective to awestruck and joyful as the crowd gathered at big old Doughboy Stadium to watch tough and talented dog teams from the Fort



**Handlers gather together in front of the War Dog Memorial at Fort Benning. The brotherhood of K9 crosses eras and branches of service.**

Photo credit: Dave Batley



**Following the speeches, the handlers move towards the memorial, flanked on both sides by a K9 Honor Guard.**

Photo credit: Dave Batley

Benning and Fort Rucker Kennels take the field. CPL Rippin and his impressive MWD, Tina, started us off as he showcased focus and precision heeling. The obstacle course, tactical work, bite work, and the chute all played key roles in the exhibition of expert dog handling and captivating decoying.

Following the dog demonstration, Fort Benning kennels invited veteran dog handlers, veterinarians, and vet techs to a private, special event at the Fort Benning kennels. They were taken on a grand tour of the facility and were able to meet and greet the teams personally and spend some time in the shade eating a luncheon catered with love and respect.

The afternoon spared a few moments for attendees to briefly visit the extensive Smithsonian-level National Infantry Museum that sits just outside the fort's gates and across the parking lot from the host hotel. The National Infantry Museum also served as the venue for our banquet. Following Dennis Lewis' humble and heartfelt pre-meal prayer, we dined surrounded by the infantry's history, where many of our Vietnam-era handlers felt at home.

Three after-dinner speakers crafted eloquent speeches to entertain banquet goers. John Meeks, II, President of

US War Dogs, Chapter 3, started with his illustrated history of Military Working Dogs. Following that theme, Johnny Mayo discussed the importance of remembering the dogs and how he created his War Dog Wall. In her thoughtful way, SGM Lavalle discussed the connections through history to the current handlers and military working dog world.

Two moving museum acquisitions occurred following the speeches. Carla Ann Anderson left everyone touched after sharing the story of the donation of her pet German shepherd, King, during the Vietnam War. His presence is still missed.

Albert received a surprising artifact, a jacket gifted by the Simonds family, presented by the three female Army personnel present. It is a unique and treasured artifact.

For the remainder of the evening, auctions were won and lost, drinks were stirred or shaken, and the finest, strongest gossamer strands of brotherhood, loyalty, and all things MWD wove a delicious tapestry made of marvelous K9 memories.

Our MWD Heritage Museum extends a profound and sincere thank you to all attendees.

**K9 Leads the Way!**



Photo from the dog demo at Doughboy Stadium.

Photo credit: Dave Batley



A fabulous and energetic dog demo included a decoy being chased down by a parachute-wearing fur missile. The chute helps the dogs develop more stamina and hitting power.

Photo credit: Rob Schnell

## New Uniform Piece for The Museum

by Dixie Whitman

Military Working Dog Heritage Museum added a fantastic new piece to our collection. In the March 2022 issue of The Paw Print, we introduced you to a dog-savvy and determined young WWII WAC named Carol Roever Simonds, a lady whom we all believe to be the first female military working dog handler. Ever.

During our investigation and the subsequent communications with Mrs. Simonds's family, they decided to send their mother's jacket to a museum. And, what better museum than one dedicated solely to the history and heritage of America's Military Working Dog Community!

With an eye on conservancy and guided by Scott Daubert of the National Infantry Museum, Dixie Whitman received the jacket and formulated a plan with SGM Viridiana Lavalle to present the jacket to MWDHM President Albert Johnson at the banquet.

The female Army handlers present: SGM Lavalle, PV2 Walters, and SPC Jones, all took part in this historic moment as Albert Johnson accepted the item from them to add to our collection.

A sincere thank you to the Simonds family for ensuring that the female handlers of today have this piece of history that honors their mother, a true K9 trailblazer.



Albert Johnson, the Heritage Museum President, stands in the background while the female Army K9 attending the banquet present the jacket to the museum. Those participating include: PV2 Walters, SPC Jones, SGM Lavalle.

Photo credit: Rob Schnell



In her retired years, former dog handler, Carol Roever Simonds visited the old WWII War Dog Reception and Training Center at Fort Robinson, NE, where she became the first female K9 Handler.

Photo courtesy of the Simonds family.



A young Carol Roever's official Army portrait taken at Fort Indiantown Gap, PA.

Photo courtesy of the Simonds family.

## Reflections On the Fort Benning Weekend

by Michael Hurder

In his eyes, I saw hope and anticipation. I also saw fear, loss, and regret. I knew him from that look. Without even knowing his name, I could tell his history. I knew where he'd been, what he'd seen, what he'd done -to make it back here. He wondered, at one time, if it was worth it. He asked himself, "did I do the right thing?" His thoughts brought out the doubts. Should it have been him instead of Harry? Was there something else he could have, should have done?

He didn't make his friend jump in front to save another's life. The hero just did it before anyone else could react. Perhaps, had he been a little quicker on the draw and not so stunned by the surprise of the attack, he might have been a paladin. Instead, here he was fifty years later, looking into the eyes of equally guilt-ridden brothers who also made it back when so many others, more worthy, didn't.

I had a glimpse into the souls of so many brothers and sisters this weekend that I am full to the brim with love, pride, joy, and gratitude. I am also overwhelmed with the empty feelings of the missing.

Many of those who left us, either during the fight or since have gone too soon. The chasm they've left behind beckons to us all. "Come home," it cries. We falter yet again. We are not ready.

The void created by this initial uncertainty eventually overflowed with funny, gutsy, and scary stories. They all have one glaring similarity. They all include claims of heroic K9s, the storyteller's K9 being the best one ever until the following story unfolds - and then the next, and the next.

The old and younger men and women, the past handlers, marvel at the new breed. The fresh look and feel of their pride. The professional way they execute their tasks. Their willingness, more a desire, to follow the inspirational leadership of their NCOs and Officers lights a fire of memories within us.

The fur missiles who work beside these young men and women bring thoughts of our own time on the other end of the leash, both blessed and cursed.

We remember, laugh, cry, and empty our souls in front of a monument built to remind all of the sacri-



Handlers, Veterinarians, Vet Techs, and the family of Medal of Honor Recipient, Robert Hartsock, place individual roses on the Memorial and the pedestals.

Photo credit: Rob Schnell



Handlers, Veterinarian, Vet Tech, and Supporter all gathered in one photo.

Photo credit: Rob Schnell

ifice, courage, and compassion it took to be a part of this community. Escorting the family of a true-blue hero catches my emotions in my throat. I stumble, only to be held up by this beautiful and loving family. Still, they give of themselves to support our community. Still,

they cause me to feel small.

We place our trembling hands on the likeness of our never-forgotten partners until our messages connect. "I'm coming soon, buddy. I'll see you over the bridge, and I look forward to it. Thank you for giving me these years

to heal and grow. You are always in my thoughts and heart. I love you, and I always will."

Our passions spent, we retreat to gather and re-live the times since our last meeting. Some of us find new brothers and sisters who've been on our team since they took up the leash. We are just now getting acquainted. The stories are the same, with differences in the location only. We've all felt the power of the bond. We've all felt the pride of belonging to this elite group and the knowledge that we, as MWD teams, are force multipliers, the likes of

which are few and far between.

Just as it was the hardest thing we ever did to leave our partners for whatever reason, the regret is again palpable. It's difficult to say goodbye after this get-together. We can't help but wonder if there will be a next time while looking forward to it just the same, promising to be there when it happens. I look once more into the eyes of my brothers and sisters. I see peace. I see hope. I see me.

WOOF, brothers and sisters.

## The Story of King, the War Dog

In 1968 we chose a furry little black and silver puppy to be part of our family. This handsome German Shepherd would be called King. He served as my playmate and protector.

In 1970 my father had decided to donate King to the United States Military in hopes that he would serve with the troops in Vietnam. I can still recall the sadness we felt when King left our family. My father assured his two daughters that King would be a great war dog. While we received periodic updates regarding his progress, the last received in

1971 confirmed that King had deployed to Vietnam.

Before he left our home to serve, my father had commissioned a portrait of King. The artist came to our house, took photos, and interacted with him to capture his personality in the painting. What a beautiful smile he had. That was King - the war dog.

My family and I, those who are now gone and those at present, are honored to dedicate King's portrait to Albert Johnson and his team at the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum.



Two of our fabulous banquet speakers: John Meeks II, of US War Dogs, Assn., Chapter 3, and SGM Viridiana Lavalle.

Photo credit: Rob Schnell

by Carla Ann Anderson



Albert Johnson, MWDHM President (left), accepts a portrait of King, presented by Carla Anderson. As Carla spoke about her memories of King, his protectiveness and intelligence, tears flowed.

Photo credit : Rob Schnell

## Fred Roberts: Part 1- Goats Among the Eagles

by Dixie Whitman

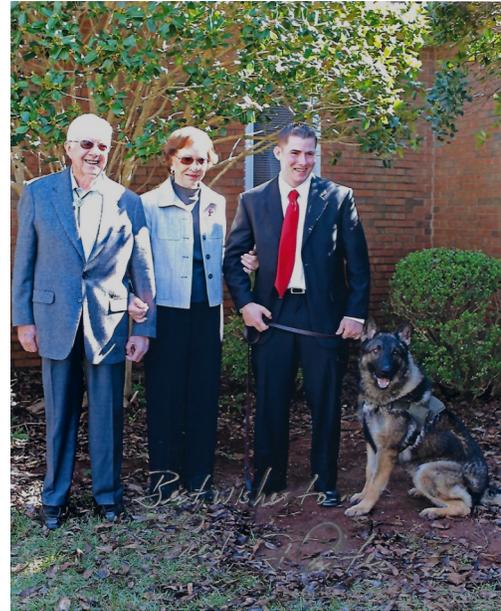
Fred Roberts didn't blame them for screaming in fear, corralled inside the same abandoned mud house with about 17 guys and one giant German shepherd. The terrified shrieks of the baby goats unnerved him, though, like a type of psychological warfare. Their cries reminded him of his children's sobs back home; maybe it wasn't a coincidence they were both called kids. The concussive blasts of the NLAWS fired from the Capra-filled room on the other side of the clay wall drove the missile forward towards the cave, the suspected lair of the sniper. Still, the back-blast exploded against the interior. After the third thunderous crack, Fred noticed a distinctive bow in the wall. He imagined it wouldn't support even a couple more shots. Mud and sticks won't buttress warfare long.

How had he come from his home in flat Florida to this remote mountain region in Afghanistan? The journey started in high school. While Fred's father had served in the military, Fred didn't see the Army as his future. He only took ASVAB classes to examine his strengths in the civilian world. As it turns out, his score had recruiters knocking on his door right away. Then he reasoned: with the Army, he'd get tuition assistance, travel, training, and the real-life experiences unlikely to present

themselves elsewhere. So, in 2003, he took his first job as an MP in Germany and rolled into an Iraqi deployment working with Personal Security.

After Germany, he moved to Fort Benning, and as he neared reenlistment, he looked at options within the Military Police and asked himself, "Which subset of the MPs seem to love what they do? Who likes going to work and who enjoys time spent together?" The kennels caught his eye. They were filled with a solid staff of talented, likable handlers; they played hard but worked even harder.

His first job as K9 took him straight to Korea from Lackland. As a successful handler in dog school, he struggled with the procedures underscored in training vs. how experienced handlers had adapted their methods to suit real-world situations. As a result, he didn't click with the group in Korea and returned to Fort Benning as a Patrol Desk Supervisor after his tour in Korea finished. Fortunately, the new Kennel Master at Benning, SFC Allred, knew Roberts' work ethic from Korea and asked him to transfer to K9 when an opening occurred. Fred worked a narcotics dog briefly, but when the kennels got Daks (aka Daks Daddy), a green dog, they needed a handler on him straight away. Roberts happened to be the only han-



Above: A photo of Fred Roberts and Daks as they completed a mission for Jimmy and Rosalyn Carter in Plains, GA. Several times they swept the church where Jimmy Carter taught Sunday School. Both Carters autographed this photo. Below: Photo of Roberts and Agbar, his first dog from Germany, on their mission with the 101st called Strong Eagle III. Photos provided by Fred Roberts



dlar without a long-term partner.

At the time, a sit was the only authorized type of alert response allowed from a K9. Daks' deferred response found him staring directly at an odor, drooling, but still standing. One of the Cert

Authorities accepted this focused response but wanted to wait Daks out to see if he would ultimately sit. He didn't. Fred and Daks had to run problems last because at each training aid Daks located, he drooled while waiting, leaving a sa-

liva pool marking the find for subsequent dogs.

Fred transferred to Germany again and, within a few months, picked up a deployment to Afghanistan with his new partner, Agbar. They first supported the 1st Brigade of the 101st out of Fort Campbell. On the last mission together, in the Sarkani district of Kunar province, the 101st guys were already planning their return trip home. Within 72 hours, the Screaming Eagles expected to be home, drinking Tennessee whiskey, kissing their wives, and playing with their children.

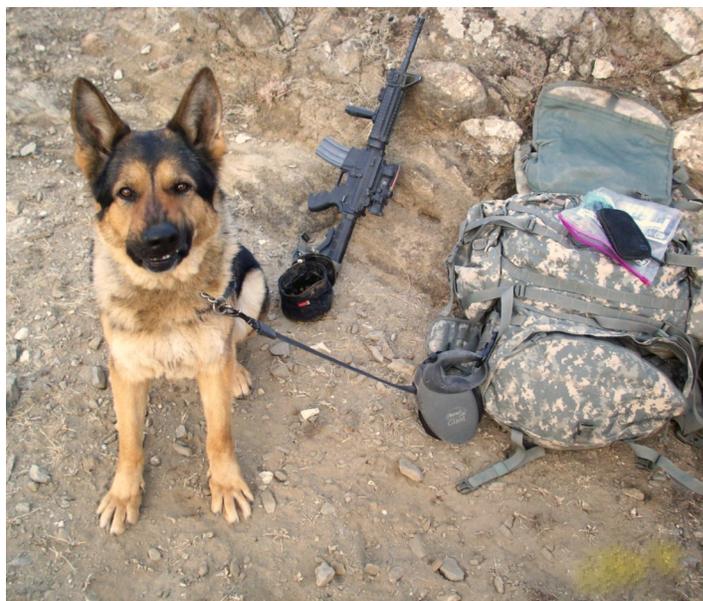
They couldn't get a "go" for the mission on their first date, and delays occurred multiple times before weather forecasters allowed Strong Eagle to take off. As they inserted, their Apache escort choppers met resistance from the enemy near the HLZ (Helicopter Landing Zone) and shot back, clearing them out. Once the Chinooks deposited all 175 men on positions overlooking the valley, the 101st owned the night. As the mechanical purring of the helicopters left, in their void remained an absolute, deathly quiet.

The squads began their hunt as the sun rose. Most teams insert at higher points; it's easier to fight downhill than uphill. The first day of the planned 3-day mission went success-

fully. The men routinely searched and cleared houses. On the second day, as they came across a large, traditional mud and timber home, Robert's platoon received rounds from a sniper. The first round ripped into an Afghan National Army infantryman and killed him immediately. The second round hit SSG Adamski, wounding him. Everyone took cover inside the mud home as the medics rushed in to begin their work. They called for a medevac and started trying to take out the sniper.

"Light up that cave," came the order. A single-use, shoulder-fired weapon, the NLAW, blasted the cave, but the sniper continued his barrage. They fired two more NLAWs, the concussions from their deadly firepower nearly collapsing their roof. Two more Soldiers received wounds. The arriving medevac received incoming rounds and could not land. Finally, the Air Force arrived with a pararescue chopper and blasted their way into the landing zone. They called all kinds of hellfire down on the sniper's location. While they quieted him, one sound that echoes still for Roberts is the crying of baby goats.

The mission continued. The men of Operation Strong Eagle battled for several days, uncovering weapons caches, unearthing munitions, and poking the insur-



**Agbar: Look at that "smile." A photo from his deployment in 2011. Below: With the 101st Airborne as they awaited extraction from their last mission. Photos provided by Fred Roberts.**



gents who'd holed up on the Afghani side of the border with Pakistan. Many successes marked that mission, but many men died, six men from Fort Campbell and more from the ANA ranks. The homecoming for the Screaming Eagle soldiers, which should have brought laughter and joy, brought mourning and an intense loss instead. We honor: SSG Frank Adamski III, SSG

Bryan A. Burgess, SFC Ofren Arrechaga, SPC Dustin J. Feldhaus SPC Jameson L. Lindskog, and PFC Jeremy P. Faulkner.

To continue with the critical work done by Operation Strong Eagle, the 25th ID based out of Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, replaced the 101st. And that is where we will continue Fred and Agbar's story next month.

## The Berm

by Michael Hurder

We all got into the 'Patrol' routine and lived a dull existence for the most part. But, while I'd worked several "sentry" posts so far, like the PX supply yard and some Motor Pools, my first actual "patrol" with Prince was the "Berm." The berm was a twenty-foot-tall dirt wall, maybe twenty-five feet wide at the base. Built by the Army Corps of Engineers for a good part of the way around the base camp, this was the last defensive barrier before an enemy would be in among us.

There were at least one-hundred-meter minefields moving outward from the berm or the inner fence line (wrapped with razor wire where there was no berm). Beyond that loomed another fence with topping razor wire. This amalgamation of hard defenses separated the base camp from the rest of the world. The berm had towers built into it at 100-meter intervals, and there were firing positions dug into it around every three meters. Even where there was no berm, there were towers and dug-out, sand-bagged fighting positions.

While on Berm Patrol, we walked just inside it, which made no sense to me since the berm was in the way of where the bad guys

would be approaching. So, how was Prince supposed to alert on what he couldn't see and would have trouble hearing or smelling? But then again, outside, there was concertina wire and minefields, so yeah, I gladly walked inside, thank you very much.

Our presence there was as much for show as it was for security. There were sections of our Patrol Route where there was no berm, just fence, and razor wire, perhaps a gate, etc. You could see the Dog Team working at various times at night from outside. While being seen like this was a good deterrent, we sure as hell felt vulnerable and exposed. More than one GI had been taken out or wounded walking past those gaps. Your team was visible for a long way off on a well moonlit night.

For myself, whenever I approached one of these no-berm sections, my heart was in my mouth the whole time. The anxiety would build and build as I came to the open section to the point I would be shaking in my boots. Prince could tell I was agitated, too; it would manifest as super aggression in his demeanor. Prince bore his teeth before we ever got to the spot. I would send him



and send him and send him again until I worked up enough courage to run across the gap. Eventually, I felt guilty about repeatedly exposing him, and I would only resend him if he alerted, sucked it up, and ran like my life depended on it - ahem.

Hours of slow walking while bored grunts in and around the towers asked stupid stuff like "what the heck kind of horse is that thing dragging you around?" or "does your girlfriend kiss on a first date?" can undoubtedly get to your sanity and patience and hey, there's one of those damn gaps coming up. But, honestly, an

MWD Team is NOT someone to ridicule.

When I let Prince answer those stupid questions, they switched me to heliports, ammo dumps, motor pools, and ration/supply yards. Bored grunts have no sense of humor unless they are making the jokes. Go figure! I thought it was funny watching them run like rats and scramble up their ladders. I'm sure Prince enjoyed himself too. He would never have harmed a one unless I put him up to it, but they sure didn't know that. All they saw was 100 plus pounds of beast running at them. Life has its moments. Sigh!

## Tales from the Perimeter: Fairchild AFB

by David Adams

King 12M5 and I arrived at Fairchild AFB in late June 1968, with the smell of Sentry Dog School still on us. Fairchild, a Strategic Air Command (SAC) base in eastern Washington, carried SAC's reputation as a hardnosed and by-the-book organization. Everyone dreaded the scrutiny and regulations associated with the Air Force's SAC bases. About half of the K9 section had been there nearly a year when I arrived. The others were nearing the end of their enlistments, with at least one tour in Vietnam under their belts. As "newbies," learning how K9 worked in the real world would be the next stage of our experiences. Doing something wrong was my primary concern. While to err is human, forgiveness wasn't part of SAC policy.

Our first post assignment was K9 1B on the north side of the B-52 alert area. At 200 sq. yards of flat cleared ground, it was an ideal sentry dog post. Being 75 yards from the alert area's fence, it was just out of the reach of its lights. The post's east boundary was the base's perimeter fence, whose lights illuminated a 50-yard area beyond the wall enveloping us in darkness. Other than the hot, humid air of a Texas summer night, there

was no difference between K9 1B and the post where King had his first alert in Sentry Dog school.

The Munition Storage Area (MSA) provided the only area where postings differed from the six posts that protected the alert B-52s and KC-135 Refueling Tankers. Two K9 teams patrolled the roadways between alarmed bunkers containing the base's nuclear arsenal. Surrounding the MSA stood four illuminated 8ft high chain link fences capped with razor wire. The third fence pulsed with electricity that rivaled the third rail of any subway system. The question "so, who are we expecting to get through that?" came naturally.

From my K9 post, I could see my Security Police brethren walking around their assigned alert birds with an M1 carbine slung over their shoulders. As I watched them patrol incessantly during many nights of duty, I became more grateful for being teamed with a dog. I wondered how long I could continue to walk that painted line around one of those B52s before I would start thinking about using the M1 to shoot myself. Then the winter of 68-69 hit.

While still in San Antonio, my Sentry Dog classmate,



Above: My partner, King 12M5, ushered me through Sentry Dog School and my first installation, Fairchild AFB, Washington. Photo provided by David Adams.

John Blue, asked about the winters when we received our base assignment to Washington State. "They're not horrible. You might see a few days around zero, but mostly mid to low 20s are more common." I assured him. Of course, mother Nature will make a liar out of you when you tell someone something like that. The meteorologist scoured 100 years of records to find weather that rivaled the months of December 68 through February 69 at Fairchild AFB. At least I can say I was honest with my dog when I told him it would differ from his Texas roots.

During that never-ending winter, massive dumps of snow preceded sub-zero temperature, introducing another blizzard. Only a tin roof covered our outdoor

dog runs in a feeble attempt to keep rain and snow out. Immersion heaters kept the water buckets from freezing solid. We couldn't hose down the runs, so that meant using a shovel to chip and scrape the frozen piles off the concrete pad of the runs.

In January, I started my early shift on K9 4 on a cloudless sub-zero night with a full moon illuminating my frozen breath. Across the runway, I could see the alert KC-135 tankers. The snow formed a solid crust of ice that allowed King and I to walk on top without sinking above my boot tops. Venturing further from the runway edge into the middle of the post, you could sink up to your knees, and the standard SAC issue didn't in-

clude snowshoes. With the combination of snow and a full moon, it was more like early dusk. About 30-minutes into our shift, I looked down and saw blood spots in King's paw prints. I lifted a paw and could see the ice was cutting his pads.

I called in my partner's condition, and we rode back to the kennels where the doc was waiting. He took one look and ordered all of our dogs off post until further notice. We turned in our .38 revolvers, hung up our leather gear, were issued old M1s, and set out without the dogs. It would be a long and miserably cold six weeks before we had the company of our pups again.

If the wind-driven snowdrifts weren't bad enough, the colossal runway snow blowers threw more frozen white onto our runway posts, K9 3 through 5. Keeping the runway clear received top priority, so the plows abandoned the perimeter road beyond the east end of the runway, and it became impassable. Once dropped off, we trudged through the drifts to our assigned positions. It was a mere 100 yards to reach K9 3 but was a 500-yard hike to K9 5.

Staying warm and surviving the massive snowfall stimulated our creativity. One handler, John Simpson (not his real name), filled his Air Force-issued duffle bag with: a folding camp stool, a catalytic tent heater, a gallon of white gas, and other creature comforts to get through the night. John looked more like a walking fire hydrant than a human being with his short, stocky build covered in his winter parka. As we slogged through the snow, I could hear John's usual flood of cursing. His stubby legs made his hike even more difficult. Suddenly in mid-sentence, there was silence. I turned, but all I could see looking in his direction was his duffle bag on top of the snow. I hollered out for him, and then I saw a chubby hand protruding from the snow as he clawed his way out. He hit a low area in the ground made deceptively level by weeks of drifting snow and instantly sunk over his head. I was laughing too hard to attempt a rescue.

As we headed into March, it began to look like we might see warmer weather again and, if lucky, bare ground to walk on. We realized if boredom stalked us, our dogs had to be sharing

our mental state. So it was time for some detection training.

With his dog secured, the handler on the post across from me hid on mine to see how well King would pick him up. As a sizeable purebred German Shepherd with a longer than average body, King tipped the scales to the 100lb mark. On our first pass, King caught the scent and did his usual, trying to charge at the target. Staying crouched down while King tried to run drained my strength, but I maintained a slow, controlled approach. I couldn't see the intruder, but King definitely had him. As we neared the boundary of our post, I wondered, "what the heck," because King kept pulling and surging at the leash. We finally got to the hiding place in the middle of the next post. The other handler thought he would pull a fast one and see how long it would take King to pick up his scent, wondering if I would start having doubts. After maintaining control of my dog for 300 yards, I wasn't laughing. I told him the leash might slip out of my hand the next time.

With May flowers blooming, I received a promise I

would not see another winter at Fairchild. Permanent Change of Station orders arrived for three of my fellow handlers and me. We were headed to the 388th Security Police K9 section at Korat RTAFB, Thailand. "Hmmm, never heard of it." Sadly, those orders did not include King 12M5, but it wasn't surprising. No one transferred with their dogs. The somber, final day arrived, and I said goodbye to my buddy, King, who had taken me from Sentry Dog School through my neophyte handler days.



Above: My partner, King 12M5, and I at Fairchild AFB, Washington.

Photo credit: Jim Begg



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## Important dates with Trooper and Scout

**June 25-30, 2022**—The U.S. Army Military Working Dog Symposium. Muscatatuck Urban Training Complex, Butlerville, Ind. Open to Army 31K. Go [here](#) to register.

**March 13, 2023**— Dedication of the Coast Guard K9 Memorial— Coast Guard Base Alameda. California. Open to the public. For more information, click [here](#).



## Historic Pooch Pic of the Month



**Left: Sgt. Carl E. Bell, Elwood City, Pennsylvania, Military Police Command, HRPE, is shown at the Harbor Camp Post Exchange offering a Hershey Bar to "Blitz," a War Dog trained at HRPE. Official photograph U.S. Army Signal Corps, Hampton Roads Port of Embarkation, Newport News, Virginia.  
Source: National Archives**

**Note: Blitz refused the Hershey Bar. Please do not feed your dog chocolate.**