

Đà Nẵng Air Base ...

Blackie, A Rainy Day

35th APS, 366th APS K-9

*by Don Poss,
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Đà Nẵng... When it rained there was no sanctuary and no respite. For 30 straight days we had not seen the sun. The rain was punishing. The wind was without pity. And together, the wind and rain were the monsoon, from which there was no mercy and no escape. Twelve hour shifts. 100% humidity and heat that caused you to sweat laying still. Sleep was fitful and restless, if it came at all. Noise, from aircraft still fighting the war without sense to come in out of the rain, was frightful. Flapping-billowing tent sides. Mamasan trying to restore boot toes and heels to black. And all the while the sun... surely there was still a sun... above the clouds, boiled the moisture from the heavens to fall upon the wicked

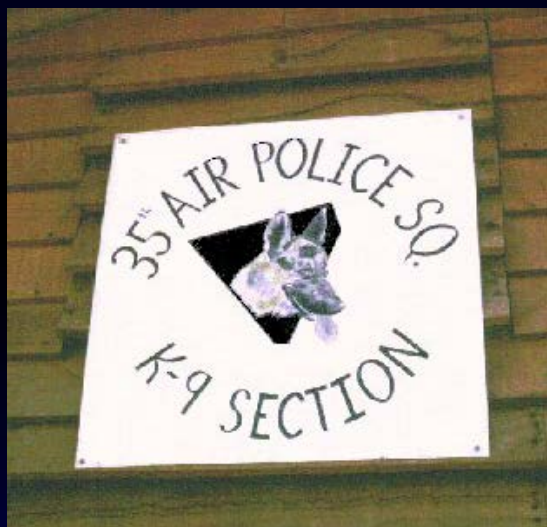
twisted forests and twisted wicked men who would kill one another.

A walk from the tent to makeshift showers to hopefully remove the clinging-slimy clay mud. Futile. Returning to the tent, a short distance, and already slimed with mud. *No one cared*. I wondered what Blackie was doing. I had put him away in the kennels, two, maybe three hours earlier. Random sounds as I tried yet again to sleep: Rain pelted the tent so hard new-guys would think it hail; laughter from a card game in the next tent on the other side of a bunker; a jeep driving by trying not to cause waves that could enter the tents. And the rain. Vietnam rain. I put on my fatigues but leave the poncho... it's a fool's errand to try and be dry.



I walk toward the kennels, catch a ride on a navy Duck loaded with bombs from the harbor. Its giant tires sling sharpnel clumps of mud like Blackie shakes the rain. Passing the Air Force K-9 Kennels they drop me off and continue on to disgourge their load of ordnance at the ammo dump.

At the Growl Pad I walk half way down the west sidewalk constructed of wooden pallets and see



Blackie's pen. His ears are straight up on full alert and he has spotted me long before I entered the compound. He too is miserable. And his mood is deadly. The new kennels has a concrete floor pad, screened front and rear and wooden side walls and roof, sheltering the dogs from the downpour. Yet Blackie, like me, is soaked. Drenched. The monsoon wind swirls the rain like the insides of a clothes-washer.

I unlock his kennel and open the caged door and enter, pulling it closed behind me. He expects a treat---*why else would I possibly be there?* I don't have a goodie, but distract him long enough to snatch a gum-ball size piece of dry food from the corner of the pen, and pretend to pull it out of my pocket. Blackie's attention is renewed and I present the prized morsel as the greatest yummy in the whole wide world. He doesn't buy it. And I can see his jaws tighten. Two can play games, he is no doubt thinking. I give him a big hug and tell him what a good boy he is and other sweet

endearments only a handler can understand. He doesn't buy that either. I take out a metal comb and groom him, seemingly raking a gallon of water from his fur. That he likes. I scratch the itch under his jaw and he lifts his head pointing a more grievous itch to my attention. I am tired. And so is Blackie.

And I set on the damp cement floor, puddled from the wind-rain, and Blackie stretches out and yawns cavernously and lays his head on my lap. I stroke his long nose and his eyes grow heavy. *Another mind-game.* He fights to stay awake, but not too hard, and those wise, playful, fearless, killer brown eyes fade shut, and his heavy massive head rests trustingly on my lap. Blackie sleeps... and so do I.

An hour passes, and I too have slept some. Nothing woke us--not F-4 Phantoms' afterburners, nor trucks, nor barking sentry dogs. Nothing. Until a torrential downpour shakes the kennels. I think that Vietnam should be under water by now. Blackie's eyes snap open, and it takes a second for him to realize he is safe and not falling asleep on duty. He stands lazily and stretches his legs forward and back and yawns wide enough to pick up a bowling ball, and circles looking for a good place to do his duty. *Time to leave.*

Back at the tent I lay on the folding cot bunk wondering if the rumor *we would soon have real beds* was true. Soon it would be time to get ready to go out again. But for now... there was only the punishing rain, an unforgiving wind, 300 days to go, and Blackie on a rainy day....

We Take Care of Our Own

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