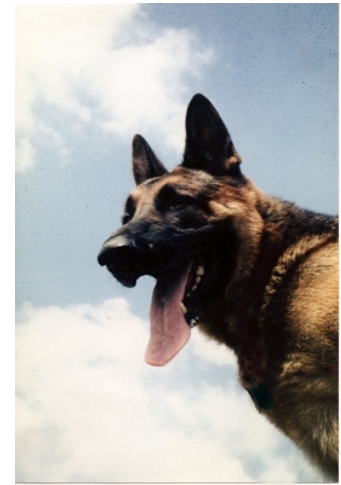


## “He’s just a dog”

How many times have you heard that statement? Or it’s just a cat, or a parrot, even a turtle? Yes they are just an animal. Heck, we even eat some of them. Whoever gave a passing thought to the cow or chicken the last time you drove through the fast food line?

“We’re having fish and chips tonight!!” *Sure sucks to be that cod but serves him right for getting caught so easily.* For most of us we take animals into our lives, love them while they are with us, and then feel fleeting sorrow when we watch them go over the rainbow bridge. And for those we consume? There’s no remorse, unless you’re a vegetarian but let’s not go into debating that school of thought.



Unless your one of the lucky few who after going into the Armed Services, put themselves into a position so they could call themselves, “**DOG HANDLERS!**” I’m proud to state that I can say that I was one of those lucky ones.

I enlisted in the Air Force in November, 1965. After basic training and Air Police tech school I arrived at Oxnard AFB in Southern California in early 1966. Later on in 1966 I transferred into K-9 and became a dog handler with my first dog, Rex K044. Military service dogs are known by their name and service number, which is unique to each dog. You can imagine in a large kennel there can be a few Bear’s, Chief’s, King’s etc. Giving each their own service number keeps them separate. Rex K044 was an older dog that had broken in more than his share of new handlers, he knew I was young and dumb so he forgave me my mistakes.

In early 1967 the Air Force sent me off to Dog Handlers School at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas. There I was paired up with another Rex only he was Rex 688E. I had 6 months with Rex K044 behind me so even though Rex 688E was an untrained dog, we evened each other out.

In April, 1967 I returned to Oxnard AFB with Rex 688E and we worked together for the next 7 months till around the end of November orders came in for me. I was going overseas, to Da Nang, Vietnam where although I didn’t know it yet, I was going to be paired with the dog that I would end up remembering all the rest of my life.

Blackie 129X was whelped in February, 1962 in Leominster, Massachusetts. The Air Force acquired him on June 30, 1963 for \$180. He weighed 95 pounds then. He was sent to the Sentry Dog Training Facility at Lackland AFB and received his first handler and trainer, Al Watts. He was lucky in that respect, Al Watts was one of those people who could train dogs to do anything, and he put all his knowledge into making Blackie the best sentry dog he would become to be. Al and Blackie later were then assigned to a very unique group called Top Dog45.

In 1965 the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Regular Army units were infiltrating bases all over South Vietnam and causing havoc in their wake. Someone at the Pentagon, (probably an NCO because officers didn’t identify with ground units) came up with the idea of sending Sentry Dogs over there to combat this and Top Dog45 was initiated. Al Watts and Blackie 129X were part of the first Military Working Dog Teams to go into Vietnam; and wherever a group of teams went, they made a statement! That statement was so impactful, that today it is said that wherever there was a base patrolled by Sentry Dogs, there was no longer a successful

infiltration attempt performed. The VC and NVA didn't stop trying to infiltrate, they just were no longer successful as they were before. Because now, there were guarded, by Sentry Dog teams. And Blackie and Al were one of those.



The first group of Top Dog handlers went over to Vietnam mostly on a TDY (Temporary Duty) assignment of 120 days. They were then given the option of staying or rotating back to the base they were assigned to prior. The person who was the Assistant Kennel Master opted to rotate back to their prior stateside base and Al, Watts being the next senior person there, was then to assume the duty of the Assistant Kennel Master. That meant that he had to find someone to handle Blackie 129X.

So while walking around the APO Al spotted this skinny kid coming back from the chow hall and seeing as he was an Air Police person, Al stopped him and asked him if he liked dogs. Don Poss didn't know what to say so he said the first thing that came into his head, "sure I like dogs, who don't?" Don Poss didn't know it then, but he just volunteered to be a Dog Handler with that statement. For the first two days that Don went out on duty with Blackie, he had to keep the muzzle on him at all times. Blackie didn't like being used to break in a new troop and kept trying to bite Don every chance he got. Al Watts would have to go into Blackie's kennel, put the leash and muzzle on him, walk him out and hand the leash over to Don. It's a good thing that nothing happened those first nights because if Don had to release Blackie on a capture, there's no telling who he would have gone after first.

Don and Blackie became a team eventually and Blackie wormed his way into Don's heart like he did with everyone who he let handle him. Dog Handlers were a "macho" minded group and having one of the biggest bad-ass dogs in the kennels just made one strut around a little bit more. Plus Blackie had a unique thing that he would do. He'd carry your helmet!! You could toss it on the ground in front of him and he'd pick it right up. And once he had it, he'd be happy. Off the two of you would go and it didn't matter how far out you had to go, he was happy carrying that helmet. Of course from the exercise that gave his neck and jaw muscles we used to joke that he could probably crush cannon balls in his mouth. But you also took grief from everyone because of it. The Marines used to tell me that I was wearing a bucket of dog slobber on my head for a helmet.



He also played games with the people who worked in the kennels during the day. One of their jobs was to feed the dogs and collect the feed bowls afterwards to clean them. Well Blackie didn't always want to give up the bowl. Some of the time they would just beg and plead with him and he'd eventually let them retrieve the bowl but then there were other times when **HE WANTED TO KEEP IT**. Then the broom stick would come out and the fight would start. There would be times when I would come to get him to go out on post and there would be a scarred and mangled broom stick hanging on his kennel door. He'd be sitting inside looking content, and **STILL WITH THE FEED BOWL!!** I swear he'd almost be laughing.

In January of 1967 Don Poss rotated back to the States and Blackie was deliberately kept in his kennel for a period in order to get him stir crazy enough that he'd be ready to go out with anyone who was dumb enough to enter his kennel and try to put a leash on him. But even after being cooped up for weeks, he still put up a resistance to a new handler. It took me 5 attempts to get into his kennel and take him out. The first 4 times he

chased me out! Another time a person later attempted to enter his kennel and put a leash on him and was not so lucky as to escape unharmed. I'm told that he still has the scars on his butt where Blackie bit him.

Blackie ended up serving 5 years in Vietnam. Originally he was at Da Nang and later he ended up at Phan Rang. He was handled by Al Watts, Don Poss, David Porter, myself (Greg Dunlap) and lastly by Clarence Dedecker. While he was with Clarence Dedecker he had a condition strike him that required surgery to correct. It occurred again and being unreparable this time, he was put down in November of 1970.

I wrote a series of stories about my year with him and those can be found at: <http://www.vspa.com/k9/dn-stories-greg-dunlap.pdf>

Blackie 129X and myself in front of the kennels

