

# Đà Nẵng Air Base

366th SPS,

USAF K-9, 1968-69

## Blackie - LT!

Halt, Dung Lai!

by Greg Dunlap

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To a man, Air Force Security Police will agree that our officers and NCOs were tops across the board... *except for now and then* one would slink over from state-side and forget that he wasn't in the land of the big-BX any longer.

Dismal days, hot and sweaty. Nights spent on post that could be better used for sleeping, "after all, it got down to 85° tonight!" One day following the next. Routine sets in. We start looking for something, anything to break the boredom and rhythm. Too soon it arrives in the form of a state-side bandy rooster lieutenant---Second Lieutenant, *L-T*, all 5' 5" of him.

Recent grad of OCS, and probably even took ROTC twice. He majored in proctology and minored in smelling salts and when thought of at all was generally in relationship to a body or face. Right after getting his gold bar, singular, brass, and unscratched, pinned on, he begs, demands, throws a fit until he gets a *combat posting*. Two days in-country and he is winning the war by assuring all the enlisted ranks know all their security instructions.

*L-T's* checking all the posts! Asking for the security questions and instructions. *What's your fourth security instruction airman?* You'd better know your pass word of the day too! Cobra and Tiger (the security police flights that had flight line security during the day and night) were going nuts with the talk of what he had done the day before. Chewed out so and so, done this, done that, you'd have thought he was Uncle Ho and the devil rolled into one entity. And all things considered---*he was*, at least a close cousin.

At Guardmount it was announced that *L-T* was going to check the K-9 posts. *Check the K-9 posts?* Why? *L-T* is all spit and polish, pressed, double-starched, and just out of the tailors, baths, and basic training. He has a firm grasp of *me-officer, you-enlisted-man* concepts and attitudes. And it's apparant to all that he's come to Đà Nẵng to straighten us out and win the war for us, single handedly. And he's not happy that we're not appreciative of his efforts, or happy to see him.

Sentry dog handlers are somewhat the opposite of a boot-lieutenant, out of necessity. K-9 Sentry dog handlers' uniforms are clean, or at least they once were, but may not have seen an iron (ever) or been anywhere near starch (if potato spills at the chow hall don't count). Boots, without exception, have *never* been spit-shinned, we do however hose the mud off of them so mamasan won't have to spend half a day trying to make them black again, and we do wash our socks regularly. Generally, our hair is cut and we don't smell too bad (admittedly, more than one physical altercation has debated this point), unless we're in a group, but individually we're tolerable... generally. We were taught to march in basic training and probably have done so at least once since then. On the plus side, most of us walk upright, have controlled our drooling (at women), and can speak in intelligent sentences (having passed the Air Force IQ test). And, our dogs do the talking for us most of the time (there are a few recorded cases where you did get a better qualified answer by asking the dog and not the handler). We *generally* keep to ourselves.

At guardmount we are informed that the Flight Sargent and *L-T* will be making the rounds together tonight, and to be sharp and *let's get this over with*. I said, "Yep, sure thing sarge..." but thought, "*Haven't lieutenants*

*got better things to do than bother us? maybe he'll not stop when challenged and we can feed him to the dog."*

"Which post does Lance or Blackie have?" were the endearments muttered as we filed away to get our partners and start our evening patrol. Sarge called me aside and said, "Dunlap I put you on kilo 17 because I'm going to start the inspection of posts there tonight with you."

I thought, "@!@#%&!)" but said, "Ok sarge, no problem, but why are you telling me this on the QT?"

"Just thought if the Lieutenant met you and *Blackie*, it may cause him to stand off the rest of the guys... and we never had this conversation and don't mention this to anyone either, GOT IT?"

"What conversation?" I ask leaving to get Blackie out of his kennel. Blackie, I'm relieved to see, is happy to see me and raring to go. He's obviously thinking, "*We get to go play, I get to go play, I get to kill something, let's go play, play, play!!!*" The usual thoughts crossing his mind. I put his choke-chain around his large neck, snap on the leash, pull the muzzle over his jaws. *Now let's go, go, go!!! Watch out, here I come, I get to go out.*" Sometimes you have to wonder if we really deserve such attention and affection.

The walkout posts, near the kennels, generally grouped up and took off together as a unit. Each one of us would drop off in our area and it gave us an opportunity to BS on the way out. We were all going over our signals, if we got inspected first, on how we were going to alert everyone else. We carried Motorola radios that were half the size of a cereal box to communicate with. What we would do if one of us got hit by a post inspection is key the mike in a pattern of bursts, 3, 2, 1. Everyone's radio would go *Psst-Psst-Psst, Psst-Psst, Psst*. Also the driver back at the kennels would do this when the Sargent walked out to check on us, or if he had to drive him out to do it. Sort of an advanced warning system.

We really thought we were out-smarting the old sarge, not to mention officers, with this early-warning-system, but the truth is---old sarge is probably the one who taught us how to use it. Afterall, if we look bad we make him look bad... and no sargeant on the planet will ever *willingly* let that happen.

We'd get the first warning that they were leaving, then the second when they arrived. Not very original, but it worked. This also allowed the second post in, anywhere on the line, to check out the one beside them and pass the word down if their area, or not, was where the inspection was happening. And everyone was wondering where the L-T was going to strike first. I was wondering what Blackie and I were going to do when he started in on us. And besides, what was it Sarge kept telling us the fourth security instruction was?

As part of the walk-out post group, I was the first to peel off, and wished everyone else good luck, and good hunting, and made ready for my chore that evening. I settled in on post and begin to think perhaps the L-T would find something better to do afterall, and would skip coming out on the line. One of the problems with our warning system is that our transistor radio's were always making noise anyway, and sometimes you weren't sure if it was *the signal* or not. Other times the squelch knob would rotate out so it wouldn't go *Psst* even if that was the sound the human voice tried to make when transmitting. All this was going through my head as I awaited my fate. Let's see... aha... *I will quit my post only when... aha... properly... aha---no that's not it*. Added to the uneasy feeling that everything was going to turn to manuer when L-T shows up (that's not the bad part... it's when sarge shows up the next day my troubles begin), but it was the fact I had to wear my helmet, gear, and can't let Blackie off leash for a real play-break, and that's a pain in the backside, because he's getting snarling mad not getting his way and is beginning to plot how to make my life miserable---which I've been told is how wives behave---but then, maybe we'll get lucky and have a genuine attack and this K-9 post inspection crap will be postponed.

Well let's get Blackie in a good mood for this anyway, just in case. We swept our area and then I kept him alerting on the marines walking the back road and in their bunkers. Of course Blackie thought it was all fun and games. Normally I tried to keep him from terrorizing the marines too much. After all, he had quite a reputation with them and there was no need to keep adding to it. I was startled when I heard the radio squawk, *Psst-Psst-Psst, Psst-Psst, Psst!* We were committed! Enemy in the area!

"Let's do this Blackie, *watch him, boy!*" I put him on alert and we started to sweep our area. The time had come and I still didn't know what I was going to do. I wondered if there was enough time to teach Blackie to fake *sun-stroke* when anyone asked me a security instruction... but would that really work at midnight, and how long would it take Sarge to catch on? And what could I do, short of letting Blackie eat L-T ... afterall everbody knows Blackie's appetite, and there would just be *one story*, and... and this just wasn't going to work. There was only one solution: I had to encourage L-T this was not all fun and games, and to want to go play somewhere else, and there's no way---*Psst-Psst-Psst, Psst-Psst, Psst!*

It was one of those black nights with very little moon, and cloud cover to boot. You had to have good night vision to see anything and I was counting on the enemy's not having adjusted yet. I saw Blackie alert on them, abreast of each other walking along the perimeter. Sarge knew to make the right amount of noise. I knew they hadn't spotted me yet so I squatted down and let them come to me. When they were about 20 feet away I stood and challenged them: "HALT, WHO GOES THERE?"

At the same time I sent Blackie to the end of his leash. He knew something was up, and he was playing his part perfectly. He sensed something was bothering me and these two looked guilty to him. Watching and growling,

there was no doubt that he wanted some action. "Sargent So-and-So and the Lieutenant!" came back the reply. Sargent was 6' 2" and with the 5' 5" lieutenant, they made a Mutt and Jeff looking pair. Sarge knew that, but L-T didn't have a clue. "ADVANCE AND BE RECOGNIZED!" I stated, still unsure of what I was going to do next.

They moved to within seven or eight feet and I told them to stop for safety. Putting My flashlight beam on them I acknowledged them, pulling Blackie in to heal close to me, I reported my post as secure and waited for what I thought was the inevitable. L-T was beside himself. He actually was sputtering! "A-A-A-Airman, aren't you supposed to salute when you report your post as being secure?" he finally forced out. A light began to shine in the back of my mind. He moved closer, within five feet now. A moth circling a candle. "WELL, AREN'T YOU?"

"No Sir", I stated. "Regulations say that I am not supposed to salute you when reporting my post because my dog may interpret that as a signal to attack, Sir!"

"REGULATIONS? WHAT REGULATIONS? I HAVE NEVER HEARD OF ANY REGULATION STATING THAT AIRMAN!" It was obvious L-T thought I was hearing-impaired, and that he was in full swing, fancying he had caught himself one, and he was going to do the officer squeeze play.

I replied, "Air Force regulations regarding Sentry Dogs Sir!" The Flight Sargent tried to back me up but L-T would have none of it.

"AIRMAN, I HAVE NEVER HEARD OF ANY SUCH REGULATION, AND THEREFORE IT DOESN'T EXIST. I'M AN OFFICER AND YOU WILL SALUTE ME WHEN YOU REPORT YOUR POST TO ME--- GOT IT?"

His fate was sealed. I had been letting out a little of Blackie's leash as I took his abuse, and all along Blackie was taking L-T's tone *personal* and I could feel the deep rumbling growl vibrating from him as he stealthfully took advantage of the slack leash. Whenever we were talking to anyone I had to watch Blackie because he would scoot backwards, trying to get some slack on the leash, and would suddenly rocket forward letting the person know that he has a death cry never before exclaimed. Blackie scared many a marine and myself a few times until I caught on to what he was doing. L-T was within five feet of me, the kill zone, and Blackie now had about three and a half feet of leash and if my hand pointed toward the lieutenant, Blackie would have a good six feet of charging room. I took a twist of the leash tightly around my hand, and snapping to attention, I answered, "YES SIR!"

Somehow, *I swear* I don't know how it happened, but in the act of snapping to attention and starting my salute, my hand extended *directly* at L-T, and in my clumsy-enlisted movement I somehow *kicked* Blackie in the upholstery. I must have been *distraught* with concern for L-T's safety. Normally it would never have happened. Honest.

Blackie was a 81mm mortar leaving the tube. Tan and Black, and all teeth. The dopler effect snapped as light-waves stretched to keep up with Blackie as he--*oh my goodness*---lunged with a fury I hadn't seen since the first time he chased me out of his kennel. L-T was standing frozen in triumph, reveling in the glory of an enlisted discretion that he was correcting---only his eye balls revealed a flickering awareness of imminent death. Yet a quizzical *this isn't the way things are supposed to go* swept the now saucer-size orbs.

A college grad (note to army, navy, and marine types: All Air Force officers graduated high school and college, unlike your GED officers), he was discovering, perhaps for the first time, that he was not now at the top of the food chain, and he was scared! I watched his face blanch and go white. I am shamed at the joyous pleasure this gave me (heh-heh). I don't know what kept L-T standing there, other than stark terror (as I'm sure he was without backbone). L-T was receiving an impression---a *Blackie Attitude* Impression.

At the magic moment when *the prey* has given up all hope of life, or ever seeing mom's face again... when his entire feeble life has flashed across his face---twice---and death is as certain as his soiled pants, and he feels the fatted breath (sorry Blackie) of the beast and glimpses the K-9 fangs and feels Blackie's spiked nails rake *ZORRO* across his chest---I checked Blackie's cannonball-momentum with practiced ease (okay... okay so what if there were an abundance of marines to practice on).

"DA..da-da... da-da-da-" L-T sputtered and I thought he was trying out some kind of Morse Code, but he completed the sentence: "DA-da-da-DAM!"

Blackie's teeth, which must have looked to him to be two feet long, had snapped just in front of L-T's slaiva splattered face close enough he wouldn't need to shave for a week. "Damn it, Lieutenant, I told you that I wasn't supposed to salute you! Calm down dog!" I shouted while playing in and out the leash. The whole time as I was pulling him back, I was pinching him on the side facing away from L-T. The Flight Sargent meanwhile, was caught between backing me up, and wanting to totally bust up laughing. Knowing what to look for, Sarge saw me *nudging* Blackie, but was telling L-T that I had tried to warn him. All the while Blackie continued trying to lunge at the lieutenant and I continued to pull him back, and finally just had to take a walk with him to get him to calm down.

It was a strange scene. L-T standing there trying to maintain any semblance of dignity that he could. The Flight Sargent making sure L-T was okay and telling me to control that "SOB (everyone called him that now)", and Blackie still trying for just a little taste of officer hinny. And me, *trying* desperately to calm friened Blackie down from fifteen feet away, apologizing, and stammering that my post was secure---but not saluting.

I think it was the first breath that L-T had taken since the entire episode began. A little color seemed to appear in his cheeks, his gaze however was locked firmly on Blackie. We stood there for what must have been a full minute, nobody saying anything. I was wondering what was going to happen next. *Did I overstep my bounds* and now was going to find myself in sandbag hell? L-T broke the silence by squeaking out something and then turning, began to walk along the perimeter toward the next post.

Sarge gave me a wink, and turned to follow L-T. I gave Blackie another boot which sent him charging out to the end of his leash barking madly. He could make a definite impression when he wanted to. I watched L-T flinch with each bark until they rounded the bend and went out of sight.

Funny thing... L-T never did ask me what any of my security instructions were.

Blackie turned to look back at me with that "Did I do good Boss?" look. Kneeling down, I put my arms around him and told him that he was the greatest doggie in the world---and meant it! The rest of the evening was uneventful. I chatted with a few of the marines in Alpha CO, who agreed that officers were strange creatures---and no, *I probably wouldn't get a medal for saving the lieutenant's life*---and then just spent some time with Blackie in case L-T decided he had a backbone afterall. Occasionally the radio would go *Psst-Psst-Psst, Psst-Psst, Psst*, so we knew that they were still on the prowl, but eventually that ended.

The sun came up and we got the call to come in, so gathering my gear I walked over to Perimeter Road and waited for the rest of the guys to join me. We grouped up and started the bull session for the walk back to the kennels. Everyone was saying that L-T wasn't such a bad ass as Cobra and Tiger Flights had made him out to be. They'd challenge him, he'd stop and watched as they reported their posts, and asked a few questions and then move on. "*Hell, the chaplain was a bigger pain than the Lieutenant had been!*" one handler remarked.

I listened quietly until I couldn't control my curiosity any longer. "Tell me guys, did he make any of you salute when you reported your post?"

"Salute? Nobody makes you salute! You know that! Damn dogs would attack them if we did that! Nope... why? Did he make you salute?" Downplaying the incident I said that he had asked for a salute and just said that Blackie had gone nuts when I saluted. I didn't want to replay the entire episode because some of it might escape, and then I'd be in hot water with L-T for sure. I also found out that L-T stayed back about ten feet from the K-9 while make the rounds.

At the kennels I put Blackie away and instead of catching the truck back to the chow hall I went into the office. The Flight Sargent was filling out paperwork and he and I looked at each other. "What are you doing Dunlap?"

"Getting Blackie a treat," I replied, and pulled out two cans of dog food. Normally the dogs got fed by the day workers and unless they had been placed on a special diet by the Vet, all they got was dry food mixed with water. "I figure he's earned a little treat for himself."

Nothing more was ever said about the L-T's inspection of K-9, but the two of us knew. As for L-T, he continued to harass Cobra and Tiger flights, but for some reason, never again checked the K-9 posts. And Blackie? You should have seen his eyes bulge out of his head as he watched me put two cans of dog food in his dish and then slide him the bowl. Doggie Heaven! Almost as good as officer hinny we agreed.

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