

# VIETNAM

## ĐÀ NẰNG AIR BASE

### AIR FORCE SENTRY DOGS

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366th SPS, Sentry Dog Section  
Đà Nẵng Air Base, Republic of Vietnam  
November 1968 to January 1970

#### Đà Nẵng Air Base - 1969

*In early 1969, the Air Force Sentry Dog Section at Đà Nẵng Air Base* consisted of approximately 45 sentry dog teams, one kennel attendant, and the kennel master. The kennel master, SSgt Carl Wolfe, whom later taught at the Dog School at Lackland AFB, Texas in the mid-70's. The dog teams worked on the base perimeter between defensive M60 machine gun positions and the actual perimeter fence.



The machine gun bunkers were at the rear corners of our posts. We only had one post located on the Air Force side of the base and 37 posts alongside three Marine companies from the 3rd MP Battalion.

We also had two posts located in the base Bomb Dump (photo below), located near an ARVN camp and the Marine ammo dump. One thing's for certain; it got very dark there! From time to time, special posts were developed as needed, such as the temporary post located in the interior of the Napalm dump. This was not a popular place to be during a rocket attack.



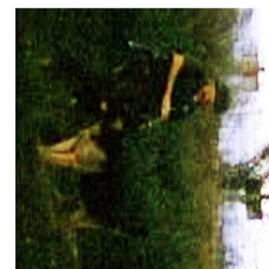
The dogs were the seasoned veterans and deserved all of the credit. Handlers came, spent a year and rotated home. Most of the dogs however stayed forever. Only a few were allowed to rotate to other bases outside of Vietnam. But while they were alive, they received better care than most GIs. Unfortunately, they were put to sleep when they were unable to work anymore.



Most dogs were males. But every kennel usually had a least one female dog. We had one named **Cinder**. Cinder was the most lovable dog in the section, not a mean or aggressive bone in her body. **Jerry Cox**, who rotated to Đà Nẵng after a tour at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, handled Cinder. Cinder did not bite very well but could she alert! As Jerry often said, if someone farted on the perimeter he knew it.

The biggest dog was **Lance**, always weighing over 100 pounds. Any dog that weighed over 100 lbs. in Southeast Asia, was the size of a small horse. Everything about Lance was big, including feet, head, body, and especially teeth. Lance's neck was so big that a regular choke chain wouldn't fit over his head. His choke chain was improvised from the "old" kennel chains that had a choke chain in one end. Lance was prone to turn on his handler, but he would let anyone take him out of the kennels, because he loved to play catch. You just didn't give him any commands. Lance and his handler had been in the one of the bomb dumps when it had been blown up. They crawled out using the ditches.

The most mean spirited dog in the section had to be **Blackie**. Blackie was big, not huge like Lance, but tall and lanky. I handled Blackie, briefly, but as I only outweighed him by about 30 pounds, it didn't work out. I weighed 120 pounds and was nicknamed "Twig" by the handlers (no, they didn't kick sand in my face!). Five VSPA members handled Blackie from 1965 to 1970! Blackie would take his chow pan to the back of his kennels and dare you to come in and get it. The number of chow pans, stored in Blackie's kennel, reflected the number of days that his handler had been gone. Blackie had been taught to carry a helmet in his mouth for his handler. His neck muscles had developed to where he could pick up a full water bucket and sling it across his kennel. The bucket had to be clipped to a fence. He would "empty" his bucket, and then try to bite you for turning it over and refilling it. Blackie did bite at least one of his own handlers.



In 1969, Blackie was handled by **Clarence Dedecker III**. Dedecker had the right size and disposition for Blackie and solved a problem we had been having with our vet. The veterinarian was prone to "antagonize" any dog brought in for exams. The handlers had discussed the issue, but were undecided as to what action to take. Dedecker solved the problem for during one of Blackie's vet appointments. Dedecker put a muzzle on Blackie and entered the clinic. The vet teased the

dog; Dedecker dropped the leash and off 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.

The most aggressive dog on post was **Baron**. He was just average sized dog. But his goal in life was to bite anyone within 10 miles of his handler. Baron would even try to nail another handler for talking to his handler on post. He would be quiet, then without any warning hit the end of his leash like a rocket. His handler could never relax and talk with anyone. I don't remember his name; never BS'd with him on post. He would even ignore Cinder, just give Jerry Cox the evil eye, until he thought he could sneak in a quick bite.

We had some *character* dogs also. One dog named **Shep** (referred to as *Crazy Shep*) actually enjoyed puncturing jeep tires with his teeth. Another dog named **Sugar** started the anti-smoking trend decades before it became popular. If you blew smoke into the air, Sugar would jump into the air and snap at it. The dog least likely to be mistaken for a German Shepherd was a big hound dog named **Marblehead**. He looked and sounded like a Blue Tick hound, but he had a hell of a nose and was fairly aggressive. If Cinder could hear a fart anywhere on the perimeter, Marblehead could smell one anywhere in Vietnam.

Newcomers to the three Marine companies, Alpha, Bravo and Charlie, were always surprised to find Air Force dog teams



patrolling with them at night on the perimeter. All of the handlers preferred to work the Marine perimeter rather than Air Force posts. Alpha CO lines ran from the main Air Force cantonment area to a gate located on the south side of the base. The road out of this gate ran past a silk factory, leading to one of the bridges over the river. I think the road ran in the direction of **Happy Valley** (A popular launching point for VC rockets). Alpha CO's CO was a **Captain Swartz**. He checked posts almost every night, and usually stopped to talk to each handler. We regarded him as having brass ones because of the way he ignored dogs agitating on him. He would walk up so close that it took a determined effort to prevent a dog from biting him.

I believe that Bravo CO had two platoons, one on each side of the bridge over the river. One of platoons was overrun and had to withdraw back across the river. They retook the bridge but suffered casualties. On Đà Nẵng, Bravo CO

lines were short with only two platoons on the perimeter. The aforementioned silk factory was located at the gate, off base next to the perimeter fence. Past the gate, Bravo CO lines were on the perimeter fence with the on base bomb dump behind them. We only had a few posts there. They were between the perimeter fence and an inner chain link fence, with a road used only in the daytime and a high dirt revetment separating the perimeter from the bomb dump. The on base bomb dumps were as far away from the flight line and cantonment areas as possible, yet still within the base perimeter.

Charlie CO lines were the longest. They stretched from the POL tank farm on the northwest Marine side of the base, around a large swamp that was north of the ends of the two parallel runways, to the POL tank farm located on the northeast Air Force side. In the area where the swamp ran off base, the fence consisted of some concertina and a few strands of barbed wire. Charlie CO controlled two vehicle gates to the base.

Our posts, beginning with Kilo-1, were between bunkers manned by 1st Platoon, Charlie CO, with the last post on Charlie CO lines being Kilo-14. Kilo-15 was on the Air Force side. Kilo-16 started the Alpha CO lines.

The area of the silk factory was the scene of sapper and sniper activity in the Tet of 1968 and 1969. Some of us had to low crawl from our posts during those attacks. In the Feb 23, 1969's attack, VC moved into the silk factory, located near the base perimeter. Alpha CO attempted to take the factory, but met with heavy resistance, with one Marine killed. The VC were hiding in large drainage pipes under the floor. The Marines contacted the 366th SPS and asked for dog teams to go into the drains. By this time most of us were in the rack attempting to sleep despite the noise, small arms fire, F-4's taking off and explosions. The first two handlers found in the hut area agreed to go. When the dog teams entered the drainage pipes, the VC immediately fled into the factory. Alpha CO then took the factory with no more friendly casualties. I think that one of the handlers was **Gary Beck**, handling **Sparky**. Gary and I shared a cube together in the *party hut*. Before he rotated he had to take Sparky to **Long Bien** to be put to sleep. In those days, handlers had to take their own dog's to all vet appointments, no excuses. I was glad that none of my dogs I had handled was put sleep while I was there.



The Freedom Bird due to land that morning, circled the Air Base for several hours before landing. When it finally did land, fires were still burning from the attack. That flight also brought in about seven new handlers from a *pipeline* USAF sentry dog class. Three of those handlers were **Bill Grife**, **Gill Perry** and **Pete Koenig**. They later described how it felt circling the base, looking down at the smoky fires. Talk about a *welcome wagon*!

The Air Force Đà Nẵng kennels, known earlier as the **Growl Pad**, had been located near the Air Force area on base, then known as Tent City. USAF military police were then called "Air Police Squadrons", but were later redesignated as "Security Police Squadrons."



In the below photo, a large blue water tank can be seen atop the K-9 Admin. office of 1966. The tree line was bulldozed back 500 yards for a clear fire zone.



By my late 1968 arrival in country, the kennels had been moved to the side of the base near the terminal and the main compound housing base headquarters. The old kennels were located just off of the main perimeter road that circled the base, behind a SAC detachment and had a POL tank farm located on the north side. Charlie CO's last bunker was near the rear of the kennels. The kennel was located behind a SAC detachment.

The new kennels had a steel roof over the cinder block and chain link dog kennels. An air-conditioned kennel support building housed the office, supply room, kitchen, and the veterinarian's office.

Security Police lived in a compound between the base headquarters compound and the main AF compound. Originally, the Squadron lived in tents, but we lived in old barracks that had been built by the French. We went out on patrol at night and worked along side Marines, but came back in the morning to the infamous luxuries of the Air Force side of the base.

Handlers lived in one of two huts. One hut was for the party crowd, the other for the more sedate handlers. The party-hut had a "get together" every morning. A few drinks (the definition of a few drinks varied for some of the guys!) and we would hit the rack and attempt to sleep until the heat of the day and aircraft noise woke us up. We would go have our evening meal in the chow hall, then started getting ready for posting.

Our weapons were kept in our wall lockers, at least until a SP shot up the NCO hut. The gunplay took place in the hut, next door to the K-9 partying hut. An armory was quickly (late 1969) built thereafter, and we had to turn in all our weapons and check them in and out.

By late 1969, most airmen lived in open bay barracks. Most barracks were divided up into cubes consisting of a pair of bunk beds facing two metal wall lockers. Industrious individuals attempted to scrounge or make furniture to fit into the space between the lockers. Plywood, impossible to find and seldom seen in the barracks, was the exception, of course, in the K-9 barracks. One of our dog posts was between the perimeter fence and a supply yard that contained lumber. So needless to say, our huts were finished a little nicer in our quarters from recovered stuff dropped by those *thieving Viet Cong*. We had walls between cubes and wood flooring over the concrete slab. The floors raised us above the "high tide" caused by monsoon flooding.

A new base commander decided that all the barracks should revert back to the open bay type and ordered the "cubes" removed. Of course, the Security Police Squadron Commander was the first to jump on it. All the other units dragged their feet. Our Commander directed all cubes removed within a week! Every hut started tearing down the cubes a little bit every day. Except the K-9 Party Hut... we had a few drinks every morning and watched everyone else tear down their cubes. Everyone had worked so hard to have a little piece of the world in the form of a cube. When the last morning arrived, we held probably the most destructive K-9 party ever. Well, they did order us to tear down the cubes.

You know what happens when you tell a dog handler to destroy something. Non-dog handlers walking past the doors paused to watch the festivities. Soon lumber, beer cans, and liquor bottles were being ejected out the door in a contest. Our version of "mine is bigger" was changed to "I can throw my cube farther than you can throw yours." Complaints were made to the proper authorities, in reference to irreverent comments and actions being observed. Law Enforcement (Security Police) responded but only peeked in through the open doors.

One handler (unnamed to protect the guilty) sang loudly as he sat atop the revetment surrounding the hut. He taunted non-canine-types by betting them \$20 they couldn't make it unscathed through the hut and out the other end! No one took him up on the bet. The irreverent crooner was also the obvious source of rude comments to officers passing near his revetment post. The First Sergeant, who happened to have bright red hair and no sense of humor, responded to restore order. This handler sang him a little ditty at maximum volume in a slurred voice that was not well received by the First Sergeant. Its more polite lyrics (this is a family page) consisted of, "I'd rather be dead... than red in the head... like the dick on a dog... woof, woof." I was told the performance was rather well received by everyone else. However, the First Sergeant's new goal in life became fetching this handler from his perch and making his life permanently miserable--everyone else's noise complaints were totally forgotten! I don't remember too much of what occurred at the end of the party (don't read too much into that), except the song became a new standard (at least out of the First Sergeant's hearing).

When the hung over dog handlers started waking up in the late afternoon, the kennel master, **SSgt Frederick Doctor**, met us. He was moving into the hut as ordered by a certain individual whose hair matched his anger at the rude and disrespectful dog handlers, who were in need of close supervision.

The kennel master was not pleased to leave the comforts of the NCO hut and being forced to live with us. We were severely chastised for his embarrassment caused by our actions. Our response was to have a welcome party the next morning for him when we returned from post. Alcoholic beverages were not banned from the barracks area. I guess that the powers-to-be preferred our parties held in the compound instead of the Airmen's Club. Oh, by the way, the Base Commander canceled his order to tear down the cubes.

Life continued, and K-9 teams going on post were dropped off alongside the main road and they walked to the perimeter. We then walked parallel to the perimeter until reaching our assigned posts. Đà Nẵng originally had only one runway in 1965-1966, the second parallel strip was built in 67-68.



As we walked past bunkers manned by Marines, we were always asked if our dog knew any tricks. Handlers quickly learned that showing off a few dog tricks would guarantee cordial relations (coffee) with the Marines manning the bunkers. They would give up a sandwich or two from the "midnight rations" delivered to the Marines on the perimeter. The sandwich was a welcome break from the C-Rations that we were given. The sandwich was always split with the most important member of the sentry dog team, the dog, which always pleased the marines.



Đà Nẵng was nicknamed "Rocket City" (to see why, check out Rocket City images and info on Đà Nẵng AB) due to the large number of attacks by 122mm and 140mm rockets. Most of the sentry dogs displayed a specific behavior pattern or alert whenever there were incoming rockets or mortars. These few seconds warning was greatly appreciated! We realized the dog's superior senses were picking up on something, but there was still an aura of mystique about this. I now realize that it was just a case of pure Pavlov conditioning. The dog would hear a rocket either going overhead or on a side of our location, and anticipate the excitement (handlers become a little hyper when rockets are exploding about) that always accompanied rockets. One dog Sugar, would jump up and snap at the air! My dog, Kobuc, would start pulling to the closest K-9 Fighting Bunker (always knew he

was the smartest dog around!). I only had to crawl; he would navigate.

In mid-1969, the off base munitions dumps exploded and burned for hours early one morning after we had just come in from post. The Marine kennels, located near the munitions dumps, had to be evacuated. Their dogs were brought to our kennels, staked out to the fence, with shipping crates used as doghouses. I remember that one of the Marine handlers had his leg in a full cast. After a few days, they were moved to the Navy sentry dog kennels at China Beach.

A short time later a Marine K-9 party was held at the Navy kennels for all of the Air Force Đà Nẵng handlers. I don't remember too much about the party (don't read too much into that, either!); however, I do recall seeing the beach from the kennels. I caught the K-9 posting truck in to the Air Base, but several AF handlers stayed and joined a party of Marine and Navy handlers at a nearby Army Club. Some soldiers decided to pick on the few Marines. They soon found out that all the dog handlers were more than willing to back each other.

A few of the lucky handlers were off that night. **Tom Suddeth** woke up the next morning and found himself at a Marine site. The only problem was that it was at **Marble Mountain**. He made it back to the base in time for Guardmount and work that night, thanks to friendly Marines.

By late 1969, the section had developed into a very exclusive, tight group. Handlers were expected to stand together on anything against anyone. It was very much a case of us against everyone else. The only exception was the Marines. They treated us better on post than our fellow Air Force Security Police did, and we responded accordingly.

No one liked to work the only post on the Air Force perimeter side of the base (Kilo15). We went through a gate located near a machine gun tower. The SP at the tower would then padlock the gate behind us. The post was between an inner chain link fence and a triple row of concertina. Behind the concertina was a row of Claymore mines, controlled by the machine gun tower. A sandbag was located behind each mine to reduce the back blast. The only other feature on the post was a K-9 bunker. We had been told that if all the Claymores were fired, the only chance we had to survive was to be in our little K-9 bunker. If you wanted to sit down and enjoy your C-Rations, you could either sit atop the bunker or sit on a sandbag and have a close up look at its companion Claymore.

It was rumored that after one rocket attack, the firing panel for the Claymores was found unlocked. The handlers were not at all pleased with that. As I said earlier, the new Marines were always surprised to find AF Dog Handlers in front of their bunkers at night. Charlie CO had more of the Marine perimeter (distance) than Alpha or Bravo Companies; thus, we had plenty of friends with Charlie CO. The Marines had ambush teams off base every night.

Our days off rotated by the number of posts and the number of handlers. There were 38 normal posts and 40 dog teams available, so two handlers were off every night. When we were off, we made a night of the movie theater and club, but we would usually end up at the kennel with our dogs. Or, we would go out with the Marine squad to an ambush site. This was always done without the knowledge or approval of the squadron. We would either catch a ride with the posting truck or the Marines would send the CO jeep to the kennels to pick us up. When the squad returned to base the next morning, we would catch the K-9 relief truck.



We were the only Air Force personnel, who drove out Charlie CO Gates without being questioned, if the right Marines were on duty. On more than one occasion, the kennel's deuce and a half (2 1/2 ton truck) made runs to certain establishments located off base. During one of the runs, an argument ensued over *prices and services* to be rendered. The handlers involved solved the argument by driving the truck through the vacated hut in protest. The hut was constructed of bamboo with a thatched roof. There was damage to the truck from an unforeseen encounter with the electric pole located behind the hut. The front bumper and the left fender had to be replaced. But no fear; for a few cases of beer the Marine motor pool repaired the damage and no one was the wiser. Of course the paint didn't match, but who cared. The handlers involved will remain anonymous.

We sometimes would have to man special posts when the squadron wanted to provide extra detection capability. All of the handlers disliked one special post in particular. It was a swamp, located between the Army Mortuary and Charlie CO Lines. SP machine gun towers equipped with starlight scopes would sometime spot movement in the swamp. Thus, it would usually result in a dog handler being posted there for a few nights. The dog team would be dropped off at the mortuary. You had to walk past the double

screen doors at the end to get to the post. You would say to yourself, "I will not look in, I will not look in;" but it was as though someone reached down, grabbed your head, twisting it to force you to look at the body bags containing all those KIAs. Then, you walked past the pallets of caskets and drums of embalming fluids. When a flare was up, you could read the label painted on the drums. After that you were in a great frame of mind, for the remainder of the night. The post even had a small Buddhist temple located within its boundaries. We would refer to this post as hunting for the "Phantom."

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 sheets of plywood. This 8'x 8' roof hung over 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. The golden rule for a handler is: "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.



The next morning the kennel attendant made his usual once a week rounds 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 neurotoxic and signs of paralysis may appear within minutes or be delayed for hours. That afternoon, 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. Kobuc really enjoyed the rare steak I bought him!

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. We had received heavier than normal rainfall and the low lying areas on base had flooded. The Vet decided that his dogs were not going to be on flooded posts. So, the dogs stayed in the nice dry kennels and we went out on post without them. I was on Charlie CO lines. The swamp

behind the bunker line had turned into Lake Đà Nẵng. It was not hard to imagine the snakes swimming around hunting for a dry place. And there you were sitting on top of a prominent island. Without the more intelligent team member to talk to it was a long, lonely night on post. It was miracle we found our way to the relief trucks in the morning. The next night the water level had dropped, so we were okay. Oh, yes, the snake-infested bunker had been on Charlie CO lines also.



*[Photo, Krait Snake: This 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 under reported, since most occur at night and unattended.]*

In mid to late 1969, we had two other Kennel Masters, each for a short duration. One was **SSgt Doctor**; the other was **TSgt Faust**, who wasn't a dog handler. Both went home for emergency reasons. By 1969, many Air Force K-9 handlers were on their second 'Nam tour. The Air Force had more dogs in Vietnam than elsewhere, so it was a revolving assignment for handlers with a four-year enlistment. Handlers would pull a 'Nam tour, go back to the world, and several months later have orders for 'Nam again. **Sydney Hillard**, **Comer**, and several others had been in 'Nam at other bases. Many handlers came to 'Nam from other overseas bases. **Cox** PCS'd from Okinawa, and **Bill Humpla** from the Philippines.

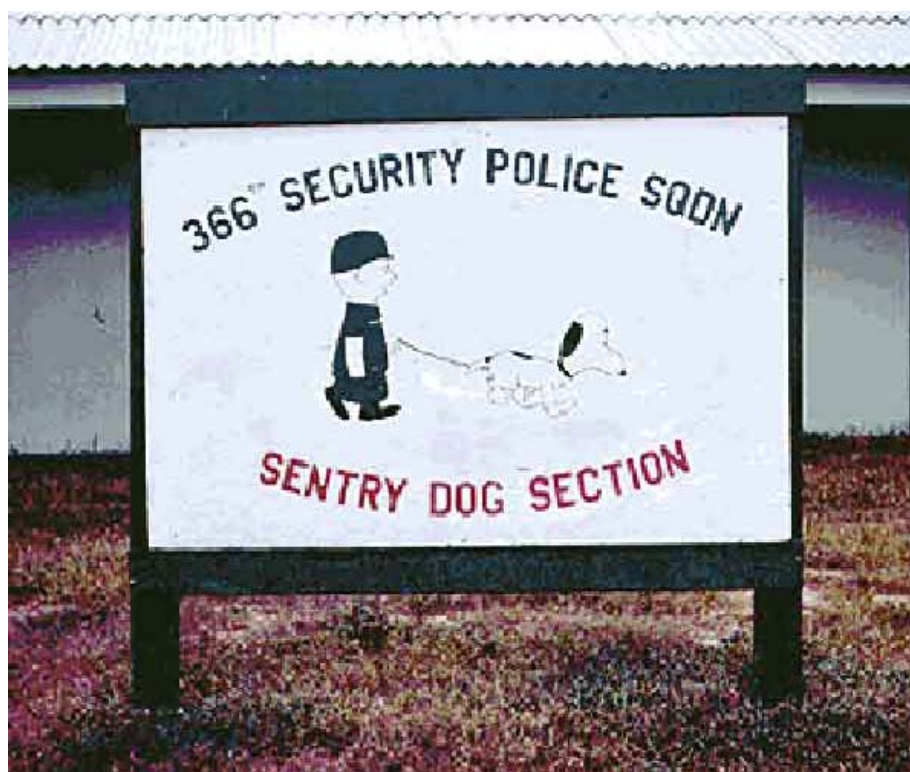
The size of the Sentry Dog Section at Đà Nẵng Air Base varied depending on the number of posts manned. In January 1970, the section was reduced while I was on my 30-day "free" leave for extending. Upon my return, I discovered that nine other handlers and I were transferred to **Phù Cát Air Base**. All excess dogs were shipped to other units. **Blackie** went to **Tân Sơn Nhứt Air Base**. My dog **Kobuc** was shipped to **Phù Cát Air Base**.

It is my understanding that the Đà Nẵng K-9 section was increased in size again sometime in 1970. Thanks to the [Vietnam Dog Handler Association](#), I have been able to contact another handler who worked Kobuc after I did: **Steve Jannick**. Steve and I have shared pictures and fond memories of "our dog Kobuc," whom we both loved. Kobuc in turn had given each of us his love, too.

There aren't anymore Vietnam dog handlers on active duty. I wish that other handlers would combine their personal experiences in their sections or units so that a history of the military dog program could be recorded or perhaps compiled. War Dogs should be remembered for the unselfish sacrifices they made and the lives they saved.

I didn't arrive in Vietnam as a dog handler. Two months into my tour, I answered a call for volunteers for the dog section. **Tom Suddeth**, **Bob Laruritsen**, **Dennis Alexander** and I were trained OJT by the Kennel master, **SSgt Carl Wolfe**. We learned that the squadron wanted all dogs on post in time for the 1969 Tet. We had one week of training with one scouting problem before we went on post. We were the rookies and the seasoned dogs were the pros. My first night on post, handlers from both sides came down to check on me and give advice. The first and last thing I was told, "Trust your Dog!" The handlers had welcomed us into the brotherhood.

I made the military a career and retired in 1987. I had a tour of duty at two of the three Air Force Dog Schools that were in existence. I have handled and/or taught Sentry, Patrol, Drug Detector, and Explosive Detector Dogs. I always considered myself a dog handler first and last. When I go to sleep at night, I still sometimes dream of a beautiful silver-black Shepherd and of posts in a far away land.



### **The K-9 Posts**

By late '69, the section had developed into a very exclusive, tight group. Handlers were expected to stand together on anything against anyone. It was very much a case of us against everyone else. The only exception was the Marines. They treated us better on post than our fellow Air Force Security Police did, and we responded accordingly. Newcomers to the three Marine companies, Alpha, Bravo and Charlie (3rd Military Police Battalion), were always surprised to find Air Force dog teams patrolling in front of them with them. All of the handlers preferred to work the Marine perimeter rather than the one post on the Air Force perimeter.

Alpha company lines ran from the main Air Force cantonment area to a gate located on the south side of the base. Kilo-16 was the first post on the Alpha Company lines. The road out of this gate ran past a silk factory, leading to one of the bridges over the river. The road ran in the direction of Happy Valley (a popular launching point for VC rockets). Alpha Company's CO was a Captain Swartz. He checked posts almost every night and usually stopped to talk to each handler. We regarded him as having brass ones because of the way he ignored dogs agitating on him. He would walk up so close that it took a determined effort to prevent a dog from biting him.

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We had been told that if all the Claymores were fired, the only chance we had to survive was to be in our little K-9 bunker. If you wanted to sit down and enjoy your C-rations, you could either sit atop the bunker or sit on a sandbag and have a really close up look at a Claymore. The mines were detonated electrically from a panel located in a machine gun tower. It was rumored that after one rocket attack, the firing panel for the Claymores was found unlocked. We were not at all pleased with that. If you told a Marine bunker that you had an alert, the Marines would, without any hesitation, back you up. On K-15, we envisioned the firing panel being unlocked.

### Our Marine Friends

K-9 teams going on post were dropped off alongside the main road and they walked to the perimeter. Vehicles on the perimeter risked sniper fire. We then walked parallel to the perimeter until reaching our assigned posts. As we walked past bunkers manned by Marines, we were always asked if our dog knew any tricks. Handlers quickly learned that showing off a few dog tricks would guarantee cordial relations (coffee) with the Marines manning the bunkers. They would give up a sandwich or two from the "midnight rations" delivered to the Marines on the perimeter. The sandwich was a welcome break from the C-Rations that we were given. The sandwich was always split with the most important member of the sentry dog team, the dog, which always pleased the marines.

In mid-1969, the off base munitions dumps exploded and burned for hours early one morning after we had just come in from post. The Marine Scout Dog kennels, located near a off-base munitions dump, had to be evacuated. Their dogs were brought to our kennels, staked out to the fence, with shipping crates used as doghouses. I remember that one of the Marine handlers had his leg in a full cast. After a few days, they were moved to the Navy sentry dog kennels at China Beach.

A short time later a K-9 party was held at the Navy kennels for all the Dog Handlers in I Corp. I don't remember too much about the party (don't read too much into that, either!); however, I do recall seeing sand and palm trees. I caught the K-9 posting truck back to the Air Base in the early afternoon, but several AF handlers stayed and joined a party of Marine and Navy handlers at a nearby Army Club. Some soldiers decided to pick on the Marines, since they were outnumbered. They soon found out that all the dog handlers were more than willing to back each other.

A few of the lucky handlers were off that night. Tom Suddeth woke up the next morning and found himself at a Marine site. The only problem was that it was at Marble Mountain. He made it back to the base in time for guardmount only because of friendly Marines.

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