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Remmy in a K9 truck. Courtesy photo

Hero Dogs of War

By Priscilla Miller, Contributing Writer

Today, Doug Davis sits behind his desk at DeWitt Marine, on Clam River, with his Dutch Shepherd “Remmy,” a retired (PEDD) Patrol Explosive Detection Dog, at his feet. The walls in his office have photos of other military service dogs and one photo in particular shows a younger Davis dressed in military garb with a magnificent German Shepherd at his side. Davis, a former Air Force dog handler, enlisted in 1966. He never thought he would see action in Vietnam but this proved not to be the case and he ended up serving over 300 nights in the bush there, outside the wire.

After basic training, he worked for several months in the Air Police at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base where he spent time at the main gate and riding patrol. He finally decided that law enforcement was not for him and switched to working security. It only took one night, walking around a squadron of F100’s, for Davis to say, “I’m out of here” and he volunteered for canine. The squadron commander tried to talk him out of it, by telling him he would be shipped to Vietnam, but by then Davis realized that everyone on the base would be going to Vietnam. He told the commander he would rather have a dog than be in a bunker by himself. Being an Air Force dog handler was among the most dangerous duties one could draw in the Air Force during the

Vietnam War but to this day he never regrets making that decision.

He proceeded to go to “dog school” at Lackland Air Force Base where all TSA, Secret Service, and dogs from all five branches of the service trained. He explains, “Back then there were three types of dogs used in Vietnam. Sentry Dogs were trained using punishment techniques and as a result they were ultra aggressive. All they did was alert and attack. These dogs could never be retired and today they are no longer in use. Scout Dogs were trained using a rewards system at Fort Benning. They worked during the day and were sent out with a squad or a company on patrols. When on patrol, they always tried to work downwind. One man and his dog were usually 150 meters in front of the main unit followed by “bodyguards.” Their job was to protect the handler and dog. They followed off to the left and right, about 50 meters behind. When the dog alerted, the handler would figure out where the alert was coming from, and using hand signals, signal back to the



Photos on Doug Davis’s office wall hold memories of his days as an Air Force dog handler and hero dogs he has known. Photo by Priscilla Miller



Remmy enjoys some cool water at a well in Afghanistan. Courtesy photo



Doug Davis with his Sentry Dog Smoke at Phu Cat, Vietnam. Courtesy photo

bodyguards, who in turn alerted the main unit. That’s when the Tracker Dogs (Bloodhounds were used) were called in to find the enemy.

While Davis was stationed at Phu Cat, about 17 miles North of Quin Yon, he and his Sentry Dog “Smoke” joined a team made up of 38 men, handling 38 dogs, and was assigned to do perimeter security at night. There were 27 miles of perimeter, lined with concertina wire around the base and the “dog men” patrolled outside the wire, actually venturing

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some distance into the surrounding jungle in search of Viet Cong. Davis explained, "Once we were locked and loaded and on our way outside of the wire, the men in the bunkers would yell out, 'Hey, dog man, stay on your toes tonight' because they knew they would be next if the enemy breached our security."

Davis also explained that each dog had a different way of alerting and it could take several months of working with a dog before the handler became familiar with the dog's alerting behavior. His dog, Smoke, would weave when alerting an animal but would walk straight forward if it was human. Once, while on patrol, Smoke exhibited a strange dance-like alert. Davis was totally confused by his dog's behavior until he saw the fire ants. He quickly jerked on Smoke's six-foot leash and it broke. Davis fashioned a makeshift leash and returned to base for a new one. Several days later, he learned that a Viet Cong officer had been captured. While being interrogated, the officer told how his men were about to fire on a dog handler when the handler experienced an "equipment failure" (the leash breaking) and rather than expose their position, they stood down and allowed him to return to base.

During wartime, dogs were the most effective devices for saving lives. They braved countless dangers to bring our men home alive. Their sense of smell is said to be 1,000 times greater than man's and they can sniff out the enemy up to 1,000 yards away. They were used during WWII and Korea. After WWII, the dogs were shipped home and given honorable discharges.

Dogs are credited with reducing Vietnam War casualties by 65% in areas where they served; in fact, the Viet Cong hated the dogs so much they offered a reward for a handler's uniform patch or the tattooed ear from a dog. Instances of dogs saving the lives of their handlers are common. In one such incident, the dog alerted, but the handler, not seeing anything, was about to step forward when his dog blocked his path. It was then, that the handler saw a trip wire hidden in the jungle foliage.

An example of the devotion shared between these dogs of war and their handlers took place in Vietnam. The handler lay critically injured and as he felt his life ebbing away, his thoughts were of his loyal dog. He did not want the dog to see him die and ordered it to "go." The dog refused to leave instead he grasped the handler's uniform collar in his teeth and began dragging his wounded comrade out of harm's way. Realizing what his dog was trying to do, the wounded warrior reached up and held on to the dog's harness. Despite being shot twice, the brave animal continued on until they reached safety.

Once the handler's condition was stabilized at a field hospital, he insisted on seeing his dog before being shipped to a military hospital for further treatment. A tearful reunion ensued as the gallant German Shepherd carefully rested its head on his handler's chest and looked up at him. After thanking his dog for saving him, the two parted, never to see each other again. The handler would always remember his brave friend and always wonder what happened to him. One thing he knew for certain, if the dog wasn't put down by the military, he would have been eaten by the Vietnamese because dogs were considered disposable "military equipment." Of the 4,000 dogs that served in the war, only 204 returned to the states.



above: **Remmy in a training exercise while in Afghanistan.**

Courtesy photo

far left: **Remmy, a Patrol Explosive Detection Dog from Afghanistan, is credited with saving many lives when he alerted his handler to a hut filled with explosives that were set to go off when they opened the hut's door. In 2012, Doug Davis adopted Remmy through Military Working Dog Adoptions.**

Photo by Priscilla Miller

at left: **Doug Davis's Sentry Dog, Smoke.**

Courtesy photo

Davis was relieved to learn that Smoke became sick while in Vietnam and was euthanized. After his discharge from the Air Force in 1970, Davis returned to civilian life, married, and raised a family but never had another dog because of the memories it would have brought back of his time in Vietnam. Then, in 2008, he received a call from Debbie Kandoll, a friend and founder of Military Working Dogs Adoptions. She told him it was time for him to adopt a retired military working dog and Davis agreed.

In November, Ringo, a Navy dog who served in Kuwait, came to live in the Davis household. Sadly in 2011, Ringo became ill and had to be put down. In July of last year, the Davis family opened their hearts and home again and adopted Remmy. Remmy is credited with preventing casualties when he alerted on a village hut in Afghanistan that contained a huge amount of explosives rigged to go off when the door to the hut was opened.

Doug says, "The dogs are so happy to be free and able to roam in the house and not be stuck in a run. Most dogs are in a run six months, before they end up with their adopted family." Like anyone, freedom is a big deal and they show it after reaching home."

Today, the adoption of military working dogs is becoming easier; however, anyone considering adopting one of these dogs should have experience handling big dogs and know how to deal with their dominant personalities.

Senate Bill S2134, named the "Canine Members of the Armed Forces Act," is part of the Defense Appropriations Bill currently before the U.S. Senate. Calls to your senators will help assure that these brave animals will no longer be classified as "equipment" and rightfully be designated "Canine Members of the Armed Forces."

For Military Working Dog Adoption information go to <http://www.militaryworkingdogadoptions.com/>