

A Teardrop from Blackie...

by Don Poss.

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*Weeks prior to the dedication of the War Dogs Memorial,
I began having butterflies in my stomach:
After six tours, and three decades, Blackie is coming home --
and I had to be there for him.*

Days of rain... decades of remembrances ... a private reunion... and today is the day... special beyond belief for me -- and I would receive a gift I will forever remember.

I'm thinking of you, Blackie, as I walk among the crowd of aging veterans assembling for a last salute to K-9 friends long dead. I remember your friendship... and yes, your special brand of humor. A dozen or more familiar faces, handshakes, back-slapping, and anxious glances toward the dark plastic wrapped about the monument protecting it more form view than the rain. Color Guard presents arms... a sea of hands salute, remove hats in the pouring rain... proud speeches... tears of remembrance... K-9 police dogs from 50 law enforcement agencies parade forward... and finally... the moment of unveiling War Dogs is at hand, and butterflies danced their dance within me.

The formal wrap of fine-cloth was not used for the monument because of the days of rain. And suddenly, the poncho-like plastic is released and flutters away. Silence. *Do they feel what I had felt a few days earlier when I had first met War Dogs?* David Eisley's haunting music began to drift across uplifted faces... and stripped away the last pretence for many *having-it-together*. A call for War Dog Handlers to come forward and place a Rose before the memorial. Men in their fifties, sixties, and seventies, nudged forward as one through the parting crowd to pay honor to their war dogs of Vietnam, Korea, and World War II. I hesitated... watching the men. Studying their reactions. Each giving one another a private moment in the swelling tide of humanity, with *his* dog.

Unable to speak to my son David, for fear of the voice I wouldn't have, I thought of the folklore that when mankind was kicked out of heaven, the dog voluntarily went with him... and wondered--*prayed*--that dogs go to heaven.

I knew the stream of dog handlers I had joined were unique in many ways. All had experienced love for, and from, a dog of war. As I drew closer to the life-like handler and K-9, it suddenly was important to know if dogs have souls... *aren't they more deserving of heaven than most humans?* I needed to believe it is so... and then wondered if Blackie lives in heaven, *does he remember me... is he watching... are they watching those who honor them now ... and those who could not be here but are in spirit?*

At that moment, a *rain-teardrop* appeared in the corner of Blackie's eye, as if God Himself allowed a brief moment to signal that, *Yes, Don... Blackie remembers ...* and that is when I let go my pretence of strength.



Other handlers gave me the moment... *did they see it too?* Some, alone in the crowd with their memories, moved forward ... placed a tribute Rose... and moved on. Other Vietvets kept an eye on them, and some drifted to their side with a

consoling arm. I moved to the side giving my comrades their gift-moment... took some pictures... wrestled with logic and reason's arguments for control: it's raining... *it's only rain* and not a tear... *he's not even real* -- just a statue ... of Blackie ... with a teardrop matching mine, and a thousand others. I knew the truth: *it was only rain*... he wasn't Blackie -- just a symbol... like the flowers ... capable... of tugging the heart and freeing memories and tears of salt and rain. I know the truth -- the first raindrop fell from heaven, as *A Teardrop from Blackie* ... in a shared moment of closeness through the decades since Đà Nẵng 1965... at war in Vietnam.

Blackie (X129), was put down after six years of faithful heroic service, from Đà Nẵng 1965 to Tân Sơn Nhứt AB, late 1970 -- a lifesaver, and a friend.

Blackie - 129X

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|----------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------------|
| 1965 | 65-66 | 66-67 | 68-69 | 69-70 |
| Al Watts | Don Poss | | Greg Dunlap | Clarence Dedecker |
| Danang | Danang | Danang | Danang | Danang - TSN |
| | | 11-67 | | |
| | | Monty Moore | | |
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