



The Paw Print

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



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Special points of interest:

- We discover the history and legacy of the Coast Guard K-9s.
- Remembering a Marine Handler lost in Okinawa.
- Dreams help us process the sting of life. Michael shares how his dreams have turned a corner.
- We honor Mama Lucca.
- And, has our grumpy cat finally found happiness?

Celebrating the Coast Guard's 231st Birthday Honoring the Coast Guard's K-9 History



Coast Guard dogs and their beach patrol handlers leap into action from a surfboat during a landing exercise along the coast of South Carolina, circa 1943. Uniform Landing Force—undress blue with leggings. Source: National Archives

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This month, we honor the tremendous history and dedication of our Coast Guard dog teams.

In 1942, Dogs For Defense procured and trained America's early K-9s to work alongside Coast Guard handlers patrolling American beaches. Guarding the coasts became a critical need as Nazi and Japanese submarines prowled the waters off both shores.

While not widely known, subs began attacking American commercial shipping.

One night, off the Outer Banks, but visible from the village of Avon on Ocracoke, a German U-boat torpedoed the *City of Atlanta*, sinking the vessel and killing nearly everyone aboard. The Germans continued to bring down other merchant ships throughout the night.

A bit further south, the *U-123*, a German submarine, blasted two oil tankers off the coast of St. Simons Island, Georgia. Another ship, the *SS Esparta*, sank the next day, torpedoed by that same sub.

War turned up at our shores. In response, Coast Guardsmen received war dogs to assist them with patrols, particularly along stretches of undeveloped land. They kept watch on activities offshore as well as monitoring any suspicious activities reported onshore.

Our Coast Guard continues to answer new challenges to America's security. Evolving and ever-flexible, they live and breathe their motto: *Semper Paratus ~ Always Ready.*

From the President's Desk



President, Albert Johnson



What a whirlwind the past month has been! We celebrated our country's Independence on the 4th of July, which kicked off an amazing month. Coins, trips, a loss, memorials, and our new non-profit status all took place in the past month. These events included a trip to Lexington, Kentucky, for a Combat Tracker reunion where I met Vietnam-era Trackers and their families. Several members of our Board along with essential volunteers attended a solemn ceremony to honor the incredible war dog, Lucca, at the Michigan War Dog Memorial. We are truly grateful for this community that sees the value in our mission to preserve the history of all things Military Working Dog.

Our newly-minted organizational coins seem to be a hit with Dogmen and Dogwomen, as well as those who support them. Thank you to all who donated to receive a challenge coin. We ask you to share our story and help us build a world-class museum to showcase the history that our dog teams, veterinarians, and vet-techs deserve.

Lexington, Kentucky, is a vibrant, historic city to start with, but add in the chance to meet dog handlers, and it's a winning combination. Trackers talked about their units, and I learned that the calculated decisions which they made flow through much of what the modern-

day Military Working Dog program uses. The reunion was my first time meeting many of the Combat Tracker teams, but they still welcomed me with open arms into the fold. I met incredible people, heard stories of being a Tracking Team member and what that entailed. The retelling of stories, both hilarious and sobering, adds the human element we strive to capture in our history. Thank you to all that broke bread with me and made me feel like family. I look forward to the event next year.

This month we celebrate the Coast Guard's Birthday as they turn a whopping 231 years old. (Between you and me, they don't look a day over 200.) With the help of a Coastie dog handler, Dixie finds much rich history to pass on to our readers. The biggest eye-opener to me was the incredible support that the coast guard provided during WWII.

We at MWDHM were saddened to hear of the unfortunate passing of Eric-John Niss de Jesus, a dog handler stationed in Okinawa, Japan. We appreciate one of our volunteers, Curtis Hendel, for personally carrying our condolences and prayers to Eric's family in Minnesota. Thank you, Curtis, for sharing your writing with our readers.

Michael Hurder envelops us in his dream world, giving us

a look at what a different ending could have been. To Michael, your progress truly inspires those of us who suffer from these same types of dreams. Thank you for sharing your frank and intimate memories.

Sara brings us on a historic look back at a fantastic journalist with an affinity for military working dogs. Ernie Pyle's story is of a real-life hero, his magnificent work, and his tragic ending. Then, we take a deep dive into the Labrador Retriever and why they make an exceptional working dog breed. Lastly, we follow our animal cohorts to visit the Highground Dog Memorial in Wisconsin, which seemed to impress our feline explorer, finally.

Several of us attended the interment of SSD Lucca K458's ashes in a reflective and sober ceremony at the Michigan War Dog Memorial in mid-July. We thank Philip Weitlauf for his enduring legacy in memorializing K-9s with a fitting and permanent resting place. Thank you to Chris Willingham, a leader among handlers, for sharing your girl with all of us. God speed.

We hope you enjoy this edition; it's one of my personal favorites. And as always, K-9 LEADS THE WAY!

Albert Johnson

Coasties: An Introduction to a Rare Breed of Handler and Dog

by Dixie Whitman

She was a sitting duck.

Silhouetted against the city lights of Brunswick, GA, the oil tanker Oklahoma presented a too-tempting target to German U-Boat Lieutenant Commander Hardegen. On April 8, 1942, just four months after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor; he launched a torpedo against her just off St. Simon's Island. To on-shore witnesses, the inferno shooting Heavenward above the ocean's darkness meant only one thing— World War II dropped anchor off Georgia's coast.

By the end of that night, Hardegen's U-123 boat battered three different merchant ships. A few mariners rode in an ambulance to the hospital. Unfortunately, the majority were transported to the morgue.

Hitler's Navy prowled the eastern American coastline. Like a Great White gutting unsuspecting sea lions, the U-Boats began sinking commercial cargo vessels. The glitzy seaside condominium boom may make it hard to imagine; however, before WW II, vast stretches of undeveloped, vulnerable beaches and marshes offered the enemy a potential inroad to America. An estimated 2,000 - 3,000 Coast Guard (CG) dog teams would eventually patrol the beaches to answer that security threat and thwart on-going sabotage.

Following WWII, the Coast Guard K-9 teams stood down; only mascots remained.

During the 1980s and 1990s, our coastal cities became throughways for drug smuggling operations. While not an official program, a few CG organizations took it on their own to add K-9; some Coast Guard units acquired drug dogs from Lackland to assist with detection and interdiction.

Concerns changed again followed the events of 9/11. Challenges to American safety arrived through the skies, overland, and potentially, steaming up to our shores. In response, the Coast Guard developed their Explosive Detection Dog program and attached them to the Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSST.) The MSST is a counter-terrorism team created to protect and secure maritime assets anytime, anywhere. Ironically, the MSST and their K-9s were attached to special teams called DOG (Deployable Operations Group), which later became DSF (Deployable Special Forces.)

In 2003, the initial class of K-9s for the Coast Guard's new doggy blueprint graduated from Auburn University's detection classes. Six bomb dogs and two drug dogs, all Labradors, joined the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard's current K-9 mission requires single-purpose explosive detection dogs. As these dog teams board ships, search port facilities, and protect maritime mass-transit environments, such as ferry systems, no aggressive behav-



A Coast Guard Sentry Team stands guard against surprise moves by the enemy. Perhaps about 3,000 served in partnership with Coast Guardsmen.
(Image source: National Archives.)



To protect large stretches of undeveloped coastline, Dog and Horse Handler was a wartime Coast Guard rating.
(Image Source: National Archives.)

ior is tolerated. Accordingly, the breeds have now expanded to include: Malinois, German shepherds, Labs, German Shorthaired Pointers, Vizslas, and Terverans, among others.

In 2004, the program transferred to U.S. Customs and Border Protection in Front Royal, VA, using the white towel/tug-of-war reward training method. Each night loads of towels hit the washing machines, dryers, and then handlers re-packed them, ready for the next day's detection problems.

In 2009, MSST K-9s again transitioned to a new agency, the TSA, where they remain. Training now takes place at the Lackland Handlers' Course. Following the traditional training, additional required Maritime Acclimation training exposes teams to the settings in which they will work. MSST K-9s work in a specialized, mission-critical environment: aboard the ferry system, hoisting on and off boats, helicopter flights to and from freighters or oil platforms, and fast-roping onto ships.

Maritime acclimatization training encompasses more than a variety of insertion methods. Shipboard searches are not like any other type of search. For the San Francisco Bay area teams, a lot of this training takes place aboard an old Liberty ship, the SS Jeremiah O'Brien. Some specialized training scenarios include: walking on open deck grating, tackling

ladder wells, or feeling the undulating rise and lowering of the ship's bow with the waves. Other training modifications ready dogs for work in poorly ventilated areas below deck, extremes of heat, and, yes, walking the gangplank to get on board.

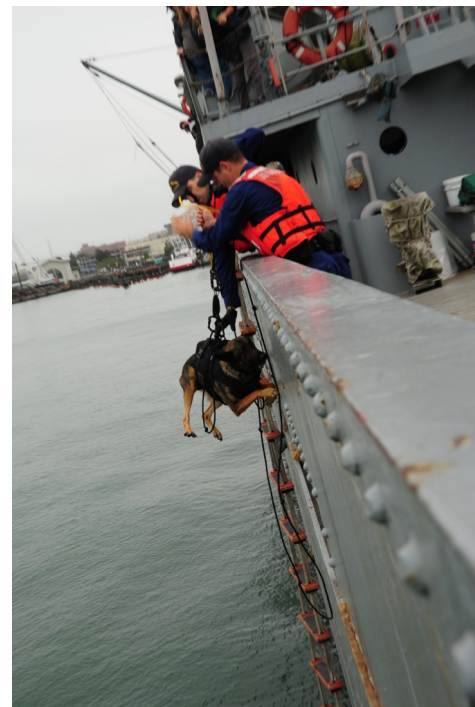
Areas where Coast Guard dogs traditionally work include ports, waterways, coastal security missions, sweeps of ferries, cruise ships arrivals, Fleet Weeks, major maritime events, national security special events, and United Nations Waterside Security.

Amazingly, only 18 teams on average cover the entire American maritime map: East Coast, West Coast, and Gulf Coast. The dog teams work efficiently with other agencies and, as an example, seamlessly transition from a Coast Guard boat to an Air Force helicopter.

Now, just as in WWII, the United States Coast Guard K-9 teams respond to ongoing and ever-changing dangers to America's safety and security.

Our Coast Guard dog teams are as unique as they are rare. Of all of the Armed Forces Dogs, only the Coast Guard K-9s reside at home. Handlers live with their dogs 24/7/365. Talk about rapport! The only time a dog might be in a kennel is during a family vacation.

A Coast Guard K-9's life is filled with critical work, ever-changing activities, and a devoted handler. What better life could a dog want?



Top image: Chief Petty Officer Anthony Ross and Chiquita perform a vertical insertion. Middle: Coast Guard maritime law enforcement specialists hoist Evy, an explosive detection dog, to train for boarding larger ships. Bottom: Petty Officer 2nd Class Richard Barone and his K-9 conduct a counterterrorism patrol along the waterfront areas in New York City region. Image source : DoD The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

In Memory of Eric-John Niss de Jesus

Story and photos by Curtis Hendel

On Thursday, June 24th, the state of Minnesota welcomed home one of its own. Starting at the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport, people lined roads, streets, and bridges, showing support for the family of Eric-John Niss de Jesus, a Corporal in the United States Marines. He passed away while on active duty in Okinawa, Japan.

Patriot Guard and Legion Riders arrived in force to participate in the caravan that returned his body to his hometown of Mountain Lake. Members of the American Legion, first responders, police, and fire departments waved American and Marine Corps Flags as members saluted the young man. Community members stood beside them along the way, showing support for the family.

After completing his University of Minnesota degree early, Eric-John sweated through Boot Camp while his classmates walked in their commencement, receiving their diplomas. He trained as a Military Policeman, earned Honor Graduate status, and served in Okinawa, Japan. He aced his way into the Military Working Dog Program and also received recognition for saving another Marine's life while on duty.

On June 5th, while he and his buddies were swimming, a fierce ocean current pulled them further from safety. As the Marines

fought for their lives, his fellow Marines remembered Eric-John pushing them to keep fighting against the current and keep moving. Even as he was losing his battle with the sea, he encouraged others to reach safety. Corporal Niss de Jesus would be the only one that did not survive the force of the waters.

The memorial service took place at Trinity Lutheran Church on Friday. One of Eric-John's fellow handlers and one of their Lieutenants escorted his body home and remained with him constantly until the funeral burial service on Saturday. The United States Marines served as casket bearers and conducted Honor Guard services at the Butterfield Cemetery.

I was honored to attend the Memorial Service on Friday and represent Rocky Mountain Dawgs Project, the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum, and a Marine Corps veterans project called Sgt. Caesar. I presented the family with several K-9 mementos and messages of condolence from officers involved in the organizations.

The loss of a Minnesota Marine while serving on active duty proved that this state stands with families in their time of loss. It also showed the intense loyalty of both the United States Marines and the Military Working Dog Community.



Honor Guard members stood at the airport to assist with the escort duties.



Marine Corps Escort and member of the Honor Guard.



Three generations of K-9, (L-R): Vietnam Dog Handler, Russ Freeburg who served at Da Nang, center is the Marines Corps escort, and on the right, ColdWar/Gulf War Era, USAF Handler/Trainer, Curtis Hendel.

A Letter From My Soul

by Michael Hurder

Hi buddy,

I know I've been MIA for a while now. It's that time of year again when the dreams make me crazy, and I tend to isolate myself. I know, I know. You were there with me, so you know all about it, and it's a good thing you were, too.

I guess you hang out with Rex and Bodie since they were the only ones you ever acknowledged on Bien Hoa. If you hang with Rex, that has to mean you see Santi, too. Say "Hi" to all and tell them I miss them and think of them every day.

Things were a little different in my dream this year, and I can't help but wonder if I've turned a corner. That brings me to why I'm writing today.

On April 10th, I had my usual dream about the kids. You remember, right? This time, though, instead of the explosions, smoke, fire, and screams, there was a game of footie. The kids were out on the perimeter road south of the woods and kicking a ball around. They were laughing and shouting and having a great time. You looked at me with the big soft

brown eyes that begged to be let free, so I said, "Okay, for a little while. We still have a Patrol to complete".

The words were barely out of my mouth, and you were gone. You tore into the gaggle of youngsters and nudged the ball away with your nose, instigating a great game of chase. Every once in a while, you stopped, and the kids caught up to you and piled on. One had a back leg, another a front one, and one had your tail. Two kids were pulling on an ear, and I swear, the littlest one was trying to grab your tongue. You ate it up and slobbered all over them, causing more shrieks of glee. Then you'd break away with the ball again, starting the whole sequence over.

Eventually, I had to end playtime and get us back to work. The kids were disappointed but still hugged you and said goodbye.

"Tạm biệt, Tạm biệt."

As we started to walk away, we heard two small voices calling for us to wait.

"Chờ đợi. Chờ đợi."



It was our two little friends from, you know, back in the day. They were coming from the woods. You didn't wait for my release; you just ran to them. They hugged you, and I thought they'd never let go, but eventually, they followed you to me, and with those soulful black eyes staring at me, they said, "Cảm ơn người lính." Thank you, soldier man.

I squatted to be at their eye level and said, "No, little ones. Thank you."

You barked, and I woke. My furry partner of today, Shea, was there at my bedside to greet me. I think she heard you too.

That day was a great day. So different from the past. Did you do that? I think so, and thanks, buddy.

The other dreams came too, but they were almost inconsequential in comparison to other years. It's a great time to be alive. I enjoy my grandkids now. So much so that it hurts - a good hurt.

I miss you, boy, but I'm not ready yet. I will see you at the bridge, though. Be patient.

Much love,

One six Xray fiver, this is Whiskey Tango one zero, signing off.

Shorty sends.

The Interment of Mama Lucca - SSD Lucca K458

by Dixie Whitman

They had me at the bagpipes.

The Metro Detroit Police and Fire Pipes & Drums started the service with a haunting Scottish melody, setting a dignified, mournful mood for the burial service of one of the most famous working dogs in recent memory, Lucca K458.

Lucca served two different Marine Corps handlers: Chris Willingham and, later, Juan Rodriguez. She led over 400 patrols during three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Death did not visit anyone who followed in her footsteps; she kept her military flock safe.

Yet in her off time, she could throttle down into a people-pleasing dog whose presence alone, just being a dog, served as a needed emotional connection to home for the troops who toiled beside her.

Chris Willingham held her leash as long as possible before handing her off to his chosen successor, Juan Rodriguez. It was Juan who witnessed Lucca's worst day ever in March of 2012. Working in the Helmand River valley, she identified an IED. In returning to Juan, she tripped a second hidden device, and the blast decimated her front left leg. Juan rushed to her side, providing emergency care, and the team whisked her to the nearest medical facility. Without a doubt,

Juan saved her life, but they couldn't salvage her leg.

After recovery from amputation, Lucca traveled to Finland to reunite with Willingham in retirement. When Chris returned state-side and moved to the Eastern Seaboard, Lucca began making visits to amputees and recovering military members at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. She enjoyed more than five years of living the best doggy life ever before succumbing to the Fate of Time spinning the threads of canine destiny.

The burial of SSD Lucca K458, coordinated at the stunning Michigan War Dog Memorial Cemetery, provided a distinguished, honorable tribute to a beautiful soul and the two outstanding Marines that were privileged to accompany her through life. The apt message on her memorial stone is:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for me?" And I said, "Here I am! Send me."

The American military deployed thousands of working dogs, including our heroine, Mama Lucca. She now rests in eternal peace—well and genuinely loved by thousands who honor her legacy.

<https://mwdm.org/>



Above: Metro Detroit Police and Fire Pipes & Drums. All photos courtesy of Krisi Bode Symons & Michigan War Dog Memorial.



Above: A somber Chris Willingham cherishes a folded flag presented to him while Juan Rodriguez receives a second flag.

Below: Chris touches Lucca's memorial stone, a last good-bye.



Ernie Pyle: A Reporter Who Loved the Troops and Their Dogs

by Sara Gregrow

While the United States has participated in numerous wars, few civilians receive access to our Armed Forces' daily threats and experiences. Even fewer are those who are beloved and held in high regard by the troops. That list, although short, bears names such as Bob Hope, Gary Sinise, Chuck Norris, and Ernie Pyle.

Ernie Pyle, a world-famed journalist/war correspondent, captivated his readers with stories of the front lines during WWII. According to Franklin Roosevelt, "No man in this war has so well told the story of the American fighting man, as American fighting men wanted it told. He deserves the gratitude of all his countrymen." Ernie Pyle felt it his responsibility to tell the stories of the troops.

A farm boy from Indiana born on 3 August 1900, Pyle took a particular interest in the 3rd Marine Division War Dog program. This program at the time had 60 dogs, 90 handlers, 10 NCO observers, two K-9 medics, and three kennel supervisors. Pyle wrote, "I actually got jealous when I saw some of the soldiers over there with dogs deeply attached to them. It was the nearest thing to civilization in this weird foreign life of ours."

Pyle got to know two special dogs, Jeep, a Doberman Pincher, and Sergeant, who served as a Scout and Security Patrol dogs. When Sergeant succumbed after a shrapnel wound, the world felt his loss through Pyle's writing as he described the impact it had on the Unit and their grief. His unique and masterful writing again appeared when he wrote of the Normandy Invasion and the War Dogs "Always there are dogs in every invasion. There is a dog still on the beach today, still pitifully looking for his masters. He stays at the water's edge, near a boat that lies twisted and half sunk at the waterline. He barks appealingly to every soldier who approaches, trots eagerly along with him for a few feet, and then, sensing himself unwanted in all this haste, runs back to wait in vain for his own people at his own empty boat."

Ernie's willingness to be alongside the troops in dangerous situations ultimately resulted in his death. Nearing the war's close, in April 1945, on an island off of Okinawa, tragically, a machine gun bullet struck and killed Ernie Pyle. However, his memory remains through his gifted words.



T/Sgt. J. A. Mundel - Div. Hq. 3D Mar. Div.

Above: Ernie Pyle goes nose to nose with War Dog Jeep on the island of Guam. Jeep, a war dog attached to the 3rd Marine Division, took part in several battles as the Americans and Japanese began the life and death chess match played across Pacific Islands. (Both photos from the National Archives.)

Below: Ernie Pyle listens to Jeep's handler. During the liberation of Guam, the first American soil to be freed during WWII, 25 Marine War Dogs lost their lives.



Combat Tracker Reunion in Lexington, Kentucky - A Family Affair

Story and photos by Dixie Whitman

The beautiful bluegrass state of Kentucky welcomed Vietnam-era Combat Trackers from across the country to their twenty-third annual reunion, June 24th-27th. Amid the splendor of legendary horse farms, where barns resemble palaces, and stone-stacked fences cost more than most homes, the Trackers arrived from every corner of the country.

The host for this event, Chuck Steward, coordinated an event that focused on the heritage of the Combat Tracker Teams and the families that support them. Everyone assembled in a welcoming and well-stocked hospitality room where the affectionate conversations alternated between laughter and solemn reminiscence.

Friday afternoon, Russell Walters, also known as author R.T. Budd, shared a brilliant presentation peppered with intelligent humor about his time in the military and his role as a vet-tech during Vietnam.

Attendees ventured out to view the sleek and spirited thoroughbred horses pastured nearby. They also sipped fine, rich bourbons, whose flavors see-saw through an array of fruit,

herbal, and spicy notes before disappearing in a lingering, sweet finish. And, then, palates dazzled, they trekked back to the hotel to prepare for an evening of camaraderie.

Saturday evening, the group gathered for the banquet and watched one of their own, Hal Hostetler, reenact the role of Gen. Patton so well that his colorful language completely masked his true calling, a minister. After dinner, a bidding war ensured that the Combat Tracker website would run well into the future.

(combattrackerteam.org)

This reunion welcomed a young Combat Tracker, Jeremy Whitmire, for the first time. Years ago, during desert training, a younger Jeremy learned Combat Tracking from Frank Merritt. Joining him, fellow Marine Albert Johnson, a former SSD Handler and now President of MWDHM, enjoyed the history and heritage of this great reunion. The two Marines served in the same places at the same times.

MWDHM honors the tremendous work of the Combat Trackers and appreciates the support shown to our organization. Thank you, Trackers.



Frank and Sue Merritt



Jeremy Whitmire & Albert Johnson



Ronnie Eubanks & Jennifer Reese

The Breeds—The Labrador Retriever

by Dixie Whitman

If the Greek goddess Até created a breed, it would likely have been the fun-loving, playful Labrador retriever. Long known as the most popular breed in America, its reputation as a companion and hunting dog is beyond reproach. But, how does such a kind and gentle dog become a dog suited for warfare?

The Labrador Retriever's story starts in St. John's, the capital city of Newfoundland, Canada, where he was known initially as the St. John's Water Dog. The earliest beginnings crossed local fishermen's dogs and the giant Newfoundland dog. The dogs became well-known for their love of water, assisting in the booming fisheries of the area by hauling in fishing lines, diving for fish that wiggled free of the net, and fetching items that tumbled overboard. They also retrieved ducks shot down over the water.

Their diving prowess made them a lucrative export to

England's docks, where the Earl of Malmesbury took an immediate shine to the breed. Thinking that it would work well in his estate's duck hunting areas, he started a breeding program. The Newfoundland breed already existed, so the Earl began to call his Canadian dogs: Labrador Retrievers.

In the late 1800s, a chance meeting of other fanciers in Scotland and England allowed these early breeding successes to occur in Great Britain, where the Labrador breed was standardized and refined. But while the Labrador's success on the British Isles boomed, the St. John's Dog in Canada floundered.

To increase sheep production, the Newfoundland government imposed taxes on the ownership of any dogs not used for herding or tending flocks. In 1885, the English laws changed regarding the importation of dogs. Due to lengthy quarantines imposed to reduce

the entry of rabies, dog admissions, in general, stopped. The early St. John's Water Dog breeders couldn't sell their dogs to the British, and overreaching government programs taxed them to the point that dog owners bred very few litters, ultimately ending in its extinction.

If we look at the Labrador's breed blueprints, we can learn something about what makes this breed agreeable for military purposes.

The standard mentions that dogs should be "strongly-built, medium-sized," "possessing a sound, athletic, well-balanced conformation," and with a "soft weather-resistant undercoat." The dog is substantial and suited for vigorous work outdoors.

The established body length permits "a straight, free, and efficient stride," telling us that the dog works effortlessly and smoothly.

"Kind, friendly eyes imparting good temperament, in-



telligence, and alertness are a hallmark of the breed." "a kindly, outgoing, tractable nature; eager to please and non-aggressive towards man or animal."

The Lab's gentle, loving disposition is a boon to handlers and troops alike. He isn't bred for apprehension or take-downs; instead, the legendary nose, broad and well-developed, makes the breed a favorite when sniffing either drugs or explosives is the priority. We applaud the Earl of Malmesbury's foresight in creating the intelligent, adaptable Labrador.

Breed Standards for all AKC-registered breeds may be located at akc.org.

The Labrador Retriever as A Military Working Dog

Photos from the National Archives video and DVIDS



Banter Backed by Bond

by Albert Johnson

You undoubtedly have seen the banter back and forth between the service branches. The dissing comes in many forms, some more vulgar than others, but the sentiment is always the same, "My branch of service branch is better than yours."

These interactions happen everywhere the services cross paths. Dog school was no different. I saw it as young PFCs, another Marine, and I showed up the first day of class. As soon as I walked in the door, the four Army Soldiers started in. "Ohh, the Marines are here. Damn, they are still wet behind the ears. Better have pictures in this book because you know Marines can't read."

After a few minutes of taking their verbal abuse, we tossed a few backs at them, saying things like, "We Marines are only here because we heard you needed heroes." Then came the Navy handlers, and they began to get the same treatment from the Army boys. "Be careful. They are Seamen. Do not get close, or you'll get pregnant."

Then came the instructors around the corner,

who both happened to be Air Force Tech Sergeants, and they joined in on the back and forth ribbing. Although, none of my classmates parlayed too offensively with the instructors, fearing they might get booted out of the program they worked so diligently to attend.

As we learned what I consider the best job I have ever had, things began to change slightly. Jokes still volleyed between teammates, but now we stood on common ground. As we transitioned into the role of dog handlers, a new-found bond united us.

Fast forward to my second deployment to Baghdad, attached to the Army Engineer K-9 unit. I was the only Marine based at Camp Slayer. The heckling continued there between the Army guys and me. Still, when we moved out to Camp Liberty or on missions, the Army dog handlers would defend me against derogatory comments from non-dog handlers. I did the same for them when I ran into other Marines that made degrading remarks to the Soldiers.

This K-9 bond is much deeper than our service



branch. It creates a tie, a common bond that outweighed all other relationships we had while deployed or stateside. This connection is primarily due to the way we train, deploy, and generally do our jobs.

We perform as subject matter experts on dog handling, after all. When we were attached to other units for missions, even as lower enlisted personnel, we had to stand toe to toe with officers who challenged us about how to do our jobs. They thought they knew best while we were attached to them. They often needed to be reminded our job was to keep their men and

women safe from IEDs, weapons caches, explosives, and the bad guy lurking behind the corner. We walked point to protect the men and women who walked behind us.

The collective defense reaction of dog handlers seems to take on a pack mentality, mimicking their canine counterparts. For example, K-9 handlers may quarrel between themselves, but if an outside force tries to do the same, they are quickly separated from the pack and dealt with accordingly.

And yet again, dogs teach us a lesson. Which end is the intelligent end of the leash? You decide.



Military Working Dog
Heritage Museum
& Handler Center

From the Team at MWDHM...

We invite you to join the museum's journey
by signing up for a free *Paw Print* subscription.

Email: info@mwdhm.org

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our newsletter.

Pooch Pic of the Month



Petty Officer 1st Class Cory Sumner, maritime enforcement specialist, and his partner Feco, an explosive detection canine conduct hoisting exercises. Sumner and Feco regularly train to ensure they are always ready to deploy wherever they are needed. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Jordan Akiyama.)

Throughout this newsletter, the appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute a DoD endorsement.

On the Road with Trooper and Scout, the Not-Quite-As-Grumpy Cheesehead Cat



War Dog Memorial : The Highground.
Source: vdha.us

The Highground, a veterans' memorial park, covers 155 acres near Neillsville, a small Wisconsin town of approximately 2,500 citizens.

The park, situated about halfway between Eau Claire and Stevens Point, states a mission of honoring, educating, and healing. With its expansive vistas overlooking the verdant Wisconsin fields and wooded hills, it indeed meets its goals. Options to stroll through a series of emotion-invoking memorials or simply sit and let the peace restore your spirits allow visitors to stop by and pay respects 24/7/365.

Dedicated in June of 2018, this is the first piece we've highlighted from sculptor Michael Martino, a native Wisconsinite. The project concept began with a story about a young Wisconsin-born Vietnam-era Scout Dog

Handler who was KIA. The Highground Board of Directors targeted an MWD memorial early on as one of their important projects. By creating a unique sculpture that depicted the bond between K-9 and handler, Martino's dramatic piece honors all dog handlers and dogs from all conflicts.

Check out the website for more information on this fabulous location with its tours, events, museum, and shopping, at :

www.thehighground.us

Location:


The Highground
W7031 W. Ridge Rd.
Neillsville, WI 54456



Review:

Trooper: 5/5 Bones 

An inspirational location which honors our veterans and educates the public.

Scout: 4/5 Mice 

Wisconsin = Cheese state.

Cheese = mice.

Mice are nice.