



USAF Dog Memorial

Maxwell AFB, AL

The Air Force Enlisted Heritage Research Institute (located on Maxwell AFB, Alabama), offers a unique glimpse at the enlisted contributions to the development of air power. This facility hosts thousands of visitors each year from around the country and the world. It is the only USAF museum totally dedicated to the enlisted men and women. They redesigned their memorial circle located in the front of the facility.

The final dedication (for the entire Heritage Plaza) was on Saturday 15 February, 2003. It is in front of the Enlisted Heritage Hall. This dedication will culminate almost 3 years of plaza development.

There are 11 monuments that are being dedicated in the newly bricked plaza. The 11 monuments are: the Bicentennial-first 200 years, Enlisted Pilots 1912-1942, Korean War, Southeast Asia-Vietnam, Delta Force 1980-Iran, Southwest Asia-Persian Gulf, Khobar Towers, SMSgt Sherry Lyn Olds-Kenya Embassy, Allied Force-Kosovo, Noble Eagle, and Military Working Dog Monument.

The initial dedication and unveiling (of the dog memorial) occurred on November 9, 2002. Since the Memorial had not been completed, only the first plaques were unveiled. The cost of the plaques were funded by the handlers. Handlers paid a small fee to have the names of their dogs engraved. Several bases raised enough funds to list all of their assigned dogs. As one handler told me. "we brought our dogs home". Former dog handlers Bill Wiggington, David F. Adams, and Bill Cummings spoke for the handlers. TSgt Paul Cook coordinated the memorial and the ceremony.



David F. Adams spoke most eloquently of the special bond shared between the dogs and their handlers.

"CMSgt Hamel, TSgt Cook, Honored Guest, and fellow veterans,

It is an honor for me to speak to you today on behalf my veteran brothers in an attempt to bring to life for you an experience we shared with one another some 30 years ago, the experience of serving our nation in time of

war. To stand in harms way teamed with a dog in whom we placed more trust and confidence than our own knowledge and instinct for survival. Each of us know what it was to walk the outer perimeter of an Air Base at night, or at the point position on a patrol through a jungle, to be the first contact with enemy protecting the lives and mission of the units we were assigned to.

War, is without a doubt, the most horrific of human experiences. It is an endeavor filled with a dichotomy of fear and courage, of anger and love. Like a Charles Dickens novel, it brings forth the best of humanity and the worst of human kind. It is a time of experiencing of all of these emotions simultaneously. A time when men and women are confronted with fear and combat it with courage, are called on in a time of anger and aggression, and respond out of love, love of family, of nation, and of comrades that compel each individual to press forward amid death and destruction, and it was love that motivated the dogs we have gathered here together to honor this day.

I would like you to open your imagination and follow me back and live for a brief moment what we lived during a war in a small corner of the world called Vietnam. You are 20 years old and find yourself half way around the world in an environment totally foreign to you. You have been together with the dog you have been assigned to for five days at best and don't yet know one another. The vehicle carrying the men and their dogs to post comes to a stop as the driver calls your name telling you this is your assigned position. Climbing off the truck and lifting your dog to the ground you attempt to look down a single-track dirt road with a perimeter fence and dense jungle a few feet to the left and dense and lush under brush and jungle a few feet to your right. You change you dog's collar from chock chain to leather signaling the dog it is time to go to work. As you peer down that pathway cut through the jungle in to a seemingly endless darkness filled with unknowns, you recall the six o'clock news you watched throughout your high school years filled with the stories coming out of Vietnam of battles, air strikes, and body counts. The times you played war as a child, trying to relive the experience of your father, has become reality and your mother can no longer rescue you by calling you home for supper. You ask yourself, "what lies ahead of me this night, is this the night my base is hit. Will they come across my post?" Then the true fear that underlies it all, "will I have the courage to carry out my duty, to make the stand I must to protect my base, the men working along the flight line keeping the F-4 Phantoms flying, and the planes themselves.

You reach for that something, that security blanket you carried as a child and your hand slides down the silky coat of the dog sitting at your side and you find comfort in his breathing and warmth. He looks up at you with his

golden brown eyes asking, "well, what are we waiting for?" Your courage is gained from that dog who has walked that same post many times before you arrived and the two of you step off and begin your tour of duty. Throughout the night you talk to your dog, not to give him confidence as you learned to do in dog school, but rather to draw confidence from him. At the end of your shift you return to the kennels putting your new partner and best friend in his run, getting him fresh water, close the kennel door looking into his tiered eyes and under your breath, "thanks Rex. Thanks for getting me through this one."

With each night that passes it becomes easier, and you and the dog become inseparable partners. A partner you share your loneliness with, your dreams, your love for the bride-to-be, or the wife you left behind who is waiting your return. He is a partner who's personality you come to know and love as it were your own, and it humors you and continues to give you that security and courage you found that first night.

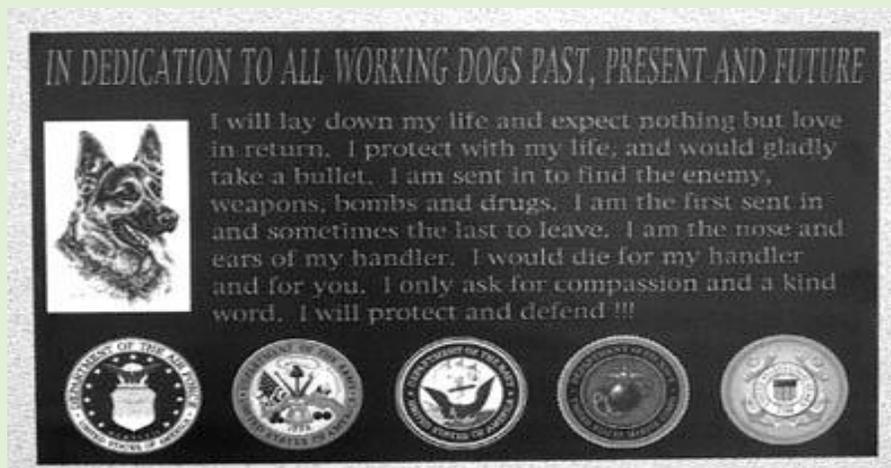
Your memories will be filled with moments when he detected an intruder attempting to enter the munitions storage area that you would otherwise not have seen, or when he helped you apprehend an unauthorized person trying to run through your post. There are memories that will forever put a smile on your face, like the time you sat down on the embankment of a bomb revetment to eat your box lunch. With one piece of the bread and slice of bologna resting on the palm of your hand, you searched the box to get the packet of mustard and turning to put it on the half of sandwich found it is gone. You looked to see where it fell on the ground, but was nowhere to be seen. Even though you felt nothing, you know where it went and look in the eyes of your dog only to be greeted by the most incredibly innocent look and an expression that says, "What?"

However, underling those memories, was the knowledge that your partner was not going to be returning home as you were. That when that seemingly endless war ended your friend would either make one last trip to the vet's table, or be turned over to the military units of that Southeast Asian country just as equipment was turned over, but to a culture that did not have any appreciation or love for a dog that you did, and so deep inside your painful hope was for the former option over the latter.

As we take this moment to pay a long over due tribute to these forgotten heroes we left behind nearly 30 years ago we need to understand what motivated them to protect us and ensure we returned to our loved ones and nation unharmed, even though they were never to share in that same fait. The motivation was not the training, nor a spirit of aggressiveness. It was love, total unconditional love for us that caused them to comfort us and lead

us down that dark post on our first night of duty. It was unconditional love that caused them to charge in to a certain death to protect their partner if the post was attacked. It was what the Bible calls the greatest commandment, love that made these dogs the heroes they are. So, as you view this memorial to their devotion and memory, and look at the pictures of them that are on display, look deep in to their eyes and see a dog not casting an image of terror, but rather see the unconditional love that drives that dog to protect his partner at its own peril.

Thank you and may God bless each of you for being here today to honor this part of His creation."



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