

**366th SPS,
USAF K-9, 1968-69
BLACKIE!**

(Vietnam 1965-1970)

BIG PIG ON THE PERIMETER!

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Air Force Security Police Squadron K-9 sentry dog handlers patrolled the perimeter of Đà Nẵng Air Base from the early days of the war. These War Dogs were posted at the bases' interior, along runways, and the perimeter, along with the marines.



Air Force Security Police K-9, posting along Đà Nẵng's runway of 1965-1966.

What's for dinner? Things started to settle down and I began to fall into the routine: Check the K-9 roster after coming off post to see what assignment Blackie and I had the next evening, go to chow, hit the rack--or have a few beers and then hit the rack. Try to get as much sleep as possible before the heat and noise made it impossible to sleep, (usually around 11 AM).



Day after day, the same thing. Blackie, my German Shepard sentry dog, and I were getting to know each other better and work better as a team. One of the first things I learned is that, HIM, meaning Blackie, had a reputation---a K-9 attitude. As we'd be walking out to our post the marines along Đà Nẵng's perimeter would call out to see what handlers were in their area that evening. I'd answer "K-9, Blackie!", and receive back comments like, "Keep that SOB out of here", "Blackie, that bad tempered SOB?" I recall one evening that it seemed like everyone was calling Blackie an SOB, so I nicknamed him that for the night:

**"Hey you, SOB, want to bite some marine fanny or some officer fanny?"
"SOB, you have a dog nose, dog face, and dog breath!"**

"SOB, if we chase those marines out of the bunker, we can eat their midnight rations. Want to, huh?"

Somehow I think he understood what I was doing because he would just wag his tail and act like there was nothing different going on and he was in on the joke. Another item I found out about is that Blackie also had a reputation of eating almost anything thrown or offered to him. Looks like food, smells like food---gone---hope it was food. Everyone used to joke about what he'd eat. Such as, *anything at all*, what so ever, that had ever been in, around, or near, a C-Rations box (except ham and lima beans). But crackers, pound cake, peanut butter, jelly, toilet paper (never tried this

but it wouldn't have surprised me), one or two bites and gone.

One evening, on Charlie CO's lines, he ate almost the entire midnight ration for the whole line. It started out that we were posted toward the start of Charlie CO's lines that evening, right across from the ARVN camp on the other side of US1. I was familiar with the driver who was running the midnight rations around and he had stopped and we chatted for a few minutes. Before he left a few other marines from Charlie CO had joined us and everyone started joking about how Blackie always seemed hungry and would eat almost anything offered. One thing leading to another and someone asked, "How much will that SOB eat?" Being challenged, and in the interest of keeping up the mystique about K-9, and being confident in my buddy Blackie, I responded, "He'll eat every sandwich you have in the truck with you tonight, and *still* be hungry afterward." This was soundly disputed: There are 22 sandwiches left to deliver---no dog could eat 22 sandwiches! Hesitant as I was, I bet that he could do it

---Air Force honor was at stake. Figuring on the fact that at least Blackie'd have the bliss of eating until he hurred.

Calls were made up and down the perimeter line and the bets were on! I had \$10.00 riding on Blackie's belly now. Several handlers and marines had joined us to witness the event. Ever see "Cool Hand Luke"? The first dozen eggs went down like the first dozen sandwiches. Blackie was in glutton's heaven. Wagging his tail and almost doing tricks for another sandwich. It was *embarrassing* to watch. 12 down, and 10 to go. Next 5 went down slower, by now he seemed to chew them more than just once. Of course I was telling everyone that now that his initial sampling was over, Blackie had pronounced marine food *fit for a dog*, and wanted to savor the flavor.

Several comments were made about the taste buds and IQ of a dog wanting to savor midnight sandwiches. I always thought the marines may have not been properly trained in the culinary skills myself---Blackie just burped and looked at the next offering. Yep... dog with an attitude. 5 more to go and we'd have the honorary title: BIG PIG ON PERIMETER! usually reserved for a perimeter line marine. Wouldn't that look nice over his kennel?

Blackie was at the point of not knowing if he wanted to eat another sandwich, or barf. The novelty was wearing thin now. When in a land of plenty, one satiates one's self, and then contemplates his own gluttony (like at Thanksgiving dinner!). Blackie was fast approaching that point.

3 more were coaxed down.

Only 2 to go.

The title---and Air Force honor---was so near, and the champ was starting to waver, assuming a glazed cross-eyed look. I took him for a comfort walk. "Hey fellas---he's got to pee sometimes guys, give him a break! Besides... if I'd known he was going to have a snack I wouldn't have fed him before patrol tonight (I hadn't, but they didn't know that, heh-heh)." Blackie had that look on his face of, "OH CRAP---*what did you get me into???*"

Back we came, the final 2 sandwiches were on the ground and displayed like a prized meal and opened. I stopped, lit a cigarette, patted Blackie and massaged his sides like a prize fighter waiting for the bell. I reached down, picking up both sandwiches. Crinkling the paper (hoping for a Pavlovian response here folks)... Blackie salivated and looked at me with mild interest. I tossed him one... then the other. Nothing hit the ground: SNATCH, GULP --- SNATCH GULP --- G O N E!!!

IT'S OURS, WE WON!!! Air Force honor was reaffirmed in the eyes of the jarheads. "Hey Marines, got any more?" Disbeliever's were dispelled that night. Blackie had reached a new level of respect. One had to bow his head when reverently mentioning Blackie's name---even in vain. But then someone remembered and reminded me, "Wait a minute---*the bet's not over yet!*"

"Hey Zoomie... you said that SOB'd still be hungry---afterwards---*no way* can he eat anything more now!!!"

I replied, "Mumble grumble, @!%&#-ratten fracker... well, yes I did---and I suppose you *really* want to see him do it?"

"Yep, we *really* want to see it---makes the bet right." Renewed hope swept the marines as shouts in agreement snatched victory from me.

"Well... there's no more sandwiches", the look on Blackie's face seemed to say, "Thank you GOD."

"Wait---I have it!" I said, remembering that I had some chocolate in my shirt pocket. I looked down at Blackie---his eyes were rolling back in his head and crossing now. "CRAP, I ate the whole thing!!!" seemed to be flowing through his doggie-brain instead of being full of used kitty litter, but still a semblance of a working dog's brain, nevertheless. Slowly I opened my shirt pocket, looking at him the whole time and making sure he was paying attention. He watched me. He hadn't moved an inch in five minutes. His belly was dragging the ground. His usually frantically wagging tail was like

rigor mortis. Could he do it? I wondered.

Taking out the chocolate bar, I tore off the paper slowly, making as much noise as possible. Crackle, crackle, wrinkle---rippppppp. Blackie's eyes snapped toward me. *Yummy coming out!!* You could see his mixed emotions and indecision happening at the same time. Luckily, the marines didn't know what to look for. I took a large bite out of the chocolate bar and chewed it with much fanfare, making ummm ummm UMMMmmmmmmmmmm sounds. Blackie's tail wagged--once... twice... *three times in a row...* his ears perked straight up as if alerted on a battalion of VC. I looked down at him--the moment of truth at hand. "Ummmmm... sure is good, Blackie---want some desert?" Wrinkle, wrinkle, wrinkle rip rip rippppppp went the paper. Really big indecision was apparent on him: *Food... or burst stomach? But food first, right? Do I want some---who are you kidding? Wait, even if I did want some, I couldn't force another bite down!!*

The moment of truth was at hand. No one breathed. An entire regiment of VC could have been sneaking across the perimeter and no one would have noticed. More importantly, my \$10.00 was on the line. Peeling open the remainder of the chocolate bar, making more noise with the paper, I again asked him, "Want some, Blackie?" It wasn't fair, lots of primeval instincts, and physical discomfort versus a chocolate bar. The huge German Shepard wagged his tail ---once--- actually, it brushed from the right over to the left and stopped, as if too much effort and pain. His face went into that dog-face look of "They never feed me anything around here, can you spare a small morsel?"

I tossed a piece of chocolate into the air.

It tumbled.

All eyes watched its slow-motion like decent.

Blackie watched its decent like a starved predator.

Blackie suddenly leapt forward and snatched it in mid-tumble and swallowed it in a single gulp!

BIG PIG ON THE PERIMETER was ours! My heart swelled in pride at victory over the United States Marine Corps! Blackie assumed a "don't touch my belly" look as if knowing I was fixing to pet him like crazy!

Grunts of disbelief moaned up and down the perimeter as if having just lost a sure-thing Super Bowl game! I don't know how Blackie was keeping everything down, but I knew it would be foolish to try to get him to eat any more. The marines however felt they had witnessed something unique---a true miracle--- something to be *reverently whispered* about, to tell their grand children about. Never again would Blackie's ability to eat *anything in any amount* be questioned.

The Word passed up and down the lines and finally, the obvious sunk in: Sounds of "What! You fed my mid-rats to that SOB---on a *bet*?" could be heard. Echoes of that "Son of a BITCH!" could also occasionally be heard. Collecting *our* \$10.00 we waddled off now, my thinking being if he did loose his lunch, we'd do it out of sight of the marines---even a dog deserves some dignity.

Blackie was done for the night however. Normally full of pep and active, now he was content to just sit and gurgle and digest, not yet able to lay down. Sounds from doing just that emanated from his belly for the remainder of the night. Even when I went to eat my C-Rations, he wasn't tempted to ask for any. It's probably a good thing that it was quiet the rest of the evening because any activity and he'd probably just lose everything if he had to do anything.

The next day the kennel people asked me if I noticed anything wrong with Blackie because he didn't eat his chow when they fed him that morning. "Really? Didn't eat!?! Blackie?? *No ... didn't notice anything*, I'll watch him closely tonight and let you know if I suspect anything though."



Đà Nẵng Air Base's S/E Perimeter, tree line at 500 yards, c. September 1965. Air Police Squadron posts and bunkers, foreground; Marine posts and bunkers outside fence.



A few days later we got posted back in Charlie CO's area and when we arrived it was like coming on with a celebrity. When I announced "K-9, Blackie", sounds of "*hide the food!!!*" and an occasional "*that SOB*", could be heard in the area. And when the driver who was running the midnight rations came around he stopped and we chatted for a few minutes. I asked, "How many sandwiches you got tonight?... only 40? Well, I'll bet that Blackie can...."

Blackie's ability to consume any amount of food was never again questioned or challenged!

ARF... ARF

Blackie, X129, USAF Air/Security Police K-9 handlers:

1965-: **Al Watts** (brought Blackie to Đà Nẵng), 6252nd Air Police Squadron ;
1965-1966: Don Poss, 6252nd APS,
1966-1967: Hoagland, 366th APS (Redesignated) 366th SPS,
1967-1968: Gregory Dunlap, 366th SPS;
1968-Nov: Monty Moore, 366th SPS;
1969-1970: Clarence Dedecker III, 366th SPS; 377th SPS Tan Son Nhut.
1970, Sep 9th, Blackie was put down at age eight.



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