



# The Paw Print

The Voice of the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum

& Handler Center



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## Special points of interest:

- A Profile of a Camp Pendleton Marine.
- "Loose dog." A Combat Tracker's encounter with a loose Scout Dog at LZ English.

## Inside this issue:

From the President's Desk	2
Messenger of the Marines	3
Veterans' Reunion—Indiana	6
Parasite Prevention	8
Canine Encounter	9
Marine Dogs and Handlers in History	11
Ethan Read: Coming Home	12

## Messenger of the Marines



Caesar von Steuben made the March 1945 cover of *Boy's Life*. Members of the 1st Marine War Dog Platoon wore the patch from the Marine Raiders. Learn more about this magnificent Marine K9, Caesar, in our November issue celebrating Marine K9s and handlers.

Both artifacts courtesy of the Eric Queen Collection.

"Report." That command from PFC Rufus Mayo to Caesar, his Messenger Dog, came nine times on their second day on Bougainville. With each order, Caesar bolted towards his other handler, PFC John Kleeman, ignoring the chaos and full-on death rattle of war, delivering the critical communications tucked in his collar.

Caesar's innate skills hinted at a great start in life, a puppyhood robust with games,

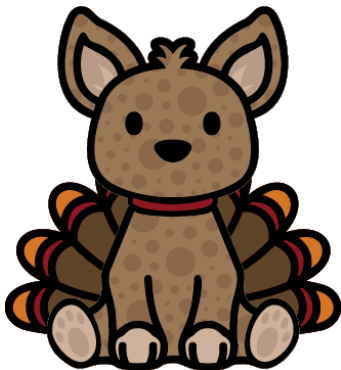
training, and love. Three brothers from the Bronx scouted nearby kennels for weeks, seeking the perfect German shepherd puppy. One by one, they rejected all whelps except one. Finally, the boys plunked down their combined hard-scrabble savings of \$60 - today's equivalent of \$1050. They purchased Caesar von Steuben, a precocious nine-week-old GSD destined for greatness.

They taught the pup to carry parcels home to their mother using the command, "Go to Mom." Caesar's perseverance in completing these trips unimpeded translated well to military life when he later followed all three boys into service.

Another lad, an Alabamian from 1000 miles distance and a universe culturally away, benefitted from the foundation laid by the three Glazer brothers.



President, Albert Johnson



## From the President's Desk

Hello everyone!

It's hard to believe it's November already! In September, John Homa, Andy Hauser, and I enjoyed the incredible opportunity to spend time with thousands of veterans at the Howard County All Veterans Reunion. In addition, we got to meet and chat with several Vietnam-Era Dog Handlers. You can read more about this fantastic experience in an article further into this edition.

For Marines, November presents an opportunity to celebrate the birth of the Marine Corps on 10 November 1775. Marines' heroic wartime acts weave themselves throughout our history: Belleau Wood, Guadalcanal, Inchon, Khe Sanh, and Fallujah, among many others. Those Marines would tell you that they did what they did to protect their brothers and sisters to their right and their left. However, these actions are why I believe the richest part of the Marine Corps history is the camaraderie, the Esprit De Corps, and the brotherhood. Each Marine cares for the man or woman next to him because they are the MVPs during these challenging times. Well,

enough about the Marine Corps, as I'm getting mushy here.

The following day, 11 November, we'll be celebrating Veterans Day, a holiday when the country shows appreciation for all veterans, past and present—honoring the service of all who wore the uniform. I feel incredibly blessed to have been a K9 handler because, as a K9 handler, it does not matter in what branch you served; the K9 field is a family. Now it may be a family who pokes fun at each other. Still, if someone outside the K9 family commented about a handler of another branch, you always defended that handler because they are your brother or sister, and that's what you do as a family. So, to all veterans, I thank you for your service; enjoy YOUR day and call a friend you served with to wish them a Happy Veterans Day. But remember, every day is a good day to reach out to a comrade.

1 November 1943, began the Invasion of Bougainville. We present an article about one of the critical Marine dogs from that campaign, Messenger Dog Caesar. Dixie writes about

Caesar's tremendous loyalty to his two handlers. His extraordinary drive ensured the vital messages he carried got where they were supposed to, even through hails of gunfire on the battlefield. I will not spoil the story for you. You will have to read it yourself; I assure you, it's well worth it.

But know that Bougainville, as most Pacific Islands, proved hostile terrain. Our Air Force Coordinator, David Adams, gave us the following memory: "I will never forget Ken Burns' series, The War, and his segment on Bougainville. Just the thought of moving around in that place would give me the creeps. It was full of inlet waterways, swamps, and can't-see-your-hand-in-front-of-you jungle. One Marine they interviewed said, 'If there is a Hell, it looks just like Bougainville.'" Hell seems just where Marines like to fight!

In closing: Happy Birthday, Marines! Happy Veterans Day! And the happiest of Happy Thanksgivings to you all. Remember,

K9 leads the way!

*Albert Johnson*



## Messenger of the Marines: Caesar von Steuben

by Dixie Whitman

Dangling in a sling mid-way between the deck of the USS George Clymer and the Higgins boat below, Messenger Dog Caesar von Steuben couldn't have known that this time was for real. Previous training with the 2nd Raider Regiment (Provisional) had exposed Caesar and the other 23 dogs from the First Marine War Dog Platoon to amphibious landing procedures. It had all been fun and games until Bougainville. With the sea below him, Caesar's four feet finally found purchase when he touched down inside the landing boat.

As part of the third wave of boats to charge through the waters of Empress Augusta Bay towards the island of Bougainville, nobody knew for sure what lay ahead. In fact, the maps and intelligence of the island proved dubious. While American submarines and recon planes had provided some updates, most navigation maps remained unchanged from the 1890s. In his opus on the US Naval history of WWII, Samuel Morison shares the following quote: *"near the end of the approach, when the navigating officer of a transport was asked by the captain for his ship's position, he replied, 'About three miles inland, sir!'"*

Bougainville, the largest of the Solomon Islands, with a thick jungle canopy draped

over its mountain spine, would become the first Pacific Battle in which the Marines used K9s. Caesar and his devoted handlers, PFC Rufus G. Mayo and PFC John Kleeman, served as a three-point messenger team. They were among the first called upon in the effort to rid the scrappy Pacific islands of the slippery enemy hidden within.

As a pup, Caesar frolicked as a spoiled, much-loved pet with the three Glazer brothers. The boys trained him to perform the commands: come, sit, down, and stay. He excelled, especially at the "go to Mom" command, and with the utmost trust, often carried a steak wrapped in butcher paper home to Mrs. Glazer from the meat market.

Caesar soon followed as his boys volunteered, one by one, for the military. He ended up at one of the Quartermaster Corps' Dog Training Centers in Fort Robinson, Nebraska, a massive training facility on the great plains that housed thousands of draft animals and hundreds of dogs. With their new dog training facility established at Camp Lejeune, the USMC visited Fort Robinson, scooped up several Army dogs, including Caesar, and transitioned them into USMC Devil Dogs.

At Camp Lejeune, multiple instructional courses took place over two and a half



Above: Marines dog handlers disembark from the attack transport, USS George Clymer, onto a Higgins boat for the Bougainville landing. On the right of the men descending, a Doberman member of the First Marine War Dog Platoon makes his solo descent. A handler waits at the bottom with another dog. Photo: National Archives.



Above on Bougainville: (L to R) Pvt. Carl Robertson, Malden, Mass.; Pfc. Nick Barack, Masontown, PA.; Pfc. Homer J. Finley, Jr., Elmira, N.Y.; Pvt. Marvin R. Troup, St. Louis; Pfc. Robert Forsyth, Stamford, Conn.; and Pfc. Rufus G. Mayo, Montgomery, Ala. The dogs are Jack (a Doberman), Jack (a German shepherd), Otto, and Caesar. Photo: National Archives.

months. The handlers learned how to train, care for, and utilize their war dogs. In addition to basic commands, the K9s learned to take cover, crawl, jump, and drop. Each animal drew

an assignment based on its skills and personality. With a history of working with more than one handler at a time and carrying packages back home to mom, Caesar's skill set matched the needs of a

Messenger Dog on all counts.

The role of messenger required an athletic dog with tremendous intelligence and a deep drive to please its masters. In addition, the Messenger Dog required no aggressive tendencies and should not “go looking for trouble.” In short, a Messenger Dog worked hard for the love and affection of only two men and proved willing and able to courier messages between them through gunfire, rugged terrain, and bodies of water.

After two weeks of bonding with his handlers: Mayo and Kleeman, Caesar began Messenger Dog training. The two handlers stood about twenty feet apart and called Caesar back and forth between them. Kneeling next to the dog, the first handler would attach the messenger collar to Caesar while sitting at heel position, signaling the start of work. Then he directed the dog to “Report,” accompanied by an additional visual cue - an extended arm. In the beginning, the second handler would issue the command “Come” and slap his leg or whatever actions would convince Caesar to leave the first handler and come to him. Once Caesar arrived at his second handler, also kneeling, the handler would remove the working collar and praise Caesar exuberantly.

“Good boy, Caesar!”

The distances between the men increased beyond a mile, and the terrain became more complex. Nevertheless, nothing prevented Caesar from locating his other handler. Then, the training ended. The dogs and the handlers from the First Marine War Dog Platoon traveled west to Camp Pendleton via rail, and a few weeks later, mooring lines untied, they sailed for the South Pacific.

On November 1, 1943, the First Marine War Dog Platoon climbed aboard a landing craft and made its way for the Bougainville beach invasion. If the Allies succeeded at capturing Bougainville, they could hobble the Japanese Air Force and isolate the airstrip at Rabaul on the Island of New Britain.

After wading ashore, all the Marines sprinted for the relative safety of the tree line. Messenger Dog Caesar, along with Scout Dog Andy, were ordered to accompany M Company on the initial foray of the Raider Regiment into the jungle - the first Marine dogs in combat in the Pacific.

M Company, following Mission Trail, quickly disappeared into the deep, green jungle to secure that path. Unfortunately, the weak walkie-talkie signals, unable to penetrate the heavy vegetation, could not reach the command post. Enter the Messenger Dog. When Rufus Mayo gave the com-



Above and below: Marine Raiders fashioned a hammock out of the bush and lashed a blanket in between to carry a wounded Caesar back to the vet clinic. Below: A wounded Caesar rests. Click [Here](#) for a video taken of Rufus Mayo and Caesar at this time. Both photos and video are from the National Archives.



Above: On Bougainville, PFC John Kleeman and unidentified Vet Tech, work on Messenger Dog Caesar after his injury. Photo: National Archives



mand “report,” along with the hand signal, Caesar sped back to PFC Kleeman. He arrived with a message tucked inside his waterproof collar. Kleeman retrieved it and sent Caesar back.

Late in the afternoon, the Marines of M Company stopped to bivouac for the night. The Raiders now wanted to sleep in the foxholes with the dogs. During that first day, the dogs had already proven their worth. Overnight, Caesar guarded his fellow Marines with the protective instinct inherent in the DNA of a German shepherd. He woke Mayo when a grenade landed in their foxhole. With his instinct already heightened, Mayo immediately tossed the grenade out. In the morning, members of M Company found eight Japanese infiltrators dead from the grenade’s explosion.

On the second day, Caesar made nine messenger runs. Japanese snipers opened fire on him. As bullets whizzed past, the swift Messenger Dog completed his runs back and forth between Mayo and Kleeman, deliriously happy to find a friend at the end of each run. Day Two had been a stellar success for the Messenger Dog Team.

Before dawn on the third day, the protective Caesar jumped from his foxhole, growling at two Japanese headed towards a sleeping Mayo. Shaking awake, Mayo

called him back, but it was too late. As he turned back towards the foxhole, the Japanese sprayed gunfire at the K9 and hit the mark three times. All Marines of M Company vaulted from their sleep into an intense firefight, killing the enemy. But during the confusion and gunfire, Caesar had vanished.

After the battle, with his partner missing, Mayo’s emotions became a tsunami. He located a blood trail that traced into the woods. Following it, he found Caesar collapsed, barely conscious, on his way back to John Kleeman. The Raiders immediately fashioned a hammock-type stretcher to carry their friend to the aid station, where a veterinarian removed two of the three bullets that pierced the heroic K9 earlier in the morning. The vet advised that the third bullet had lodged too close to the heart for retrieval. His assessment that Caesar might pull through proved prophetic. Within three weeks, Caesar returned to active duty. The trio continued moving with the Marines to Guam and Okinawa, leap-frogging across the Pacific islands.

On Okinawa, Caesar took his last breath. During a battle there, he received a mortal wound. Caesar’s death, often listed as KIA, may have resulted from “friendly fire” from one of



**Above: Caesar’s other handler, John Kleeman, inserts a message into the collar. Notice the healed wound on Caesar’s shoulder and hip. He returned to duty three weeks following his injuries on Bougainville. Photo: National Archives**

the other Marines in the unit. Caesar von Stuben, a dog that seemed invincible, was suddenly gone.

Mayo had written to his parents, telling them how much Caesar meant to him. As noted in an article by Rebecca Frankel for National Geographic, Mayo posted a letter to his family that included the note— *“I would not give Caesar up for a general’s commission.”*<sup>1</sup>

In his youth, Caesar had belonged to three loving young boys, and now, in a land far removed from the Bronx, NY, he unconditionally loved and served two more young men: Mayo and Kleeman. When Caesar died, a light extinguished.

John Kleeman returned home, married, and lived a long life.

Rufus Gidion Mayo, who answered his country’s call after the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor, left south Alabama as a young man who loved hunting with his dogs. When he returned home, a fierce struggle with battle fatigue accompanied him.

On May 11, 1960, Rufus Mayo, an out-of-work veteran, was found dead in the back seat of his car after a night of heavy drinking with a Houston, Tex. buddy. Unfortunately, the death of this WWII hero, recorded as acute alcoholism, came much, much too early.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/article/140517-dogs-war-canines-soldiers-troops-marine-military-pacific-japan>

## The Howard County All Veterans Reunion

by Albert Johnson



Above left to right: John Homa, Tony Morris, Mike Summer, John Zolonda, and Ron Martin.

Walking past our War dog display, a little blonde girl unexpectedly erupted into tears. Her tiny chest shuddered with uncontrollable sobs. Then, with her face pressed against her mother's side and her lip quivering, she whispered, "Why did they bring a dead dog?"

Her mother and I quickly assured her that the dog lying on its side, a first aid dummy, provided a training tool for dog handlers. I further shared that we used it to learn hands-on CPR and first aid to keep our dogs alive if something happens and they can't get immediate medical help. With her tears slowing, she told me it seemed scary to look at when she first saw it, but she understood how important it was to keep real dogs safe. She left our booth with an understanding, a bracelet, a poster, and a smile on her face. Did we bribe her to leave happy? You bet. Crises averted.

But teaching young children the importance of using MWDs to save lives remains a critical part of our mission.

September 12-17th, the museum set up a booth at the Howard County All Veteran's reunion ten miles outside Kokomo, Indiana. What a brilliant week!

Everyone welcomed us with open arms as if they had known us their entire lives. We drove past miles of farmland to get to the event location. The Healing Grounds, surrounded by fields of corn, comprise 36 acres of the campground, with only a few permanent structures. From the moment we drove onto the property, the world's weight seemed to lift from our shoulders. Seeing all the unit flags on campers, military vehicles, and a garrison flag hanging in front of the Healing Grounds adjacent to the stage, provided the welcome party any veteran needs to feel at home.

John Homa told me, "There is the comfort of belonging. When you pass another attendee and greet each other, you know that you both understand what the other has been through."

Right off the bat, I knew we would have a great week because our booth space faced across the aisle from the US War Dogs Chapter 3 booth, run by John Meeks and his incredible cohort, Terri Vaughn. Terri introduced us to several Vietnam dog handlers and other super supportive vendors who were curious about our cause. We shared our mission with everyone who walked through the striped vendor tent full of fantastic Veteran organizations and cool swag to buy. A church group handed out popcorn (which saved us from leaving to eat during busy crowd times).

Next to our booth, a fantastic veteran couple, Charles and Cathy, with C&C LLC,

sold incredible corn hole boards. They also offered wall hangers, games, and beautiful lamps made from PVC pipe. In addition, they donated two lights with our museum logo for us to auction off at a later date.

We had great conversations with Timothy Michael Potter, an Air Force dog handler in the first Patrol Dog Class. Michael Stanton, an Army Scout Dog handler in Vietnam, stopped by with his beautiful, recently retired Air Force MWD, Dzina X337. We met Vietnam Veteran Air Force dog handler Kevin Goze, Army Vietnam dog handlers Allen Mathews and Rick Hong, along with a total of ten other Vietnam veteran dog handlers.

We already have a glorious week on the schedule for next year. And we look forward to reuniting with all our newfound friends, including a soft-hearted little blonde girl with a love of Military Working Dogs.





### Howard County All Veterans Reunion.

Top row—Left: John Homa, Army Sentry Dog Handler, Mike Stanton, his retired dog, Dzina Z337, and Albert Johnson. Right: John and Albert pose with USAF handler, Keven Goze. Middle row—Left: Future dog handlers listen to Albert Johnson talk about the best job in the military. Right: USAF handler Michael Potter poses with Albert Johnson. Bottom row—Left: Vietnam Scout Dog handler John Senac poses with Albert Johnson. Right: Dog handlers at the 40th Anniversary of the Kokomo Vietnam Veterans Reunion (now the Howard County All Veterans Reunion.)





## Parasite Prevention—Dipping

By David Adams

Tropical climates bring warm, balmy air with lush green landscapes and beautiful blue seas to mind. Thoughts of parasites rarely enter that idyllic mental image. Those year-round hot and humid climates are ideal for their propagation. Southeast Asia has no shortages in varieties and numbers: ticks, mites, fleas, mosquitoes, screwworms, tapeworms, hookworms, and so on. The defense of choice for our dogs during the Vietnam era was periodic dipping that ranged from once to twice a month, depending on local conditions.

The effectiveness of dipping was born out for me when I had surgery requiring me to lie up for several weeks. As much as I wanted to go and at least exercise and groom Rex, I was in no condition to safely handle a German shepherd sentry dog with an alpha attitude. Consequently, he missed his monthly dipping. When I had medical clearance to return to duty, he was in dire need of grooming. It ended up in a tick removal session. I lost count at 135, and he never left his run.

I had never had to dip a dog before my assignment to Korat RTAFB, Thailand,

so my first session was educational. First, we filled the large dip tank with water and enough Malathion to achieve a 5% solution. Next, moving along in an assembly line process, we put a dab of salve at the bottom edge of the eyes. Then, as the dog blinked, we rubbed the lids to ensure a complete distribution over the eyes.

Anyone who has ever done it knows one way to irritate even the gentlest dogs is to blow into their ears. After spraying screwworm balm from an aerosol can directly into the ears of a German shepherd, you now have one extremely irritated dog. That annoyance did not improve the next stage of the process.

Lifting Rex and setting him into the tank with the solution mid-way up his body, I started to slosh solution over him like bathing him. His ears flattened; you could tell he was disgruntled. The guy next to me gave me advice: *"Naw, that doesn't get it done, just reach under and pull his legs out from under him."*

Down he went, rolled, and wholly submerged under the solution and then back up again. Disgruntled does not come close to describing his attitude when he came back up. Then, I



Above and below: Dipping dogs at Korat RTAFB. Above teams line up for their turn in the tank. Below, a muzzled dog requests a reprieve.

Photos courtesy of : John Homa



lifted him out and took him for a trot around the training grounds as he shook, ran, shook, and snorted.

*'Ah, think I will just leave the muzzle on for a bit longer.'*

After turning and lifting Rex out of the tank, and his subsequent shaking, I might as well have crawled

in with him. My skin felt a burning sensation from the Malathion solution, and I figured he must feel the same. I could take my clothes off and shower, but his coat required a while to dry. After this session, I wondered how many shifts I could go without mosquito repellent.



## Canine Encounter

by Vietnam Combat Tracker, Oscar Diaz

They finally arrived, hours late. Their jeep pulled up to the side of the hooch that served as clinic and storage. A captain of veterinary medicine leaped from the passenger seat and dashed across the dirt drive to the last hooch in a row of four. That hooch served as the 39th Scout Dog Platoon's HQ. The jeep's driver busied himself unloading the vehicle's contents and moving them into the clinic.

The reason for the pair's haste remained unclear. Perhaps the urgency stemmed from a late arrival or to minimize their exposure to the insufferable conditions of the hot, tropical sun, but the duo hurried their movements.

I sat alone to watch the pair's appearance. No one else was in the Combat Trackers' hooch just minutes till noon. The other trackers went to the Engineer Company's mess hall, where we took meals. I could not fathom putting on a fatigue jacket and striking out to consume a greasy meal of heavy calories that would only add to the misery of an insufferable day.

As a general rule, the other trackers would not have gone the near half-mile across the bulldozed terrain of LZ English for lunch. Today was different. Several scout dog handlers were in from the field, and the guys accompanied them to lunch. We shared a small compound with their platoon and their kennels. For the most part, we saw only one German shepherd handler on any given week and then only for a day or two. They and their canines generally stayed in the field, walking the dangerous position of point for Grunts on patrols. Their presence in numbers was a pleasant break from routine.

The Vet soon returned, running back to the clinic. I watched his assistant exit and scoot between two of the four hooches on his way to the kennels.

A ruckus of barking erupted from the kennels. 'Oh dear God, no,' I thought; they would not dare commence examining the dogs without their handlers present. A stranger attempting to grab and deal with seventy pounds of military-trained canine can only lead to a catastrophe.



Above: Oscar Diaz, Combat Tracker Team member, pets the belly of a runaway 39th Scout Dog at LZ English.

One of those giant beasts, Buddha, already had enemy kills to his credit. The barking was waning when I reached the front of the hooch.

I hurried back to the rear door to check the clinic. The assistant was tugging the leash of a shepherd, a small canine with a blonde coat that lay on the clinic steps, refusing to enter.

The petite creature reminded me of a childhood pet, Mitzi, a mixture of Collie and German shepherd. Mitzi's sad eyes watched all my comings and goings from behind the backyard fence until I entered the enclosure. Then they lit up, sparkling with pleasure in anticipation at attention to be

shown to her. She would run to me with a rubber ball to throw and then tease me by having me chase after her to retrieve the darn thing as if it was "my" favorite toy.

With nothing left to see outside, I went to my bunk with memories of home weighing on me. Unfortunately, a full bladder also weighed on me. I fought the urge as long as I could, dreading going out into the misery of mid-day Vietnam. Finally, the pressure on the bladder won out. As I rose from the bunk, the commotion at the kennels renewed.

It was agonizingly hot as I stood sweating at an open-air urinal tube to relieve myself. I wanted to

make it short, but it took long enough to make a racehorse jealous.

The return of the assistant with a large black shepherd with a perfect blond fringe offered a distraction. He was double-timing, leading the massive creature as if parading him before a judge at a dog show. But as they approached the steps, the shepherd halted, seeming to suspect something unpleasant awaited inside.

I finished my business and watched the assistant in an earnest tug of

war with the black shepherd. At the foot of the steps to the clinic, a battle raged between a one-hundred-twenty pound, determined man and a seventy-pound, reluctant canine with teeth capable of inflicting severe harm.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, the smaller shepherd from earlier vaulted from the clinic's threshold directly over the pair of scrappers. It was a majestic leap worthy of a great athlete which caught all eyes. She landed and started for the kennels but no sooner spotted me

and altered her course, charging straight toward me.

I braced myself for a vicious attack from a military-trained canine: left arm up to protect my neck and head, and the right hand curled into a fist to strike at the beast's snout. But just as she lunged at me, I saw a familiar-looking twinkle in her moist eyes. I hesitated. I staggered back as large front paws pushed hard against my chest. Then, a gritty tongue sloppily licked at my face.

Satisfied at having performed a proper greeting, the playful thing laid on her side, offering her underbelly for a rub.

A likely family pet donated to the military to go into the hostile jungles of Vietnam so that young men might return home, she just craved that attention that she once got from a loving family.

"Hang on to her," I heard the busy assistant holler. "I'll be there shortly."

There was no need. She just laid there, enjoying a hearty chest rub.

## Volunteer Spotlight - Eric Queen



Military Working Dog Heritage Museum is delighted to showcase our fantastic volunteer, Eric Queen, in this month's newsletter.

Eric is a vital part of our Heritage Discovery Committee. His wealth of knowledge is only exceeded by his willingness

to share—not only images but artifacts with our organization and all of you. Attendees at the Fort Benning Event may have seen the original 1960s Fort Benning Scout Dog poster he donated.

Eric Queen's love of dogs and military history came from his father, a US Marine serving during the Korean War. Eric began collecting original military artifacts at eight, a hobby he shared with his father until his father passed in 2019. His main collecting focus is MWD artifacts (especially

WW2 USMC). Unsurprisingly, his favorite piece is the original uniform of his dear friend Mr. Homer Finley, Jr.—Finley, a 1st Marine Dog Platoon member, fought with the 2nd Marine Raider Regiment on Bougainville.

Eric volunteers at MWDHM because he believes in educating the general public about the significant contributions and sacrifices made by these four-legged heroes and their handlers in supporting America's conflicts.



## Marine Handlers and Their Dogs Throughout History

Photo sources: DoD and NARA



**The Doberman was the World War II Marines' breed of choice.**





## Ethan Read—Coming Home

by Dixie Whitman. Photos courtesy of Ethan Read

In his childhood home, Ethan Read reveled in the comfort of community – surrounded by family, friends, and the Land of 10,000 Lakes. Days passed fishing, snowmobiling, and hanging out with his friends as he dreamt of a future serving and protecting the public. Studying didn't come easily to Ethan, as he felt things much more interesting existed outside the doors of his school. However, once he decided to join the Marines, he grasped a new goal, buckled down, and graduated from high school so he could qualify for the United States Marine Corps.

In the Marines, young men and women discover their intensity of purpose. Ethan felt he would get valuable life experiences as a Military Police Officer. The enlistment would open a challenging and different world – a world he wanted to meet head-on.

He accepted the further challenge of becoming a K9 handler on a base filled with talented and legendary dogmen – Camp Pendleton. His first dog, Polly F158, had returned from Iraq with a ton of innate talent in detecting explosives. Handed off to Ethan by another Marine, Polly's push-button skills helped him become a successful handler. However, Polly, always a sweetheart, had never truly excelled in Patrol and Bite

Work. She originally transferred onto C-Pen from an Army base where they had painted her toenails pink to insult her lack of aggression. Still, Ethan insists, "if I had to go and look for bombs, I would want Polly. Detection was natural for her."

Camp Pendleton bustled with innovative, challenging trainers and talented, dedicated handlers. However, becoming K9 requires a specific type of personality. A prospect must be able to go above and beyond, to be passionate about their job and life. Like-minded K9 personnel formed their own crucible, with skilled and dedicated handlers hanging out together: eating, partying, and playing roller hockey. Often Ethan and another handler, as encouraged by the Kennel Master, would grab their dogs from the kennels, bring them back to the barracks, and play online games while spending extra bonding time with them.

Nothing says being young and unattached in southern California than cruising the roads. Bright red convertibles come to mind. However, when you're a Lance Corporal, you use what you've got, and Ethan owned a grumpy, battered old Dodge Caravan that he nicknamed Blue Steel. What Blue Steel lacked in sex appeal, she more than made up for with her ability to haul around a ton of friends. The

decisions often made came from the answer to the question: "Will this be a good story?"

As a dog handler, you pride yourself on the talent and skills of your dog, and sometimes it's hard to believe that you get paid to go and play with dogs every day. Ethan found it incredibly rewarding to train with a group of 15-20 other handlers. He enjoyed working with dogs, determining how to work through the dogs' training obstacles, and getting input from various voices and viewpoints on how to solve a problem. The creative training at Camp Pendleton came with changes in places and spaces; they utilized the entire base and locations around San Diego. Training went from mundane to goofy, crazy things. Ethan's favorite K9 activity included accompanying dogs to their vet visits. His least favorite task at the other end of the spectrum involved hoses and brooms scouring out the kennels.

During his career, he particularly enjoyed being in the community to help and interact with people. He most had fun with two events: the Rock and Roll Marathon, a San Diego fundraising Marathon and Musical extravaganza, and the 4th of July Beach Bash. The Bash became a day-long, family-friendly, classic beach party as only Camp Pendleton can



Ethan poses with his first dog, Polly F158, a girl who loved to sniff for explosives.

create. Both events draw people in the thousands and can get raucous.

Unlike Polly, Ethan's second dog, Brick, had deployed a couple of times and excelled in Patrol Work. However, where Polly loved to sniff, Brick lived to bite. Ethan's pride in Brick's abilities came to fruition further during an area search while trying to locate a suspect who'd run from two officers. The kid ran into a massive thicket, seemingly impenetrable to light, with a tangle of low-hanging branches and shrubs standing shoulder to shoulder. Brick pulled him onward, and ahead of the light provided by one of the MPs following him, he kept running into branches in the pitch black. Ultimately, as Brick zeroed in on the suspect, the kid fearing what might happen if the dog nailed him, gave up.



To be in K9, one must be dedicated and driven. And that drive translates to other areas of your life. Thinking back, Ethan is in awe of his fellow handlers, who have accomplished much with their passion. Hopkinson, who became a lawyer and a champion of the Innocence Project; Megan Leavey, whose story is now known to the world; and Albert Johnson, whose vision remains to tell the story of these dogs to future generations. Marine Boot Camp challenges every recruit's mental, moral, and physical limitations – constantly pushing further. Unfortunately, during basic training, Ethan injured his ankle, changing the trajectory of his enlistment. The ongoing medical care, surgery, and limitations required made his planned deployment to Iraq with the 1MEF Camp Pendleton Marines impossible. It shortened his time as a Marine and accompanied him as he moved back home.

Returning to his native Minnesota, Ethan still hadn't lost the desire to serve others. It took a long time to find peace with the fact that he never got to deploy; it intruded into his thoughts for years. But he's carved a new path, including a short stint as a contract K9 handler at the Embassy in Iraq. He also gained his master's degree in 2011.

When he returned home, hundreds of applicants applied for each law enforcement job making the positions scarce. So Ethan took on his role as a police officer with one of Minnesota's Native-American Tribal Reservations. The differences between reservation and standard municipality work are notable. One significant consideration is that the tribe controlled both their government and casino businesses and blurred the lines between them – not always in a good way.

The tempo of calls proved rapid and dangerous, with alcohol and chemical abuse playing a prominent role. Ethan notes that the reservation also provided a Family Service Division with Social Workers to help on some calls and their own Tribal Courts to mete out the appropriate justice or offer assistance.

While rare, Ethan being a non-Native caused hostility with some of the tribal members. Yet he enjoyed the calls and the community, participating in many activities and functions, sometimes even being asked to be a pallbearer and escort funeral processions onto the reservation. He particularly enjoyed time spent with Veterans who welcomed him into their homes for Indian Fry Bread Tacos made with buffalo meat.



**Above: Ethan sitting at the vet clinic helping Rex (Rexy Too Sexy) to overcome a partial tail amputation. Rex's handler at the time was Alex Lopez.**

**Below: The Read family—Brayden, Irelyn, wife Nicole holding new pup, Kyia, and Ethan.**



Ethan has moved on from his years with the Sioux. He's returned home as a Police Officer in the place he always wanted to serve and where he feels comfortable. He's grateful for his gifts of family and friends in a place where ordinary has become an extraordinary life. He remembers the K9 unit fondly at Camp Pendleton and recognizes the sacrifices of the dogs like his girl Polly, who during his tenure did a crazy number of de-

ployments. But he's grateful to the dogs for their companionship and all the people they served and saved. Each of his fellow handlers who made their way back home and positively impacted their communities with a successful career or family life are due in some small part to the K9s at Camp Pendleton..

K9 does lead the way, even back to the familiarity and comfort of home!



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Heritage Museum &  
Handler Center  
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From the Team at MWDHM...

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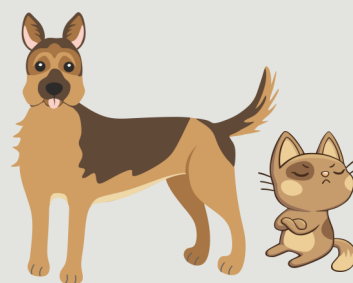
## Important dates with Trooper and Scout

**November 13, 2022 War Dog March** Pellissippi State CC  
Knoxville, TN - Benefitting our organization & 1 Veteran  
org. To sponsor, contact Jessica Hodge 865-765-4494.

**March 12, 2023 K9 Veterans Day Ceremony**  
American Legion Post #166, 201 S. Water Street East,  
Fort Atkinson, WI 53538 1:30-3:00 PM

**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 - 25<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary Dedic-  
ation of the War Dog  
Memorial at the Uni-  
versity of Tennessee  
in Knoxville.**



## Historic Pooch Pic of the Month



From 2008: Marines deployed from the 1st MEF at Camp Pendleton pose together for a photo that captures leadership personified. Left to right: Justin Rodriguez and SSD Rex, Chris Willingham and SSD Lucca, Billy Soutra and SSD Posha, Albert Johnson and SSD Johnny. Chris Willingham and Lucca had a book written about them. Chris is the President of US War Dogs and our USMC Coordinator. Billy Souta went on to receive the Navy Cross for heroism in combat. Albert Johnson founded our MWD Heritage Museum.