



Blackie #129X One Dog's Story.

**By Al Watts, Don Poss,
Greg Dunlap, Monty Moore,
and Clarence Dedecker III**

Photos by Greg Dunlap

All government equipment are assigned a National Stock Number (NSN). The military considered dogs to be pieces of equipment. Each dog had a distinct four-character serial number tattooed in his/her left ear. The NSN on its records, specified the type of dog (Sentry, Patrol, Patrol Drug Detector, Patrol Explosive Detector, etc.). Dogs could be ordered from the government equipment catalog just as any spare part.

This is the story of one such piece of equipment. He was more than a stock number. He never asked for anything but a pat on the head. He was a living, breathing creature that will be remembered by everyone who came in contact with him. Blackie was exposed to firefights, sapper attacks, rocket and mortar attacks, and even a fatal plane crash at Da Nang AB involving a B-57 Canberra bomber. Four VSPA members were assigned to Blackie.

Although the story starts in the middle 60's, it was not compiled until the 90's. While searching the web, I came across a site for Vietnam dog handlers (Vietnam Dog Handlers Association), and read the bulletin board. I noticed an entry from an AF Sentry Dog Handler (Don Poss) searching for other Da Nang Air Base handlers of Blackie 129X. I had been stationed at Da Nang AB as a handler and it brought back memories of my youth. Because of the Internet and organizations such as VSPA and VDHA, these reunions are now common.

E-Mail

From: Monty Moore

To: Don Poss.

I found your bulletin board entry. I was at Da Nang AB (68-70) after you and there was only one Blackie in the kennels. I didn't really handle him but he was assigned to me for two days. Or, more correctly, I was assigned to Blackie and he handled me.

I didn't arrive in Vietnam as a dog handler. At Da Nang AB, I answered a call for dog handler volunteers. With Tiet 1969 approaching the Squadron wanted all dogs manned and on the perimeter. Thom Suddeth, Bob Laruritsen, Dennis Alexander and I volunteered. We were trained by the kennelmaster, SSgt Carl Wolfe.

The first morning I reported to the kennels, Wolfe explained how the handlers worked and then directed Suddeth to show me the unassigned dogs. They all looked alike, big, barking and not at all friendly. Several looked like Rin Tin Tin, but they didn't act like him. I accompanied him back into the office where Wolfe asked me which dog I wanted. I didn't get a chance to answer. Thom Suddeth told him that I wanted Blackie. Wolfe looked very surprised and stated, "*You want Blackie!!!!*"

Being young and dumb, I had to ensure that I didn't appear lacking a sense of adventure (to phrase it politely). So I did what any young teenage male would do, I lied through my teeth. I told him how much I liked the dog and was sure that Blackie and I would hit it off. He asked me several times if I really wanted Blackie. Each time, I replied with something positive. Wolfe finally nodded his head and told me okay if that was what I really wanted. I then went outside to look in the kennels to see what I had done to myself.

Blackie had the habit of carrying his chow bowl to the back of his kennel and then he would dare any to come in and get it. The number of bowls usually reflected the number of days that this handler had been gone. There were several chow pans in the rear of his kennel while I was attempting to get in on him. He would even pick up his water bucket when possible. He would throw it across his kennel and daring anyone to enter. To prevent this game, the water bucket

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was clipped to the fence. He was growling at me more than most of the other dogs. He was attempting to chew his way through the fence to get at me. I was not thrilled over this. I was told me to talk to him. The theory to this was to get him use to my voice. I talked to him for one whole day but he never stopped growling. He stared at me like a hungry dog looks at a steak that he can see and smell but not touch. The other guys had their dogs out, I was jealous. On the second day, another handler told me that sometime you had to just walk in on a dog for it to accept you. I tried that, the good news was that I made it out; the bad news was that for years I wore a small scar on my left cheek. And I might add, not the cheek under my eye. After this, I went to Wolfe, ashamed with my head hanging down. Before I even said anything, Wolfe asked me if I was ready for a dog that didn't need an experienced handler. So, I was assigned to Kobuc. Within an hour I had him out on leash. He was acting like a pet, except that he growled at anybody that he saw. I had wasted almost two complete days of my five day training time on Blackie. I was seriously behind the learning curve. Three days later and we were out on post.

Our training consisted of little more than "this end bites and this ends" We learned that during attack training our dog might bite us before he recognized us as his handler. What a buddy! That the dogs could see, and hear at night far better than the handler. We also learned that the dog could smell an intruder (one scouting problem before we went on post). The alert behavior can best be described as the dog puts it in 4 paw drive, and wants to drag you so he can bite the you know what out of someone. We spent more time filling sand bags than anything else for our 5 days. We completed a bunker that Wolfe said would stop a 122mm rocket.

The other handlers took us under their wings and worked with us. The dogs really trained us. I was told to watch the dog close and learn his normal behavior. Any different behavior called for us to carefully investigate. The term carefully was mentioned several times. Everyone told us the same important rules:

1. *Always stay behind the dog.*
2. *Never go anywhere that the dog doesn't want to.*
3. *Always trust the dog.*

Years went by without my ever thinking of Blackie until I read your bulletin board entry. I had fond memories of Kobuc; from time to time I still look at my photos of him. I extended at Da Nang AB because I didn't want to leave him. Plus by then (1969), many handlers were having two tours in Vietnam during a four-year enlistment. It was simple math, more dogs were used in Vietnam than anywhere else. Several of the handlers in the section had rotated home from a Vietnam tour, spent several months on a stateside base and had orders to go back. Several handlers were also shipped to Vietnam from other overseas bases. I thought that if I had to pull a second tour, it might as well be with the same dog and a familiar base.

My experiences even prompted me to make the dog program a career, spending seven years teaching at two of the dog schools. I always taught the 3 rules that I had learned years before. They are still valid to this day! Years later, Wolfe and I crossed paths again. He was a patrol dog team chief and I was assigned to his team. We were both instructors at the Military Dog Studies Branch, Security Police Academy, Lackland AFB, Texas. We laughed over Blackie. He told me he knew that Blackie needed an experienced handler but I had really convinced him that I wanted him. I should have won an Oscar! I retired from the Air Force in 1987.

Note: Don & I corresponded by E-mail and compared memories about Da Nang AB. He was there several years before me so we didn't know any of the same handlers, just some of the dogs. Don knew that Blackie had been brought in-country by Al Watts in 1965. Don Poss handled him from 1965 to 1966. Don knew that Blackie was next handled by George Hoagland (1966-1967). Don posted the e-mail that I sent him on a WEB site. Several months went by and we received a E-Mail from Greg Dunlap. Greg had seen our discussion about Blackie on the WEB site. Dunlap had Blackie (1968-1969) until just before I arrived at the kennels. Greg's first night on post with Blackie was Tiet of 1968. That had to be a real experience.

E-Mail: Dec 1998
From: Gregory Dunlap
To: Monty Moore

"Imagine my shock at seeing him (Don Poss) and you talking about the same dog, the one I had. I remember something about them letting one of the new guys try to get in on Blackie. I gave them hell over that. You could have been seriously injured! Oh well, youth is wasted on the young. Old age and treachery will overcome youth and enthusiasm every time.

It took me 2 days to get into his kennel when I arrived. He chased me out 4 times before he let me in. Tell you what, opening that door a 5th time and walking in with him sniffing up and down my legs and around my groin was an experience I have never forgotten. As it was, they had one of the daytime kennel people standing there out of sight with an M-16. The plan being that if he nailed me, they were going to shoot him before they went in to get me. I just stood there, scared, my testicles trying to climb back up inside my body, and telling him that we were going to be good friends and if he didn't bite me, I promised not to bleed all over his face. He had been locked up for about 2 or 3 weeks and he was just about stir crazy enough to let anyone take him out. We got out and just played in the yard for about 3 hours. Then I put him away, fed him; all the male bonding things except get drunk and laid. And guess what? The next time I went to get him, he chased me out again! Had to sit down and start talking to him all over again. After a few seconds I could see his face sort of say, "Oh yeah, he takes me out to play and all." Had 2 days with him and on the 3rd day we went to work--January 20, 1968. Tet, how's that for timing? We had some good times together. I have a photo on the wall of my house, a picture of him and me coming in, him carrying my helmet."

From: Monty Moore
To: Gregory Dunlap
CC: Don Poss

Well, your E-mail made me feel better. They did not have someone outside with an M-16 for me. The last time I saw Blackie he was assigned to Clarence Dedecker III. Dedecker had the right size and disposition for Blackie. In December 1969 or Jan 1970 the section was cut in size from 40 dog teams to 7. I was home (for extending) and came back to an almost empty K-9 hut. Nine other handlers & myself were shipped to Phu Cat AB. Our dogs went to other bases. And yes, the last time I saw Blackie, he had a helmet in his mouth.

E-Mail: Feb 1999
From: Al Watts
To: Don Poss, Greg Dunlop, & Monty Moore

Glad to hear from another of Blackie's handlers. I knew I had a good partner when I got him at Lackland. The dog that I had developed heart worms, so they would not let me take him to Nam. His name was Fury 166E and lived up to his name. He got me 42 times in training, not bad, but that's only because I had experience.

I started out in K-9 in 1956 at Landstuhl, Germany. Anyway, they told me at Lackland that I could have any dog there, just pick one. I told them that I wanted one that only has obedience training and that I would train him in attack when I got to Nam. He turned out to be a good dog and companion. I had my own way of training him. I only had him 120 days; we were in country TDY (Temporary Duty) for "Top Dog". A message came down to leave the dogs there and send the handlers back. I told Col. Philips that I wanted to stay because I could read between the lines. Only three bases received dogs back then. They were Da Nang AB, Tan Son Nhut AB, and Bien Hoa. After the original handlers left, I was left with 13 dogs, and no handlers. Colonel Phillips told me that I would be the new Kennelmaster, pick the handlers, and that I had three days to put them on post. That is how Don got Blackie. I will tell you the rest later.

E Mail: May 14, 2000
From: Monty Moore
To: Al Watts, Greg Dunlap, & Don Poss

I talked with Dedecker last night. Dedecker and I compared memories of the Da Nang dog section. Blackie was the only unassigned dog in the section when he arrived in country. Dedecker was told to either get in on him or go to security. Blackie never "chilled out with age" and remained difficult to get in on. Blackie tried to bite him several times but never connected. Dedecker extended his tour at Tan Son Nhut AB for an additional six months after being reassigned there. That would have put him leaving Tan Son Nhut AB in late 1970 or early 1971. He was told that Blackie was put to sleep after he left. That would agree with what Don was told by VDHA. Now we only have to find George Hoagland (Blackie's Handler 1966-1967). And Greg, Dedecker also has fond memories of Blackie carrying his helmet also.

Photo Below: Greg Dunlap & Blackie (Greg did the Snoopy artwork at the kennels).



Now, this story also leads to the birth of the VSPA K-9 web pages. Don introduced me to the Vietnam Security Police Association and their website. At that time there were no pages on the dog program. Don was the webmaster and I offered to help him. Don was busy building the VSPA pages. He promoted me to K-9 Webmaster and told me to go forth. And I did! I learned the programs needed and built the K-9 pages. So, I owe that to a dog that never even allowed me to pet him. Photo Below: Don Poss and Blacky 219X



[E Mail the K-9 Webmaster](#)