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## Military Working Dog Team Support Association, Inc.

### MWDTSa KENNEL TALK



## *Tails From the Desert*

By a Dog Loving Pilot

Although perhaps a little embarrassing, this "tail" is best told with all the (please read as MY) errors included. My crew and I were operating on a Stage mission supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom. The Stage missions have undergone various cosmetic changes over the last three years, some good, some bad and some just plain hard on the crews. The current iteration usually includes an unusually late Alert (or mission start time) which normally coincides with the time in which people actually go to sleep, not start their

day. Our days normally last up to 24 hours. We fly all day and end up in Germany. Once we get there, we get some rest and then start operating missions in and out of Iraq and Afghanistan for two weeks and then return home. In those two weeks, we can also expect a crew rest in our favorite sandy oasis of Al Udeid, Qatar. Our life has improved dramatically over the past few years but we still have to endure many hardships. Even our worst hardships do not come close to what many of our Army and

Marine brothers and sisters face, and believe me, not one of us ever forgets that.

Our mission on this particular day was to fly up to Balad Air Base, just north of Baghdad, a lush garden spot that attracts many of the local bad guys, just itching to knock off either a US soldier or a large hulking aircraft...like my C-17. Our air crews use a variety of techniques and equipment to help prevent such a catastrophe, with good results so far, but there is always a significant possibility that

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TODAY is just not our day. In order to minimize our time on the ground, we coordinate to do an engine running offload or ERO. We announce our arrival to our command and control on the ground at Balad, receive our upload information and get cleared to conduct our normal operations. All goes very well, nobody shoots at me or the airfield and we are soon happily on our way.

We then make our second stop of the day in Ali Al Salem in Kuwait. Once on the ground, the fun begins with the question, "Where is your Medical Evacuation Crew?" from the command post. My professional response to them is ".....ahhhh, I dunno, where?" in a kind of what's-going-on incredulous worried voice. While they get on the phone to sort out the problem, I look in to our frag, short for fragmentary order, which lists a bunch of information on our mission. I see buried in a column that I had previously failed to notice before that, indeed, we were supposed to pick up our med crew in Balad. I felt particularly bad at this point because I felt that some young soldier's life may now be in serious danger. I was a little confused, however, because no one at Balad had mentioned anything about a med crew to us, and we were on time, did all the appropriate communications and were even on the ground a bit longer than normal. I have seen errors like this in the past though and an aircraft commander is often chasing down problems such as this. I on the other hand, had missed this one, but I knew I

was about to pay dearly for it.

I decided to visit command post in person at Al Salem. By the time I got there, the problem had been solved. The remark in the frag had been entered in error and our patient and med crew were actually at Al Salem. In fact, they were now waiting for me back at the jet.

My loadmaster, Leon, got on the radio and announced to all those who cared to listen, "Our patient is a K-9, that is a Delta-Oscar-George." His requirement to spell out "dog" was comical enough without substituting 'george' for "golf" and simply added to the relief that I felt for missing that one line in the frag and not chasing it to the ground. Now an aircrew will typically play practical jokes on one another, so I thought for a second this was my wisecracking crew toying with me as most people know that I am a very large dog fan.

Once back at the aircraft, I met Black, our hero, his handler, Army Specialist Daniel Martin and his vet tech, Specialist Tom Pickles. Then all of them got situated on the jet. As per normal airevac duties, I asked if there were any restrictions to the flight to make it easier on the patient. I was curious as to the dog's condition and his temperament. I was informed that Black had a lot of fluid building up around his heart, which had been drained the day before. As to his temperament, it was nothing short of fantastic. Black is a gentle and friendly German shepherd.

Sergeant Black had served his country for 10 years. That would be 70 years for you and me. I say Sergeant Black, because he is actually given a rank by the Army and as per custom, he outranks his handler. In fact, because of his age and skill, Dan nicknamed him "Sergeant-Major."

Dan had started working with Black just over a year ago. He called him a "pushbutton" dog because he is so good at his job, he required very little in the way of handling. In fact, Dan was proud to say that Black actually taught him. Dan and Black had been assigned to Arif John, an Army Post in Kuwait. While there, Black's duties included inspecting Host nation vehicles that were staging for convoys to Iraq. Black also engaged in patrol work.

The temperature in Kuwait the day I met the trio was hanging out around 105. Dan said "it seems kinda cool". The temperature in Kuwait over the summer had reached peaks of 120F and even in his black and brown heavy fur coat, Black had gone about his duties very well. On the morning of 14 September however, Dan noticed that Black was not performing well and was wobbling around. He was immediately rushed to a Vet where it was determined that Black had fluid building up around the walls of his heart. They conducted many tests, looking for a tumor or any other signs of damage to Black's heart, but could not find any. They determined it was best to get Black to a better equipped medical facility. Once cleared, Black would finally be

***My loadmaster, Leon, got on the radio and announced to all those who cared to listen, "Our patient is a K-9, that is a Delta-Oscar-George."***

allowed to retire and, if all went well, he would be allowed to live out the rest of his life as a normal member of a household.

This is where my crew and I join the story. We were tasked to deliver Black and company to Germany. I was given the traditional call sign of a medical evacuation flight, with corresponding diplomatic clearances and off we went. While airborne, I got to talk with both Dan and Tom. They spoke very highly of Black's temperament and skills. His biggest drug bust was a total seizure worth more than \$7 million. Perhaps just a little harder to quantify, however, is the protection Black and others like him provide to our forces. Black cleared vehicles destined for our forces inside Iraq by checking for explosives. Even the most advanced machines we have can't beat the nose of a dog. Black also helped insure the security of Dan and his comrades by conducting patrols and base wide inspections. Dan estimated that by the time Black was fully trained, the government had invested between 50 and 80 thou-

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## 2007 MWD TSA Hero Dog Recovering

In 2007, the team of Military Working Dog Lucca K458 and her handler, SSgt Chris Willingham, were recognized by MWD TSA as Heroes.

Her former handler writes:

"On 23 March 2012, my former Military Working Dog Lucca was injured while on patrol in Afghanistan. She saved the lives of everyone on patrol and no other injuries occurred. Lucca was serving her third combat deployment and has saved countless lives in Iraq and Afghanistan. Lucca's current handler saved her life by providing immediate medical attention. She sustained burns to her chest and torso and her front left leg had to be amputated. She is currently in California recovering and is in good spirits. Lucca will be retired as a true hero and I can't wait to be reunited with her."



*Left: Lucca recovering from her severe injuries.*



*Below, left to right:*

*Lucca on patrol, Lucca 2007, Lucca and Chris.*

## New Board Member and Newsletter Editor

By Avril Roy-Smith



Recently, Dixie Whitman, President of MWD TSA, asked me if I would like to join the Board of Directors of that organization and if I would take over the job of Newsletter Editor. I

felt quite honored on receiving her requests and agreed to take on both positions. As this is the first issue of the MWD TSA newsletter that I have edited, I thought I should take this opportunity to introduce myself.

I was born an Army Brat - my father serving at the time in the British Army in the Royal Veterinary Corp, stationed in Germany. His duties included working with British military dogs as well as retraining Ger-

man ones. My childhood was spent moving around the world with a family that always included a number of working dogs.

I moved to Los Angeles in 1978. My working life was spent in the fields of Film & TV, advertising and computer and web related endeavors, providing me with a number of skills that should prove useful in my positions with MWD TSA.

Currently, I live in Savannah, GA. My son is career military, stationed at Hunter Army Air Field. I am still involved with dogs, training my Catahoula Leopard Dog for competitive obedience. As you might notice from my photograph, my other passion is aviation.

Thank you, Dixie, for allowing me to help.

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sand dollars in him. I asked Dan if Black enjoyed his work – the answer was a resounding yes. The ultimate prize for a job well done is a game of catch with his favorite toy.

I was very impressed with the military as they pulled out all stops to take care of one of their own. I would hope that all those who give so much would get the same respect and treatment, but I know this is not always the case. Black earned no money save room and board, and will get his medical bills covered. We flew back from Balad, down to Kuwait and on to Germany adding about 2 hours of flying time just for him. Is this a wise expenditure for “just a dog, especially one that may die shortly? I firmly believe so. Black valiantly served his country, endured hardships and protected his unit, the Army and really all of us. He did it without complaining and performed at 100% every year, sometimes in blazing heat and many times in difficult conditions. Even if we ignore the money that can be

attributed directly to Black, we owe it to all of our soldiers, every single one, whether they have two legs or four, the thanks of a grateful nation. To me that means more than just words; it also means deeds. An “Evac” call sign, medical tests and a trip home is the least we can do for a soldier who served his country for 70 years.

My crew and I were proud to get the chance to fly this mission. We have endured hardships of our own and seen caskets and wounded returning home. We are always excited to pull our comrades out and send them on their way back home to friends and family. There is something special, at least to me, about a working dog. Not only are they special just because they are a dog, eager to please and naturally funny, but they are also heroes who selflessly put their lives on the line for their masters and for us. They make our lives better just for being there, never mind catching the bad guys. My crew and I were happy that we were part of the process to say thank you to Sergeant Black.



*Daniel Martin and his partner, Black, in Kuwait.*

*Below: Ann Wilkerson was presented with a plaque as official recognition for all of the work that she put into MWD TSA.*



## *A Job Well Done*

By Dixie Whitman

Ann Wilkerson was the 1st VP for a number of years and resigned from the board due to health issues.

Ann has been a steadfast supporter of military working dogs and dog handlers since summer of 2001, when we started working together on events at Fort Benning. Her positive attitude

and joyful spirit brought good things to our missions. That event was magical for us and, I think, for many of the Vietnam handlers that attended.

When we first chose to make MWD TSA an official organization, Ann was the perfect choice for Vice President and held that

position until her health diminished. I want to say "MWD TSA will miss you. I will miss you and everything you did for the organization." We hope that you find some com-

fort in knowing all of the lives that you've touched and what a difference you made.

Thanks for a job well done.



## *Military Dog Handler Day in Georgia*

Military Working Dog Handlers from across the state of Georgia gathered at the state Capitol on Thursday, March 29<sup>th</sup> to witness Governor Nathan Deal proclaim March 29<sup>th</sup> as Military Dog Handler Day. In attendance were handlers from five military installations across the state (Moody AFB, Fort Gordon, Fort Benning, King's Bay Naval Submarine Base and the Marine Corps Logistics Base in Albany) along with dogs representing each of the four branches of service working in Georgia.

Also in attendance were members of MWD TSA, supporters and local Vietnam veteran dog handlers who came to share their time and history with the younger handlers. We know that the story of the dogs in Vietnam was not as positive as so many of the stories are today. MWD TSA missions include education and we believe that it is important that everyone know what happened to those brave dogs and that nobody forget what they and



*Above: Army dog handlers from Fort Gordon and Fort Benning represented the Army well, along with MWD Miley. To the right is Jarvis Ellis, a veteran dog handler with the 59th Infantry Platoon Scout Dog unit in Vietnam.*



*Right: Air Force Dog Handlers from the Moody 820th Kennels attend with their dog, Oksana. Included in the photo is Air Force Security Policeman, Carl Walker, assigned at Phan Rang AFB in Vietnam with the 35th SPS.*



every generation of war dog since has done.

After the visit and photo op with Governor Deal, attendees adjourned to a local eatery for a more relaxed atmosphere. This provided an opportunity to share dog stories and present gifts: the dogs received KONG toys and the handlers were given a commemorative T-shirt from the day. During the day, the active duty handlers had an opportunity to meet and greet veteran handlers and volunteers who work hard to ensure that they, and their K9 counterparts, are supported on their missions while deployed in harm's way. Care packages are sent with items of support for both ends of the leash.

This is the 11<sup>th</sup> annual proclamation of Military Dog Handler Day in Georgia. After the event, the original proclamation is framed and presented to one of the military kennels in the state. This year that proclamation will be presented to Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, GA.

Additional 2012 base visits are in the planning stages.



*Above: Dog handlers from installations across Georgia are greeted by Georgia Governor Nathan Deal, for Military Dog Handler Day. In addition to the handlers from King's Bay Naval Submarine Base, Marine Corps Logistics Base, Fort Gordon, Fort Benning and Moody AFB are veteran handlers: Jarvis Ellis, Dale Miller and Carl Walker. Also photographed are some of the great MWDTSA supporters. Dogs in attendance were Vagony, Oksana, Miley and Rex representing Navy, Air Force, Army and Marine dogs.*



*Right: Georgia Governor Nathan Deal proclaimed March 29, 2012 as Military Dog Handler Day 2012. He is seen here being presented with a special Military Dog Handler Day T-shirt.*



## 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of MWD TSA Website

Our wonderful and talented webmaster, Jonathan Wahl pointed out that April 10<sup>th</sup> was the 5th anniversary of our website. Over the past five years our organization has grown and touched many, many people.

Here are just some of the things that took place on that day:

We received a photo and thank you of recent care packages sent to one Army and two Navy handlers, newly deployed to Afghanistan.

We got a great donation of wonderful, healthy treats from Zuke's ([www.zukes.com](http://www.zukes.com)) to be sent out in our next round of care packages. A total of 60 sets of mini naturals in chicken and peanut butter (120 total) were donated. These will be perfect for the "Fun in the Sun" packages that are in the process of being prepared for shipment.

Once again our partners at Community Coffee shared their wonderful coffee products with us for our care packages. If you haven't had an opportunity to try Community Coffee, this product is making its way into grocery stores outside of Louisiana. If you would like to try it and your local store doesn't carry this wonderful brand, check out the Community Coffee website at [www.communitycoffee.com](http://www.communitycoffee.com). They will be happy to ship a cup of Joe straight to your door. Remember to thank them on behalf of all of the military

working dog handlers who have benefited from their corporate generosity.

And, lastly, our President, Dixie Whitman, had the honor of spending about an hour with a great group of young folks from the Homeless Pets Club at Pickett's Mill Elementary School in Cobb County, GA. They looked at some photos and asked some great questions and really gave a lot of energy to the presentation. The children are working on great artwork to include in our next round of care packages.

It's been a hectic five (plus years) that we've been an official organization, but every opportunity to send support to our wonderful dog teams, to honor our veteran handlers and advocate for our retired military working dogs has been a joy. And, we thank all of you who send your support.



*Recent care package recipients sent photos and thanks for their parcels.*



*Generous donations were received from Community Coffee and Zukes.*



Military Working Dog Team  
Support Association, Inc.

## Sit. Stay. Support.

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We are on the web!! See our Blog!  
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Kennel Talk is the proud recipient  
of GSDCA Special Newsletter  
Award!

PLEASE RECYCLE BY SENDING TO A FRIEND



*Then and Now:*

*Both of these photos of dog handlers were taken at Fort Benning.*

*Above: Vietnam era dog handlers.*

*Below: Dog handlers in 2011.*

