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**Dogs from all services and from WWII to the present were the focus of the floral tribute**

**Photo courtesy of Chris Willingham**

## Natural Balance Pet Foods 2013 Rose Bowl Parade Float Celebrates Military Working Dogs

By Dick Baumer

**Dogs from all services and from WWII to the present were the focus of this floral tribute that will lead to a monument at Lackland AFB in Texas later this year.**

### Irwindale, Calif. — December 31, 2012

A chance encounter in Washington, DC 18-months ago between Joey Herrick and John Burnam led to this year's Natural Balance float. Before they parted, CEO Joey Herrick pledged that Natural Balance

would co-fund, with Petco, the MWD memorial at Lackland AFB in Texas.

The memorial was planned by John Burnam, a former Vietnam War Scout Dog handler, who has worked for years to create the Military Working Dog Teams National Monu-

ment.

In 2003 Burnam wrote *A Soldier's Best Friend: Scout Dogs and Their Handlers in the Vietnam War*, a first-person account of working with his dog Clipper.

The monument is expected to

www.mwdtsa.org

cost \$1.2 million and celebrates the thousands of lives saved by military working dog teams during WWII, Korea and Vietnam to the current era. The float is the kick-off of that effort.

Fiesta Float employees and dozens of volunteers swarmed over the float applying the finishing touches just days before the New Year's Day parade. The float displayed a Doberman Pinscher, a German Shepherd, a Labrador Retriever and a Belgian Malinois leading a dog handler on patrol. These were all rendered in mustard seeds to resemble the twice life-size bronze statues designed by Paula Slater. The rest of the float was covered in thousands of flowers, seeds and leaves, even grass. The National flag and service flags of the Army, USMC, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard, all created in flowers, flew over the it all.

After the parade was over, I learned that the float was seen by one million people live, 39 million Americans watching on television and hundreds of millions more watching in 220 countries around the world.

### MWD Teams Participate

Natural Balance had invited current and retired handlers, along with their dogs, to participate in the Rose Bowl Parade. The retired dogs got to ride rather than walk the 5-



**Above: Employees and volunteers applied the finishing touches just days before the parade. The dogs were rendered in mustard seeds to resemble the bronze statues of the memorial.**

**Photos courtesy of Dick Baumer.**

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1/2-mile parade route. John Burnam also rode on the float.

Among the invited teams were **Marine GySgt Chris Willingham and CPL Juan Rodriguez with Lucca**, a retired Marine Specialized Search Dog who was "MWD TSA Hero Dog 2006." Natural Balance arranged and paid for Chris and Lucca to fly from Helsinki Finland to LA for the parade. Lucca had her own seat in first class!

Lucca was teamed with Sergeant Willingham for 5 years and then with Corporal Rodriguez for 18 months. While scouting in Afghanistan in March 2012, Lucca lost her leg after a roadside bomb she alerted on exploded. But, she saved Rodriguez's life. Lucca now lives in "spoiled retirement," as the family pet of Sergeant Willingham. All three are MWD TSA care package alums.

Also on the float was **Sergeant First Class Charles Shuck with Gabe**, a retired 10-year old Army Labrador. The team was deployed to Iraq and participated in 210 missions with 26 finds—earning the team 40 awards and coins of excellence. In 2008 Gabe was selected as the AKC's "Heroic Military Working Dog," and in 2012 Gabe was the selected as the AHA's "American Hero Dog." \*

*\*As we went to press, we learned that Gabe passed away on February 13, in the arms of SFC Shuck.*

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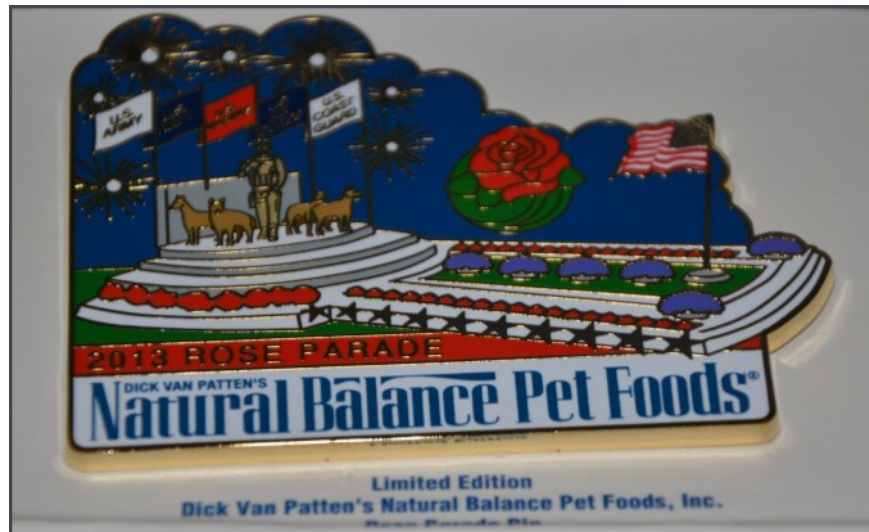
Natural Balance continued from page 2

Another handler onboard was USMC Corporal Robert Harr, 86, whose WWII German Shepard Oki was the most decorated War Dog in the Pacific theater. Bob told me how he smuggled Oki back to the U.S, and was able to adopt him. While in law school at Baylor University, Harr was asked to bring Oki to the White house to receive a plaque from then President Truman. The event proved emotional for them, especially because Oki growled at Truman and Harr said he thought he'd be the first to have his dog take a bite out of a POTUS\* When Oki died in 1958, he was buried with full military honors in Newport Beach, Calif. where Harr still visits every year on Oki's birthday.

A well-known, but non-MWD also rode the float. Tillman, the surfing/skateboarding dog featured on last year's award-winning Natural Balance Rose Parade entry has become a "spokesdog" for Natural Balance. Although he doesn't have an ear tattoo, Tillman was made a Marine Private First Class during a Marine Corps Birthday celebration last October at Camp Pendleton, Calif. He proudly wore his Marine blues on the float.

MWD TSA alum team, **Navy Master at Arms 3rd Class**

\*POTUS — President of the United States



**Above: The Natural Balance Pet Foods 2013 Rose Bowl Parade pin depicts the float with a replica of the MWD memorial which will be installed at Lackland AFB.**

**Below: Marine GySgt Chris Willingham and CPL Juan Rodrigues with Lucca posing with the twice life-sized bronze statues that comprise the memorial.**

**Photos courtesy of Chris Willingham.**



Natural Balance continued from page 3

**Nickolas Cody Aloï with Sunny**, a 7-year old German Shepherd, walked the entire parade beside the float, keeping up the Navy spirit. MA3 Aloï is probably familiar to MWDTSA fans and friends as he and his dog are featured in our 2013 calendar and have appeared in the blogs numerous times. He and Sunny were also featured prominently in our Caribou Coffee promotion, which brought in over 400 lbs. of donated coffee.

Just to balance things off, **USMC Corporal Michael Davis and Astor** from MCAS Miramar, Calif., walked next to the float as well as **USMC Corporal Jose C. Rivera with Rex**, from MCAGCC Twenty-Nine Palms, Calif. **Air Force Staff Sergeant Manuel Rodriguez, Jr. and Rex**, from Edwards AFB, Calif., rounded out the team participants.

A surprise for TV viewers and parade goers occurred when the Natural Balance float stopped at "TV corner" at the start of the parade route. Army Sergeant First Class Eric Pazz, who was riding on the float, got off and surprised his wife and 4-yr old son. They had been flown to Pasadena from Germany. His wife was told they had won a contest sponsored by Natural Balance to attend the parade and had no idea her husband would meet them there.

In a "it's a small world" moment, one of the float volun-



**Above: Chris Willingham and Lucca rode on the Natural Balance Pet Food float during the 2013 Rose Bowl parade.**

**Below: Many of the Military Working Dogs and their handlers who took part in the Rose Bowl Parade gathered to have their photo taken with the bronze statues that comprise the monument to celebrate the thousands of lives saved by military working dog teams during WWII, Korea and Vietnam to the current era.**



teers working on another float in the Fiesta Floats barn, Yvonne Juarez, turned out to be the daughter of a former Korean war-era Army Scout Dog handler from the 42<sup>th</sup> IPSD in Germany. Budford Smoll and his dog **Ilko** were stationed in Bamberg with the platoon.

Yvonne had brought in her dad's photo album. The handlers were amazed at the great photos of the dogs and kennels, scenes that haven't changed much. I was able to put her in touch with the web mistress of the 42<sup>st</sup>IPSD web site, which even has a separate page for the Germany-based unit. Hope Yvonne and her dad are able to attend the next platoon reunion.

### Nationwide Tour Planned

The monument's actual bronze statues will crisscross the U.S. during the next six months aboard an 18-wheel rig to showcase the monument before arriving at Lackland AFB for the October dedication.

Look for the truck and trailer at an event near you soon. The itinerary will be listed on the Natural Balance website ([www.naturalbalanceinc.com](http://www.naturalbalanceinc.com)).

## Goodies for Grek

Goodies for Grek is a two-part story. In this month's Kennel Talk, Dixie Whitman explains the how, the why and the hard work of assembling the care packages and getting them into the mail system.

Next month, we run the story of how the packages get to their recipients at the COPs (Combat Out Posts) and FOBs (Forward Operating Bases). The recipients we will hear about are Grek and his handler.

Grek, a 9-year old yellow Labrador, is an Army Specialized Search Dog. Grek and his handler, Jason, a 9-year Military Police veteran, are currently attached to a Special Forces Team in Afghanistan.

### Part I: Putting Care into Care Packages

By Dixie Whitman

As a former Commanding Officer of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Combat Tracker Platoon in Vietnam and MWD TSA co-founder, Ken Besecker commented many years ago as a reason for establishing MWD TSA, "I am motivated by the desire to ensure that the final treatment of MWDs from Vietnam will never happen again and just as importantly, that the treatment dog handlers and all other veterans who served in Vietnam will not be repeated. It is my motivation, to the extent I can influence anything, that never again will one generation of veterans and other citizens ever abandon veterans of another generation." Of all of the missions that MWD TSA addresses, sending Care Packages to deployed dog teams is paramount in the hearts and minds of our supporters. People want to ensure that our dogs and dog handlers are supported with quality goodies, thoughtful gifts and meaningful correspondence.

MWD TSA currently sends quarterly care packages to deployed teams for whom we have mailing addresses. Generally, we send our packages to the end of the line, to

the individual team. One reason for this is that, early on, we discovered that really great items did not always make their way out to the folks at the end of the supply chain. A second reason is that, for many handlers and dogs, we actually have the capability of personalizing their care packages. If a handler does not like coffee, we can send tea or hot chocolate. If a handler works with a lab or a spaniel, we can send balls to fetch instead of KONGs to chew. That format seems to work pretty well for us.

For individual dog teams, we use the standard APO flat rate boxes. We can ship as much weight as we would like in this box and it costs us a flat rate of \$14.85. When you multiply that by the hundreds of boxes that are sent, you get a sense of why so much money is needed in this process and why we are always looking for financial support in addition to the donated items.

A lot of planning goes into the design and completion of care packages. Taken into consideration are the holi-



**Top Left: We received donations of 48 grooming products from Coast Pet Products. 24 Pet Shedder grooming and 24 nail clippers!**

**Top right: Belgian chocolate bars for the "Valentines" portion of our care packages.**

**Bottom: Caribou Coffee Pick up display.**



Goodies for Grek continued from page 5

days about to take place, the temperatures anticipated when packages are sent and making sure that we have great items balanced between the dogs and the handlers. We only send top quality toys and snacks to the dogs, along with grooming tools, collapsible water bowls, foot toughener and other items needed for a comfortable deployment. On the other hand, for the handlers, it's no holds barred. Peanut brittle, chocolates, caramel corn and other tasty delights are often included to bring a touch of America to whatever location they may be serving.



**Left: Top Dogs Pet Boutique's two Georgia stores in Kennesaw and Roswell have been strong supporters of MWDTSA since our inception. Posing with one of the famous KONG toys that are donated via KONGs for K9s, are store employee, Hailey, and store owner, Suzette, with a donation check on behalf of their many supporting customers. We appreciate Top Dogs and all of the amazing pet stores across the country that participate in KONGs for K9s.**

Grek, a 9-year old yellow Labrador, is an Army Specialized Search Dog. Grek and his handler, Jason, a 9-year Military Police veteran, are currently attached to a Special Forces Team in Afghanistan.

Jason has been a MWD handler for 3 years and is on his first deployment. He is from Ft. Hood, Texas. Jason works Grek off-leash on patrols to clear areas and roads of IEDs

and other threats.

Jason's hometown is Baltimore, MD. His wife, Cecelia, and he have two children Devon (7) and Dakota (3).

*"I have to give outstanding credit to my amazing wife Cecelia for holding everything at home down while I am away for the 1st time. Couldn't ask for a better or stronger woman to be in my life through something this*

*tough. I couldn't ask for a better SF Team to be attached to.*

*I have to give a lot of my credit to my Instructors from Lackland ABF, for making sure I trust my dog. My best trainer there, SSG Bennett, is now in Germany. He made sure that my training was good enough to push me and my dog past our limits, to make sure that we could work to-*

*gether even under great stress.*

*Grek would work himself into the ground for me as long as he would get the Squeaker Ball out of my pocket. He loves to do our patrol, and get back into the trucks and sleep on the way back to camp, where he enjoys a nice rawhide..."*



**Left: Jason, Grek and the team on patrol.**

**Below: Jason and Grek.**



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In our planning strategies for first quarter boxes, we anticipated mailing boxes out during the first week of February and that they would begin to arrive in 10 days to three weeks, depending on location. Looking at the wacky calendar of holidays, we found that Pistachios were being celebrated. We knew that the winter can be harsh in the Afghan Mountains. We had a generous donation of Caribou Coffee and a \$500 grant from 4Imprint.com. And, I really like to treat the folks in the tiny Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) who are oftentimes way on out in the middle of nowhere to some good quality stuff. So how does all if it come together?

Our great solicitor general, Dick Baumer, was able to connect with the Pistachio Growers of California to get some wonderful pistachios donated. He convinced a friend, who owned a casino, that we could use some playing cards and we were able to get some gently Casino-used playing cards from the Silver Slipper in Mississippi. Mariani Packing Co. in California was extraordinarily generous with their Honey Bars: all natural, all goodness and so many amazing varieties that I could envision the smiles on the handlers as we packed them. Speaking of smiles, the dogs were gifted with things that dogs really want, yummy dog treats: both high quality Natural Balance treats and very



**We only send top quality toys and snacks to the dogs, along with grooming tools, collapsible water bowls, foot toughener and other items needed for a comfortable deployment. On the other hand, for the handlers, it's no holds barred. Peanut brittle, chocolates, caramel corn and other tasty delights are often included to bring a touch of America to whatever location they may be serving.**



Goodies for Grek continued page 8



special Stewart's Freeze Dried Liver Pro Treats. All of these amazing items were coordinated by Dick Baumer, who is also a previous Commanding Officer of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Combat Trackers, so you can see that MWDTSA is well supported by the Cav!

KONG toys also make the dogs' day and we were glad to receive matching toys from the KONG Company as a result of our annual KONGs for K9s drive. We were delighted that Coastal Pet Products donated some grooming tools for the dogs. The dogs may not be excited over the grooming tools, but the handlers who receive them will be over the moon. And, a few dogs will receive pairs of donated Ruff Wear boots.

We already had the Caribou coffee and we turned the \$500 grant from 4Imprint.com into coffee mugs to keep that coffee warm in the cold winter climate.

Of course, we cannot get everything donated. Some funding is turned into items that enhance the boxes. This time we supplemented with warm MWDTSA hats, dog bandanas and lip balms to keep lips from chapping and cracking in the cold, windy weather.

Once the items are planned and a date is selected, we turn to collecting addresses for currently deployed han-

dlers. MWDTSA is fortunate to have such supporting commands in a variety of locations; they often times will send us addresses. We also reach out to bases where we have contacts to see if any handlers from their locations have been deployed. And, quite often, handlers whom we have met will send addresses for friends of theirs who have been deployed.

I sometimes think of keeping up with all of these addresses as a little bit like being an air traffic controller on steroids. Handlers coming and going and moving locations, or handlers home on leave. It's not an easy job, sometimes made a bit more difficult by transposed zip codes or suddenly, drop-of-a-hat, changed team numbers.

It all seems to come together in the end is a sort of frenetic compilation.

We try to arrange for receipt of donated and purchased products about a week to ten days before the actual packing date because our garage also doubles as the warehouse. This means that for about a week each quarter, we cannot fit our car into the garage. For the rest of the time, we have a two car garage that holds only one car. Food items take up my dining room.

When the time for packing arrives, we prepare the labels, customs documents, letters to



**Above: Packing weekend was a never-ending stream of boxes to be unpacked, boxes to be discarded and mailing boxes to be constructed and filled. Dick Baumer (who flew in from California to help), SeDonna Asberry, E.A. Wilkerson and Jerry Whitman spent a busy weekend packing.**



## New MWD TSA Board Member Richard E. Baumer COL, (USA-Ret.)

MWD TSA would like to introduce our newest Board member, Richard Baumer, who joins us as 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President.

Richard E. Baumer is Vice President, ROI & Measurement of Imagination Publishing, Chicago. Imagination is a custom content agency that specializes in targeted print, digital, broadcast and social media delivery for Fortune 500 brands, associations and non-profit organizations to help create and strengthen relationships with their customers.



Baumer is a graduate of Claremont McKenna College and was commissioned through ROTC. During his 32 years of active and reserve service he was the Training Officer and Commander of the 26<sup>th</sup> Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog) at the U.S. Army Scout Dog School, Ft. Benning, Ga. and the Commander of the 62<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Platoon (Combat Tracker) in Vietnam. Other assignments included Chief, Visual Tracker Division, at the U.S. Army Combat Tracker School, Ft. Gordon, Ga., Adjutant and Commander, Co. B, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry (Mech), 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Div. (Forward), in Germany, and an Operations/Systems Analysis Officer at the U.S. Army Recruiting Command.

While a reservist, he was Commander of the 6302<sup>nd</sup> Reinforcement Training Unit (Inf. Div. HHC) in Pasadena, CA and held an individual mobilization augmentation assignment with the Directorate of Military Personnel Management in the Pentagon. He was recalled to active duty for 5 months during Operation Desert Shield/Storm in 1991 serving in the Army Operations Center.

Baumer lives in Monrovia, Calif. with his black Labrador, Brutus Sky Trooper of Ft. Outpost. When not out hunting or off-roading in their Baja Bug, they are frequent visitors to the Huntington Dog Beach ([www.dogbeach.org](http://www.dogbeach.org)) a one-mile off-leash dog park in Surf City USA, and the SoCal Dock Dog Club ([www.socaldockdogs.com](http://www.socaldockdogs.com)) in Chino, CA.

Goodies for Grek continued from page 8

the troops and order a supply of APO/FPO boxes that would make a General proud. And, we stock up on packing tape, lots and lots of packing tape.

Packing day is exhausting. Each time there are different items going in the box so each time there is a different rhythm that has to be achieved. Finally, at the end of the packing day, boxes are stacked with relative neatness awaiting their bustling trip to the post office to go to their own special dog team. And, multiple trips are made

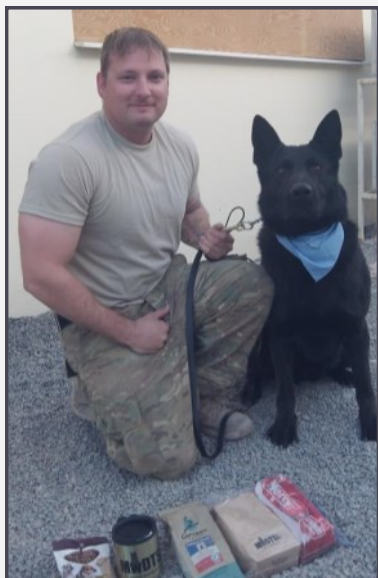
to the back yard recycle barrel to dispose of the carcasses of dozens and dozens of shipping boxes that at one time held incoming donations.

Once dispatched into the hands of the Post Office clerk, our boxes are out of our hands and now making their way to the hands and paws of the recipient. MWD TSA boxes are on their way, thanks to the support of hundreds of supporters and dozens of wonderful organizations and businesses.



**Above: Jerry Whitman on one of his trips to the recycle barrel to dispose of the dozens of shipping boxes that had held incoming donations.**

## Photos from Handlers



At MWD TSA, we love to share the photos we receive. When we send out care packages, we receive photos of the MWDs and handlers sharing the contents.

Clockwise from left: (Photos courtesy of the respective handlers):

Nnorman and handler, Bonello, pose with the dog treats Nnorman received in his care package. The double "n" on Nnorman's name confirms that he was born and bred military as part of the Puppy Program at Lackland AFB;

Sgt Adam Serella and Nero with the goodies they received;

Rose and handler, Jessica Newton. Rose was particularly impressed with the Liver treats ;

Edo (handler Loretta Streichert) with some of the goodies he received from MWD TSA in his care package.



**Right:**

**Thank you to the veterinary staff supporting dogs at FOB Sharana.**

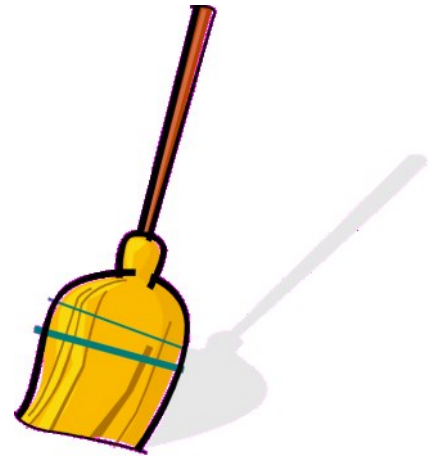
**MWD TSA also sends support care packages to veterinarians and vet techs whose job it is to monitor and care for the health of our Military Working Dogs.**





# Operation Clean Sweep

## Closeout Shopping Supports the Teams



**Military Working Dog Team Support (MWD TSA) has produced a wide range of T Shirt styles over the years in support of both recognition and fundraising efforts by our organization. As we introduce new ideas for 2013, we find that we have odds and ends that could use a clean sweep.**

**With that mission in mind, MWD TSA is offering a first come, first served opportunity for supporters to get shirts at a great cost. In order to streamline the process, the choice of limited sizes is yours; the choice of limited styles is ours. All shirts were selling for \$19.95 each with \$6.50 shipping per shirt.**

**Shirts will now be \$9.99 each or 3 for \$25.00. Costs of shipping will be \$6.50 for the first shirt and \$1.50 for each additional shirt.**

**The Clean Sweep Sale will open March 5<sup>th</sup> and will continue until shirts are gone.**



## Military Working Dog Team Support Association, Inc.

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### Sit. Stay. Support.

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[www.mwdtsa.org](http://www.mwdtsa.org).

We are also on Facebook.

Kennel Talk is the proud recipient of GSDCA Special Newsletter Award!

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## Women's History Month Expo

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Please Recycle by Sending to a Friend



**Dog Handler, SrA Candace Colburn, and some of her female co-workers in the Vehicle Search Area (VSA) posed for a photo for women's History Month Expo.**

**Below:**

**From left to right, A1C Madeline Edwards, SrA Racheal Rideout, SrA Candace Colburn and MWD Ed-  
dy, A1C Alexandra Litsey, and TSgt Angela Miranda.**

**Photo Courtesy of Candace Colburn**

