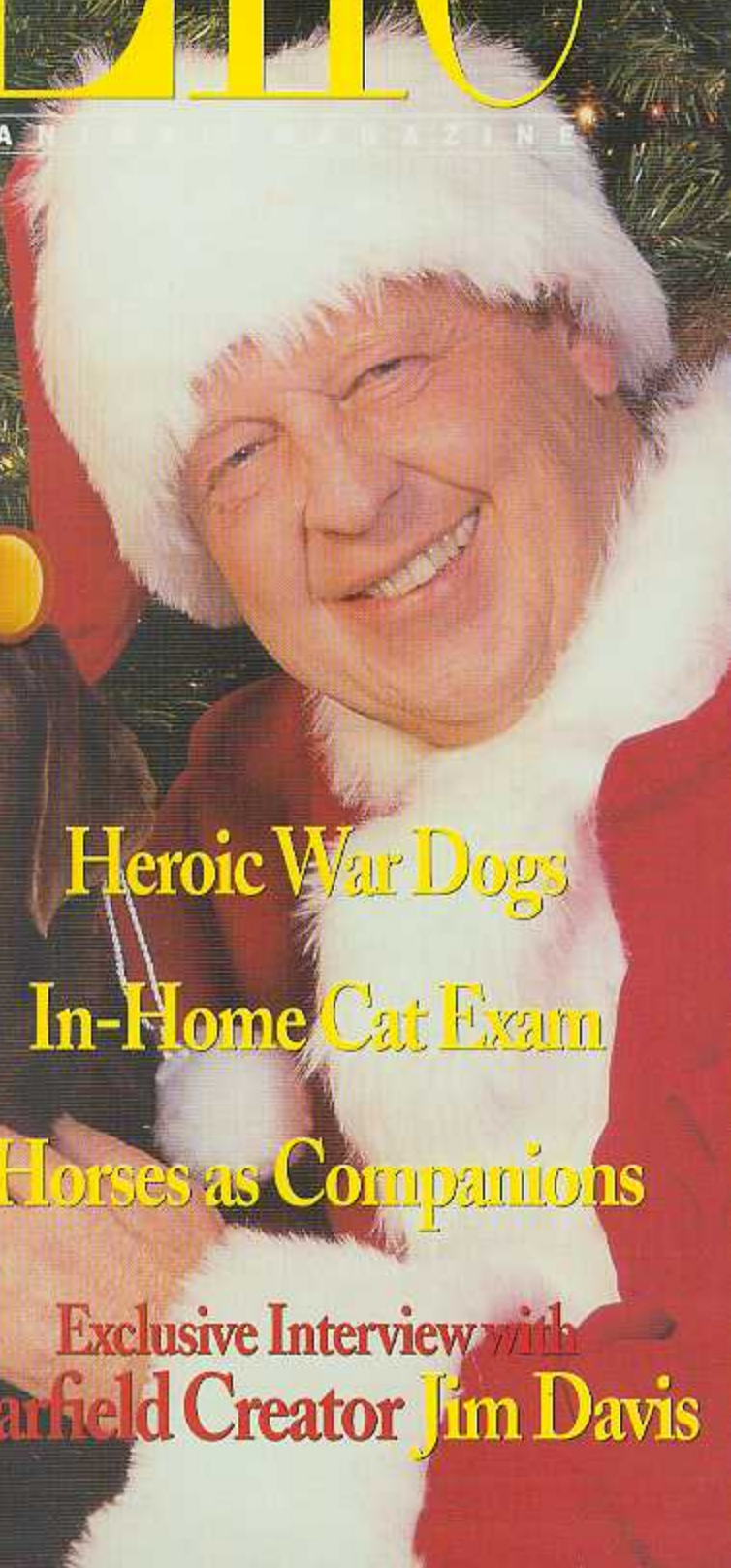
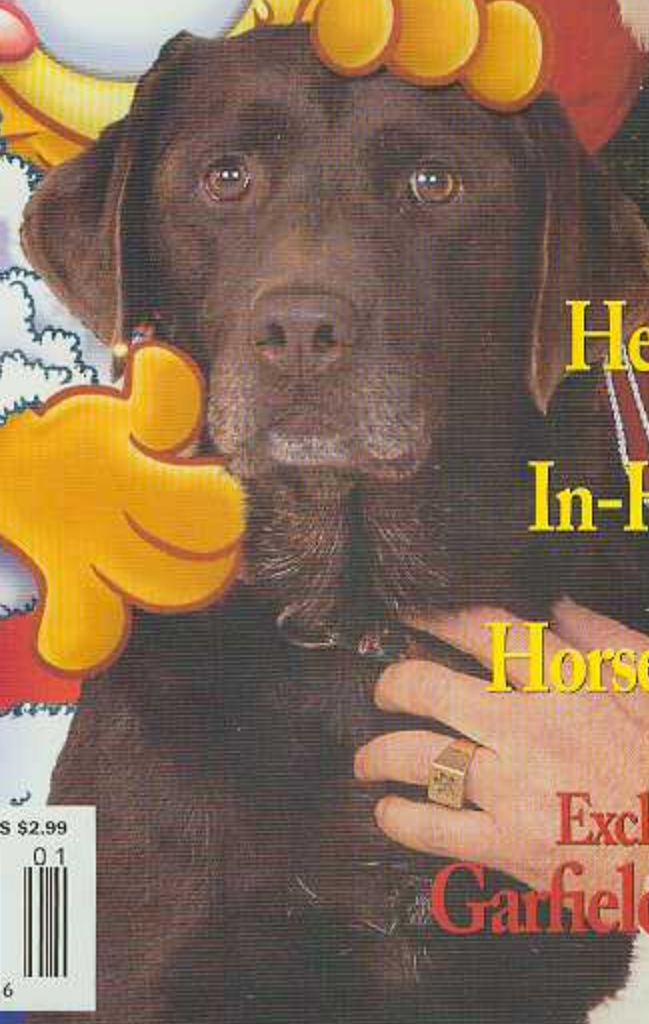


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always

by terry wilson

faithful



the **courage** of the u.s. marine corps **war dogs**

It's been said that war tests the true metal of man and beast. In the wake of that proverb stands the courageous deeds of the unsung heroes of World War II, the Marine Corps War Dog Platoons. ♦ Like their human counterparts they, too, were civilians—and they also volunteered to serve their country. When the Marines decided to enlist the services of man's best friend, the Doberman Pinscher Club of America volunteered to supply and deliver dogs to the various recruiting stations as part of the Dogs for Defense Program. ♦ “A lot of people don't realize that these dogs were loaned to us by their owners,” said William Putney, commanding officer of the Marine War Dog Program. “It was my job to train them and their handlers for combat. The program was new so we learned as we went. We got the dogs used to exploding shells. That wasn't too hard, but teaching them to know when it was okay to bark and when it wasn't was more difficult.”

“A big misconception is that the dogs were trained to attack the enemy; this simply wasn't true. They were to help us find the Japanese. It was our job to fight them.”



Putney's approach to teaching the War Dogs their lessons was always done in a non-aggressive manner. His love for the dogs and their well-being always came first. The end result cumulated in a combat-ready team that would forever forge a bond between animal and handler.

"We trained three kind of dogs," explained Putney. "We had scout dogs, messenger dogs and dogs that detected mines. A big misconception is that the dogs were trained to attack the enemy. This simply wasn't true. They were there to help us find the Japanese. It was our job to fight them."

Dogs were also used to carry ammunition and medical supplies between the lines. And, more often than not, they performed their tasks under heavy fire. Because of their effectiveness, Japanese troops made the Marine War Dogs a top priority target.

Putney and his Dogs were put to task on July 21, 1944 when, under intense enemy fire, the Second and Third War Dog platoons hit the beach as the invasion of Guam got underway.

The battle for Guam was one the most bloody fights of World War II. Nearly 30,000 Japanese defenders were prepared

Marines to pay dearly for every inch of ground conquered.

Two hundred fifty Marines inched their way through a steamy jungle. Nerves on edge they knew the enemy was out there, but where?

"The jungle was so thick you couldn't see your hand in front of your face," recalled a Marine who was on the patrol in question. "We didn't know it at the time, but we were walking straight into an ambush. The Japs were invisible, none of us knew they were there except for Kurt. He knew. Kurt saved all our lives that day."

Kurt, a Doberman Pinscher, was part of



Contrary to popular opinion the War Dogs couldn't tell the difference between a Japanese soldier and a Marine by smell. They were trained to detect anyone who was in front of the patrol. This was the mission of the scout dogs and they were the best in the business at what they did.

to die for the Emperor and, in the process, take as many Americans with them as possible.

The Japanese turned the jungle into a killing zone filled with bobby traps and snipers. Caves became fortresses as a determined enemy forced the advancing

the Third War Dog Platoon serving with the Third Marine Division on Guam. Specially trained to "sniff" out enemy troops, Kurt alerted his men to the pending ambush.

During the ensuing firefight an exploding enemy mortar shell critically injured

Kurt and his handler, PFC Alan Jacobson. When medics arrived, Jacobson refused treatment until his dog had been taken back to the aid station. Such was the relationship between the Marine handlers and their dogs.

"As the commanding officer of the Third War Dog Platoon and veterinarian for the Second and Third War Dog Platoons, I cared deeply for the dogs who were wounded or lost their lives and for the young Marines who lost their partners and companions," said Putney.

As the aging Marine recalled the incident, his eyes locked onto that special place

Meanwhile, on Chonito Ridge, PFC John V. Rich's Doberman, Fritz, stopped dead in his tracks, his ears stiffened and his nostrils flared. The Marines knew something was coming. Thanks to Fritz, the Americans were alerted to what was the largest Banzai charge of the war. More than 5,000 Japanese troops raced toward the now waiting Marines. Prepared for the charge, the Marines repulsed the attack. Once again an alert War Dog had saved many American lives.

PFC Rick Reinauer of Chicago and his midnight-black male German shepherd—also named Rick—were two of a kind.

wonderful animals," said O'Brien. "The dogs stopped us from walking into an ambush that none of us would have survived. If it weren't for that dog my mother would have gotten some flowers from the government and I'd just be a name on a cross."

O'Brien recalled the following unique story about a dog and his handler, one of many he remembers:

"PFC Harold Tesch had this Alaskan malamute named Tippy. This dog was labeled incorrigible. He was even hostile to other Marines. This is the only dog we would give a wide berth to. Mean as hell,

"Put him in the Marine Cemetery. He's a Marine like all the rest of them."

that we all go when we remember things that once were. Holding back a tear, he relived the time when Kurt was brought to his aid station.

"Shrapnel had blown off the top of his spine, exposing the spinal cord," he said. "I tried desperately to save his life. After surgery, I carried him into my foxhole to watch over him. When the shells hit and exploded, the earth rose and smashed into my face. Kurt was unable to protect himself, so I gathered him in my arms to keep him from slamming down on the ground as the shells burst all around us."

At 3 a.m., with machine gun bullets cracking through the bushes overhead, Kurt stopped breathing, earning him the dubious honor of becoming the first of 25 War Dogs to die in combat during the Guam Campaign.

Putney said, "When I asked my commanding officer what I should do with Kurt, he replied, 'Put him in the Marine Cemetery. He's a Marine like all the rest of them.'"

Following the battle, Putney carried Kurt to the Marine Cemetery and buried him among his fellow Leathernecks.



They were inseparable—and a more deadly fighting team didn't exist. After the war they went home together. Rick (the dog) became a famous show dog and Rick (the human) went on to produce the nation's longest running animal show, *Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom*.

Cyril O'Brien was an infantryman on Guam who later became a war correspondent. He, like many other Marines, owes his life to the scout dogs.

"My butt was saved two times by those

but a fantastic scout. He would never bark and give away our position. Tippy had this real low growl and he was never wrong."

"In my heart I'll always believe that God Himself sent Tippy to look after me," said Tesch. "He was so good he could even smell a sniper hiding in a tree."

During a mortar attack Tippy and Tesch were blown out of their foxhole. Shell fragments tore into Tesch and his dog lay paralyzed some 20 feet away. Tippy managed to drag himself back to his bleeding master and laid his head on the Marine's chest. Both Tippy and Tesch survived.

"After the war, Tippy was released to Tesch on permission of the dog's owner," said O'Brien. "They were inseparable. Then one day, this wonderful dog that had saved so many lives was deliberately run down and killed by some bum on a motorcycle. Tesch carried his old friend to the river by his house and buried him there."

Dogs cry, too.

PFC Edward Topka's bullet-riddled body was found in a ditch surrounded by half a dozen dead Japanese soldiers.

Guarding his lifeless body was Topka's Doberman, Lucky. The dog wouldn't let anyone near the handler's body, not even his fellow Marines.

Another Doberman, Seig, was so distraught over the death of his handler he refused to eat and lost 20 pounds.

There were 72 dogs on Guam and of that number, 24 were killed in action. They were buried next to Kurt, the first dog to die in the line of duty. One other dog was buried at sea.

After the war Bill Putney was still taking care of his canine troopers. He developed a program to reintroduce them into civilian

life. All of his surviving dogs were returned to their owners after the war. Now civilians, the former War Dogs never bit, attacked or caused any trouble. The former warriors were once again ideal loving pets.

Today on Guam sets the War Dog memorial. A bronze sculpture representing Kurt stands proudly with the names of his fallen comrades inscribed on the base of the monument.

The War Dog Cemetery is one of the most popular attractions on the island. The person responsible for this tribute to the fallen four-legged marines of the Third War Dog Platoon was the man who trained them, commanded them and patched their wounds.

"In 1989 I returned to Guam with my friend Dale Quillen, who was also a Marine dog handler," said Putney. "We were dismayed when we couldn't find the cemetery. We learned that in 1963 a typhoon destroyed the original site. The graves and

alive because the dogs buried there gave their lives. They deserved a place of honor and I wasn't going to rest until they had it."

Working tirelessly and at his own expense, Putney waded into a sea of red tape. Relentless in his pursuit, he eventually was able to secure a final resting place for the dogs that served in his command.

By working with the U.S. Park Service, Marine General Louis Wilson and former handler, now attorney, Dale Quillen, the cemetery was eventually moved back to its original location on Asan Beach. Then the United Doberman Club raised money for a bronze statue created by artist Susan Bahary.



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the markers had been relocated to a remote jungle location near the town of Dededo. It was a disgrace. The markers were down and scattered about, high grass and weeds grew over the graves. It was disgraceful to see the final resting place of those gallant animals so desecrated. I was deeply disturbed.

"A lot of us (former Marines) are still

On June 20, 1994, Always Faithful, a life-sized statue of a Doberman and the nation's first tribute to war dogs, was unveiled.

"This memorial is absolutely fitting," said Putney. "As the Commandant of the Marines said, 'This is a tribute to fallen Marines.' He didn't call them dogs. He called them Marines." ■