

“He’s just a dog”

BLACKIE 129X

(Six Tours in Vietnam, 1965-1970)

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How many times have you heard that statement? Or it’s just a cat, or a parrot, even a turtle? Yes they are just an animal. Heck, we even eat some of them. Whoever gave a passing thought to the cow or chicken the last time you drove through the fast food line?

“We’re having fish and chips tonight!!” *Sure sucks to be that cod but serves him right for getting caught so easily.* For most of us we take animals into our lives, love them while they are with us, and then feel fleeting sorrow when we watch them go over the rainbow bridge. And for those we consume? There’s no remorse, unless you’re a vegetarian but let’s not go into debating that school of thought.



Unless your one of the lucky few who after going into the Armed Services, put themselves into a position so they could call themselves, “**DOG HANDLERS!**” I’m proud to state that I can say that I was one of those lucky ones.

I enlisted in the Air Force in November 1965. After basic training and Air Police tech school I arrived at Oxnard AFB in Southern California in early 1966. Later on, in 1966, I transferred into K-9 and became a dog handler with my first dog, Rex K044. Military service dogs are known by their name and service number, which is unique to each dog. You can imagine in a large kennel there can be a few Bear’s, Chief’s, King’s etc. Giving each their own service number keeps them separate. Rex K044 was an older dog that had broken in more than his share of new handlers, he knew I was young and dumb so he forgave me my mistakes.

In early 1967, the Air Force sent me off to Dog Handlers School at Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas. There I was paired up with another Rex, only he was Rex 688E. I had six months with Rex K044 behind me, so even though Rex 688E was an untrained dog, we evened each other out.

In April 1967, I returned to Oxnard AFB with Rex 688E and we worked together for the next 7 months till around the end of November orders came in for me. I was going overseas, to Da Nang, Vietnam where although I didn’t know it yet, I was going to be paired with the dog that I would end up remembering all the rest of my life.

Blackie 129X was whelped in February 1962, in Leominster, Massachusetts. The Air Force acquired him on June 30, 1963 for \$180. He weighed 95 pounds then. He was sent to the Sentry Dog Training Facility at Lackland AFB and received his first handler and trainer, Al Watts. He was lucky in that respect, Al Watts was one of those people who could train dogs to do anything, and he put all his knowledge into making Blackie the best sentry dog he would become to be. Al and Blackie later were then assigned to a very unique group called Operation TopDog45.

In 1965 the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Regular Army units were infiltrating bases all over South Vietnam and causing havoc in their wake. Someone at the Pentagon, (probably an NCO because officers didn't identify with ground units) came up with the idea of sending Sentry Dogs over there to combat this, and TopDog45 was initiated. Al Watts and Blackie 129X were part of the first Military Working Dog Teams to go into Vietnam; and wherever a group of teams went, they made a statement! That statement was so impactful, that today it is said that wherever there was a base patrolled by Sentry Dogs, there was no longer a successful infiltration attempt performed. The VC and NVA didn't stop trying to infiltrate, they just were no longer successful as they were before. Because now, the major Air Bases in South Vietnam were guarded, by Sentry Dog teams. And Blackie and Al were one of those.



The first group of TopDog45 handlers went over to Vietnam mostly on a TDY (Temporary Duty) assignment of 120 days. They were then given the option of staying or rotating back to the base they were assigned to prior, and several TopDog45 handlers opted for a full one-year tour and stayed with their dogs. The person who was the Assistant Kennel Master opted to rotate back to their prior stateside base, and Al Watts being the next senior person there, was then to assume the duty of the Assistant Kennel Master. That meant he had to find someone to handle Blackie 129X.

So, while walking around the APO Al spotted this skinny kid coming back from the chow hall, and seeing as he was an Air Policeman, Al yelled across the street at him and asked, "Hey, you like dogs". Don Poss said the first thing that came to mind, "Sure I like dogs, who don't?" Don Poss didn't know it then, but he just volunteered to be Blackie's Dog Handler with that statement., and Blackie's six-years tour in Vietnam began.