



# *The Paw Print*

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



Volume 5 Issue 8

August 2025

## Upcoming Events:

September 14-21, 2025  
Kokomo, IN.  
All Veterans Reunion

October 17, 2025  
San Antonio, TX. US War  
Dogs 25th Anniversary  
Celebration

November 10-11 2025  
Columbia, SC  
10th Anniversary  
Rededication of the  
South Carolina War Dog  
Memorial

## Coast Guard Dog Handlers: Always Ready



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From the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum archives, we are honored to share this image of WWII Army and Coast Guard handlers with their dogs. Army and Coast Guard handlers sometimes trained at the same facilities, such as Front Royal, Fort Robinson, and San Carlos. The family of Coast Guard handler Richard Homer Ayers, 5th from the right in this photo, donated this image. Credit: MWD Heritage Museum Archives.

On June 13, 1942, a group of four saboteurs launched a rubber boat from a German submarine under the cover of darkness and heavy fog, successfully infiltrating Long Island, NY.

John C. Cullen, a member of the Amagansett Coast Guard Station, was conducting his routine six-mile nightly patrol when he stumbled upon a group of men on the beach. Cullen spoke with

the group leader; however, being alone, he felt he could do little in the situation. Pretending to accept a bribe, once out of sight, Cullen hurried back to his station to report his findings.

An armed Coast Guard team soon arrived, but by then, the men had vanished into the night mist. The following day, the Coast Guard discovered four cases buried on the beach. It became evi-

dent that these individuals were well-funded, as the boxes contained American currency, high explosives, detonators, timing devices, and other materials associated with a sapper school near Berlin.

This is why beach patrols proved vital to America's safety during WWII. Well-trained Coast Guard dog teams served as a mobile security perimeter fence.



President, Albert Johnson

Hello and happy August to all of our faithful readers.

August brings us our Coast Guard edition of the newsletter. The Coast Guard has been pivotal in securing our waterways since its inception on January 28th, 1915. Initially, Congress merged two organizations to form the United States Coast Guard: The United States Revenue Cutter Service and the United States Lifesaving Service.



In 1942, the Coast Guard Dog program began when Dogs for Defense procured and trained dogs to pair with Coast Guard handlers for beach patrols during World War II. These K9 teams provided a valuable asset to the US arsenal, enabling early detection of infiltrators attempting to enter American

## From the President's Desk

soil, as well as the ability to scent out infiltrators who may have already made it to land.

In this edition, you will find a history of the incredible work the Coast Guard K9 teams have done in the past, as well as some photos about hoist training for the Coast Guard's K9s.

You can't properly tell the history of the Coast Guard K9 program without important trainers like Mr. Richard Homer Ayers, a WWII-era Coast Guard K9 trainer. We would love to share with you all of Mr. Ayers' personal history, but we are strapped for space in a newsletter this size, so we have done our best to provide you with a highlight reel in a 3-page spread in this newsletter edition. Dixie paints a picture of this pioneer of Coast Guard K9 training. His ability to create well-rounded dog teams capable of fulfilling any mission given to them through a variety of training scenarios was evident when the research was done on Mr. Ayers for the article. We hope you enjoy this historically significant story as much as we do.

You will see on our list of upcoming events that this fall is going to be busy for us at the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum as an organization. In September, we have the Kokomo, Indiana, all-veterans reunion,

where we will be set up for 5 days with historical artifacts, swag, and handouts for the kids to spark their interest in our K9 history. In October, we will attend the 25th anniversary celebration of US War Dogs. Although we haven't confirmed whether we will have a booth set up or just attend, we are looking forward to the event either way.

We enjoy collaborating with other organizations and attending events that bring together handlers from all eras and branches of service.



In conjunction with this event, there is also a Marine K9 reunion the weekend following the anniversary celebration that a few of our board members will be attending not only to reminisce about old times in our prime K9 handling days but in hopes to motivate more of our Marine Corps brothers and sisters to become volunteers or at least be willing to do interviews with us so that we can preserve their history as well.

In November, we have an event in the planning phase, the rededication of the South Carolina War Dog Monument in Columbia, South Carolina, for the days leading up to and including Veterans Day. This event will follow the same format as the one we had at Fort Benning in 2022. There will be guest speakers, fundraiser dinners, free time to explore the area, and evenings to hang out with former and current handlers.

These may not be all the events from now till the end of the year; these are just the biggest for us as an organization. We want to thank you for your support this year by reading our history, sharing our organization with friends, making monetary donations, and donating your time to volunteer with us. Without you all, we could not share our mission with the world. Have a great August,

And as always,



**K9 Leads the Way!**

*Albert Johnson*





# South Carolina War Dog Memorial

10th Anniversary  
Re-dedication Events  
November 10-11, 2025

Please join us in Columbia, SC  
for re-dedication events  
November 10-11, 2025.

See the Events page for the latest  
updates.

[MWDHeritageMuseum.org/events](https://MWDHeritageMuseum.org/events)

or contact:  
[Events@mwdhm.org](mailto:Events@mwdhm.org) for questions.



Richard Homer Ayers (left) worked with dogs in many capacities: owner, trainer, handler, and eventually a renowned judge in the AKC show rings. Photo circa 1944. All photos donated to the museum by his son, William Ayers.

## Richard Homer Ayers: WWII Coast Guard Trainer

by Dixie Gilmore Whitman

History teaches, inspires, and challenges us, whether the events occurred twenty years or five centuries ago. By examining historical events and the individuals who lived before us, we can learn, understand, and enhance our own lives. Additionally, this exploration allows us to show respect for the rich and varied experiences of those who came before us.

One fascinating personal history from World War II involves Richard Homer Ayers, a skilled dog trainer and dedicated patriot. In

1943, Ayers joined the Coast Guard and quickly found his niche with training in the Canine Corps.

His son, William, who remains exceptionally proud of his father's service during World War II, shared numerous images taken of his father's time in the Coast Guard. Richard Ayers provided impressive public dog demonstrations to encourage the support of the newly established working dogs in America's military.

Richard took seriously the need to patrol the coastlines

and provide security for mission-critical industries for the war effort. His determination and training efforts produced qualified dog teams equipped to protect America and her assets.

He deployed to the South Pacific during WWII on LST (Landing ship tank) 775. These ships, created in response to England's failed invasion at Dunkirk, allowed the movement of tanks, wheeled and tracked vehicles, artillery, construction equipment, and military supplies to an unimproved beach; the LST ships provid-

ed perfect transport for invasions.

LST 775 and her crew participated in the Pacific Campaign landings at Leyte (November 1944), Subic Bay (January 1945), Lingayen Gulf (January 1945), and Mindanao Islands (April 1945.)

In October 1945, Richard separated from service and returned to his job as a salesman at the Chase Bag Co., where he became the Sales Manager of the Toledo, OH branch.



As a successful salesman, Richard moved up the ranks, eventually becoming Vice President and Director of Sales and a member of Chase Bag Company's Board of Directors.

But he balanced this financial success with his continued love of dogs and dog training. On his separation papers from the military, he lists his occupation as a Dog Trainer-Salesman. Even though he soared to great heights in the sales world, he listed Dog Training as his first skill. After World War II, Richard did some training for Guiding Eyes for the Blind and other organizations providing German shepherds as guide dogs.

His love of the German shepherd dog breed pulled him into training, breeding, and ultimately judging. Devotees of the GSD breed will find many old photos of Richard in the early 1960s presenting winners' cups to the best German shepherd dogs at prestigious shows nationwide.

Richard Ayers's life story winds through many states: Louisiana, Oklahoma, Iowa, Missouri, Texas, New York, and finally Connecticut, where he died in June 1966. At the time of his death, Richard Ayers was only 55 years old.

The museum values and conserves Richard Ayers's story. Please remember his service and his passion for Coast Guard K9s.



In an exciting time as the K9 Corps ranks exploded during WWII, getting the dog teams out in public to do public demonstrations such as this were critical to capture America's support of military working dogs. In this image Richard Ayers catches a Doberman pinscher.



Richard Homer Ayers, second from left, lines up with his dog for a Coast Guard Demonstration.



Another Coast Guard demonstration during WWII, where Richard Ayers shows his talent.

*Semper paratus.*



**Willie Necker (left) Lt Commander of US Coast Guard War Dog Unit, with Richard Ayers, a dog trainer for the Coast Guard, during World War II.**



**During a USCG demonstration, handler/trainer Richard Ayers catches the business end of a World War II Doberman pin-scher.**



**Richard Ayers, far right, spends time with other members of his USCG Dog Corps during WWII.**



**Richard Homer Ayers posed on a vehicle with one of the K9s from the Coast Guard's WWII Dog Corps.**



**Above: Richard Ayers and a trained sentry dog.**  
**Below: Ayers' tag and Selective Service Registration.**





## Sgt Kolbi - Meet the Artist and the Creation

Story by Shannon Campbell/Photos by Dominic Frederico

On a beautiful, sunny day in May 2025, I had the opportunity to meet the creator of MWD Sgt Kolbi. Stacy Hendershott, Weld Worx Metal Art artist extraordinaire, opened her creative space to me and my good friend and photographer Dominic Frederico (USAF MAJ Ret).

### Meet Stacy

Do you have friends who carry a magnet in their car just to see if that weird/fun/odd metal item you saw in a shop or along the side of the road is something you can use? If so, you may be named Stacy Hendershott. A magnet will stick to steel and that is easy to weld.

Stacy, while growing up, learned welding from her uncle to help maintain farm equipment. She describes herself as an accidental artist. After leaving a 32-year career in law enforcement, including Major Crimes Investigation in law enforcement, welding became one of her tools to unpack and unplug from her previous life. Her detective skills of observation, deduction, and instinct help turn ideas into

life-size art installations.

When we first arrived at the neat-as-a-pin workshop, Stacy was working on a life-size peacock (and those are not small creatures). Before starting a piece, she researches the anatomy, lines, and nuances of the animal to ensure accuracy. This opened the door for me to ask about how Sgt Kolbi came to life.

### Meet Sgt Kolbi

A board member of the Platteville Veterans' Memorial asked Stacy to create a statue, which would be on loan until funding could be obtained through donors. Meanwhile, until donors could be secured, Stacy moved on to create Sgt Kolbi, from initial concept to installation (July 4, 2023), at the Platteville Veterans' Memorial in Platteville, Colorado.

Within 18 months, this beauty, weighing approximately 700 pounds and comprising over 400 pieces of metal, stands guard surrounded by the Mizpah Cemetery.

Hendershott knew this piece had to be life-sized and based on GSD/Malinois anatomy and dimensions. Quite



Stacy Hendershott in her workshop  
(May 8, 2025).  
Photograph by Dominic Frederico

Right: Donor Sign  
Photo by Stacy Hendershott



Above: Sgt Kolbi stands watch (May 8, 2025).  
The jaw/cheeks of Sgt Kolbi are shaped by two halves from a pair of handcuffs Stacy carried on duty during her career in Law Enforcement.



The wristwatch is set at 3:41. To the right of the "3" on the face, the date is set at "7". This configuration honors the current military training ground for Military Working Dogs; the 341st Training Squadron of the 37th Training Wing, at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. Photo: Dominic Frederico

often, in her work, a new technique or challenge will appear. Sgt Kolbi's challenge was incorporating personal items (not unusual for most of Stacy's works) using a "capture technique," along with a bit of learning about the chemistry of attaching brass, aluminum, and steel to each other.

And generous donors were found.

Sgt Kolbi was made possible by the Mead Area Community Foundation, Cameron and Veronica Silbaugh for the Native Flagstone, and Colorado Wire Cloth for the support steel (which is not visible), as well as Weld Worx Metal Art (Stacy's sculpture studio).

### Sgt Kolbi is made of what?

Remember I noted the neat-as-a-pin, organized workshop? It contains all types of upcycled material that can be welded. People bring her things, donate, or call to see if she wants to drive to Montana, Wyoming, or the Dakotas to pick up a particularly unique item. Stacy neatly piles all materials into different categories and spaces depending on how she wants to use them; rusty materials and items with patina may

sit outside. Just the right shade or surface may be on a shelf in the workshop now. Sgt Kolbi is no different, along with personal items, even those added by others who have stopped by the memorial.

### So, the name Sgt Kolbi

There is no official record of an MWD named Sgt Kolbi. However,



The wrenches came to Stacy from various places and were made in the USA or in countries where US MWDs have served (e.g., Japan, Korea). Photo: Dominic Frederico

there is a personal connection to Stacy. The rank of Sergeant is mid-level, and we all know that the MWD carries a rank higher than their handler. The rank was easy for Stacy. Kolbi is a combination name of Kenzi and Colby, an homage to two dogs Stacy knew and loved, who still stir her soul when she speaks or thinks of them.

Word for word from Stacy:

*"Kenzi is the (now retired) K9 of a (not retired) law enforcement*

*friend of mine and was a dog I worked with before she and I retired. Colby was my own dog, who was the most courageous and loving dog I have ever known. She feared no living thing and loved her pack deeply. "Kolbi" combines their names/spellings. The eyes of Sgt Kolbi were inspired by Colby's eyes."*

### Final thoughts

We formed a fine trio of fellow dog lovers, military supporters, and new friends on that bluebird sky day in Northeast Colorado. And now I, too, have a magnet in my car to see if I can find anything interesting Stacy could maybe use in her future creations. I encourage you to stop by if you are in the area. Take a look at the details for yourself. Tell me what you think, as I never mentioned if Sgt Kolbi is a brave boy or a brave girl watching over the Platteville Veterans Memorial- even Stacy won't tell you- you have to decide for yourself.

Sgt Kolbi is located a 15-minute drive East from Interstate 25 between Denver and Ft. Collins, in the town of Platteville. 🐾



Detail from the memorial, the Tactical Vest. Photo: Dominic Frederico



## Earl Nills—Memories of A WWII K9 Cadre

by Dixie Gilmore Whitman

When Earl Nills first arrived at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, in 1942, he started working from an old white clapboard house that had once housed General George Custer. This historic Sandhills Army fortification, a remnant from the Indian Wars, was transitioning from a Calvary Remount Station to a new mission: K9. Earl felt fortunate to be among the first to join the dog program.

### Becoming K9

Earlier in his Army career, as he finished his supply sergeant's school at the old Army post, Francis E. Warren, in Cheyenne, Wyoming, Earl heard that the Army sought recruits with dog experience. Originally from the St. Paul, Minnesota area, Earl's family had given him a strong foundation in working with animals—primarily horses and dogs, both of which would be abundant at Fort Robinson. Motivated by this opportunity, he raised his hand to volunteer.

Fort Robinson had been a major Cavalry Remount Center since 1919, and old habits die hard. The Supply Sergeant dutifully handed over the complete set of gear to the new K9 recruits. However, instead of K9 specific items, they received Calvary gear, in-

cluding riding britches, boots, and spurs. Earl and eleven other newcomers received instructions from four civilian K9 experts.

This outstanding group of twelve dog handlers formed the core of the K9 cadre. However, even experts did the dirty work during wartime, and these men began constructing doghouses to shelter the dogs that would soon arrive in large numbers.

One time, Earl recalled that in the early months of 1943, Fort Robinson welcomed a new group of K9 in for training. The temperatures dropped to 40 below zero, and the snow piled up to their eyeballs. The base medic stopped by to give a stern warning, "Any of you men from Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan, and the Dakotas ought to be able to handle this. I am not letting any of these Texans out because they'd standstill and freeze to death."<sup>1</sup> As a result, a small group of hardy Midwestern handlers took over the care and feeding of the dogs until the Chinook winds came through, breaking up the cold and snow, finally releasing the Texans.



Above photo: Earl Nills in uniform. Photo Credit: Nebraska State Historical Society Black and White Portrait of Earl Nills in Uniform RG2310.PH. In Folder: RG2310 Nills, Earl

Article source: Earl Nills Interview Transcript. July 8, 1989 by Debra O'Donnel. Nebraska State Historical Society.

### Punchbowl Memories

Fort Robinson had not yet welcomed the Women's Army Corps (WACs), who would gather at the Army post a couple of years later. However, Earl and his fellow dog handlers were looking for female companionship.

The ranching wives around the Crawford, Nebraska area organized a dance for the GIs at the city dance hall and invited the young ladies of the Sandhills to join them for an evening of dancing. Earl remembers a mas-

sive punch bowl filled with a pink liquid that he felt wouldn't enhance the dance hall experience, so he and his friends added crème de menthe, bourbon, and any other liquor they could sneak into the mixture. He recalls, "Everyone had an excellent time that night."<sup>2</sup>

One vivid memory for Earl involved Sally Rand, a famous fan dancer who was married to a rodeo champion serving in the Remount Section. When Sally visited, her celebrity status and her "impressive jeans" made a

significant impact. When asked if Sally had danced for the men, Earl chuckled and replied, "All we got to look at was those tight jeans, and they were very tight."<sup>3</sup>

### Moving On

Earl's training journey took him from Fort Robinson to Cat Island, Mississippi, for jungle training. There, he learned additional dog-handling skills from an English captain and two English sergeants who had brought their dogs with them during the Battle of Dunkirk. After receiving this specialized training, Earl became part of the training cadre, teaching newcomers how to navigate the jungle environment as dog handlers.

He was then shipped to San Carlos, California, where he served as a First Sergeant for a scout dog

platoon consisting of 30 men and one officer, Lieutenant Walker. In the spring of 1944, they headed for the South Pacific. The ocean crossing was long and circuitous, taking them along the Pacific Coast of North America and then south to the coast of South America. From there, they sailed through the warm waters of the Pacific to Fiji and New Caledonia, where they were attached to the Americal Division.

### South Pacific Battles

Soldiers in New Caledonia, part of the Americal Division, received extensive weapons instruction and participated in training exercises on jungle terrain. They became the first US Army unit sent to Guadalcanal. Due to transportation issues, the Americal Division arrived in smaller units and en-

gaged in combat alongside the battle-hardened and exhausted Marines of the 1st Marine Division, whom they eventually relieved.

The soldiers quickly learned battle tactics from the Marines to employ against the Japanese forces, resulting in fewer casualties than anticipated. From Guadalcanal, the dog handlers supported efforts in Bougainville, part of New Guinea, before moving on to Luzon in 1945.

The Japanese could never successfully ambush their patrols during this fighting, thanks to using K9 units. Earl received a Purple Heart during his service. He lost one of his men and six dogs.

His unit was sailing for Japan when the war ended. Arriving in Japan with

enough time in service to deactivate, Earl was shipped back to San Francisco and then to Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, where he received his discharge and returned to St. Paul.

Please join the museum in remembering Earl F. Nills, born November 22, 1921, and who passed away June 7, 2002. Earl is buried at the Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis, Section 13, Site 2123.

### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Earl Nills Interview Transcript. July 8, 1989 by Debra O'Donnel. Nebraska State Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Earl Nills Interview Transcript.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Earl Nills Interview Transcript.



## Pvt. Whitmus Trains Sentry Dog



8125th AU Sentry Dog training session. Pfc. Frank Whitmus.

PFC Frank Whitmus, Wolf Point, 8125th AU Sentry Dog Det., veterinarian-technician, has the job of supervising feeding and care for sick dogs in the sentry dog training detachment in Korea. The dogs are used to guard ammunition for the 24th division.

Dogs and GIs are trained to work together as

teams. The program lasts for eight weeks and upon completion of the course, the dog reacts to only one master.

The dogs are taught to obey, when and how to attack and to love their master. Although the primary purpose of the sentry dogs is to guard ammunition, the dogs believe that they are protecting

their master. Thus, the more a dog loves his master, the more effective he is as a sentry dog. The ages of dogs who receive initial training ranges from 18 months to three years.

*The Herald-news.* (Wolf Point, MT), Aug. 11 1955.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/sn86075271/1955-08-11/ed-1/>.

Contributor: Montana Historical Society.



Reprint from *The Herald-news* (Wolf Point, Mont.), August 11, 1955



# USCG - Seattle K9 Hoist Training



## Coast Guard

Photos by Annika Hirschler



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From the Team at MWDHM...

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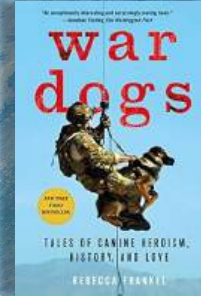
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## Book of the Month



War Dogs – Tales of Canine Heroism, History, and Love is a 2014 book by former senior editor at Foreign Policy Magazine, Rebecca Frankel. *War Dogs* is a sturdy, well-researched book that reads smooth and steady. Rebecca covers mostly the more “modern” era with the Iraq/Afghanistan history, focusing on multiple individual handlers/dogs. One of the dogs discussed is Dyngo, whom Rebecca ultimately adopted and is the subject of her next book. She does dip somewhat into other eras, such as Vietnam, with Ron Aiello and Lieutenant Colonel E.H. Richardson (the “father of war dogs”) in World War I. I can't recommend this enough! Find it [HERE](#).  
Review by Joel Burton.

## Submitted Photo of the Month



**Photo by: Dominic W. Frederico (MAJ  
USAF Ret)**

**Sgt Kolbi is on guard at the Platteville Veterans Memorial in Platteville, Colorado. One of our volunteers took a day trip to meet with Stacy Hendershott, the welder extraordinaire and creator of this beautiful piece of art.**