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Governor Proclaims Day for Handlers

Military Working Dog Handlers from four Georgia installations and two veteran dog handlers were guests of MWDTSA for an event in Atlanta, Georgia on March 25, 2009. Governor Sonny Perdue posed for a photo with the handlers as he signed a document proclaiming May 20, 2009 as Military Dog Handler Day in Georgia and called upon the citizens of Georgia to recognize the sacrifices made by dogs and handlers in defense of our country.

Joining MWDTSA were representatives from three Army installations: Fort Stewart, Fort Benning and Fort McPherson

along with representatives of Robins Air Force Base. A yellow Lab, Cider, from Fort Stewart represented all Army dogs at the ceremony and a solid black GSD, Pharaoh, attended from Robins to represent all AF dogs. The original proclamation will be framed and presented to the kennels at Robins AFB in late May.

The luncheon following the ceremony was attended by the handlers, veterans and supporters. Conversation centered around support requests with which the handlers thought MWDTSA might be able to assist. Two of the most popular topics were assistance with

locating buildings in which handlers and dogs could practice their skills that are different from the buildings available to them at their bases and seminars for handlers to attend for additional education.

MWDTSA is committed to assisting in whatever manner we can and have already connected with a large construction company that is willing to allow handlers and dogs to utilize their buildings for training.

Please see additional photos of the event on the last page of this [Kennel Talk](#).

Special points of interest:

- Photos from the Proclamation signing with Governor Sonny Perdue.
- Spotlight on Labrador Retrievers working to get the job done.
- Fort Bragg handlers visited.
- Photos of handlers in Iraq.



Handlers from Fort Stewart, Fort McPherson, Fort Benning and Robins Air Force Base join veteran Army handlers Ken Besedeker and Frank DiMartino as they watch Gov. Perdue sign proclamation.

Invisible Fence Provides Visibility in Community



Above:

Invisible Fence fundraiser allows MWDTSA advocate, Ann Wilkerson, an opportunity to spend some time with a cute little Papillion who stole our hearts.

Right:

Ken Besecker, MWDTSA Secretary/Treasurer enjoys time with another supporter.

MWDTSA was invited to attend a fundraiser by supporters at Invisible Fence by Peachtree on March 7, 2009. This Cherokee County, Georgia based business has made it a mission to help the dogs working in the war zones by both donating dollars and increasing the awareness of Military Working Dogs and their impact on America's security.

MWDTSA will be working

with Invisible Fence representative, Jody McGlothlin, to get the word out about the history and dedication of America's Military Working Dogs and to raise funds to assist with missions and morale through community events, fairs and festivals.

Also attending the Invisible Fence Open House in March were representatives from several area dog related busi-

nesses, including our friend from Top Dogs, Betty Lou Stokes. Great contacts were made at these businesses who really support the Military Working Dog.

We did nearly lose Ann to the Aussie Mobile Pet Grooming people; when they talked about doing blueberry facials on dogs, she almost got in line.

One of the businesses, Pet Dreams Memorial Center offered Atlanta area owners of retired Military Dogs free services for those dogs at the end of their dogs' lives. That's a very generous offer and certainly a fitting tribute to a dog who has served our country so valiantly.

Other very supportive vendors were around and donated some wonderful gifts for the raffles.

It wasn't all business though as the general dog-owning public was invited to come and bring their dogs for a day of fun with agility play and bone tosses. Perhaps the most fun was simply the opportunity to meet and greet other dog enthusiasts and their dogs. The human-dog bond is a joy to see.

MWDTSA sends its appreciation to Jody and the entire staff at Invisible Fence for a wonderful day and your unwavering support.



Labradors working from Southeast to Southwest Asia: A labor of love



A black lab leads the way as the olfactory member of a Combat Tracker Team in Vietnam.

September 1970, Phouc Vinh, South Vietnam:

It's not quite first light and yet the US Army Combat Tracker Team is waiting at the helipad. The Team was alerted last night that an Infantry Platoon had been in contact with an enemy force throughout the night. Although it is not yet daylight, the Trackers are sweating in the muggy, humid, already-hot air. The whoop, whoop, whoop sound of a Huey helicopter, nicknamed a slick, is heard coming in to land at the pad. The Trackers pick up their seventy plus pound rucksacks and weapons and load onto the Huey. The men have supplies for a week in addition to food and water for the Combat Tracker Dog. They don't say much as they have previously worked missions near the Infantry unit's location. One Team member,

however, has a different demeanor. The Team's Tracker Dog, a Black Labrador Retriever, jumps aboard the Huey with excitement and enthusiasm ready for another day to be with his best buddy, and play the games he and his buddy play after they go for helicopter rides.

The Lab, as are all his canine buddies in the Tracker Platoon, is quite pleased with the helicopter ride and enjoys the wind blowing in his face and flapping his ears. He looks up at his handler for another pat and "good boy" and then shakes his head vigorously slinging slobber on everyone in the compartment. His face displays great joy and anticipation of another exciting day in the field. The rest of the Team is more subdued and rarely speaks, mostly just staring down or out of the helicopter at the jungle passing below.

About a half hour later the slick lands at a fire support base (FSB) that is a couple of days old. There are 105mm howitzers in place, partly prepared fighting positions, and barbed wire has been strung. The howitzers are firing continuously and the noise is deafening. Two actions are simultaneously taking place. One, the FSB is being matured: positions are continually being better prepared; supplies are being ferried in; communications are being developed, more soldiers are being brought in by other slicks and; in general, the area that was a heavily wooded hilltop a few

days ago is barren of trees and has the appearance of organized chaos. The area is blinding with swirling gritty red dust. Secondly, the battalion manning the FSB is in full tactical operation running the battalion's missions, including the platoon attacked the night before.

As soon as the slick is on the ground, the Combat Tracker team quickly offloads and the slick is on its way having barely touched the ground and not fully stopping its flight. The Tracker Dog is quite pleased with his ride. He's had a good time with his best buddy and the other guys with whom he hangs out, and is ready to check this place out and get on with the day.

The Tracker team leader finds a place for his team to wait and looks for the Battalion Tactical Operations Center (TOC). The Trackers look across the FSB and see another slick come in. Three Scout Dog Teams unload this slick as quickly as the Trackers had just done. No one on the team speaks and barely exchange glances. They know for certain now this will not be a fun day.

These Combat Trackers are part of a long and illustrious history of Military Working Dogs. In the Vietnam War, Combat Tracker Teams (CTT) were generally composed of 5-7 men and a Labrador Retriever Dog trained to track. Black, Yellow and Chocolate Labrador Retrievers were used by the US Army. The purpose

of the CTT was to: reestablish contact with an elusive enemy; reconnaissance of an area for possible enemy activities; and locate lost or missing friendly personnel. Combat Trackers used visual tracking techniques (broken twigs, scuff marks in the dirt, etc) and the olfactory senses of the tracker dog. A dog team is dog and a handler. Trackers worked well ahead of supported units to maintain noise discipline and move more quickly.

The first US Army Combat Tracker Teams (CTT) were trained by the British Army in Malaysia in 1966. The teams were numbered CTT 1, CTT 2, etc. and were generally assigned individually to support Army Brigades. In about 1968, teams were combined to form Infantry Platoon (Combat Tracker) (IPCT) units. Generally there was one IPCT to support each US Army Division

About 1969 the US Army established its own Combat Tracker School at Ft Gordon, Georgia to train visual trackers and tracker dog handlers. The original Tracker School facilities (kennels, administration building) have been utilized since the school closed by the Fort Gordon Military Police Military Working Dog (MWD) section. Only within the last two years has a new kennel been built adjacent to the original Tracker School facilities. The original Tracker School Kennel still remains. Indeed last year, I accompanied the Military Working Dog Team Support Association to Fort Gordon to present the Fort Gordon MWD section with the Georgia Governor's MWD Han-

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dler Proclamation. Among the Veteran Dog Handlers attending was a Tracker Dog Handler from my unit in Vietnam. It was quite emotional as I accompanied him to the now abandoned kennel and he walked right to the run in which his dog, Traveler, was boarded while they learned together how to track and save American lives. His memories of Traveler and others were overwhelming.

Combat Tracker Teams were but one type of MWD teams which served in Vietnam. The US Army Infantry School, Dog Training Detachment (DTD), located at FT Benning, GA., trained Scout Dogs for the Army, Navy and Marines. During the Vietnam era, the DTD had a couple of hundred dogs, almost all German Shepherds (or at least dogs having pointed ears and a saber shaped tail) in various stages of Scout Dog Training. Scout dogs were trained to alert (by smell, sight, and/or sound) on personnel, equipment caches, and trip wires. In the field, Scout Dog Teams walked point with Infantry units to give early warning. "Dogman, take the point" is a phrase embedded in the heart and soul of every Scout Dog Handler.

Sentry Dog Teams in Vietnam, consisting of one dog and one man, generally worked fixed facilities such as Air Base perimeters or larger "permanent" facilities. Sentry Dog teams

proved invaluable to warn against facility attacks. It can be very lonely when it is pitch black and you are by yourself in the dark at the perimeter of an airfield or other facility. That loneliness is significantly compensated knowing one's dog is by your side and is using all his/her capabilities to detect any intruder. Mine and Tunnel Dog Teams were generally assigned as Infantry to Scout Dog Platoons and were the forerunners of today's military explosive detector dogs.

The relationship between dog and man was and is an unbreakable bond. The handler's life and those being supported was entrusted to the dog, who would endure the heat, rain, leeches, jungle vines, mountain side footing, elephant grass, bamboo, and all other discomforts until he or she dropped, just to hear their best friend say, "good dog," and get a pat on the side or a scratch on the head. The real life accounts of dogs lying beside their wounded buddies or continuing to track or scout or guard in the face of any danger are countless. Today's MWD Teams, likewise, endure similar hostile conditions with the same dog/handler relationship and commitment to accomplish the mission.

While in Vietnam, I also served at the United States Army Vietnam (USARV) Dog Training Detachment (USARV DTD). The USARV DTD mission was, in part, to receive all incoming trained scout dogs, tracker dogs, and handlers and supply them to the various Scout Dog and Tracker units in the Army, generally one Scout Dog Platoon per Army Brigade and one Combat Tracker Platoon per Division. USARV DTD matched up incoming handlers with dogs, if they arrived without a dog, and provided in country training prior to them reporting to an

assigned unit.

Just like my Combat Tracker time, my USARV DTD time provided me with countless memories which provide smiles and sadness yet today. For example, while with Combat Trackers, we had many, many successful tracks and "experiences." As the result of one particular mission, the entire team was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" for valor. The entire team includes Otis, Tracker Dog number T019. I still have the order awarding the medal and the picture of the Division Assistant Commander pinning the Bronze Star on a yellow towel hung around Otis.



Awarding of Bronze Star with "V"

Otis was a great tracker and quite a character. If we had to wait too long (by Otis' determination) for a helicopter to take us in to land or rappel to a mission, Otis would pout. His entire persona would change until the helicopter arrived and we were on board. Incidentally, every dog I can remember loved riding in helicopters, a trait I personally never acquired. All I wanted to do was get out of them and on the ground where it was safe.

The accounts of dog heroes in Vietnam and today's dogs are endless. I still remember Sam, a large black Labrador Retriever. Sam's handler was killed in action shortly before I arrived at the 62 IPCT. Sam was nearing the end of his working days and there was no handler to work



June 2008: A U.S. Soldier provides security while his Military Working Dog, Lucky, searches for weapons caches and bomb paraphernalia in a forest near Mosul, Iraq. This operation is aimed at reducing insurgent activities.

Photo credit:

Army Photo by Pfc. Sarah Du Boise.



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U.S. Army Spc. Eric George gives Diego, a military working dog, a rest on a rooftop while conducting a cordon and soft knock in Muhallah 728 in Eastern Baghdad, Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. James Selesnick/Released)

helicopter, went in the "club," lived in the commander's quarters, etc. What a wonderful retirement for a dog who gave so much to his handlers, the Team and his country.

"One eyed" Jack was still another one of kind who saved countless lives, both working as a Scout Dog and as a trainer at USARV DTD. Jack was wounded in action and, in part, lost an eye. Jack was used as a training dog at

generally didn't take many iterations of being stared at by a half blind German Shepherd Dog that handlers quickly began to pay attention to Jack and consequently to read and trust their assigned dog.

The experiences with: Major (a Scout Dog who worked with Combat Tracker Teams); Traveler (a great Combat Tracker Dog); Sissy (a Mine detection dog I helped train at USARV DTD and who was killed in action with her handler and others when riding in an armored personnel carrier); and many others are similar to those of the great dogs, and their handlers, described above. Those dogs all worked in Vietnam. The women and men working MWDs today have similar experiences and memories.

I don't know if any of those heroes were given the right to come back home. You see, our government sent only about 150 of these totally devoted veteran heroes back to America. I was privileged to be part of the selection process to send the first 100 Scout Dogs back home: To America, the country for which they sacrificed so much. After a medical records review had been completed, I travelled all over Vietnam to review dog's training records, talk with their handlers and in many cases walk coverman for the handler on missions to evaluate the dogs. This happened in 1971 when I was assigned to USARV DTD. I know about 50 dogs each were put on two planes and sent back to Lackland AFB. My understanding is in total, about 150 dogs were returned to their country.

Unbeknownst to those of us in the MWD programs, most all US MWDs (veterans) left in

Vietnam were either euthanized or given to the Vietnamese Army when Americans finally left Vietnam. To this day MWD handlers' eyes water at the thought of their beloved dogs who gave so much and asked so little. Fortunately the policy is different today and handlers and dogs travel to and back from war zones as a Team.

Those of us involved in MWDTSa are motivated by many and varied reasons. At least one person I know is 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 that to the extent I can influence anything, never again, will one generation of veterans and other citizens ever abandon veterans of another generation. MWDTSa is my force to help today's fine young men and women and their dogs be treated with the respect and honor they so very much deserve.

When a MWD Team arrives at a unit about to go on a combat mission an unexplained, surreal, yet sensed phenomenon occurs. Many troops are just glad to see the dog. Many have left their own dogs at home and it just makes them happy to see a dog with them. Patting a dog when one is about to go on a tactical combat mission is a great stress reliever. Many of the troops have worked with a MWD previously and feel comforted to know a significant combat multiplier has been added to their unit.

September 1970 continued:

him. Sam became a King of the kennel and often was allowed to just roam the unit area when someone was there to watch him, play ball or whatever. The Commander of the unit to which the 62 IPCT was attached mentioned several times that he remembered Sam from the Commander's previous tour with the same unit. Indeed, he more than mentioned SAM. He wanted Sam to be his mascot and go wherever he went. I explained I couldn't do that because Sam was a MWD, etc. Eventually, I wore down. (Hope the statute of limitations has passed). I completed a death certificate for Sam indicating he had been killed in action; took the certificate to the 1st Cavalry Division veterinarian for his signature and Sam was no longer a MWD. Sam became instantly retired! From that day forward Sam went with the CO wherever the CO went: laid around his office, flew on the command

USARV DTD. Jack was paired up with newly arrived off leash Scout Dog handlers who were having difficulty reading their dog's alerts. Scout Dog alerts varied from the extreme of sticking their nose up in the direction of detected scent and holding it there to the other extreme of simply flicking their ears and keep on walking. "One Eyed" Jack was invaluable with training handlers. Jack gave a strong alert. When Jack would alert (and the handler would miss it) the handler would tell Jack to "move out." Jack would take a few steps, and again alert. If the handler missed the alert again, the handler would again tell Jack to "move out." It was generally at this time Jack would take a few steps, alert again and then look back over his shoulder (on the side which had no eye) and stare at the handler as if Jack were saying something like, "...that's three times, I've told you, now pay attention." It

For the LOVE of Labs



A U.S. Army Soldier and his military working dog conduct a cordon and search for improvised explosive devices and weapon caches in Al Sinna, Iraq, (U.S. Army photo by Pfc. Sarah De Boise) (Released)



Budge is working as a Therapy Dog in Iraq



Spaulding in Afghanistan

The Combat Tracker Team is inserted to support the Infantry Platoon. There being no landing zone or clearing, the team (including the dog) must rappel in to meet up with the platoon. CTT member exit the hovering chopper which is kept steady by skilled pilots as the team members fight their way to the ground through tree branches and vines.

The CTT finally gets on the ground and coordinates with the Infantry platoon leader and others. Radio frequencies are exchanged. Other coordinating information is exchanged and the CTT is briefed on the unit's events from the previous night. The Infantry platoon stays in its defensive position and the CTT goes to work. The CTT employs

one of its techniques to find a track (the path of a fleeing enemy). Some 50 meters from the Infantry platoon's location an area of a disturbed leaves is found and luckily a few drops of blood are seen also. The Trackers move slowly as there are few other signs in the immediate area. Finally, after identifying a few more scuff marks and more blood drops; the visual tracker has determined the direction of the track. The vegetation is thick and it's already steamy and rancid smelling on the jungle floor. The tracker dog team quickly picks up the scent and the Tracker Team moves out. The CTT moves cautiously and quietly, but there is a lot of time to make up. The Tracker team

with their Labrador Retriever in the lead will "seek on" and "track on." A radio call is made to the supported Infantry unit. They are given a direction of travel and also begin to move out.

Any Infantry combat veteran (or combat medic or artillery forward observer or engineer and others) of any war knows the rest of this story and can provide their own experiences and many different endings.

It is estimated about 10,000 Americans were saved by using dog teams in Vietnam. I don't know what the estimation for current conflicts are, but I do know that those units who are using Military Working Dogs are glad to have the canine and handler heroes

with them.

Additional and detailed information on the role Labrador Retrievers played in Vietnam can be found on the Combat Tracker Team website, <http://www.combattrackerteam.org/>. Additional information regarding all MWDs from Vietnam and current MWD activities can be found at the Vietnam Dog Handlers' Association website <http://vdha.us/>.

Please check the MWD TSA site <http://www.mwdtsa.org/> regularly. The blog has frequent updates featuring the actions and pictures of deployed MWDs and handlers.

North Carolina Kennel Welcomes MWDTSA



Dog handler, Floyd, and his dog, Bridge pose for a photo submitted to MWDTSA from Iraq. At right, Floyd at Fort Bragg.

Below: Sgt. Greenfield at Fort Bragg received an MWDTSA box while working with his dog in Afghanistan.



On a recent visit to North Carolina, MWDTSA President, Dixie Whitman had an opportunity to meet with handlers at Fort Bragg and do a quick tour of the kennels.

"The original thought was to catch up with some of the handlers who had made a trip to the War Dog Memorial at Fort Benning back in 2007."

Scott Carter, our Point of Contact, was on temporary duty in Missouri. Scott, however, put us in contact with Sgt. Greenfield who had received an MWDTSA package while in Afghani-

stan. Welcoming our visit, we were able to make a stop and get some good feedback from active duty handlers on what were most critical needs. Also at Fort Bragg was SSgt. Floyd whom we had previously also supported while he and his dog, Bridge, were in Iraq.

Although we missed out on reconnecting with Scott, we were delighted to meet faces in person that we had only previously seen in photos.

MWDTSA thanks Fort Bragg handlers for a tour of the kennel and their time.



You're Picture Perfect



Shared MWD photos.

Left: Air Force Handler, Philip, on left with his MWD, Rico, near the Tigris River in Iraq.

Right: Marine Handler, Sebastian, with his MWD, in Iraq.

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We are on the web!!

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Sit.Stay.Support.
Thank you Invisible Fence!!!



**PLEASE RECYCLE
BY SENDING
TO A FRIEND**



Fort Stewart handler, Christopher Justice spends a few moments readying SSD dog, Cider.

Active duty dog handlers and dogs gather on the corner of Capitol Square in Atlanta prior to meeting with Governor Sonny Perdue. Pharaoh, a solid black GSD from Robins AFB (right) and Cider, an SSD dog from Fort Stewart (above) attended as well.

