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Lucca made the transition from MWD to family pet, posing here with Chris Willingham's children.

Finding Joy, Not IEDs

By Dixie Whitman

The Military Working Dog community has suffered devastating losses in the past couple of months. Each hero has a Memorial page on our Blog site.

- Abraham Tarwoe
- Dick A. Lee, Jr.
- Keaton Coffey
- Sean E. Brazas
- Joshua Ashley
- Michael Brodsky

She was a no-holds-barred girl, a worker with a drive and a determination that brought her adventure and accolades. Yet, she had a funny side, an engaging face and an athlete's physique that attracted her fair share of Marines.

On her third tour in harm's way and leading a patrol, she did her job; she located one IED (Improvised Explosive Device). Her partner, Rodriguez, started searching for secondary devices. A second IED detonated and she took the brunt of its force. Maimed and dazed, she staggered

back -- back to Rodriguez, who quite simply refused to let her die. He had promised to keep her safe to too many people, but most especially he had made a pledge to her, his very special dog, Lucca K458.

"I heard her squealing and screaming," Cpl. Rodriguez said. "I went up and gave her first aid and a tourniquet. I petted her to try and keep her calm."

"It was rough. Nobody else got hurt."

According to the Veterinarians,

the first aid that Cpl. Rodriguez performed in the field saved Lucca's life. She maintained her hearing and eye sight, but unfortunately, due to her injury, her front left leg was amputated. She also suffered burns to her chest, neck and torso. After 400 missions in the field and 40 confirmed finds, Lucca's luck had run out, she was suddenly and tragically among the combat injured.

Early in dog school, handlers are taught that the dogs are expendable. It's a nearly

H.R.4103 and S.2134 Canine Members of the Armed Forces Act

By Dixie Whitman

H.R. 4103, a resolution introduced by the Military Working Dog's best legislative friend, Rep. Walter Jones of North Carolina's 3rd District, would reclassify military working dogs as Canine Members of the Armed Forces *instead* of equipment. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, from Connecticut, introduced an identical bill, S.2134, on the Senate side.

While labels and name calling usually do not mean much to a dog, military or otherwise, this important distinction would enhance the quality of life for many of America's canine battle buddies. And, perhaps as importantly, it would improve the lives of those handlers adopting their best friends.

Currently, if a dog retires at an

installation Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS), they are available for adoption, but not for repatriation, unless someone is willing to pay for their return. The change in status that this bill would provide, if passed into law, is that it would allow the dogs to return to the 341st Training Squadron, currently located at Lackland Air Force Base, where they can join the ranks of other potential veteran dogs eligible for adoption. Happily, once back at Lackland, retired dogs are currently being adopted as soon as they become available.

This bill also directs the Secretary of Defense to establish and maintain a system to provide for the lifetime veter-

inary care of retired, adopted dogs by using a private non-profit organization to set up funding and collect donations for the care of these retired dogs.

This bill will also direct the Secretary of Defense to create a decoration or other appropriate recognition to honor dogs that are Killed in Action or perform an exceptionally meritorious or courageous act in service to the United States.

And the scintillating news is that we Americans can help.

Rep. Jones, Sen. Blumenthal and the co-sponsors of this bill need us to make our voices heard with our own representatives in Congress. Share this newsletter with them, call them, especially your Sena-

tors, and ask them to co-sponsor this bill. The house side has already passed and included this important addition to the National Defense bill.

S.2134 has not yet been approved by the Senate. This bill is currently sitting in subcommittee and without our work and your support, it may never see the light of day.

Let your voices be heard loudly in support of our Military Working Dogs. We can do this together! Contact your Senators today. Time is of the essence.

<http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml>

***The Congressional Budget Office has stated that this bill would not have a significant impact on spending.**

What skills can you share to support our dog teams? We are looking for volunteers in:

- *Fundraising*
- *Grant writing*
- *Giving presentations*
- *Soliciting in kind - donations*
- *Newsletter editing*
- *Social networking*

Contact us for more info: info@mwdtsa.org

Max is enjoying a retirement that allows him to relax with his toys.



Finding Joy — continued from page 1

impossible lesson to learn because a handler's heart lectures on a different message.

The relationship with a dog, as a partner, is complex. The handler trusts his life and the lives of every troop walking behind him with his K9. Ultimately, most dogs are seen as members of the team, and the rules of "no man left behind" extend to the canine partners. In one of the most extreme examples of this unwritten law, after a dog was shot twice during a fire fight, a Vietnam dog handler with the 47th Infantry Platoon Scout Dog unit carried his partner about eight hours through the dense jungle undergrowth until they could get to a Landing Zone and life-saving medical help via a Medevac chopper.

After Lucca received initial life saving procedures, first in the field and then a base hospital, she was flown to a more advanced veterinary care center in Germany, where they repaired her. She was then

Chris and Lucca at work.
US Air Force photo by Senior Airman Eric Harris.



flown back to Camp Pendleton's Animal Hospital, where an entire platoon of Marine dog handlers was pulling for her recovery, a recovery that had just begun.

But, the military does not have a use for three-legged dogs. So why save these dogs?

Quite simply, it is the right thing to do.

Many tragic events are avoided because of the skill of dog teams. Tens of thousands of lives have remained untouched by disaster because of the efforts of these dogs. Their work and their esteemed legacy should be honored. As caretakers, we, the American people, have an ethical duty to ensure that those living, breathing, loving souls, our military working dogs, are as respected and cared for as are the troops they protect. These dogs serve, on average, the equivalent of 70 plus years in military service and ask nothing more than food, water and a pat on the head. In my per-

sonal opinion, it is our moral obligation to care for them into retirement.

Title 10 US Code 2583 is the law directing the disposition of military working dogs. It provides for adoption of military working dogs, unless the dog is considered unsuitable for a new home, such as having serious health concerns, like cancer, or tractability issues. The decision is made by the commander of the last unit to which the dog is assigned, generally with input from the veterinarian. Dogs become available when they are no longer useful, they are excess or in certain extraordinary circumstances.

Authorized recipients include

Ante spends his time concerned about playing dress up with his former handler's six year old daughter .

other law enforcement agencies, former handlers or members of the general public who are capable of caring for these animals. While there is no charge for the animal itself, the costs of adoption can be quite high, even for former handlers. Transportation costs can be steep and, in addition to the normal intensive care and routine aging issues with breeds like Belgian Malinois, German Shepherd Dogs and Labrador Retrievers, retired military working dogs have more structural concerns due to the continuous wear and tear on their bodies during their years of demanding work and daily training.

Despite the concerns with transportation and health issues, the dogs themselves seem to have little difficulty as they morph into vital family members. Retirees, such as MWD Ante who spends days in his leisure time concerned about playing dress up with his former handler's six year old daughter, instead of hunting down insurgents. His days in the western outposts of Iraq are distant thoughts as he



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The relationship with a dog, as a partner, is complex. The handler trusts his life and the lives of every troop walking behind him with his K9.

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Fons was waiting for his old handler at Fort Benning. The family adopted him on his retirement.



and his best friend wander through her childhood, creating memorable moments. His life is now filled with finding joy and no longer searching for IEDs.

Transitioning into a family dog is just one more skill these highly trained dogs possess. Another MWD, Fons, recently retired in a ceremony televised on the local TV stations in Columbus, GA. Fons and his handler/adopter, Tolley, have known each other since first meeting in Germany in 2005, when Fons was fresh out of dog school. They worked together for five years, in Germany, on the edge of Iraq, near the Syrian border during one long deployment and by providing U.S. Secret Service support in Ghana, Ukraine, the Republic of Georgia and Albania.

Because he was not yet ready for retirement, in late 2010, Fons stayed behind in Germany while Tolley moved to a stateside post. During the following year, Fons was picked up and certified with a new handler who worked with him for a short time, with Tolley always keeping tabs on his buddy.

Finally in April 2012 the retirement paperwork was approved and Fons was available for adoption. Tolley, in Afghanistan on another deployment, filled out the adoption papers and sent them off as quickly as he could get them to Lackland. Logistics were going to be difficult: Fons was in Germany, Tolley was in Afghanistan and ultimately, both of them needed to be in Georgia. And, it would cost Tolley in the

neighborhood of \$800 to get Fons transported back state-side, a significant hit in the budget of a military family with two young children.

Sometimes, fortune smiles, as it did when the MWD program manager from Germany flew back to the U. S. and had a layover in Atlanta. He was able to bring Fons with him and members of the Fort Benning kennel drove to the airport for the final transport, so that Fons was waiting for Tolley when he returned from his tour in Afghanistan.

Fons is in great shape. The only issue he has is joint pain in his hindquarters. He is on a regiment of Dasuquin for joint health and his handler is looking forward to Fons being around for a long time. He is adjusting well to retirement and easily walking in heel position for his new friend, his handler's young daughter. It took Fons a few days to finally put down the Kong toy. As an active duty dog, Fons had to

The dogs themselves seem to have little difficulty as they morph into vital family members.

work hard to for the opportunity to play with his Kong reward; he is finally starting to realize that he can have the toy whenever he wants it. Retirement is grand.

Another recent adoption was done by Travis. As my folks would have said, Travis is a "dickens". After meeting him a couple of times, I sort of felt for his parents, as I'm sure keeping up with Travis might have been a full time job as he was growing up, but not in a bad sort of way; more of an energetic, what can I get into next sort of way. In my



It took Fons a few days to finally put down the Kong toy. As an active duty dog, Fons had to work hard to for the opportunity to play with his Kong reward.

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A Century of Service to Mankind

Centennial Celebration – Early Notice for next year - 2013 Planning

The German Shepherd Dog Club of America will celebrate its centennial year as it honors "A Century of Service to Mankind," a love story between Americans and their most versatile dog. The breed was formally accepted at the 1913 Westminster Kennel Club when The German Shepherd Dog Club of America was organized.

For such a relatively young breed, the German shepherd dog has impacted Americans in ways and with numbers that no other breed has ever achieved. For the past century, these dogs have excelled

in capacities that include work with Seeing Eye, Police, Search and Rescue, Therapy, Companion, Herding and, of course, Military Working Dogs, among others.

Everyone is invited to join in the 100th anniversary party as the national club coordinates activities, banquets, shows and trials beginning October 9, 2013 and ending with the World Trials October 20, 2013 in greater Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, with some events flowing across the river into New Jersey.

While we are very early in



Above: Jalk in transport

making this announcement, we did want to ensure that the information was available as people are planning events for next year. The most important date, which dog handlers should target, is Friday, October 11, 2013. This is day scheduled to honor Military Working Dogs and active duty and veteran dog handlers, among other heroes.

Additional exciting announcements will be forthcoming in later issues of Kennel Talk, including an opportunity for a few lucky handlers to attend the Friday events as guests of the German Shepherd Dog Club of America.

For more information and for general planning purposes only, here is the website for the Centennial:

<http://www.germanshepherd100years.com/>

Any specific questions can be sent to: gsdca_honors_mwds@yahoo.com.

Please keep in mind that many of the details not been completed and, until such time that more information becomes available, the mailbox will monitored weekly.

www.mwdtsa.org

Zorby in Afghanistan.



day, we would have said he is "All boy!" But, having had a beyond flat (actually concave) tire at Fort Benning one day, it was Travis that came to our rescue. He quickly became one of my favorite folks.

Travis next contacted me from the mid-east where he was deployed from a base outside the continental U.S. (OCONUS) with his buddy, Zorby. This was Travis' 2nd dog and during their six month tour in southern Afghanistan, Zorby had over 25 finds of IEDs. Travis felt lucky to be on his first deployment with a skilled, veteran dog like Zorby, who was on his 5th or 6th trip to the sand box.

Zorby is a classic black and tan German shepherd; he will be turning 11 years old on October 1st. Zorby and Travis had to leave Afghanistan two weeks early due to a medical condition called pannus; which was noticed forming on Zorby's eyes while conducting a night mission. Once back at Kandahar, a rigorous medical exam also found fluid on Zorby's right knee.

So Zorby and Travis were sent home to their Italian base where Zorby had to undergo a series of steroid therapies. All of the handlers at that base pulled 24 hr watch to give him his eye drops every four hours on the hour. In the end there is no treatment for pannus, the only thing they can do is slow the progression. With his age and health issues, a medical discharge was in order.

"I am so happy that I got to keep him, the dog saved more people's lives on deployments than I think I could even count. I absolutely love this dog and I feel very privileged to say that he is mine and I am his." Travis continues, "I would like to leave you with a quote that I found that hit home, because my dog is a shining example of this quote."

"He is your friend, your defender, your dog. You are his life, his love, his leader. He will be yours, faithful and true, to the last beat of his heart. You owe it to him to be worthy of such devotion."

Devotion is the key component of the dog-handler relationship. And devotion is what Lucca's first handler, Chris Willingham, had for his amazing dog. As Chris moved to a new duty location, he ensured that he found the most suitable handler to match up with Lucca's drive and personality. And, his instincts proved to be right on that fateful day, when the blast took her leg, but spared her life.

As Lucca continued to progress towards a full recovery and retirement, Chris began making plans to bring her from California to his new duty station in Finland. The costs were exorbitant – nearly \$1500 for both Lucca and her current handler to escort her to Helsinki. (A K9 heroine deserves an escort, especially when she has only three legs.) Fortunately, friends from American Airlines became aware of Lucca's situation assisted with the transportation; they even bumped her up to First Class.

\$1500 in transport fees, \$5000 in bloat surgeries, \$300 monthly maintenance medications: these concerns happen for handlers every day. Handlers who must move Heaven and Earth to get their dogs must also bear the brunt of the expenses for transportation or for health issues and all to support their partners. These partners were assigned by the military and are the very souls that saved countless American lives. At the same time, the handlers must balance the needs and responsibilities of their growing families.

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But there is good news, we can help.

We can educate members of Congress regarding these issues. In a rational, compassionate manner, we must adjust the current status by working on laws that will speed up the adoption process for Military Working Dogs, make arrangements for transportation of newly retired military working dogs when they are headed to adoptive homes with their former handlers and cover reasonable expenses for veterinary care for the veteran dogs who are no longer in service to their country.

Attaining these goals will not only help ease the lives of the handlers who are trying to do the responsible thing by adopting their dogs, but will be the ethical next steps for the American public to pursue as we try to right the wrongs that were done to our dogs in Vietnam. After all, we do owe it to these retired military working dogs, to be worthy of their lifelong devotion.



Zorby at rest in retirement.

2013 Calendar Debuts

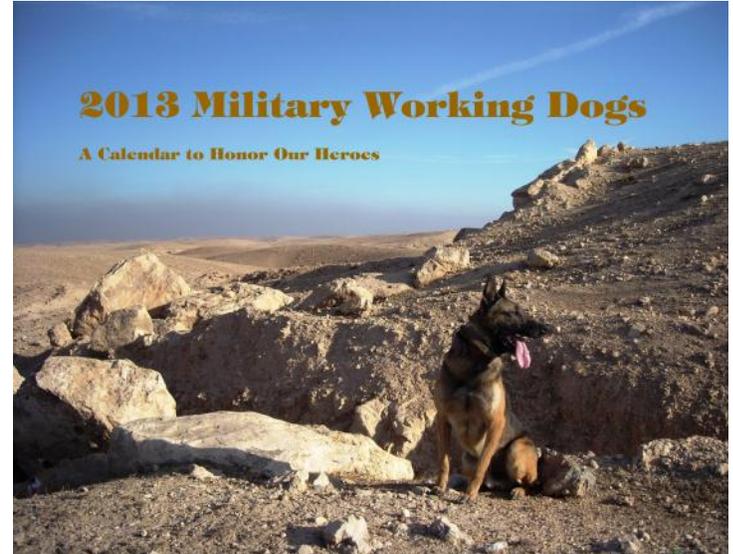
MWD TSA is both excited and proud to offer our new educational calendar, "2013 Military Working Dogs—A Calendar to Honor Our Heroes" in our online store "Dog Tagz".

The 2013 calendar is a work of heart, with pictures by dog handlers, MWD TSA members, and some of the best Department of Defense photographers.

The calendar showcases four gorgeous images each from Marine, Air Force, Navy and Army dogs. It also boasts candid photos inside the body of the calendar. These snapshots are of military working dogs at work, in training and at rest.

Our board member, Chan Douangdara, wrote the dedication for this calendar in honor of all American dog teams, past and present. This includes her brother, John Douangdara, who was lost when a Chinook chopper was shot down in Afghanistan on August 6, 2011. Also lost in that tragedy were 29 other members of the military, many from Seal Team Six.

Please take a moment and visit our e-store, Dog Tagz, to order your calendars for 2013. We are certain that you will want to order more than one. At \$18, these are brilliant gifts for any dog loving friends and the proceeds will support our missions.



Stop by our website and get your order in soon or send a check payable to MWD TSA for \$18.00 per calendar (add tax-

es if delivered to a Georgia address) along with your address to: MWD TSA, P. O. Box 5864, Canton, GA 30114.

KONGs for K9s 2012

The KONG Company continues its support of MWD TSA and America's Military Working Dogs in a big way. MWD TSA is excited to announce our 2012 KONG toy drive.

As we head into the fourth quarter, MWD TSA and the KONG Company will partner for our annual KONG toy drive to replenish our supply of this perfect and always requested dog toy. During the month of October, selected stores across the country will accept donations of KONG toys on our behalf.

During the first week of November, volunteers will stop by the participating stores, collect the toys and inventory these donations. The happy



news is that the KONG Company will then match each of these donated toys with another free KONG for MWD TSA.

These toys will be sent to military working dogs as part of our organizational missions, where they are used as re-

wards for successful work.

It is easy to participate. Find a location near you or contact one of the stores listed on our website and they will be happy to help you out.

<http://www.mwdtsa.org/kongsk9.html>



Dogs, like Eenzo, love working for KONGs; MWD TSA and the Kong Company love working for dogs like Eenzo.

Military Working Dog Team Support
Association, Inc.

Sit. Stay. Support.

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Above: Larry Snitgen and his Combat Tracker Dog, Goldie 5X03, in Vietnam .

We are on the web!! See our Blog!
www.mwdtsa.org

Kennel Talk is the proud recipient
of GSDCA Special Newsletter

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Then and Now ***Combat Tracker Dogs***

*Below: Lucy, a Marine Combat Tracker Dog while
deployed in Afghanistan - handler is A J Nieto.*

