

U-TAPAO RTAFB
635th SPS, K-9

Sport and Tiki!

by **HL Hartford**
(1972-1973)



My days as an Airmen at U-Tapao, Air Base 1972-1973: As I recall it, I was transferred to U-Tapao, Thailand along with a few other SPs from the 3 SPS, Air Base, in Kunsan Korea. I was still green behind the ears when I came to U-Tapao RTAFB as one of the new Patrol Dog Handlers.

The Kennel NCOIC, assigned me to a dog named Sport. I was informed that he had not been out of his kennel in months, and was a bitter. Having no fear (ha ha), it took me about three or four days to work my way into the same kennel as Sport. He was very unclean and had not had a vet examination in a while.

I put a muzzle over Sport's head and worked him with the muzzle on. The next day I give him a bath which he seemed to find unsure of. We were both still getting to know one another so I began to take him on walks around the kennel area trying to build a relationship with him. In just another day or two I would be going to post with Sport.

Before going to post one night while the other handlers were gearing up to head out to post, I wanted to impress them by showing them I was Sport's new Handler. Sport had a very bad rap and the other handlers knew it. I did not put a muzzle on Sport, and had at times removed the muzzle while working together with him. As I started walking Sport the other handlers stopped and watched us. I guess they must have looked at it as if we were going to post.

Up to this point I had not given him any correction, he did what I told him but was very slow in responding to anything that I asked of him to do. The other handlers, about 30 or so, were watching me with Sport. As I went to correct him for only the second time he jumped up biting down on my left arm. Two or three of the handlers who were watching me and Sport came to my aid in removing him from me. While the other handlers went to post I went to the Hospital on base.

The Kennel NCOIC paid me a visit at the hospital and informed me that I would no longer be handling Sport--end of subject! He said he was giving me another canine to work with. I requested a bit more time with Sport, but the Sgt said no, that I was too green for a dog like Sport.

My new Dog was named Tiki, a truly wonderful, good looking German Shepard, and was he ever smart. I was happy having Tiki, but sad that I did not complete the job with Sport. I still kept my eye on Sport until a new handler got him. His new handler had worked kennel support at Lackland A.F.B. in Texas and did know much more about working with a dog like Sport. I learned a lot from Sport's new handler.

On post, like me, Tiki liked checking out the limits of our patrol before the long tour ahead. On one post the other SPs would fire mortar-flares into the air about 500 hundred feet. Being down range the casings would fall back to earth making a loud noise. We would look and run for cover, but after a while you could spot the sounds where they were falling and move away from them.

Each handler would carry what was called Slap Flares, which were very small. We would open them up and remove their parachute. Being a Dog handler you were the front line at U-Tapao, and had a clearing zone of about the length of a football field in some areas around the base. Launching a slap-flare with a parachute would not only kill your night-vision but would reveal your position. The idea, without parachute removed, was to get the flare into the air, see what you needed too, and have it free-fall to the ground creating a lot of light in the area were the enemy was located. By the flair going up and back down so fast, you could move out of a bad cover

area. Responding SAT teams could then move in the dark and fire into the lite up area, if needed.

When Sport was examined by the Air Force K-9 Vet, it was found that a lot was wrong with him, and unfortunately he had to be put down. As for Tiki and I, we did well together.

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