



The Paw Print

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



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Korea: K9s and the Cold



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The cold in Korea is relentless—cutting through your skin and burying itself deep into your bones. Shown in the snow are the personnel of the Dog Scout Platoon, 25th US INF DIV, with their dogs in a division training area in Korea. 7 December 1953.

US Army photo by Pvt Teeman 25th Sig Co. Via National Archives, courtesy Sandra Fickbohm.

Thirty-five years later a kid from SW Minnesota learned the difference between Midwest-cold and Korea-cold. See his story beginning below.

By Curtis Hendel

Let's talk about the cold for a bit. By cold, I mean old man winter in all his fury.

I grew up in farm country, southwest Minnesota, and we know temperature extremes. From triple-digit summer heat to winter weather far below zero, we have it all; we are talking about the cold in all its glory.

We have two types of cold in Minnesota. First, there is cold with wind. At zero degrees Fahrenheit, with a stiff breeze, it is seriously cold. I met people in the military who had never experienced a little thing called "wind chill," which translates the thermometer reading to reflect how cold it actually felt, even if the temperature wasn't all that terrible. The wind chill on any given day

could be as low as fifty below. We fought cold like this with layers. Carefully planned out clothing to include sweatshirts covered by coveralls with a parka over the top. Throw on a ski mask and heavy gloves before you realize you forgot to use the little boy's room before applying these layers, and you were on your fourth cup of coffee for the day

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From the President's Desk



Dear MWD Community,

As a dedicated friend of the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum, you already know that our mission is to acquire, conserve, and showcase the incredible artifacts, photos, and stories that highlight the vibrant history of America's Military Working Dog program. Together, we celebrate this remarkable K9 legacy!

We hope you enjoy this December issue, filled with articles and photos highlighting service in South Korea. We are honored to feature the story of Robert Fickbohm, a member of the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon.

In addition to our focus on Korea, we have some engaging stories from our newsletter staff, including contributions from Greg Dunlap and Curtis Hendel. Both writers bring their unique styles to the table and provide plenty of laughs.

A key aspect of our non-profit organization is our volunteer team's commitment to doing things right. They avoid shortcuts and pour their heart and soul into everything we undertake. This year has been particularly busy with educational activities. We have attended events in California, Texas, Tennessee, Michigan, South Carolina, and Indiana to pro-

vide educational resources and opportunities to these communities.

One of my favorite parts of being on the road is meeting new people. We relate to many of these people through dogs—they may be civilians, but they understand the bond and devotion we share with our dogs. Quite often, we run into former handlers or veterinary staff when we are out and about. The roots of the MWD tribe run deep, creating bonds that last a lifetime.

Since 2016, we have worked tirelessly to gather, share, and protect the history that is important to all of us. Our mission focuses on the dogs and military members who have served alongside them, and we could not have achieved this without the generous support of friends like you. Thank you!

This year, your gift can make an even bigger impact as we strive to make 2026 a pivotal year. We encourage you to contribute whatever you can.

We'd like to take this opportunity to wish you and yours a wonderful holiday. During this festive season,



President, Albert Johnson

we reflect on how fortunate we are to have you on our team. Here's to a holiday filled with happiness, surrounded by loved ones.

Thank you once again for everything you do to support The Military Working Dog Heritage Museum and for giving back to the dogs that tirelessly serve America. We appreciate you taking the time to read through this request and considering renewing your gift this year. Your support means a great deal to us.

On behalf of the entire Military Working Dog Heritage Museum Team, I wish you the warmest holiday greetings and invite you to join us in 2026 for some exciting new changes.

Happy Holidays!

K9 Leads the Way!

Albert Johnson

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

when you started getting dressed. With layers, you could work in the cold and, hopefully, not have to be out in it for very long, certainly not during the hours of darkness.

Then we have nasty cold temperatures with no wind and maybe even the sun to brighten your day. Even thirty below with no wind could leave you with just a sweatshirt, stocking hat, and insulated bibs. If you were on a mission to walk cattle pens early in the morning and chop ice off the waterers, you could easily break a serious sweat if you *overdressed* for thirty below. Working out in this weather was tolerable, thanks to the occasional warm-up break.

From Minnesota, I went to basic training in San Antonio during the summer heat, received my training afterwards, and landed in South Korea in the dead of winter. It was here that we all learned what Korea's cold was like, especially those from the south.

At Osan, I don't recall the temperatures frequently dropping below zero, but the cold was distinctly different. As perimeter rats of the K9 section, our winter shifts often extended to long hours on the fence line, with perhaps one break inside the Metro Van if the Store Keeper 1 wasn't too busy.

"But it's a dry heat..."

We've all heard that from people who lived in the desert southwest. "A hundret and te'en ain't dat bad, it's a dry heat..." To a certain



extent, I understood the effect of humidity on a hot summer day and the extra stress it caused the human body, especially when baling hay or shingling a roof. But I never thought it would have the same effect in the cold.

I was wrong.

I rapidly learned what Korea-Cold was. Naturally, being a peninsula, South Korea had wind blowing either off the bodies of water surrounding it or originating in Siberia.

We were issued a wide range of cold-weather gear, including parkas, parka pants, bunny boots, mukluks, and long underwear. Let's say you put on all those clothes they supplied. You would look like a marshmallow man, sweating underneath all those layers before reaching the post, and you'd be unable to manipulate much of your gear due to the restrictions of all those pieces of clothing. So, if anyone uninvited decided to visit and had bad intentions, you would be in a very bad way.

Then came the reckoning. The wet, cold air, no matter how windy, could cut right through every layer of clothing, down to the

sweat-soaked tee shirt and onward to your bones themselves.

I took the advice of the squad's elders and dressed, but not overdressed. My parka, parka pants, and bunny boots never saw the light of day. I could be cold in one of two ways, and I chose the one that allowed me the ability to defend myself still, if necessary.

Our one ace in the hole was a can the size of a gallon of paint. In it was the magical "sterno", the wax-like substance you lit to create a small amount of heat on the coldest nights. Used in a machine gun bunker, it threatened to allow others to see the light emitted from the flame. Used in a much tighter and secure mortar bunker, the toxic fumes emitted when the substance burned tended to irritate the eyes and cause stomach upset. There were nights when the security troops in the M113 Armored Personnel Carriers would camp out on your post if they wanted your can of Sterno and your dog in their tracked, green icebox badly enough.

Speaking of my dog, Ero LOVED the cold. He was from Europe and was made for that weather. The colder

the better, and when I was shivering, he wanted to stay out in the elements and enjoy the weather! He was young and had all the energy he needed to survive the cold happily.

The one advantage to being cold every night of the winter season was the early spring when Team Spirit would bring people from all over the Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) to Osan to participate in the yearly war games that badly irritated our neighbors to the north. The worst of the cold was over, and during the day, we perimeter rats would run around in fifty-degree weather in shorts and T-shirts. We had survived another winter, and our bodies had adapted to the cold. Fifty seemed like seventy at that point.

The fun was seeing people, especially those from the Philippines, suffering in the weather we felt was balmy. They would be headed to the ville in parkas and insulated boots, their hoods up and zippers of their parkas so tight you weren't sure if it was a small man or a woman. Our hearty, vibrant systems, welcoming the renewal of spring, made us feel like Viking warriors enjoying the plunder of battle.

At the end of the day, Korea Cold left an impression on you for sure, but it wasn't nearly as cold or as hellish as the Chosin Reservoir 35 years prior.

"Come to Minnesota, it's a dry cold..."



Robert Fickbohm and K9 Hasso

by Dixie Whitman

The Encounter

Hasso paused, nose high, dissecting the heavy night air for any hint of the enemy hiding in the distance. This German shepherd dog, trained to detect dangers that might otherwise have gone unnoticed, owned the darkness. Robert Fickbohm, his handler, translated his partner's alert for his 2nd LT.

"Sir, Hasso has picked up the enemy."

Ahead lay the North Korean and Chinese soldiers, and behind them, an infantry platoon from the 3rd Infantry Division (3ID) whose members held their position, bracing and praying they would make it back to the tents, because "there were a thousand ways to die in no-man's land."¹

When a squad receives an early-warning detection, the leaders can choose to set up their own ambush, call in the artillery, or retreat and report.

Next to Robert stood a newbie, a minty-green, fresh-from-the-ROTC 2nd LT, with no field experience, yet with the responsibility for the lives of the men around him. Leaning into his dog handler's expertise, he opted to back off and call in the big guns, the 105 Howitzers.

The soldiers braced themselves as the first barrage thundered down on the suspected enemy position, hoping to neutralize the threat.

SHROOP-BOOM! Five rounds of High Explosives flew into the suspected location.

The Decision Point

A quiet following the barrage of 105s offered some measure of confidence. The Lieutenant, eager to assess the effectiveness of the strike and ensure mission success, considered moving forward to check the outcome. However, Robert stepped in with a word of caution.

Drawing on his experience and understanding of the battlefield's unpredictable nature, he strongly advised against advancing so soon. What if the enemy had dug in well and were waiting for the Americans to check them out? An ambush remained a possibility. Robert's intuition prevailed, and the squad held its position, observing for an additional half-hour.

SHROOP-BOOM! Suddenly and without warning, five more rounds of High Explosives landed in the same exact spot as the first.

A mistake in Fire Control resulted in a duplicate volley of shells. If the Americans had moved up to check out the enemy, they would have been standing precisely where the rounds landed. The explosion underscored the importance of patience and battlefield intuition.



Robert Fickbohm poses with his partner, K9 Hasso, in Korea.

Photo courtesy Sandra Fickbohm

Banks of the Missouri

Robert E. Fickbohm was born along the banks of the Missouri River in Union County, South Dakota, into a farming family. Their farm, located near Burbank, SD, was not far from where the Lewis and Clark Expedition held its first election west of the Mississippi River in August 1804.

In the 1800s, elk and bison herds roamed the area, but small family farms gradually began to take shape in the fertile Dakota soil, cultivated by the hard work of Germanic and Nordic immigrants. Robert's parents had five children, and, as was common at the time, he left home at the age of 14 to work for neighboring farmers. He remains grateful for the opportunities and kindness he received from neighboring family farmers.

During this time, he moved livestock, tended to the

fields, and learned essential life skills. At 16 he worked full time driving truck to deliver farm machinery around five states. This experience led to a lot of truck driving between patrols in Korea.

Further West

At 17, Robert received an invitation from his grandfather and uncle to work on their farm. He also worked part-time at a nearby airport, close to the Black Hills. The prospect of working with airplanes inside a hangar seemed much more enjoyable and considerably less labor-intensive than baling hay or mucking out barns, so Robert eagerly accepted the opportunity.

Upon his arrival, he was offered a choice between receiving wages or learning to fly a lightweight plane, the Piper J-3 Cub. Flying proved to be an offer he couldn't refuse, and he took his check ride on his 18th



Robert Fickbohm shows off his partner, Hasso, in Korea.

Photo courtesy Sandra Fickbohm

birthday. Along with obtaining his new pilot's license, Robert Fickbohm also registered for the draft.

Uncle Sam Wants You

The Army, unable to draft World War II veterans, turned to young men like Robert to fill its ranks. After boot camp and AIT, he headed to Korea in 1953 as an infantry rifleman.

Upon arriving in Incheon, the young soldiers looked around and noticed dozens of refugee children, barefoot and shivering on the snow-covered ground. The sight deeply touched their hearts,

and many of the men ended up giving their C-rations to the children before heading out to the front lines.

Their mode of transport, a rickety train barely newer than those from the Civil War era, struggled toward the battle zone, carrying untested recruits on board. They received advice to avoid standing near the doors or windows, in case enemy snipers decided to take a shot.

The trainload of recruits chugged towards Outpost Harry, a remote position in the Korean War located on

a tiny hilltop that spanned about five acres. The enemy bombarded this outpost with up to 20,000 rounds per day, and the grim possibilities of injury or worse occupied everyone's thoughts.

Get A Dog

"After lying awake all night listening to Outpost Harry getting hammered, the next morning my name was called over the PA system.

"When I reported, I found out it was for an interview. There were three sergeants going through our records, looking for replacements. They wanted farm boys or people that worked with dogs or animals for the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon, a special 8th Army unit.

"The platoon hadn't been getting trained dog handlers from home so they had to train their own replacements in country. They chose soldiers who had taken advanced infantry training and map reading.

"So I was one of 12-15 guys who were interviewed. When they told us it was considered hazardous duty and you could only volunteer for it, about half of them weren't interested. Even though it was usually not a good idea to volunteer for anything in the army, there were about 7 of us who decided to volunteer. After lying awake listening to all that shelling the night before, it didn't take long for my hand to shoot up in the air."

(S. Fickbohm. Personal communication. 10-25-2025.)

Then Robert was trained in the field to become a dog

handler received a new partner, Hasso."

Hasso served with a total of five handlers. Robert was the fourth military partner to work with this fine German shepherd dog. It can be challenging for both a dog and its handler when the handler leaves, and initially, Hasso exhibited hostility towards Robert, waiting for his previous handler to return. However, over time, by feeding and spending time with Hasso, Robert helped the dog transition and accept him as a new handler. Robert learned that Hasso had completed 50 combat patrols, and achieving that many patrols without any injured Soldiers indicated that Hasso was a skilled scout.

A prior handler reported that Hasso showed signs of PTSD, but after being temporarily taken off-duty, he recovered and never faltered again. Robert says that Hasso saved him on 3-4 occasions. This admiration for the skills of the dogs used in the Korean War was not unique. Before the dogs were introduced, infantry patrols at night felt like suicide missions. The addition of K9s gave the infantry a newfound sense of confidence.

Missions

The men and dogs from the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon (ISDP) were in constant combat. Dog teams led patrols every single night for 17 consecutive months. Typically, this meant that Robert and Hasso scouted through the darkness three

times one week and two times the next.

Most patrols consisted of a dog and a handler, two medics, two signalmen, and a nine-man infantry squad. These patrol teams were often tasked with identifying the number of enemy fighters and monitoring their actions. If the patrols could persuade the enemy to surrender and take prisoners, it would provide a valuable source of intelligence, though the Soldiers were usually reluctant to drag detainees along with them.

In the afternoons before his missions, Robert went to No Man's Land to observe the terrain through field glasses. He carefully studied the route he would take, noting significant features of the landscape. The area had been heavily bombed, leaving few identifiable markers—only stumps, debris, and burned-out tanks. However, these remnants were numbered and useful; for instance, Dead Tree #5 served as a marker for calling in artillery.

Leading about fifteen yards ahead of the rest of the patrol, the dog could often detect an ambush, especially if the prevailing winds were in their favor. Hasso was capable of sensing danger from about 450 yards away, and some dogs could detect the enemy up to 800 yards away if the wind conditions were optimal.

Closing Shots

Two nights before the Armistice, the 2nd ID moved on-

to the line and the 3rd ID was headed to Reserve. The 3ID was supposed to be resting, but as the Republic of Korea Army (RoKs) faltered, they found themselves pressed into the uneasy gap behind the RoKs.

That night, curious about the Chinese activity on the other side of a ridge, Headquarters called for a dog team. Robert responded. He and his partner moved through the darkness on patrol.

At first, the front was hushed with a brooding quiet. Fickbohm and Hasso followed the patrol map as far as it took them. Abruptly the quiet shattered as the Chinese hurled five mortar rounds over the ridge. One man was hit and injured, but not seriously. The medics managed to calm him down. Three more rounds exploded near the center of the patrol.

Fickbohm looked around and saw Hasso digging frantically. Following Hasso's intuition that the subsequent shell would land near them, he thought, "Uh, oh. The next one must be ours." He immediately hugged Hasso and the ground as tightly as possible. The final round landed only eight feet from them.

Fickbohm later reflected, "If I had been sitting up, like I was, I'd have gotten that shrapnel in the back of the neck between the flak jacket and helmet. Hasso would



Robert Fickbohm poses with his partner, K9 Hasso, in Korea.

Photo courtesy Sandra Fickbohm

have gotten it in the face. It would have finished us. He saved my life that night with his sixth sense."²

The Truce

The morning the truce was meant to be signed erupted in a storm of artillery from both sides. Robert doubted peace could ever come while explosions tore through No Man's Land, carving fresh black scars into the earth. Smoke billowed thickly, rising from every direction, and the sky pressed down on scorched ground as far as the eye could see. All day, the thunder of guns grew louder, a relentless crescendo of Howitzers, each random shell a sharp note added to the chaos.

But at 2200 hours, the guns abruptly ceased, leaving behind a silence as chilling as a morgue. The truce held.

For a few heartbeats, the eerie stillness lingered, until the nocturnal creatures of South Korea slowly reclaimed the night with their tentative calls.

Historian and Brother

The men of the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon, like dog handlers across generations, forged bonds during the Korean War that stood the test of time.

Forty years after the war, Robert and family began searching for men who served in the unit which resulted in about a dozen reunions and many visits, phone calls and letters. Though very few of the 26th ISDP remain, they all were blessed by the time together.

Over time, Robert became the guardian of the platoon's memories, eventually stepping into the role of unit historian. Inspired by his daughter's support, they co-authored a book that brings to life the experiences of Korean War dog handlers. Their work, **Cold Noses, Brave Hearts**, stands as a tribute and resource for anyone drawn to the stories of K9 heroes from that era,



Footnotes:

¹ Robert Fickbohm, "Robert E. Fickbohm" interview by The Korean War Legacy Foundation, Inc. 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9FiMcwHI_as

² Ibid.

Blackie Meets the Phantom And Gets A Bath

by Greg Dunlap

Days and nights, blend into one another. So far, I have many more days left in country than I've spent in Vietnam. Tonight, I am on standby, which is the closest thing to having a day off. Standby is when a handler doesn't have a post assignment for the evening, yet he can't get drunk either. If anything happens or if someone gets sick, he's on deck. Sort of like the maid of honor at a wedding. All fluff and stuff, yet someone else is going to be getting all the real attention.

Oh well, it could be worse, I could have the Kilo 15 assignment and be stuck with Tiger Troop all night. Instead I hung around the kennels for a while playing with Blackie, then headed back to the hooch to see what was going on there. I can't join in on the drinking party with the others who are off, at least not the way I would like. Play a few hands of poker here and there. Here I am, all geared up as if I were going out, yet with nothing to do. It's boring. I hated being the standby person. Most evenings like this, I would take Blackie out for a walk around the perimeter or go over to the supply area and hang out. However, unbeknownst to me, tonight was going to be different.

The radio crackled to life, announcing, "K9, standby to the kennel area!" Upon arriving, I discovered a jeep waiting for me. It appeared that

Tiger 2, the second in command of Tiger Flight, had noticed some movement near a small pond by the flight line. After his people conducted a search and found nothing, he requested a Sentry Dog Unit to investigate further.

Now one has to know Tiger 2 to fully appreciate this situation. He habitually called in shadows across the moon, lights on the horizon, and had bats in the belfry. Ever see someone who has reached the Peter Principle? That is, they have been promoted up to their level of fullest incompetence. The nicest thing we can say about him is that the wheel is turning, but the hamster is dead.

I looked at the Sergeant and gave him a "Tiger 2 ???" look. He nodded and let me know that the request came from higher up and to please play along with the seriousness of the situation. "All right," I said, "Let's go get Blackie."

Blackie has spotted me approaching and is eagerly anticipating our outing. "Oh boy, we get to go out! I get to go out! Can I kill something tonight?" I put on his leash and muzzle and open the door. "Here we go! OUT, OUT, OUT!!!"

I lifted Blackie onto the deuce-and-a-half and climbed aboard. We drove to who knows where following "Tiger 2" and his two Tiger Flight brown-nosed tag-alongs. After about ten

minutes, we stopped. When I looked around, I found that we were on the edge of a small pond surrounded by thick brush. Five jeeps parked nearby illuminated the area with their headlights. Surrounding the vehicles are anywhere from 10 to 15 SPs, all armed and attentively watching the brush and pond.

I learned that "Tiger 2" thought he spotted some movement in the brush and wanted me to take Blackie down there to investigate. The pond was about a quarter of an acre in size, and the waist-to-shoulder-high brush extends back from it, 10 to 15 feet deep in some areas. Standing on the bed of the deuce-and-a-half, I survey the situation and plan my approach.

I brought along a 20-foot training leash, unsure of what to expect, and snapped it onto Blackie's collar. I instructed "Tiger 2" to move his troops back, just in case I needed to let out the full length of the leash. By this point, the situation had been unfolding for about an hour. Many people had walked through the area, leaving behind a mixture of scents—some old and some new. We were near a pond that, I later learned, had several hundred gallons of JP-4 poured over it to control the mosquito population. The sun had caused this to bake into a hard crust. So, in addition to all the human scents, there



was an overwhelming smell of JP-4. We were expected to find a needle in this haystack of odors.

I put Blackie on guard with a command to "Watch them!" and we began to cover the area in a clockwise manner. I doubted that Blackie could smell anything other than JP-4, but he put on a good show regardless. The downside is that he seemed more interested in eating the SPs as a midnight snack than in searching through the bushes. I kept him focused on the task at hand, recalling the Sergeant's instruction for us to play along, but I didn't discourage him either. After all, it feels like a good way to mess with someone other than the Marines. Blackie seems to agree; the SPs do smell better than the Marines, yet they act just as silly when he charges at them.

After two sweeps around the pond, it's becoming clear that the old "shadows cast by the moon" were likely the reason "Tiger 2" thought he saw spooks in the bushes. A few of the SPs have started to comment on this, but "Tiger 2" remained con-

vinced that the bogeyman was nearby and we just missed him. He instructs me to walk out onto the crust covering the pond and search outward from there.

Me, walk on water? I look at him as if he truly doesn't realize that he's missing some vital parts in his head, like the normal number of brain cells. Sarg's hope that I would go along with this clown grew thinner by the minute. Nevertheless, after receiving assurances that the crust would support our weight, I reluctantly stepped onto it. It felt like walking on a blanket stretched over water. Firm on top, yet each step sent ripples undulating beneath me, creating a trembling-earth sensation. I compared it to standing on a waterbed. Blackie, however, is looking at me with the same expression I gave "Tiger 2" when he suggested we do this. He seems convinced that I've truly lost my mind this time. I'm starting to agree with him as I struggle to keep my footing while we move around the edge of the pond.

Slippery, treacherous, and bad-smelling, and just as I'm thinking that this might work, the inevitable happened. The firm crust that supported us let go, and I plunged armpit-deep into a black, smelly muck. Blackie turned, looked back at me, and stopped in mid-stride, almost as if to say, "What happened to the lower part of your body?"

I yelled at him to "STAY!" but was too late. He started towards me, and the area un-

der him also gave way. We manage to wrest our way out, but he and I are both covered with an oily slime from the neck down. "Tiger 2" wisely does not argue with us when I state that there is no one in the bushes, and if Tiger Flight doesn't believe me, they can



go and walk the *()*&*%^(*)&* pond for themselves till Hell freezes over.

Blackie meanwhile, had this look on his face like he wanted to kill something, and he didn't not care who at this point. I had specific suggestions to give him in that respect. I reached back to get his muzzle for the ride back to the kennels, only to discover that there is a big clump of oily gunk hanging in it.

"Screw it."

I put him in the back of the deuce-and-a-half, and we rode back the way we came. Neither of us is in the best of moods. All our gear, from my underwear to his leash were ruined, and he looks like he received a terrible paint job. "Tiger 2"

be very dead now. He became less amused by the situation as it continued. But he looked so funny, covered with this black yuck, soap bubbles all over him, and me squirting him down with the hose. I'm lucky he let me live through it all.

After finally getting him cleaned up, I called Tiger Flight to send a jeep over to take me back to the hooch so I could clean myself up. They hesitated at first, but I reminded them that I was the one who went out for "Tiger 2." If they wanted us to participate in these operations again, they better send that *(^%#\$^& jeep right away. It took them about half an hour, but I finally made it back to the hooch. And guess what? There was no hot water available anywhere in the complex. I ended up using most of an entire bar of soap to scrub off the grime with cold water—not an experience I want to repeat.

The following day I went over to supply to replace my gear. The guy there started to chisel me for everything. When we got to the gas mask, I told him to stick his face in it and take a smell. Most of these items I had hosed out and left out to dry overnight, so they didn't look too bad. He took one sniff, and that settled everything. The only nice thing positive to say about the adventure is that Blackie and I got all new stuff because of it. However, none of us went out for another "Tiger 2" adventure again.



Coast Guard Station Jones Beach: Nike

by Petty Officer 3rd Class Ali Blackburn

NEW YORK (Reprint from 2015)

Nike runs as fast as his legs will carry him, straight into the cool, salty ocean. His furry, black body breaks the water's surface with a huge splash as he plunges in. He manages to keep his head up and his eyes on the prize. Above the water, his face looks focused and calm. Below, his muscular legs kick and paddle, driving him forward

His jaws clamp around the stick, and he turns around, steering back toward shore. Dropping his prize, Nike walks a few feet and then flops down. He flips and turns, coating his wet fur in the hot, grainy sand. He burrows his muzzle in a hole and flips some sand in the air, snorting with delight.

The first time Seaman Alistair Brockmeyer brought the unit's dog to the beach almost turned out to be a terrible adventure.

"I took him down to the beach one day while doing a security round," said Brockmeyer, a Coast Guard member at Station Jones Beach. "He was just running around in the sand and next thing I know he just takes off into the water. I was completely shocked, thinking I would get into trouble or we'd have to perform a Search and Rescue case to go get the station dog."

Brockmeyer learned that Nike loves going for swims in the afternoon, especially during the hot New York summers. Although the station has had to launch their boats after Nike a couple times, he is usually good about returning to shore when called.

Keeping up with his grooming is a must after Nike visits the beach. Towels in hand, Brockmeyer wipes Nike down, drying his wet coat. Nike's eye squeeze shut and his lips begin to form a sort of smile. He loves this part! Nike groans and grunts with happiness as Brockmeyer moves the towel swiftly up the dog's back, down his legs, around his neck, and over his face.

Brockmeyer pats the dog on the rump, signifying the end of the massage. Nike spins around quickly, grabbing an end of the towel, hoping to engage Brockmeyer in a game.

Chuckling, the Coast Guardsman grabs the other end and begins a game of tug-of-war. Nike repeatedly jerks his body backward, gripping the cloth tightly between his teeth. The constant yanking creates a tear in the already frayed and well-worn fabric. The towel rips in two and Nike trots away, victoriously.

When Nike's not spending time down at the water, he is dutifully greeting visitors, keeping the watchstanders



Nike, a black Labrador stationed at Coast Guard Station Jones Beach, N.Y., sits patiently for a treat, July 6, 2015. Nike, at the time, had been with the unit for about four years and enjoyed swimming at the beach, fetching sticks and greeting visitors. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Ali Flockerzi.)



Nike, a black Labrador stationed at Coast Guard Station Jones Beach, N.Y., spends time inside with the unit's crew members. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Ali Flockerzi.)

company or running to pay the UPS man a visit at the gate. Nike even sleeps with the crew, waking up with them to do station checks every few hours.

"He's got a great home here. He's got plenty of places to go and people that adore

him," said Brockmeyer. "We try and take the best care of him that we can, showing him the affection that a dog needs. He's got his own beach. What more could a black Labrador ask for?"



Christmas In The Kennels

by Curtis Hendel

How many of you remember the Christmas Holidays during your time in the Military Working Dog Program? I know that each of us had varied experiences depending on where we were stationed at the time. I spent one of my Christmas Eves on Kilo One at Osan, one of the worst posts on a cold night. Others, I spent comfortably inside, while others stood the line in the cold and lonely darkness of posts far and near.

As different as our experiences may be, we can all enjoy some Christmas Music memories, restyled for the K9 world. Here are some holiday songs to which you might relate.

*I'm dreaming of a clean kennel,
Just like the one my roommate knows.
But my dog paints walls, he really galls,
And barks, the whole time that I hose.*

(Sung to the tune of White Christmas)

*Barking dogs, barking dogs,
Barking all the day,
Christmas Eve was a bit rough,
At home, I'd like to stay.*

*Off last night, our squad is tight,
Partied the night away,
Today we work, my dog's a jerk,
And is punishing me today...*

(Sung to the tune of Jingle Bells)

I was lucky that both of my assignments were at bases with a ton of dog handlers. Christmas was a time when few could take leave to travel home, especially from overseas. If we were fortunate enough to be off duty for Christmas, there would certainly be activities rolling within our K9 family.

At Osan, we didn't really have residences to go to, so it was either the ville or the



day room. However, once I got to Lackland, our gathering spot during the holidays became my team chief's home, not far from the base. Bob was an Army Sergeant and became one of my best friends. I was from Minnesota, and he was an Iowan who started north of the border. If anywhere could feel like home, it was at Bob's house.

Oh, you better not twitch,

*You better not move,
You'd better not snitch,
And stay in your groove,
Ero bites all strangers on sight.*

*He flies by your knees,
making you flinch,
Gonna keep watch,
Who's moving an inch,
Ero bites all strangers on sight.*

*He wants to bite your buttocks,
Or maybe your left knee,*

*He waits for you to screw up bad
So you will need a stitch or three...*

*Ohhh, I told you once, and told you twice,
Now the ER is looking real nice,
Ero bites all strangers on sight.*

(Sung to the tune of Santa Claus Is Coming To Town)

The K9 program was a great gift to all of us, and I was partially through Patrol Dog

School when Christmas '85 came to town. I was fortunate, as Corporal Fox, an Army corporal, hailed from the same area as my hometown in Minnesota. We road-tripped home during our Christmas shutdown. We missed Christmas but made it home for New Year's Eve.

The Twelve Days of Christmas (Skipping the first Eleven verses! You're welcome!)

On the twelfth day of Christmas my Sergeant gave to me...

*12 Kennel squeegees,
11 Empty canteens,
10 Clumps of hair,
9 Nasty Kennels,
8 Teeth Titanium,
7 Doctors stitching,
6 Worn-out raps,
5 Awesome scars!
4 Grooming tools,
3 GSDs,
2 Malinois,
And a handler aggressive Dutchie!!!*

As we parody the Christmas classics, there is a more serious tone we can all appreciate. I'm sure that almost all of us spent holiday seasons away from families, and I think the first few, at least for me, were the most difficult.

Christmas 2025 will, once again, take a great number of our fellow Americans, K9 and all others, away from their loved ones for the most traditional of holidays. Keep them in your thoughts and prayers throughout the

entire holiday season and be thankful for all our young K9 warriors who have taken up the leash we all held so proudly.

*Decoy got run over by my K9,
Biting wraps on this Christmas Eve,
He may say my dog is not so forceful,
But judging from his face now, he believes.*

*He'd been actin' way too cocky,
Telling me "Just send the dog,"
I warned him to be vigilant,
But he snorted like some overzealous hog.*

*When I found him after the bite,
At the scene of the attack,
Where my dog taught him a lesson,
With incriminatin' bite marks on his back.*

*My decoy got run over by my puppy,
Doing training on this Christmas Eve,
He thought he could outfox my skilled K9,
With his forever scars now, he believes.*

(Sung to the tune of Grandma Got Run Over By A Reindeer)

From all of us at the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum, we wish you the best of this Christmas Season, and may we remember the rea-

son for the season. Love those around you, care for those who need a little extra help, and if you know of any veterans who suffer in silence, help them get to either a VA or a Veterans Services Officer to start their path to a life they have earned.

Thank you all for your time on the leash, and let's all look forward to a great 2026!

K9 Leads the Way!



Happy Holidays

**PAWS AND ENJOY THE SEASON!
BEST WISHES FOR A WONDERFUL
HOLIDAY FROM THE TEAM AT
MILITARY WORKING DOG
HERITAGE MUSEUM.**





*Military Working Dog
Heritage Museum &
Handler Center
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From the Team at MWDHM...

We invite you to join the museum's journey
by signing up for a free *Paw Print* subscription.
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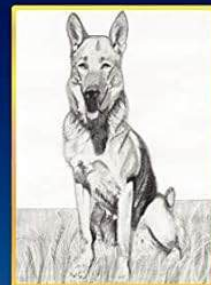
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Book of the Month

**COLD NOSES, BRAVE HEARTS:
Dogs and Men of the
26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon**

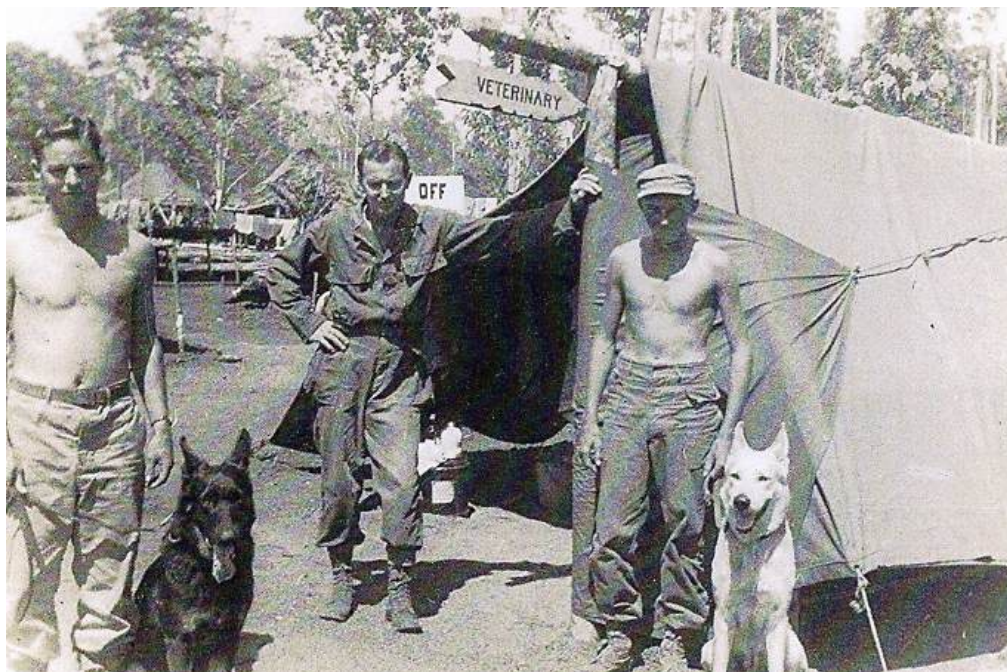


Robert Fickbohm and
Sandra Fickbohm Granger

Historians have produced few books about the dogs of the Korean War. One of them, this gem by a father-daughter team, is a tribute to and recollection of the men and dogs of the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon during the Korean War and WWII. Robert Fickbohm served with that unit and relays firsthand accounts of time spent in Korea. This work is a favorite resource of mine, and I highly recommend it.

~~ Dixie Whitman

Submitted Photo of the Month



From Sandra Fickbohm, via George Diller, comes this great image from the 26th ISDP during WWII in the Pacific.

Shown left to right: Leavitt, Sullivan (Vet Tech) and Schut in front of vet tent with two dogs.