



# Snake Stories from SEA



The above photo was printed in the Korat Base Newspaper. Mike Balash provided for me to scan and share with others. The handler in the photo is Greg Latronddress. I don't recall if we gave the snake or its sidekick (we captured two of them from the same post along the runway approach lights) a name, and I am positive the Air Force didn't tattoo them, even though they had their own special pen built at the kennels.

When the first one was captured the Tiger Flight NCO was coming around checking posts and giving a new SSgt a the nickel tour of the perimeter. The NCO thought it was pretty cool that the two handlers had captured the 15' snake and took one of them and the snake to the kennels in the jeep much to the horror of the new staff. The snake was kept in an empty run until Salvatore Cretella built a more appropriate cage.

A few weeks later I was on the post that the snake called home when the new SSgt came bouncing down the road in the jeep. He asked why the both dog handlers were together. I explained to him that if we had trouble anywhere it was always on that post and we had instructions to patrol it together.

That part was the truth. Then I told him, besides we are sure that the python had a mate and we were trying to find it so they wouldn't be lonely. He looked at me backed the jeep around and took off never to be seen down there again. A mate, or at least another of about the same size was found and captured.

As noted in the article the snakes up and disappeared one day. Some believed they were released. Others thought they were stolen. They may have shown up on the dinner tables of a small village located on the other side of the fence. I think anyone who would grab a live rice beetle the size of a pack of cigarettes, bite the head off and eat the innards, or dig up dogs that had been euthanized and buried to eat them would find a couple of 15 foot long pythons to be a gourmet meal.

I suspected guys got tired of catching live food to toss in the pen for them to eat. They were not going to fall for MSD, and if it wasn't moving they were not interested. Talk about picky eaters. Their stuff was a lot fresher than the baloney sandwiches that came in box lunches and had green around the edges. Balash looked at the baloney one night and offered it to his dog who turned his head the other way. Mike told me he knew then that the stuff would probably kill him if he ate it. Before going to Korat he hated olives, but they were the only thing in the box lunch that he thought was eatable and acquired a taste for them. I guess it changed Thanksgiving dinner forever for Mike. He could now do something with the olives besides stick them on his fingers.

Above story courtesy of David Adams



Story #1 One night during some slight inclement weather at NKP. My dog Smokey & I were walking on one side of a small kalong or ditch in the Alpha sector I believe. I sat my pail on the ground and then sat myself on it. As it was raining I let Smokey kind of get in under my poncho as much as possible. I was looking out toward the fence line when I caught sight of some movement about 6 feet away from me on the other side of the ditch. It was a snake of some sort I could not really make it out very well. I watched it as it went on its merry way toward Bravo Sector. About 10 minutes later along comes his brother, slithering away in the same direction. I thought this was a bit interesting so I started to keep a closer watch on the ditch instead of the fence line. Well wouldn't you know it a few more minutes go by and here comes another snake going the same way. They all looked to be about the same size and possible coloration. But I decided then and there it was time to move away. Smokey & I repositioned ourselves about 20 yards up on Alpha and we saw no more snakes that night.

Story # 2 Again Smokey & I were on patrol and this time we were in Bravo Sector my flashlight was getting low on battery juice and was getting dim. I was trying to pick my way through what little vegetation there was when I saw the prettiest damn snake I ever saw cross right in front of us. Smokey never saw it and if he did he never showed it. Anyway it was very slender like a pencil and about 3 feet long with a green body and a bright red head. I believe that was a bamboo viper. But wasn't sure until I got back to base and checked it with the collection at the dispensary.

Story #3 This incident happened to occur at Udorn. I was working Toni then. We were assigned a post next to the active runway and there was an unused trim pad close by. Well Toni & I sat down in the middle of the pad to eat our box lunch. Toni alerted me first then I saw it. A very small cobra with its head up and hood open was crawling towards me. It was about 6 feet away but on open concrete that was close enough. I did a back flip and stood up and pulled Toni towards me. I put her in the sit position and removed my machete from my bucket and proceeded to harass the cobra with it before I eventually killed it. I sure did not expect a snake come after me like that since I was not doing anything to it, and hadn't even seen it. Toni saved me that night from a possible snake bite and I am glad as hell she was there.

*Above Stories From David VanHoogstrate  
Member: Vietnam Dog Handlers Association #176 & Vietnam Security Police Association  
NKP: 56th SPS, K-9, 10/70 - 3/71, Smokey 04X6  
Udorn: 432nd SPS, K-9, 3/71 - 10/71, Toni 4A93*





Snakes, some of the world's deadliest snakes crawled thru the surrounding jungle and base areas. None of us dog handlers wanted to meet them or suffer a bite to ourselves or our dogs. Southeast Asia is infested with common Asian Cobras, King Cobras, Kraits, and Numerous Vipers (All Deadly).

I had posted the handlers and was checking the posts on the south side of the base when the most dreaded call (I think) came in "Handler bitten by snake - respond immediately K9 Post \_?? (number long forgotten)". As you would expect under "Murphys Law", the handler was posted by B-52 parking area and I was on the opposite side of the base. I had to try and get around the runway and to the other side of the base as quick as I could. Now a 21/2 ton truck can run pretty fast and this one did. All I could think of was how deadly was the snake and how much time did we have.

After what seemed an eternity, I arrived at the post and got handler and dog on to the truck. Off we went to hospital where personnel were standing by awaiting our arrival. We finally arrived and handler the was checked by medical personnel. No bite wounds were found, only a small scratch on one leg just below the knee. The handler could not tell us what type of snake it was. He described the area on his post when the incident had taken place. I went back to the post to see if I could find and identify the snake - IF IT WAS still in the area.

Slowly, driving the duce back and forth looking and looking: THERE IT WAS - exactly where the handler said it took place. It was the biggest damned BARB-WIRE SNAKE you ever saw. Its head height off the ground matched the height of the scratch mark on his leg.

Much relief was felt when this info was reported to hospital. Needlessly the next day, we went out and killed about six of these snakes: used a wire cutter to do it!

Just another day in the life of the "dog handlers"

*Courtesy of MSgt (Ret) Vernon Anderson, U-Tapao Night Supervisor*





I was never afraid of snakes until I went to Da Nang AB air Base, South Viet Nam. Now being a native Texan, I was use to Rattlesnake, Copperheads and Water Moccasins. But, this country had snakes that were called "Two Steppers". If bitten you took two steps and died. We had the common Asian Cobras, the King Cobras, Bamboo Vipers, Kraits, and several other that I didn't care to discover. Of course, many of our dog posts were in the swampy or bushy areas. Ideal places to find snakes.

Our little K-9 bunkers were located between the bunkers that formed the rear corners of this post. These were built of a layer of sandbags, stacked outside small barrels filled with sand. The bunkers had a roof made of two 4X8 sheets of plywood. The square roof hung over the sides of the bunker and made a welcomed haven against monsoon rains. The bunkers were low enough so that you and your dog could look over the top. This forced you to crawl on your hands and knees into the bunker. When preparing to enter the bunker the dog would normally enter first. You would almost have to get on your hands and knees to crawl in. You and dog could sit there, on your comfortable sandbag seat, and both of you could look over the top of the wall.

One night my dog didn't want to go into the bunker. I always dropped off a field pack that contained extra ammo, C-Rations and 2 water canteens. I would return to the bunker throughout the night. I had placed the pack on the wall next to the entrance. But Kobuc didn't run in like he normally did. As a matter of fact, he locked up all four paws. An experienced handler always stayed behind the smarter member of the team. I remembered the rule; "If dog doesn't want to go there---you don't want to go there." Hence, I did the prudent thing; I dropped off my stuff elsewhere. I examined the bunker but did not see anything.

That morning the kennel attendant made his usual once a week round to pick up equipment left on post. He started into the bunker and found a large Krait snake coiled up, and very unhappy at being disturbed. Like the Cobra's venom, the Krait's venom is neurotoxin and signs of paralysis may appear within minutes or be delayed for hours. The black and white banded snake is nocturnal and one of the most dangerous snakes in Asia, and bite readily at times and without hissing. In addition to this, the bite is virtually painless, and victims may neglect to seek proper treatment. Deaths from this snake are probably underreported, since most occur at night and unattended. That evening, I was told about the snake and asked if I had entered the bunker the night before. I made immediate plans to treat the smarter member of

the team to a steak dinner from the NCO Club. My dog really enjoyed the rare steak I smuggled into the kennels for him!

Later, we had another critter experience. Due to a nearby typhoon, we had received heavier than normal rainfall. The swampy areas on base flooded. The Vet decided that his dogs were not going to be wading on flooded posts. So, the dogs stayed in the nice dry kennels and we went out on post without them. I was on my favorite Charlie Company lines. The swamp behind the line of bunkers had turned into Lake Da Nang. It was not hard to imagine the snakes swimming around hunting for a dry place. The bunkers provided a nice sitting area if you wanted to hop up on the roofs, which were maybe 3-4 feet off the ground. All night long, you could hear splashing. Some handlers swore that they saw snakes swim by. It was easy to imagine snakes wanting to share our little dry island. Without the more intelligent team member to talk to it was a long, lonely night on post. It was a miracle we found our way to the relief trucks in the morning. There is nothing clumsier than a dog handler without his dog! The next night the water level had dropped, so we were okay. The snake-infested bunker had been on Charlie Company lines also.

*Above Courtesy of Monty Moore Sentry Dog Handler,*



One night in 1970, I was posted on Kilo 1 at Pleiku AB Air Base with my dog Bullet. About 2300 we started taking heavy incoming in the form of an artillery barrage. We got plastered with 105s and 155s for a little over two hours, and rounds also hit Camp Enari, the 4th Division base camp (killing 14), the Vietnamese Ranger ammo dump (blowing it up), the Mike forces base camp (I saw a guard tower turned into splinters by a direct hit) and Camp Holloway. During the middle of this, someone on our perimeter called in movement, and the whole side of the base opened up on the paddies. Then Camp Enari's perimeter lit up, and everyone else soon followed. But I didn't see anyone at all in the paddies, and neither did my dog. Then a guy on Bravo 1 (the machine gun bunker behind Kilo 1) also called in movement, and almost took my head off with his .60. The controller called me on the radio to confirm Bravo 1's sighting, and I told him Bravo 1 was firing at the white free fire marker, which he was. He just panicked, I think, or maybe he was just bored and wanted to bust some caps along with everyone else. Meanwhile, the controller called all the dog posts, and everyone reported negative contact. I know the controller believed us, but the whole damn base was firing (except for the dog handlers), and I guess he had to go with the majority vote. But there was nobody out there. It was just mass

hysteria. Meanwhile, I was sitting on a berm with my dog, eating a C-rats pound cake and watching the fireworks. The next post down, Kilo 2, was guarded that night by a dog handler who had been in Nam for three tours and perhaps was wound a little too tight. As far as I know, he never cleaned his CAR-15 the entire time I was at Pleiku AB. The barrel was plugged with dried mud, and we all just assumed it would blow up if he ever fired it. I'm getting ready to open my peaches (pound cake + peaches=only edible C-rats) when suddenly I hear Kilo 2 cut loose on full auto, emptying one magazine, then another. I was on my feet, crouching and running with my dog toward Kilo 2 when he fired yet another magazine. These weren't bursts either-- they were the full auto take-no-prisoners stuff that melts barrels and makes you think someone's in serious trouble and has no alternative to melting a barrel, so I was expecting trouble. When I spot Kilo 2, he's just standing down by the wire looking down at the ground. I called out his name to let him know I was behind him and scuttled up to his side.

"What is it?" I asked, peering out at the paddies.

"Snake," he said, and pointed to a little green snake about 6 inches long crawling away from the wire.

"You fired three magazines at something three feet away and missed?"

"Nobody else is hitting anything either," he said.

At guard mount the next evening we were told the Army had mistakenly attacked our base and the others because they had screwed up their artillery grid coordinates. As far as I know, no one on our Air Base was WIA or KIA, but about 40 US army, ARVN and Mike force guys were killed.

*Courtesy of Bruce Kinnard, Sentry Dog Handler, Phan Rang AB Air Base*



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