

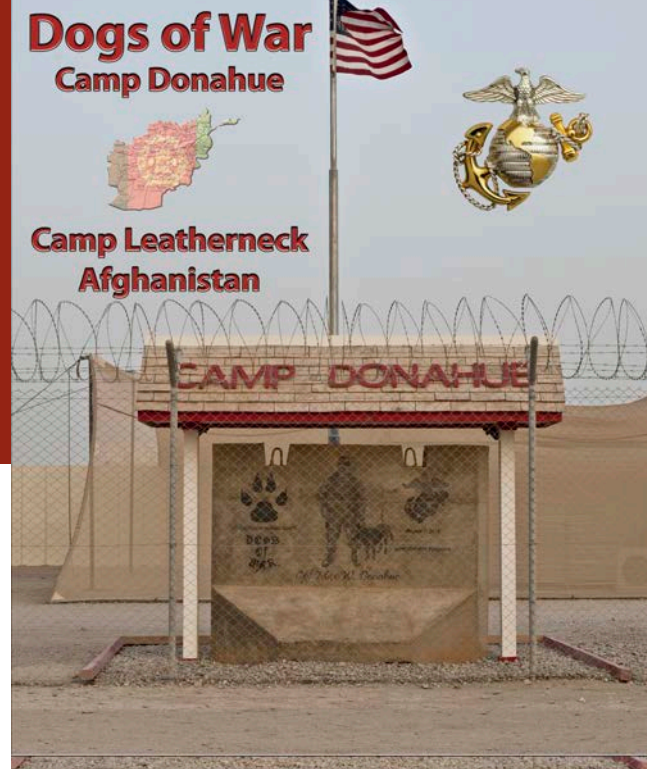
# USMC

## Military Working Dog

**Camp Max W. Donahue  
Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan  
Summer 2011**

As a former member of the USAF 633<sup>rd</sup> Security Police Squadron, K9 section, at Pleiku AB (1968-1969), the memories of Vietnam and my two dogs (King and Prince) will forever remain with me. When I left Vietnam at the age of 20, I never thought that some 42 years later I would find myself at a different military working dog kennel sharing my memories with handlers who, although in a different conflict in a different time, are the same age I was when I fought in Vietnam.

I presently am employed at Camp Leatherneck in the Helmand Province of Afghanistan. My job involves exploiting battlefield material recovered by our Marines for forensic evidence. As fate would have it, one day returning from the DFAC (dining facility) I found myself walking in the direction of a Marine dog handler who was walking his MWD (Military Working Dog) partner in my direction. As we got closer, he walked off and away from me so as to not allow me to get close to his dog. His dog was wearing a



pair of wrap-around sunglasses, which I found out later is done to keep the ever present blowing sand out of the dog's eyes. I introduced myself to him as a former military dog handler and veteran of the Vietnam War, and he immediately smiled and greeted me with a "hello Sir". Like all Marines I have encountered at Camp Leatherneck, they always greet you with the highest degree of respect and courtesy, as did this young Marine.

While we had a brief conversation, his dog on leash found some shade from a parked vehicle and lay partially under the vehicle to escape the sun and heat. We had a short conversation and he invited me to contact the Kennel Master, SSgt Morris Earnest, to set up a time for a visit to Camp Donahue. I thought this to be a wonderful opportunity to



**Myself with LCpl. Christen Carthan  
and MWD Cobra**

see the Marine Corps Military Working Dog program up close and meet some of the handlers. I contacted SSgt. Earnest by email to request a visit and told him of my intentions of writing an article in the VDHA Dogman Newsletter. He was very cordial about the visit and allowed me to take a few photographs for the article.

The Marine in the photograph is LCpl Christian Carthen of Sacramento, CA with his military working dog Cobra. This is LCpl Carthen's first deployment with MWD Cobra who is a Belgian Malinois.

After the Marine has completed the Military Police training program only a select few Marines are then screened for the Military Working Dog Basic Handlers Course program. The Basic Handler's Course is held at Lackland AFB, Texas and is approximately three months in duration. Two months concentrates

on patrol/sentry work, and the last month focuses on detection. However, the school is constantly evolving and redesigning the course curriculum based on feedback and AAR (after action reports) from all of the branches of the armed forces.

Once the Marine has completed the Basic Handlers Course he/she has the opportunity to be selected for additional training as either a SSD (Specialized Search Dog), or a CTD (Combat Tracking Dog) handler. Both advanced schools are approximately six months in duration. The Basic Handlers Course, Specialized Search Dog, and Combat Tracking School are conducted at Lackland AFB. The instructors are a mix of experienced dog handlers from all the branches of the armed forces. SSgt Eric Taylor, Assistant Kennel Master at Camp Donahue and a former instructor explained that the Lackland AFB Basic Handlers Course is the primary school for all branches of armed forces but has also been a training site for international armed forces as well.

SSgt Taylor also elaborated that SSD's are unique dog teams that work endless hours throughout the countless days training their dogs to work remotely via radio harness on the dog. However, the SSD is always within constant sight of the handler who has communication with the



**Morale Welfare Recreation (MWR) Area**



**Cement Barrier Mural at the Perimeter Fence**



**Fallen Hero Memorial**



**Cpl. Max W. Donahue**

SSD via radio/verbal/visual commands. The SSD handler can

give verbal/ visual commands to the dog to search right, left, forward, and return. All SSD dogs specialize in commercial explosives and in IED (Improvised Explosive Device) materials. IED's are a very common war tactic of the Taliban and insurgents, and as you can imagine IED search is an integral part of the Marine War Dog program. It is also arguably one of the most dangerous jobs to perform.

On August 7, 2010, Marine dog handler Cpl Max W. Donahue, for who the Camp Leatherneck Kennels is now dedicated and bears his namesake, was killed conducting a Combat Patrol while searching for IED's with his K9 partner Fenji. The Kennels established memorial in his honor, and for the military working dogs that have perished while here in theater. Above a shadow figure of a MWD handler on one knee along with his MWD in quiet reflection "From a Few of the Finest" is etched

on one side of the memorial. On the other side of the memorial is a display, which reads "To the Finest of the Few" above a shadow symbol of a fallen hero (boots-rifle-helmet). In the center of the memorial are the names of war dogs that perished in the Afghanistan Theater. The memorial is located in their MWR area (Morale, Welfare, and Recreation) and is a reminder that they will never be forgotten. Like all Marines and particularly the MWD Platoon's, they are a family.

Camp Max W. Donahue serves as the hub for the Military Working Dogs assigned to the Regional Command SW. The MWD compound is a secured area and visitor entry must be under escort. The handlers live in the compound and unless deployed on a mission, they are here twenty-four hours of the day.

The MWD compound is easily recognizable by the War Dog and the Marine Corps logos painted on a cement barrier proudly displayed on the inside perimeter of the chain-link fence and razor wire boundary. On left side is the logo of the War Dog logo adopted by the Marine Corps Military Working Dog Handlers. A hand drawing depiction of Cpl Max W. Donahue and his K9 partner is in the center of the mural. While on the right side of the mural is the Marine Corps logo (Eagle, Globe and Anchor).

The original War Dog logo was the concept and design of Sgt Adam Cann, a handler who was KIA in Ramadi, Iraq in 2006. He was the first Marine Corps dog handler KIA since the Vietnam War. He was on his second tour in Iraq and had previously served in Afghanistan.

SSgt Earnest explained that Sgt Cann wanted to design a logo for the Marine Military Working Dog teams. His concept and design is now a symbol of this tight-knit group of warriors who proudly display a tattoo of the logo and wear it as a badge of honor.

As one dogman to another, there will always be that common bond or connection no matter the branch of service. As a symbol of our support to them, I distributed the VDHA K9 Handler challenge coin to their members. I would like to express my appreciation to Kennel Master SSgt Earnest, Assistant Kennel Master SSgt Eric Taylor, and MWD Handler LCpl. Christian Carthen for their time and stories for this article. I also want to thank our VDHA BX manager, Dave Broeker, for his assistance in shipping the challenge coins overseas.

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