



Dog School

(USAF Sentry & Patrol Dog Training)



September 1, 2008

Thanks to everyone who has been involved in the production of Dog School as we continue to tell our history. This fourth edition of **DOG SCHOOL** hopefully will continue to tell our story of dog handlers past, present, and future. This edition will focus on the experiences of our handlers while attending Dog School and where their tours took them following graduation from “Dog School”.

We’ve all heard the stories, but now is the time to give them their place in history. In this edition, we have several versions of the exploits of our training. In addition, we have an “Old Sentry Dog” story from 1962-1964 from a handler who received a copy of **DOG SCHOOL**. I think you will find it very interesting – I know I did.

Please consider telling your story! For those of you that were “OJT” handlers – we especially want to hear from you – you know, the Dog School of Hard Knocks! I can’t wait to see how you guys were introduced and by whom? OK, dust off the memory caps and put pencils to paper – let’s keep this going and share our stories with each other. If anyone has photographs from any of the dog schools, we would love to see and publish those photographs – just e-mail them to me at usafbrutus@comcast.net .

A1C Bill Cummings & Duke 54M5
USAF Sentry Dog School – Lackland AFB, TX
August – September 1968

In October 1967 I joined the USAF and was of course, shipped immediately to Lackland AFB, San Antonio, Texas. Basic training! What a different world for this country boy from the shores of the Chesapeake Bay of Maryland. What in the world was this all about?

Following the basic, I was assigned to Davis-Monthan AFB, Tucson, Arizona – Home of the 390th Missile Wing, 803rd SPS, Strategic Air Command (SAC). When I arrived at D-M all I had was a lack of hair and a mosquito wing on my arm – what a culture shock. I arrived at about 0200 hours in the morning – of course the Air Force had first class accommodations for me. I was told that there were no bunks available for me sleep. But wait, the CQ told me – “You can go down the hall and “hot bunk” in one of the K-9 rooms – they won’t be back for hours”! What a sweet deal I thought – WRONG!

I was escorted down the hall way and told to drop my bags and “grab a rack”. What in the world was this smell? Oh well – get some sleep I told myself. I know I slept for about 30 seconds when the door swung open and this very large 3 striper yell out “What the %\$R&*()#@ are you doing in my bed?” There was leather gear and chains hanging all over this dude – and there was THAT SMELL AGAIN. Well, as you might imagine – it was quite the rude awakening for the first day (hours) at my new assignment.

Long story short – I never moved out of the K-9 section sleeping quarters. I went through the routine SAC training and then got stuck humping alert aircraft and missile silos. This ain’t for me – there has to be more.

Of course my “bunkmates” encouraged me to look into volunteering for K-9. They took me out to the kennels on my days off and I helped clean kennels, feed dogs, and even ventured into the attack suit (105 degrees in Arizona – what a treat). OK, I’m hooked and I was introduced to the Kennel Master who said that the guys had vouched for me as “solid” and he said “we’ll give you a try as soon as a dog comes open”.

Max 629X - Holy \$^*#@#! Ninety five pounds of teeth – there was nothing else – just teeth. Max’s handler, Bob Barry was rotating out to Phan Rang – I now had a dog, or should I say he had me? I worked Max for about four months when I was told that I had been selected to attend Basic Sentry Dog School at Lackland – I had made the big time – packed my bags – with all four months of being a handler under my belt – what in the world could they teach me now – I was a SAC trained killer with an attitude with teeth at my side. Guess I had a few things to show them when I arrived – I’d probably be asked to help with the instruction of the “new troops”?

Off to Lackland – this should be a snap! I laid low for a few days, not telling anyone I was a “seasoned handler” – You guys know me – I’m not about to show all my cards – then it hit me. There I was, in the Texas heat of August 1968, with a choke chain attached to ammo can – “Sit” – the damn can won’t sit – now what? Class 12068 was now in session! Well, you guys know the rest of that story.

Finally, we were introduced to our dogs. I just knew I’d draw some mutt that I would have to drag around the course and make excuses. The he popped out of the kennel – a beautiful one and a half year old GS – black with tan muzzle markings – I was in love – then the SOB bit me!

That was my introduction to Duke 54M5, USAF Sentry Dog. Well, we breezed through the course – all of the time, Duke taking the lead – he was a natural. It didn’t take me long to figure out who was in charge of this K-9 team – I was along for the ride. As the course of instruction continued I realized that something special was happening here – we were on top of the leader board going into night scouting training.

One of the instructors – I think it was SSgt McKinney called me and Marine Gunny Sergeant Baker off to the side of the class after class one afternoon – this gruff old fart was probably going to find a way to make this scouting class even harder. No - I had been found out – no doubt in my mind – I thought they had reviewed my records and found out that I was an OJT trainer and they were going to bust my butt?

Instead, he told us that we were tied for Honor Graduate Team and the scouting training would determine who would be the Honor Team. Man, I’ve got to go head to head with an experienced Vietnam veteran “Jar Head” – I’ve got to find an angle for this one – and quick!

I found the angle that evening. GYSGT Baker and I went out for a beer and talked dogs. We had become friends due to the fact that we were working in the same squad. What a great guy, he told me over a beer that he knew he was going back to Vietnam, but this time he would have some help! The Gunny and his dog were anxious to get back there – he said he had some scores to settle.

Then he surprised me – he took me back to the base and handed me a good luck charm. He had prepared one of his USMC utility hats (starched in on a coffee can) and presented it to me to wear during scouting training. This was a class Marine and we both agreed – who ever come out first would buy the other a “few rounds” after graduation.

I’ll never forget it – I remember being assigned to the training area, checking the wind and telling Duke – “OK, let’s go to work”. We couldn’t have been 75 yards from the point when Duke hit the end of the leash on his hind legs – there was something out there and Duke wanted a piece of what ever it was – PLEASE let it be the decoy I said to myself. He had never let me down during the entire training – and I remember these words that I still use today “trust your dog and rely on your training”.

“Get’em Duke” – and all of a sudden fur, spit and saliva was all over the place. We had made contact, followed the scent cone and Duke had a piece of the decoys %\$^((()#! “Out – come” – and you know what – HE DID! Back to a perfect heel position at my side - what a great display of what he had learned. We were debriefed and returned to the pre-staged position to join the rest of the squad.

I was greeted by GYSGT Baker and his dog Bill – actually, Bill was better looking than me (no surprise here I guess). Gunny asked me “How did Duke do”? “Man, you wouldn’t believe it – that dog bailed me out again – all I could see was DARK!” Gunny and Bill were also very good that night – as I expected them to be – Damn Marines!

Once again SSgt McKinney called us in – the moment of reckoning. We were told that we were tied for Honor Student – according to SSgt McKinney, this had never happened before – who knows? A decision had been made and we both waited anxiously. “Here’s the deal – you two dudes will lead the formation into the graduation ceremony together – that’s it”.

The Gunny and I just looked at each other and then he said “Beer for everyone – we’re good to go!” Sentry Dog school was about to end, but not before the march to graduation. Gunny Baker had stopped by my room before we went to the kennels – he adjusted my “gig line” and a few other things that weren’t exactly up to USMC specs – “Damn Marines”! We shook hands and promised to be the best Sentry Dog teams that the Air Force and Marines would ever have.

It was one of the proudest moments in my military career as Gunny Baker and Bill and Duke and I lead the formation into the parade ground. What a very special honor – I’d love to find GYSGT Baker – to this day I just can’t – but you can count on one thing – he was the few, the proud, the Marine Sentry Dog Handler – I’m sure of it.

I had the pleasure of going through Dog School with, I believe according to the best knowledge that I have thirteen handlers and seven dogs that were assigned to Nakhon Phanom and Korat Royal Thai Airbases in Thailand.

The next day I returned to Davis-Monthan AFB after a very tearful good bye with Duke 54M5. I later went on to serve at U-Tapao Royal Thai Airbase in Thailand from 1970-1971 and handled a very well known dog – my big guy – Brutus X321. I was discharged from Davis-Monthan AFB in August of 1971.

Sentry Dog Duke 54M5 was whelped on October 20, 1966 in Meridian, Mississippi. He was purchased by the Air Force and arrived at Lackland for his physical on May 23, 1968. He stood twenty-five inches tall and weighed 74 pounds, black and tan in color. He served his country for seven years and four months with the U. S. Army assigned to Company B, 728th Military Police Battalion and Battery D, 2/71 in Korea. He was euthanized on September 16, 1975 – 27 days before his eighth year of birth. What a great dog and one of my heroes to this day.

Finally, I had the pleasure of getting to know Mike Balash (Korat), Gene Fret, Joe Fuller, David Kaltenbach and Stephen Westmeyer (NKP); Bill Borges and Vernon Anderson (U-Tapao) after dog school via their association with the Thailand Dog Handlers – is life good or what?

(A1C Bill Cummings and Duke 54M5 at Sentry Dog School – August-September 1968 - **Class 12068**)





Sentry Dog - Duke – 54M5 – Lackland AFB,
Texas – 1968



COMPLETES COURSE -- Airman First Class William E. Cummings Jr., son of Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Cummings, Tilghman, recently completed Sentry Dog School at Lackland AFB, Texas. The 8-week intensive training course included scouting, obedience and physical endurance of the team. Cummings graduated as an Honor Student. He and his dog Duke maintained the Honor Student requirements throughout the entire period of training. A 1966 graduate of St. Michaels High School, he is serving with the 803rd Security Police Sentry Dog Section at Davis-Monthan AFB, Ariz. Prior to enlisting in the Air Force in October 1967, he was a Barrack Clerk at the State Police Barrack, Easton.

Local Press Release – A1C Cummings
Completes Sentry Dog School

Purple Mouthed, Thigh Biter!
Jim Stastny – Korat 1970-71

August 1968, there we sat, a couple of airmen, just out of Security Police School, and a couple of lifers, all waiting to process into the 4661st Security Police Squadron, Kincheloe AFB, Michigan, the frigid north of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Suddenly, a deep, gravelly voice shocked us out of our boredom. I looked up; there stood John Wayne's evil twin, our 1st Sergeant. "I need volunteers to return to Lackland AFB and attend Sentry Dog School. Who wants to go?" growled the man. Practicing the advice to never volunteer, we all kept silent. After the 1st Sgt. disappeared into his office the lifers started to encourage us to take the offer. We newbies kept hearing things like: "It's the best duty an SP can have." "Would you rather hump around a B-52 all night long, or be in the woods with a dog?" "Man, I remember my girlfriend would visit me out on post when I was a dog-man. She would hide her car, I would secure my dog, and we would neck all night." "As an SP you can't beat being K-9."

With all those encouragements I timidly approached the 1st Sgt. “What do you want sonny boy?” he barked. Facing this giant, guff man I mustered my courage and piped-up, “I want to volunteer for dog school.” His simple, tough-guy reply: “You’re too d**n late sonny boy.” My heart sank, thinking I missed a chance at a great assignment. The 1st sarge continued: “You’re to d**n late to volunteer, ‘cause you’re goin’ anyway.” “When?” I stuttered in reply. “As soon as I can get your sorry butt off this stinking base,” he shot back. So, in less than 24 hours I found myself back at Lackland to begin one of my life’s greatest experiences, being a dog-man.

In school they assigned me a German Shepherd named Dante (632M), a lively brute going through his second or third course of training. As we worked and learned together, I noticed something wrong with his teeth and gums. “Hey sarge, look at this,” I uttered to the T.I. Opening Dante’s mouth I showed the sarge a spot where Dante’s teeth and gums were separating, like a hide peeling from a rabbit. Obviously, you do not want weak teeth and gums in a dog whose purpose is to tear the flesh off people. Off to the vet we went.

Finished with his examination of Dante, the vet gave me a bottle of a vile, purple solution, with a big cotton swab attached to the inside of the cap. “Swab this in his mouth and on the infected area four times a day for the next two weeks,” the vet instructed. He continued, “This stuff tastes nasty, he won’t like having you apply it, be careful he doesn’t bite you.” I didn’t need to hear that. The doc continued, “By the way don’t get any of this on you either. It will stain your clothes and skin.” Oh boy, I thought, more good news.

Fortunately, this took place during the obedience portion of our schooling, so, the care of Dante’s infection did not interfere with our training schedule. By the time we entered the detection and attack phase the medicine had healed the problem, but we looked like two grape popsicles, me with purple hands and fatigues, Dante with purple teeth, gums, and jowls.

Then came the day of epiphany, during attack training, as Dante charged the man in the suit, he somehow missed biting into the double protected arm. Instead he slipped under the target’s forearm and took hold of the upper thigh, right where the protective padding thinned out to the barest of protection, a spot near the family jewels. Well, the poor target screamed with real pain and fear. To the man’s relief I pulled Dante away from him. Somehow, something clicked in that dog’s head because from that day forward he never bit the sleeve, but always went for the leg. I guess he liked to hear real screams of terror, not just pretend ones.

After K-9 school I returned to Kincheloe, Dante stayed at Lackland. Now fast forward about eighteen months or more. I get orders to go to Korat RTAFB, arriving in May of 1970. After being there several months I get a phone call from Sgt. Corky Curson. Corky processed in with me at Kincheloe that fateful August day, winding up going with me to Dog School. We then served together up in the frozen north of Michigan. At this point in the story he’s stationed at Takhli RTAFB. One day I get a message that he wants to call me, so, I’m to be a certain place at a certain time. I arrive, he calls. After some idle chit-chat Corky gets down to business and asks, “Jim, give me the name and tattoo number of the dog you had when we went through K-9 school.” I respond “Dante 632M, Why?” He says, “Didn’t that dog develop an affinity for biting legs?” To which I replied with the affirmative, “Yep, especially the upper thigh, close to the family jewels” “Well then.” said Corky, “Dante is here at Takhli.” My old pal then proceeded to tell this story.

It seems the handlers at Takhli had orders to retrain their sentry dogs into patrol dogs. As us old handlers know that meant we no longer utilized the attack suit while training, just a sleeve to protect the arm. Well, you readers can guess what happened next. That’s right, one day during retraining; Dante’s handler let him loose on a target, who only wore a sleeve for protection. Dante viciously tore into that poor man’s leg almost making it impossible for him to ever sire children and sending him to a prolonged stay in the hospital. That’s how Dante became a purple mouthed thigh biter.

As a postscript, many years later I learned that, after returning to duty, Dante’s victim asked to be assigned as his next handler. I guess it takes a man with huevos to handle a dog who wants to bite them!

How I became a K-9 Handler **By Robert B. Threatt (Ubon 1969-70)**

I have always been a lover of animals although I grew up in the city. As a child, my friends and I played in the wooded areas of the city and I became quite good at tracking (our way of doing it learned from watching TV movies), sneaking up on the “supposed enemy”, and all the other things done in the woods. I had a dog most of my life but never even thought about training one or that there was even such a thing as training a dog.

In the early sixties there was a draft, therefore, after finishing high school, everyone knew that going into the Army was a given. Being very close to an army base and seeing what they were doing, I didn't want any part of them. With my father being retired from the Navy, I knew a lot about them and didn't want any part of them or the Marines. That only left the Air Force and, not knowing anything about them; I decided to give them a try to keep from going into the Army. Also, being a Black man, with jobs in the military being limited to Blacks, I devised a plan to keep from being a cook, truck driver or mechanic. So, I flunked, on purpose, everything that dealt with jobs of that type and focused on police work. Basic training ...would I survive? I was doing my best and had a ball marching, etc. My squadron, they said, was one of the best they'd seen and we marched all over Lackland doing “monkey drills”, etc.. Then, one bright sunny day, we marched past the kennel area. I saw those dogs and the men out there with them and knew, immediately, what I wanted but I was told to forget it, Blacks weren't accepted in K-9 (this was 1964, the Bill of Rights had just been put into law, segregation was supposed to be out but that is another story entirely), but I couldn't get those dogs out of my mind.

My first base was Pease AFB, New Hampshire, and I was a “slick sleeve” Airman Third Class “ramp rat” humping B-47's and KC-97's. Not my idea of having fun BUT they accidentally kept my dream alive. K-9 was short of people to man posts and handlers for dogs. At this time K-9 was primarily for Caucasians so I couldn't get in as a OJT (On the Job Training) handler but I could hump a K-9 post without a dog, so, I would volunteer every time they would let me. I would go to the kennels, be around the guys and dogs, ride to post with them and walk post (at times I would walk post with a handler and his dog). I was in paradise and vowed that if I could get into K-9, as a trained handler, I would re-enlist when the time came.

Pease AFB had no place for a Black K-9 handler and I got orders for Bien Hoa AB, Viet Nam. I heard about Nemo and that just thrilled me but it still was not in the cards for me. I left “Nam” for Beale AFB, California, and became a “ramp rat” for the B-52's and KC-135's and later got assigned as a TDY (temporary duty) to the 9th RTS (also at Beale) as an entry controlled for the SR-71's. I would see K-9 all the time and longed to be one but my enlistment was quickly running out and so was my dream of becoming a K-9 handler.

During Guardmount, one evening, I really wasn't paying attention because I've heard it all before and the great majority of the Guardmount was for the regular “ramp rats” and not for the SR-71's, I faintly heard the Sergeant call for a volunteer to attend dog school at Lackland with orders to deploy overseas after graduation. My hand was up before I realized that I had done it (I know the saying “never volunteer” but here was my final chance). By this time I was an Airman First Class and the Sergeant had to check if they accepted a person of my rank. He did, I was accepted and I was floating on cloud nine with a big grin on my face.

Sentry Dog School was a blast. I loved it and really excelled. A week before graduation, my orders were cancelled for the deployment and they were going to send me back to my base before graduating. My instructor went to bat for me and I was allowed to graduate and I went back to my base a school trained sentry dog handler. It took three weeks to get accepted and into the kennels, because no one wanted me there, and for three weeks I did not have a place to go and the First Sergeant had me stay home and call each morning to see what the status was.

Eventually I had a job, a position at the kennels and my first dog to hump post beside (or behind). But, being a Airman First Class, I was a squad leader and that didn't set too well with the other handlers, especially with me being “new meat” and Black but I hung in there and made it.

Later I became, at other bases (Thailand, Florida and Germany), a patrol dog handler (we called them “command dogs” then), a narcotics dog handler, assistant kennel master/trainer-supervisor, then kennel master and, near the end of my career, I became First Sergeant at Minot AFB, ND, which finally made me retire (“Why not Minot.....Freezin’ is the Reason). To this day, I still love K-9 and will always love K-9 and the handlers. “ONCE K-9, ALWAYS K-9”

**Another “Ole” Sentry Dog Handler – Richard Fulton’s Story – 1962-1964
Submitted by Steve Crane - Udorn 1969-1970**

I belong to a gun club in Bourbon County, Kansas (near Fort Scott) and recently learned another member was also, like me, a former Air Force sentry dog handler. We had been in the same squadron, at Blytheville AFB, Arkansas (a SAC base), although not at the same time and started trading dog names and stories about the section and the various posts. It was a much appreciated conversation. That was Tuesday and today in the mail he sent me a copy of your news letter. After reading it, I decided to send you some recollections about Wheelus Air Base in Libya during the 1962-1964 periods.

We had over 40 dogs in the section and half the handlers were Libyan civilian police. The rest of us were GI and most were OJT rather than school trained. The section chief was Senior Master Sergeant Marcus Grant who had been a major in an African-American unit during World War II. The kennel master was SSgt David Turcott from Nebraska.

There were three flights, half Libyan and half GI, each headed by an American SSgt and a Libyan Police Sergeant or Corporal. The flight I worked for was Clarence C. Stokes, better known as Pappy Stokes and he was a fine leader who laid the foundation for me about how to take care of the troops. At the time I was an A2C so we were always very formal in the way we addressed him. I ran into Pappy at Tan Son Nhut in 1968. By then I was also a SSgt but I still called him “Sergeant Stokes” rather than addressing him by his first name. That was a natural thing. We all liked him a great deal and he had our full attention and respect for the way he did business.

Wheelus was a large base located just east of Tripoli. It belonged to USAFE but was also a major MATS (later MAC) base. All the fighter squadrons in Europe flew down several times a year to use the large gunnery and bombing ranges out in the nearby northern fringe of the Sahara Desert. Back then very few Air Policemen were married, especially in the lower ranks. It was an 18 month tour of duty. During swings and midnights, the K-9 section was responsible for guarding a large bomb dump that included igloos and revetments (about five square miles), the air base water wells, and a large salvage yard. These were all off base. There were some on-base posts too, of the classified type.

Most of the time I pulled shifts in the bomb dump. We had four handlers there on each shift and we did the patrols two by two, a very unusual arrangement but set up that way because of the dangers of the environment and the fact that Libyan King Idris was making Taureg people from the desert stay in camps when they came to Tripoli because he feared there would be a coup against him. (He was right. Quadaffi is a Taureg.) Usually there were two GIs and two Libyans so we all learned a lot about each other’s culture, language and history. To this very day I can write my last name in Arabic script, enjoy strong black tea with raw peanuts, and can still mooch a cigarette and light in the Libyan coastal tribe’s language (if I still smoked!).

Wheelus was my first assignment after Air Police School at Lackland. When I first got over there, I was assigned to a law enforcement flight and pulled a lot of gate duty. After about a month of that I was bored out of my mind so was quick to volunteer when some openings in the section were announced. The dog I was assigned to was Mady, a coal black Belgium Shepherd female, then about six, meaning right in her prime. Mady was a bitch in more ways than one and I still have some faint scars across the back of my hand, earned in our getting acquainted session. It then took about a week before I could get back in on her.

All the dogs lived in a pair of concrete runs with each dog having its own shelter in a chain link enclosure. We wired ammo cans inside each run and kept our personal dog grooming gear, sheath knives and extra (meaning "illegal") ammunition in them. The section was near the base firing range. We had a good refrigeration system so we traded the flight crews and marksmanship trainers cold sodas for their extra .38 rounds (semi wadcutters).

We had half of the third floor of the concrete barracks that was assigned to the air police squadron. It was about two blocks from the beach and just across the street from the engine run-up facility. There was a chow hall nearby. When I first got over there, the squadron was equipped with WWII weaponry. There were a few .38s of the Model 10 variety but most carried the GI .45. The squadron also had M-2 carbines, .30 caliber BARs and 1919A1 .30 caliber light machine guns equipped with metal shoulder stocks and bipods. The Libyan policemen carried Webley revolvers and Enfield rifles. The only time K-9 troops had long arms was the three days after the Kennedy Assassination when we all carried M-2s and manned beach posts in case the shooting marked the start of a war and Wheelus was invaded.

I am not sure what good a 30 round magazine and Mady would have done in such circumstances but man the beach we did. For most of the tour we had Smith and Wesson .38 combat masterpiece revolvers, carried in Bill Jordan holsters we bought ourselves from Don Hume Leather Company. We carried them on traditional web belts, wore bloused boots with ladder laces, and stuffed Case or Chicago brand butcher knives bought at the BX inside cardboard sheaths inside the boot top before the time when most of us managed to scrounge on to carbine bayonets. We stuffed rolls of toilet paper, candy bars and our two way radios into parka pockets, carrying those issue coats to post but seldom wearing them. We had green and USAF gray fatigues and Ridgeway caps.

The center of the bomb dump had a tower with fighting positions and an emergency generator that we were to fall back to in case of an overrun (as if we could!). It was equipped with the machine guns and manned by a regular duty air policeman, 24-7. The dump also had a roving patrol in a pickup. There was a lot of conventional Infantry type munitions stored there that was being sent to different places in Africa, but mostly the dump contained practice munitions for the F-100s down from Europe.

The dump had a large stone wall all around it, about 12 feet high in places, with BAR towers in each corner (though not manned). The roadway was miles and miles and twisted all over the place. There were a lot of gullies and ravines, sand and rock, and desert type of terrain and vegetation. There were some little Gazelles inside that we used to feed cigarettes to, plus a lot of scorpions and little sand asps (the same type that allegedly bit Cleopatra). They moved like sidewinders and we had to watch the dogs closely as the snakes would come up on the asphalt roadway at night because it held heat and the dogs would find them first and try to play with them. They did not have fangs but were like coral snakes but still very dangerous. The most dangerous thing about the dump was the Arabs that tried to sneak in now and again. They were not playing games. One night Sergeant Stokes was in a 2 and ½ ton commercial type truck and had just left my post and was going around the perimeter wall inside when I suddenly saw his brake lights come on and I heard the squeal a half mile away. Some Arabs had murdered a man and thrown his body over the wall right in front of Sergeant Stokes, trying to instigate some sort of international incident. On another night A Libyan dog handler and his dog were murdered at a post on base.

We worked three swings and three midnights, and did training on the swing before the start of the first mid. The section was well equipped with obstacles and attack sleeves and a suit.

I had to give up Mady a month before rotating stateside. They gave me Sentry Dog Klaus, a very large German Shepherd that was going on nine years of age and was to be turned over to a Libyan handler. Klaus was a gentle giant of a dog and all he wanted in life was to be told "Good boy!" Mady on the other hand was a hunter. We were not to turn the dogs loose unless it was the same circumstances in which we would fire a gun. I turned her loose three times in that tour and she was always well satisfied with herself although I never made an actual apprehension. The intruders made it to the wall and up and over before I could get to them. We learned a lot about the use of cover and concealment and how to read the dog and about how to read the wind. It was good training for Korea, 1966-67, and then for my two tours in Vietnam as an Air Force military journalist assigned to ground units to cover air support.

There were some excellent people in that dog section. Bill Keller lived across the hall from me and we all wanted to be “Keller” when we grew up. He was about five years older than most of us and was a regular “Joe Cool” (and still is). There were many others whose names I have remembered but with whom I have lost track: Terry Seats, Troy Lyon, Ken Ward, Mike Williams, Heinz Smith, Ted Baldwin, Russell Clark, and many others. They were good people to pull a semi-isolated tour with, and were the kind to ride the river with.

These days as I watch the news and see GIs in tough circumstances in the Middle East I remember my own tour of duty in Libya. We got no ribbons nor medals; nothing to mark that tour from the Air Force or from DoD, but yet it was an experience never to be forgotten – the trips away from the base into Tripoli or to Leptus Magna, the ruins of an old Roman City some 60 miles or so up the coast; a trip to Benghazi; being able to attend a Moslem wedding of one of our Libyan dog handlers (we had to stay off the rug); eating some wonderful Italian meals at the Green Gate, the Sicilian restaurant just outside East Gate; going each year to the International Trade Fair; riding bikes by ourselves all over Tripoli on days off; getting to see Bob Hope and Curtis E. LeMay in person; hours long beach parties (but as monks because there were very few unattached women at Wheelus).

We worked hard posts with some great K-9 companions and did it in difficult and challenging circumstances. We learned how to rely on each other and that meant relying on Libyans and on dogs as well as on fellow GIs. We learned what day by day military discipline is all about, and we learned to make do with what we had rather than complain about what we didn't (to this day I can shoot a mean game of eight ball with a broom stick instead of a cue).

I cross trained out of Air Police after my first enlistment because I discovered I liked to write and to put on paper the things I thought about as I walked post. Yet even today I frequently wear a metal belt buckle that has an air cop badge and a dog handler upon it. I didn't get to work a dog in Vietnam but I learned things as a dog handler before Vietnam that stoop me in good stead whenever I was with Marine or Army Infantry units in 1968 and 1969. I will never forget Wheelus, my pals Mady and Klaus (grooming them with a GI Scrub brush), nor the men with whom I served, and the lessons they taught me which I later used both as a US Army civilian employee and as an Army Reserve captain in a Civil Affairs unit in Korea. I am very proud to be a former Sentry Dog Handler.

Regards to you and to your readership,

Rick Fulton - Pittsburg, Kansas

Flashback in visit to Lackland

Ernie Childers, Kelly Bateman, Bill Cummings, and Fred Dorr were at Lackland AFB working on a K-9 project for the USAF on July 17, 2008. Because it was Ernie's birthday, our Air Force sponsor treated us to a tour of the kennels at Medina Base during one of our breaks.

As we drove toward Medina the scenery began to look very familiar and Ernie said, “Make a right turn and we are here.” It was like stepping back in time; the place hasn't changed a whole lot, which made it even easier to recognize.

We walked up the steps to the Vet Clinic and, out of old habits; we almost announced “dog coming in” as we entered the office. Walking through the kennel area there seemed to be a few more trees than we remembered. Ernie remembered the back of the Vet Clinic where we prepared the dog food on the back dock to feed our dogs.

We drove around a bit in the training areas and we saw the mesquite trees where we staked out our dogs during the heat of the Texas days. Driving around to the back side of the kennel, Ernie took a photograph from “Phoo Hill.” It was flashback time again as we saw ourselves exiting the back gate and heading up the hill to let my dog do their business and then started the days' training. Man, it seems like yesterday.

During our visit we found out that the students of the Basic Dog Handlers course now have to fall out in training in full battle dress. That has got to be hot! We noticed that one of the students had a Thai flag on his uniform. I don't think the guy had time to even say "What the heck is going on" because we were all over him so quickly. He immediately was greeted with numerous "sawadee's," hand-shakes, and other greetings in broken "Thai" from me, Kelly and Bill who were stationed at Udorn, Ubon, and U-Tapao respectively during the 70s.

Our Thai language was a little rusty, but you can count on it – this handler knew we had spent time in his country. One of his classmates declared "Man, you're a star," as our hosts introduced us as handlers from the Vietnam era.

It was quite the thrill to see that Thailand flag and to finally get the chance to welcome one of their K-9 handlers. We all wished we had more time to visit. But you guys know Lackland and Medina – training must go on!



A Thai dog handler in full uniform was a surprise discovery by, from left, Bill Cummings, Kelly Bateman and Ernie Childers, when they recently visited Lackland Air Force Base. All three were stationed at USAF bases in Thailand in the 1970s.