



# The Paw Print

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



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## Upcoming Events:

September 15-22, 2024  
Howard County Veterans  
Reunion, Kokomo, IN

September 26-29, 2024  
The Smoky Mountains  
Cluster Dog Shows,  
Knoxville, TN

## Defenders of the Force



Defenders assigned to the 92nd Security Forces Squadron patrol the flightline during exercise Titan Fury 24-1 at Fairchild Air Force Base, Washington, Nov. 15, 2023. This exercise ensures Fairchild's Airmen are trained and ready to provide Rapid Global Mobility at a moment's notice in support of strategic deterrence and the National Defense Strategy. (US Air Force Photo by Airman 1st Class Matthew Arachikavitz.)

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Military Working Dog teams are stationed throughout Air Force bases worldwide to help guarantee the safety and welfare of all personnel, their families, and base assets 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

During the First Gulf War, an Air Force pilot echoed what many pilots felt: "I never worried about my

*plane being tampered with on the hot desert runways of Saudi Arabia because K9 teams were guarding it."*

Security Forces Squadron (SFS) K9 teams are watchful -- patrolling and monitoring the base's perimeters and flight lines to ensure that restricted areas remain secure at all

times. Yet, SFS roles have expanded in recent years.

Inside, we'll take a closer look at some of the dogs and handlers who have taken up the immense challenge to keep our Air Bases safe and who have pushed themselves further to heed the Air Force Motto:

**Aim High ... Fly-Fight-Win**

## From the Vice President's Desk



Lane Hagerdorn



Thank you for taking a moment to join us in celebrating the US Air Force's birthday and remembering Patriot Day on September 11th.

History is kind of our thing around here. We live it, breathe it, talk about it, collect it, and, of course, share it. Sometimes, we encounter some juicy nuggets of history that surprise even the most galvanized. Things like this little ditty – Did you know the US Air Force owes its existence to the US Navy's refusal to play along with the War Department (the name for the US Army post-WW II)?

After WW II, the War Department, in an effort to improve efficiency and maintain a lethal force, proposed creating a single military function that blended the US Army and Navy into a single force. The US Navy adamantly refused the proposal and forced a compromise in the National Security Act of 1947 that created the US Air Force, giving the Secretary of Defense centralized but limited authority over US military forces instead.

So, on this 77th USAF birthday, thank you, US Navy!

Every September, we ask that you pause, if even for a moment, on 9/11 to remember the lives lost that day of the horrific attacks on American soil. As a veteran of that war, I am always humbled by how many Americans remember.

I was on active duty on 9/11. I was a USAF Staff Sergeant MWD Handler at Travis AFB, California, and had just returned from a combat readiness course in mid-August. On that fateful Tuesday morning, I was home, planning on taking it easy for a few days before embarking on a temporary assignment in South Carolina later that week. The phone rang, it was my parents. "Are you watching the news?" they asked. As I turned on the TV, I simply said, "I gotta go to work; I love you."

The next few weeks were a whirlwind of activities cen-



Late September 2001, headed to the Mid-east.

tered first around the security of the base and its mission while making all the rapid preparations to bring the fight to those responsible for the attacks. While I will save the details for another entry in a future newsletter, the moment we boarded the C5 Galaxy with classified orders in hand, we knew we were fulfilling a destiny we had been train-

ing to take on for as long as we wore the uniform.

While not my first or last deployment, that deployment inspires me to be part of the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum. We were a part of history and owe it to all generations to preserve and share that history for eternity.



On that deployment.

Do you have a moment like that? A point in time that lives with and in you that others should know? If so, then reach out and let us know.

Speaking of reaching out, I wanted to close this letter with a reminder: No one is alone, even in the darkest days, and we need you here.

If you find yourself in a bad spot, feeling down, defeated, and/or at the breaking point, and unsure of what to do, reach out to someone, including the VA Veteran Crisis line below.

**K9 Leads the Way!**

*Lane Hagerdorn*

**If you know a Veteran in Crisis, the VA Veteran's Crisis Line is: Dial 988, Then Press 1.**



## Casi Smith: “Trust Your Dog, Trust The Process.”

by Dixie Whitman

Hugo D586 rushed into the dimly lit house seconds after the breaching ram ruptured the well-worn front door. He remained laser-focused on the task at hand. “*Find the Felon*” was a terrific game! That day, Hugo hunted a menacing, barricaded suspect. The most dangerous kind of criminal is one cornered into his last safe space with nothing left to lose except his freedom. Without regard for his safety, Hugo’s nose pulled him forward. Instinctively, he sought more concentrated scents, indicating the suspect was close. “*Bingo! There he is!*” Hugo launched forward, grabbing the man by the arm and actively holding him until his backup could arrive to arrest, slap on handcuffs, and haul his felon’s tooshie to jail.

Hugo, satisfied with the outcome, sat smiling, almost as if to say, “*Mom, you gotta trust me. I can do this.*” At the other end of the 100-foot long line, his proud handler beamed. Even though this evolution was a training scenario, it validated all the blood, sweat, and tears Casi Smith put into building this dog, pulling him back from the brink after his body took hit after medical hit. Looking back at how far her K9 career had progressed, she couldn’t help but feel proud of their achievement.

“Good boy, Hugo.”

+++++

Casi Smith worked multiple jobs, making ends almost meet when a friend joined the military. Inspired by her friend’s actions and determined to be part of something bigger, something that would make a difference, something that mattered, Casi stopped by an Air Force recruiter’s office to discuss opportunities. When the recruiter listed K9 as an option, Casi thought, “*What a cool job!*” Always having an exceptional relationship with animals, dogs in particular, K9 sounded like an ideal career. But first, she had to become a Security Forces member—a cop.

During the first three years of her Air Force career, Casi worked the nooks and crannies at Ellsworth Air Force Base (AFB) in South Dakota. Ellsworth AFB is situated on the edge of the Great Plains, on a broad expanse of relatively flat land before it T-bones into the Black Hills, about ten miles further west. The 28th Bomb Wing, which operates one of America’s two B-1B combat squadrons, is headquartered there.

While stationed at Ellsworth, Casi began working with the 28th Security Forces Squadron K9 Unit. She found a wonderful mentor in SSgt Gabriel Easler, who supported her by offering advice on her K9 training and career. Gabriel had valuable insights to share



Hugo D586 proved himself. All photos courtesy of Casi Smith, unless otherwise indicated.



NNicholas W000, a dual purpose dog from Ellsworth Air Force Base partnered with Casi Smith as her first dog.

with Casi, as his former partner, a beautiful Mal, K9 NNi-colas W000 (Nic), became Casi's first dog. She will always be grateful to Gabriel for his guidance and encouragement.

Nic's muzzle had started to grey by the time she partnered with him. His wealth of experience helped Casi gain confidence as a handler. Lesson learned: **Trust Your Dog!** As she says, "You never forget your first dog." She only worked Nic for five months before being deployed to the Korean Peninsula and Osan Air Force Base.

After arriving at Osan, her new kennel offered Casi some novel challenges. Her new partner, a handsome, dark sable German shepherd dog named Max B091, had only recently completed his basic training at Lackland. Compared to Nic, Casi's previous partner, a push-button dog with a calm temperament, Max, an aggressive Green Dog, bore some rough edges.

However, Casi learned that every dog has something to teach, and from Max, she learned the importance of patience. It takes time and consistency to transform a dog with basic skills into an exceptional partner. Casi was successful in molding Max into a fantastic Patrol Dog. The kennels at Osan were also a wonderful experience, with a strong camaraderie. Unfortunately, Casi only had around ten months with Max before a second

PCS to Offutt AFB, Nebraska.

Near Omaha, Casi and her new partner, Baba, were in for an adjustment period. As a PEDD team at Offutt AFB, their work relationship took some time to sync. Casi had only worked with male dogs previously, and Baba had previously partnered with a male handler. Neither were accustomed to working with a female. Neither gave up. Over time, they learned to lean in and trust each other. This dog taught Casi to **"Trust the Process."** One of her proudest moments with Baba occurred on a Secret Service Mission to San Francisco. That was the first time Casi had ever traveled with a partner on a plane and in a hotel. She was thrilled that a content Baba quickly settled on the plane and behaved properly in public and private. They had gelled as a team.

After getting her footing in K9, Casi re-enlisted, wanting to learn more about dog behavior, communication, and training. For her re-enlistment ceremony, she celebrated with a double dog bite.

Moving on to her current base, she's at Fairchild AFB and partnered with another young dog named Hugo.

Laughingly, Casi describes her current dog, Hugo, as the canine version of the character Donnie from the cartoon series *The Wild Thornberrys*. Donnie is an almost feral boy, having been raised by an orangutan. He's described as in



Casi Smith with Osan AFB partner, Max B091. Max served as a single purpose Patrol Dog.



At the Golden Gate Bridge on a Secret Service mission to San Francisco with her Offutt partner, Baba C202, a PEDD.



perpetual motion, with an unmitigated joy of life, speaking gibberish, with no off-switch. While Hugo chills in the kennel, once that door is opened it's "Go,go,go!" He's a whirlwind of energy.

At an early vet check, the veterinarian described Hugo as a lemon, equivalent to a car coming off the lot with oodles of problems. He required a special food, additive powders, and a number of other supplements.

In addition to the laundry list of medical issues noted in his records were behavior quirks like "won't eat when it's windy." Some problems were a combination of both, or better stated, started as being believed to be behavioral, "won't jump in the truck," to finding out the reason behind that; Hugo arrived at Fairchild with a piece of hard plastic dancing around his abdomen. During the procedure to remove the foreign object, the medical staff discovered that the original veterinarian had performed the gastropexy surgery incorrectly, so they had to remove that pexy and let the area heal.

Opening up the gut is not for the weak or timid; it's a painful, complicated surgery. No sooner had Hugo healed up from that surgery, but they had to go right back through that same incision area and redo the failed original pexy. Through it all, Casi stayed by his side, sleeping at the vet clinic and near his kennel, being spelled briefly by other

kennel staff to catch a couple of hours of sleep in a bed, only to be right back by his side, keeping watch on her partner.

In addition to the dogs she's cherished along the way, Casi has been fortunate to be impacted by some amazing friends who have shared their knowledge and lessons in K9. Among the lessons that she's learned and which she is happy to share with younger handlers are some of the basic truths of working with dogs:

Through the tough times, if you fail, it's okay. Failure helps you learn.

The goal isn't a sprint; take the little victories along the way and enjoy them.

If you're passionate about something, you find a way to make things happen.

Along the way, Casi has learned from the struggles with caring for Hugo not to get frustrated. It's not personal. Things don't get fixed overnight, just trust and be consistent and know that it will be fixed. Going from 0 to 100 never works.

Hugo, with all of his challenges, has taken up a chunk of Casi's heart. She says, "Every dog has had an impact." But with Hugo, it's more.

When you have a bond, that dog can go from a lemon to a Lincoln, and that feeling of being with him for the ride is exhilarating and amazing.

And, Hugo, just in case you don't know, your Mom says, "I love you, Bud."



At Fairchild AFB with her current partner, Hugo D586. (US Air Force Photo by Airman 1st Class Matthew Arachikavitz.)



Casi's mentor, SSgt Gabriel Easler, with his dog, NNicolas W000, who later became Casi's first dog. Photo: Courtesy Dixie Whitman.

In honor of Gabriel, the newsletter now has a link to the Veterans In Crisis hotline.

If you are ever experiencing a challenge, Dial 988, then press 1.

## Navy Chief Rob Calabro Retires

by Dixie Whitman

On August 2, 2024, on the Island of Guam, our dedicated volunteer, Chief Petty Officer Robert Calabro, retired after 25 1/2 years of unwavering military service. His service has left an indelible mark on our military community, inspiring us all and making us immensely proud of our teammate.

Born a Long Islander, young Rob considered several options following his high school graduation. His decision to attend the Corrections Academy, a program designed to prepare individuals for entry-level positions as correctional officers, was a response to his internal drive to keep others safe.

In 1999, his lifelong love of the service inspired him to enlist in the Navy Reserves and attend the Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, Illinois. A few years later, under the General Assignment Recall Act, he attended Master-At-Arms 'A' school. Master-At-Arms (MA) is a dignified way to say 'Navy cop.'

With that school under his belt, Rob took on increasing challenges and moved around the world, starting in August 2003, to Bahrain. This first assignment as a regular MA introduced him to the opportunity to go K9. His first dog, Reno, was a Patrol/Explosive Dog. Together, they completed three deployments to Dubai.

When he returned to the States in 2006, he landed at NAS Jacksonville with an Explosives dog, Nnick. During this assignment, he performed many Secret Service Missions, provided security for the Pope's visit, and deployed with the Marines to Iraq to support Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Chief Petty Officer Robert Calabro's career took him on a global journey, with assignments at NAS Sigonella, Sicily; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey; NAS Key West; and a return to NAS Bahrain. He eagerly sought out new responsibilities at each duty station, showcasing his adaptability and dedication: Military Working Dog Handler, Kennel Supervisor, Kennel Master, Anti-terrorism Officer, and Tactical Officer, he's done it all.

His last assignment was Guam, an island somewhere between Hawaii and the edge of the world with a massive paw print in the history of America's Military Working Dogs. Rob's heart is all-K9, and we join with his beautiful family - his wife, Kimberly, and daughter, Julietta - to celebrate his well-earned retirement and look forward to his future museum work.

K9 leads the way! Please join us in honoring Robert Calabro, a long-time Navy K9 leader. Congratulations on your retirement!



Rob and one of his partners posed for a candid photo. Courtesy of Rob Calabro.



Photo of Rob with his daughter, Julietta, and wife, Kimberly taken at his retirement ceremony. Photo courtesy Rob Calabro.



## Strahon and Csonti: A Military Working Dog Story

by Keefer Paterson

On the afternoon of July 13, in Butler, Pennsylvania, the presidential rally was in full force — crowds cheering, American and campaign flags waving in the wind, and citizens chomping at the bit to see their presidential choice speak.

For Staff Sgt. Jessica Strahon, 21st Security Forces Squadron military working dog handler, and Military Working Dog Csonti, this was a relatively routine event supporting the US Secret Service. That is, until loud popping sounds and screams echoed across the stage and nearby bleachers.

The radios rang out, “Shots fired, shots fired!”

Strahon, MWD Csonti, and the Explosive Ordnance Disposal team — famished from a long day of sweeping the area for explosives and grabbing a quick bite to eat — heard the call, dropped their food, and ran toward the screams.

“We were initially confused because Trump was raising his fist, people were chanting ‘USA,’ and nobody was running,” Strahon said. But then we saw the Secret Service agents with their weapons pulled, moving Trump off stage toward the motorcade.”

While the motorcade was leaving, Strahon and others turned their attention to caring for the wounded.

“They started taking the other gunshot victims off the bleachers,” Strahon said. “One guy was brought over to a minivan. I think he was a staffer; he looked a little confused. I asked if they needed gauze or any help. They said yes.”

EOD personnel immediately jumped into the minivan and started doing body sweeps to identify any other wounds.

“He had a gunshot wound to his left tricep and then what looked like shrapnel or a splinter of a bullet in his abdomen,” Strahon said. “He had a lot of bloating and didn’t have an exit wound... Even though it’s really small, thankfully, I had Csonti’s med kit with me.”

While emergency medical services focused on Trump and more severe gunshot victims, Strahon and her team provided the best first-aid care that they could until EMS arrived.

“We got him bandaged and did everything we could, and about 10 minutes later, EMS was able to take over,” Strahon said.

The team was then notified that another victim was to be medevaced, and the helicopter needed to land nearby.

“I looked at my EOD guy and said, ‘I know this is not a bomb threat, but normally we train to sweep helicop-



Staff Sgt. Jessica Strahon, 21st Security Forces Squadron military working dog handler, and Military Working Dog Csonti pose for a photo at Peterson Space Force Base, Colorado. Strahon and Csonti have been working together since they both entered the Military Working Dog program. (U.S. Space Force photo by Keefer Patterson)

ter landing zones for explosives. So, we should do that,” Strahon said. “We ran to the softball fields behind the stage and the barn. We did it sprinting because the helicopter was coming in and waiting to land.”

After that, all the EOD and handlers returned to the barn to conduct a head count and a quick debrief with their Secret Service point of contact.

“After an hour or two, we were informed that the shooter had a remote on his body and they now had reason to believe that he had explosives,” Strahon said. “They wanted us to re-sweep the entire site. So, we swept everything — the bleachers, the stage, the field. There was trash everywhere. People left their phones; someone even left a scooter.”

The team was then asked to sweep the building the shooter was in — one handler covering the exterior, one covering the second floor and Strahon covering the first floor.

“It was a workshop,” Strahon said. “My EOD people said that it looked like an improvised explosive device factory because of all the wires, soldering irons, and weird machines. Even though it was just a workshop, it still puts you on edge.”

While sweeping the building, Csonti had a distinguishable behavior change in one of the rooms and sat down — indicating the dog had identified something. Strahon and her team made the call to evacuate the building and notify local EOD authorities who are legally required to take over.

“After they took some X-rays, there was a safe they couldn’t get into,” Strahon said. “So, they did an intentional detonation. They don’t know if anything was in there, but they counted it as a positive find simply due to the nature of the events and because you can’t really test after it’s been blown up. After that, our day was pretty much over.”

Throughout the day leadership consistently checked in on Strahon and Csonti.

“They were contacting me when it was going on saying we know you’re busy but please let us know if you need anything,” Strahon said. “Upon our return, my unit and base leadership came out to say thank you and told us they were here if we needed anything, which was very sweet. Col. Klock [Space Base Delta 1 commander] coined me and Csonti. We joke about maybe putting the coin on a chain so Csonti can wear it. Lt. Gen. Miller [Space Operations Command commander] called me a few days later to provide the same sentiment,” Strahon said. “He made me promise that I would let him know if I ever needed anything. Everyone was very nice and welcoming.”

Professionals practice until they can’t get it wrong

Before July 13, 2024, Strahon’s previous six years of military training and experience prepared her for the events that would unfold that day.

“At my previous bases, before I went canine, we did a lot of active shooter training,” Strahon said. “That’s the main reason why I didn’t have to really think about anything, because I did it so much.”

“It helped that I had that training, but it also helped that my two EOD guys were both prior infantry — one Army and one Marine. So, we were all on the same page and didn’t have to tell anyone what to do. We just did it and worked together despite meeting each other six hours prior.”

Growing up in a military family, Strahon always thought about serving. When she eventually decided on the Air Force, she set her sights on security forces, specifically becoming a military working dog handler.

“I’ve always loved animals and dogs and had dogs growing up. So, working with canines was the goal,” Strahon said. “The Air Force is a little different than the other branches. You must be a regular cop first. Then after you volunteer at the kennels, you can get a letter from the kennel master endorsing you. Then you can apply for the MWD program. But the Air Force wants you to be a subject matter expert on being security forces first.”

The majority of MWDs are procured from kennels across the world. Csonti was born in Hungary and brought to the United



**Military Working Dog Csonti awaits direction from Staff Sgt. Jessica Strahon, 21st Security Forces Squadron military working dog handler. Military working dogs are used in patrol, drug and explosive detection, and specialized mission functions for the Department of Defense and other government agencies. (U.S. Space Force photo by Keefer Patterson)**

States at an early age. His name means “bone” in Hungarian.

“Csonti is certified in detecting explosives. We’ve been together for almost three years — he’s my first dog and I’m his first handler,” Strahon said. “New handlers don’t usually get new dogs but that’s just how it worked out. It was difficult at first because we both didn’t know what we were doing but we figured it out and grew up together. I think everyone loves their first dog the most. Most handlers do not get to keep their dogs for three years, so I’ve been really fortunate that we’ve stuck together for so long. I’m not looking forward to the day I have to give him to someone else.”

Strahon and Csonti’s story is but another addition to the greater, age-old narrative highlighting the relationship between man and

beast. Their unbreakable bond, forged through countless trials, emphasizes the importance of MWDs and their place as Airman’s best friend.

“It’s hard to express how proud my team is of Jessica and Csonti,” said Daniel Beaudoin, 21st Security Forces Squadron commander. “MWD teams spend many hours together developing a strong bond so they can do a tough job together. Our men and women in this specialty sacrifice lots of personal time to ensure their K9s are healthy, trained and ready for anything. My squadron and I are proud to serve alongside heroes like Jessica — the focus, tenacity, and selflessness she displayed by springing into action, despite a dangerous situation, to save another person’s life was truly exemplary.”



## The Night That Made One K9 Team Immortal

by Christopher Dion

Imagine you are about 22 years old. You enlisted in the US Air Force, a branch of the military that is just a little younger than you are. You come from a traditional patriotic small town in central North Carolina with 11,000 people. Before this day, you had rarely been out of that town for very long, and now you find yourself in an alien environment on the other side of the world in a place you had never heard of before, called Vietnam.

You're here to defend Democracy, promote freedom, and free the oppressed, or at least that's what the recruiter, the Air Force Training Instructor, and all your leadership have told you. You have been here now for five months, and all you know is, *'I'm in a foreign country that is hot, wet, and filled with people, insects, and animals that all want to kill me. Well, all the animals except one want to kill me, and he only wants to kill me part of the time if I don't work him right or feed him on time.'*

*You think, 'I'm truly blessed to have been selected as a K9 handler. At least I'm not alone, and this furry beast helps me*

*feel a little less homesick.'*

As a K9 handler, you also have more liberty and independence as you are responsible for your assigned partner's care, maintenance, and training. People view you as a subject matter expert for a true force multiplying asset. However, your duty day is far from the simplicity of eight hours a day and 40 hours a week. There are no weekends and holidays for you. Your responsibility to the mission and your partner never takes a day off, and you are one of the few, not the many.

Your team is responsible for perimeter security and early warning. When the enemy sees you, your visibility provides a psychological deterrent to attack. You instill fear when your adversaries cannot see you, as they fear where you may be. Your effectiveness is a constant thorn in their side, resulting in a price tag that you know exists being placed on your head.

Knowing these dangers, you still strap on your gear, get your leash, grab your dog, and do your duty daily without fail. On this day in December of 1966, your squadron



Robert Throneburg saying good-bye to Nemo in Vietnam.

USAF photo.



Robert Throneburg's family toured the Working Dog facilities at Lackland AFB and ended their tour at the Nemo Memorial. Hosted by the Airman's Heritage Foundation and the 802nd SFS.

USAF photo by 2nd Lt. Kate E. Anderson

effectively defeated an insurgent attack focused on preventing the arrival of over 5,000 American troops and tons of weapons. The sun is going down, and you must work the night shift. You're going out to walk silently and stealthily, looking for a well-trained enemy that has learned to be one with the jungle and deadly in attack.

Suddenly, you see your dog alert! His hackles rise. His tail straightens. His ears pin back. You read his body, follow his clues, see the enemy, and fire at the intruder.

You continue your mission, knowing that there are more dangers out there. Again, your dog alerts. You release him on the threat just as the ene-

my fires. In an instant, a 7.62 x 39 MM piece of cold lead rips through the air and into your shoulder, putting a large hole where flesh once was.

As you fall, your best friend is also hit. He takes a round in the nose that takes out his eye. This bullet would kill a normal creature, but this is no ordinary animal. He is K9.

Although severely wounded, your furry partner continues the fight, giving you precious time to call for support. In the meantime, your fellow handler, who was on patrol with you, comes to your rescue and pulls you to safety.

As you fade out, your loyal partner returns, know-

ing you are hurt. He fulfills the covenant made in the garden. The one you repeat to each other every day. I promise to protect you with my life as you protect me with yours. He stands watch over you, only leaving when forced to do so so that medical staff can save you.

For some, this would be the end of the story. But not for Airman Robert "Bob" Throneburg and USAF Sentry Dog Nemo A-534. After five surgeries over seven months, Bob recovered and received two Purple Hearts and the Bronze Star. Nemo would undergo several skin grafts and lose his right eye before becoming the face of the K9 Corps and encouraging recruiting and awareness.

No words can better speak to the testimony of this historic team than those penned by Bob Throneburg himself.

*Brave beyond words.*

*Ferocious without self-regard.*

*Bonds never broken.*

*Loyal till death.*

*Defender of the night.*

*He was a war dog.*

*Stay back, handler down!*

Now, it is for others to carry forward the torch that heroes like Bob Throneburg and Nemo carried. The pen is placed in our hands to write the next chapter of K9 history.



## Share Your Story

Everyone has a memory. A story! Most are not about combat. Some provide insights to our history. Some are humorous. But each one is a part of the Military Working Dog History. Sharing them builds on the growing archived history for future generations.

**We Want to Hear Yours!**

**Contact us at: [newsletter@mwdhm.org](mailto:newsletter@mwdhm.org)**



## Fifth Army History

Shortly after our landings in North Africa, on 8 November 1942, orders were received from the War Department directing the activation of the United States Fifth Army. This took place on 5 January 1943. This Army, created in the field, and dedicated to the offensive operations, has had a varied and glorious history since its earliest days in French Morocco. Even while its units were training, the Army staff was preparing plans for carrying the war to the Italian mainland. Then, when all was ready, we struck.

The American Soldiers of the Fifth Army who went ashore at Salerno on 9 September 1943 were the first Americans to plant themselves on the soil of Europe in this war. Our invasion virtually destroyed the Rome-Berlin Axis; yet more, for long months Fifth Army bore the entire brunt of our participation in this land war against Germany.

Our men fought the more valiantly and boldly for the knowledge that the prestige of our armed forces rested on their shoulders. The enemy dipped deep into the pool of his already strained resources, first to prevent our landings, and then to hold us south of Rome. The ensuing struggle in the rugged Italian mountains was bloody, protracted, and at times our advances were measured in yards; but Fifth Army was not stopped. On 4 June 1944 we entered Rome, and today, as I write, we are engaged in a bitter struggle south of Bologna—300 miles north of the Salerno beaches.

*Headquarters Fifth Army  
In the Field, Italy  
27 October 1944*

.....  
The world knows the names Salerno, Cassino, Anzio, and Futa Pass; the men and dogs of the 33rd Infantry Scout Dog Platoon helped to write that history.

Reprint of the Foreword by Mark W. Clark, Lieutenant General AUS Commanding



**K9s Come Home – New York—Among arrivals at Staten Island Pier 12 aboard the troopship S.S. James Duncan, were 192 Infantry Scout Dogs. Left to right: T-5 Bruce Roth, with “Gus”; T-3 Amos Schaeffer, with “Rex”; Sgt. Irving Paley, with “Sgt. Dobie”; T-5 Harry F. Williams, Jr., with “Duchess”; T-5 Robert Bennett, with “Bob,” and T-5 George Eiler, with “Jiggs”. The soldiers served with the 33rd Infantry Scout Dog Platoon and were among the first to see action in Italy with the US 5th Army.**

These dog teams trained at Front Royal, Virginia.

Photo from Military Working Dog Heritage Museum archives.

## Two September Events—Join Us in Tennessee or Indiana



## An Eye-Opening Experience

by Curtis Hendel

I have already shared the "hazing" incident with the vicious contraband dog Bear, but my 'welcome to Osan' tour was not nearly over with that.

I picked up an assignment to Squad 2, Perimeter Defense K9. My squad leader was a man I admire to this day. He was kind, yet you knew you had better keep your poop in a group with him. On my first day, he called me 'Steve.' Obviously, my name is not Steve, but he said I 'looked like a Steve' to him, so I was Steve most of the time.

My first shift was a swing, and I rode with the Squad Leader that night, getting accustomed to the perimeter and the job that was staring me in the face. After everyone was posted, we were going to tour the perimeter and stopped first at a high-security site at a post known as Kilo 2. The handler on Kilo 2 that night was my immediate supervisor, a Senior Airman named Pete. A chubby red dog that looked like a big sweetie sat at the business end of Pete's leash. His name was Mentor.

When we approached the parking lot in the four-door Dodge "six-pack," Pete greeted us, standing with Mentor at his side in a 'heel/sit' position. Everything seemed pretty normal at that point. The supervisor told Pete to give me an example of the post-briefing each handler had to memorize in the

event of an officer popping up. "Sir, Senior Airman Pete reporting," followed by the boundaries of the post along with information about our Military Working Dog and our armaments.

When Pete was a few words into his briefing, all seemed in check, and Mentor decided he wanted some attention. He began to nuzzle Pete's left hand. Pete tried to be professional for his boss and new troop and tried to brush Mentor to get him to back off. I saw the look on the red dog's face, and he seemed surprised that he was not the center of attention. Suddenly, the portly pooch moved like lightning, sinking one side of his canines into Pete's hand, barely missing between the middle and ring finger with the other side of his mouth.

Shocked by this turn of events, the moment froze in time. I knew handler-aggressive dogs were out there, but usually, it was from a training confrontation, not a random refusal of affection!

I quickly buried my shock as my squad leader and I moved to help Pete. His pain obliterated everything else. Mentor just locked down his grip. The bulky nature of Mentor's physique proved his strong point. We tried to choke him off of Pete's hand. Mentor had a neck like a bull and resisted the choke chain as he flexed his neck.



Mentor and his handler.

Photo courtesy Curtis Hendel

I have no idea how much time passed; it was probably much shorter than I remember, but it seemed like an eternity. Pete finally chose the 'flight' option and ripped his hand from Mentor's bite. That night would put Pete out of commission until he left Korea two months later. His intense injury required several surgeries to fix the damage of one spurned red dog.

Mentor would, eventually, lose his 'road gear' instead of his life. Our kennel attempted to take some of the fire out of the dog, but to no avail. Luckily, his next handler was a stout, hard-headed Oklahoman who enjoyed the challenge. Mentor would remain a beast. He had a bite like a Great White and didn't fully appre-

ciate the "out" command. Gunfire was a nightmare and was usually just avoided. When the gun went off, Mentor would bite something, anything.

Having Mentor on my squad meant we had the most exposure to him. He certainly left a strong impression on others. All these years later, Jeffrey Draycott is one of my old Osan brothers who remembers Mentor. "He had the hardest bite I ever felt. I remember the first time I caught him; his canines went through the wrap and leather under-protector."

Michael Stevens also remembered Mentor: "Mentor was a living terror. Nobody wanted to catch him due to the fear of being eaten by the 110-lb Belgian Malinois



(aptly referred to as Maligators). Mentor was a wrap-happy dog. Mentor shredded them regularly."

All these years later, I wonder how many others remember Mentor. Most of us have dogs we recall as the greatest or the biggest, the most unique, or the most nasty. I saw some meatheads at DTS (Dog Training School) after my time in Korea, but Mentor

was still one of the biggest headaches I ever remember. After Pete, another great friend of mine handled Mentor. While he wasn't bitten by the beast, he was on his toes most of the time.

Things have certainly changed in the Military Working Dog Program since my time. There are minimal opportunities for dogs like Mentor to thrive. For any handler, Mentor was a gift

on post. That dog didn't rest when he was on duty. He remained one of the most vigilant partners a handler could have. Today, the strong perimeter dogs that owned the hours of darkness are few and far between. Perimeter dogs could be unruly in public if they were strong on the fence line.

I can't remember how many dogs we had at Osan back in

the day, but I believe it was on the high side of sixty. Out of those dogs, I remember many of them, from the squared-away great dogs to the holy terrors. On that list would be Elmer, Nike, and Mentor at the top. They could be handler-aggressive and absolute nightmares for decoys.

Funny, I even miss the nasty dogs for some reason.

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## Artifacts of the Month



Patch from Patrol Dog School, Lackland AFB.  
All military K9 training is coordinated through Lackland, AFB,  
San Antonio, Texas.

## Historic Pooch Pic of the Month



Left: Gary Knutson was at Da Nang in 1966, coming off post on his last night there with Eric 128E. Gary and Eric were part of Operation Top Dog, the introduction of the first Dogs and handlers into Vietnam.

Gary died in 2018 from complications caused by Agent Orange.

Photo by Don Jones, Courtesy of Greg Dunlap.