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August 2015  
Award Winning  
Monthly Newsletter

Volume 7, Issue 8

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Kennel Talk is an award  
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### Inside this issue:

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Devotion in Triplicate	1
K9 Toy Council	5
Leland Library Donations	7
Thank You for Your Support	8
Prepping for the Totally Tubular Boxes	9
Max at the Movies	10
Qualified	11
From the Archives	12

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MWD TSA touches the lives of dogs and people near and far. This month, our articles and photos take us from Tennessee, to West Virginia, Michigan, North Dakota and on to California and our time travel takes us to Iraq, Afghanistan and Vietnam.

Subscribe to see where we connect next month!

Military Working Dog Team Support Association, Inc.

## MWD TSA KENNEL TALK



***Johnny F728, SSD dog extraordinaire, in Afghanistan on his last deployment in 2010 with Sgt. Stice.***

## Devotion in Triplicate

By Dixie Whitman

You could hardly blame Johnny for the dirty look he was giving Albert. Their big bird had finally landed, the back ramp lowered and Johnny, bounding out in the lead, had just breathed his first fresh air in hours, only to realize when the first scent molecule hit his olfactory system, that he was back in Iraq, yet again. After one whiff of Eau d'Iraq, Johnny turned and glared at Al as if to say, "You've got to be kidding me, man. Not this again." As disappointed as Johnny might have been with their working location, it did not deter him from his job at hand.

In fact, he was all business; Johnny was never deterred from the job at hand. From the earliest beginnings of his career, Johnny was trained with old school methods and had been through the Koninklijke Nederlandse Politiehond Vereniging (KNPV) or Royal Dutch Police Dog Association training. This training

is unchanged and old-fashioned in order to produce strong working dogs with tons of drive and spectacular high bites. It was not unusual then that, when Johnny's first handler, SSgt. Harvey, flew to Israel to pick him up, he was bitten on the arm by Johnny through the fencing of the kennel run when the SSgt. leaned against the run and chatted with the kennel trainer.

The first handler, Jason Harvey, was matched up with Johnny due to their combined personalities and work ethics. While that first bite might not have been the start that Jason had hoped, over the next two weeks of forming a bond with Johnny, it appeared that the two of them really did click. While Jason was finding Johnny an independent thinker, vocal and needing the last word on things, he also found in him a stellar partner, one he says he could always count on 100%. He never doubted

Devotion continued on page 2

things when Johnny was in front.

Ultimately, with an additional eight months of training at Camp Pendleton, California, Jason was able to mold Johnny into a first class Specialized Search Dog (SSD), one who was able to work off leash at a range of 1,000 meters. Jason could watch Johnny through binoculars and, either through hand signals or radio communication, would send him commands to search specific areas.

In early 2005, this team's skills would be severely tested for the first time as they drew a tour in the wild west, known as Anbar Province, Iraq. And, a year later in late 2006, they were back again in another conflict in Afghanistan, again working the wild west area of Helmund and Kandahar Provinces.

Over the duration of their partnership, Johnny and Jason found twelve IEDs and two weapons caches. One of the caches was located under the foundation of a school in Iraq. Intelligence gathered from locals had told the Americans that a cache existed, but two previous searches had come up empty. The locals could not be dissuaded; there was something there, they insisted. The third time the sweep was scheduled, Jason, the top ranking handler present, decided to take his dog and do the search himself.

They entered the school and found nothing much. One little canister with some residue that could easily be explained. On a search of the exterior of the school, Jason noticed some paths going up to the side of the building, path locations which made no sense. He asked Johnny to search and in a tiny crack in the foundation, Johnny recognized odors he knew and sat immediately to tell Jason there was indeed something wicked under the building. Jason called for a sledge hammer and pulled out some of the foundation. Looking underneath the building at burlap sacks filled with items, he knew he had something big.

Ultimately, two full seven-ton truckloads of items were pulled from the cache, filling the big supply trucks with everything from explosives to ammunition to tactical gear. The find put a serious crimp on insurgent



***Specialized Search Dog Johnny F728***

plans. What a rewarding find and a true testament to all of the efforts this team and gone through to become so proficient.

Another time, riding in a convoy, Johnny and Harvey's vehicle was hit by an IED at the rear of the vehicle. It was damaged, but sustained only minor damage, which was quickly repaired. Within a quarter of a mile at a chokepoint, they were hit again by a second IED, this time on the front end. After climbing out of the vehicle and checking that everyone was ok, they pulled Johnny out to search and the team found two pieces of unexploded ordinance underneath the vehicle where it had stopped.

If Johnny had a bumper sticker, it might have read: "All Bark, All Bite". Jason recounted the time that he and Johnny were stationed at one of the CIA/SEAL Camps where budgets existed to hire people to cook freshly prepared meals instead of the plastic covered MREs. The team was coming around the corner of a building and ran into one of the Afghani locals who was working as a cook and carrying a basket of

fresh tomatoes. Johnny took offense at anyone who smelled local and barked at the terrified man who dropped his basket of tomatoes to the ground only to watch Johnny gobble up one of the plumpest, ripest tomatoes. Later that day, the same man was walking nearby again and saw Johnny. The cook immediately threw Johnny a tomato that he had pulled from his pocket and bounded the other direction. Tomatoes became that cook's first line of defense—throwing one at Johnny whenever he appeared and skedaddling in the opposite direction, which was fine with Johnny, because he loved tomatoes. He was rapidly learning to train people, too.

The time came for Jason to move on and as a SSgt. with the Marines, he had the opportunity to influence the fate of his dog and also look after one of his Marines at the same time. He found a perfect second handler in Cpl. Albert Johnson.

It was about this time that MWD TSA "met" Johnny as an individual war dog. He and Albert were deployed to an area north of Baghdad in 2008 and we had their team



Devotion continued from page 2

individually on our "Care Package" listing. Our first communication from the team went something like this:

*"Thank you very much for the package. My dog, Johnny, is really enjoying all the treats you sent. Plus, he looks handsome all brushed out with our new FURminator. I am also enjoying the truffles, too. I can't thank you enough."*

*Cpl. Johnson and Johnny"*

Johnny continued his winning ways under the leadership of Albert Johnson. His demeanor had not changed. He was still a dog that took no slack from anybody, continued to be very vocal and always wanting to have the last word in any conversation, pretty much a grumpy old dog in a young dog's body. Unless Operational Security required him to be silent, he was rarely in "stealth mode". He found weapons, bombs and caches as if his life depended on it. Of course, not only his life, but the lives of his partner and anyone following behind him was his responsibility and he was always a dog who took his responsibility seriously.

It was about this time that Cpl. Johnson was approached by MWD TSA about submitting Johnny's name for the AKC's Award of Canine Excellence, a Hero Dog program where heroic actions, not votes, determined the recipient. Johnson was happy to have his dog recognized, but was reluctant to share his dog's many stories. They were too personal, too intimate to be



**Left and below: Johnny with his first handler, SSgt. Jason Harvey, on deployments to both Anbar Province, Iraq and Helmand Province in Afghanistan.**



**Left: Johnny with his second handler, Cpl. Albert Johnson, on a deployment to Iraq.**



**Below: In the company of other Marine heroes, from the left: Justin Rodriguez and Rex, Chris Willingham and Lucca, Billy Soutra and Posha and on the far right, Johnny and Cpl. Albert Johnson on a deployment to Iraq.**



**Left: Johnny and his last handler, Sgt. Stice, working with Special Operations teams in Afghanistan.**

Devotion continued on page 4

shared with the world, just yet.

After their last deployment in Iraq, the team returned to Camp Pendleton. Cpl. Johnson placed Johnny in the kennel, took all of his equipment back and signed out to go get some good sleep. His days with Johnny were over and Johnny would be going to a new handler.

Johnny, however, had other ideas. The new handler, Aaron Stice, came in to care for Johnny, and true to his reputation, Johnny became very aggressive and refused to accept his new handler. Cpl. Johnson, called from his sleeping area, had to make the introduction and help Aaron learn Johnny's unique personality.

The transition flowed more smoothly after that and Aaron took Johnny on his fifth combat deployment with the 1st Recon Marine Battalion to Afghanistan. They were again in Kandahar Province this time in support of the 101st Airborne.

Aaron and Johnny's first mission was scheduled to take 14 days; instead it took 57. That's 57 days of being in the field, with no showers, hot food, cots or good sleep and with Johnny still finding IEDs, caches and keeping those following his footsteps safe.

They spent a lot of time in the area known as Trek Nawa, a volatile relatively lawless region just east of Helmand province's Marjah district and with so many swampy areas that it was often referred to as "Viet Nawa".

Sgt. Stice would call in the Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) whenever Johnny found something that would go "boom". The first time that the EOD blew up something that Johnny had found, he came back and tried to kill the EOD guy. We don't think Johnny studied Sir Issac Newton's Laws of Physics, but for every boom, there was an opposite and equal bite—sort of an Equilibrium Law of Ordinance Disposal. Stice got that reaction every time so he started to send Johnny far, far

away when the boom would happen and by the time he had gotten back to Stice, his anger had subsided - somewhat.

As dog fanciers know it, the word "stacked" means the way that dogs stand in the breed ring for the breed judges. In the world of military working dogs, the term "stacked" refers to something totally different; the campaign ribbons that would have been his, had he been a human Marine instead of a K9 Marine. We've all seen lifetime career military officers with a chest full of ribbons. Johnny earned this "stack" of ribbons in the span of his eight years of active duty.

Johnny gave this country five combat deployments, found a total of seventeen IEDs and nine weapons caches, and saved countless lives, and yet, now that it was time to retire, his old "aggressive" reputation came back to haunt him. Everything ever written about this dog also included the word "aggressive" in large letters to forewarn veterinarians and technicians that he didn't suffer fools gladly.

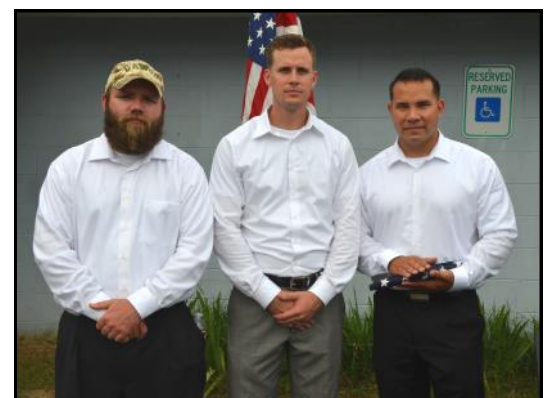
The military policies allow for adoption, but not when the dog is overly aggressive and Johnny was pretty much on the cusp of not being adoptable. As hard as he fought for his Marines, his Marines fought for him. In the end, it was agreed that his second handler, Cpl. Albert Johnson, would adopt him based on a huge list of caveats to which he also had to agree: among them, no children and an eight foot fence. Johnny was whelped in April of 2001 and passed away in June of 2015 at the ripe old age of 14; a lifetime of courage and commitment, fidelity and fierceness, love and loyalty.

His memorial on July 18, 2015 in Newport, Tenn. was attended by all three of his devoted handlers, many friends and family in honor of this once-in-a-lifetime military dog, Johnny F728. All three handlers agreed that what they would like to say about Johnny is from his adopted tongue, "Kelev tov." In Hebrew, it means "Good dog".



**Above: Johnny and Stice.**

**Below: The "stack" of ribbons that Johnny would have been eligible to wear had he been a human Marine instead of a K9 Marine.**



**Above: All three of Johnny's handlers made the trip to where his memorial service was held by the Disabled American Veterans Chapter in Newport, Tenn. Albert Johnson, Aaron Stice and Jason Harvey.**



## K9 Toy Council

By Dixie Whitman

MWDTSA is always on the lookout for fabulous new dog toys to send in care packages or to take with us to base visits. We have some traditional favorites, but are always looking for new and innovative toys to add more dimension to the dogs' reward system of playtime.

Why are toys so important? Because they are the reward for which these dogs work and train. The more interesting and innovative the reward, the harder these dogs will work.

Going out in the 3rd quarter care packages are the KONG Tails, a toy based off of the traditional KONG Clas-

sic, but with a handle and some tugging tails for new stimulation games with the MWDs.

The Chuck It's launchers will not fit into the care packages because of length, but we do take those with us on base visits as often-requested toys with an added bonus of variation in the type of balls launched.

To help us identify toys which work best for us, we have a K9 Toy Council which consists of various retired MWDs who can play with and help us investigate new toys while being in the careful view of their family.



**Left: Aura, our newest K9 Toy Council member, receives her testing box and made short work out of Ms. Pink Pig, but loved the KONG Hose Tug. Ms. Pink Pig is an awesome toy for the vast majority of dogs, but just did not work for this dog. Perhaps you can see it in her eyes, "mmmm....bacon".**

**Right from top to bottom: Some of our favorite toys include, Chuck It Launchers and balls, KONG rubber toys of a variety of shapes and sizes and West Paw's Jive Ball and other Zoogoflex toys.**

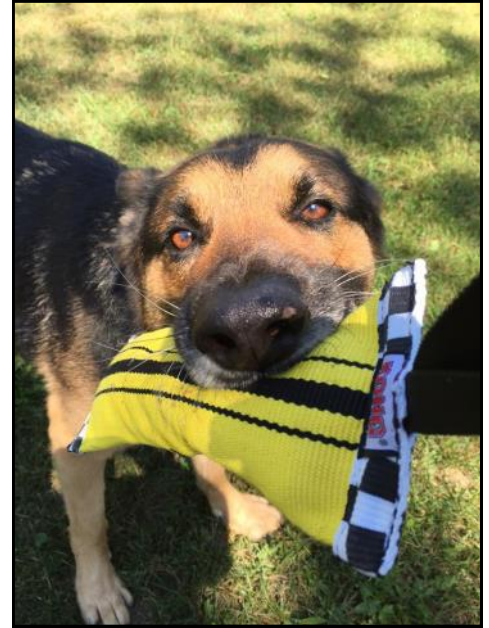
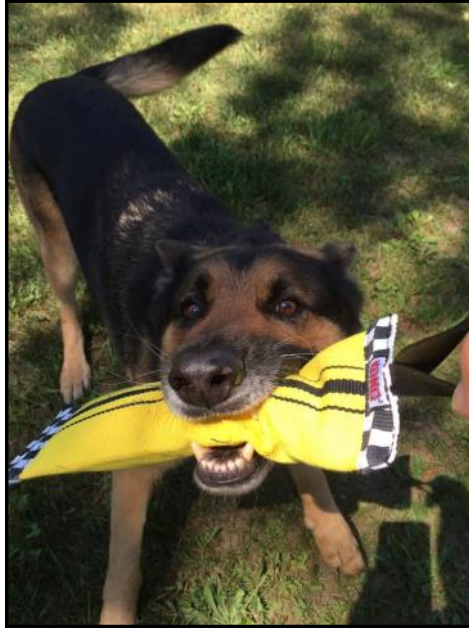
Miss Aura, a newly retired malinois received her first toy tester package and is thoroughly enjoying her new jobs of safety inspector and K9 toy tester. There's dog safe and then there's "maligator" safe.

The next toy tester was also new to our testing council. His name is Tank and he's an adorable German shepherd dog. Tank loves water, water toys and sticks. We were interested to see how he would respond to Ms. Pink Pig and the KONG tug hose.

He really had a ball with the KONG tug hose both carrying around and tugging on it. He made short work of Ms. Pink Pig.

Our third test participant. Uno the Weimaraner, is a veteran at balancing toys on his head. The pig was much larger than the KONG and balls that he is used to working with so he had a challenge cut out for him. He enjoyed his KONG Tug session.

**Right top: Tank takes hold of the KONG Tug Toy and challenges his caretaker with his eyes.**

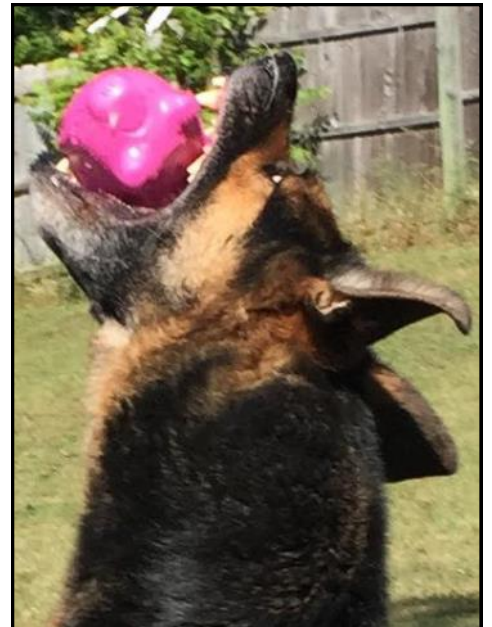


**Left :Tank starts backing up to play Tug-O-War**



**Right bottom: Tank enjoyed chewing on Ms. Pink Pig, but she didn't totally escape damage from his powerful jaws. This is why we insist on strong toys!**

**Left: Uno balances the new toy on his nose. It's a pretty big toy and requires a lot of concentration.**





## Leland Library Donations

Story and photos by Allison Merrill

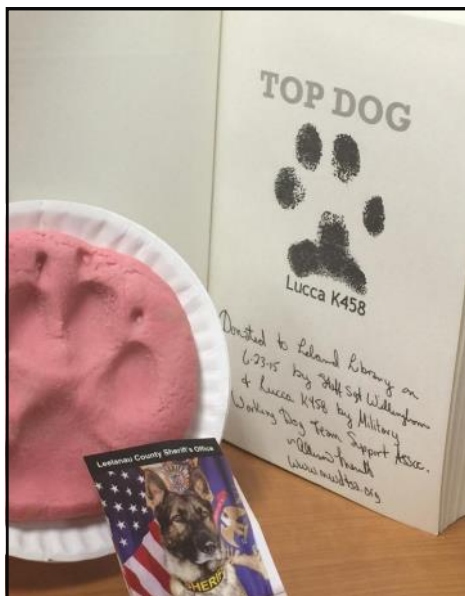
The Leland Township Library in Leland, Michigan is having a special summer children's reading program called "Every Hero Has a Story". This is a great opportunity to get children educated in the stories of and history of military working dogs.

It happens that one of our local volunteers lives in the area and wanted to support the program and the area children with her own donation of several books for their summer reading. Additional books for educating adults were also included in this gift.

Our MWD TSA volunteer, Allison Merrill, trekked to her local library, along with the county Deputy, Hornkohl, and his Police K9 Nico to present the new books to the county librarians. Included in the donation, was *Top Dog*, a favorite book of ours which outlines the story of Lucca K458. A "pawtographed" copy of the book was given to Allison by MWD TSA to be used as a donation and we are delighted that she found such a great home for the book.



**Above: The array of military working dog books donated by Sun-Dog Kennels and Allison Merrill to her local public library.**



**Left: An impressive impression of local K9, Nico's, footprint side by side of the impression of K9 Lucca's "pawtograph".**

**Right: On hand to receive these books are the library staff, county Deputy Hornkohl and his partner, Nico, along with Allison showcasing a copy of Top Dog with Lucca K458's "pawtograph".**



**Left: K9 Nico has his own local following as the kids in attendance created artwork about Nico and his handler, Deputy Hornkohl.**



## Thanks for your support! It's Totally Tubular

MWDTSA relies on the generosity of our donors, without whom we would be unable to make the care packages to the MWDs and their handlers happen. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the following companies and individuals who gave recent donations:

Dalton Aguilar  
 Eva Andrews  
 Animal Hospital of Thousand Oaks, their clients  
 & Dr. Elizabeth Barr, Thousand Oaks, Calif.  
 The Animal Keeper, Oceanside, Calif.  
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 Allison Merrill  
 Laurie Newton  
 Christopher Nielsen  
 Katie Garside O'Brien and friends  
 Jennifer Powers and family  
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 The Real Meat Company, Montrose, Calif.  
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 Chris Rogers  
 Nikki Rohrig  
 Kristen San Antonio  
 Jan Slotar  
 Travis Strickland  
 T C Country, Canton, Ga.  
 A Tail Away and Linda Standard  
 in memory of Tank Share  
 Sandra Thompson  
 Christa Ursini  
 Jeannie Voeks  
 MSgt (Ret) Emmanuel Vouvalis  
 Wayne and Helen Vouvalis  
 Kathy Woodring





## Prepping for the Totally Tubular Boxes

By Dixie Whitman



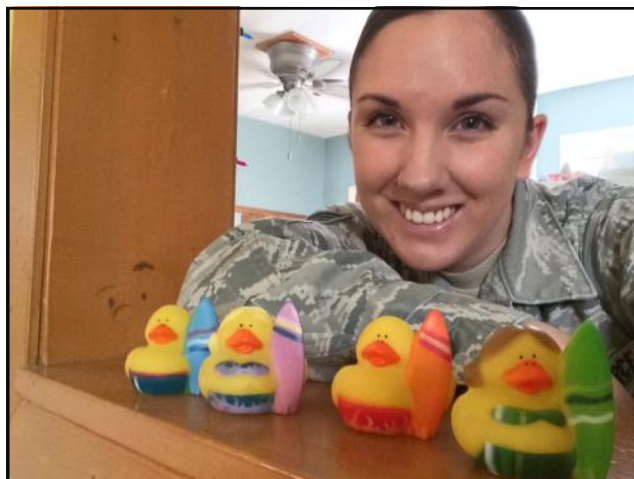
Thanks to our awesome 3rd quarter care packing team, led by Jessica Newton, we are getting prepped to send out care packages early in August. Many of our volunteers have stepped up to help locate items for donations and our supporters are sending in funding to assist with the purchases and shipping costs associated with these great boxes.

The care packing dates are scheduled for August 7-8 and the theme of the box is "Totally Tubular", a nod to all folks who love riding a wave tube and following the "endless summer".

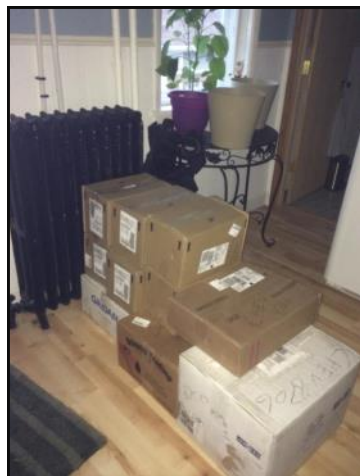
This box will be filled with KONG Tails and Chuck It Flying Squirrel dog toys, several variations of dog treats, and thermometers to monitor dog temps. We have tank tee shirts, foot care and trail mix bars for the handlers and much more to come.

We celebrate our partners, such as Animal Hospital of Thousand Oaks for having supported us for two years with our quarterly packages, and to the newest supporters who are joining us for this quarter. Thank you one and all.

Last, but not least, a thank you to Christa Ursini for her inspired graphics artwork & Joyce Gibson for the Tank tee artwork.



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**Right top and down: Jessica Newton poses with the "Surfing Coaches" that are heading out to give lessons to the handlers. These coaches are Dillion, Montana, Jordan and Nalani.**

**Surfing lollipops for a sugar rush.**

**Tank Tees for the "beach"**

**Left: Boxes arriving en masse at the coordinator's home.**

**Right: A display of some of the items that will be going into the boxes.**



## Max at the Movies

By Dixie Whitman

Three MWDTSA volunteers, Jonathan Jackson, Jan Slotar and Nikki Rohrig, used the movie opening of "Max" to get MWDTSA's story out to the public.

Jonathan Jackson, a former SSD handler went to Channel 10 - WBIR, the NBC affiliate in Knoxville, TN to talk about his experiences while working with Special Operations Teams in Afghanistan with his SSD Toby. He talked about the support that both he and his wife, Jodi, also a former military working dog handler received from MWDTSA on their deployments.

While this was Jonathan's first time on TV, it is not the first time that he's done press and public education events for MWDTSA, having completed an interview on radio a few years ago. Jonathan has also made a

couple of stops at children's library events to help educate children and adults.

Volunteer Jan Slotar was able to attend the directors' event in Los Angeles and got to learn some of the background information directly from the sources. She got to meet two of the five dogs involved in filming the movie: Carlos and Jagger. Jan also set up a public education table at one of the first theater showings in the Simi Valley, CA area.

Volunteer Nikki Rohrig set up a big display in one of her local theatres and was able to get the word out about MWDTSA in the Charleston, WV area. Also attending that show was Search and Rescue dog, Soot, who enjoys tennis balls and finds lost people for a living.

Thanks to all team members for your hard work to share our story and educate.



**Above: Photo taken by Jonathan of the behind the scenes action at WBIR while he was awaiting his TV interview.**



**Left top: Volunteer Jan Slotar attended the director's "Meet and Greet" when Max was introduced to the public in Los Angeles. She got to meet a former Marine, (Cpl) Matt Foster, of Colorado, and MWD (R) Mick, his former partner, whom he adopted.**



**Left center: Adorable volunteer Scarlett joins Jan at a small event at a local theatre introducing MWDTSA to the audience.**



**Left bottom: Jan was joined by three other volunteers, Monica, Scarlett and Annie to set up a display table at one of the first showings in her local theatre. Also volunteering, but not pictured are: Edith, Grace and Anna.**



**Right bottom: Volunteer Nikki also set up a public education table at one of the local theatres and got to meet Soot, a Search and Rescue dog.**



## Qualified

By Michael Hurder

*About 1 month into my assignment at the 34<sup>th</sup> Patrol Dogs, our LT volunteered us to help ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) prosecute the huge "sapper infiltration" issues we had in and around Bien Hoa Base Camp. Our Company Sergeant talked the LT into qualifying us first, before we were let loose on the outside world for the first time. This is an excerpt from my memoirs about that time...*

We had a large company area of several acres most of which lie in a depression that was overgrown with the typical flora for the area. Basically, 5 to 10 foot tall brush filled this depression and was an adequate training area for scouting/patrolling. This had been the kennels and company area of the 34<sup>th</sup> IPSP before us with some added acreage for training purposes. Over the years, trails had been worked into this terrain. After some "landscaping" was done, meaning us peons ripped some more of the overgrowth out by hand to the specifications of the Sarge, the cadre would then use these trails and the area around them to lay traps, set ambushes, and hide stuff for us to find. This was great practice and helped to prepare us for what it would be like outside the wire.

We also used the closest part of the training area to our central compound to do demonstrations for visiting VIPs. Our Company was one of the highlights of the base tour that most visitors enjoyed. Most folks, military, politicians, press and others were amazed at what our partners could do. In fact, most didn't know there was such a thing as a War Dog. After one of these demos when Prince and I were at bat, we were at parade rest in front of the reviewing stand. A civilian in the crowd

(probably a politician) asked me how I liked my job. Of course, I answered in the positive, stating how I spent my nights safe and sound on Bien Hoa Base Camp. He then asked if I thought my dog felt the same way. To which I responded, "I'm not sure, sir. I've never asked him." So I turned to Prince and asked, "Prince, which would you rather be, a lifer or a dead dog?" In response to which he immediately lay down, rolled on his back and propped his 4 legs in the air. Prince and I got a standing ovation for that. I could have said anything really, but as soon as I said "dead dog" he correctly responded to the command he'd learned from other handlers before me and went into his little "dead" act. I loved the feat in the air thing. Training him to do that must have been hard. *That* handler was a genius. Next morning we woke to a stack of Budweiser beer cases (24 of them to be exact) piled in our day room. Attached to the stack was a note that read, "That was the most entertained I've been in my 3 weeks in country. Thanks men. Have a couple cold ones on me." It was signed, Alexander Haig, Major General, USA.

As to us assisting ARVN in their Sapper Sweeps outside the wire at Bien Hoa, since none of us had even been off base yet, let alone work our partners on a real deal patrol, Sarge argued for qualifying us first and he won the argument once he started asking the Lt if he really wanted some of our less capable "newbie" handlers outside the wire. So each of us got to run a day-time patrol just outside of Bien Hoa Base Camp as a test. This provided a clear separation of who could and who couldn't. Of the 16 teams we had active, 4 were deemed fit to "travel" in the first week. Not that it had a lot to do with me, but



**Above: This breathtaking artwork was painted by the writer's mother from a photograph that he sent to her of his dog Prince.**

Prince being the superstar he was, we almost immediately became one of the teams ready for the big time. I should say in spite of me, we became one of the first to be qualified.



**Left: A photo taken at the Director's "Meet and Greet" in California where two of the dogs playing Max, Carlos and Jagger, were introduced to the crowd. Presenting is Director, Boaz Yakin.**

**Right: A cake that was on display at the Marquee Cinemas-Southridge, Charleston, WV.**



Max at the Movies continued from page 10

## Sit. Stay. Support.

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Kennel Talk is the proud recipient of multiple GSDCA  
Special Newsletter Awards!

## From the Archives

### ***Beginning Another Patrol***

***January 28, 1971***

***BEGINNING ANOTHER PATROL – Cpl. Ural Hunter and his sentry dog "Fritz" take the point position as Combined Action Platoon 2-3-3 begins another day of patrolling near Vien Hao. Cpl. Hunter has been working as point man with several CAP units for the last eight months.***

***(USMC Photo by Sgt. Roger A. Paul)***

