



The Paw Print

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



Volume 5 Issue 3

March 2025

Upcoming Events:

March 13, 2025—
Harrogate, Tennessee. At the Lincoln Memorial University School of Veterinary Medicine.

March 13, 2025—
Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Dedication of "Send Me" Memorial honoring SSD Lucca K458.

March 29, 2025—
Fredericksburg, TX. National Museum of the Pacific War. War Dog Exhibit. [Details here.](#)

Female Dog Handlers at Clark AFB



Clark AFB All-Female MWD Demonstration Team—L to R, top row: A1C Strawberry Jones (Decoy), A1C Rosa Siller, A1C Cindy Sessoms, SSgt Bob Dameworth (Team Trainer), A1C Joyce Ries (Team Lead), and A1C Linda Anderson (Decoy). L to R, bottom row: Unknown dog team, A1C Paula Dondeville with MWD Pig, A1C Jenny Woods with MWD Kurt, A1C Sherry Shapiro with MWD Spanky, and A1C Yvonne Perez with MWD UNK. Photo courtesy of Paula Bavalacqua.

Inside this issue:

- From The Vice President's Desk** 2
- All-Female K9 Drill Team** 3
- K9 Veterans Online Event** 5
- K9 Veterans Day Tyndall AFB** 6
- Alaskan War Dogs: Future** 7
- Cool Hand Blackie** 9
- With The Hearts of Lion Tamers** 11

March is Women's History Month—which offers our newsletter team opportunities to celebrate women's contributions to the history and heritage of America's Military Working Dog community.

This issue will explore some of the earliest female "Airmen"/dog handlers who formed a unique and talented K9 demonstration team at

Clark AFB, the Philippines.

Women have officially impacted the military K9 world since at least the ending salvos of WWII. We explore the early history of WACs in the K9 Corps with a visit to the History Nebraska archives and the documentation of females who paved the way. It's disheartening to see how the

military shelved their energies and tremendous talents for far too many years.

The Military Working Dog Heritage Museum is honored to celebrate these strong, dedicated female handlers. Sometimes, the most talented handlers just happen to be born women. And we are delighted to showcase them.

From the Vice President's Desk



Lane Hagerdorn
Vice President



As spring approaches, March brings an important opportunity to celebrate the profound legacy of our military working dogs (MWDs) and the remarkable individuals who have contributed to this heritage.

On March 13th, we proudly observe **K9 Veterans Day** to honor the courageous military working dogs who have served alongside our troops throughout history. From patrolling war zones to detecting explosives and saving countless lives, these exceptional dog teams have been unwavering in their loyalty, bravery, and skill. Their service is a testament to the powerful bond between humans and animals in the pursuit of peace and security. As we honor their contributions, we recognize the veterinary staff and support teams working tirelessly to ensure their success.

Please make plans to join us via Facebook for our K9 Veterans Day event. We plan to gather a group of handlers to answer your K9-related questions. This session will be pre-recorded because many of these handlers have other obligations on

K9 Veterans Day. You may submit your questions to Albert Johnson's email by February 28th: President@mwdhm.org.

This March, we also celebrate **Women's History Month**, spotlighting the many incredible women who have played vital roles in the history of MWD operations. Women have been at the heart of the military working dog community, from pioneering handlers to dedicated trainers, veterinarians, and support personnel. Their resilience, innovation, and determination have paved the way for future generations of women to leave their mark in this field. Their contributions remind us that the story of military working dogs is not just about the dogs but also about the people who dedicate their lives to serving with them. We extend our deepest gratitude to all the women who have shaped this history.

None of this recognition would be possible without the incredible efforts of our **volunteers**, whose dedication drives the mission of the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum. Whether researching

historical archives, curating exhibits, or engaging with the community, our volunteers are the backbone of our mission to discover, preserve, and share the rich history of America's military working dog teams. Their work ensures that the legacy of these remarkable teams continues to inspire future generations.

This year, we've made great strides in creating world-class displays that capture the essence of military working dog history. From the stories of the legendary MWDs of World War II to modern-day canine heroes, each exhibit tells a story of courage, partnership, and sacrifice. Your support—whether through volunteerism, donations, or simply spreading the word about our work—makes this possible, and for that, we thank you.

As we reflect on the legacy of military working dogs and their human partners, let's move forward with a renewed commitment to ensuring their stories are never forgotten.

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.

All-Female K9 Drill Team

by Paula Baviacqua

In early 1975, something new and exciting occurred at Clark Air Base in the Philippines. MSgt Billy Owens, the Kennel Master, decided that the kennels needed a military working dog exhibition team to help familiarize the community with the capabilities of trained police dogs. He sent a memo to all his handlers, inviting them to join the prospective team.

However, he also reminded them that they would still need to fulfill their regular duty shifts in addition to training for this team. Surprisingly, only female handlers showed up for the first practice session. Female dog handlers, a relatively new addition to the career field, jumped at the opportunity to expand and showcase their skills.

Making History

In 1974, Amn Shelia Dugan and Amn Rickie Thompson made history as the first females to complete the Department of Security Police Military Dog Studies at Lackland Air Force Base. Their success opened the door for more women to join the ranks of both law enforcement and K9 units. Since Clark AFB contained the Air Force's largest kennel, it was unsurprising that the Philippines had the

highest number of female handlers.

The demonstration team, composed of nine members, testified to the female dog handlers' dedication. A1C Joyce Ries accepted the position as the team leader, with A1C Linda Anderson and A1C Strawberry Jones acting as the catchers. The other team members included A1C Rosa Siller with MWD Gray, A1C Jenny Wood with MWD Kurt, A1C Cindy Sessoms with MWD Buffy, A1C Sherry Shapiro with MWD Spanky, A1C Carla Emling with MWD Bullet, and me, A1C Paula Dondeville, with my fantastic partner, MWD Pig. SSgt Bob Dameworth took the role of the team trainer.

Training

Upon arriving at the training area, Dameworth instructed the handlers to muzzle all our dogs. Next, he had us walk in a large circle to help our dogs become familiar with one another. After that, he asked one dog team to step out of the circle but remain beside it while the others walked past. Everyone seemed to be getting along well.

Then, Dameworth directed us to line up with five feet of space between each team. He told us to



Above: A photo op of the K9 Drill Team - L to R: A1C Rosa Siller with MWD Gray, A1C Jenny Woods with MWD Kurt, A1C Cindy Sessoms with MWD Buffy, A1C Paula Dondeville with MWD Pig, A1C Sherry Shapiro with MWD Spanky, A1C Strawberry Jones (Decoy), A1C Linda Anderson, (Decoy), and A1C Joyce Ries (Team Lead).

Bottom photo: The first Drill Team Demonstration at the Silver Wing Community Center. Both photos courtesy of Paula Baviacqua.

L to R: A1C Rosa Siller with MWD Gray, A1C Cindy Sessoms, A1C Carla Emling with MWD Bullet, A1C Paula Dondeville with MWD Pig, and A1C Linda Anderson (Decoy).



place our dogs in a down position, command them to "stay," and then walk to the end of the leash, turn around, and face our dogs. The handler at the end of the line received instructions to step her dog over the backs of every dog in the line. The moment that dog passed the second dog, it lunged. Once one dog lunged, all the others followed suit! Barking, snarling, and general chaos erupted. Dameworth knew that he needed to break down and redefine the personal space of every dog on his team.

To the team's surprise, Dameworth immediately put everyone back into the same formation and started over, establishing a foundation of perfection from the ground up. Each time a dog broke the formation, the entire team had to restart the exercise. Later, after removing the dogs' muzzles, the team ran the obstacle course several times with each dog.

Finally, we began working on aggression. A1C Anderson put on a large, padded burlap arm protector to engage the dogs. The handlers encouraged the dogs to focus on the "bad guy." Anderson would step in and allow the dog to bite the wrap. She vigorously shook it to prevent the dog from stopping his attack and coming off the

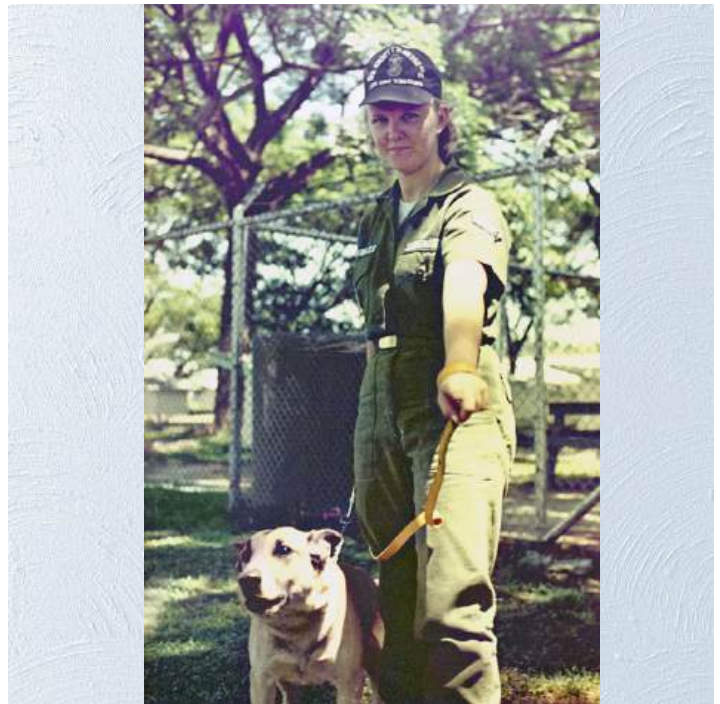
wrap. Additionally, the dogs fed off each other's energy and aggression.

Our First Show

The team held its first show at the Silver Wing Recreation Center in front of a large crowd. Colonel Joe Daigle, 3rd Security Police Squadron Commander, attended the event to support this new team. Although there were a few jitters initially, everything went off like clockwork and was well received. At the end of the demonstration, the announcer called A1C Anderson to the front. SSGt Dameworth presented her with a bouquet of flowers to acknowledge the bruises all over her arm from repeatedly catching fired-up military working dogs. Her arm, bruised and battered from the onslaught of K9 jaws, showed every shade of red, to deep purple, to nearly black from wrist to elbow!

Racing Hearts

The team encountered a few small situations that caused some racing hearts. During a demonstration in the large picnic area, they were showcasing some aggression work. The area had been roped off so they could use the entire field. The dog team was positioned at one end, while the "bad guy" was about 50 yards away, allowing the dog a long run to chase after him.



Above: A photo of the author, Paula Dondeville Baviacqua, and MWD Pig. Photo courtesy Paula Baviacqua.

When the handler released the dog to pursue the bad guy, a tiny, blond three-year-old suddenly ran out from the crowd, yelling, "Doggie, doggie!" Alarmed, the child's mother screamed. The handler quickly commanded her dog to call off the attack and return to the heel position. In response, her dog, running at full speed, rapidly stopped, circled the child, and immediately returned to its handler.

The mother hurried onto the field to pick up her child, and the crowd jumped to their feet, giving the dog team a standing ovation. The relieved handler stated, "I never want to do that again!"

In 1974, the Security Police Digest featured our team in an article highlighting our accomplishments. By then, we had performed for more than 20,000 people, and the kennels received an average of 15 to 20 requests each month for performances.

We enjoyed showcasing our talented partners and served as excellent community liaisons. It also proved a huge step forward for females in the K9 field, as it became clear that we were ready, willing, and able to serve in the previously male-dominated Military Working Dog Handler dominion.

Join Us Online March 13th In Celebration of K9 Veterans Day



Join us for a K9 Veterans Day Program as Museum staff and guest handlers answer your MWD-related questions. Session will be pre-recorded.

HANDLERS ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS

K9 experiences 🐾 K9 Community 🐾 Honor K9 Bond 🐾



Submit your questions by February 28th

PRESIDENT@MWDHM.ORG

MWDHERITAGEMUSEUM.ORG

K9 Veterans Day Celebrated at Tyndall AFB

March 13 is K9 Veterans Day and to commemorate the unofficial holiday, the 325th SFS MWD section put a few of their dogs to the test to demonstrate the capabilities of both dog and handler.

The United States Air Force directs that each base should have six dogs on the clock to be able to successfully complete the mission. "These dogs are just like regular Airmen," said Staff Sgt. Jason Vogt, 325th SFS MWD handler. "They work day to day, driving as hard as they can to complete the mission to the best of their abilities."

Vogt is the handler for a dog named Sunny. Vogt and Sunny spend their working hours together and each day is different depending on the needs of the mission, the animal, the installation and the handler.

"On a regular day, we start out with some cardio work," said Vogt. "Drills to the dog is (like) fetch. To us, it's burning a little bit of his energy and getting some exercise in. Then we'll usually roll into some kind of patrol training, work on bite work, or personnel detection. Then we'll go into patrol utilization, so we'll basically bounce around the base from spot to spot, organization to organization." Handlers and dogs spend countless hours focusing on training standards and techniques to keep the team sharp.

"(We) do training, on and off shift," said Tech. Sgt. Marcus Lavalais, 325th SFS MWD kennel master. "(We) come in on break days and do training...to get proficient. Here at Tyndall, our main focus is rebuilding and trying to make the base safer."

After morning drills the dogs and handlers will report to their daily assignment, which could include additional training, kennel cleaning, medical appointments for the animal, and so on. Day-to-day operations also depend on what classification each dog falls into.

"They can either be dual purpose, or they can be single purpose," said Lavalais. "If they are dual purpose they are either patrol and explosive, or they're drug and patrol. (Single purpose) can be drug or explosive or searching dogs."

"When they are patrol certified, they can find a suspect," Lavalais continued. "When they are just explosive, all they do is search for bombs, same thing with drugs. If they are just drugs, then they just search for narcotics."

The United States K9 Corps was created March 13, 1942. Military, government and law enforcement organizations have been using the unique skillsets available through K9 programs. "Our dogs' mission is detection, deterrence, and apprehension," said Vogt. "(We)

Story and photo by Staff Sgt. Magen M. Reeves



Above: Pictured is the security forces beret and 325th Security Forces Squadron military working dog unit patch owned by Tech. Sgt. Marcus Lavalais, 325th SFS MWD unit kennel master at Tyndall Air Force Base, Florida, March 3, 2020. This photo was taken while doing a demonstration for K9 Veterans Day. (US Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Magen M. Reeves)

focus on the fundamentals of bite work (used in) apprehending suspects. Deterrence is just the dogs themselves are deterrents; people see the dogs, and they don't want to mess with them. Then detection work; that could be either personnel or substance detection."

Additionally, K9s are known for supporting large-scale events where a dignified party or individual could be at risk. The dogs act as detection assets sniffing out explosives or firearms as well as physical deterrents causing adversaries to think twice.

"(We do) things like US secret service missions," said Vogt. "Sunny and I just returned from one recently. That's a pretty normal thing for us, but it also bounces from handler to handler; we each have a chance to go on one. We'll do (President

of the United States) and (Vice President of the United States) missions."

Organizations have been using MWDs for the past 78 years to enhance deterrence and assist in mission success. Each animal brings a unique personality and a needed skillset to the fight and is considered one of the military's most successful assets.

It is, however, the relationship between animal and human that makes this partnership so successful. K9 Veterans Day honors that partnership and the lives of both K9s and humans that have dedicated hours and hours of bonding and training to ensure that dog and handler duos work as a team and are a force to be reckoned with.

"I love being a K9 handler," said Vogt. "I love working with dogs."

Alaskan War Dogs: Bridging Past to Future

EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska – Editor's note: This is the third and final part of a series featuring the history of the military's use of sled dogs in Alaska.

It was not long after World War II that organizations such as the Alaska Dog Mushers Association and Alaskan Sled Dog and Racing Association were established. At the same time, races such as the North American Championship sled dog derby and the Fur Rondy Open World Championship Sled Dog Race were started.

It was into this world of dogs and racing that enlisted airborne instructor and World War II veteran Joe Redington Sr., Father of the Iditarod, arrived in Alaska in 1948.

Shortly after his arrival, Redington was able to secure a government contract and served with the 5039th Maintenance and Supply Group from 1949 to 1957.

He, along with other dog team drivers such as Sgt. Eldon Bush and Tech. Sgt. Bud Nesji, took dog teams out to aircraft crash sites to help recover personnel and aircraft. Also, members of a US Air Force Intelligence unit

trained with Redington as it was believed familiarization on the use of dogs and sleds may be needed in the future by the USAF Intelligence Corps.

Redington is thought to have had a strong association with the 10th Air Rescue Squadron. The 10th ARS used dog teams as part of search and rescue operations in Alaska and had jump-qualified dogs, which had to have five jumps to wear jump wings, assigned to the unit. The history of the 10th ARS is today maintained by the 210th Rescue Squadron of the Alaska Air National Guard.

In the '60s, the helicopter continued to become more technologically advanced and could reach places where only dogs could go before. The need for military dogs was beginning to fade, but not before the military found other uses for Alaskan war dogs.

Though fading, there was still a need as dogs were being studied at the Aero Medical Laboratory on Ft. Wainwright in an effort to understand the effects cold had on humans. From the lab emerged Master Sgt. Walter Millard.



Joe Redington Jr., seen here, was enlisted specifically by the Army to race dogs in Alaska. Redington Jr. won the coveted Fur Rondy trophy in 1966, bringing it back to Alaska after many years of being won by Dr. Roland Lombard of Wayland, Mass. (US Army photo)

Similar to Redington, Millard was jump qualified and a World War II veteran. After the war and a short break in service, Millard became a part of the Air Rescue Service and made over 250 jumps throughout his service in the military and many times with sled and dogs on rescue missions.

Millard was the first known Air Force participant in sled dog racing in the Fairbanks area. In March of 1963, he competed with huskies owned by the Aero Medical Laboratory in the preliminary heats for the North American Sled Dog Derby. Later, his Air Force "team" was invited to participate in the 1964 annual 10-

mile Jeff Studdart Invitational Race.

In 1966, another big organization-sponsored team took center stage: The US Army Alaska Modern Winter Biathlon Training Center dog team from Fort Richardson. At the team's head, though low in rank, was Pfc. Joe Redington Jr.

Redington Jr. was enlisted specifically by the Army to race dogs in Alaska. "They came to me and told me I was going to be drafted and then offered to enlist me and bring me back to Alaska to race for the Army on a two-year enlistment," he said.

Redington Jr., along with Sgt. 1st Class James VanHoutan, Spc. Five

by Jack Waid 354th Fighter Wing Historian

Larry Gibson, and Pfc. Johnny Armstrong raced and trained the dogs Redington Jr. competed with in 1966. That year, Redington Jr. won the coveted Fur Rondy trophy, bringing it back to Alaska after many years of being won by Dr. Roland Lombard from Wayland, Mass.

With things heating up in Vietnam, the military sled dog racing programs in Alaska were effectively disbanded. Redington Jr. was discharged and permitted to purchase a few of his previous military dogs and returned to civilian life, which would be the final curtain for the use of Alaskan military sled dogs in Alaska.

Whether it is pack dogs, sled dogs, sentry dogs, airborne dogs, or search and rescue dogs, the heritage of the Alaskan war dog is still seen today, specifically in the military working dog teams scattered throughout the state of Alaska at multiple military installations, our very own Eielson included.



A member of the US Army Alaska sled dog team rests with one of his dogs circa 1965. (US Army photo)

Anatomy of a Sled Dog Team

Photo: from the MWD Heritage Museum Archives



1. Lead dog or dogs — Can be one or two dogs in this position. These intelligent leaders, find and set the trails. Steer the team, set the pace.

2. Swing dogs — This two-dog brace swings the rest of the team into the arc created by the lead dogs on turns. They are often lead-dogs-in-training.

3. Team dogs — All the dogs between swing and wheel, provide the power and thrust to move the sled. Consider them the engine of the team. The number of team dogs varies widely.

4. Wheel dogs — The two dogs before the sled. Big, tough, powerhouse dogs. Calm temperament. They dig in to start the sled from a stopped position.

Cool Hand Blackie; What's for Dinner?

Several weeks after the coordinated attacks of the Tet Offensive, Blackie and I settled back into a routine on the perimeter. After coming off post one morning, I checked the roster to see what assignment I had the following evening, went to chow, hit the rack, or had a few beers and then hit the rack. Day after day, the heat and noise grew unbearable as the sun hit its zenith. I tried to get as much sleep as possible before the day's sweltering heat, and rising din made sleeping impossible (usually around 11 AM).

Blackie and I were getting to know each other better and continued improving as a team. One of the first things I learned is that HE, meaning Blackie, had a reputation. As we walked out to our post, the Marines called out to see what handlers were in their area that evening. I'd answer, "K9 Blackie!" and receive responses like, "Keep that SOB out of here," or "Blackie, that bad-tempered SOB."

One evening, I recall everyone calling him a SOB, so I called him that for the night. "Hey, you, SOB, want to bite some Marine fanny or some officer fanny?" "SOB, you have a dog nose, dog face, and dog breath!" "SOB, if we chase those Marines out of the bunker, we can eat their midnight rations. Want to?"

Somehow, I felt he understood what I was saying because he would wag his tail and act like there was nothing different going on.

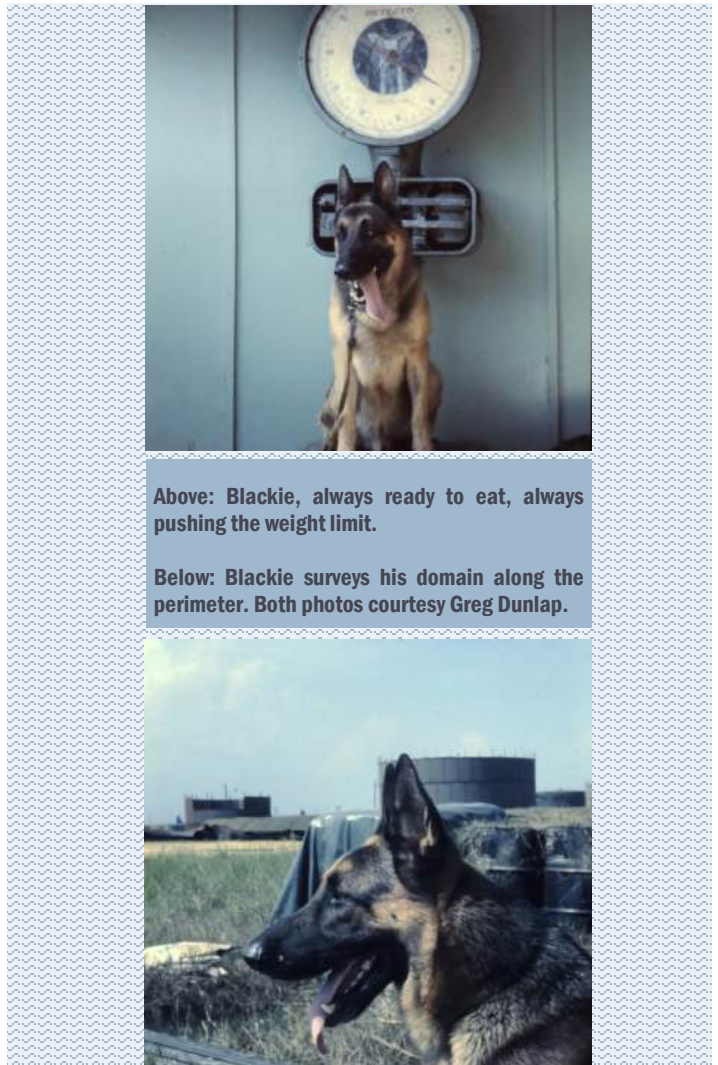
Another item I learned about is that he also had a reputation for eating almost anything thrown at or offered to him. It looked as if it was food or anything that remotely smelled like food; it was gone. I always hoped it was food.

Everyone used to joke about what he'd eat. The rumor rolled that Blackie would devour anything at all that had ever been in, around, or near a C-Rations box, with the unique exception of Ham and Lima Beans. I mean, he had to draw the line somewhere. But crackers, pound cake, peanut butter, jelly - all inhaled in one or two bites. Toilet paper? (I never tried this, but it wouldn't have surprised me.)

One evening, as we took up our position at the start of Charlie Company's line, directly across from the ARVN camp on the opposite side of the road running north out of Đà Nẵng, Blackie valiantly defended his reputation.

The driver delivering the midnight rations was a friend, so he had stopped, and we chatted for a few minutes. Before he left, a few other Marines from Charlie Company joined us, and everyone started joking about how Blackie always seemed hungry and would eat almost anything offered.

One thing led to another, and someone asked, "How much will that SOB eat?" Being challenged, and in the interest of keeping up the mystique about K9, and be-



Above: Blackie, always ready to eat, always pushing the weight limit.

Below: Blackie surveys his domain along the perimeter. Both photos courtesy Greg Dunlap.



ing confident in my buddy Blackie, I responded, "He'll eat every sandwich you have in the truck with you tonight and still be hungry afterward."

The Marines soundly disputed my claim. After all, there were 22 sandwiches left to deliver. No dog could eat 22 sandwiches. Hesitant as I was, I bet that he could do it. Even if he couldn't complete them all, I felt he'd have a grand time eating them all—at least until he hurled. Bored Marines and Airmen made calls up and

down the line, and the bets were on!! I had \$10.00 riding on Blackie's belly now. Several dog handlers and Marines joined us in witnessing the event.

Ever see "Cool Hand Luke?" The first dozen eggs went down like the first dozen sandwiches. Blackie was in Glutton's Heaven. Wagging his tail and almost doing tricks for another sandwich. It was embarrassing to watch. Twelve down, and ten to go! The next five went down more slowly as Blackie seemed to chew them

Story and photos by Greg Dunlap

more. Of course, I embellished the tale, explaining to everyone that now that his initial sampling was over, he had pronounced them edible and wanted to savor the flavor.

Several comments banded about a dog's taste buds wanting to savor midnight sandwiches. I always thought the Marines might not have received proper training in culinary skills myself. Blackie just burped and looked at the next offering. Five more to go, and we would get the title. "BIG PIG ON PERIMETER!" Wouldn't that look nice over his kennel?

Blackie was at the point of not knowing if he wanted to eat another sandwich or barf. Monty Moore once told me that the veterinarian put his dog to sleep because he had a condition known as bloating. That diagnosis nagged at me now. The novelty was wearing thin now. When in a land of plenty, one satiates oneself and then contemplates one's own overindulgence. Blackie was fast approaching that point.

We coaxed down three more sandwiches—only two to go. The title was so near, and the champ was starting to waiver. I took him for a comfort walk. "He has to pee sometimes, guys; give him a break!" Blackie had that look on his face of, "OH SHIT, what did you get me into???"

Back we came. The final two sandwiches were on the ground, opened. I stopped, lit a cigarette, and reached down, picking them up. Crin-

gling the paper—Pavlovian response here, folks—he salivated. I tossed him one, then the other.

SNATCH, GULP...SNATCH, GULP!!!

G O N E !!! IT'S OURS, WE WON!!!!

We dispelled the disbelievers that night. Blackie had reached a new level of respect. One had to bow their heads when mentioning his name. But then someone reminded me that - - - - - it wasn't over.

"You said that he'd still be hungry afterward. No way can he eat anything more now!!!"

I replied, "Mumble grumble, rotten fracker, yes, I did, and I suppose you want to see him do it?"

"Yep, makes the bet right."

"Well, there are no more sandwiches," the look on Blackie's face almost said, "Thank you, GOD."

"Wait, I have it!!!" I said, remembering that I had some chocolate in my shirt pocket. I looked at him; his eyes were rolling back in his head. "CRAP, I ate the whole thing!!!" was flowing through his brain – a dog's brain, full of used kitty litter, but a semblance of a working brain nevertheless.

Slowly, I opened my shirt pocket, looking at him the whole time. He watched me. Taking out the chocolate bar, I took off the paper slowly, making as much noise as possible. Crackle, crackle, wrinkle. Yummy coming out!! If you knew what to look for, you could simultaneously witness his

elation and hesitation. Luckily, the Marines didn't know what to look for, they didn't speak K9.

Taking a large bite of the chocolate, I chewed it for a while and then looked down at my partner. "Sure is good. Want some?"

Wrinkle, wrinkle, wrinkle went the paper. Indecision pinged through Blackie's mind. "Do I want some? Who are you kidding? Wait, even if I did want some, I couldn't force another bite down!" This next stage was the moment of truth and \$10.00 if we won.

Opening up the remainder of the chocolate bar, making a lot of noise with the paper now, I again asked him, "Want some, Blackie?" It wasn't fair; there were lots of primal instincts and physical discomfort butting up against a chocolate bar.

He wagged his tail. His face went into that dog face look of, "They never feed me anything around here. Can you spare a small morsel?"

Once again, I tossed a piece into the air. Leaping forward, he caught it and swallowed it. I don't know how he kept everything down, but I could tell it would be foolish to encourage him to eat anymore. The Marines, however, felt they had witnessed something unique. Never again would Blackie's ability to eat anything be questioned.

The word passed up and down the lines. Snippets like "You fed my mid-rats to that SOB??" could be heard occasionally.

Collecting our \$10.00, we moved off now. My thinking was that if Blackie did lose his lunch, we'd do it out of sight of everyone.

Blackie was done for the night, however. Usually full of pep and active, now he was content just to sit and digest. Sounds from doing just that emanated from his belly for the remainder of the night. Even when I went to eat my C-Rations, he never attempted to ask for any.

It's good that the rest of the evening quietly passed because he'd likely lose everything with any activity. The next day, the kennel staff asked me if I noticed anything wrong with him because he didn't eat his chow when they fed him that morning.

"Really, didn't eat!!? No, I didn't notice anything; I'll watch him closely tonight and let you know if I suspect anything, though."

It was a few days before we got posted back in Charlie Company's area, and when we arrived, it was like returning with a celebrity. When I announced "K9, Blackie", sounds of "Hide the food!!!" and an occasional "That SOB!" could be heard in the area. However, his ability was never again questioned regarding how much he could eat.

And that was how one evening Blackie ate almost the entire midnight ration for the whole Charlie Company line.



With the Hearts of Lion Tamers: Early Women in the K9 Corps

by Dixie Whitman

The story of women in America's K9 Corps is one of evolution. It mirrors women's challenges and earlier limited opportunities in other realms, such as government or boardrooms. Today, we recognize the talents and skills of female K9 handlers - taking advantage of their dog training and handling abilities. However, this progress took time.

As a young girl in New Jersey, Carol Roever dreamed of a job as a lion tamer. Later, she worked in East Coast Kennels and then at The Seeing Eye School early during WWII. She eventually joined the Army to become a dog handler, not realizing that her recruiter had lied. Females were not allowed to be dog handlers at the start of WWII.

On April 5, 1944, the Women's Army Corps (WAC) activated at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. WACs started arriving about a week later. By the end of the first three months, twenty-six additional women transferred to this Cavalry Remount Station, including Caroline R. Weaver, Violette M. Blakeman, and Margaret F. Wells.

With the arrival of 2LT Dorothy Davis on April 19, 1944, and Carol Roever in the late summer months, the stars were aligning for a first attempt at women in the K9 Corps. New ratings were awarded, and the K9 program started WAC participation in the fall of 1944.

WHOA! Not so fast!

The directors of the War Dog Reception and Training Center remained adamant and stone-walled female participation. Their line in the sand stood: only men could be sent into combat, so they could see no reason that women should be allowed to train dogs.

At first, the Army selected four exceptionally strong and talented women for participation. While Carol Roever had childhood dreams of snapping lions into obedience inside a circus ring, Pfc. Violette H. Blakeman actually presented credentials as a highly successful big cat trainer at numerous circuses across the country. Pfc. Weaver and Pvt. Wells also came with robust dog training credentials. The female handlers, brimming with talent, were enthusiastic about their work. Yet, the men in charge allowed them scant opportunities other than feeding, scooping poop, cleaning, moving supplies, and acting as decoys in the surrounding woods. Disillusioned and disappointed, three asked to transfer to other jobs.

In a letter dated November 18, 2005, Carol Roever offered additional details to Thomas Buecker, a former Fort Robinson Historian. "Shortly after starting this, while on an off-duty horseback ride, I was thrown, winding up in the hospital for a few weeks, and when I



Left: WWII poster to encourage women to join the military.

Crandell, Bradshaw, Artist, and Funder/Sponsor United States Army. Recruiting Publicity Bureau. *Are you a girl with star-spangled heart?--Join the WAC now!--Thousands of Army jobs need filling!* / Bradshaw Crandell, 1943. [Recruiting Publicity Bureau United States Army] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/90712746/>.



Right: Carol Roever holding one of the collies who served as an MWD in WWII at Fort Robinson, Nebraska in 1945. Carol Roever—one of the first four women to take the leash at Fort Robinson, Nebraska and the only one to successfully manage the gauntlet thrown down by the male handlers.

Photo courtesy of Nebraska History. www.history.nebraska.gov

got out, I found that the other three women had decided that the work was not what they had in mind and asked to be transferred to other departments."¹

Carol's transfer back to the Motor Pool coincided with those of her colleagues. As a driver, her responsibilities included transporting the handlers and dogs to the outlying areas surrounding the fort for training sessions. She continued to spend time with the dog handlers, many of whom she knew well from her dog-showing days. While the men took breaks, she held their dogs on leashes and offered advice, quickly earning the trust and confidence of the men who had overlooked her talents in the past.

The Army attempted to initiate women into the K9 Corps again as the war drew down. Carol Roever, one of the first four WACs to try K9 in the fall of 1944, transferred again to the War Dog Training Detachment. Her skills and determination were clearly a match for the headstrong K9 leadership. In August of 1945, Carol became the first and only successful female handler to take on de-agitation training of dogs returning from the front lines of WWII.

It would be many years before women were allowed in the K9 field in numbers too big to ignore.

¹ Carol R. Simonds to T. Buecker, Curator, Fort Robinson, Nebraska. November 18, 2005. Carol Roever file/History Nebraska.



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

From the Team at MWDHM...
We invite you to join the museum's journey
by signing up for a free *Paw Print* subscription.
Email: info@mwdhm.org

**Military Working Dog Heritage:
Always on Point**

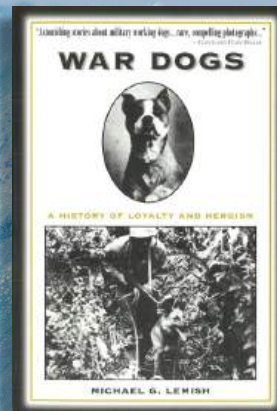
We're on the Web: mwdhm.org
We're on Facebook:
Military Working Dog Heritage Museum

Recycle, please.



- Share your story.
- Share your vision.
- Share your voice.
- Share your copy of our newsletter.

Book of the Month



Two of my favorite Military Working Dog history books are by author and military dog history Michael G. Lemish. *War Dogs – A History of Loyalty and Heroism* (1996) begins in 431-404 B.C. and then digs in with World War I. Mr. Lemish's research is second to none, and beginning with Chapter 3, "Starting from Scratch," which outlines the origins of the civilian-led "Dogs for Defense," it progresses, in detail, through the Vietnam War (including the "Superdog" program). This book is right up any canine program history aficionado's alley. It is still available, and I highly recommend this great book. Available [on Amazon](#) or from a local bookstore. By Joel Burton.

Submitted Photo of the Month



One last photo submitted of the All-Female K9 Demonstration Drill Team.

"Double Search and Call-by."

L to R: MWD Pig, Decoy A1C Strawberry Jones, Handler A1C Paula Dondeville (Bavilacqua), and Decoy A1C Linda Anderson.