



Stories of Da Nang

By Sentry Dog Handler
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THE FIRST 4 DAYS IN VIETNAM, or what the hell is this?

Every journey is an adventure, little did I realize that Vietnam was going to be more than just a normal one. From the start, dark clouds on the horizon should have tipped me off, but being young and dumb at the time, I didn't have a clue.

We gathered at a base in Southern California for the flight over. Tearful good-bye's and "I'll promise to write/not forget you/be waiting when you come home's" were being exchanged. There were quite a few of us young and eager men going off into what we couldn't imagine. Southern California was a pleasant place to be then, low 60's in temperature, clear, crisp days. We were dressed in the light tan uniform expecting a tropical climate as our destination.

FIRST DARK CLOUD

The call to load up into the aircraft came and everyone gathered their carry on luggage and walked down the ramp. We had been looking out the window at the airplane. waiting and wondering, "Flying Tiger Airlines", who ever heard of that one? Asking around it was found out that it was a contract carrier the military used. Flying Tiger Airlines was normally a freight carrier but had won a contract to ferry troops to Asia for the War. Different freight, same idea. No assigned seating just get in and fill it up. When all of us were seated we had the usual drill, seatbelt, air masks, flotation devices etc and then buttoned it up. The engines started and just as they were winding up, they stopped! Should have gotten off then and there and caught the ferry but we had to just sit there, on the ramp, waiting for them to fix whatever was wrong. The problem with this is that you have a 707 packed with people, sitting on the ramp without the engines going and thus no air conditioning operating, and no doors and windows open. It got real warm and damp in a hurry. After about 5 minutes they opened the doors to allow the air to flow through. Minor problem they said, be fixed in no time. I considered again taking the ferry but now they were closing the doors and this time the engines started and held.

Has anyone experienced a Lehman's start with a 707 packed with people? Normal air lines you would taxi up the side runway, turn onto the main runway, stop, rev up the engines, pop the clutch and away you'd go right? Flying Tigers had a surprise for us. Taxi up the side runway, start to turn onto the main runway, and half way through the turn. put the pedal to the metal and off we went. You have this sensation of pressing back into the seat, and being pulled to the right at the same time. Accelerating and turning in a airplane on the ground, must say I hadn't done that before. After they got the plane on the main runway, accelerating all the time, they had to get it straightened out for the take off. This was accomplished while rolling down the runway and accelerating at the same time. You felt the plane swerve left and right as the corrections were being made, straighten out and then the uplifting sensation you get as the plane leaves the ground. Goodbye California and civilization, what's in store for me? After a while we were told that there were going to be a stop over in Anchorage, Tokyo, and Okinawa before we got to Da Nang AB. Anchorage was interesting. By now it was 1 AM and it looked dark and wicked out there. Anchorage in January, imagine it. When we touched down the plane stopped out in the middle of no where. Nothing around us to be seen.

Just like parking out in the middle of a field. The intercom came on and we were informed that there was a blizzard happening in Anchorage at the moment and that the snow drifts had prevented us from parking next to the terminal. We were to look for a light right in front of us as we got out of the plane and run for it. It was the terminal, about 100 yards away, and we were to wait there for them to finish servicing the plane. The temperature outside was minus 20, so don't get lost because you'll freeze to death before we find you. Remember, everyone is all dressed in tropicals (Light weight summer uniform) , we're going to Vietnam, not Alaska. Talk about a blast of juxtaposition, Anchorage in January wearing what amounts to nothing. Who said military intelligence was an oxymoron? Everyone must have made it because I don't remember any panic or search parties being organized. Or else they just didn't count all of us and there is still some poor soul up in Anchorage, locked in the permafrost. The rest of the journey was uneventful, except for the take offs, fly for hours, land, wait in the terminal, load up and take off again. Hurry up and wait, we've all done that.

IN COUNTRY, THE SECOND DARK CLOUD:

Coming into Da Nang AB for the first time!! I had a window seat and got a first hand view of it. Lovely, green, lush looking country. Having lived in the Philippines for 3 years as a military dependent I knew what the native housing was going to look like so no surprise there. The base looked dismal however. Red clay dirt everywhere, where is the grass and trees? Oh well I thought. They pulled us up to the terminal and opened the doors, and we were hit by the blast furnace of Vietnam. I thought that it can't be this warm, it must be the inside of the plane and all the bodies again. No, it was that warm. Robin Williams in his role as a radio disk jockey in "Good Morning Vietnam" says on the weather report that today it's going to be HOT, HOT, HOT!!!! And tonight it will only be HOT, HOT!! He's not kidding. I was looking for the return stub of my round trip ticket, can I use this now?

Everyone was unloaded and checked off, put on the bus and taken over to the main complex. At Da Nang AB there was a center section to the base where everything was headquartered. We were left off here and told where to go to check in at our units. I found my way over to the Security Police section and reported in. A call down to the kennels that they had fresh meat waiting for them (me) got someone up to show me around. I was taken over to supply, received sheets and uniforms, the armory for my M-16 and ammo belt, and the hut for bunk assignment. I was told to get settled in and I'd be picked up in about an hour to go to the kennels to get my dog. It was afternoon so a lot of people were up already and I was greeted warmly. "Hi fresh food for the puppies, Hell Charlie will have this guy for breakfast, Did your parents have any normal children, Did you bring any nude pictures of your wife or girlfriend with you, want to buy some?" the normal banter among those who have been there a while and a new person. I took it in good nature and then it was time to go to the kennels.

GETTING MY DOG, DARK CLOUDS WITH A SILVER LINING

The kennels were located on the South end of the base, right off of the flight line, next to another barracks area. Reporting in I met the kennel master, SSgt Wolfe. He asked me about my qualifications as a dog handler, and after finding out that I was experienced, said that he only had one unassigned dog and that I was going to get him. I asked what he was like and he said, "You'll see". I knew then that something was going to happen to me, but what? One of the day kennel workers was told to take me to my dog. Walking down the row of kennels I was told that my dog, Blackie, had been locked up in his kennel for the past 2 or 3 weeks and that I shouldn't have any trouble getting in on him. I remember mentioning that it seemed a bit much to do that to a dog and I was told, "wait till you meet him".

Now I was becoming apprehensive, but I had come this far so there was no turning back at this point. Besides, we had stopped in front of a kennel, marked Blackie. Now mind you, when you walk down a row of kennels at a sentry dog unit, most of the dogs are standing at the gate, barking at you. You get to where you ignore it, they bark, you walk on by. No big thing. Walking up to Blackie's kennel the first time was different. This was the dog you were going to be working with for your tour of duty.

This was the animal you were going to develop a relationship with, and this was the individual you were going to trust and depend on. Not like stateside, you were in Vietnam, and this was different. I looked in on a black and tan dog, laying there in the back of his kennel, not scared of us at all. Just watching us. Something about him suggested raw power and barely controlled fury. He looked at us and a low growl came from deep in his chest. When he saw that we were just standing there looking at him, and not going to move on, he uncoiled and hit the gate full force!!

"Did we mention that he's the nastiest dog here?" I heard the remark from the day worker at the same time my head was filled with the thought that this can't be happening to me! I looked at the day worker and weakly said, "You want me to take him?" I was laughed at, both by the person I was with, and by this black and tan monster trying to eat his way through the gate to get to us. Blackie, I was informed, was mine.

It took me 2 days to get into his kennel and take him out. I ended up taking a chair out and sitting down in front of his gate talking to him. I got his leash and muzzle out and let him smell it through the wire. He could smell himself on it and he knew that it was his. I hoped that he would get the idea that I would take him out of the kennel if he just calmed down long enough for me to do it. I'd stick my finger between the wire and touch him as he walked by, pulling it out quickly because he'd go for it. Eventually he would calm down, and then go lie in the back of his kennel. I guess he figured that I wasn't going to leave so he tried to ignore me. Being young and dumb, I thought he had accepted me and would then tell everyone that I was going to try to

go into his kennel and take him out. Now mind you, I was told to make sure everyone knew when I was going to go in on him because they would have one of the day time people standing by, out of sight with an M-16. The plan being that if he nailed me, they were going to shoot him before they went in to get me. Back at the hooch the word went around how many times I tried to go in on him that day, and the bets were favoring him nailing me before I managed to take him out. Talk about moral support.

Now for those of you who don't know, when ever a handler goes into a kennel to bring a dog out, there is a procedure to follow. This is for safety reasons and is designed to prevent the dog from getting out and escaping. You open the door, there are generally two latches, one unlocks them and pushes the door inwards, blocking off the opening with your body and slipping inside. Once inside you close the door and throw the latches, but don't lock them. Inside there is a strap attached to the door and you take it and clip it inside the cage. Now you are locked inside with the dog. He can't get out, but more importantly, as in this case, it is harder for anyone else to get in if there is a problem.

He chased me out 4 times before he let me in. Tell you what, opening that door a 5th time, on the second day, and walking in with him sniffing up and down my legs and around my groin was an experience I have never forgotten. I just stood there, scared, my testicles trying to climb back up inside my body. The whole time I was telling him that we were going to be good friends and if he didn't bite me, I promised that I would not bleed all over his face. As I said before, he had been locked up for about 2 or 3 weeks and was just about stir crazy enough to let anyone take him out. I got the choke chain around his neck and the leash on him.

When I went to put on the muzzle that drew a growl so I figured that we could do without the muzzle right now. I announced that we were coming out and that he was un-muzzled, the day person backed away. He and I walked out and went into the exercise area. For the next 3 hours we just played in the yard getting to know each other. I had been warned not to try to give him any commands but to just let him do whatever he wanted, but not to let him off the leash in case he forgot who I was. Afterwards I put him away, fed him, gave him fresh water, all the male bonding things except get drunk and laid and guess what?

The next time I went to get him, which was only a few hours later, he chased me out again! Had to sit down and start talking to him all over again. After a few seconds I could see his face sort of say, "Oh yeah, he's the fool who takes me out to play." Had two days with him and on the night of the second day, we went to work-----January 20, 1968, Tet. How's that for timing?

THE NIGHT OF TET 68, LARGE DARK CLOUDS

Being the new guy, and having gained some respect by being Blackie's new handler, and still in possession of all my extremities with no new openings in my body, I thought things may improve now. For my first working night they had even gone to the trouble of having someone who would have normally have had the night off, accompany me on post the first time out. Hey first night working and an old timer to show me the ropes, what more could I ask for? His name was Chuck and I remember his face to this day. He had about a month left before he rotated back home to the states and he was looking forward to it. The first assignment I drew was in Alpha Company, around kilo 5 or 6, just at the edge of the perimeter where the fence swings around to the right on the south side of the base. It was one of the walkout posts in that it was close enough to the kennels that right after guard mount (roll call held for Security Police before going to work), we got the dogs and walked out to go to work.

Alpha Company's command post was on one side and 100 or so yards south was the other perimeter bunker. My post that night was between the two of them. The area I patrolled was flat, sandy, and had one fighting bunker, consisting of a hole dug in the ground and 3 layers of sandbags piled up around it, for us to occupy if things hit the fan. I found out that we shared perimeter duty with three companies of 3rd Marines, Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie Company. Other important words of wisdom which were passed on that night were items such as never, never, never get ham and lima beans C-rations for your midnight snack. They are inedible. Blackie wouldn't even eat them, and he'd eat almost anything else. All night long Chuck had this premonition of doom, it being Tet and all, and he kept saying that he was sure that we were going to get hit that night. Me being the new kid on the block and full of hopeful mindless euthanasia, kept reassuring him that he was just worried because he was so short in his time left in country.

At midnight Chuck made me muzzle Blackie and get into the bunker. I thought he was being overly cautious but went along with his instructions. Sure enough, midnight came and all around us outside the fence, the Vietnamese were celebrating Tet. Guns going off all over the place. At

one time the sky was full of tracers everywhere you looked. None of this was directed at us but we were apprehensive all the same. Blackie got a little stirred up and I had to take him on a walk around the area to calm him down. He practically insisted on doing this in that he kept on walking away and pulling at the leash. I later found out that he knew a lot about what was going on around him and what his job was supposed to be. He must have known that I was a dummy at the time and was asserting his authority accordingly.

Right after 3 AM Chuck went to check with Alpha Company if anything may be in the wind, leaving me alone with Blackie. It was the first time we had really been just together by ourselves that evening and as handlers do, I found myself talking to him. Trying to see what he responded to and what made him tick.

I recall that there was an unnatural quite that seemed to descend on us, and then I heard something north of my position. It is hard to describe, a whooshing, whistling in the air type of sound. Something moving very fast through the air, and something with a little weight to it. Looking north I saw the first two incoming rockets explode about 100 yards away from where I was standing. Right at that time the radio went berserk.

**"INCOMING, DA NANG
THIS IS MARINE ONE, YOU HAVE INCOMING" !!!!!"**

Marine One was a post on Marble Mountain, just West of the base. It looked over Happy Valley where most of the incoming rocket and mortar attacks came from. Their job was to look over the valley and give us the warning when they saw launchings that may be headed our way. Most times they were right on the money and caught them leaving the tubes, giving us up to 5 or so seconds warning. And sometimes, they missed seeing them until they were going off all around us. This was one of those times. Right then and there I decided that yes, I was in Vietnam and sometimes things may not be all fun and games. Blackie was going nuts. I had to pull him back into the bunker and hold him down. I was remembering everything I had been taught and followed that teachings. Keep your head down, get down etc. I doubt if paper was any thicker than I was trying to make myself at the moment.

Things got real exciting then. The sirens were going off all over the base, those first two rockets had landed in a warehouse and set it aflame. I could see the flames from the bottom of my bunker. More incoming rounds were heard, followed by the explosions and flashes in the sky to accent them. I kept thinking that behind me was these massive fuel bladders filled with JP4, laying on the ground and wondering what an incoming round could do to them. And the radio. I had to turn it down with all the noise it was making. "INCOMING, INCOMING, DA NANG, THIS IS MARINE ONE, YOU HAVE INCOMING!!!!!" On top of this the desk Sergeant was yelling for everyone to get down, as if we would have to be told. This attack probably only lasted 10 minutes. I was told later that 125 rockets hit the base that night, but at the time it sure seemed to go on longer than that. When I figured that it was over, or that there was a long enough lull, I stuck my head back up and started checking around me.

Now during the whole time I would occasionally look up out of the bunker and make sure that the fence was still in one piece and nothing was going on in that direction. Then the noise would start up and I was back in my hole, keeping my head down. Looking around now, there were still sirens going off all over the base. Flames and smoke was coming from several places, none close enough to me to cause any concern. What caught my immediate attention was this large glow, coming from what I later found out was the bomb dump. It seemed that at least one rocket had landed in the area where the flares "Spooky" used were stored and they were going off. Each of these would put out 2 million candlelight, so imagine several hundred going off at once. The handler in this area had to abandon his post because of the heat, his gas mask had melted. However the most impressive thing was that the amount of light coming from this drove back the night. In Vietnam there wasn't that much ambient light and you could see a lot of stars at night. This night there was so much light coming from the bomb dump, the sky was blue and there were few stars to be seen at the moment. An occasional second explosion would cause me to duck back down but for the moment, Blackie and I were content to stay put in the bunker and watch the action from there.

The marine bunker to our right fired off a flare and that sent us both scurrying down in our bunker like scared rabbits but other than that, and the fires, the excitement was over for the night. Chuck joined us again and there were no I told you so's to be said %40 I first apologized to him for doubting his judgment and we both agreed that this was one hell of a first night for me. We stayed close to the bunker for the remainder of the evening, Chuck filling me in on things like, "That's the bomb dump burning, hope they can contain it". Good thought I remember thinking. The remainder ' of the evening was uneventful, if anything could be

described as such. The sun came up and we got the call to come in off post for the night. Walking back we passed the warehouse I could see burning from the bottom of my bunker. It was just charred metal and ashes now, the fire department had done their job and there was still smoke coming from different areas of the base. The explosions had stopped however-

THE SUN COMES OUT

Everyone all had different reactions to what had happened and all was a gaggle back; at the kennels. The dogs were put away and watered. I told Blackie thanks for the evening, and I meant it. He yawned and went to the back of his kennel and curled up to go to sleep. Nice to know he was impressed. All of us ended up getting on the duce and a half and getting dropped off at the chow hall. After breakfast quite a few of us found ourselves outside the hooch. It seems that there had been a large ground force that was supposed to come up on the base during the attack and hit it from the side I was on. They had gotten bogged down, the sun had come up, and were retreating now, with the Vietnamese Air Force hounding them in the AI E's. Someone had turned on a radio to the pilots frequency and although no one could understand what they were saying, everyone knew the intent of their words as we watched them fly down and strafe or bomb these poor stragglers. Every time they dropped a bomb a cheer went up. Someone passed a beer into my hand and I was initiated into the party group. New guy, first time out, and a hell of an attack to boot. Did I mess my pants? You can't keep the banter down between guys who share what you do. I was to find out that they were a group, like the marines who were on post with us every night, that I could count on.

In the future I will attempt to recall all of the flavor and scents, of being where I was, and this incredible animal that I was fortunate to have share all of this with me. For those of you who have made it this far, I applaud you.

What's for Dinner?

Now things started to settle down and I began to fall into the routine. Check the roster after coming off post to see what assignment I had the next evening, go to chow, hit the rack or have a few beers and then hit the rack. Try to get as much sleep as possible before the heat and noise made it impossible to sleep, (usually around 11 AM). Day after day, the same thing. Blackie and I were getting to know each other better and work better as a team. One of the first things I learned is that, HIM, meaning Blackie, had a reputation. As we'd be walking out to our post the marines would call out to see what handlers were in their area that evening. I'd answer, "K-9, Blackie!" and receive back comments like, "Keep that SOB out of here;" "Blackie, that bad tempered SOB." I recall one evening that seemed like everyone was calling him a SOB, so I named 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 think he understood what I was doing because he would just wag his tail and act like there was nothing different going on.

Another item I found out about is that he also had a reputation of eating almost anything that was thrown at or offered to him. Looks like food, smells like food, gone, hope it was food. Everyone used to joke about what he'd eat. Such as, anything at all, whatsoever, that had ever been in, around, or near, a C-Rations box (except ham and lima beans). But crackers, pound cake, peanut butter, jelly, toilet paper (never tried this but it wouldn't have surprised me), one or two bites and gone. One evening, on Charlie Company's lines, he ate almost the entire midnight ration for the whole line.

It started out that we were posted towards the start of Charlie Company's lines that evening, right across from the ARVN camp on the other side of US (road running North out of Da Nang). I was familiar with the driver who was running the midnight rations around and he had stopped and we chatted for a few minutes. Before he left, a few other marines from Charlie Company had joined us and everyone started joking about how Blackie always seemed hungry and would eat almost anything offered. One thing leading to another someone asked, "How much will that SOB (see start of this story) eat?" Being challenged, and in the interest of keeping up the mystique about K-9, and being confident in my buddy Blackie, I responded, "He'll eat every sandwich you have in the truck with you tonight, and still be hungry afterwards." This was soundly disputed, there were 22 sandwiches left to deliver. No dog could eat 22 sandwiches. Hesitant as I was, I betted that he could do it. Figuring on the fact that at least he'd have the bliss of eating until he hurred. Calls were made up and down the line and the bets were on!! I had \$10.00 riding on Blackie's belly now. Several handlers and marines had joined us to witness 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. 12 down, and 10 to go. Next 5 went down slower, he seemed to chew them more. Of course, I was telling everyone that now that his initial sampling was over, he had pronounced them edible and wanted to savor the flavor. Several comments were made about the taste buds of a dog wanting to savor midnight sandwiches. I always thought the marines might have not been properly trained in the culinary skills myself, Blackie just burped and looked at the next offering. 5 more to go and we had 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 said that he was put to sleep because he had a condition known as bloating. I wonder when the diagnosis was made? The novelty was wearing thin now. When in a land of plenty, one satiates one's self, and then contemplates on their own gluttony. He was fast approaching that point. 3 more were coaxed down. Only 2 to go.

The title was so near, and the champ was starting to waiver. I took him for a comfort walk. "He's got to pee sometimes guys, give him a break!" He had that look on his face of, "OH SHIT, what did you get me into???" Back we came, the final 2 sandwiches were on the ground, opened. I stopped, lit a cigarette, and reached down, picking them up. Crinkling the paper, Pavlovian response here folks, he salivated. Tossed him one, then the other.

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

Disbeliever's were dispelled 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 afterwards, 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 his 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 now. "CRAP, I ate the whole thing!!" was flowing through his brain. 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!! You could see the emotions and indecision happening at the same time if you knew what to look for. Luckily the marines didn't. Taking a large bite out of the chocolate, I chewed it for a while and then looked down at him. "Sure is good, want some?" Wrinkle, wrinkle, wrinkle went the paper. Real big indecision was apparent on him. "Do I want some, who are you kidding? Wait, even if I did want some, I couldn't force another bite down!" This 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, lots of primeval instincts, and physical discomfort, 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 was keeping everything down but I could tell that it would be foolish to try to get 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 was passed up and down the lines. Sounds of "You fed my mid-rats to that SOB??" could be heard occasionally also. Collecting our \$10.00 we moved off now, my thinking being if he did loose his lunch, we'd do it out of sight of everyone.

Blackie was done for the night, however. Normally full of pep and active, now he was content to just 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 wasn't tempted to ask for any. It's probably a good thing that it was quiet the rest of the evening because any activity and he'd probably just lose everything if he had to do anything. In fact, the next day the kennel people 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, 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 coming on with a celebrity. When I announced "K-9, Blackie", sounds of "Hide the food!!" and an occasional "That SOB!" could be heard in the area. His ability, however, was never again questioned in regards to how much he could eat.

BLACKIE GETS THE METAL or is this really brass?

Dismal days, hot and sweaty. Nights spent on post that could be better used for sleeping, "after all, it got down to 85 tonight!" One day following the next. Routine sets in. We start looking for something, anything to break the boredom and rhythm.

"AND IT ARRIVES IN THE FORM OF A BANDY ROOSTER!!!"

Second Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt, all 5 foot 5 and 1/4 inches of him. He's been through OCS, and probably even took ROTC twice. He majored in proctology and minored in smelling salts (in other words, he resembles a body opening). Right after getting his bar, singular, brass, and unscratched, pinned on, he begs, demands, throws a fit until he gets a "COMBAT POSTING!!!" Can't you hear the band in the background? Let me say it again, "COMBAT POSTING, taa- - - daaaaa!!!" Flags are waving, hearts are beating, isn't life wonderful? Can you say COMBAT POSTING? Try it boys and girls, c o m b a t p o s t i n g. Gee isn't this exciting? Probably got sent out because he threw such a fit that they got rid of him hoping he'd qualify for a fragging. The Bandy rooster has been here 2 whole days and the rumor mill is going full blast. He's checking all the posts!! Asking for the security questions and instructions. Remember those from basic training? What's your fourth security instruction airman? You'd better know your pass word of the day also. Cobra and Tiger (the security police flights that had flightline security during the day and night) were going nuts with the talk of what he had done the day before. Chewed out so and so, done this, done that, you'd have thought he was Uncle Ho and the devil rolled into one entity. And all things considered, he was. And it was announced that he was going to check the K-9 posts.

"TONIGHT!!!"

Now the reader has to understand the differences this poises. Second Lieutenant pain-in-the-butt is all spit and polish, pressed and starched. Just out of the tailors, the bath, and basic training. With a class 1-A me-officer, you-enlisted-man attitude. He's come over here to straighten us out and win the war for us single handedly. And we're supposed to be happy to see him.

Sentry dog handlers are somewhat the opposite. Our uniforms are clean, or at least they once were. I doubt if they have ever seen an iron or been anywhere near starch, (if potato spills at the chow hall don't count). Boots, without exception, have never been polished, we do however hose the mud off of them, and wash our socks at the same time. Generally our hair is cut and we don't smell too bad, unless we're in a group but individually we're tolerable. We were taught to march in basic training and probably have done it at least once since then. On the plus side, most of us do walk upright, have controlled our drooling, and can speak in intelligent sentences. Those who can't, have their dogs do the talking for them. There are a few recorded cases where you did get a better qualified answer by asking the dog and not the handler but lets not go into that. It's something we keep amongst ourselves.

At guardmount we are informed that the Flight Sergeant and Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt will be making the rounds together tonight, so be sharp and lets get this over with.

"Yep, sure thing sarge, haven't these jerks got better things to do than bother us, maybe he'll not stop when challenged and we can feed him to the dog. Which post does Lance or Blackie have?" These were the endearments muttered as we filed away to get our partners and start our evening. I got called aside however.

"Dunlap I put you on kilo 17 because I'm going to start the inspection of posts there tonight with you." I get informed.

"Ok sarge, why are you telling me this?"

"Just thought if the Lieutenant met you and Blackie, it may cause him to stand off the rest of the guys, and we never had this conversation and don't mention this to anyone either, GOT IT?"

"What conversation?" I ask leaving to get Blackie out of his kennel.

Blackie, I'm relieved to see is happy to see me and raring to go.

"We get to go play, I get to go play, lets go play, play, play!!! Put on the chain, put on the leash, put on the muzzle, now lets go, go, go!!! Watch out, here I come, I get to go out." Sometimes you have to wonder if we really deserve such attention and affection.

The walkout posts generally grouped up and took off together as a unit. Each one of us would drop off in our area and it gave us an opportunity to BS on the way out. We were all going over our signals, if we got inspected first, on how we were going to alert everyone else. We carried Motorola radios that were half the size of a cereal box to communicate with. What we would do if one of us got hit by a post inspection is key the mike in a pattern of bursts, 3, 2, 1. Everyone's radio would go Psst-Psst-Psst, Psst-Psst, Psst. Also the driver back at the kennels would do this when the Sergeant walked out to check on us, or if he had to drive him out to do it. Sort of an advanced warning system. We'd get the first warning that they were leaving, then the second when they arrived. Not very original but it worked. Also this way the 2nd post in, anywhere on the line, could check out the one beside them and pass the word down if it was in their area or not that the inspection was happening. Everyone was wondering where the Bandy Rooster was going to strike first. I was wondering what Blackie and I were going to do when he landed on us to crow.

Peeling off first on the way out, I wished everyone else good luck and made ready for my chore that evening. One of the problems with our warning system is that the radio's were always making noise anyway, and sometimes you weren't sure if it was the signal or not. Other times the squelch knob would rotate out so it wouldn't go Psst no matter what. All this was going through my head as I awaited my fate. Added to this was the fact that I had to wear the helmet, wear the gear, can't let Blackie off leash etc., what a pain in the backside!! Maybe we'll get lucky and have a genuine attack and this will be postponed. Well lets get Blackie in a good mood for this anyway. We swept our area and then I kept him alerting on the marines walking the back road and in their bunkers. Of course he thought it was all fun and games. Normally I tried to keep him from terrorizing the marines too much. After all, he had quite a reputation with them and there was no need to keep adding to it. I was startled when I heard the radio squawk, Psst-Psst-Psst, Psst-Psst, Psst. We were committed!

"Lets do this Blackie, watch him!" I put him on alert and we started to sweep our area. The time had come and I still didn't know what I was going to do. Short of letting Blackie eat him, I had to encourage Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt that this was not all fun and games and to want to go play somewhere else. The evening was dark, very little moon and cloud cover to boot. You had to have good night vision to see anything and I was counting on theirs having not adjusted yet. I saw Blackie make them out, abreast of each other walking along the perimeter. I knew they hadn't spotted me yet so I squatted down and let them come to me. When they were about 20 feet away I stood and challenged them.

"HALT, WHO GOES THERE?"

At the same time I allowed Blackie to go to the end of his leash. He knew something was up, and he was playing his part perfectly. Watching and growling, there was no doubt that he wanted some action.

"Sergeant So-and-So and Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt!" Came back the reply. The Sergeant was around 6 foot 2 and with the 5 foot 5 inch lieutenant, they made a Mutt and Jeff looking pair. "ADVANCE AND BE RECOGNIZED!" I stated, still unsure of what I was going to do next. They moved to within 7 or 8 feet and I told them to stop. Putting My flashlight beam on them I acknowledged them, them pulling Blackie in close to me, I reported my post as secure and waited for what I thought was the inevitable.

Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt was beside himself. He actually was sputtering! "A-A-A-Airman, aren't you supposed to salute when you report your post as being secure?" He finally forced out. A light began to shine in the back of my mind. He moved closer, within 5 feet now. A moth circling a candle.

"WELL, AREN'T YOU???"

"No sir", I stated. "Regulations say that I am not supposed to salute you when reporting my post because my dog may interpret that as a signal to attack, sir!"

"REGULATIONS? WHAT REGULATIONS? I HAVE NEVER HEARD OF ANY REGULATION

STATING THAT AIRMAN!!!!' Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt was in full swing. He had fancied that he had caught himself one, and he was going to do the officer squeeze play.

"Air Force regulations regarding Sentry Dogs sir!" I replied. The Flight Sergeant tried to back me up but Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt would have none of it.

"AIRMAN, I HAVE NEVER HEARD OF ANY SUCH REGULATION. I'M AN OFFICER AND YOU WILL SALUTE ME WHEN YOU REPORT YOUR POST TO ME, GOT IT?????"

His fate was now sealed. I had been letting out a little of Blackie's leash as I took his abuse and Blackie had been taking advantage of the slack. Whenever we were talking to anyone I had to watch Blackie because he would scoot backwards, trying to get some slack on the leash. Suddenly he would shoot forward, letting the person know that he was there. He scared many a marine and myself a few times until I caught on to what he was doing. Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt was about 5 feet away and Blackie now had about 3 1/2 feet of leash between him and my hand. I took a twist of the leash tightly around my hand and snapping to attention, I said "YES SIR!!!"

Somehow, I swear I don't know how it happened, but in the act of snapping to attention and starting my salute, I kicked Blackie. I must have been distraught. Normally it would never have happened. Honest.

He was a rocket leaving the tube. Tan and Black, and all teeth. He lunged with a fury I hadn't seen since the first time he chased me out of his kennel. Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt was standing there, reveling in his glory, he had caught a discretion and was correcting it. But this wasn't the way things were supposed to go. He was finding out that he was not now at the top of the food chain, and he was scared. I watched his face blanch and go white. I don't know what kept him standing there, other than stark terror, but he was having an impression made on him, a Blackie's attitude impression. Blackie's feet raked across his chest. His teeth, which must have looked to him to be 2 feet long, snapped just in front of his face as I pulled Blackie backwards. "Damn it lieutenant, I told you that I wasn't supposed to salute you!!! Calm down dog!!!!" The whole time as I was pulling him back, I was pinching him on the side facing away from Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt. The Flight Sergeant meanwhile, was caught between backing me up, and wanting to totally bust up laughing. Knowing what to look for, he caught me kicking Blackie, but was telling Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt that I had tried to warn him. All the while Blackie continued to lunge at Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt and I continued to pull him back and finally just had to take a walk with him to get him to calm down.

It was a strange scene. Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt standing there trying to maintain any semblance of dignity that he could. But only his laundry lady knew how scared he got. The Flight Sergeant making sure that he's all right and telling me to control that SOB (everyone called him that now). All the while not giving anything away by just laughing out loud at the whole situation. Blackie still trying for just a little taste of officer fanny. And me, telling him that he should behave and mind his manners. I calmed Blackie down and standing about 15 feet away from them, apologized, and repeated that my post was secure. Again not saluting.

I think it was the first breath that Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt had taken since the entire episode began. A little color seemed to appear in his cheeks, his gaze however was locked on Blackie. We stood there for what must have been a minute, nobody saying anything. I was wondering what was going to happen next. Did I overstep my bounds and now was going to find myself in sandbag hell? Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt broke the silence by squeaking out something and then turning, began to walk along the perimeter toward the next post. The Sergeant gave me a wink, and turned to follow him. I gave Blackie another kick which sent him charging out to the end of his leash barking madly. He did make an impression when he wanted to. I watched Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt flinch with each bark until they rounded the bend and went out of sight. Blackie turned to look back at me with that "Did I do good Boss?", look on his face. Kneeling down, I put my arms around him and told him that he did great!

The rest of the evening was uneventful afterwards. Chatted with a few of the marines in Alpha Company, or just spent some time by ourselves in case Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt decided to come back. Occasionally the radio would go Psst-Psst-Psst, Psst-Psst, Psst, so we knew that they were still on the prowl but eventually that ended also. The sun came up and we got the call to come in so gathering my gear I walked over to the perimeter road and waited for the rest of the guys to join me. We grouped up and started the bull session for the walk back to the kennel. Everyone was saying that Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt wasn't as bad as Cobra and Tiger flights had made him out to be. They'd challenge him, he'd stop and watch as they reported their posts, ask a few questions and then move on. Hell the chaplain was a bigger pain than the Lieutenant had been. I listened quietly until I couldn't control my curiosity any longer.

"Tell me guys, did he make any of you salute when you reported your post?"

"Salute?? Nobody makes you salute!! Damn dog would attack them if we did that!! No, why? Did he make you salute?"

Downplaying the incident I said that yes he had asked for a salute and just said that Blackie had gone nuts when I did it. I didn't want to replay the entire episode because some of it may escape out and then I'd be in hot water with Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt. I also found out that the Lieutenant stayed back about 10 feet from them while all this was going on. It crossed my mind that he didn't want them to see the stains but who knows? Reaching the kennels I put Blackie away and instead of catching the truck back to the chow hall I went into the office. The Flight Sergeant was in there filling out paperwork and he and I looked at each other.

"What are you doing Dunlap?"

"Getting Blackie a treat." I replied as I pulled out 2 cans of dog food. Normally the dogs got fed by the day workers and unless they had been placed on a special diet by the Vet, all they got was dry food mixed with water. "I figure he's earned a little treat for himself."

Nothing more was ever said about the incident but the 2 of us knew. As for Lieutenant Pain-in-the-Butt, he continued to harass Cobra and Tiger flights but for some reason, was never seen again checking the K-9 posts. And Blackie? I think it took him 4 or 5 bites to wolf down the 2 cans of dog food I placed in his dish. You should have seen his eyes bulge out of his head as he watched me put them in his dish and then slide him the bowl. Almost as good as officer fanny we agreed.

Blackie meets the Phantom & Gets A Bath

Days and nights, one blending into another. So far I have far more days left in country than I've spent. Tonight, I have the next thing to having a day off, standby. Standby is when your not assigned to a post for the evening, yet you can't get drunk either. You are the person who goes out if anything happens or if someone gets sick. Sort of 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, could be worse, you could have Kilo 15 and have to put up with Tiger Troop all night.

Hang around the kennels for a while playing with Blackie, then back to the hooch to see what's going on there. Can't join in on the drinking party with the others who are off, at least not the way you would like to. Play a few hands of poker here and there. Here you are, all geared up as if you were going out, and nothing to do. Boring. Hated being the standby person. Most evenings that I had this, I would take Blackie out and just walk the perimeter, or go over to the supply area and hang out. Unknown to me however, tonight was going to be different.

The radio sounds off, "K-9 standby to kennel area!!" Arriving I find a jeep waiting there. It seems like Tiger 2, Tiger flight's 2nd in command, thought he saw some movement around a small pond by the flight line. After his people not finding anything, he wants a Sentry Dog Unit to check it out. Now one has to know Tiger 2 to appreciate this situation fully. He calls in shadows across the moon, lights on the horizon, and has bats in the belfry. Ever see someone who has reached the Peter Principal? That is, 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 look at the Sergeant and give him a, "Tiger 2"??, look. He nods and lets me know that it's being requested from higher up and to please play along with the seriousness of the situation. All right I say, lets go get Blackie. Blackie has spotted me coming and is eager to see me. "Oh boy, we get to go out, I get to go out, can I kill something tonight?? Put on my leash and muzzle, open the door, here we go! OUT, OUT, OUT!!!"

I put Blackie on the duce and a half and climb aboard. We're driving to who knows where following "Tigee 2" and his 2 tiger flight brown nose tag alongs. After about 10 minutes we stop and I look around. We are on the edge of a small pond surrounded by brush. There has to be 5 jeeps there, parked with their lights on, illuminating the area. Surrounding this is anywhere from 10 to 15 SP's. All of them armed and watching the brush and pond. I find out that "Tigee-2" thought he saw some movement in the brush and wants me to take Blackie down there and check things out. The pond is 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 spots. Standing on the bed of the duce and a half I survey the area and decide how I want to work this situation.

I had brought along a 20 foot training leash, not knowing what to expect, and I snap this onto Blackie's collar. I tell "Tiger-2" to move his troops back in that I may be letting out all 20 feet of leash. Of course by now, this situation is up to an hour old. They have had who knows how

many people walking around down there, and the area is just swarming with their scents. Some old, some new. We're by this pond, which I find out later has had several hundred gallons of JP-4 poured over it, to keep the mosquito population down. Which has also, in the Vietnam summer sun, backed itself to a hard crust. So mixed with all the human scents, there is the overwhelming smell of JP-4. And we're supposed to find the needle in the haystack in this mess. Putting Blackie on guard with a "Watch them!" We begin to cover the area in a clockwise manner. I doubt if Blackie can smell anything but JP-4 right now but he puts up a good show anyway. Problem is that he wants to go and eat SP's for his midnight snack more than this looking in the bushes nonsense. I keep him on the task at hand, remembering that the Sergeant said for us to play along, but I don't exactly discourage him either. Figured we might as well mess with someone other than the marines. Blackie feels that way also, after all the SP's seem to smell better than the marines, but act just as goofy when he charges them. After two sweeps around the pond however, it is becoming apparent that the old shadows across the moon were responsible for "Tigee 2's" seeing spooks in the bushes, and a few of the SP's were even starting to comment thusly. "Tigee 2" however is certain that the bogie man is in here and we're just missing him. He tells me to walk out on the crust covering the pond and search from there outwards.

I look at him as if he really doesn't realize that he is missing some vital parts in his head, like the normal ration of brain cells. Sarg's wish for me to play along with this clown is growing thinner by the minute. Yet after receiving assurances that the crust will support our weight, I reluctantly step out. It's like walking on a blanket that has been spread over the water. Firm on top, yet every step sends ripples undulating underneath you. I compare it to standing on a water bed. Blackie however is looking at me with the same look I gave "Tigee 2" when he told us to go do this. He's convinced I've lost it this time for sure. I'm starting to agree with him in that I can barely keep my footing as we move around the edge of the pond.

Slippery, treacherous, and bad smelling is how I would describe it. Just as I'm thinking that this isn't so bad, the inevitable happens. The firm crust I was standing on lets go, and I am now armpit deep in black and smelly muck. Blackie turns to look back at me and is stopped in mid stride. I'm getting this look like, "What happened to the lower part of your body?" from him. I tell him to "STAY!" but it's too late. He has started back towards me and now the area under him lets go also. We manage to wrest out way out, but him and I are both covered with an oily slime from the neck down. "Tigee 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 $(\)\&*\%^{\wedge}*$ pond till hell freezes over for themselves.

Blackie meanwhile has this look on his face like he wants to kill something, and he does not care who at this point. I have some suggestions to give him in that respect. I reach back to get his muzzle for the ride back to the kennels, only to discover that there is a big clump of oily guck hanging in it. Saying screw it, I put him on the back of the duce and a half and we ride back the way we are. Neither one of us in the best of moods. All of our gear, from my underwear to his leash is ruined. And he looks like he received a bad paint job. "Tiger 2" stays behind, still convinced that the bogeyman is amuck and he's angry that no one wants to co-operate with his delusions. Back at the kennels there is a further surprise in store for me. I can't put Blackie away covered in oil like that. He'll do a dog thing and in trying to lick it off, will ingest it and get sick, or worse. So here I am, stripped down to my shorts, with the hose and a bucket of hot soapy water, giving him a bath. If looks could kill, I'd be very dead now. He's becoming less amused by the situation as this goes on. But he looks 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.

Getting him finally cleaned up I call up tiger flight and have them send a jeep over to run me back to the hooch so I can clean up. They start to balk at this and I remind them that I was the person who went out for "Tiger 2" and if they want any of us to do these little games for them again, they'd better get that $(\wedge\wedge\%#\$\wedge\&$ jeep over here for me. Took them the better part of a half hour but now here I am, back at the hooch and guess what? There is no hot water to be had in the entire complex. Used the better part of an entire bar of soap getting that guck off me using 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 inhale. Now most of these items I had hosed out and left out to dry overnight, so they didn't look too bad. He made one sniff and that settled everything. The only nice thing positive to say of the adventure is that Blackie and I made out getting all new stuff because of it. None of us went out for another "Tiger 2" adventure again however.

Blackie's Helmet , Rainy Days, and Yes, He does bite.

This was truly a unique animal. He affected everyone that he touched or came into contact with through his presence. There are 6 handlers, whom we know of, that were deeply touched by him. There are others, who just circled around him, and knew him, who remember him. What makes a dog so unusual? Shortly after I got there, I was told that he liked to carry things around in his mouth. One night, coming off post I stumbled and my helmet fell off. He grabbed it and from then on, he carried it wherever we went. A helmet weighed 2 or 3 pounds. Not heavy one would say, however imagining that your carrying it around in your mouth, most times with your head held high.



This is my helmet, I get to carry it and when I have it, it belongs to me.

"YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH THAT???"

When you came out of the kennels, your dog had to be muzzled. This was for safety reasons, they couldn't bite another handler, or another dog when they were muzzled. Remember that normally only the more aggressive animals went into this program, Cinder included, and they would attack each other as well as another person if they felt like it. I believe that with Blackie however, if I had just given him the helmet to carry, I would never have had to muzzle him. When he had it, he was manageable. Just leave him, and especially his helmet alone, and he's content. Anyone, however trying to get the helmet out of his mouth, is in for a whole boatload of trouble.

There was one time when all of Alpha Company was laughing at me because of him. We were walking out of the old kennels and had stopped in front of Alpha Company HQ out on the perimeter. While we were BS-ing with the marines, Da Nang AB got another dose of what it was named for. "Rocket City."

Blackie was standing there with my helmet in his mouth, minding his own business as far as he was concerned. The radio went nutso with the alert for incoming rockets and the first mistake I did was to make a grab at the helmet in his mouth. Imagine yourself, lying on the ground, watching this idiot dog handler fighting and arguing with his dog.

"GIVE ME THE DAMN HELMET, YOU SOB!!!!"

He carried this out with him every night now, and had developed muscles in his jaws that could crush cannonballs. I had as much a chance of taking it away from him as I did of flying to the moon. Of course, this was not something he was going to take lightly, my trying to take his helmet away from him.

"KISS OFF A--HOLE, THIS HELMET IS MINE AND YOU'RE NOT GETTING IT!!!!"

Meanwhile rockets are landing on the base, (a mile or so away from us but close enough as far as I was concerned), the sirens are going off, the radio is going full tilt, "ROCKETS, ROCKETS, ROCKETS, GET DOWN, GET DOWN!!!!" Desk sergeants always imagined the worst. And this damn dog and I are arguing and fighting over whom gets the helmet. On top of all this, Alpha Co and the other K-9 handlers are laying there on the ground, watching and laughing at us.

"GIVE ME THE DAMN THING!!!"

"SCREW YOU!!!"

"I HAVE TO WEAR IT!!!"

"WEAR IT ON YOUR OWN TIME, NOT MINE!!!"

Occasionally I'd comment to the audience, "Dammit you guys, this isn't funny!!"

The chorus would come back, "Yes it is."

By now I'm just lying on the ground, him beside me, my helmet still clenched tightly in his jaws. And if I didn't know better, I'd say he's laughing at me also. We all know that dogs can't laugh, right? Finally I gather enough of my senses to realize that the only way I'm going to get him to let go of it, is to tell him to drop it. I'd have to do this all the time to get it back. At the time, I was reacting to the situation, not using my common sense. Once you asked him to put it down, he'd do it, but you had to ask first. I guess he figured that you gave it to him, and you had to ask for it back. Believe me, he'd never give it up otherwise. Sometimes I'd try to take it away from him just to see what he'd do. He let me know in no uncertain terms that I was in for a fight if I kept it up.

We were the talk of the perimeter however. The marines, after calling him SOB, would comment about him either carrying the helmet everywhere we went or how much he could eat. "Hey Dunlap, you're wearing a bucket of dog slobber!" Such a thing to be known for...

This attitude extended to his kennels also. He sometimes would take his chow pan into the back of his kennels and dare anyone to try to get it out. The day workers knew that all he wanted was for them to show him some attention, so they would make a big show out of begging and pleading for him to give it back so they could wash it. Most times he'd give it back. Occasionally, however, no amount of persuasion or begging could tempt him into releasing it and then the broom handle would be used to retrieve it. Now this works fine if he's just trying to mess with your mind a little. There were a few times however, when he WANTED TO KEEP THE PAN. I'd come to take him out and there would be a broom handle hanging from his door. Chewed, broken, completely disfigured. It would be the way that the day workers would tell me that he was in one of his moods again. Sometimes the pan would still be in the kennel with him; he'd have a look of total contentment on his face, as if he had won that round. They'd gripe to me about his attitude and I'd always respond that he was that way with me also, and that we could trade jobs for a while. "Tell you what, you take him out on post and I'll stay here and sleep all night in your bunk, OK?" For some reason they never took me up on my offer...

The other thing he would do in his kennels is something I trained him to do. Whenever you got your dog out, you would dump the water bucket and leave it upright so the day workers could come by and fill it with fresh water. One day I told him to pick up the water bucket. Took me about 5 minutes to show him what I wanted him to do, but from that day on, I never had to bend down and dump his bucket. I'd walk in his kennel and say "Bucket." He would give it a paw swipe to knock it over. Then he'd pick it up in his mouth and walk around with it till I got him to put it down. Then we'd put on the leash and muzzle and be off. Monty says that he got to knocking his water bucket over so much that they had to end up clipping it inside his kennel. Like I said, all he wanted is a little attention. Give him that and he'd be happy.

Blackie was identity challenged. Now why do I say that? Well, he fashioned himself to be a boxer. Most dogs, when you would play with them, they would grab your hand or arm and growling the whole time, and tug at it. Correct? An occasional few would go for the feet and play with them. Some just wanted to have a tug of war with you and would shred whatever towel or whatever was brought out for that purpose. Blackie wanted to fight, to box and wrestle actually.

He was a knife fighter in that he liked close-in-stick-it-in-your-face combat. He'd ram me with his head till he knocked me down. Then he'd come up on his hind legs and deliver a one-two punch to my upper body and head with his front paws. And I'd better be prepared because he would not pull his punches. One day I was sporting a small black eye where he nailed me. I'd allow him a few attacks, parrying as well as I could. Whenever he left me an opening, I'd smack him back. A free for all would eventually ensue. He'd ram that head into my midsection and I'd grab him. We would go rolling off on the ground, me on top, him on top, etc., him growling and barking, me yelling "HELP, HELP, MY DOG'S TURNED ON ME!!!" The marines would always offer to shoot the two of us, wonder why?? After a while we'd end up lying on the ground, laughing and catching our breath. Occasionally we'd go another round, but most times he just wanted the one go around. Of course all this foolishness did nothing but enhance his reputation. Damn SOB attacks his handler as much as he does us, the marines would be thinking.

He did know when to pick his times, however. During the summer, the dogs would have an influx of fleas and ticks. Some of the handlers would also. Besides using spray and powder, we'd take everyone to China Beach and make all of us swim in the salt water to get the parasites off. We'd arrive and take over a whole section of the beach. The idea would be that we'd just go out far enough to submerge most of our bodies, the bugs would release and float away. I don't know how effective it was but it was a break in the daily routine so we went for it. Also it presented us with the opportunity for a beach party!! We'd load up on the duce and a half like we were going out on post, guns, flack vests, helmets, the whole nine yards. However every extra spot on the truck would be taken up with cases of beer. When we arrived at the beach we'd stake out a section for ourselves, strip down and take the dogs swimming.

Summertime in Vietnam, the temperature is in the high 90's to 100's and who the hell cares? The water temperature is 80 or above, not refreshing but just wet. After a while of just walking around in the surf and letting Blackie soak in the salt water, I get the idea to have him start swimming and pull me around. So I pull him out deeper until he has to swim to stay afloat. As he goes past me I roll over on my back and think I've got it made. Here I am floating on my back, being pulled through the water, and drinking beer. How could things get better? What I didn't realize is that Blackie was swimming in a slow circle, and as soon as his feet touched the sand, he had a surprise in store for me. I feel the pressure on the leash change and looking up, catch a quick glimpse of him. He had raised up on his hind legs, and turning around, was coming down on top of me. Here I am, on my back, floating in the water, and he pushes me under, and tries to hold me there!! The first time he did this he caught me totally off guard. I thought I was going to drown. Came up sputtering and coughing, and while trying to catch my breath, he head butts me, knocking me over, and attacks again. So now the two of us are going at it and everyone else is scattering. Something about blood attracting sharks they later said. Some of our more enjoyable play periods happened at the beach. But my body would take a beating from his toenails. Fresh scratches in salt water. Good thing we brought the beer to act as an anesthetic.

Other things that were unique only to him. He would never lay down on post unless you told him to, NEVER. What does this mean you ask? Well the dog that lays down, goes to sleep. Occasionally he and I would catch a few winks out there however. I would bring a timer out and set it for 1/2 hour or so. I'd then tell him that I was going to catch some shut eye and put him on alert. I knew that I could safely snooze and that he'd stay up watching for me. We had an arrangement. I'd wake up, stretch and all, then tell him to lay down. He watched for me, I'd watch for him. Should have heard him snore. We never got caught and he understood the arrangement. The last evening I spent on post with him, I slept an hour. That's how comfortable I felt. He watched while I slept, I did the same for him.

AND NOTHING GOT PAST EITHER OF US!! HE ABSOLUTELY HATED, DESPISED, ABHORRED, LOATHED, CURSED, AND BORE A GRUDGE, AGAINST RAIN,

Rainy nights were the worst thing in the world for us. He'd be in a foul mood thick enough to cut. I've watched him get so nasty about the rain coming down, that he'd stick his head straight up in the air, and bark, growl, and bite at the raindrops. And it didn't seem to matter if we were under cover or not. He DETESTED rainy nights. We'd sit out on post, trying to get comfortable and he would have a murderous look on his face. I'd sit out there making fun of him, the rain dripping off his nose and all. You could see the thoughts going through his head,

"I HATE IT HERE, I HATE THE RAIN, AND I'M STARTING TO LIKE YOU LESS. I'M GOING TO BITE HIM IF HE KEEPS THIS UP. I WANT TO FEEL HIS LIFE OOZE OUT OF HIM SLOWLY AS MY JAWS COME TOGETHER."

An occasional snarl would tell me that I had better find something else to amuse myself with because he wasn't enjoying any of what I was dishing out.

One rainy night I made the mistake of correcting him for something trivial. I should have known better. He had let me know earlier that he was in a terrible mood and I ignored it. He nailed my left hand and my ring finger has a long scar on it visible to this day. At the time he left the bone exposed, and upper and lower teeth marks were on the palm and backside. We separated and I clutched my wrist with my other hand to slow down the blood flow.

Now imagine, it's dark. I come up to the first bunker, in Charlie Company, holding my injured hand up, my other hand around my wrist. It's raining, the rain mixing with the blood, diluting it, spreading it. I yell up to the bunker to call the medic, that my dog had bitten me. The marine looks out of his bunker and asks, "Which dog?"

I reply, "Blackie!!" There is a scramble as he grabs his flashlight and shines it down at us. I am holding both arms upwards, as I described. The rain, by now, has caused the blood to wash over my arms and it's dripping off my elbows. From the amount of blood, it looks like I had cut off both of my hands at the wrist. The marine goes pail in the face and dives out of the bunker to get the medic. As they're wrapping my hand up, I'm calling in for the truck so I can get to the hospital and have this looked at. The marines are however passing the word around that Blackie and I got into it, and both of us are still alive. There were several volunteering to take Blackie out if I wanted them to, a few offering to do both of us for the price of one. When I get to the kennels, there is Doc, the Vet, waiting for me.

The first Vet we had was a wonderful human being. There wasn't enough he could do for you and your partners. He was the only one, besides myself, that could take off Blackie's muzzle and open his mouth to check his teeth. Blackie knew that he was there to help him, so he never gave him any trouble. Imagine someone else just taking off his muzzle and opening his mouth. They'd end up being his lunch. Whenever things got rough, the Vet would even be out there on the line, M16, helmet, flack vest and all, backing us up. Now here he is waiting for me to come in so he can bandage me up. Afterwards he sent me to the hospital because he said that he couldn't give me a shot legally. Besides the needles he used would leave quite a hole in my hide. I get to the hospital and the first thing they do is comment on how well bandaged I am. Now the fun begins. They asked who did the bandage job. I replied, "The Vet."

I get this look like I just got here from another planet. "You mean you let the Vet treat you???" I get asked.

"Sure, why not?"

They just couldn't understand why I would let the Vet treat me. The humorous part about the entire evening was that they soaked my hand in the same solution the Vet had used. Put the same salve on the wound. Gave me a shot, big deal. But did not do as good a job of wrapping the wound afterwards. When I got back to the kennels, the Vet was still waiting for me. "Thought they would do a bad job on that bandaging", I get told. "Now just sit still and let me fix that." I was as docile as the dogs were whenever we brought them in to see him. Something about that man.

All of us were very responsive to what the Vet wanted. He not only took care of our partners, he watched after us. He was the Base Sanitation Officer. This meant that he inspected the Mess Halls. If we wanted to have a party, the Vet took it personal that we got the better steaks for the party. If they didn't meet up to what he considered to be good enough, and he came to the parties, then that Mess Hall would have strike marks on their next inspection. Our parties always had the better steaks when Doc was around. Another thing he would do is give us his shopping list. We had a post in the supply yard. Whatever Doc, or any of us wanted, it was easier for us to get it outright, than to request it through regular channels. Doc rotated out around July or August and we got in his replacement. He was the opposite of everything the other Vet had been.

"First off, I've never been a base Vet, I've been in research all my life. I need this combat posting in order to qualify for promotion. And I believe that you should never, NEVER, NEVER, have to use force on an animal. Just talk to them and they will respond to your voice. And anyone I see using force will be in trouble.

We used to work the dogs up and then take them in to see him. Every time they'd twist their head and try to bite him, even though they were still muzzled, he'd jump.

E-Mail**To: Greg Dunlap****From: Monty Moore**

The replacement vet was a Major. In mid 1969, Blackie was assigned to Clarence Dedecker,.. Dedecker had the right size, experience and disposition for Blackie.

This veterinarian was prone to antagonize any dog brought in for exams. After the dog agitated he would complain about the handler's inability to control the dog. Allegedly, Dedecker solved the problem for us during one of Blackie's vet appointments. Blackie was muzzled and led into the clinic. The vet teased the dog, and the leash "slipped" out of Dedecker's hand and away went Blackie.

He chased the vet around the table and pinned him in the corner. Blackie was trying to rub his muzzle off on the vet's chest, so he could return the "teasing". Dedecker was just a little slow in recovering Blackie, and apologized for the leash "slipping". No damage occurred, but the vet never teased another dog. When Dedecker was asked about the incident he would only smile. He never would admit or deny it. I guess that he felt that Blackie did all the "work" so there was no reason to say anything.



Photo Above; Blackie with his water bucket, Courtesy of Greg Dunlap.

NEXT

There was a saying we had, "I'm next!" One said it with pride, a little boasting, and a whole lot of conviction.

Next!

Such a lovely word, next. Not next to get on the truck, or next in line for a haircut, or next for R & R. No, you were Next. You were special. You were NEXT!!!!

You walked with a little jaunt in your step. Your head was held a little higher. Your mind was filled with thoughts of the land of the big BX, round eyed women, clean clothes and nice smells. The freedom bird was arriving and it had your name on it!!!!

YOU WERE GOING HOME, AND YOU WERE THE NEXT TO LEAVE!!! NEXT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Yell it out, shout it from the roof tops, "I'm going home!!!!!!!"

You were a short-timer and you rubbed it in. Your year in hell was almost over, and it was ending soon. You had less time left in country than most of the guys would spend in the bathrooms there.

"You've got how much left to go??? Hell even Uncle Ho isn't planning on spending that much time in this god forsaken place." "I'm so short, I walk under doors, and they're not open." One had to really know how to make others enjoy the quality of life to savor the experience properly. And when one said it, "NEXT", everyone else knew what was meant by it. The only other element of our society that could probably relate to this feeling is convicts facing release. That's what it felt like. You had spent your time, paid your debt, and now you were being released back into the real world. The one you had occupied for the past 12 months was not the real world, it was your perjury for the sins you had committed, be they real or otherwise. You had volunteered to do a duty for your country because you felt that this was something you owed to the nation that had fostered you. You didn't shirk that sense of obligation; in fact you felt pride in having done what you considered to be your responsibility. You had performed that duty to the best of your ability, and now, the end of your indenture was approaching. Nights on post were now spent with bragging rights. And, occasionally, with quiet times, talking to your best friend.

At the end of that 6-foot leash was another individual, and they weren't going home with you. As far as they were concerned, they were home. And you being there with them, that was all they ever asked for. You were leaving, and they were staying behind. How could you explain that to them??? You had told them every story about your life you could remember, and not just once. All your dark secrets, regrets, triumphs, and embarrassments. Everything!! And through it all, they had just sat or stood there, and acted like it was the first time they had heard it. And they had enjoyed every word out of your mouth, and had thanked you afterwards for the tale. They watched your back, acted as your muscle, and your counsel. You poured out your heart to them, and they gave back all their love, devotion, and respect. Now you were leaving, and they were staying behind. How do you explain that and feel good afterwards???

Every one of us acted the same on that last day. We'd joke around the hut with everyone. "Hey last day huh? Want to trade places?" "How long you got left, how does 11 hours sound?" the usual banter. There was the changing of the sign, generally involving some alcohol and joking. Then you realize the full impact of the day. You were leaving, and they were staying behind.

Every one of us ended up back at the kennels for most of the day. I took Blackie out and just spent time with him, for the last time. Most of the day actually but whose keeping score? I remember some of the newer guys walking by during this period and saying something to the effect of me spending time with him for the last time.

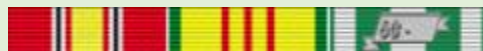
He was groomed, fed, canned food, what a treat!! Played with and showed attention to. What more could a dog ask for? Being treated like this with your best friend, only he does not know that tomorrow you won't be there. . You were leaving, and they were staying behind. And try as you might, you couldn't explain that to them. We had shared a bond, a trust, and it was ending. In one respect you felt such joy at leaving. Yet in another, such sadness as leaving behind.

You were leaving, and they were staying behind.

Goodbye Blackie, believe me, I'll never forget you.



Greg Dunlap on right receiving the next sign.



[E Mail the K-9 Webmaster](#)