

Toby - The Best "Top Dog"

By Dick Bachmann
6250th Support Sq.
Project Top Dog 45

Thirty years ago this July I landed in Vietnam - Time has paled a lot of memories of my time in Vietnam. On the other hand, some things I remember as though they happened yesterday. I do remember one thing for sure. I had the best sentry dog that went to Vietnam in 1965. His name was Toby. We went over together with 40 dog teams known as the USAF's Project Top Dog 45. We were first U.S. dog teams to be used in Vietnam, arriving on July 17, 1965.

Each team was chosen from various air bases in the States. Toby and I came from Myrtle Beach AFB, SC.



The tents we used as kennels didn't do much to keep the dogs, or us cool.

Before leaving for Vietnam, we stopped in Texas for three days of prep training on our way over. Part of the training was a night exercise in which Toby and I had to track down four or five hidden "intruders," flush them out and chase them down while firing our .38.

As you would figure, Toby found them all, no thanks to me. One of them was up in a tree that Toby kept going to. I kept pulling him away until one of the instructors told me to look up. Needless to say, from that time on I never doubted Toby again.

After our training, we left for Vietnam going over together in C-130's. It took three days to get there. When we landed at Tan Son Nhut the heat was stu-

ring, unbearable. One of the dogs had to be packed in ice to cool. Unfortunately, he did not make it and he died of heat



Toby and Dick ready to move out on patrol at Tan Son Nhut in August 1965.

stroke before he got to the kennel. He was the first American dog to die in Vietnam.

Looking around the base it was quite clear there really must be a war going on. There were troops, barbed wire, and sand bags all over the place.

THIS WAS FOR REAL!

We were sent to the processing center and split into three groups. One group went to Bien Hoa, one to Da Nang, and one stayed at Tan Son Nhut. Toby and I stayed at TSN. It took about a week of prep work before we started walking patrols. I think most of the time was spent "rounding" up loose dogs. All we had for kennels was a tent and our dog's shipping crates. This made for close quarters and we had a lot of dog fights and loose dogs. Water had to be trucked out to the "kennels" on a daily basis. Heat was always a problem as the tents didn't do much other than give a little shade. But both dog and handler

adjusted quickly.

One day, during that first week in-country, two of my buddies and I were walking to the post office when we were stopped by the base commander. He had seen all our dog gear (choke chain, muzzle, leash, etc.) hanging from our web belts and thought we were telephone repairmen, or something like that. Well, when we told him we were dog handlers he was as happy as can be. He said they had been waiting for us to arrive and was really glad we were there. He said that if there was anything he could do to help us to just let him know. That made us all feel pretty good. Heck, in the States the base CO wouldn't even talk to you.

I guess of all the memories of Vietnam, the ones of Toby and I on post are the most vivid. I'll never forget my first night on the perimeter. I was a little scared not knowing what to expect, but I had old Toby and a .38 revolver with six rounds to protect myself. That's all we had for a weapon for the first week or so. Then finally we were issued M-1 carbines and a couple of banana clips of ammo.

Anyway, on that first night things were going OK for the first couple of hours or so. Then I heard a small plane circling overhead. I didn't think that much about it until the whole sky lit up. I hit the ground and pulled out my .38 Special Toby just kind of stood there looking around. I thought for sure we were going to be hit any minute. Well, after awhile the flares went out and nothing happened.

They forgot to tell us that this was a nightly occurrence, just for security sake. After that first night we just kind of took

it for granted, but we also tried to stay out of the light as much as possible.

Another time on post, Toby had an alert in the grass at the edge of the road. I pulled my .38 and in we went. After only a few



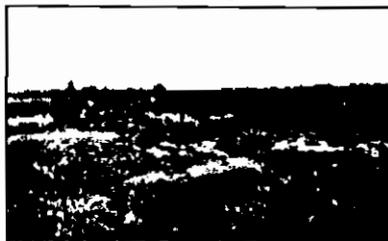
Toby and the trusty M-1 Carbine. That and a .38 Special is all they had in those days.

feet into the grass Toby stopped short when something sat up in front of him, took a swipe at him and then disappeared back into the grass. Scared the hell out of me and Toby too. Could have been a cobra, or a small animal. To this day I don't know what it was.

I have many other memories that are fresh in my mind, but the one I can't seem to recall is my last day with Toby before returning to the States. I don't know if I am blocking it out subconsciously, or just don't remember. Whatever it is, I do think of Toby often and I'll never forget him.

A little over a year after I left, on December 4, 1966, Toby, and two other USAF dogs, Rebel and Cubby, were killed-in-action when the VC attacked Tan Son Nhut. They died on post, protecting the thousands of Americans stationed there at the time.

Three US servicemen, including one dog handler, George Beovich, were killed that night, but many, many more would have perished had it not been for the dog teams. Before Toby died he took two VC with him. He was a great dog and a true friend.



Typical post around the 13th Air Base back in 1965. There was plenty for the VC to hide behind.

Dick now lives in Menomonie Falls, Wisconsin, with his wife Christine, and their two children Samantha and Daniel.

Toby is
Bachmann
#C 305?
30505
See 1965

With 6
models of T-17