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June 2015  
Award Winning  
Monthly Newsletter

Volume 7, Issue 6

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Kennel Talk is an award  
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MWDTSA touches the lives  
of dogs and people near  
and far. This month, our  
Kennel Talk articles once  
again reach across the  
world—from Afghanistan,  
to Japan, Alaska, Califor-  
nia, Missouri, Michigan,  
Virginia, North Carolina  
and finally Georgia.

Subscribe to see where we  
connect next month!

Military Working Dog Team Support Association, Inc.

## MWDTSA KENNEL TALK



***Dax, 18th Security Forces Squad-  
ron military working dog, bites  
Civilian Guard Shitetsu Hirata,  
18th SFS kennel assistant, during  
control aggression training on  
Kadena Air Base, Japan, March  
28, 2014. Dax came to Kadena in  
September 2013, and was re-  
cently certified after seven  
months of training with his han-  
dler.***



## MWD: The Road to Certification

Story and photos by Airman 1st Class Hailey R Staker

OKINAWA, Japan - A military working dog and his handler walk out onto the field after being instructed to perform two lefts, two rights, two about faces and two halts while marching. The handler commands his dog to sit, lie down, sit back up and stay, then walks away and repeats the commands.

He commands the dog to heel and the 2-year-old, 90-pound German Shepherd walks toward his handler and sits correctly by his side.

They walk side-by-side through a gate toward the obstacle course where the dog is let loose to complete every obstacle on his own. He effortlessly balances on the catwalk, makes

the first leap and gracefully trots up and down the stairs toward the next board to jump over.

Obstacle after obstacle he clears until he meets the tunnels, his only obstacles left until completion. Although his frame is larger than most military working dogs, he clears the tunnels with ease, just like its second nature.

The handler bends down and ruffles the soft fur of the animal, praising him for a job well done. With the hardest part of the day coming up, the duo pushes through to the next task at hand: control aggression.

A decoy steps out onto the field dressed in a bite suit, prepared for anything the dog might

The Road to Certification continued on page 2

The Road to Certification continued from page 1

do to complete his mission. He shakes the hand of the handler while the dog watches him. When the decoy runs away, the dog chases after him, jumping to grab hold of the decoy's arm, holding the bite for more than 10 seconds.

Once the handler calls him out of the bite, the animal lets go of the decoy and goes back to his handler. When asked to be searched, the decoy pushes the handler, and the dog bites without being commanded.

The decoy is escorted to the bleachers, the dog watches him attentively to ensure the decoy doesn't run or fight once more.

The decoy faces the handler, the dog stares at him in anticipation of his final task; the handler is nervous, knowing one of the hardest tasks for the animal to learn is next: the standoff.

Dax, an 18th Security Forces Squadron military working dog, has been on Kadena for the last seven months training with his handler, Staff Sgt. Ralph Rodriguez from the 18th SFS, to become a certified MWD. For Dax, certification almost wasn't a possibility.

"Dax was a dog that [Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas] bought as a puppy, like any other dog, and they were going to train him," Rodriguez said. "Lackland did the detection part of his training, and Dax passed, but Dax likes to spin in his kennel. While he was spinning in the kennel, he hurt his tail so they had to [remove it]. When they did the procedure, he went into a medical recovery time."

Rodriguez explained how Dax and other dogs in the kennels got sick from a disease there after his procedure, which put him on medical hold for longer than expected. As a result, Dax had gone past the time that the dog training school was allotted to train him.

"Once he passed that timeframe, it was done," Rodriguez said. "Dax didn't pass because he outgrew his time, and after that, Dax was left at Lackland until they could figure out what to do. Thanks to [Lt. Col. Kathy Jordan, 18th SFS commander] we got him."

At a time when Kadena lost four dogs due to medical reasons or retirement, Lackland could only supply two certified MWDs. However, they had Dax who they could provide to Kadena under the condition that Kadena trained and certified him on tasks such as obedience and patrol.

Rodriguez, a MWD handler of three years, had never trained a military working dog until now.



**Dax enjoys the spring breeze on Kadena Air Base, Japan. Dax came to Kadena in September 2013, one of three dogs Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, TX provided to Kadena.**

***U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ralph Rodriguez, 18th Security Forces Squadron military working dog handler, holds the leash while Dax jumps over an obstacle during the obstacle course. Dax had been put on medical hold after injuring his tail, which resulted in a procedure to remove it, as well as getting sick after the procedure. Once he was removed from medical hold, he had passed the time allotted for him to be trained, and was unable to be certified by Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland, Texas. Dax was then brought to Kadena under the condition Kadena trained and certified him.***



The Road to Certification continued on page 3



The Road to Certification continued from page 2 .

"Training Dax was definitely a challenge," Rodriguez said. "At the beginning, we thought it was going to be the obedience and the patrol work, but it turns out that Dax was sitting in medical hold for so long, even the detection part he had forgotten. We had to remind him again what odor was and how to find it, which he picked up faster because he just had to be refreshed on it."

Rodriguez said training Dax was a new experience and was very difficult. He needed to show Dax the basics of obedience: how to sit, lie down, heel and stay, as well as how to bite a target and run through the obstacle course.

"Every task would take at least three days with him, but little by little he caught on to what he was actually supposed to do," Rodriguez said.

After obedience was complete, Dax began bite and patrol work. However, the hard part was just beginning.

"It's a process of him having the desire to bite, hold, how strong his bite is and how to control him when he's biting," Rodriguez said. "Once he learned how to 'out the bite,' he needed to know what the word 'out' meant. If he's chasing a decoy and I tell him out, he should stop chasing the individual, which is the standoff."

The standoff was Dax's most challenging task to accomplish. Once he mastered control aggression, Rodriguez said, Dax ran through the obstacle course, taking his time to understand he could fit through the tunnels.

Rodriguez, who has been in the Air Force for 12 years, became a MWD handler after realizing he wasn't challenged enough in his everyday duties of being a response force member.

"Working with a dog is probably the best thing I've done as far as in my career, and training a dog by far has been my greatest achievement," Rodriguez said. "Training a dog from the bottom and seeing him grow, he knows nothing, all of a sudden you see him certification day and he's doing every single thing by the book, it's amazing."

After seven months of training, Rodriguez and Dax were ready for certification day, March 25, and could finally showcase Dax's hard work and dedication to overcome medical hold and become a certified military working dog.

The decoy takes off running, and Rodriguez releases Dax, resulting in his perpetrator giving up. Once called out, Dax sits behind his decoy, performing the perfect standoff and completing this portion of his certification.

The final tasks Dax needed to complete were detection and gunfire. Dax was brought onto the base and tasked with finding a decoy that had been hiding behind a door. Once



**Above: Dax, crawls through a tunnel during the obstacle course on Kadena Air Base. The tunnel was the last obstacle in the course, and Dax's hardest to understand, as he is a larger dog and believed he didn't fit through the tunnel.**



**U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ralph Rodriguez walks Dax on the cat-walk during the obstacle course.. The obstacle course consists of nine obstacles including balance, heights, jumping over boards and crawling through tunnels.**

The Road to Certification continued on page 4

The Road to Certification continued from page 3

building detection was complete, Rodriguez hid a decoy in a field, letting Dax head into the field and find the hiding perpetrator.

For gunfire training, the certifier fired three shots, each one closer to the duo, ensuring Dax was not aggressive toward the gun or his handler. Rodriguez was then offered the gun, and shot two rounds, ensuring Dax was not aggressive. The military working dog, so close to the end, did nothing, completing the task at hand, and ending certification day.

"Once gunfire was done, that was the last task and [the certifier] said he was good-to-go and certified Dax," Rodriguez said.

With certification complete, Dax can begin advancing what he already knows.

"Dax is certified, now it's just advancing him," Rodriguez said. "He's certified on the basics. He bites, he stands off, and he knows obedience. There are different tasks, which are not required for him to pass, just advancement for dogs, so you can have a better dog."

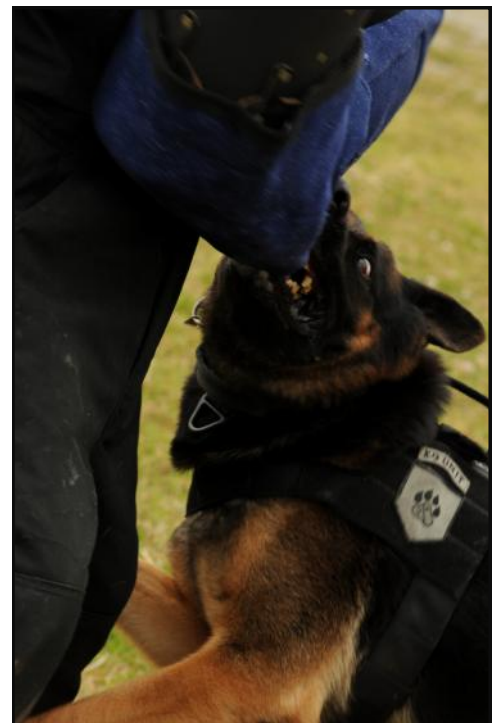


***Dax and Staff Sgt. Ralph Rodriguez walk beside Civilian Guard Shitetsu Hirata during control aggression training.***



***Left: U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Ralph Rodriguez marches with his MWD, Dax, during obedience training. Dax was recently certified as a military working dog after seven months of training with Rodriguez.***

***Right: Dax bites a decoy during control aggression. Control aggression is one of many tasks Dax learned in order to become a certified military working dog.***





# Elmendorf AFB Memorial to Norton and McElroy

by Dixie Whitman

On January 22, 2006, two airmen from Elmendorf AFB, TSgt. Jason L. Norton, a military working dog trainer, and SSgt. Brian McElroy from the 3rd Security Forces Squadron were killed while supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom when their vehicle struck an IED near Taji, Iraq.

The two men were good friends. Their bodies were buried together at the National Cemetery in Arlington, Va.

Last year, MWD TSA was made aware of an effort to solicit funding for a memorial to both men at Elmendorf AFB in Alaska. In reaching out to the Kennel Master at that location, it was determined that MWD TSA would match donated funding up to a certain amount to help raise funds for this project.

We are delighted to say that the memorial dedication was done on May 11th, the beginning of National Police Week.



**Left: A twenty-one gun salute was fired to honor the two men.**



**Above: The rock with the plaque honoring TSgt Norton and SSgt McElroy was delivered early in 2015 and readied for the memorial location.**

**Below: The finished memorial.**



**Right: The memorial was completed due to efforts by TSgt Robert Black & the squadron. In their note to MWD TSA: "Thank you so much for contribution, the families and the squadron appreciate it!"**



## Florida-Georgia Line Care Packages Packed and Shipped in Early May

By Dixie Whitman

On Saturday, May 2nd, a group of enthusiastic volunteers gathered together to prepare and pack MWD TSA's 2nd Quarter care packages. These boxes were themed "Florida-Georgia Line"; they were originally scheduled to be shipped from Tampa, but later the event location was changed to Georgia and the theme just seemed to fit.

Some of the items that went out in the boxes were alligator meat sticks for the handlers, alligator cookies for the dogs, alligator dog treats, Jelly Belly Pet Gators and alligators even graced fabric on some of the bandanas. This was a nod to both the Okefenokee and Everglades Swamps. But the theme didn't end with

gators, we included peaches and peanuts, ocean fish and key lime cookies all in support of that Florida-Georgia vibe.

We also included a great T shirt, tumbler, socks, cap, flamingo pops, Madra Mor Mud, KONG toys, magazines and more. It was simply a colorful, joyful box to pack. We hope to begin receiving some photos of the recipients before we go to press, but in the meantime.....

See 'ya later, alligator.



***Above: Isaac, Irene, Phillip and Lyndsy start the day with prepping the boxes.***

***Right: Marissa and Derrick pose in front of the finished stack of boxes. At that point, there were 101 care packages completed. Since then, we have shipped out many more boxes as new names were received.***





Florida-Georgia Line Care Packages continued from page 6



**Left: Phillip packing Alligator Bob's meat sticks**

**Right: Isaac enjoying the fruits of his labor, an after packing picnic. Isaac and his wife, Irene, donated the embroidery on the caps we sent out.**

**Below: Vietnam era veterans supporting the pack: Jerry & Isaac.**



**Below: Part of the group of volunteers who efficiently and enthusiastically supported the care packing: Linda, Derrick, Marissa, Irene, Phillip, Isaac, Racheal and Elizabeth posed with some of the "dead boxes".**



**Below: Racheal, Irene and Ann enjoying some social time at the picnic, after the packing was completed.**

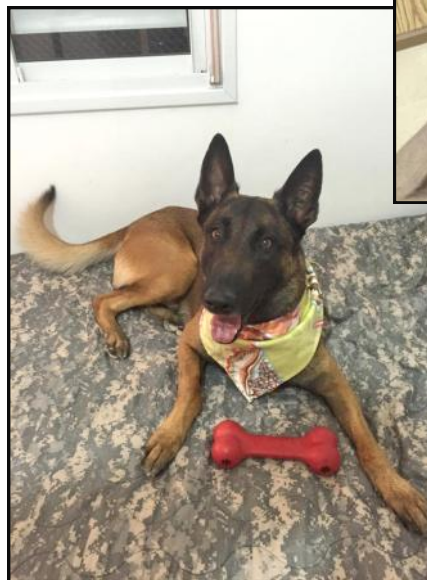


## 2nd Quarter Care Packages Received

Sending out the care packages (see 'Florida-Georgia Care Packages Packed and Shipped' on pages 6 & 7) always leads to photos from the MWD handlers, and their dogs, displaying the contents of the packages they received. Please enjoy these photos of some of the recipients of our 2nd quarter care packages. Join us on Facebook for additional photos.

**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:**

**A Tail Away**, Canton, Ga.  
**Aces High Historica, Inc.**, East Northport, N.Y.  
**Jeff Andersen**  
**Lyn Askew**  
**Stanton Bost**  
**Patricia Carter**  
**Amy Cernicky**  
**Drs. Foster & Smith** - Rhinelander, Wis.  
**Dunbar Animal Hospital**, Dunbar, W.Va.  
**Garrick Galvez**  
**The Gessners**  
**Suzanne Julian**  
**Naomi Kamine**  
**Marcoa Publishing Co.**, San Diego, Calif.  
**Andria Metrakos**  
**Carol Murray**  
**New Hope Animal Rescue**, Scott Depot, W.Va.  
**Laurie Newton**  
**Christopher Nielsen**  
**Lisa Preckel**  
**Christine Rankin**  
**Stephen Redden**  
**Rita Richardson**  
**Lance Robertson**  
**Betsy Ross Foundation, Inc.**, Paris, Tenn.  
**Robert Schnell**  
**The Soden Crew**  
**Scott Van Voris**  
**Verizon Foundation**, Andover, Mass.  
**The Werlys**  
**Jonathan Wilcox**  
**Janet Wong**  
**Kathy Woodring**  
**Will, Nick and Joe**— young men from Virginia.





## MWD TSA Supporters Showcased

MWD TSA could not continue with its mission without the aid of our donors. Our supporters are many and diverse; young and old, and across the world. These photos showcase two groups who have recently provided support to MWD TSA.

***Below: MWD TSA was truly touched by the generous gifting from these three young men: Will, Joe and Nick, third graders from Virginia who created a yard sale to support military working dogs.***

***We get random acts of kindness, but usually from adults. This is just such a special feeling. Kudos to the parents, your hard work is reflected in the generosity of these three young men who "decided we wanted to help military working dogs. The three of us all like dogs."***



***Above: The Animal Hospital of Thousand Oaks is a staunch supporter and partner, soliciting donations and funding on our behalf. Pictured are the staff of AHTO showing off their MWD TSA Volunteer T-shirts, and a signed plaque presented to them by MWD TSA to thank them for their continuing efforts.***

Care Packages Received continued from page 8



## PMO K-9's Entertain WWII Vets

Story and photos by Cpl. Michelle Reif

WILMINGTON, N.C. - Dog handlers from the Provost Marshall's Office K-9 unit are accustomed to putting on demonstrations for eager spectators. They often receive visits from bright-eyed school groups and future military recruits at their kennels on Camp Lejeune. The military working dogs have never failed to excite and entertain a crowd. But for the handlers, one special demonstration struck a chord in their hearts.

Members from the Camp Lejeune PMO K-9 unit held a K-9 demonstration at the Senior Resource Center in Wilmington, North Carolina, April 22, 2015, for veterans of the Second World War and their families.

"All of our guys are veterans, so we know what it means to be a veteran," said Trent Tallman, a working dog handler with PMO and native of Jacksonville, North Carolina. "We'll do what we have to do to accommodate them."

Before PMO arrived, the group of veterans viewed the film 'War Dogs of the Pacific' about the Marine War Dog Platoon during World War II. Tallman explained that the type of dog used and the specific duties of the dogs have changed a great deal since WWII. This change is a frequent topic for questions from the veterans.

"I think it's good for them to see the progression and see how it's changed from when they were active duty," said Tallman.

The PMO dog handlers explained that they enjoy doing demonstrations for veterans more than any other group because they are always attentive and appreciative.

"It's neat to see the energy and it's good for us too," Tallman said. "Sometimes you get the crowd that doesn't really seem to care, but not with this crowd. We want to stay as long as we can and make sure we answer every question."

The handlers and spectators weren't the only ones enjoying themselves during the demonstration. The three working dogs showed off their skills in obedience, detection and aggression. The dogs enthusiastically sniffed out a hidden explosive and zealously chased down a simulated enemy combatant, all to the crowd's delight.

"They feed a lot off of the crowd," said Tallman. "If they are cheering and clapping, then the dogs will be into it too. Nothing makes me prouder than when we get to go up in front of a group of veterans, especially World War II veterans."



**Above: A member of the Provost Marshall's office K-9 unit answers questions from the crowd while his dog obediently waits during a military working dog demonstration for World War II veterans and their families at the Senior Resource Center in Wilmington, N.C., April 22, 2015. The unit members and their dogs were proud to put on the demonstration for members of "the greatest generation."**

**Below: A member of the Provost Marshall's office K-9 unit shows off how loving his dog can be during the military working dog demonstration.**





## Reading for MWDTSA

Megan Francisco and her retired MWD Jalk recently visited the students at Butler Elementary School for a public education event. The students learned about MWDs, and had a chance to ask questions.

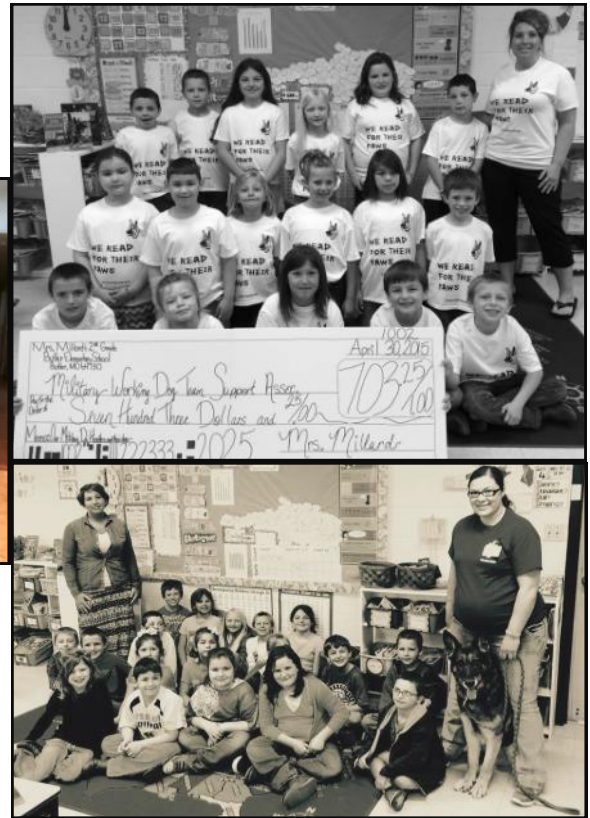
The students had previously raised over \$700 for MWDTSA by reading and test taking, earning 25 cents per test.



**Above:** The students show off the graphs that they used to chart all their reading and test taking.

**Middle:** Jalk with new toy and Butler t-shirt.

**Top Right:** The students with their donation to MWDTSA.



K-9s Entertain WWII Vets continued from page 10

**Below Left:** A member of the Provost Marshall's office K-9 rewards his dog for a job well done with a squeaky toy during a military working dog demonstration for World War II veterans and their families at the Senior Resource Center in Wilmington, N.C., April 22, 2015.



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## Sentry or Patrol

by Michael Hurder

If I had to choose a duty, it would definitely not have been an ammo dump of any sort, but especially not an Air Force ammo dump. Bien Hoa was both an Army and an Air Force base camp. The ammo dump on the Air Force side of the fence ran almost the entire length of the 10,000 foot runway. It was about 100 yards to the east of the runways and came close to abutting the fence that separated the Army from the Air Force side. Imagine seemingly endless rows of bombs stacked on pallets. There were 3 bunkers along this run at equal intervals, so you wouldn't have too far to run if TSHTF. Seriously? A bunker in an ammo dump? Was this to make things easier for the graves registration guys or what?

One night my good buddy from North Carolina, Don Lassiter, and I got the Ammo Dump together. There were three posts we patrolled here. One inside the dump itself and two outside. When Don and I saw the size of the dump I think we both volunteered at the same time to take the outside patrols. Who in their right mind would want to stuck in there with all those bombs? The two outside covered the open spaces between the runway and the dump to the east or north of the dump to the outer fence line or west of the dump to the fence separating the Air Force side from the Army side. There was no berm here, just wire, mines, fence and then us.

While Prince and I were working the east side of the dump and Don was on the other, the radio chirped up with someone calling out "would you believe incoming?" and my heart sank. I'm willing this guy to say where. Where is the incoming coming

in for chrissakes? I looked down at Prince and said "well, it won't make any damn difference where we go right now in the middle of all this, so let's just watch the show." Prince said what I was thinking ... "grrrrrrrrrrrr". I just agreed.

Turns out the rockets came in on the Army side almost a mile away from us. Still...WTF, over?

It was dark and slightly hard to see. As we slowly continued our patrol north, I felt Prince straining a bit at the leash like he does when he's on to something. It was completely unlit here and fairly dark, so I got a little closer to him as we moved and saw his nostrils twitching and he kept straining ever so slightly to the north...the direction the wind was blowing from, right into our faces. He had definitely made a scent alert.

I called the alert in and reported that I was tracking towards the north end of the dump. I guessed Don had the same thing going on because when I looked left I saw him moving north too on the other side of the dump but even slower than I was. As we moved north Prince was straining just a little harder indicating he was getting closer and the alert was becoming more urgent to him. I could feel the tension in the leash growing.

He still had the scent and we were getting closer. I started to think "what do I do if there really is someone out there", as if Prince would alert like this without someone being out there. The fact was, and I finally realized it, that there was not just someone, but a "bad" someone out there for sure.

My nerves were on fire. A hundred scenarios reeled through my head but I stayed zoned in on Prince. I was about to radio for orders when I had what I thought was a good idea. I fired my three round volley into the air. One round of the three would be a tracer round so the follow on forces could easily find me. I wanted them to find me now.

I was shaking all over but adrenaline and Prince kept me going forward. We slowly passed the last pallets of bombs and were headed towards the last of the three bunkers. I thankfully saw Don approaching the opposite side of the bunker.

Seeing that Donny had my six provided the burst of confidence I needed. I had already locked and loaded a 30 round mag. Our two teams came around the sides of the bunker from opposite directions. Both dogs glanced at a parcel laying up against the bunker wall and then both strained north again with a continuing scent alert. Don and I looked at each other, then at the parcel (a satchel), then at each other again in final joint recognition of what we were looking at and both yelled "OH S\*\*\*", pulled our hounds in tight and ran like hell back the way we came.

I snatched the radio handset while running and yelled into it "We are didimao-ing our way back to bunker #2. Please don't shoot, us" and after several seconds of pause I clicked again and said "over?" completely forgetting radio discipline and protocol. While the radio operator at HQ was trying to get me to identify myself and location we ran into a couple truckloads of APs who had been dis-



## Spring Plant Sale

by Allison Merrill of Sun Dog Kennel

Sun Dog Kennels held a Spring Plant Sale which raised \$252 for MWD TSA.

Retired Boy, MWD Remmy, donated plants that were taken to the Dept. of Veterans Affairs and delivered to veterans. One lady was so happy, had the biggest smile of thanks. She said I made her day.

Harris the Collie, a Sun Dog Camper and Therapy Dog donated plants to Orchard Creek Supportive Care. They said it was perfect as they just got their plant hangers out that same morning.



**Above: Tank, a Sun Dog Camper, with a selection of the hanging plants that were sold in the Spring Plant Sale fundraiser.**



**Left: The Orchard Creek Supportive Care resident therapy dog Zippy happily accepted plants for the patients.**

Sentry or Patrol continued from on page 12

patched in response to my first call.

When I told the Lt in charge what we'd found he asked incredulously, "And you just left the satchel there?" I responded, "YES SIR, I SURE AS GOD DID, and SIR, by the way Sir, I'm pretty sure we chased the sappers away who set the satchel there. They were headed north of the runways". I heard Donny say in a breathless near whisper, "You bet your ass we did. I saw 'em afore I thought my ass was 'bout to get blow'd off.". It was then that I realized that the crotch of my pants was soaking wet. I didn't know

what happened and didn't care. I looked at Don and started laughing hysterically. It took a few minutes for me to calm down again and as the Air Police disappeared down the line in pursuit of our nemesis, Don and I restlessly returned to our patrol.

We finished our shift with no further incidents except for a radio operator who kept trying to get me to report "who the hell I was, now, over?". I looked at Don and said ..."Nope. Not happening. That's one FUBAR I ain't telling no one about". He chuckled and said, "you're a trip,

Shorty." Aside from the sheer terror of those few moments, the lone fallout was that I had a rash down the insides of my legs for a week.

We'd "done real good", Sarge and the LT said. Don and I partied like crazy when we got back to our compound and in our reverie forgot the terror that had liquefied our insides earlier that night and that we had to do it again the next night, and the next...

## Sit. Stay. Support.

MWDTSA  
P. O. Box 5864  
Canton, GA 30114  
Editor: Avril Roy-Smith

Phone: 404-451-2539  
Email: [info@mwdtسا.org](mailto:info@mwdtسا.org)



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

## Remembering Jalk L467.

May 2005-May 16, 2015

Volunteer Jalk was put through many reinventions in support of MWDTSA. Recently, he visited a school for an educational event (see Reading for MWDTSA on page 11). Previously, he modeled a Tony Stewart Foundation hat and dog toy. He was also our model for the NASCAR bandana. He was a handsome and joyful dog, always ready to give more. He will be missed by all who loved him.

MWDTSA would like to share some photos of Jalk when he was active duty, some deployed photos, and one with General Petraeus.

