

# Sentry Dog Nemo

K-9 Hero of Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN

Nemo was whelped in October 1962. He was procured by the Air Force when he was one and a half years old. After completing an 8-week training course, he was assigned to Fairchild AFB, Washing, for duty with the Strategic Air Command. In January 1966, Nemo and his handler Airman Leonard Bryant, Jr., were transferred to the Republic of South Vietnam with a large group of other sentry dog teams. Airman Robert A. Thorneburg was assigned as Nemo's handler in July 1966.

In the predawn hours of 4 December 1966, Tan Son Nhut AB Air Base was attacked by a large force of Viet Cong commando raiders who used a single avenue of approach through friendly force positions outside the base perimeter. Once inside the base, the raiders divided into small groups to attack their targets. Several sentry dog teams stationed on preventive perimeter posts gave the initial alert and warning almost simultaneously. As a result of this early warning, security forces of the 377<sup>th</sup> Air Police Squadron successfully repelled the attack, minimizing damage to aircraft and facilities.

Although wounded, one dog handler maintained contact with the enemy and notified Central Security Control of their location and direction of travel. Two security policemen in a machine gun bunker were ready and waiting as the VC approached the main aircraft parking ramp. In a few seconds they stopped the enemy, killing all thirteen of the attackers. Security forces rapidly deployed around the perimeter and prevented numerous infiltrators from escaping, forcing them to hide in a Vietnamese graveyard, dense vegetation and wells. Search patrols believed that all remaining VC were killed or captured the following morning.

Unfortunately, supervisors did not include dog teams in those daylight patrols, so just before total darkness when Airman Thorneburg and Nemo were posted, Nemo alerted and was released to attack the VC who had evaded earlier detection. Both handler and dog were wounded, but not before killing at least one VC. Nemo's injuries included the loss of one eye. A sweep of the area by the Quick Reaction Team met with negative results. Using additional sentry dog teams, the security forces located and killed four more VC. A second sweep with the dog teams resulted in discovery of four more VC who were hiding underground. They too were killed.

Nemo was credited with saving his handler's life and preventing further destruction of life and property. On 23 June 1967, Headquarters, USAF, directed that Nemo be returned to the United States as the first sentry dog officially retired from active service. His permanent retirement kennel is located at the Department of Defense Dog Center, Lackland AFB, Texas. He is frequently taken on tours in the United States to assist the procurement of military working dogs.

Excerpt from Air Force Manual 125-5, Volume II, dated April 28, 1972. Nemo died from natural causes at the Lackland AFB, Texas on March 15, 1973.



Photo Left: Nemo and Handler Sgt Michael DeForest, US Army assigned to DOD Dog Center (Detachment 37), Lackland AFB, Texas Photo Courtesy of Brian Rueger (Retired MSgt USAF).

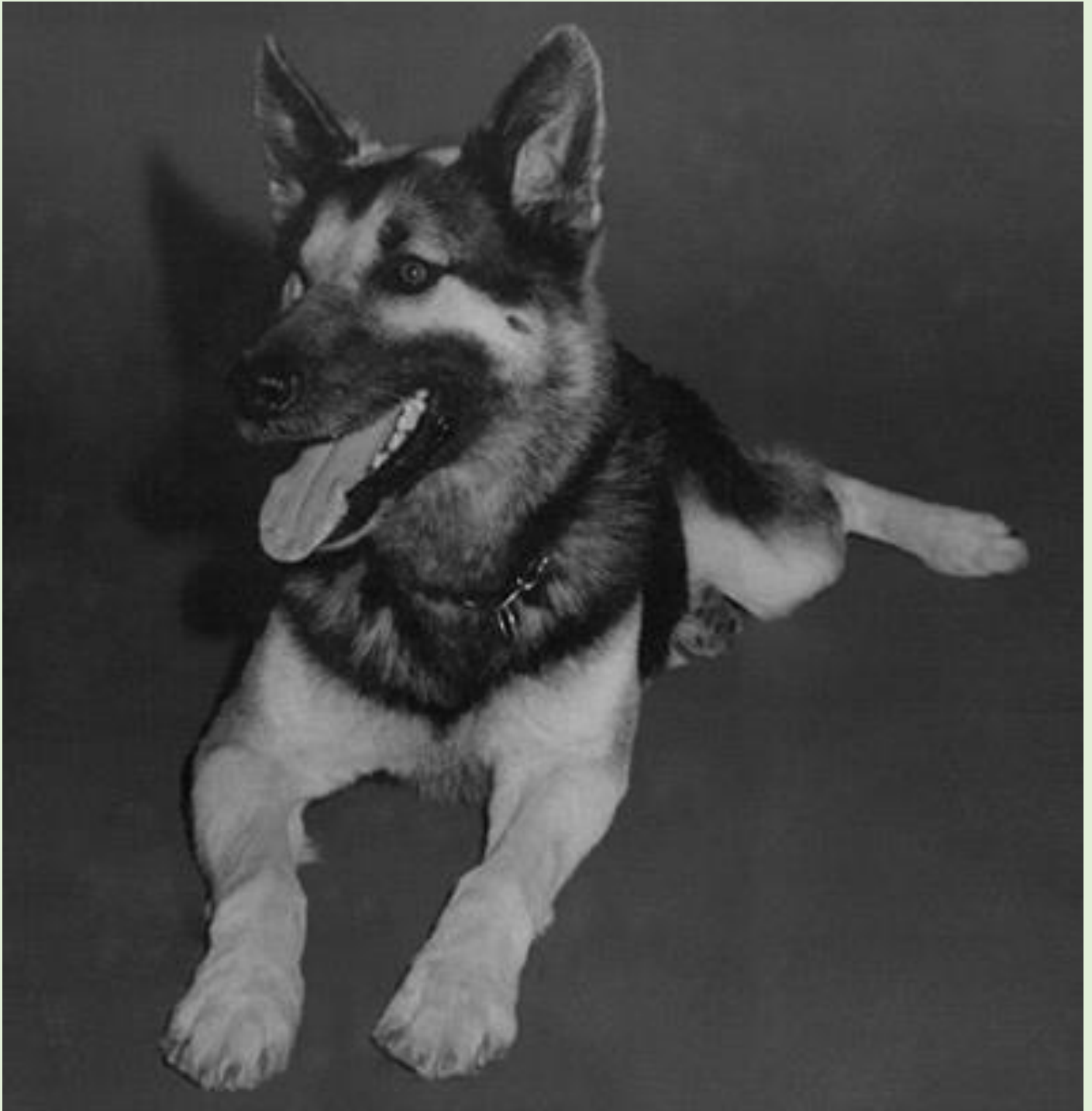


Photo Above Courtesy of **Nemo's War Dog Heroes Memorial.**

Photos Below: Nemo in his kennel at DOD Dog Center, Lackland AFB, Texas.



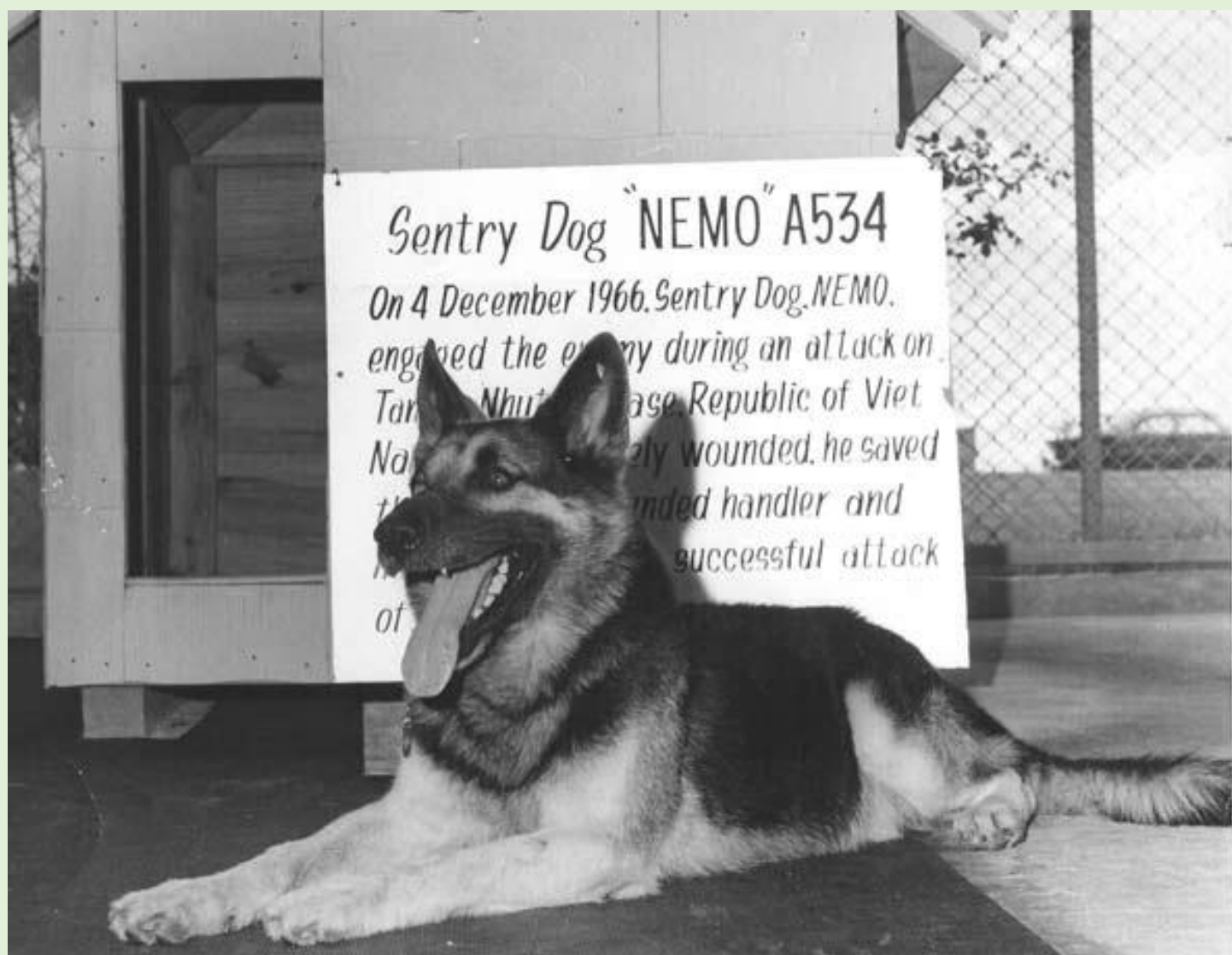




Photo Above shows the terrible wound suffered by Nemo.  
Courtesy of Nemo's War Dog Heroes Memorial

## Nemo's Kennel Memorial Project

### By Bill Cummings

In 2003, a group of old Military Working Dog handlers were in San Antonio, Texas for a Vietnam Security Police Association reunion. As part of this reunion, we took a tour of the DOD kennels at Lackland AFB. Most of us in the group had received our Sentry Dog and Patrol Dog training at this location. When we arrived at the kennels, many of us were anxious to see Nemo's kennel. Nemo was retired to this location after receiving wounds in the 1966 attack on Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam. When we located the kennel, we found ourselves staring at what was left; a barren, eroding pad with crumbling raised borders around the perimeter. Absolutely nothing was left to mark the significance of the kennel. Very few of the military personnel that accompanied us were even aware of the significance of this old pad.



Nemo's kennel pad, November 3, 2003  
Photos courtesy of Ernest Childers, Jr.

A group of the old handlers decided, then and there, to reveal the history of the site and honor Nemo's legacy in a befitting fashion. The group's primary and most immediate concern was to restore Nemo's kennel to its original condition. After several meetings with the 37<sup>th</sup> Squadron commander, Lt Colonel Robert Roth and Lt Thomas McGillicuddy of the 341<sup>st</sup> Training Squadron, we received permission for the project. With that accomplished, we formed the "Nemo's War Dog Heroes Association" and began assembling our goals and acquiring the seed money needed to get the project out of the planning stage. While awaiting approval, the fencing and roofing of the kennel, Nemo's doghouse and kennel sign were reproduced to replicate the original condition as closely as possible.

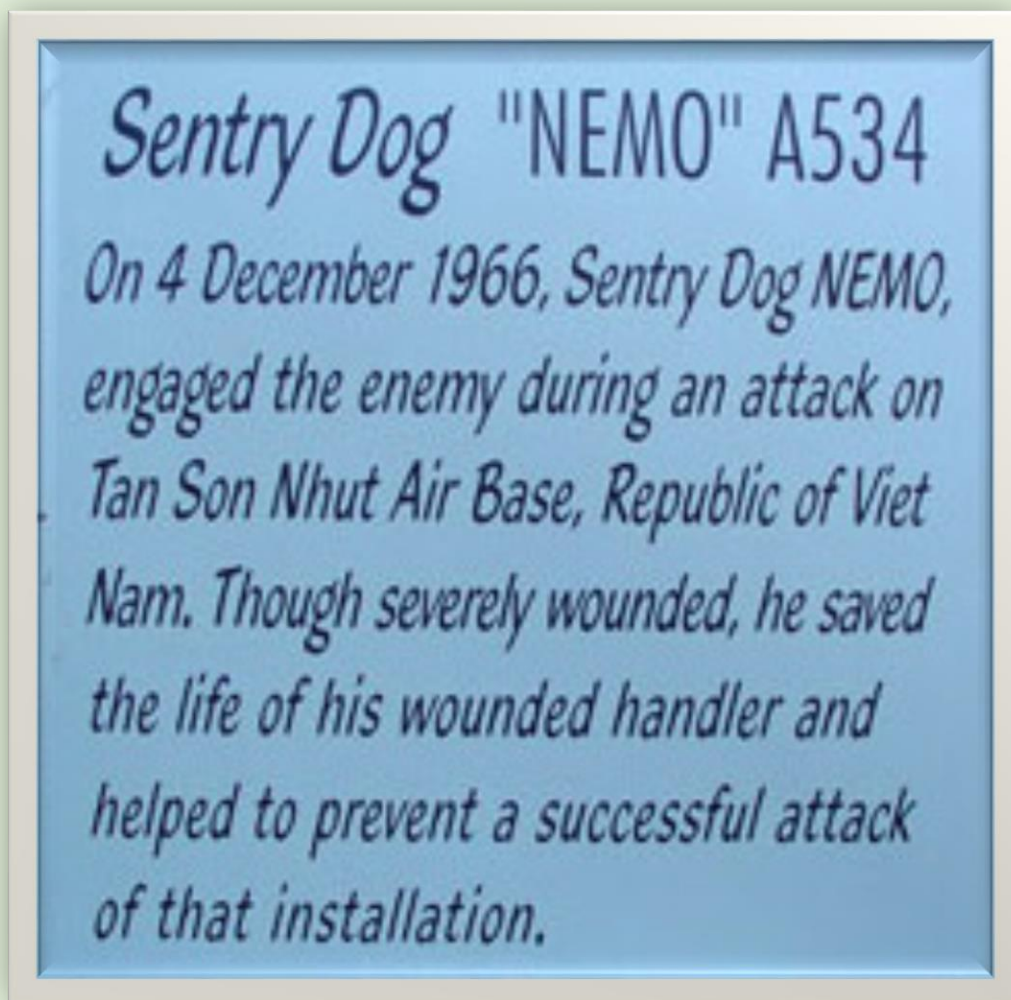
Next Photo: Old dawgs (L to R), Kelly Bateman, Terry Strickland and Bill Cummings) fastening panels together to form kennels. Concrete slab is the original slab used for Nemo's kennel.



During one of our many trips to Lackland, Lt. McGillicuddy stated that he knew someone we would be very interested in meeting. He introduced us to Marine Sgt Chris Willingham, one of the instructors for a new training program called Specialized Search Dogs (SSD). Sgt. Willingham relayed that, as a means to build pride in his team, he had assigned his troops the task of researching their Military Working Dog heritage. They not only took the "ball", but they ran with it! The Marines and Army researched the history of their respective K-9 branches, and SSgt Mike Long was assigned Nemo. A week later one representative from each branch gave a presentation on what they had learned. During his research, SSgt Mike Long discovered that Nemo was an Air Force Sentry dog credited with stopping the infiltrated Viet Cong assault on Tan Son Nhut AB in December of 1966, and had spent the last five years of his life on Lackland Air Force Base.

With the selection of Nemo as their hero, further research revealed his empty concrete pad. Immediate and prompt work began to develop a plan to raise funds for a dedication and memorial stone for Nemo. The memorial stone was to give the war hero his due respect and to let former dog handlers know his sacrifices were not forgotten. It should be noted that to raise these funds they held car washing events, as well as using their own personal funds. Motivation and dedication quickly became the plan of action!





Since, the old dogs were working on basically the same restoration project for Nemo's kennel and his story; we joined forces with the SSD team and agreed to make it a joint effort. Hence, we have a committee made up of old and young handlers who have the same objectives, to recognize, honor, and maintain the history of War Dog Heroes.

On September 23, 2005, several of the old dog handlers who had visited the site initially were invited to the graduation of SSD, Team II and the dedication ceremony of Nemo's memorial headstone. With the installment of the stone, the groundwork has been laid for Nemo's War Dog Heroes Association to complete the memorial. Our intention is to restore the kennel to the condition of 1967-1968 by using photographs of its original condition. The efforts of today's handlers, young and old, will bring the project to completion and put in place the path for the continued recognition of all War Dog Heroes.



Well done SSD, Team II: Instructors U.S. Marine Corps Sgt. Chris Willingham and Mr. Orlando Nunez, team members, A.F. SSgt. Mike Long (Class Leader), U.S. Army Sgt. Danyel Claire; U.S.



Marine Corps Sgt. Mark Corrado, CPL Tim Johnson, LCPL Josh Hays, LCPL Brett Hamm, and LCPL Mike Evans. VSAP Members Kelly Batman, Terry Strickland, and Ernest Childers

Stone Below purchased by SSD Team II Members.

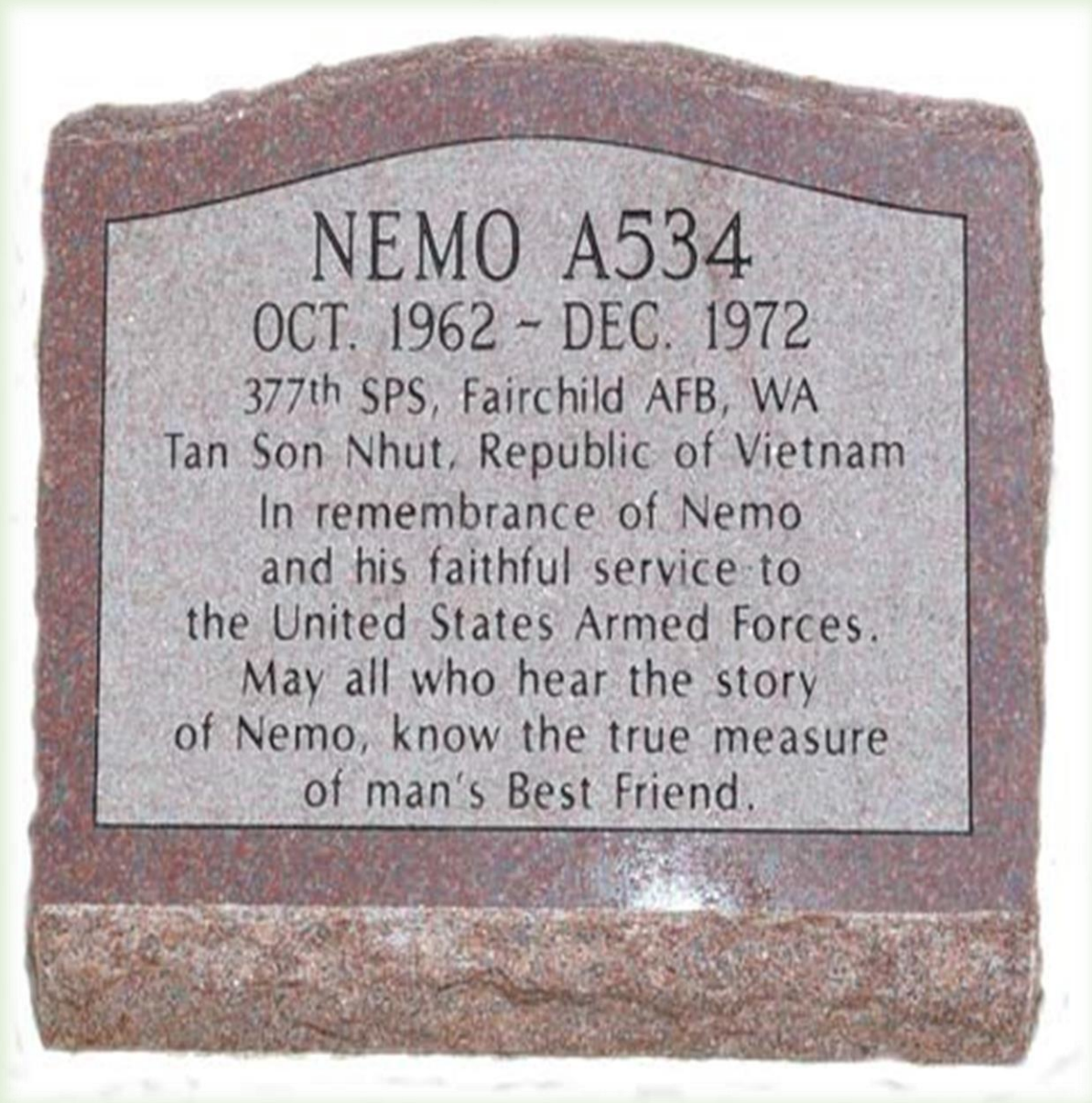


Photo Below: Nemo's Kennel with K-9 Honor Guard During Dedication



The memorial is an ongoing project, Donations are still needed to fund other planned improvements, such as a roof over the kennel site. Checks should be made payable to Nemo's War Dog Heroes Memorial (NWDHM).

NWDHM  
10172 N. Tall Cotton Drive  
Marana, AZ 85653



I was an Airman Third Class Air Policeman assigned to "A" Flight, 377th APS at Tan Son Nhut AB from September 1966 to September 1967. I was 19 years old and had been in country a little over 2 months. This is my story:

It was Sunday, December 4, 1966. I had been relieved from post (A-10) at approximately 2030 hours the night before and after returning to the AP compound to turn in my weapon and equipment it was after 2100 hours before I got to bed. I had been asleep for 2-3 hours when I awoken to someone yelling "fall out, were under attack" and I heard explosions and machine gun fire coming from the vicinity of the flight line. I quickly got dressed and, grabbing my Helmut and web gear, ran (shirt unbuttoned and boot laces dragging )over to the armory to get a weapon. After receiving an M-16 I boarded a 1 1/2 ton stake truck with 14 others and we drove to CSC to determine what was happening and to find out where we should go.

After a brief time, it was determined that we should go to the west perimeter and set up a blocking force on the perimeter road just south of the ditch that ran under the perimeter fence between the runway and the counter-mortar battery. I was one of the last to dismount the truck once we were in position. The truck then moved north on the road and had traveled about 100 feet when it suddenly exploded, apparently hit by a rocket propelled grenade. Soon after getting into position on the base side of the road, we came under mortar and small arms fire. Suddenly there was a small explosion to my right and a scream. I turned to look in that direction and saw an individual run across the road and dive into the elephant grass. We fired into the area where the individual dived. Because of the mortars raining down on us, someone decided that we should change our position to across the road towards the perimeter and set up positions there. Soon the mortars stopped and we were instructed to move back to our original positions.

After establishing our positions I heard the birds in a tree just south of me outside the fence line start making a lot of noise as if they had been disturbed. I mentioned this observation to a senior member of our team and stated that I thought something was about to happen in that area. Sure enough a machine gun started firing at us from under the tree. Aircraft soon flew over and attacked that area and eliminated the threat.

We were soon joined by other Air Policemen and several ambulances came and went. None of us on the team had a radio so it was a mystery to us how we were getting help just when we needed it. It turned out that A1C Skip Miller was in a tower (A-15) near our position and could see what was happening and reported our actions to CSC and requested the help we needed. We were under fire most of the night and as daylight came things quieted down. We were under the misconception that the attack was over and we started to stand up and talk amongst ourselves when someone yelled "there's some over there" and shots rang out. I had been talking to another member of our team when I heard and felt a bullet pass between us (we were about 2 feet apart at the time). We spun around in opposite directions and fell to the prone position and started returning fire. The head of a VC I was shooting at suddenly exploded and the man fell to the ground. I heard a commotion to my right and turned in that direction to see a couple of APs working on an individual who had been shot. They were about 10 feet from me. It turned out that that individual had been shot in the chest. A pen in his pocket had deflected the bullet enough that it missed his heart. Soon the firing stopped and 2 VC stood up with their hands in the air. We rushed up to them and took them prisoner. After a sweep of the area, an "all clear" was sounded and we boarded vehicles to be taken back to the AP compound to get cleaned up, get something to eat and to rearm. Tables were set up with clerks to take our stories, however, I didn't get a chance to tell my story. "A" Flight was supposed to have a 0400 Guardmount that morning but it was delayed several hours because of the attack, so we had a quick Guardmount and went out to our assigned posts (A-10 for me). Shortly after being posted a tower guard reported movement on the north side of the runway. I was pulled off post to help in a sweep of the area. One VC was found and killed on that sweep.

After our shift, I was assigned to the reserve alert team and we were soon called out to again sweep the area north of the runway on the west side of the base. Soon after starting our sweep, we came upon a ditch filled with waist deep water that we had to cross. Some of the team members went into the water. I saw an area to my right that appeared dry and mover



over to cross there. I had started across and was about half way when the "surface crust" broke and I sank up to my armpits in the mud and had to be pulled out. There was sporadic gun fire all around us for the next couple of hours. When the "all clear" was sounded we made our way out to the perimeter road for pick up and return to the alert hut. We recovered several VC bodies along the way.

All to soon it was time for Guardmount and back on post and live returned to "normal". I never did get a chance to tell my story to the clerks for the records and got no recognition for my part in defending the base. Many years later I read that the base had been attacked by 2 battalions of VC/NVA and that just outside of our position on the west perimeter the VC/NVA had established a blocking position of about 100 troops. They were there to protect their comrades as they infiltrated the base after the attack. I also read that our team was lead by TSGT Olbert Heitt and that out of the 15 men sent out, 2 were killed (A2C O. J. Riddle and A2C J. M. Cole) and 9 were wounded. I was one of four that came out of it alive and unhurt.

PS: Several days later as I was walking past the orderly room I saw an individual that I had gone through AZR with. He was a dog handler in the K-9 Unit and was standing there with a sentry dog. As I approached him he asked me to hold the dog while he went to use the restroom and I agreed. I noticed that the dog had been heavily sedated and was covered in bandages. He had lost part of an ear and one of his eyes had a bandage over it. His name was Nemo. For 10 minutes I was a dog handler in Vietnam and as soon as I got back Stateside I put in a request for K-9 and was accepted. The dog I was assigned was Kemo, he was Nemo's older brother.

Bill Trimble, VSPA Life Member 465



Photo above Kemo, Unknown Brand #, Brother of Nemo

Submitted by: A3C William C. Trimble, 377th APS, Tan Son Nhut AB,  
Republic of Vietnam., 1966-1967



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