



The Paw Print

The Voice of the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum

& Handler Center



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Special points of interest:

- **Duty, Sacrifice and Family: Remembering SFC (Ret.) Jesse S. Mendez**
- **The Mercy Dogs 1914–1918**

My God, They're Everywhere!



Diablo's signal to handler A1C Robert (Bob) Press was the first alert of the '68 Tet Battle of Biên Hòa.

Courtesy of VSPA.com. (c)2015, Don Poss

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As the calendar turned to 1968, Vietnam was well past "that place no one had heard of." By then, young men like A1C Robert (Bob) Press, who were being sent there, had watched nightly news reports of the war through most of their high school years. Airman Press's orders had him reporting to the 3rd Security Police Squadron's (3rd SPS) K9 Section at Biên Hòa at the end of January, just in time for the Lunar New Year (Tet), the most revered Vietnamese holiday. Tet was

a time when even the war took a semi-holiday. That is until 1968.

Originally built by the French, Biên Hòa Air Base was located 16 miles northeast of Saigon. With the completion of several US projects, enlarging and improving the base infrastructure, including a new runway, it was the largest air base in the southeast Asia theater of operations and served as a joint operations base that included the US Air Force, the Republic of Vietnam Air Force (RVAN), and US Army Aviation units.

On the evening and early morning hours of January 30/31, 1968, "newbie" Bob Press and his sentry dog, Diablo X313, were a new K9 Team in the 'getting used to each other' mode and posted on a southeast section of Biên Hòa. He wasn't quite sure what TET was all about, thinking it was some kind of big holiday, like Thanksgiving or Christmas.

Please join us inside for the second article focusing on The Tet Offensive. This time from a USAF base.



President, Albert Johnson

From the President's Desk

I want to start this month's president's desk article by acknowledging our Social Media Team's hard work and success. Finding a volunteer team that works so well together is a rare thing. In the past few months, the team has implemented a new plan to engage more with our followers and diversify the type of material posted. They've scoured the archives and left no stone unturned to bring you the most entertaining and historically significant visuals they can find. Thanks to Dixie Whitman for stepping up to lead this endeavor on our behalf. I must thank Linda Standard, Ann Wilkerson, and Rob Schnell for their hard work and incredible dedication as vital Social Media team members—they are amazing. We have witnessed a tremendous increase in engagement, with handlers reaching out to tell us their stories.

Our organization has been blessed to have specific items of great historical value come to us in our short existence. We recently obtained an exquisite collection of patches, uniform items, photos, and documentation that I can't wait to share with everyone. We will be working on showcasing these

items in both the newsletter and on our Facebook page shortly.

On the 55th Anniversary, David Leitson, our fantastic editor, looks at the Tet Offensive beginning at the end of January 1968 in South Vietnam. North Vietnam chose to attack on this date due to the many ARVN members being on leave to celebrate Tet, the Lunar New Year holiday. The bet was the allied forces would be at their weakest. This historical look at the battle is well worth the read.

In this edition of the newsletter, we have an article written by historian Michael Lemish remembering a legend in the K9 field, SFC (Ret.) Jesse Mendez. Jesse's presence at last year's rededication of Fort Benning's War Dog Monument inspired attendees of every era, along with the guests. It was the first time I met Jesse, but he greeted me and told me he was proud of our organization's work. That was one heck of a compliment from the man you will learn more about in the article, no more spoilers from me.

Michael Lemish also brings us the story of the Mercy Dogs. These dogs were crucial to caring for the wounded on the battlefield during WWI. What these dogs had to contend with

during their wartime service is unfathomable. They saved countless lives and brought much comfort to the wounded and dying men in the fields. I can only imagine being a soldier wounded on the battleground as fury raged around me and finding one of these extraordinary dogs at my side with wound dressings. If that is not an example of a force multiplier, I don't know what is.

Rick Fulton shares a close encounter titled Love Taps that has us all thankful for the gear supplied and that fresh pair of undershorts. Having had a few close calls and near bloody misses, I can tell you my heart was pounding just reading the story and reliving my own memories.

Lastly, I thank David Leitson for putting this newsletter issue together. We see the polished product, but endless hours go into producing *The Paw Print* every month, so shout out to our incredible Newsletter Team for the education, the passion for these outstanding dog teams, and the stories of what they endured.

Happy Valentine's day to all!

As always, K9 leads the way!

Albert Johnson



Remembering SFC (Ret.) Jesse S. Mendez

Story by Michael Lemish, Photos Courtesy of the Jesse S. Mendez

Duty – Sacrifice - Family

January 15, 1928 –

June 3, 2022

The date is April 17, 1969. You are 41 years old, career Army and soon to retire. And you are at a civilian airfield near Columbus, Georgia, about to make your 238th parachute jump. The jumps you made at this time were still primitive by today's standards – a conical chute and the hope you didn't break anything on landing. This is not a jump for the Army but one for yourself and something you believe in. It's the companion that is along for the ride with you that makes the difference this time. Hang on to your risers and file this episode from history under "P" for persistence.

Jesse Salvador Mendez was born in Mason City, Iowa. His parents were working class and lived a hardscrabble life. Mendez did not have it easy – the United States was just entering the "Great Depression" that would make life unbearably harsh for many Americans. The second strike against him was being born Mexican-American. You'd grow up as a second-class citizen in a world where many storefronts posted a sign, "No Mexicans Allowed." Mendez took the high

road and wanted respect. The best way to earn that, he decided, was to join the military.

Mendez joined the Marine Corps in 1945 and for two years was part of the occupation force in the Pacific with an MOS of railroad traffic duties. After departing the Marines, he worked for several railroad lines back in the states until the military bug bit him again, and he joined the Army in 1950.

In 1951 he shipped overseas, where the Korean War was in full swing after a year of conflict. Mendez became a minefield demolition platoon sergeant and served two years there. He was awarded the Korean Service Medal with one silver and one bronze star. He also earned the United Nations Service Medal along with the National Defense Service Medal.

But it would be in 1954 when he would find his true calling in the Army. Jess always enjoyed the company of dogs. He volunteered for the Scout Dog Training Course conducted at Fort Carson, Colorado. It was during this period that he met his soon-to-be future wife, Eloise Perez. Jess would be continuing training and educating himself before attending and graduating from the Scout

Dog Instructor Training Course.

It was in 1957 when Mendez was posted in Lengries, Germany, the hub of Army dog training and the procurement of German shepherds for military use in Europe and the United States. Jesse and Eloisa Perez married there on June 27, 1957. Behind every good man is a strong woman. Eloisa fit the bill precisely. The pair would raise three children, and she would bear the brunt of the work with her husband often away on deployment. Loneliness and hardship are not uncommon burdens most military families face to this day.



In 1962 the United States began shipping German shepherd dogs from Europe to South Vietnam. The idea was to start a military dog program for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). In April 1962, Mendez volunteered along with three other instructors. They began at Go Vap, about 12 miles east of Saigon, while construction of a larger training facility com-

menced nearby. In one of my early interviews, Mendez talked about some of the problems the instructors faced:

There were many difficulties encountered in getting the ARVN handlers to accept their dogs. It was very difficult to show how valuable the dogs were for security and scouting. When we first got there, we had a heck of a mess. The Air Force had trained many sentry and attack dogs, and the ARVN was trying to use them with infantry units out in the field when only a silent scout dog would work. They would bark on patrol and even attack their own patrol members. We were eventually able to exchange them out.

But the biggest problem was trying to get the handlers to praise their dogs if they performed well or did what was expected of them. Perhaps they were reluctant because of the dog's size - after all, many handlers only outweighed their dogs by a few pounds.



Mendez was instrumental in establishing five ARVN

scout dog platoons. While in-country, he was awarded two Purple Hearts along with the Air Medal (Army) based on the number of helicopter operations he was involved in. After three tours of duty, he returned home. The timing was perfect as the United States was sucked into the Vietnam conflict. With just one scout dog platoon (26th IPSD) available, the DoD ramped up an expansion plan for additional platoons along with a push for dog recruitment. Mendez was able to take the lessons he learned in Vietnam and apply them at Fort Benning for the scout dog program as Chief Instructor. Training manuals were updated and developed, and he had a simulated Vietnamese village built to make the training even more realistic.

And so, it was on a sunny Thursday afternoon in April of 1969 that Mendez would board a Cessna 175 with a parachute strapped to his back. But unlike all previous jumps, this time scout dog Pal (X296) would be along for the ride. The pair climbed to 3,800 feet and they departed the plane together. Mendez delayed opening the chute and recorded the first HALO (high altitude-low opening) jump with an Army scout dog.



The results were almost anticlimactic as Pal did not struggle during the descent, and the pair landed just 200 feet off target. Still, it must have scared the crap out of the dog, just like anyone who has made a jump for the first time. Several more jumps were made during the next six months including one at an airshow. Pal eventually retired to spend his remaining years with the Mendez family. But the Army never ran with the idea of parachuting handlers and dogs until many years later. HALO jumps would eventually exceed an altitude of 15,000 feet, and the idea of a handler jumping with a dog would not happen until parachute technology advanced. Credit Mendez with paving the way.



It was the following month when Mendez retired from the Army on May 31, 1969. Something truly deserved. As to his character, he was not one to sit around and be a layabout. He would continue to support his church and the Columbus, Georgia community. He volunteered as troop leader with the Boy Scouts of America Weracoba District, Troop 132. He also belonged to Woodmen of the World, a national fraternity that supported their local communities in many ways depending on what was needed at the time. And with growing enthusiasm for citizens band radio during the 1970s, he was a member of the "Valley Fivewatters," the Columbus Chattahoochee Valley Citizens Band Club.

True to form, dogs were always by his side, either at home or somewhere in the area that needed help. He volunteered at the Metropolitan Animal Shelter and as a driver for the Metropolitan Animal Rescue Service. Essentially he was part of an ambulance service for dogs that were hit by cars or injured and needed immediate veterinary care.

He would also contribute and honor the history and champion the advancement of military working dogs. After the dedication

of the war dog memorial at Fort Benning in 2000, he was instrumental in establishing several memorial pedestals that would surround the statue. At the memorial rededication on May 14, 2022, Jess was able to make one final visit to the site. Although he was not able to leave the car, he was overwhelmed by friends and well-wishers that wanted to greet him.



Courtesy of Michael Lemish

As we go through life we will meet hundreds, if not thousands of people. Some we will dismiss, like, dislike, love, or even hate. A select few may also inspire and make a mark on you. And then there are a couple of folks that make you say, "This is someone I want running shotgun on my backside to check my six." Jesse Mendez is one of those select few. I remember in a telephone interview I did with his daughter several years ago, Army LT. Colonel (ret.) Monica Mendez, and she said, "He is my hero." Yes Monica. But with his devotion to God, country, family, and dogs, he is a hero to the rest of us as well.

Celebrating the Dogs We Love! K9 Leads the Way!



TET 1968: Biên Hòa Air Base

A Collaboration of Two Vietnam Dog Handlers

At the Welcome to Biên Hòa Air Base orientation (attendance required), new handlers were told by an unknown sergeant that "... In the Vietnamese culture, the Lunar New Year is a time when bad spirits may try to enter your home and bring bad fortune for the coming year." Airman Bob Press was two hours from learning how literally true those words were.

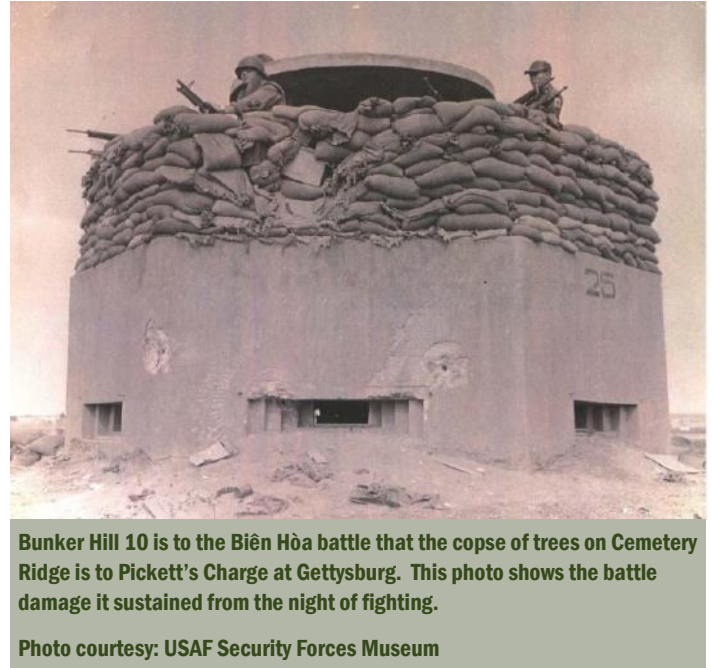
There is no comparable feeling to being new to a combat air base and patrolling a post in the black of night; snakes in the tall grass, jungle beyond the perimeter, and ever-present distant or close enough sounds of war. Just you and your dog quartering a couple hundred yards deep and wide, while observing the perimeter's double- or triple-strung barbed wire, just this side of a field of landmines.

Facing the perimeter fencing, Bunker Hill 10 (BH-10), a French-built concrete bunker, was to Press's right. To his left, another K9 post was somewhere in the darkness. Several hundred yards behind him was the east end of his post, the runway, the arming/de-arming shed for aircraft, the engine build-up building where aircraft tested engines before a mission,

and the flight line riveted F100 Super Sabers less some 60 yards from the engine build-up area.

On post, A1C Press was squatting, scanning the tall grass field for obvious places an enemy might seek as cover or concealment. He could also see the Air Base Control Tower flight line with various aircraft lit up for maintenance or ordnance loading for coming missions. Bunker Hill 10 loomed brutishly, old and worn, with Sentry Towers standing guard every hundred yards along the perimeter road. Towers manned by AF Sentries looking for trouble and armed with M-60 machine guns or M16 automatic rifles. It was time again to move positions and check out Diablo's ability to alert on whatever, and draw his attention to it. Just one more minute to watch the ever-present string of flares ... drifting. Awesome. Hypnotic. Sizzling their short lives away.

Feelings of aloneness were quickly banished when the traditional Tet cease-fire that had gone into effect 24 hours earlier exploded as the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army (VC/NVA) attacked in the central highlands north of Biên Hòa Air Base. The 7th Air Force Commander, Gen-



Bunker Hill 10 is to the Biên Hòa battle that the copse of trees on Cemetery Ridge is to Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg. This photo shows the battle damage it sustained from the night of fighting.

Photo courtesy: USAF Security Forces Museum

eral William W. Momyer, rapidly ordered all bases to Condition Red Alert."

At 0300 hours, all hell broke loose. A barrage of 82mm mortars and 122 rockets were unleashed and rained down on the Air Base. Shrapnel scattered across the aircraft flight line, like a child's spiked toys of Jacks, with shards of jagged metal. The attack knocked out the power to the 3rd SPS's Central Security Control's (CSC) communications center. Squadron Commander, LTC Kenton Miller, in his last month of his 12-month tour, raced from his quarters in PJs carrying a uniform and using an SP law enforcement handheld radio for command and control.

Under cover of the barrage, combined VC and NVA forces swiftly moved between the perimeter's double-fencing. At 0320, Diablo alerted handler Bob Press who called in the alert. It was the first alert called in on what was the '68 Tet Battle of Biên Hòa. LTC Miller instructed Press to launch a handheld slap-flare. It ignited, bathing the area in surreal dancing-amber light and shadows, and LTC Miller heard A1C Press call back: "My God, they are everywhere—Charlie's in the wire! Another K9 handler, and BH-10 manned by two Security Police and an Augmentee, also called in, confirming perimeter penetration.

Bob Press cut Diablo loose, commanding him to

attack, but Sentry Dog Diablo was hit and killed before reaching the enemy. A1C Press was also immediately wounded and went down. He and Diablo were the first US casualties of the battle for Biên Hòa. Wounded, all A1C Press could do was lie still and play dead as hundreds of the enemy ran by or jumped over him. A1C Press would be shot and wounded twice more through the night.

Bunker Hill 10 was manned by two Security Police and one Augmentee, who were laying down a withering field of fire with an M-60 machine gun and M16 rifles, while drawing enemy fire consisting of small arms and RPGs. The first RPG fired at the bunker, either by marksmanship or luck, destroyed the M-60 on top of the bunker, sending it cartwheeling down to the perimeter road. LTC Miller reinforced Bunker Hill 10 with a Quick Response Team and sent his Operations Officer, Capt. Reginald Maisey, Jr., on his second tour in Vietnam, and the son of an Air Force SP, to take charge at BH-10.

SSgt William Piazza and Sgt James Lee raced from the east to ammo-resupply BH-10, but sniper fire

forced them to turn around and approach the position from the west. Once at the bunker, SSgt Piazza, armed with an M-16, swapped it with an army lieutenant, armed with a 40mm grenade launcher he was not familiar with (later wounded), took up position behind BH-10. SSgt Piazza, using his newly acquired mounted grenade launcher, began exchanging fire tit for tat with a VC B-40 RPG team.

BH-10, SSgt Piazza's cover, was quickly pockmarked and scarred by numerous machinegun rounds and RPG explosions. Floating cement dust, eerily glowing with burnt flare-light, draped macabre upon the attack. VC continued firing a stochastic steady pattern from their crude circle-bunker of sandbags, stacked in hurried disorder, and seemingly stockpiled with enough RPGs to destroy the world, or at least BH-10.

The VC had launched thirteen RPGs at BH 10 to SSgt Piazza's nine launched grenades in return. His tenth grenade hit the VC position and stockpile of ammo and RPGs, lighting the black sky in massive secondary explosions, and swatting away supporting helicopters,

who streamed in their wake a tail of red-fire tracers towards the enemy.

Capt. Maisey stayed in contact with LTC Miller while directing the men in the BH10. Then LTC Miller heard Maisey say, "Oh, I'm hit," but Maisey kept communicating— though hit squarely in the shoulder by an RPG that somehow made it through a firing slit in a BH-10 wall. Inside BH-10, the din of noise was ear-puncturing, the darkness like liquid-nothing, and the men, so intensely locked into survival, were unaware of directions being given— or that Maisey was even in the bunker.



Though mortally wounded, he continued directing his men inside and outside the bunker.

At 0430, an hour and a half after the start of the battle, Capt. Maisey was about to try and go outside for better radio reception when an RPG hit next to one of the bunker's firing slits, and the brunt of the

shrapnel blast hit him in the back. In the smoke and battle chaos, no one inside the bunker realized Capt. Maisey had been killed until they tripped over a body and then carried it outside to make room for ammo. They laid the body on stair steps leading down into the bunker, which provided some cover. By flare-light, they recognized it was Capt. Maisey, and that he had bled out. They heard a sudden rise in weapons firing and raced down into the black din to help their Augmentee, busily stuffing another magazine into his M-16. SSgt Piazza was now in charge of the bunker's defense and held the key to whether Biên Hòa Air Base would be overrun.

Under heavy fire, the VC and NVA, who fought their way on base, took up cover and concealment positions at the arming/de-arming shed, engine build-up area, and in tall grass at the east end of the flight line. Intense triangulated cross-fire from the SPS Air Base Defenders ruthlessly drove them into the open. An F100 Super Saber of the 531st Tac Fighter Squadron got airborne and conducted a napalm strike on enemy forces still trying to hide at the end of the east runway. It was the first time a US Air Force aircraft

dropped ordnance on its own base in defense of it.

By near dawn, the Army was able to get AH-1 Cobra helicopters in the air, and they hungrily stalked and subjected the enemy forces to brutal strafing and rocket fire. As they flew over the perimeter looking for enemy, Bob Press managed to get himself up and, standing shakily, waved at the predator helicopter in hopes of rescue. Not seeing a military dog with him, the crew assumed he was the enemy and fired rockets at him. Press quickly turned but too late, and shrapnel from the exploding ordnance pummeled his back, and he went down again with a fourth wound. With both enemy and friend trying to kill him and unable to move, he laid where he fell, praying the Cobra would not strike again, fearing he might bleed out unless soon found, and passed out.

SSgt Piazza and the original Bunker Hill 10 team remained in the bunker through the morning and afternoon to give fire cover for those sweeping the field twice for hiding enemy. During the sweeps, they found Bob Press, miraculously still alive and medivac to Japan. Bob Press, severely wounded

in the process, successfully performed his primary objective, to give the first warning of an enemy attack. He returned from convalescence on March 2nd, two months later, to finish his tour. Those who saw his scars couldn't believe he was still alive.

Under the exemplary leadership of LTC Kenton Miller and Capt. Reginald Maisey, the 3rd Security Police Squadron's force of 400, including Augmentees, were outnumbered more than 5 to 1, yet they prevented a combined VC and NVA force of 1,500 from overtaking Biên Hòa Air Base. Capt. Maisey, K9 Diablo X313, and one other were killed. Bob Press and nine others were wounded. The enemy subjected Bunker Hill 10 to extensive fire with small arms and RPGs but was unable to take it out of commission.

Capt. Reginald Maisey was awarded the Air Force Cross and Purple Heart posthumously, and SSgt William Piazza the Silver Star. A1C Bob Press was awarded three Purple Hearts. His fourth wound was friendly fire, which merits a sorry 'bout that.

The VC and NVA left behind 140 of their dead bodies and a number of

wounded between the perimeter fence and the engine build-up. A large portion of the dead was found in Bunker Hill 10's field of fire. Many unmatched body parts were gathered. We say this not to be gruesome but to account for a larger number of enemy KIA revealed decades later. Another 25 NVAs were captured. That night a dozer plowed its width in a long trench, and the dead were placed in the open mass grave at the east end of the Air Base. Air Force Security Police K9 guarded their exposed bodies from prowling animals till morning. At dawn, the gaping sore of a mass grave was backfilled with red earth and compressed with the dozer. Through the years, men rotated tours in and out from the air base until the gravesite's location and existence were forgotten - erased from memory - except for the few who were there and saw the destroyed bodies, remembered the open grave, and that long night guarding them.

In 2017 members of the Vietnam Security Police Association, Inc. (USAF) assisted Vietnam in locating the mass grave, found near the end of the runway close to Bunker Hill 10

and the attack area. DNA testing (non-existing in 1968) led to the identity of 159 VC and NVA remains, returned to families to have laid to rest. Vietnam had a large, dignified ceremony that hundreds attended, including Americans who helped locate the grave. And once more, VC and NVA soldiers were reburied together, providing closure for their families.



The Paw Print is grateful for the information that made this article possible.

- "TET 31 Jan 1968 Biên Hòa Air Base First Alert: Robert (Bob) Press WIA, Sentry Dog Diablo X313 KIA" by LTC Kenton Miller, Squadron Commander, provided by The Vietnam Security Police Association, Inc. (USAF).
- "The Battle for Biên Hòa AB Tet 1968" provided by the US Air Force Police Alumni Association

The Mercy Dogs 1914-1918

by Michael Lemish

The setting for World War I is unique, and it is difficult to comprehend the immense scale of destruction and suffering endured by millions of people. Most of the time was spent in static positions. Soldiers squatted down in trenches as each side engaged in furious battles to gain just a few yards of real estate. Between the combatants lay no-man's land. It was here, under the cloak of darkness, that many dogs worked and achieved great success.

Dogs employed during WWI provided three main services: Red Cross dogs, often called mercy dogs, located wounded soldiers. Other dogs were trained for messenger duty, transportation of pigeons, and sentry detail. Still, others were recruited as ammunition and light gun carriers, laying communication wires and scouting. Hundreds of Jack Russell terriers were working to combat the hordes of rats that often infested the trenches. A conservative estimate of all the warring factions involved places the number of dogs employed at nearly 50,000!

If you happen to be traveling in New York just outside the city, you may want to stop at the Hartsdale Canine Cemetery and view a striking monument of a

German shepherd. The plaque reads, "Dedicated to the memory of the war dog. Erected by public contribution by dog lovers to man's faithful friend for the valiant services rendered in the World War, 1914-1918." Those who helped establish the memorial had no idea at the time that this was not the "war to end all wars." The likeness of the shepherd, lean and bearing Red Cross markings, can evoke many feelings. What struck me first are the eyes, as the dog seems to gaze beyond you, searching for something or someone - a dog in the midst of his work.

The Red Cross dogs - or sanitary dogs (*Sanitätshunde*), as the Germans called them, provided wounded men with two essential services. They carried medical supplies and small canteens of water or spirits that were typically attached across the dog's chest or with a saddlebag arrangement. The wounded man, if conscious, could avail himself of these supplies. The second and primary mission for the dog was, once a wounded man was found, to communicate this to his handler. How this was accomplished is truly remarkable. These animals would be the forerunners to today's search and rescue



Courtesy of The National Archives

dogs - with one caveat - nowadays, SAR dogs don't need to deal with artillery or deadly mustard and phosgene gases to accomplish their task.

The initial training involved having the dogs be able to distinguish the living from the dead. Once this was accomplished, a method to inform the handler a wounded man was located needed to be developed. There were two methods developed. If the wounded man was somewhere behind their own battle line, the dog was trained to call for his handler. The vast majority of dogs searched no man's land, and a different technique was needed in this landscape.

At the beginning of the war, the innate sense of retrieval bred into many dogs led to the way they were trained, meaning the return of a cap or helmet

indicating that a wounded soldier was located. In one case, a French Red Cross dog named Captain located thirty wounded men in a single day using this method.

This technique posed its own set of problems. Not finding a cap or helmet, the dog would pull a piece of uniform, a bandage, or even hair to accomplish the job at hand. This increased in frequency as the war went on and forced the Allies to rework their training methods. The new training regimen had the dog lie down if no wounded were found or beckon the handler to return to the site if, indeed, a soldier was still alive.

The Germans faced the same problem at the beginning of the war but went in a different direction with much better results. They devised a short leash

called a *Brindel*, sometimes referred to as a *Brinsel*. Upon finding a wounded man, the dog would return with the leash in its mouth. Conversely, if the leash hung loose, no wounded or perhaps only the dead were to be found. It is also reported that these dogs were trained to distinguish between friend and enemy and disregard the latter. This was probably propaganda and more reflective of the times than fact.

The amount of enemy activity in the immediate search area determined whether the Red Cross dogs would be sent out during the day. Most often, they worked at night, relying on their acute olfactory capability. At this time, people did not fully comprehend how dogs scented - only that they could. The scientific community did not have the capability to truly understand the olfactory ability of dogs or to the extent to which this gift could be developed.

Mercy dogs dealt with deadly gases, slit trenches, barbed wire, artillery, and the enemy as they went about their work. Four-footed silhouettes quietly and efficiently searched no-man's land at night, occasionally illuminated by a flare or artillery blast. A French dog named Prusco

located nearly a hundred men after a single battle. The dog, wolf-like and all white in appearance, would drag men into protective craters and trenches before alerting his master. Several dispatches from different regiments mentioned the heroic efforts of this dog.

Dogs and horses alike were valuable animals that were widely used during the war and needed to be properly protected. The development of gas masks to protect humans was advanced to a point where they could afford some protection for both dogs and horses. Mercy dogs could not work with them on (although messenger dogs occasionally did), and they could only be used for short periods of time during a gas attack. One drawback is that they seriously inhibited the dog's ability to pant and stay cool. These primitive masks would be refined in later years and were part of the US military working dog inventory until 1968.

Of all the armies that participated in the Great War, only the United States lacked war dogs within its military ranks, with the exception of some sledge dogs in Alaska. When the Americans entered the war in 1917, they borrowed all the dogs they needed from



Courtesy of The National Archives

the British and French forces. Our only canine contribution would be the delivery of 400 sledge dogs to the French to help haul ammunition in the Vosges Mountains.

Several American canine associations attempted to persuade the military to adopt a war dog program. This idea was advanced by the German Shepherd Dog Club of America and the Army and Police Dog Club of the United States. All requests fell on deaf ears. The general consensus was that with America's entry, a speedy end to the war would occur. It did happen in November of 1918. The US military also considered that future wars would be so mechanized that there would be no place on the battlefield for dogs. The United States quickly demobilized, and a military working dog pro-

gram would not start at home until 1942.

Like a Gypsy fortune teller laying out her cards, an article that appeared in the United States issue of *Army Ordnance*, published in 1928, foretold the future. A series of photographs from Berlin depicted dogs donned with gas masks carrying telephone wire. Another showed a machine that made footprints with no scent attached to them. This was a precursor to a tracker dog program using visual clues only. The United States would find itself in a bind and have to start from scratch during WWII. With a working dog program. If you look at MWD operations today and the thousands of dogs employed, it's hard to fathom that 84 years ago, canines were considered obsolete in modern warfare by the United States.

Love Taps

by Rick Fulton

My roommate in Libya, Terry Seats, handled a typical lifer dog named Egon. Egon, a quintessential laid-back character, enjoyed a good stretch and treasured pats he snuck from the other handlers. His dog run shared a fence with Mady, my dog, a black-hearted little huntress who liked to search and destroy. Mady's personality, energetic and the type of dog to handle with care, proved the opposite of good old Egon. Egon, about her age, carried an amiable temperament and spent far more time sleeping than prowling while off duty.

I remember one time at the start of the three-day swing shift cycle, the exact time when the flight did the close order drills, the obstacle course stuff, and the aggression. We had a flight helmet with the sun visor removed and replaced by a heavy-duty wire screen to protect our faces. In addition, the aggression ensemble included an old-fashioned high-collar padded suit and attached sleeves. The intent was for the person in the bite suit to fight a bit, bounce around, and then

freeze while the "Down, Stay, Watch" bit took place so the handler could simulate a pat-down search of an apprehended subject.

I took my turn in the suit and saw that Terry and his mutt were up next.

I thought, *Let me see if I can wake the old boy up with a couple of love taps with a sleeve and then freeze.* Somehow fate twisted me inside the bite suit. Terry came up to search, and I swear this is true. My nose itched. I turned some, and the suit moved half an inch. The dog watched intently from 20 feet away. That guy, usually my buddy, a K9 who I could walk in on during cleanups without any fear or concern - the dog I usually sat next to in the pickup bed as we rode out to the bomb dump. My friend's K9, with whom I had chased insurgents several times, along with Mady on the romp. Yes, good old Egon.

When I twitched, he broke and walloped me, knocking me straight back and wrenching a muscle in my back. Then, as I lay there in the dust, he decided to eat my face. He chomped numer-



Although this photo isn't of Egon, it does illustrate the exercise, up to a certain point. (Image courtesy the David Adams collection (AR.2011.037) via the National Museum of the United States Air Force.)

ous times on that face protector wire as Terry tried to get him off me. That dog attempted to rip me a new one. For me, fear crept in. Those teeth were a half inch from the end of my nose. Finally, out of drool, which I feared may drown me, he backed off, wagged his tail, and automatically went back to where he was supposed to be, laid down, and waited for the handler to catch up. Me? I just remained sprawled there.

My friends finally got me out of the suit, but I couldn't move, so they called the medics. I then got a ride to the emergen-

cy room, some muscle relaxers, and a 24-hour stay in the barracks with a pink slip to recuperate. When I returned to duty, good old Egon, waiting to be ear-scratched through the wire, wagged his tail at me. We did the pickup ride as usual, out to the bomb dump. Everything returned to normal. He didn't hold a grudge, but I never again underestimated Mady's buddy, Egon, as a lifer-type of dog — anything but.





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From the Team at MWDHM...
We invite you to join the museum's journey
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Share your voice.
Share your copy of
our newsletter.

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 Memo-
rial at the University of
Tennessee in Knoxville.**



Historic Pooch Pic of the Month



**Naval Air Station, Pensacola: Marco,
a military working dog, leaps from a
squad car during a base exercise.
One of four such dogs comprising
NAS Pensacola's K9 Corps, Marco is
trained in drug interdiction and
many secondary duties ranging from
assisting officers on patrol to find-
ing lost children. Photo by David P.
Chiappetta.**

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