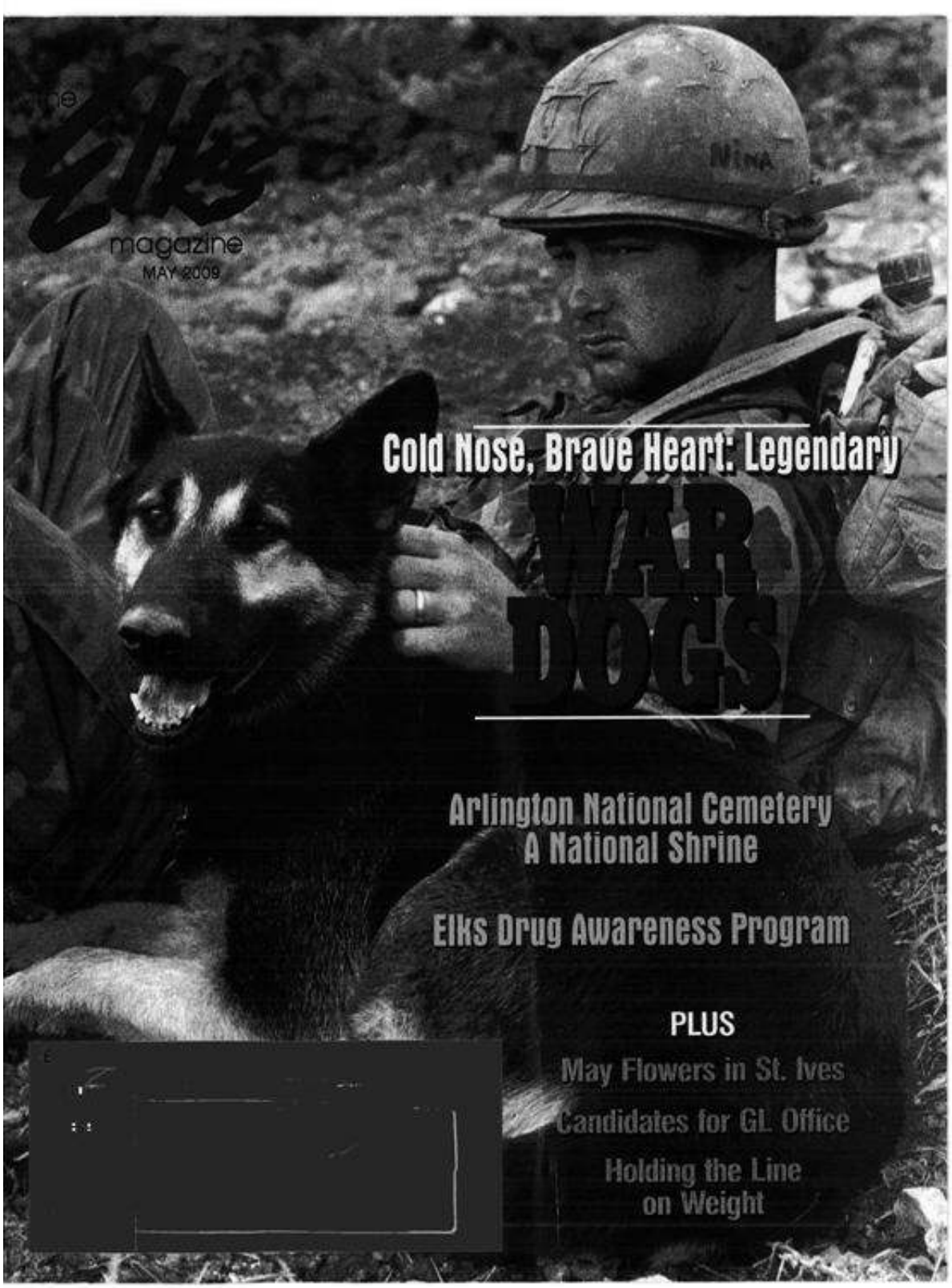
Cold Nose, Brave Heart: Legendary War Dogs



LINDA MCMAKEN

Cold Nose, Brave Heart: Legendary American WAR DOGS

THEY are American soldiers who never carry a rifle or receive a letter from home but who face death and danger every day. They have been responsible for saving the lives of thousands of other American soldiers, and many of them have given their lives for their comrades. Officially and unofficially, they have been protecting American soldiers for over one hundred years. In fact, ever since World War II, war dogs, properly known as military working dogs, have served in every branch of the US military.

War Dogs "Over There"

Although dogs have been used by the US military since the Civil War, the United States had no formal war dog program until World War II. During World War I, dogs were used primarily for rescuing the wounded. If a soldier was unconscious, these rescue dogs, which were trained not to bark, would inform medical personnel that the soldier was injured by bringing them his helmet. The dog would then lead medics to the wounded man. Large breeds worked as ambulance dogs, pulling two-wheeled carts across devastated fields or tugging soldiers out of harm's way.

One of the most famous World War I rescue dogs was a French Red Cross dog named Captain. This brave war dog once located thirty wounded soldiers in a single day. But in order to fully understand how amazing this was, one must understand the horrific conditions of a World War I battlefield, where only a few hundred yards separated enemies who were dug into rat-infested trenches surrounded by barbed wire. Many of the wounded lay in those few hundred yards, and during the night the dogs would crawl through this field, amid bombs, gunfire, shrapnel, poisonous gas canisters, and dead bodies, to save wounded soldiers.

One American dog who won fame for his exploits in World War I was owned by John Robert Conroy, a young American soldier. In 1917, Conroy defied army regulations and smuggled his stray bullterrier, pit-bull mix named Stubby onto his troop ship. It turned out to be a good decision. More than once during their tour of duty together, Stubby alerted Conroy's unit of impending gas attacks or of an approaching enemy. He once even captured a German soldier who was sneaking through the American camp, clamping his bullterrier, pit-bull jaws down and not letting go until the man could be taken prisoner.

Like the four-footed heroes shown in this 1942 photo, World War II military working dogs were trained to carry equipment, rescue their human comrades, carry messages, and parachute into war zones.

PHOTO: DAVID POLLACK/K.J. HISTORICAL/CORBIS

< Although this 1917 US Army recruitment poster shows a canine recruiter, the United States did not have an official war dog program in place until 1942. During World War I, American soldiers were forced to obtain their war dogs from other Allied armies fighting in Europe.

Stubby's notoriety grew as the 102nd Infantry fought its way through France. After Stubby was wounded by shrapnel, the women of Château-Thierry made him a blanket, and it became a custom to pin medals on it. When Conroy and Stubby returned home, Stubby's popularity increased. The brave military dog was awarded a medal by General John J. Pershing.

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PHOTO: BETTMANN/CORBIS

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< Stubby, a stray bullterrier, pit-bull mix, was smuggled to Europe aboard a troop ship and proved his worth on more than one occasion by warning his master's unit of impending gas attacks or approaching enemy soldiers. Shown here in 1942, Stubby is wearing his military medals on a blanket made for him by the women of the French town of Château-Thierry.

PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

A War dogs like this one, seen here keeping his handler company on Guam in 1944, were highly valued by the US Marines during World War II.

the commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, and Stubby received a lifetime membership in the American Legion. Not bad for a stray from Connecticut. Yet for all of Stubby's publicity, most dogs of World War I were considered "mercy dogs," not "war dogs," and their contributions were largely forgotten by history.

The American War Dog and World War II

Following World War I, the United States downsized its military and disbanded its meager and unofficial canine force. Then came December 7th, 1941, and with it came a jarring realization: military working dogs were needed once again.

At that time, the only military working dogs America had were sled dogs in Alaska, Newfoundland, Greenland, and Iceland; they were being used for transportation and to locate missing pilots. In the United States, however, a private organization, Dogs for Defense, was soon established to recruit dogs for military use from families across America. Americans responded by donating dogs of many breeds. In the midst of war, it was a patriotic act to volunteer a canine member of one's own family to the service of the country.

Another important supplier of dogs to the US military's War Dog Program

PHOTO: BETTMANN/CORBIS

A US military working dogs like King, pictured here after being wounded by shrapnel in the fighting on Iwo Jima, served in some of the bloodiest battles of World War II.

A Shown here on his way home after the war to the family who donated him to the war effort, this German shepherd, husky, and collie mix named Chips was one of the most famous dogs of World War II. He was credited with causing the surrender of an enemy machine-gun nest and its crew.

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was the Doberman Pinscher Club of America. Dobermans quickly became associated with the US Marines, and the marines actually gave the dogs a rank. Beginning their service as privates, the dogs received their first promotion after three months. They received another promotion every year, and along with their marine handlers, these highly intelligent dogs were called upon to serve in some of the bloodiest and most horrific battles of World War II.

Working in war zones took a heavy toll on all the different breeds of dogs used by the US military during World War II. In New Guinea the heat and humidity caused their paws to swell, while heat exhaustion and hookworm infestations hit them hard. Sent to North Africa by ship, they suffered blistered paw pads from the ships' hot decks. Ticks and parasites, as well as bad water and predatory animals, were a constant threat; yet the dogs, like their human handlers, persevered. From Calcutta to Burma and into China they saved lives. The dogs' ability to scent enemies made them a strong asset for every unit lucky enough to have them, and the marines gave their dogs this glowing report: "[T]hey have given consistently excellent performance. Japanese personnel could be detected at one thousand yards depending on terrain and wind condition, and [the dogs] were very effective during amphibious landings detecting the enemy on the beach and in undergrowth."

On the front lines, in foxholes, or walking point in dense jungles, military working dogs were invaluable during World War II. They were rappelled down mountains and parachuted with supplies for search and rescue missions. The larger breeds, such as the husky, carried heavy loads, including .30-caliber machine guns, into dense jungle areas. The war dogs of World War II did it all. They were messenger dogs, rescue dogs, sled dogs, pack dogs, paratroopers, and unit moral support dogs.

One of the most famous dogs of World War II was named Chips. Chips was a bona fide mutt. A German shepherd, husky, and collie mix, he was a donated family dog from New York. Initially sent with his handler, US Army PVT John P. Rowell, to North Africa in 1942, he saved the lives of many US soldiers, including Private Rowell. Once, when Rowell found himself assaulted by enemy machine gun fire from a deeply entrenched pillbox, Chips broke his leash, dove straight into the pillbox, and after a few agonizing minutes reappeared with an enemy soldier firmly clasped in his jaws and at least three more surrendering soldiers in tow. Chips suffered powder burns and other minor wounds, but later that same day, he still managed to alert Private Rowell to the approach of ten

PHOTO: BETTMANN/CORBIS

Chips' heroics garnered him the **Purple Heart** and the **Silver Star.**

enemy soldiers, allowing him to take them prisoner as well.

Chips' heroics garnered him the Purple Heart and the Silver Star, both of which were later taken away because Congress felt that bestowing such medals upon a dog detracted from their significance. Because of Chips' media publicity, however, his awards were never publicly revoked.

The Right Stuff

PHOTO: BETTMANN/CORBIS

Although the German shepherd eventually became the war dog of choice, the US Army originally accepted more than thirty different types of dogs into the War Dog Program, as witnessed by this 1942 photo showing twelve potential war dogs waiting with their handlers for their induction into the army at the Canine Reception Center.

IN THE EARLY YEARS of World War II, the US military was willing to take more than thirty different breeds of dogs into its newly formed War Dog Program. Initially, dogs as young as one and as old as five were accepted; however, experience quickly demonstrated the greater desirability of certain breeds and the need for war dog training to begin early in an animal's life. Subsequently, the military only accepted dogs into the War Dog Program that belonged to one of about seven different breeds or mixes of breeds and that were between the ages of one and two.

Among the more desirable breeds were German shepherds, Belgian sheep dogs, Doberman pinschers, and Siberian huskies. Dogs that successfully completed their war dog training often possessed favorable size and temperament characteristics as well as powerful scenting abilities, and in general, the War Dog Program was most interested in dogs that stood between twenty and twenty-six inches at the shoulder, had neutral-colored coats, and weighed between forty and eighty pounds.

The dog ultimately found most suitable for military service was the German shepherd. Because of its size, intelligence, temperament, and dependability, as well as its adaptability to extremes of climate, the German shepherd has come to be regarded as the ideal war dog. — *JS*

At the end of World War II, the War Department made arrangements for donated four-footed heroes like Chips to be returned to their families, used as company mascots, trained as service dogs, or given to their handlers. At peace for only a short time, the US military virtually disbanded the War Dog Program, and America's arsenal of military dogs soon consisted of only one small unit, which was used mainly for shows and parades.

War Dogs in Korea and Vietnam

In 1950, the Korean War once again created a need for military working dogs. In Korea, military dogs were used primarily for night patrols, where they once again proved their value. The North Koreans and the Chinese hated American war dogs. The dogs' success at ambushing snipers, penetrating enemy lines, and scenting enemy positions made them prime targets for the enemy, and there were numerous reports of the North Koreans using loudspeakers to broadcast the message: "Yankee—take your dog and go home!"

Night was when the scout dogs worked best. A dog would alert his handler to the approaching enemy; the unit would set up an ambush in the dark, and the trap would be set. One

Dogs for Defense

PHOTO: BETTMANN/CORBIS

In order to help raise money for Dogs for Defense's War Dog Fund, Fala, President Roosevelt's Scottish terrier, was made a private and is shown here in 1943 with his enlistment certification and the president's cousin, Laura Delano.

FOUNDED in January 1942, Dogs for Defense was a civilian organization that had the goal of training dogs donated by American civilians for use by the military as war dogs. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Office of the Quartermaster General, which was in charge of the US military's fledgling military working dog program, asked Dogs for Defense for about two hundred fully trained war dogs. At this point, the Quartermaster General believed it would only need enough dogs to guard factories and Quartermaster depots, and around April 1942, Dogs for Defense began training its first one hundred recruits.

But, because its training facilities were decentralized and its trainers were volunteers who lacked an understanding of the military requirements for war dogs, Dogs for Defense never achieved adequate, standardized training methods. In addition, Dogs for Defense only delivered a limited number of the dogs required by the Quartermaster General, and this meant that the organization was not a reliable source of fully trained war dogs.

Consequently, the Quartermaster General established the US military's War Dog Program during the summer of 1942 and transferred the responsibility for training war dogs to its Remount Branch, which had a history of managing military animals. Although the military was now training its own dogs, it continued to rely on Dogs for Defense as its chief provider of recruits, and by the end of World War II, Dogs for Defense had obtained about eighteen thousand out of the approximately twenty thousand dogs the military recruited during the war. —*JS*

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PHOTO: JOHN BUSHNELL

A Taught to detect trip wires and enemies in foxholes, trees, or in plain view, Clipper was a German shepherd who saved hundreds of American lives while serving in Vietnam with the 44th Scout Dog Platoon.

dog, York, a German shepherd and member of the 26th Dog Scout Platoon, took part in 148 combat patrols, and his exemplary performance earned him the Distinguished Service Medal. All together, the 26th Dog Scout Platoon was awarded three Silver Stars, six Bronze Stars of Valor, and thirty-five Bronze Stars for meritorious service during the Korean War.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the jungles of Southeast Asia again provided American military dogs with a battlefield on which they excelled. In the thick vegetation, fog, and ceaseless rain of Vietnam, military dogs alerted their handlers to the presence of underground networks of Vietcong. The dogs often rushed into the tunnels where enemy soldiers hid, willing to give their lives to save their human companions. According to US Marine LCPL Charles Yates, of the 3rd Amphibian Tractor Battalion, 1st Marine Division, "Charlie hated our dogs. When the mortars hit, they went first for the ammo tent and second for the dog kennel. Those dogs walked sentry, and alerted us to many Vietcong ambushes."

Roughly four thousand dogs and nine thousand military dog handlers served in Vietnam. There were scout dogs, combat trackers, sentry dogs, patrol dogs, mine and booby-trap dogs, and water dogs, and they were so feared and hated that the Vietcong posted twenty-thousand-dollar bounties for their capture.

One of the dogs who served in Vietnam was named Clipper. A German shepherd attached to the 44th Scout Dog Platoon, Clipper was a smart, even-tempered dog handled by US Army MSG John Burnam. Burnam found Clipper easy to train and taught him to detect trip wires and enemies in foxholes, trees, or in plain view. On dozens of missions Clipper walked point, carried out sentry duty, detected mines, and saved hundreds of American lives. He even survived a relentless attack on his kennel that killed and wounded dozens of other military dogs. Burnam's tour of duty lasted fifteen months, but in March 1968, when he left Vietnam, he had to abandon Clipper in the Vietnamese jungle because the US government would not allow "expendable equipment" to be brought home. As a result, Clipper's life was left in the hands of the encroaching Vietcong.

The military dogs of Vietnam served many handlers and stayed in Vietnam for the duration of the war unless they fell victim to the enemy, heat, snakebite, poor food, bad water, or lack of medical care. Only about two hundred war dogs were ever brought back from Vietnam, and at the end of the war, unlike the dogs of World War II and the Korean War, the military dogs who served in Vietnam did not receive discharge papers, were not sent home to loving families, and were not given medals by the president. Unless their handlers were adept at cutting through the "red tape express" or were good smugglers, when the war ended the dogs were left behind. These American heroes were euthanized, given to the South Vietnamese Army, or left to the Vietcong, who hated them.

The War on Terrorism

Military working dogs and their handlers are still in service with the US armed forces today, striving to save soldiers' lives and keep terrorism away from American shores. There are approximately 2,500 dogs and 700 dog teams currently serving in Iraq, and although they still perform many of the same kinds of missions that war dogs and their handlers always have, a lot has changed since previous wars.

Today's military dogs are treated like soldiers. They have their own medical kits and even have bulletproof vests, booties, and goggles available to them. They are given physicals twice a year, and they receive excellent medical care, including electrocardiograms, blood tests, and even root canal treatments.

But perhaps more importantly, a law passed in 2000 now allows police departments, former military dog

Military Working Dogs in the Cold War

PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

Shown here in the Dalat Valley, Vietnam, in 1965, this sentry dog named Match and his handler, US Army PFC Herman D. Kottwitz, guarded a Minnesota-based army missile site designed for air defense prior to the war.

DURING THE COLD WAR, military working dogs once again proved their value as members of the US armed forces. The Soviet Union was a very real and heavily armed enemy, and war dogs were called into service in the years following the Korean War to protect America's nuclear arsenal. This was an era before electronic surveillance, before motion sensors and infrared cameras, when dogs and their handlers walked sentry duty around desolate silos containing missiles, and the deadly importance of these missile sites meant that the dogs chosen to guard them had to be highly aggressive.

According to one former soldier who was stationed at Nike missile sites in New York and California, the military dogs that guarded these batteries attained iconic status and became synonymous with the missiles themselves. They were used to locate people trying to infiltrate the bases as well as soldiers who had gone AWOL, and they were sometimes feared by everyone except their handlers.

Brutus, Lothar, Cheetah, and Fritz were four such war dogs. They guarded the Malibu, California, Nike missile site and were considered fearless by those who knew them. They roamed the facility with their armed handlers, guarding the nuclear weapons stored there until the installation was decommissioned in the mid-1970s. However, in keeping with a 1949 military rule prohibiting the adoption of former attack dogs and the attitude toward military working dogs that developed following World War II, the dogs were put down rather than being adopted out of the military. —*Linda McMaken*

PHOTO: ASSOCIATED PRESS

▲ Thanks to a law passed in 2000, US Air Force TSGT Jamie Dana (Ret.), who was forced to leave the military after being wounded in Iraq, was permitted to adopt her German shepherd war dog, Rex.

PHOTO: HARTSDALE CANINE CEMETERY, INC.

▲ Carved out of Vermont granite, the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery and Crematory war dog memorial was built in 1923 to commemorate the dogs that served in World War I.

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handlers, and private individuals to adopt suitable, retired military dogs. In some cases, even active duty animals are cleared for adoption, and this is just what happened in the case of US Air Force TSGT Jamie Dana and her German shepherd war dog, Rex.

After Sergeant Dana and Rex's vehicle was struck by an explosive device on a road in Iraq, nearly killing Sergeant Dana and lightly wounding Rex, Sergeant Dana, who was forced to leave the military as a result of her injuries, was permitted to adopt Rex. Unlike the military dogs of the Cold War and Vietnam War era, Rex enjoys a life after the military, and he and Sergeant Dana currently live together on a farm in Pennsylvania.

To the soldiers who have served with them, American war dogs are not only soldiers—they are a bit of home. They are a cold nose gently nudging a weary soldier's hand, a brave heart snuggled in a foxhole keeping watch over his comrades. Many American soldiers have survived to come home thanks to military dogs. And although the bravery of America's canine heroes has been largely overlooked, their valor has not been entirely forgotten, as is evidenced by the war dog monument located in the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery and Crematory in Hartsdale, New York. The monument, erected in 1923, is topped with a bronze German shepherd and is surrounded by small US flags; it is dedicated to the memory of the war dog. ■