

Đà Nẵng Air Base

366th SPS K-9

Blackie X129

K-9 Patrol along Marine Perimeter, 1968

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In 1968, USAF K-9 often patrolled the base perimeter along the US Marine bunkers. Mutual admiration was shared, and over time the K-9 handlers felt more at home with the Marines than our fellow non-K-9 Airmen. That's just the way it was. What follows are four nights of patrol covering USMC perimeter bunkers for Bravo and Charlie Companies. Camaraderie developed and jarheads and fly-boys played jokes on each other. Marines sometimes won...Air Force sometimes won...but neither doubted that Blackie always turned out to be the winner!

Charlie CO: We Own a Bunker!

I'm bored, tired, sweaty, and hungry. About six months have gone by and I know the next six are going to drag like the first six did, and probably worse if that could happen. Blackie is walking along ahead of me carrying my helmet as usual when we turn the corner and are heading southwards on the final leg back to the new kennels.

This morning we are walking back to the kennels from Charlie CO on the North side of the line and as we pass by a Marine bunker on our right, we hear a challenge.

"HALT-- Who goes there?"

Now Blackie and I are thinking that either the Captain or Lieutenant is out checking the lines or we have a newbie here. I answer back, "K-9, Blackie!"

"Blackie! That SOB is afraid of his own shadow, eats his own crap, and you're wearing a bucket of dog slobber, Dunlap!"

Blackie on hearing his name called pauses and looks up at the shadows in the bunker above us, which by now is in full-swing at yelling insults down at us Fly-Boys. Also by now, his companion joins bad mouth number one and we are getting the brunt of two bad-mouthed Marines yelling down at us. I'm standing there just listening to what is going on when I notice that this is the Rolls Royce of Marine Bunkers. Mostly, all bunkers have a ladder going up to the top level; this one is equipped with "*stairs*." *Stairs that can be easily negotiated by a person, or a dog.*

I tell Blackie to put down the helmet and after he does it, I tell the Marines that they have hurt my dog's feelings and that they have to offer apologies to him. In fact, they have to do it personally and to help them accomplish that; he and I are coming up to see that it gets done properly. With that I charge up the stairs with Blackie following me. I do catch a glimpse of two wide-eyed individuals as they are diving headfirst out of the front of the bunker towards the ground ahead of our arrival upstairs.

When we reach the top and go inside, there is no one there to greet us. However in their haste to get out, they have left us with everything! Guns, helmets, one pair of boots, half a sandwich from mid-rats (Blackie says *grace* and it's gone), and we now own the bunker! But now there are two pissed off Marines on the ground in front of us. Pissed off and a little scared.

Blackie and I take up a position at the front looking out at them and listen to them for a moment telling us how they are going to catch hell if the Captain or the Lieutenant comes by and catches them outside like they are and with us in their bunker. I let them know they are free to come back up, I don't harbor any grudges, but that Blackie has taken it personal that they don't seem to like him and that they spoke unkindly towards him. Now they are starting to feel really foolish. Here they are on the ground, unarmed, looking up at us in their bunker, one with no boots on, telling

Blackie that they didn't mean it when they said he was dumb, ugly, chicken, just so they can get back up inside.

I make a big deal about letting them know that he has accepted their apology and that we are now coming back down so they can go back up. Also, I figure that we had better put some ground between them and us when one discovers that half of his sandwich is gone. They back off and Blackie and I climb down the stairs, pick up the helmet and off we go, at a little faster pace now. After a minute or so I hear some noise in the background but we are further down the road now and out of sight for the moment.

But, for a brief moment in time there, we owned a bunker!!

Bravo CO: A Sound in the Darkness

"ALERT" Blackie's ears popped up! That was an alert, sound or sight I'm not sure, but one thing I am sure about is that it was not a scent alert.

ANOTHER ONE! Sound, definitely. Ears straight up and focused, nose and eyes going back and forth searching but ears staying fixed out in front no matter where the head turns. Don't know what's causing it but it's got to be a long way off from the way Blackie is acting. Crap, now what? If I call in that my dog is alerting on something then the damn radio will take half the night to shut up.

Blackie and I had been posted to Bravo CO on the South side of Đà Nẵng that night. At least I was thankful that we were not between the fences like we usually are when we get Bravo CO, but our post has the Bravo CQ on it, so very little joking with the Marines tonight. We had been out for just a little while, just long enough for boredom to start setting in (normally takes between 20 seconds and a few hours), and here is Blackie throwing sound alerts.

Word at guardmount was that there was some extra activity noticed around the area so we were supposed to keep alert more than usual. Well at least one of us was doing just that. ANOTHER ALERT! Damn Blackie--what's up--what are you hearing?

I decide to get up and wander over to the local Marine bunker and ask if they have anything out in the area in front of us tonight. They asked why and I tell them that my dog is hearing something making noise out there and was wondering if they knew what it might be. It's early in the evening so both of them in the bunker are still awake and I hear one on the land line getting back to the CQ and talking to someone about me reporting my dog alerting on some sounds coming from out in front of us. He calls down to me that the Captain is coming out and wants to talk to me. Oh great, I'm thinking; now I hope I didn't put my foot in my mouth. Next time I'll just place my hands over Blackie's ears, I'm thinking.

Shortly three guys show up out of the darkness behind us (Blackie spotted them way off so they were no surprise to me) and one approaches and stops ten or so feet away. There is enough light for me to make out the Captain's bars on his collar and the way he's carrying himself sure distinguishes him from the normal grunt Marine. Plus the way that the other two are deferring to him leaves me with no doubt as to whom he is. "What's going on K-9?" I hear.

"Sir," I reply, "my dog is hearing some noise out there ahead of our position and from the way he's acting, I'd say it's more than a little ways off and I was asking the guys in the bunker if you had anyone out in the bush in front of us poking around tonight."

"We have a LP (listening post) out about 1/2 to 1 Klicks or so from us," he says, "but they're not supposed to be making any noise out there. That dog of yours able to hear that far out??" he asks.

"Well sir," I reply, "he's hearing something out that way." And I gesture toward the area Blackie has been alerting on.

He then turns to one of the people that walked up with him and tells him to get the LP on the radio for him. A short dialog ensues while the LP is contacted. He takes the radio and after talking to them for a little he glances up and says that one of the guys was playing with his Zippo lighter a little bit ago but stopped doing it when he was told to. He again questions if my dog could have possibly been hearing that, could he?

"Tell you what," I reply, "ask him to count to ten and do it again. And watch the reaction of my dog when he does."

I have a lot riding on you now Blackie I'm thinking, don't fail me now.

He relays this to whomever he's talking to on the radio and we all start to count down mentally while we observe Blackie: 4, 3, 2, 1, pause and ALERT!!! Head snaps around, ears go up, hair bristles and a low growl from deep down in his chest. Perfect textbook alert! One would have to be blind to miss it. I look over at the Captain who after recovering from his shock, is now in full officer fury chewing out some poor Marine about if my dog can hear him screwing up all the way back here, Charlie only has to be in the same country to do the same!

Sensing that it's a good time to exit stage left I mumble something about getting back to work now that's been settled and start to move off. The Captain stops chewing out whoever he is on the radio with to tell me a "Good Job K-9!" and goes back to making someone's life miserable. One thing for sure, next time anyone on K-9 says his dog is alerting, this CO of Marines is going to be paying real close attention.

Charlie CO: It's Wake Up Time!

Tonight it's a walkout post in Charlie CO. We're at the new kennels on the North side, so we now walk out for the first five or six posts there. We exchange good hearted banter with the Marines in the bunkers on the way out, paying attention to the one's we knew a little better. They were all well-pass wanting to pet Blackie. One yells down at me to wake him up at 1 a.m. when it's time for him to assume watch. I say sure, no problem and wonder off, starting my post for the evening. Like I have nothing better to do but be the wake up service for the Jarheads. Sure you just go ahead and sleep while I stay awake all night here. Not that we were innocent of copping a couple of Z's here and there, but at least we did so discretely. Now how can we make something out of this?

12:45 a.m. rolls around and we wonder back down to the bunker who requested a "wake up call." But an idea is brewing in my head now. I reach the bunker and call up asking if they still need Blackie and me to wake up the relief. I hear back that if I think I can wake him up, I'm free to come up and try: "lousy SOB sleeps like the dead," I hear back.

I strap Blackie's leather-muzzle on him and go up the stairs (Cadillac of bunkers here), and enter inside and the Marine on watch looks over at us and his eyes get real big!

"You brought that SOB in here?" he asks! Referring to Blackie!

"Relax, I've put his muzzle on, he can't hurt you." I reply. I then reach down and pick 90-pounds Blackie up and lay him down on the cot with the sleeper, draped half over him in fact.

Things were calm for a few seconds as both the Marine on watch and I are holding our breaths to see what happens next. Blackie is a little confused also in that this has never happened to him before, and he's no doubt wondering if I just; but then the "sleeper," feeling the weight of a sentry dog on him, begins to stir getting Blackie's attention.

"GET HIM!" I say and now all hell breaks loose. Blackie realizing that there is a person under the lumpy blanket he's been placed on, and the okay to eat a marine, and in fact he has been given permission to get what he can and he goes German Shepard nuts!! He attacks, or at least as best as he can with his muzzle on. He's up on his paws now and he's letting the guy on the cot know who the boss is, and who is in charge around here. He's got his nose pressed tightly up against the "sleeper" and he's doing his best to get a purchase all the while snarling and growling up a storm while delivering head swipes to the victim in the process. Blackie's leather muzzle is stretched to max and his K-9 teeth are fanged-out with *Cujo-eyes* budging in rage. A little reminder here: USAF Sentry dogs hate everyone and everything and will try to kill anyone or thing not his handler.

The guy on the cot is fully awake now, yelling and howling, and has rolled over onto his belly and has placed both arms around his head protecting the sides of his face and ears from Blackie's leather muzzle and head swipes. He's still taking a pounding though even if Blackie can't bite him--it's sure not because of lack of trying to on Blackie's part.

I let this go on for about half a minute and then pull Blackie off and we go stand in the doorway, out of range of everyone. The wide-awake marine sets up; face drenched in a canteen worth of dog slobber. "*There's your wake-up!*" I reach down and take off the muzzle asking if we need to go another round and up the odds a little? For some reason, everyone declines. *Wonder why?*

I ask the Marine who's been on watch if he needs a wakeup call and he says that he's *just fine not getting one this time*, check with him again another time.

The word spread up and down Charlie CO that all Air Force K-9 handlers are crazy and their dogs will try to mount you if you fall asleep! Time passed and occasionally whenever Blackie and I were posted near that bunker again, we would get a request for a "wake up call." Didn't happen often but when it did, we both enjoyed our special marine-wake-up treat. *And yes, I made sure sleeping beauty's weapon was not within reach (heh-heh).*

Charlie CO: Cinder is Scary!

Blackie is sick tonight. This morning I had to take Blackie in to see the vet and he got wormed. Whenever this happened, Blackie was sick to his stomach all day and night. And taking him out on post was out of the question. He probably would still be aggressive, but he would either throw up or crap on ya instead of attacking. Not very impressive. Plus he would feel like crud all night so Cinder is free and I go out with her instead.

Cinder has the disposition of a true lady. She's friendly, happy, playful, just a ball of energy to be around. She also has the best nose in the kennel, anything, and I mean anything comes within a mile of you and Cinder is onto it. She will bite when she's told to, but she hates doing it so you have to really *mean it* to get her to do bite. She just wants to play with everyone and the Marines just love having her around to play with. Cinder's only bad fault is that she is an alcoholic: with a mean barroom attitude "I can beat up everyone in the place" alcoholic. If you get her three quarters drunk, and she turns real mean on you. We would occasionally get her drunk prior to posting just to see the reaction she would make when the person who was taking her out, and expecting her to be docile, would go into her kennels to get her. Used to give her to the new guys to see if they were awake all the time. She was not

assigned to anyone and was used whenever someone needed to be on post and their dog was laid up for one reason or another.

So tonight, with Blackie sick I have Cinder, and nobody but me and her know it.

We are posted this evening at the Northwest end of the base, over by the fuel tank storage area at the start of Charlie CO's lines. It's also at the gate everyone uses to go out into Dog Patch village so there is a roadway off the main road that drives right up to it. I'm standing there talking to the Marines shortly after getting posted and the Gunny and his driver come driving up in a jeep and join us. Now no one has noticed that I am out with Cinder instead of Blackie, and I have not said anything yet either. When challenged I just replied, "K-9 – Dunlap," and let them think what they did. So when the gunny shows up, I stand at the back of his jeep joining in on the conversation.

Eventually it gets around as to who's the K-9 here tonight and when I say "Dunlap" the conversation turns to Blackie.

"Dunlap! You got that SOB out here with you tonight? And keep him away from our mid-rats!"

"You hear how they're talking about you?" I say to Cinder. "I think you should make them say they are sorry!" and I pick her up and set her down in the back of the jeep, without a muzzle, with the gunny and his driver looking at us from the front seats they are in.

They both get real wide-eyed and bail out of the jeep like a snake was tossed in on them! And when they get up off the ground they come up giving me hell!

*"You stupid college-boy- *&^%\$#-for brains, putting that ()^&\$ \$# in the jeep with us!*

Cinder on the other hand has this really hurt expression on her face. She's not used to anyone just not wanting to play with her and she's confused by all this.

"Guys, guys, guys," I say, "it's Cinder--*not* Blackie!"

"Cinder?" I hear back-- "where's Blackie?"

"He was sick tonight so I'm out with Cinder," I reply.

They all agreed that was one of the better spoofs played on them, and Cinder was happy in that everyone was playing with her and giving her all the attention now. For me *I felt a little prouder of Blackie*. Even without being there, you had to say his presence was felt.

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