

THAILAND

UBON RTAFB

8th SPS (PACAF) , 8 Dec 1965

Ubon RTAFB K-9/Hunce

1st Long Night!

1972-1973

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Photos by Peter Williams

I was 18 years old when I arrived in Southeast Asia. Just a kid, full of pride, fearlessness and daring all wrapped up in a U.S. Air Force Security Police K-9 officer's uniform.

Having been at Ubon Royal Thai Air Force Base for one week, my in-processing to the base was complete, and it was time to go to work. As we traveled the five miles to the kennels I looked at the 20 guys with their "game day" faces on, dressed in camouflage and armed like soldiers. The berets had been put away. No more badges or handcuffs, no more blue ascots or spit-shinned boots. We were no longer security policemen, we were American fighting men--*the Air Forces' infantry*.



On arrival at the kennels the crescendo of dog barking was at its peak. The dogs heard us coming and they knew it was time to go to work. I had met Hunce, an 85-pound black and tan German Shepherd just one day before. Our introduction went, well, fairly okay, I guess.

It only took 45 minutes of sitting on the concrete kennel floor, outside of his cage, "sweet talking" to the raised fur and pearly whites of my new companion. His ferociousness impressed me, scared me and comforted me all the same time. I thought that when--and if--he accepts me, we would become a great K-9 team.

After more training with Hunce, I was assigned my first post, called Kilo 2-7, at the southern end of the base runway. This godforsaken piece of real estate was in the middle of nowhere. Measuring 100 yards across by 50 yards deep, as measured from the fence-line to the perimeter road. Behind me were the 30-foot observation/gun towers and below them, the M60 machine gun bunkers. I quickly realized I was in front of everyone's weapons and that thought frightened me.



As the K-9 truck pulled away I was left standing in total darkness, just me and my new partner and an eerie silence. This indestructible 18-year-old felt very vulnerable and scared. We stepped off the perimeter road, heading for the fence-line. Hunce, as a seasoned veteran of Ubon and having worked this post many times prior to me, led the way.



Hunce's experience in working under these Ubon conditions proved itself almost immediately. As he pulled me toward the fence, he suddenly stopped, perked his ears, lifted his nose and abruptly changed our direction of travel. Having just met this dog I was unaware how he would react to an intruder, but I knew he was trying to tell me something--I just didn't know what that was. Standing my ground, I turned on my flashlight and searched the path ahead. Not fifteen feet away lay a coiled King Cobra snake! Hunce made every effort to keep us away from this thing and I learned my first lesson from this dog. *He's the veteran--I'm the rookie. Pay attention to the dog!*

Completing the sweep of the post, I decided it was time to sit down and take a break, but Hunce began pulling on the leash. Now what? Remembering lesson #1, I had just gotten up to look around when I felt the first bite. Ants! Red fire-

breathing ants were all over my leg. Lesson #2 is to never forget lesson #1.

This being my first night on duty, Hunce and Kilo 2-7 were making quite an impression on me. Two things became perfectly clear: (1) I loved this dog, and (2) I hate this place!

As the night wore on, Hunce and I got to know each other a little better. I realized it was going to be this dog's skill that was going to get me through the next 364 nights.

That first night's meal included a couple of hard-boiled eggs. Without giving a thought to sharing anything with Hunce, I dug in and Hunce lay quietly at my feet while I ate. Feeling a little guilty, I reasoned that the vets had always told us to keep our dogs on their prescribed meals. And besides, Hunce's breakfast would be waiting for him as soon as we got off post.

Cracking and peeling the first egg I noticed that Hunce rose to the sitting position and was watching me--intensely. Paying no attention to him, I ate the egg and started on the second. Suddenly, Hunce started to growl. I put down the egg and got up to scan my surroundings. Hunce dove for the box and inhaled the egg, shell and all.

I later learned from other handlers that Hunce had been conditioned to get a hard-boiled egg every night. On nights when the box lunch did not include them, he became a mean, angry dog with a history of biting his handlers. Lesson #3: always come to work with a hard-boiled egg!

As the sun came up and my shift drew to a close, I came to the conclusion that I could survive this place as long as I put my faith in my partner and allowed him to do what he has been trained to do. If the lessons he taught me this first night were an indication on how the rest of my tour of duty would go, I knew I was in good hands... make that *paws*.

(Since his discharge, Williams has been a professional fire officer and emergency medical technician with a Massachusetts fire department).

**Check out
Williams' Ubon photos!
and Apocalypse!**

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