

Interview with Jim Kelley

When did you first begin?

I joined in May 65 Army originally electronics or missiles. After basic training went to Sandy Hook in New Jersey. They put me on a missile sight in Old Bridge about 36 miles outside New York City. So everything was fine until ran a drill clambored down into a pit in the silo and went into a little room. Hatches that came off a cruiser that locked in. Then I discovered that I have claustrophobia. So being in a closed room with about 8 guys, and all this equipment, and I went nuts. So they got me out of there, put me on, ahh, topside again. Now they couldn't figure out what to do with me. So a guy by the name of O'Keefe was a Corporal and dog handler in the battery and he and I had gotten together a few times, over some cold ones and he says why don't you OJT, I'm leaving the Army...on dogs. Well this was something that was never done before, so they said we'll try it make a few phone calls, to make a long story short, a month and a half later I was walking a dog. Kicked me up from PFC to SP4 and then we have a full complement of dog handlers. About 2 years later we got a new battery commander in who was really kind of a stroke. He started changing things around. The dog handlers, there were four of us, and called our own shots. Came and went as we pleased, worked 8 hours on and then a night off, every other weekend was a three day pass. So it was great duty. This guy came along, and he was a Nam vet, knocked all this stuff out and started playing games, changing rotation, took all stuff away from us, making snap inspections, he went as far as trying to take the dogs out by himself and ending up calling the Sgt. Major, and Dix on this clown. By that time, (Helpful?) he was US a draftee, so he was getting out. So with my main guy leaving, and two new dog handlers coming with slick sleeves, this was crazy, I'm not going go through this again. So I just dropped paper, and volunteered to go to Nam. 28 days later I was on my way. So I got in country and I went to Okinawa, and because I OJT'd they more or less didn't tell anybody that I ever handled a dog before. So when I got to Okinawa, they put me in school. and 2 of the guys who were cadre in the sentry dog school there I knew from different batteries in New Jersey, so when they saw me they said this is nuts, you don't need any of this. Just go get yourself a dog. The 1st Sgt. guy by the name of Berriman, turned out they he more or less my mentor for 3 months from April, more than that to July.

What year was this?

67. And I rode around with him. Took my dog out once a week and worked him and that was it. Just rode around with the 1st Sgt. and platoon Sgt. or the Lt. and that was really sweet duty. Then it was time we went in country, and landed in Cameron Bay 4th of July 67, as we — had 49 dogs in a C-130. And 7 troops and it was the worst flight of my life. Ungodly, absolutely terrible. Then at Cameron Bay we got mortars and had to task off again and landed Ton Sinui they dumped us off literally, just dumped us off in Ton Sinui, put all the kennel crates on the ground in the heat. Read us our grave registration so this woke you up. So we went in country from there and worked the LOn Binh ammo dump the largest ammo dump in the free world, at that time. It was just absolutely mind boggling, how boring this was. No one took it for real. And yet we were being probed and almost every single night. Something in the wire and the military establishment felt that this is because the biggest nothing is going to bother us, because we have the super duper sensors, and dogs, and this and that. So they brushed aside the idea that Charlie was really going to try to get in here.

Is this VC or NVA?

VC But of course in the time frame it could have been both. Because when I got out of Long Binh, out of sentries, that was in Oct. 67, and all this time Charlies, North Vietnamese have been following people down. So it could have been of NVA or VC with NVA cadre. So we had a couple of incidences, that were kind of weird. When I was on a corner of the Long Binh dump, and I was talking to another dog handler, underneath the guard tower, this guy's name was O'Neil and he was drafted out of the Philadelphia Eagles farm club. This guy was huge, huge ball player. As we were talking my dog suddenly alerted and I looked out over the wire and I saw somebody. I can stand here and swear to God I saw this guy. So, O'Neil sees him, and both of our dogs are going crazy and I yell up at the guard tower, "Do you see anything out there?" Well these guys are smoking dope. One of the guys sees something, so I have a pencil flare in my pocket. I popped the flare, which it comes up red, which means in the dump nobody ever told us, that you mobilize all these goofy things and all of a sudden all these helicopters are up in the air. In the meantime before any of this happens I see this guy running, so I flip the selector over to full

automatic and I start popping caps out, the guys on the tower turn a 60 on it, and they start letting go. Well, the next thing I know we got helicopter gunships and everything else in the area, flares and all this, I'm being yanked out by a Major that there wasn't anything there and that they relieved me on the spot and brought me back to D<sup>2</sup> Co headquarters area, I had to fill out a firearms use report. Now I thought to myself, this is kinda of strange because where in a war and the next morning they call out the rapid deployment and go in that area. and the said they couldn't find anything. Well now, go up to Jan 31 or so of the new year and this is where they came through. My feeling is and I was out on that dump that Charlie and tunneled underneath it. 3 or 4 months later that what had happened is I just spooked, I just found someone trying to get into a tunnel and these guys couldn't find him. The brass who ran the ammo dump, were really down on my company commander and everybody, that I had acted this way. They wanted to bust me.

But you had confirmation from somebody else though?

There were 4 other people who saw it. The 2 guys up on the top who saw it before they woke their buddies up and then there was O'Neil and I. They didn't believe us, they just figured they were covering for me. But there was no reason to cover for me, I stuck by my story. But that's the typical mindset of these people, which played itself out over and over again in the time and still is today. So they sent all these people out the next day and said nothing was there. I really got a ration of crap for quite some time. That area I finally got a chance to sit down with my Lt. and, who was from Springfield, NJ and we were pretty tight. Why don't you just get outa here. So this guy Fauver, Fauver came to me and said heh listen, the 199th is looking for guys to become scouts.

Just to back track a bit. What breed of dog were you working?

German shepards. I never played with anything else, all I had were shepards. I had shepards here in the states and a shepard here in the states and 2 shepards going through school in Okinawa and then I kept Rock, wthe one I ended up with until Oct 67, and then Fauver and I left the the <sup>18th MP</sup> company, 18th MP Brigade, to 12th MP company and went to the 49th Scout Dog Platoon, 199th Light Infantry. Our feeling was we were never going to see the MPs again, that the in that time or just about, I had my trouble, Fauver had the same problem on a different post in the Long Binh ammo dump something similiar, except he didn't shoot. He called people up on the radio, and nobody came out, and so he was dosgusted. I'll tell you the feeling you got working that thing because you had all these lights and everything. The bear in the penny arcade. You shoot at it, it goes back and forth. All you did was walk between one post and another, back and forth, all night long, and they write you up if they ever found you sitting. Which is kind of stupid because if you do the same thing time and time again, you set up a routine, people know your routine and they know what to do with you. So that's basically with all the chicken crap and everything else that came down, we would be feed. And under the impression any even under the 199th the same impression that we weren't going bacj we would be part of them forever and ever. So, we took quite a detail course with them and more or less became members of the 199th Light Infantry and went out on patrols and went into Ben Cat got a dog, out, off the South Vietnamese and then just proceeded to train since we already had our sentry experience behind us. It was just a matter of these guys explaining how to work a scout. A German Shepard scout dog is traine dnot to be agressive as far as biting and is trained more for sense, booby traps, tunnels, personnel, food, things that would carry a human sense. The basic premise is you walk in front of the or alongside a group of people and attempt to find the enemy as opposed to with trackers, where they would go for blood trails and things like that.

Ground sniffers?

Right Right, TRackers were more into that, The shepard was a little bit different.

Back track to one point. Were you aware of scout dogs before you went into the service.

Never knew anything about them. It was a well kept secret. I didn't know anything about sentry dogs. The only thing I ever heard about them was watching a old movie WWII and they had an airdale they were using, I think it was a Frank Lovejoy movie, and they had this airdale thatthey were running up and down some island in the Pacific. I thought to myself, that's kind of neat. That was the end of that. I never dreamed that I would be doing something similiar. Training was prestty intensive with the 199th, we were constantly doing something, plus you were also

going out on real operations. A lot of the theatre that we played with on our training was outside the Long Binh ammo dump and was amazing to find all the tracks we were finding, you know treads, the sandals, HO Chi Minh sandals. And these things were all over the place. But yet they discounted a lot of what we were saying, or intelligence never got back to what we were telling that what we were finding and then there was a couple of times that we actually got into firefights in these huge ravines behind the Long Binh ammo dump. Where all of a sudden we would pop into somebody and we traded fire with people. And we'd lose them and you wonder where the heck to these people go. It's like Co Chi, I was talking to a dog handler from the 25th infantry 9th division and they literally set up base camp, their home, whatever division, right on top of the tunnels of Cu Chi. Right on top of them. They had hospitals and everything and everything else right underneath these people so the United States Army just didn't quite understand what tunnel systems were until later. So that was kind of unique.

Me: They seem to forget the lesson from the Pacific, try to figure it out though.

It just doesn't make any sense. After our month the game plan was we were stay with them, but they had no kennel area. In the mean time the 212th MP company opened up a huge new kennel area. And they said, what we are going to do with you guys is ship you back to the 212th, but you're going to be on call tours. No big deal. But the US Army decided once again that they were going to take our dogs and put them into the general population of the rest of the sentry dogs. Well these things bark, and we went to the Sgt. and told him, you can't do this because, these dogs are going to start barking and next thing you know you are going to get us killed. We pulled night ambushes, if these things start yapping some night, Charlie is going to come in on us and wipe all of us out so that ended up in a heated debate with the people of the unit and it ended up somebody, put a smoke grenade under the Sgt's bunk one night and literally burned the Sgt.'s hooch down, but it got the point across. So the dogs were moved. And that was the end of that. They didn't play with us too much, they gave us our own little hooch that nobody lived in, our own weapons locker, and were set apart from everybody else. Much to the chagrin of the lifers who really like to lean on us. They didn't like the fact that they could walk through our hooch some morning, sometimes they couldn't, we would lock the doors, but they come through the hooch and find us asleep. Well they didn't realize that we came in at 3 o'clock in the morning the night before and that at one o'clock in the afternoon we were leaving again. There was no real structure to what we did. It was just come and go. If an element of the 1st division needed a handler and they couldn't get him out of the 199th they came to us and poof you were gone. You might one day get a call, grab your socks and what not, you're going out for three days and a helicopter would land outside and you would run over there and be gone for a couple of days. The lifers didn't like that, they didn't like the routine, they wanted us up 0630 in the morning, revelry and all this other garbage that just didn't make any sense. So, we had a lot of animosity between ourselves, the ranking NCOs and some of the regular handlers, didn't understand. We kept, Fauver and I kept going back and stay with the 199th permanently so we didn't have to put up with this. Those guys were pretty much left alone. In fact they lived with the LURPS, the LURPS had the lower section of their hooch and these guys had the second floor and you came and went as you please. Lt. Gaines was our platoon leader from the 199th, many a day he came over to our area and butt heads with the 1st Sgt. said leave these guys alone. Their just trying to do what they have to do. We used to work camouflague, carry fatigues and they didn't like that. We come striding through the company area, we our frags and our claymores dog and our food strutting through with a black beret on with a tiger suit and these people would freak. So they didn't quite understand. You played the game

And you worked with same dog?

Yeah. He was a good dog. Terrible on booby traps, he would lead you right through a booby trap. How do other troops perceive the dog and some troops hated you because they lost guys and it depended more or less on how often the dog was worked and how good a handler. My dog was super on people. Super if there was someone out there he would find them. But as far as booby traps he would lead you right through it. He gets killed. You had to really watch him. Fauver had a dog by the name of Prince who was fantastic would literally find a trip wire across the trail wrap the lease around Fauver's legs to keep from going any further. Guys did not believe this until they saw it. It really, really something to see. Unfortunately no one will ever see it. But his dog was not very good on personnel. He could go into a vil and the kids would come out and play with him. If anyone got close to mine he would get bit. Rusty hated Vietnamese he didn't care too much for Americans, but he hated the Vietnamese. Which aided in using him to question people. Once we came into a vil one day, Found a real big Vietnamese but we had a Cui Hoi with us who felt this guy might be Chinese. He kept Buco kilo, Buco kilo, and this guy was big, I'm 6-2 and he was

15/11/2007 24/12/07

almost 6 foot and you don't see too many south vietnamese who are 6 foot, This guy was probably 170 pounds. So the ARVN's questioned this guy for a long time. If you talk to other guys you know they don't question people gently. And they end up calling me over with the dog and I've been through it before and you just come up on somebody tie him up to a tree and then you bring the dog up Rusty well he catch he started going crazy. Ended up getting them a couple of times. Then I was sent away and one of their people, PD leave and I went back over to my people a couple hundred yards away and they continued their interrogation. And they came back and said there is beau co VC in the area. This guy's one of them...bla bla... Bang — end of ball game. [Don't quote me on that.] But that's one of the things that happened. they dealt with it in there own manner so ahh generally we were discovering more and more evidence that something was coming. Pits with all of our waterproof sandbags and weapons laying around that were discarded that weren't there when we cleared the same area a week ago. Which generally gave everyone the idea that something's coming was of course it was tet right down the road. And when tet finally did hit we were pretty much caught off base. No one was expecting it. Although if you read about it now, oh ya, we knew it was coming and we intercepted all these messages and whatnot. But nobody really seemed to act on it. And what did happen, Fauver and Coffman, another dog handler by that time were down in Saigon and then I went into Longbinh because Charlie come underneath it and alot of egg on alot of lifers faces. I realize that he did indeed tunnel into the center of the ammo dump. I've necver seen anything on print that said that but being inside the ammo dump, we found an awful lot of holes in the ground, these people were popping out from nowhere.. They were there long enough, I mean it's their country, the ammo dump was there upteem years I think, the third time they blew it. The first time I blew it I was in country, but twice before then in 66 Tet was pretty much, and everything after that kinda of rolled into one. We were going 36 48 hours straight. I went out with elements of the first division 101st airborne.

Hot time

11th cav, you would come in be gone again. In that period of time Fauver left. I didn't even see him go. I was out in the field, I came back and Is aw his bunck all rolled up. I said to someone, where did Fauver go. ON R & R? Nope H left went back home. No sooner than that happened I went on R & R, came back and they had 5 days later and they were OJTing another dog handler. They weren't even senfing him to the 199th, they were just sending out into the field. Which raissed an awful lot of eyebrows. How can you do this? You sent me away for a month and your going to train these two guys for a week, it take sa heck of lot longer than a week and they were using green dogs. So it got really squireelly. By that time I really didn't care that much. cause I was getting short and pretty much fed up with the whole way everything ws going. But one of the guys who got Fauvers dog, guy by the name of Murray and he was from eastern PA, somewhere

How can he pick up the alerts in two weeks?

No. You can on people if they are good. You'll pick that up in a matter of days. But subtle things especially when

y our working booby traps andstuff like that its subtle and if you push he'll just walk over it. Just ignore itfeeling that's not what you want to bring out in him and usuallyu what you want to do is work the handler the old handler with the new one so he's at least get's to shows you the nuances and the perks that this dogs has, cause dogs are like humans they all have personalities. And if you don't praise that dog or bring that out your going to miss it and the dog's,—is going to get soft and not going to do it. He doesn't care And that's the worse thing you can do By the time I found out Fauver was gone and MUrray wa stalking his dog everything was just rolling into one big ball and heading off into nowhere. Now I look back and talking to other pewple, find that the Army MPs, just gotten into a situation where they wanted to look like their really doing something but yet they didn't know what they were doing. They were out of their element. THEY didn't know how to handler this rthing and they were making MPs into infantrymen and they didn't want to do that. Yet all over South Vietnam they did the same thing. MPsd as grunts but then refuse to give them the glory or whatever, the CIB, which was one of my pet peeves, when I got out. It wasn't until 20 years later that I fuinally sat down at looked at the DD214 and there was nothing on it. Some hairy slicksleeve private E-deuce

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