



The Paw Print

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



Volume 2 Issue 7

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Special points of interest:

- Read a first-hand account of one night at Wheelus AFB's ammo dump.
- Enjoy a fantastic sample of a new Vietnam Combat Tracker book.

Getting To The Fight



Off the shores of Guam, Coast Guardsmen and Marines offload a "Devil Dog" as they transfer a War Dog from a Coast Guard-manned landing barge to an "alligator." He is boxed because he is trained for battle and apt to go after any and all but his own particular handler. These "Devil Dogs" were used to ferret out hidden enemy and carry messages under fire in the Guam invasion, after proving their worth in the Marshalls. Official Coast Guard Photo.

Inside this issue:

From the President's Desk	2
K9 Transport	3
K9s in Libya 1964	4
Fred Roberts, Pt. 2 Kunar and Bagram	6
Semper Fi Bar and Grille Fundraiser	8
James Mellick's Wounded Warriors	9
Chasing Tomorrow's Nightmares	12

Transporting K9s during the early years of the dog program came with challenges. For example, getting the WWII Devil Dogs from Camp Lejeune to Camp Pendleton on the opposite coast required three Pullman sleepers, five baggage cars, one diner, and one caboose. Being the lowest priority, the train carrying the dog teams rested on a sidetrack while troop trains or those transporting tanks and artillery passed.

With the dogs' kennels, jammed into the back cars, the K9s required a steady feeding, exercising, and cleaning rotation by the handlers. The men didn't complain much while on sidetracks as it allowed them to pull the dogs outside to exercise in fresh, clean air with no need to clean up.

When the train rattled down the line, the dogs couldn't relieve themselves outside, so a makeshift K9 head,

complete with painted wooden fire-hydrants, squatted in the center of one particular baggage car. In his book, William Putney mentions that the craftsman "did not use adequate paint, because the red soon shriveled and peeled under the assault of the dogs. They did not mind, however, and continued to spray them down as if they were the real things."

William Putney, *Always Faithful*. (New York, The Free Press. 2001.)

From the President's Desk



President, Albert Johnson



Welcome to the July issue. Independence Day is a great time to celebrate the freedoms bravely fought for by those who came before us. I remember working the Del Mar beach bash at Camp Pendleton for several years with my K9 partner. We ensured law and order where things could quickly get out of hand. Hundreds, maybe even a thousand, gathered around to hear the bands play and enjoy the camaraderie of their brothers and sisters-in-arms, cutting loose from the daily grind. Then, watching the fireworks show off on the coast. Being on the other side of the celebrations the last few years makes me appreciate everyone who works to ensure the masses can have fun safely.

We dedicate this edition of the newsletter to the transportation of MWD teams. In my K9 career, Johnny and I completed transport by many modes. One of our least favorites was the Osprey, a Marine Corps aircraft capable of taking off like a helicopter and flying like an airplane. The Osprey was the most incredibly terrifying aircraft I have ever ridden. This panic occurred primarily because my "friends" Chris Willingham and Billy Soutra had talked to the pilot and informed them that it was my first time. So they should pop my Osprey cherry the "right way" in what they lovingly referred

to as the "jump and run." In this maneuver, the pilot turns the rotors down to lift off but quickly turns them to the rear and hits the throttle. This speed causes the passengers and equipment to sling to the back of the aircraft. The plane's tail hangs lower than the rest of the aircraft and has the ramp down. I thought Johnny and I were tumbling out the back, free-falling to our inevitable deaths. Once I regained control of myself and no longer had a green visage, I spouted language even a sailor would blush to hear.

Johnny's favorite mode of transportation was anything he had his own seat, whether a humvee, helicopter, plane, or even a Toyota Hilux pickup heading to the flight line. We had a chance to do a few missions with a striker brigade. Those things were so cool to look at, but once you cram 18 full-grown men, their gear, and ammo for the heavy guns on top, you realize it wasn't much more than a sardine can on eight wheels with a rear ramp to pile out of once the real mission started. Have I mentioned that Johnny used to get an upset stomach if he couldn't see where we were driving? It was one of the few times I was unhappy to hear them yell for me over the engine. "Hey, dog guy, was that your dog?" I swear he could peel the

paint off the walls of those things.

In this issue, you will find a story and photos of our fundraising dinner at Semper Fi Bar and Grill. We had a fantastic time meeting new people interested in our mission, breaking bread with handlers, and building a solid bond with the owner of the business, a retired Marine Master Sergeant. So many stories were told, laughs shared, and food chowed down. I want to give Mr. Todd Trammel a shout-out for his help selling tickets until we opened the doors. Todd's belief in our mission has allowed us to tell the stories of these heroic dog teams to larger audiences. Todd, I can't wait till we can get together again and talk all things "dog."

When it comes to military working dog art, one name stands out to many in our community: James Mellick's Wounded Warrior Dog Project. In addition, you will see a story that David Adams wrote about a fantastic sculpture in the collection. I considered myself lucky to see many of the figures a few years ago when the Marine Corps Museum hosted the display.

We hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter and, as always,

K9 leads the way.

Albert Johnson

K9 Transport

by Dixie Whitman

Walking up the gangplank, a platoon of rowdy WWII dog handlers and their obedient partners made a peculiar and fascinating sight to dockhands quayside loading Liberty ships with food and supplies. The novelty of dogs heading off to war created unique challenges: to safely transport, adequately exercise, and feed in a confining and often stifling ship's belly.

The crates stashed below deck in hard lines pushed against each side housed dogs who grew seasick from rough weather or lost body tone due to lack of movement. Dogs would arrive weeks later at their destinations in the Pacific, needing exercise and healing.

In one case, due to a massive gale storm, saltwater flooded the decks. The seawater dissolved the protective skin and made the dogs' paws raw. Treating their feet with a drying powder and bandaging made things worse. Nothing seemed to work until one handler from the platoon found an innovative solution. All dogs were treated again with a drying agent and had coiled cotton weaved between their toe pads. Then the veterinary staff wrapped the entire foot in several layers of gauze before sheathing it in a protective condom. The feet healed.

As the dogs and handlers received notoriety and recognition for their successes, their prospects improved. After Action Reports continued to advise that "Patrols led by dogs were never ambushed and suffered no casualties." One dog detachment assigned to the New Britain Campaign received an offer of a plane ride with a group of staff officers. The rough landing bounced one K9 into another's space, and a battle of jaws ensued. There was nothing like a frenzied dog fight bouncing around the cabin to cause a rapid deplanement—as the plane slowed, the staff officers pushed through the escape hatch to safety.

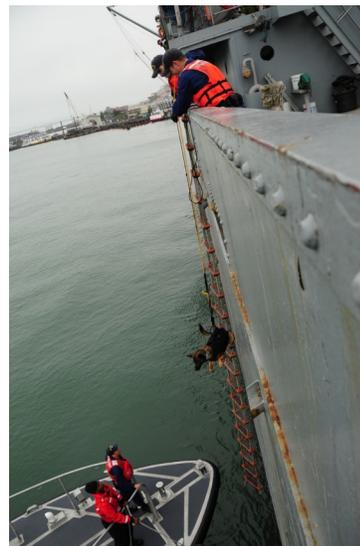
In Vietnam, the Huey became symbolic, as the Calvary arrival meant a flight of choppers skimming the air. The dog teams ferried in and out of missions on a Huey. Often, the dogs pushed their face into the wind, much like a joyful car ride on steroids.

In today's military, dog teams practice fast-roping, transitioning from one watercraft to another, and jumping from helicopters hitched to their handlers: all transportation is on the table. Innovation always finds a way; no MOS is more gifted with ingenuity and out-of-the-box thinking than military working dog handlers with a problem.



Above: One WWII mode of transport, the Liberty Ship.
Below: The Huey became synonymous with Vietnam.

Both images via the National Archives.



This Coast Guard dog practices transitions from a ship to another craft.
Photo source: DoD

K9s in Libya in 1964

Story and artwork by Rick Fulton

After technical training school, I received an assignment to an airbase about five miles east of Tripoli, Libya. Today it is called Mitiga International Airport, but back in the early 1960s, it was called Wheelus Air Base, named after a young American officer killed in Iran during World War Two.

For most of my year and a half tour, I worked as a sentry dog handler, primarily with a six-year-old female Belgian Shepherd named Mady. Eventually, Mady decided she preferred me over spending the rest of her life inside a chain link dog run; we soon became the best of pals, although Mady could be hard-nosed now and again.

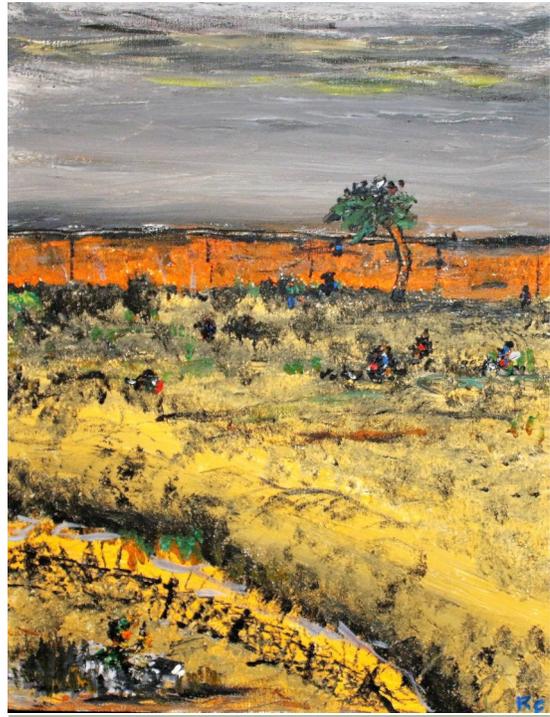
The dog section kenneled about 40 sentry dogs, mostly male German Shepherds. Half of the handlers were Libyan nationals who served in the Supernumerary Police, wore British military uniforms, and carried British revolvers. The rest of us were Americans.

Senior Master Sergeant Marcus Grant, who had been a major in an Infantry battalion in World War Two, led the K9 section. He had four NCOs who were American, a Libyan police sergeant, and several Libyan police corporals. He divided the dog section into three flights, each headed by a USAF staff sergeant, assisted by a Libyan NCO. The

Libyan dog handlers worked the older dogs to guard warehouses and storage facilities on or near the base. Although the American handlers worked sensitive posts on the base and overnight at the water wells and some warehouses off-base, eight handlers, on shifts, also patrolled the base bomb dump, located about ten miles to the southeast of Wheelus.

Inside a stone-walled facility, perhaps five square miles in size, the bomb dump sat amid Saharan scrub brush, ravines, sand, and dust. Asphalt roads criss-crossed the rectangle, linking underground concrete igloos secured by massive locks. Additionally, large, open revetments stored iron bombs used by fighter-bombers flying down from Europe to practice. The 60-mile-long El Uuitia Bombing Range, located in the nearby desert, provided 364 annual days of sunshine, perfect for practice. The revetments included 20mm cannon shells and heavy mortar shells on pallets.

Wheelus supported United Nations activities, particularly in central and southern Africa. The bomb dump still exists. To find it, go on the Google Map Earth website to the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea and run your finger straight south to the Libyan coastline. You



Artwork completed by Rick Fulton illustrating his vision of what happened that night in Libya.

will see a place named Tajoura. Located close by is a patch of dark-colored scrub and desert terrain. It is about the size of the nearby Mitiga Airport. That is the [former Wheelus bomb dump](#). Blow up the screen as large as possible and take a close look. You will see the stone fence around the place and many of the igloos' steel doors. The revetments, though, are gone. The terrain today is much the same as it was back then.

In 1964, security on swings and mids at the bomb dump included two dog teams in the front half of the rectan-

gle, two in the back half, and a regular Air Policeman. He manned a tower in the center of an area surrounded by a six-foot-tall entanglement of barbed concertina wire. Fresnel lighting perched on telephone poles edged the perimeter. A diesel-powered generator powered a radio. On top of a hut, a .30 caliber light machine gun, an M-1919A6, kept vigil in a rack, along with several boxes of belted ammo. There were also foxholes around the base of the tower.

Outside the wall, inhabitants of scattered Arab villages occasionally crept inside to see what they could steal.

Our dog section lost a couple of Libyan members who, walking solo on base in a warehouse area, were murdered. The dogs with them were knifed as well. When I first arrived, dog handlers at the water wells and the bomb dump posts carried the required .45 pistols or .38 special revolvers and 12 gauge pump shotguns loaded with buckshot. We had handheld radios and flashlights, but these seldom worked due to battery issues.

The section furnished GI parkas which we appreciated due to their large pockets, typically held our soda cans and toilet paper. Handlers wore Ridge-way Caps, but out on a post, the hats were frequently stored in the parka's sleeves and dumped near the dismount point. We posted in either a pickup or a commercial type of ton-and-a-half truck. We could only source water at one point at the bomb dump, behind the office building at the main gate. Ridge-ways were suitable containers to provide the dogs with a drink but bad for wear while walking post due to the hat's silhouette. Handlers disliked sharp shadows which displayed straight lines.

Generally, we stayed close to asphalt roads but about once a shift, we completed a team scout out into the brush, then searched along the base of the walls.

Each corner of the dump had wooden towers, complete with BAR tables. We used these on moonlit nights to watch for movements.

Snakes slithered in the brush; they, along with small deer, scorpions, palm-sized beetles, and scrub bush infested with ticks and inch-plus long thorns, impeded our way. We played games as we slinked along and stopped to hide deep in the shadows, but the games were real. A nose kept in the air meant "watch out." A person is there.

Turning the dog loose meant the same thing as shooting a weapon. Before unsnapping the leash, you first had to shout a loud verbal challenge. Sometimes we would just yell out a challenge to see if there was a reaction. Mostly there was not, and the dogs would look at us quizzically. But sometimes, we heard the sounds of running feet.

Our dog section, located close to the small arms range, allowed the range instructors to use our refrigerators. We received left-over ammunition for this privilege, which we kept in boxes wired inside our dog runs, along with our knives. Extra ammo and belt knives were no-nos, but what you took to walk post with was your own business.

I had about six weeks to go, in the spring of 1964, be-

fore rotating to a new assignment back in the states. My partner that dark night on the back part of the dump, Bill Dunlop, and I patrolled together. With no wind nor artificial light, I peered at my watch. The time was about 0200 hours that April morning and the dogs seemed fidgety, though not on any strict alert. Suddenly headlights of the pickup came at us fast. We stepped out into the road. The driver told us he had spotted a group of about fifty locals come across the wall, down into the front part of the dump. Calling in the sighting, he received orders to round up the dog teams to consolidate at the tower. The desk sergeant also ordered us to turn our dogs loose.

All five of us Air Police headed back to the tower. One dog handler went with the regular AP up the steps to the hut on top of the lookout. They broke out and set up the light machine gun. The remaining three of us each picked a hole to climb in, to watch from, and soon we all saw the moving shadows and heard yells of surprise and screams. I saw one dog nail a man on the thigh, and you could tell he was hurt.

We prepared to start shooting if they got into the perimeter wire, but they didn't. There was a lot of noise from the dog attacks and

screams for several minutes; then, it got silent. It was a long night.

We were relieved by a truckload of regular flight Air Police at dawn. Over the next several days, there were a lot of demonstrations in Tripoli and around the Wheelus Air Base.

I did this painting to communicate that long-ago night's emotions. It took me about two hours at the kennel that morning to clean Mady's coat of the blood on it. Other dogs were the same shape, all very proud of themselves that morning.

This history was about an event that happened at a time when the people of Libya had no hospitals. We were far out in the brush, on the fringe of the Sahara Desert. Some locals paid a significant price for swarming across the wall, which was well marked in Arabic with signs to stay out. They came at us, anyway. We obeyed orders received. As sentry dog handlers, we did our duty in the way expected.

But the memory remains.

--Rick Fulton

May 2021

Fred Roberts: Part 2—Kunar and Bagram

by Dixie Whitman

In Part 1 of Fred's story last month, we reported that he spent time with the 1st Brigade of the 101st on their final mission in 2011. Mike Boettcher produced a movie, **The Hornet's Nest**, using footage taken during that mission. In April 2011, the 25th's 3rd Brigade Combat Team replaced the 101st in Regional Command East, one of the most viperous areas of Afghanistan.

Roberts and Agbar packed for a 3-day mission. Agbar had proven himself to be a "push-button dog" when they met in Garmisch, Germany. Roberts breezed through, and they certified on their first attempt. Agbar balanced his talented nose and ability to work at a distance with a goofy personality. Initially, he'd been part of the Specialized Search Dog training until his finite attention span mixed with any flashy distraction (squirrel) caused him to wash out into the regular PEDD program.

The 3rd of the 25th, with the dog team attached, flew out on the Chinooks for an insertion, seeking a high-level Taliban leader. Their search area included the insurgent's hometown; intelligence had proven over time that when evil goes to ground, it usually seeks familiar surroundings. On that mission, multiple companies ferried into HLZs overlooking the valley.

The mountains of the Hindu Kush wane as they slide westward through the Afghani landscape. The Kunar River, birthed in higher altitudes, traces serpentine lengths of green ribbon in an otherwise arid high desert. Water, the sustainer of life, also draws dangers to those verdant valleys.

Army rucks held supplies to last 3-4 days. Carrying enough water for a Soldier and his 100-lb. dog can be problematic. Roberts looked like a Sherpa humping water up and down the mountains. The summer brought more heat and more risk; keeping hydrated was critical.

This mission took place in the belly of the beast. While they cleared villages, their sister company across the river moved lower, into the valley and the guts of the Taliban operation. There, they drew fire from the enemy who remained hidden in the mountainsides' shadows in every direction. The Taliban weapons killed American and Afghani soldiers without discrimination.

The urgent need for the team to move quickly to support the 25th's fellow soldiers pinned down in the valley by Taliban firepower required three days of pushing themselves. Sadly, during that time, six Americans and multiple Afghans died. The wailing from fellow Muslim ANA soldiers told their anguish at the loss of their



Watercolor from photo of Fred Roberts and his partner, Agbar, during Operation Strong Eagle III, Kunar Province, Afghanistan, 2011.



The shadow box, holding Agbar's photo, flag and awards.

brothers and the torment of not being able to bury their fallen immediately as their religious customs required.

When Roberts returned from the mission late at night, he found that the Base Development Board had confis-

cated their only K9 vehicle, a covered truck that Mortuary Affairs needed to transport bodies. Fred got on the phone early the next morning and started making calls. He didn't like being without a vehicle. Agbar went outside into the fenced

yard around 9:30 with shade and water while Fred continued to make phone calls. After a half-hour with no results, he placed the phone back down and checked on Agbar, who lay by the fence and didn't respond appropriately. Upon closer inspection, Fred checked on him further and realized his partner was experiencing a heat injury. Without a vehicle, he and another handler threw ice packs on Agbar and immediately inserted an IV. Then, they called the MP for transport. Fred did chest compressions on Agbar, 120 beats per minute, in the back of the vehicle as the MPs flew across the compound. When the vet staff took over, they brought Agbar back, momentarily, but he ultimately slipped away. The Army rolled Agbar's service into the larger memorial for the Soldiers. A video exists, but Fred hasn't been able to watch it.

Within four months of his return, he received a young, dark sable German shepherd dog, Turbo. Turbo acted like a massive puppy with energy for days. His records hinted that he could be a bit of a spaz, capable but consistent only when he cared. He could find the slightest traces of one odor and miss a bucket full of another. He just didn't always bother. They did certify as a team and suddenly were tasked with another

deployment. Someone else had failed certification, and Fred ended up picking it up. At Bagram, the Program Manager noted the inconsistencies in Turbo's alerts and, while unwilling to send them out into the field, felt they could do security sweeps on base. Six months into the deployment, Fred and Turbo planned to head home early due to a family health issue. Fred fed Turbo and put him in his kennel while he coordinated his flights and finished wrapping up a college class.

"Loose dog." came the cry.

Either a contractor dog or a TEDD dog, Fred doesn't recall which, got out of his enclosure to run fences with the MWDs. Turbo got overstimulated and ran the fence line, turning and racing back in the opposite direction, mirroring the dog on the other side. Even though he'd had gastropexy surgery, his mesenteric root (small intestines) rotated, choking the blood supply and quickly causing the involved tissues irreparable damage. The vet, already on a chopper on the flight line, required time to get back to the clinic and couldn't save Turbo.

That type of injury is rare, and having to make a second call back to the home kennel to explain his dog wouldn't return from deployment with him proved exceedingly difficult for everyone.



**Above: Turbo on a mission in Colmar, France.
Below: Turbo and Fred on Bagram.
Photos provided by Fred Roberts.**



Fred keeps the memories of both partners alive. Their impact on him, especially with Agbar, is endless. If Fred could talk to Agbar, he'd pull the photos of his

children from his wallet to show Agbar and tell him, "I'm here for them because of you."

"Thank you."

Semper Fi Event and Photos

by Dixie Whitman

A favorite local watering hole for several MWD Heritage Museum volunteers, Semper Fi Bar and Grille in Woodstock, GA, created one additional piece to our event-saturated weekend. On Monday evening, May 16th, Semper Fi flung open its doors to a local Military Working Dog Heritage Museum fundraiser.

Part museum and part restaurant, Semper Fi is owned and managed by a retired Marine Master Sergeant and his wife. The walls, crammed full of memorabilia, beckon people with a penchant for military tales.

In addition to the history, the food is out-of-this-world tasty. For our event, smells of Italian pasta and chicken wafted from casserole pans on the steam tables, but this grille is also renowned for its burgers and Reuben sandwiches.

As always, K9 is a small circle, but we are grateful for the fantastic support of so many as the museum continues on the journey to document, preserve, and exhibit the story of America's Military Working Dog Teams.



Above: Military Working Dog Heritage Museum Team Members chat with Semper Fi owner. Left to right: Albert Johnson, Michael Hurder, Chris Willingham, Ralph Roeger, and John Homa.
Photo: Courtesy of Rob Schnell



Above and below: Museum supporters gathered to eat, drink, and be merry.
Photos: Courtesy of Rob Schnell



Above: Supporters of Military Working Dog Heritage Museum came to offer financial support at our Semper Fi Bar and Grille Fundraiser.

Photo: Courtesy of Rob Schnell

The Wounded Warrior Dogs Project: Giving Form To Honor And Sacrifice

A review by David Adams

While making one of my periodic virtual visits to the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in January 2020, a photo on the first page of the website caught my eye. The image of a young woman and her three children standing by a sculpture of a German Shepherd and its artist, James Mellick. I clicked on the photo, and it took me to the story of a traveling exhibit titled The Wounded Warrior Dogs Project. The exhibition included ten sculptured canines. In the middle of the presentation was a flag-draped box titled "Under the Flag," symbolizing the ultimate sacrifice paid by a military working dog. The display placed the dogs in a circle around a flag-draped box as sentinels.

As I looked at the photos, a yellow lab with a deflated football in its mouth caught my attention. 'That has to be Cooper,' I thought, the Explosive Detection Dog who died along with his handler, Kory Wiens, in an IED explosion. I met Kory at his dog class's graduation cookout at Lackland AFB. I enjoyed talking to him about the mission training. I told him I would hate to lose my dog to an IED. At least during Vietnam, if we lost a dog, it had gone

down fighting. He told me he would hate to lose his dog but could take consolation because he died saving lives in his unit. Ten months later, I got word of the first K9 team (both handler and dog) killed in action since Vietnam. It was Kory and Cooper, killed by an IED in Iraq. The news left a hollow spot in me, and his words echoed as prophetic. I had to see this exhibit in person.

James Mellick, an award-winning sculpture artist, took an interest in Military Working Dogs (MWD) when seeing photos of soldiers with Belgian Malinois holstered to their sides. Dogs rappelling down cliffs and parachuting from aircraft intrigued him. He began sculpting his first Belgian Malinois in January 2015 in a project he titled; The Wounded Warrior Dogs Project - "Giving Form to Honor and Sacrifice." It grew to eight allegorical sculptures reflecting the sacrifices made by handler and dog that make up a K9 team serving our nation.

Mellick made his first creation with Dog #1 representing Iraq and Dog #2 Afghanistan. Dog #3, titled "Not Forgotten," was a German shepherd representing Vietnam and the 4,000 dogs left behind in South-



James Mellick poses with his most recent masterpiece, Nemo A534, inside the Nemo Memorial at Lackland AFB.

Photo: Courtesy of Col. John Probst (Ret.)



Above: "Not Forgotten," a tribute to the over 4,000 dogs which served in the Vietnam War.

Photo courtesy of David Adams

east Asia. Dog #4, "Sniffer," a bomb detection dog and a departure from the traditional Malinois and German shepherd, was a chocolate lab. Dog#5, named "The Way Back," is a large but gaunt German shepherd returning from patrol, projecting the fatigue and hell of war. Dog #6, titled "Blessing and Mercy," paid honor to World War II veterans. It is a Doberman Pinscher. Sculpture #7, "Under the Flag." The last dog of the series, #8, is "Flashback." It is a Doberman projecting the devastation of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Viewing the exhibit's photos, I found James Mellick's medium, wood, exciting and different from the memorials I had seen sculptured in stone or metal. Entering the museum's Kettering Hall and seeing the exhibit, my memories of serving with my dogs ignited as no other sculptured memorial had previously done. The organic nature of the wood medium projects warmth and life. As the memories of our dogs keep them very much alive in us, the grain of the wood forever brings life to the sculptures.

The prosthesis incorporated into sculptures I had seen in the photos came alive with meaning, seeing

them in person. It was Mr. Mellick's "Giving Form to Honor and Sacrifice." This body of work is not just a story about the dogs but also the handlers. The prosthesis projected wounds of their handlers. Serving side by side, what happens to one happens to the other.

The project drew him closer to the military working dog world, past and present. He moved from allegory sculptures to actual dogs whose stories needed telling. "K9 War Stories" became the next series. An artistic license is necessary to create an allegory, but sculpting a dog that lived requires much greater research and attention to detail to pay it tribute properly.

Each sculpture tells a story. Dogs with white doves on their backs represent K9 teams who paid the ultimate price. Those with black doves symbolize the non-physical wounds of war. The combat wound that is not recognized with a Purple Heart but is as devastating as any physical wound, and often more so, is PTSD. It is a wound that sinks its dark tentacles into both handler and dog. It robs the veteran's post-service life of peace and joy and injures families and loved ones, as well. For



Above: The family of TSgt David Simpson joins artist, David Mellick, for a portrait with Robbie L096.

U.S. Air Force photo by Ken LaRock.



Above: On the left is Cooper holding his forever-deflated football. Cooper was KIA in Iraq by an IED. Beside him is his "girlfriend" Lucca K458 who was later severely injured in an IED blast and lost her front left leg.

Photo courtesy of David Adams.

this, Mr. Mellick created "Flashback."

For this dog, he sculpted a Doberman using a light maple. Still, to his surprise, the dog emerged with a light and dark contrast dividing the head. This unexpected outcome, caused by the infusion of fungus from beetles during the tree's life, became the perfect metaphor for dark trauma that invades and robs veterans' peace. He placed both the black dove and the white dove for the loss of life through suicide, which is often the end stage of the ticking time bomb of PTSD.

One of the stories that inspired Flashback was that of TSgt. David Simpson. After separation from the Air Force, he was able to adopt his dog Robson L096 when "Robbie's" retirement came up in 2014. Sadly, the unrelenting effects of PTSD and severe pain from Lyme Disease contracted during deployment resulted in David taking his own life. The photo that drew me to the exhibit was that of his wife, Erin Simpson, an Air Force veteran, their three children, and Mr. Mellick with his sculpture of Robbie.

As I worked my way around the circular display, I smiled at Lucca K458 with her flopped ear. It reminded me of my dog Rex

7A98 and his drooped ear following the removal of a hematoma. Looking at Cooper K154 with his squashed football, I remembered Kory's young face and smile and pondered the terrible loss. The two together during deployment, now together "Across the Rainbow Bridge," as Mr. Mellick titled the pair.

Then I came to "Not Forgotten," representing my time at the end of the leash. The German shepherd of Vietnam brought back so many memories. After 50-plus years, the ones that put a smile on your face are the ones that come forward. The PoW/MIA logo pays tribute to those who never came home, including the dogs that served in Vietnam and Thailand.

The most dramatic sculpture was that of the German shepherd Jajo R620. An IED had hit both Jajo and his handler Patrick Tutko. In what must be the most challenging sculpture of the series, the dog is captured as he propels backward, receiving the full blast of the IED. His handler's helmet is bouncing off his left front paw. Shrapnel embedded in his legs and torso portrays the actual occurrence that severely wounded both dog and handler. Studying Jajo, I could sense the force of the blast.



Above: James Mellick's sculpture of Jajo R620.

Photo: Courtesy of James Mellick

James Mellick's most recent K9 War Stories dog, Nemo A534, was unveiled at the Vietnam Dog Handlers Association's 2022 in San Antonio, TX. Nemo became a K-9 icon of the Vietnam era when on December 4, 1966, he thwarted an attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base. During this action, he saved the life of his handler, Airman Robert A. Throneburg.

Mr. Mellick combined his talent and compassion for the MWD teams to share our stories with the public and provided those who have served with touching moments united with our dogs again.

Chasing Tomorrow's Nightmares

by O.G. Diaz

We have an interview set with Mr. Diaz later this summer to discuss his writing and role as a member of an elite Combat Tracker Team during the Vietnam era. But we wanted to bring you an excerpt of his latest work, "Chasing Tomorrow's Nightmares."

The writing is rich with vivid images, and while "fictional," it is based on actual tracking missions, making you feel you are there.

We wanted to share—a sort of 'eat dessert first' option. Enjoy!

Prince manages to pick up on a scent a short time afterward. He found the spoor, during a deep sweep of the area, on what turned out to be an old, overgrown path, leading into the jungle interior. It is eight thirty in the morning when he picks up the smell, and visual signs confirm its enemy tracks. In no time, we are fast on the move, brushing through the confined space of a forgotten footpath.

Though it is not even mid-morning, the heat and humidity retained by the thick vegetation is stifling. No breeze worms through the narrow, overgrown

trail to offer any relief from the oppressive conditions. By nine thirty, my jungle fatigue jacket is drenched with sweat, and perspiration burns at my eyes. At times, it feels as if I am swimming in a hot tub, trying to breathe while underwater, and the worst of the oppressive heat is yet to come. I cannot recall ever encountering such a horrid combination of temperature and humidity at home in Louisiana, although the foul conditions appear to have no effect on our dog's well-trained nose.

The path widens a kilometer from where we started. It runs south, parallel to foothills of tree covered highlands to our far right. Prince sweeps either side of the trail with his nose, but keeps a steadfast pace forward. The path's heading along flat ground allows Prince speedy movement, but two to three hours later, he pants, and his tongue hangs to one side.

We covered several kilometers, trying to catch up to an enemy with a fourteen-hour head start. Unfortunately, canines do not have the level of stamina that nineteen-year-old human males have, and a dog's panting can alert



"The path widens a kilometer from where we started. It runs south, parallel to foothills of tree covered highlands to our far right. Prince sweeps either side of the trail with his nose, but keeps a steadfast pace forward."

the enemy to our presence.

Brandon Whitman moves to the front of the formation and takes over tracking. The visual tracker hurries up the jungle path, moving from one sign post carelessly left by the NVA to others further up the trail. Talmadge follows close behind to cover him from danger. A partial sandal print here, a broken sprig there, has Whitman moving as if he is in a race to gather eggs at an Easter egg hunt, rather than in pursuit of a dangerous, armed quarry. Talmadge occasionally moves forward to tug at

his web gear to slow him, if only for a minute or two.

It is fascinating to see the tracking process at work. We all trained to perform this very task, but it is something totally different to witness a tracking team in action. Like young Grim Reapers, the process has us quickly descending upon unsuspecting victims to harvest their lives.

Tracker School taught us all to see and discern things the mind of others tend to overlook as superfluous. We learned to see everything, even the most mundane of details, things necessary to stay on track or vital to sur-

vival. It also taught us to move quickly, silently and undetected through all sorts of terrain and water features. What they failed to teach, is how to conquer one's terror while on the chase. Nevertheless, I marvel at a process that brings us closer, and closer to someone's death.

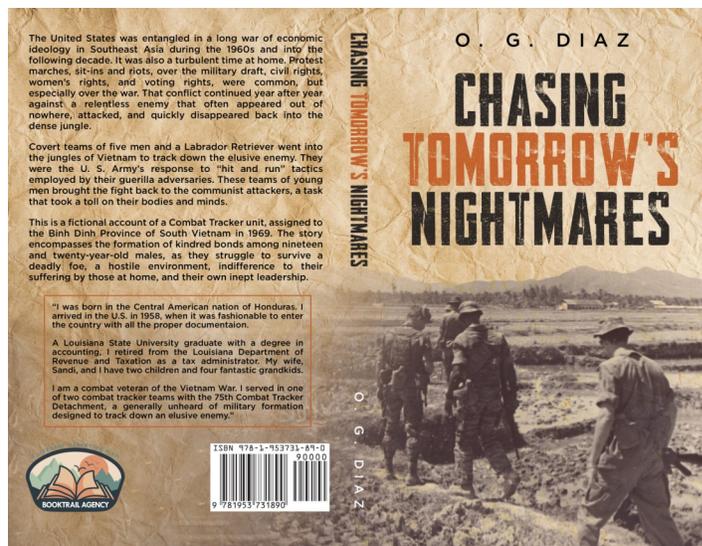
We move fast for hours, in silence, like apparitions in the wind, far too vigilant with the jungle surroundings to dwell into fears or to continue contemplating the oppressive heat and humidity. Eleven to thirteen NVA, hauling five to six wounded, left clear signs that a blind lieutenant can follow. They appear to have no idea that anyone is in pursuit.

Every kilometer or so, trampled vegetation and pools of dry blood show where the enemy rested and cared for their injured. Those rest stops serve as reminders of yesterday's confrontation at the beach, though we are assured that this time, a full infantry platoon will spare our involvement in any killing. After locating each of those pit stops, we progress cautiously, at least the first quarter of a kilometer, before Whitman resumes a quick pace to the NVA's next stop.

Our team leader, Newsom, finally calls a halt. It is past one in the afternoon. We have spent some five frenzied hours trying to catch up with a small band of slow moving NVA. The stop is a welcome breather from our constant diligence to safety, as much as for our bodies to recover from exertion.

Newsom points to coordinates on a map to relay our location to lieutenant Harbor. I finish woofing down a small can of fruit cocktail and make the call. The lieutenant voices reservations with the great distance covered and our speed of travel. They lag far to our rear and have tired. I softly inform the platoon leader that we are closing with the quarry. Broken vegetation on the trail has wet sap, and the last NVA pit stop had blood, still moist to touch. The platoon leader comprehends, and says he and his men will make up the distance.

Ten minutes later, Whitman has us back on the chase. Vigilance is at its height. Talmadge presses closer to Whitman as a constant reminder to the enemies' nearness and to better regulate the visual tracker's speed. The pair



The front and back covers of Oscar Diaz' newest book, "Chasing Tomorrow's Nightmares." The book is available at local booksellers and online.

approach every sharp turn of the trail as if expecting to see someone around that bend. We all scan through the thick vegetation and far up the trail, looking deep into the surrounding foliage for anomalies, or the slightest movement, just anything appearing out of kilter. After all, advantage for survival goes to the party that first detects the other.

I find myself far more anxious as we close with the dozen plus men ahead of us. At times, I find that I am holding my breath and have to make a conscious

decision to release the spent air and breathe. When I do, it is a deep intake of muggy air, laden with mildew of rotting vegetation. Those deep breaths lessen my anxiety for only seconds, precious seconds nevertheless.

My body is also tense. All muscles are wound tight, ready to launch me into the safety of the shrubbery at the outbreak of gunfire; all typical reactions to what you would expect of someone lacking mettle.



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Important dates with Trooper and Scout

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

July 17, 2023 – 25th Anniversary Dedication of the War Dog Memorial at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville



Historic Pooch Pic of the Month



Left: From posh to battlefield. During World War I, Americans donated pet dogs from various breeds to serve in France as Red Cross Mercy Dogs or Ambulance Dogs. Mrs. and Mr. Darling of San Francisco showcase several dogs of their breeding heading into Red Cross training. July 17, 1918.

**Photo by Charles Freinberg, San Francisco Bulletin
Source: National Archives**