



The Paw Print

The Voice of the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum

& Handler Center



Volume 3 Issue 1

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Special points of interest:

- We open this month's issue with an introduction to the Tet Offensive.
- Please consider volunteering with us. We are seeking volunteer voices from every era and every service.

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Tet Offensive: Pulling Defeat From the Jaws of Victory



Ernie Ayala, (second from left) and other Vinh Long dog handlers on the trail of straggling NVA after the first night of the Tet Offensive.

During the Vietnam War, in honor of the Lunar New Year, when the Vietnamese people celebrated their most sacred and joyous holidays, battling North and South Vietnam armies traditionally settled into an informal truce. However, that changed in late January of 1968 when a massive coordinated series of attacks took place in Vietnam's cities and military bases.

This event, the Tet Offensive, changed the Vietnam War's trajectory

The North Vietnamese felt that a blistering set of attacks would cripple the Southern forces by introducing discord and discontent in the ranks of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. As a result, over 100 coordinated infiltrations occurred across the country, yet

the South Vietnamese resolve never wavered.

While the North Vietnamese lost vast numbers of troops during Tet, with estimates of up to 50,000, the event exposed President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration's glossy outlook as untenable. The attitude of the American people took a direct hit as more citizens questioned the war.

From the President's Desk



Lane Hagerdorn
Vice President



Happy New Year, and thank you for being a part of the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum in 2023! Undoubtedly this year will be full of new friends, findings, and events, all of which we will keep you in the loop through this newsletter and our social media channels.

The Tet Offensive you just read about began in the early morning hours of the 30th of January 1968 and is a military milestone we continue to study today. The offensive's over 120 coordinated attacks on over 100 cities, and outposts throughout South Vietnam over a presumed cease-fire showed the US Military command staff the danger of assumptions and letting your guard down. The Tet Offensive also showed the ferocious tenacity of the military fighting forces, especially in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. That determined spirit of strength in the face of adversity permeates even today in our troops currently serving. Thank you to all who did and do serve!

Elizabeth Arden once said, "Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they have the heart." And there are no bigger hearts than the volunteers we have at the Military Working Dog

Heritage Museum. From the board to committees to those who pitch in as needed, our batch of hard-working volunteers "bring the goods" each and every month. Albert Johnson and I have said many times that the museum's future is bright explicitly because of the selfless contributions of our volunteers. Our hope, too, is that every volunteer and future volunteer sees the benefits of contributing to their lives.

Dr. Jean Segal co-wrote an article where she pointed out that volunteering helps counter the effects of stress and depression. It fuels happiness, increases self-confidence, helps provide a sense of purpose, and helps us stay physically active; all of which we have seen volunteers benefit from over the years! If you or someone you know would like to experience the benefits of volunteering, please connect with us via email at Volunteer@mwdhm.org or on our Social Media pages.

Military Working Dogs have been a part of nearly every era of military history we can research. We will always enjoy sharing and relishing in stories like the ever-famous MWD Nemo, who rose to fame for his heroic actions during an NVA attack at Tan Son

Nhut Air Base in December of 1968.

Still, there are countless other stories of K9 teams who held the line in battle and stalemate. This month, Andrew Revering shares one such story he lived during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. His fascinating story also shows the power of his USAF K9 experience that allowed him to follow his dream that ironically kept him from the war in Vietnam. In turn, Andrew enjoyed some unique experiences and earned incredible recognition over 33 years of service to his community.

Do you have a story you haven't shared? Perhaps one of the Cold War, OIF/OEF, a deployment, a TDY, or maybe a special duty assignment. Perhaps you have a funny anecdote about a particularly "entertaining" dog. Maybe it's a fun on-post incident that the world needs to know about. We welcome any and all K9 stories as we seek to share our unique military contributions with the world. Send those stories to info@mwdhm.org, and we will gladly share them with the world!

K9 Leads the Way!

Lane Hagerdorn

MPs on the Front Line

Forward by Mike Hurder:

How many of you have heard the term REMF, also known as the politically incorrect Rear Echelon MF? I was one. Most grunts consider MPs to be REMFs, too. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Vietnam, there were NO safe places – no rear echelon. The enemy hid everywhere. That's not to take away from the conditions our grunts faced every day, 24/7/365. The bush was hell, and I gladly accepted my REMF duty, thank you very much.

Ernie Ayala, my brother from the VDHA, might have been in Saigon in 1968 during the Tet Offensive. No one had it easy come 1 February '68, definitely not the Military Police (MPs) in Saigon. He would have been there for the opening volleys of the Tet Offensive, but providence and the Army Provost Marshall interceded. Ernie went to Vinh Long instead, not that that was party time. Let's listen to his story.

As I pondered a transfer from the 212th MP Company (Sentry Dogs) to the 716th MP Battalion, something told me to hold up. The routine at the 212th became so dull, walking my dog back and forth at my second detachment in Long Binh's Ammo Dump. Long Binh secured the world's largest ammo dump, which required twenty Dog Teams to patrol the perimeter. I felt like I was walking my dog around the track at my

hometown high school because the perimeter road's red clay pavement made it easy to patrol.

After a few weeks of working six days a week, my restlessness urged a change. So I called my buddy, Manny Rodriguez, at the 716th MPs (Saigon) to see how things were there.

Manny reported their duty primarily involved policing up guys who got out of hand in the Saigon bars and started fights or were messing with the bar girls after having too much to drink (or smoke). The upside was that the MPs resided in a downtown hotel with free food, room service, and maids within the vicinity of the local females. The MPs were considered a catch. The Vietnamese girls knew if they should marry one, that a free ride to the States awaited them.

MP work interested me, and I desperately wanted out of Long Binh, so I requested a transfer from the First Sergeant. He told me to wait a day or two. Then, he said something on the horizon would interest me, so I delayed my request.

With the holidays approaching, I looked forward to seeing Bob Hope and all the pretty girls he always brought to the USO shows. On the day before the show, I sat spit-shining my boots. With my cloth MP brassard, I had plans to sneak into the

by Ernie Ayala with a Foreword by Michael Hurder



Two military police helmets, one with a bullet hole in it, and a pool of blood mark the spot where two MPs were killed by Viet Cong commandos during the attack on the US Embassy (background). 31 Jan. 1968

Photo by: SP5 Edgar Price Pictorial A.V. Plt. 69th Sig. Bn. Photograph, VA030828. 31 January 1968, Mr. Don Jellema Collection, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=VA030828>, Accessed 19 Aug 2022.

show on the pretext of being an on-duty MP. The next thing I knew, Sgt. Coolidge said, "Ayala, you're being transferred out of here. There won't be any more detachments for you to get kicked out of after this. You're going to our most dangerous one – Vinh Long." I had heard of Vinh Long. Nothing good, but I looked forward to going because I'd heard there was lots of action there. So, I said, "Great. Let's go!"

Four of us transferred to Vinh Long. They were moving many of us to other detachments to make room for the new company of handlers coming in from Fort Carson, Colorado. I got my wish by seeing some combat on 23 December '67, when a barrage of 81mm mortars bombed us for about ten minutes.

Meanwhile, Manny called me to ask if I still wanted to transfer because they were short of men and could use all the help they could get. I was still interested in going, but I kept thinking about all the time the Army spent training me as a Dog Handler and about nine months of Handler experience going down the drain if I transferred to a non-K9 MP unit. Finally, I told Manny that the Lunar New Year holidays were coming, and the brass was uptight about losing any handlers before then. So I told him I'd write the transfer papers after the holidays.

In Saigon, an uneasy silence unfolded in the streets at sundown on 31 January. The celebrations stopped by 7 PM, and the people headed home. The locals

knew something was going to happen.

Around midnight, something did happen. Nineteen Viet Cong (VC) attacked the US Embassy. The two MPs at the gate were sharp enough to lock down the doors and call Battalion HQ with the code words "Signal 300". That communication meant the Embassy was under attack and to send all available personnel. While the force halted the initial Viet Cong storming of the gates, an explosion blew a hole in the Embassy's brick wall. The MPs stopped the first two VCs through the gap, but SP4 Charles Daniel and PFC William Sebast sustained injuries and succumbed to their wounds shortly.

Two more MPs responding to the call drove up in their jeep and were killed before they could grab their weapons. Sgt. Jonnie B. Thomas and SP4 Owen E. Mebust were machine-gunned, but more reinforcements kept coming. The Embassy attack became the big story concerning the beginning of the Tet Offensive. It made the evening news as journalists from all over the world covered it.

The news didn't cover an even bigger story until later when the VC attacked the Joint General Staff Compound. A company-sized VC Unit arrived at the gate in a bus, and the occupants

stormed the entryway. The Quan Canh (South Vietnamese MPs) opened up on the charging enemy. A US MP unit happened to be driving nearby and also opened fire on the VC. The Viet Cong returned fire and killed the two Americans but not before the Quan Canh closed and secured the gate. The Military Police requested more help from the Provost Marshall's Office.

A twenty-five-man platoon answered that request to assist in repelling the attack in a two-and-a-half-ton truck escorted by two jeeps. Unfortunately, as it drove down a dark narrow alley close to the Long Hoa Pagoda, it ran into a VC ambush.

The deuce-and-a-half was hit with anti-tank rockets, causing it to explode. The VC then poured machine-gun fire into the conflagration while Sappers tossed satchel charges and grenades into the back of the truck to finish off all the wounded MPs. There were a few survivors; my friend Manny was one of them. I didn't hear from Manny again until I left the country and found out he was still recovering in Japan. He received a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. In all, thirty-one Saigon Warrior MPs lost their lives that day. The 716th became the most decorated MP Combat unit in history.

The Viet Cong, who were captured in Saigon and

questioned by interrogators about the first units to engage them, to a man they replied, "US Army MPs."

The thought that I could have been there unsettled me. I vowed never again to see the grass greener on the other side. That's not to say I didn't see action on Vinh Long during Tet.

Three hundred VC attacked our airfield to soften us up. Unfortunately, hundreds of them came under the wire while we were taking cover.

They knew the K9s were taken in for the dogs' safety and were encouraged to attack with little care.

Before the night was over, hundreds of VCs lay dead on the airfield. About 100 ARVN (South Vietnamese Army) and 30 Americans also died on Vinh Long that first night of Tet. The attacks continued for three weeks. We couldn't eat at our snack bar but got special orders to eat at the First Air Unit's mess hall. We got no mail or shipments of anything, so we had to be content with eating fish sticks and powdered eggs for the duration. Luckily, we suffered no losses from our K9 unit.

Hours after the initial attack, our group had to search for stragglers or dead, as the brass needed an accurate body count. Leading us were an infantry sergeant and door gunner, the only individuals with combat experience.



Right: Saigon, Vietnam

Rubble and the remains of barbed wire line the streets of Cholon, a suburb of Saigon that was burned by South Vietnamese army troops in an effort to flush out any Viet Cong that remained after the Tet offensive in late January.

We did this for two days, and since we were the only MPs on the base, we were responsible for housing seven VC prisoners. We put them in K9 travel cages.

I don't know what happened to those prisoners; some were just teenagers. We handed them over to ARVN Intelligence Corps. They were interrogated quite aggressively at our compound before being taken away.

The end.

That Ernie chose to leave it at that is as telling as the story itself. There was no end to anything while we were in-country. But, when it was over for us, there were no bugles nor drums. Instead, there was a space where our brothers should have been.

A Dog Handler's Memory of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Story and photo courtesy of Andrew Revering

I spent all my four-year enlistment from 1961-1965, except for basic training, at Blytheville AFB (SAC), Arkansas. During that time, two major incidents stand out that I won't forget. Here is the story of one of them.

I was working the afternoon shift from 3:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. On October 16th, 1962, we had just reported for duty when we were advised that the base was going on full alert status, and the B-52 Bombers, on the alert pad, were getting ready to leave the base. We were further advised that this was not a drill nor a SAC inspection but an actual alert. We received instructions to load our dogs onto a 3/4 ton stake truck and would all head out to our posts early. We usually didn't go on posts until dark. We received word that President Kennedy had placed all the military on alert status after discovering that Cuba was preparing nuclear war-head missiles for launch status. Russia provided missiles to their Cuban allies, and they refused to remove them. All the B-52 Bombers, armed with nuclear weapons, had Russian targets. As we were getting dropped off on our posts in broad daylight, the alert pad bombers began to leave, one after the other. Shortly after the bombers left the base, all the KC-135 Tankers flew out also.

Ironically, we walked with our dogs in these big open

fields outside the fenced-in area of the base, and there was nothing left for us to guard. All the planes had gone. The tense situation made the duty eerie, to say the least, not knowing what may come next. Everyone was expecting this to be World War III or Nuclear Annihilation. There wasn't much left to do except pray. We stayed in the highest DEFCON Readiness for 30 days. We worked the entire time for twelve hours on and twelve hours off. By October 28th, 1962, Russia agreed to pull their missiles out of Cuba; however, we stayed on alert for another 15 days. As a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy awarded the members of the 97th Bombardment Wing a Presidential Unit Citation.

Note: When I was at the end of my enlistment in June of 1965, Vietnam was just starting to heat up. I had a roommate who was not a dog handler that went TDY (Temporary Duty) for 90 days to Vietnam in late 1964. When he returned, he told us there wasn't much going on over there.

I remember I was scheduled to be honorably discharged in June of 1965. The Air Force tried to get me to re-enlist. They offered me a nice bonus, another stripe, and said they would send my dog and me to this exotic land. I turned them down and told them I was going



Airman 1st Class Andrew C. Revering and Sentry Dog Duke II of the 97th Combat Defense Squadron, Sentry Dog Section, Blytheville AFB (SAC), Arkansas.

home to become a civilian police dog handler. I learned later that over 500 Air Force Sentry Dog Handlers and their dogs were sent to Vietnam by the end of 1965.

I joined the Anoka Minnesota Police Department in September of 1965. Anoka is a Northern suburb of Minneapolis. In 1967 I became the first police dog handler with police dog King in Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan Area. King's success led to helping establish police dog units in a five-state area surrounding Minnesota.

He worked until 1972. When he died, the City of Anoka named a park in his honor (King Memorial Park) and placed a life-size bronze statue of him. King passed away in 1973. I was promoted to sergeant and

eventually up through the ranks to Chief of Police. I retired after 33 years of service, the last 14 as Chief of Police. The duty I most enjoyed while working in the police department was while I was King's handler. In 2018 a new National Law Enforcement Museum opened up in Washington DC. Anoka Police Dog King was inducted into that museum. A couple of years ago, I wrote a book about King that is available on Amazon and sold at the museum. It is titled "A Dog Named King-The True Story of an American Police Dog." In the early part of the book, I cover in detail, with photos, my experience as an Air Force Sentry Dog Handler.

Look here for the book:

[A Police Dog Named King.](#)

Ten Great Reasons to Join Us and Make Your Mark on MWD Heritage



Please consider joining our team for a remarkable opportunity to frame the future. Here are 10 fantastic reasons:

1. Share your vision— As we plan, design, build, and create the new museum, you'll have more direct input and impact as a volunteer on the concepts, services, galleries, and final build

2. Do your part— Contribute ideas, energies, and synergy to help complement the work of others in our cadre of volunteers. Each of us has a critical part to play; play yours to the hilt.

3. Pass along your wisdom— Almost everyone has some exceptional talent or skill that can contribute in a large capacity to our team. K9 folks are among the most intuitive and creative people we know, so please consider sharing your wisdom with others.

4. Develop new talents— Consider picking up a skill or two. We have people who can work with you in all types of software and proficiencies. Volunteering can open up brand-new vistas you never previously recognized.

5. Work for a cause— The final goals unite all of us. K9 leads the way, and we are at the forefront of the K9 world, with most of our Board Members as former K9 personnel from all service branches. We're all about the history of K9s.

6. Join the excitement— We have a building to create, artifacts to acquire, displays to conceive, programs to design, and events to produce. This team enjoys working together and having fun at the same time.

7. Grow from experience— Volunteering with our team gives you opportunities in the K9 world that you might not find elsewhere. We try to say "Yes" and help volunteers achieve their full potential and robust voices.

8. Meet new people— As a volunteer, you'll have the opportunity to connect with various people and places. You will learn, probe, explore, and grow from fantastic new opportunities.

9. Keep active— Besides helping the museum, your volunteerism helps you remain active, involved, vibrant, and healthy. Volunteers are less likely to develop high blood pressure and retain better thinking skills. Volunteering can also lessen chronic pain symptoms and reduce the risk of heart disease. It's good for the body.

10. It's good for the soul. Volunteering is a fabulous way of connecting with your brothers and sisters in K9. It challenges your mind and lifts your spirits. It leaves you with personal satisfaction that reduces stress and empowers you with positive energy.

A View of Our Volunteers in Action— Join this Talented and Devoted Team Today!



Scout Dogs Begin Training Here At Army's Only US K9 School

The Fort Carson Mountaineer

On February 15, 1952, during the Korean War, the Fort Carson newspaper, *The Mountaineer*, published an article about the Scout Dog school at Fort Riley, KS moving to Fort Carson. The piece is reprinted below.

A new kind of basic training started here this week as 18 German shepherd dogs began learning the fundamentals of serving as messengers, scouts, and sentries at the Army's only stateside canine school – Carson's Dog Training Center, commanded by Capt. John F. Riddick.

Complete training for the dogs – all German Shepherds – takes 12 weeks. Then they are ready for their jobs.

25th ISDP

Training is conducted by men of the 25th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon in a five-acre compound on O'Connell Blvd., east of the mule stables. The area is surrounded by a seven-foot wire fence, and the whole section is marked "Off Limits." These precautions are not to protect the dogs or to maintain secrecy so much as to prevent injury to curious people who may stray into the area.

Lt. Richard R. Peterson commands the platoon, the only one of its kind in the United States. He explains that teaching the dogs is almost the same as teaching close-order drill to recruits. The basic steps for the dogs – heeling, staying, sitting – are taught by long repetition of the same commands over and over again until the animals obey instinctively.

Ten Dogs

Lt. Peterson's platoon has ten dogs, and eight more are assigned to the dog school itself. The dogs are tied to wooden kennels when classes are not in session. When being taught, they are led on chains by the trainers.

Each dog is named and branded for identification, but unlike the mules, they are not given serial numbers. Most of the dogs have had some preliminary training at Ft. Riley, where the 25th was stationed before it moved here last week.

Three Dog MOS's

Eventually, each of the police dogs will find himself in one of three classes: messenger, scout, or sentry.

Carson's Newest Recruits



These German Shepherd dogs of the 25th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon started basic training at Camp Carson. Typical of the war dogs is Laddie (left). On the right, Cpl. Ray Thayer, who trained hunting dogs as a civilian, teaches heeling to Fox. Cpl Thayer spent a year at Fort Riley training dogs before moving to Fort Carson. Mountaineer photos by Fred Morath.

Messenger dogs have two handlers, or trainers, and learn to run from one man to another when the command is given. They can carry messages, food, ammunition, or any other light objects under all conditions.

Scout dogs are used by line units for their sense of smell, which gives them the ability to spot soldiers – friendly or enemy – at much greater distances than humans. They are especially useful at night when they can find infiltrators and give the alarm to their handlers.

Savage Sentries

Sentry dogs are the only type taught to attack men. They can be trained to patrol a given area, such as a warehouse or vital installation. They will attack any intruder who enters their post.

The Army no longer accepts dogs from private owners as it did during World War II, it was learned. Now all dogs are bought specifically for training by the Army.

Although no definite plans have been announced, it is expected that the Dog Center will be strengthened by the addition of more dogs and men.

Favorites from The Paw Print in 2022

By the Newsletter

Our newsletter team continues to surprise and delight our supporters with stories and photos about the Military Working Dog community. We thank you for your continued support and kind words.

With various new authors in 2022, our team thought it would be fun to look back again and share our favorite photos and articles with you.

This year Rick Fulton penned the choice article of our talented team member, Michael Hurder. Rick's memories of one stressful night at **Wheelus AFB in Libya** in 1964 start on page 4 of our July 2022 issue. Rick's words pull you into that night at the Ammo dump — you hear the screams, feel your heart pumping, and sigh relief at the morning's sunrise. *"I felt that,"* says Michael.

Team member Curtis Hendel is always at the top of many favorite lists. His writing connects with every emotion and produces work that makes people happy. Sherri Swanson recommends everyone read his article **"Rex C058: The Old Dawg That Broke Me In"** from our April 2022 issue.

Curtis talks about his first dog, Rex, at a kennel being an older, experienced dog. But as an older K9, what Rex lacked in physicality, he

more than made up for by transferring his wisdom to a willing newbie handler. We learn that we can glean essential skills and information from dogs who aren't the flashiest in the kennel. Curtis finds his blessings everywhere and shares them with us, especially in this piece.

Another team member, David Adams, also selected a Curtis Hendel article for his favorite from last year. In the March issue, Curtis wrote a compelling piece that shared the importance of WHY there needs to be an official day celebrating K9 veterans. Check out K9 Veterans Day in the March issue for a discussion about honoring the dogs who serve us.

And, speaking of Curtis, he selected a tragic story from our April issue as his favorite. **"A Bitter End"** is recounted by James Hazelton to our team member, David Adams. Curtis' reason for selection is that even as we celebrate victories, reminisce about great times, and look at a bright future, we cannot lose sight of program failures, like leaving the dogs behind in Vietnam. Without vigilance, events like this could happen again.

Last year, we had various article types: informative, emotional, and funny. Dixie Whitman loves finding small pieces of War Dog history because she feels that every



Above: "Yeah-no." Dixie's photo pick is a love-hate relationship with dynamic photos—that features snakes. Thanks to Tim Sparks and a photo he shared taken by photographer, Airman Tony Pacheco at Korat, Thailand. Credit: DoD photograph.

Below: For Curtis Hendel, this photo of the artwork created by sculptor James Mellick of Jajo R620 ticked every box to become his favorite photo of the year. Credit: James Mellick



dog, handler, veterinarian, or vet tech has a unique and compelling story. Therefore, it's no surprise that among her favorites was an article written by David Adams about War Dog Lex-Loci. In the August 2022 issue, a small piece called **"A Dog With Clout"** examines the detailed history of Air Force dog Lex-Loci, a talented K9 who came with some influence.

We strive to craft stories that engage our readers and share the spectrum of MWD history. These articles frequently evoke emotions

arising from serving alongside man's best friend. One such tale from our October issue, entitled **"Best Friend,"** hit our volunteer, Jeanne Dedrick, squarely in the heart. "It brought me to tears." This piece, written by Dixie Whitman, tells the story of extreme loss in the vastness of Iraq. Please take a moment and check out our favorites or discover some of your own by revisiting our previous newsletter issues. You can find them on our website at:

<https://mwdheritagemuseum.org/newsletters/>



This National Archives photo brought back memories for Michael Hurder of his partner, Prince. "He jumped in, and out with the same enthusiasm. It brought a smile to my face remembering that considerable head sticking out in the slipstream with his tongue lolling about half a foot back, slobber blowing back into my face. "Thanks for the shower, buddy."



Above: This photo of Air Force handler, SSGT Alexis Fierro, ticked all of the boxes to become the favorite 2022 photo of our team member, David Adams. This photo can be found in the March 2022 issue celebrating female handlers. DoD photo.



Above: A photo from our November issue provided David Leitson's favorite photo of 2022. It showcases Marines deployed from the 1st MEF at Camp Pendleton in 2008. 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.

The Pit and the Poop

by Rick Fulton

The February following my return from north Africa, the bitter weather at a SAC base in Arkansas greeted me with its harsh winter's howls. Then, Minnesota opened its doors and shooed us snow, ice, and a cold that penetrated so deeply to the bone that it left me shivering.

My sergeant arrived to tell me to put my partner Cochise in the truck and take him back to the kennel. The weather proved too cold for the dogs, but not Airmen.

He told me to get in the truck, and back we went to the post. *Ohhh-kay? We had to protect the Little Rockers and Memphians from them "Roosians" out there.* I walked post for about two more hours, and then the swing shift was over. I returned to the barracks with a slippery shimmer of ice coating my boots and parka. I trudged up the wooden stairs and had just reached the landing when my foot slipped, and down the steps, I plummeted. Unfortunately, I landed on my back, affecting the same muscle I'd injured the previous year.

A friend took me to the emergency room, where the doctor gave me a shot of something – unfortunately, he didn't give me a pass for work. Back in bed, I passed out. At 0900 the following day, rough hands shook me

from my coma-like sleep. I had kennel duty to feed and water a couple of dozen hounds and then wash out kennels. The sergeant kept yelling at me for not having been out there already. I still had quite a buzz from the pain shot, but I went to work, feeding and watering my charges. Our kennel's design included concrete runs with a sidewalk in the middle of the two rows of pens. Just adjacent sat a six-foot pit into which we washed the feces. To access the hole, one had to lift the protective grate. I started the wash down, but I also needed to remove lots of snow and ice. Walking backward, I held the hose between my legs; its strong stream swept stuff down through the trough. Next, I remembered seeing my legs go up and then nothing.

When I awoke, I found myself in the pit with my knee stuck in the drain. Furthermore, I couldn't move it.

Below the pit's lip, I became trapped in water up to my chest with a shift-full of K9 crap floating around me.

Bitter cold, then numbness overtook me. I remember seeing the water floating the turds around, and the water continued to rise because the hose continued gushing water. The term "being in deep doo-doo" seemed appropriate.

I started yelling. As usual, the kennel setup kept us far

from others, except for the nearby bomb dump. Fortunately, one solitary worker could hear my pleas. With his teeth chattering from either the cold or his intense fear of K9s, I convinced him that I had locked the dogs inside their runs with gates closed. (About this, I lied. I couldn't remember for sure.)

Fortunately, he finally arrived and, at least, turned off the hose before leaving to call for help.

Next, a patrol truck arrived—same deal. I explained that I had secured the dogs. They came inside the fenced area to get me out of the pit. I couldn't get up, so they wrapped me in something. The winds continued to howl while my fatigues soaked wet, attracted dog crap like a magnet. The ambulance whisked me to the base hospital, where I remained for four days. The staff threw my smelly, damp, dog-feces-covered fatigues in my hospital room's locker; they didn't even wash them.

My First sergeant came by to yell at me for making the squadron look bad. Next, the Kennel Master visited, mainly to laugh. He found it hysterical. Then the Wing Safety NCO stopped by to interview me for a couple of hours. He decided I should not have walked backward while spraying the stuff along and slapped my wrist verbally. Naturally, the



Squadron CO was not pleased. I got that message several ways.

After finishing my hospital stay, I put on my now-dry, but still smelly, fatigues and walked to the barracks. I returned to duty about 24 hours later. The barracks folks laughed a lot about it, but I couldn't find the humor, so I said nothing.

Shortly afterward, the Re-enlistment NCO told me about a new program Strategic Air Command called 55/45. They offered cross-training and an automatic promotion to E-4 if you re-upped.

So, I sewed on my Airman First stripes. I hated to leave the dogs and the hunt, but as for the squadron admin types, the safety gents, and all the rest, they can still kiss my rear end.

(I remember this clearly from when I was 20 and am now 77.)

Trust me, almost drowning in a pit full of frigid water with lots of dog turds floating past the end of the nose was worse than any dog nips or even an attack in a suit. Being in the dogs has always been a dangerous duty, often in many more ways than one can imagine.

Honor Flight

by Michael Hurder

Smiles - handshakes - cheers - applause - more cheers - flag waving - bunting - an Army band, and, oh yes, a heartfelt "welcome home, son" from my adoring family. Yup. That's what I imagined. I was sure of it. Everybody loves a soldier when he comes home. Right? I was so damn wrong.

Instead of any of that, I went to jail. The local police arrested me because some hateful morons who didn't know me from Adam called me a baby killer. I doubt they knew what that meant to me, but that didn't matter. I wanted their blood—all of them. I only got to one of them, and I felt terrible for him in the middle of ending his life. So, I stopped. His cowardly buddy hit me from behind, and that knocked me over. I fell to the ground and again bashed my head. For the umpteenth time in the past two weeks, I left the world of the consciously involved.

I returned to the world in a jail cell with seven of my cohorts. The civilian cops who were supposed to keep the longhairs away carted us off in a paddy wagon. They completely ignored us until a Navy Captain came to the jail and threatened to bring the feds down on them. They were smirking at us as we filed out of the cell. We stood our ground and stared them down until every last one turned away. We promised to return and reminded

them that we played by jungle rules. That was when I learned to hate.

I know how to hate.

Fifty years ago, there was a war. No one loved it. It seemed that no one loved the warriors either. We learned to take cover here as we did over there. Some of us learned to hate for the first time. The odd part was that we hated our fellow citizens even while we never hated our enemy. Those were the bad times that got worse for some of us.

I put a mean face on. I dressed as rough as was necessary to keep people away. The thing I feared most then was jail. It didn't take much for an idiot to light my fuse. It happened. I exploded. Then I ran. Jail would kill me. I often thought of joining my brothers in Arlington Cemetery. Dead was better, right? "Fekk it. It don't mean nuthin". But - that wasn't to be my fate.

The strongest woman I ever knew came out of the fog. Somehow she tamed me, and we made a life, though I was only a part-timer. We even had kids. They turned into decent people only because of her. Nevertheless, I was still angry and in hiding. I worked an autonomous life. I isolated as much as I could. I freaked out whenever I had to mingle. Working with the kids on a science project was unbearable. What if my efforts cost them a grade or



On one of the highlights of Michael's trip, he got rubbings from The Wall. One is his friend, Santiago Escobar, and the other is MOH Recipient, Robert Hartsock, a dog handler with the 44th IPSD. Dewayne Washington, the young man assisting, is the grandson of another Honor Flight attendee.

humiliation? What if they never spoke to me again? Failing them would be the end.

Through her determination and never-say-die attitude, we stuck it out. The kids grew and made successful lives for themselves despite my history. We now have six grandkids. The way of the world baffles me, but I'll take it, though. She lights the way, and I stay in her high beams. When I started to rejoin the human race, I wondered how I could hold onto that hate for so long. No one else seemed to remember, not in the circles where I dwelt.

I finally met some people I could stand. Though most of them, veterans like me,

made a better go of things than I did. Some of them even remembered me. I finally gained my band of brothers. Everything was good, and I started to like living again. Even my honey felt better for me. That was the blessing I had hoped she would gain one day. Not having to worry about me would be an extraordinary accomplishment. God knows she deserved it.

Another savior came into my life a few years back after I'd retired and the kids had grown and moved out of the house. I had struggled again with the past, and I'd lost focus. But the dreams of my past never seemed to stop. He recommended I sign up

for a trip to DC so I could visit "Santi" (Santiago Escobar) and all our brothers face-to-face, so to speak. He called it an Honor Flight. He said he was sure it was just the right thing for me to do at this stage. I hesitated but just for a minute and asked where to sign up. Months went by without hearing a word, and then the pandemic hit. I put it out of my mind and buried myself in busy work. I even signed up for more classes at the local college. You can never learn too much photography. It kept me grounded mostly.

Like many other pipe dreams, I'd put the trip to Washington out of my mind. I felt it would have happened if I'd been meant to go. So I bought another lens and signed up for Advanced Digital Photography. This class would stretch my limits for sure. Photoshop, at this level, is no one's friend.

I was on a shoot for class at Del Valle Regional Park, and I needed to catch the eagles in flight, hopefully teaching their younguns to hunt. That would be perfect. I waited almost two hours for them to show. The kids were flying circles around their papa, and it was grand. I had such a grin plastered on my face, and I completely forgot about making images. I just watched them cavort.

As it happened, I was in one of the two areas within the park where you could re-

ceive a call. When the phone rang, it first startled me and then pissed me off. I looked at the screen in case it was family, but it was an unknown number. When I started to put the phone back in my pocket, I had a funny feeling that I should answer it.

"Hello, this is Mike, and you'd better have a good reason for interrupting my eagle watch."

"Oh, I'm sorry. This is Connie from Honor Flight. I can call back later."

Several seconds of disbelief passed before Connie said, "Hello? Are you still there? Mr. Hurder."

I blinked into the now and responded with a raspy, "Yeah. Yeah. I'm here. Connie, did you say?"

On September 22, 2022, I and 26 other aged and flight-weary veterans arrived at Washington DC's Reagan International Airport. I thought we were in trouble as we taxied up to the gate when I saw a fire engine spraying water at us. Then someone on the other side of the jet said, "They're over here too. What the hell?"

There was no fire, but as we trekked through the Jetway to the Gate area, we heard someone saying, "Welcome, home. Thank you for your service" over the PA. We stole wary looks at each other. WTF, over?

A gauntlet of flag-waving, hollering, clapping, smiling Americans were on their feet and cheering us—hundreds of them. They were recording the event on their phones. Many were crying. That's when I felt the tears on my cheeks. A fellow Cav Trooper grabbed me and said, "Is this real?" He was crying too. This line of revelers extended through to the main concourse. It went on for so long that I was sure I would drop dead any minute, and wouldn't that just be fitting?

That was just the beginning. The weekend was a whirlwind of tributes, excitement, revelry, and, dare I say it, exoneration. Throughout it all, we kept looking at each other, the Nam Vets among us, visually pinching each other as if to prove it was real.

I spent time with Santi at the Wall, mostly staring at his rubbing. I found Sergeant Robert Hartsock and got a rubbing for his sister and niece. My Cav brother, Bob Conley - a platoon leader in the 2nd of the 7th - wounded three times himself, lost six men in one day and fourteen throughout his tour. He was as tough as you'd expect a Trooper to be. We plowed our way through his list and then held on for dear life as the reality of us being there in their hallowed presence struck us with more humility than any man could bear.

Our reflections in the Wall transformed into the young faces of the warriors we left behind. We promised to live our lives to the fullest - in their memory. We live now not just for them but because of them.

That the trip had to end was the only negative. We all put off our goodbyes for as long as possible. Expecting a hurried exit and a long drive home, our arrival at SFO brought more disbelief. Active-Duty military, local police, firefighters, friends, family, and more strangers met us at the gate with as much fanfare as our arrival in DC.

Handshakes turned into hugs, promises to keep in touch, and exchanges of phone #s, business cards, and addresses; we did all we could to keep it from ending. Weary soldiers all, we finally had to admit the weekend had spent us completely. But it isn't over. We will meet again soon for a reunion to reinforce the new bonds we've made. I can't wait.

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother." - The bard.

None too soon comes the end, and I am finally ready. WOOF, Prince. I heard you.



*Military Working Dog
Heritage Museum &
Handler Center
P.O. Box 54
Newport, TN 37822
Phone: 865-507-8903*

From the Team at MWDHM...

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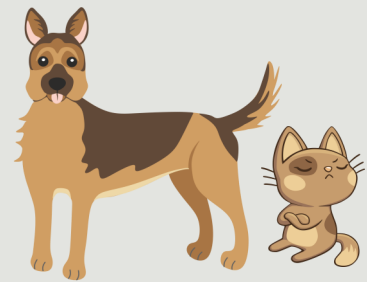
Share your copy of
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Important dates with Trooper and Scout

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 – 25th Anniversary Dedication of the War
Dog Memorial at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.



Historic Pooch Pic of the Month



US Air Force STAFF Sergeant Derek Donahey, a Military Working Dog Handler, with the 568th Security Forces Squadron, Ramstein Air Base, Germany, plays with his partner Rico, as they wait their turn in the building search portion of the 2001 Ramstein, K-9 Competition on January 22, 2001. Eleven teams from Ramstein are competing to determine who will represent their base.

Photo by SSGT Ken Bergmann, USAF
Source: NARA

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