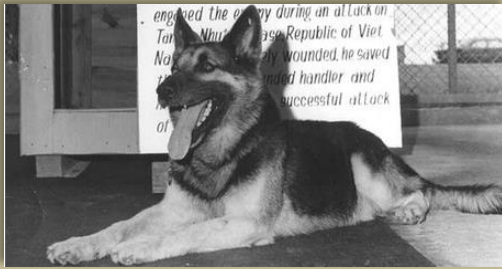


VIETNAM WAR - NEMO



Nemo A534 - was a German Shepherd dog who served as a sentry dog in the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War. Vietnam's sentry dogs were brave and fearless. Their efforts to help root out the Vietcong earned them the name "guided muzzles." Of the many dogs that served their country in this war, Nemo is probably the most famous.

The Air Force bought Nemo from an Air Force sergeant in the summer of 1964. The two year old black and tan German Shepherd received sentry dog training at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas. His serial number, A534, was tattooed in his left ear and, in January 1966, he was sent to Vietnam.

Nemo and his partner became one of several sentry dog teams belonging to the 377th Air Police Squadron at Tan Son Nut Air Base near Saigon. These teams made up the base's first line of defense against the Vietcong. Each man and his dog spent the night alone patrolling an assigned area at the perimeter of the base. The sentry dog team's job was to spot and get rid of any Vietcong intruders. The enemy wanted to destroy the strategic base's aircraft and facilities. The sentry dog teams job was to see that this didn't happen.

With their keen senses, the dogs were usually the first to detect trouble. When something wasn't right, a sentry dog would make his master aware of it. He could do this with a look or movement. The security policeman would then notify the Central Security Control (CSC) of the possibility of trouble. Then the team would move in to investigate, with the dog in the lead. If it turned out to be the enemy, the handler would inform the CSC. Then the CSC immediately sent backup to assist man and his dog.

In July, Nemo's original handler returned to the States. The dog was then paired with 22 year old Airman Second Class Robert Thorneburg. The two worked well together. This was important because their lives depended on each other. And the lives of everyone else on the base depended on them. This became painfully obvious on December 3rd, 1966.

December 3, 1966 Attack

In an early pre-dawn attack, two Vietcong units tried to infiltrate the base. The sentry dog teams got out word of the invasion. The 377th fought hard. It was a long grueling battle. Finally, after 7 long hours, the base was once again securely in American hands. But the victory came at a cost. Three airmen and their dogs had died in the fighting.

The next day, Thorneburg reported for duty 3 hours early. That was usual procedure. Handlers spent that time visiting their dogs, checking for any scratches, bites, or sores, and generally looking after their partners. The sentry dog teams that climbed into the back of the army truck that night were quieter than usual. Many of the soldiers were thinking about the events of the previous night. They were saddened by the loss of their fellow soldiers. They were also anxious about what awaited them on their patrols. There was a good chance that stragglers from the previous night's invasion could still be out there.

Thorneburg and Nemo pulled duty near an old Vietnamese graveyard about a quarter mile from the air base's runways. They got out and began patrolling, side by side. They walked around the old grave markers and looked out the elephant grass that grew taller than a man's head. It was a clear, starlit night. Nemo paused by a shadowy Vietnamese shrine. Thorneburg studied his dog. Nemo's eyes were glistening. His ears had perked up. The fur around his neck was standing on end. Thorneburg could tell that Nemo sensed something was out there. But before the handler could radio the CSC, that "something" opened fire. A bullet struck Thorneburg in the shoulder. Nemo was shot in the muzzle. The bullet entered under his right eye and exited through his mouth.

That might have been the sad end of the story. But Nemo refused to give in without a fight. Ignoring his serious head wound, the 85-pound dog threw himself at the four Vietcong guerrillas who had opened fire. Nemo's ferocious attack brought Thorneburg the time he needed to call in backup forces. These troops came in and took care of the guerillas. They rushed Thorneburg and Nemo back to the center of the base for emergency medical care.



The base veterinarian performed skin grafts on Nemo's torn up face. He did a tracheotomy to help the dog breathe. And he had to remove the dog's right eye, which was hanging uselessly out of its socket.

Thorneburg had to evacuate to the United States Air Force Hospital at Tachikawa Air Base in Japan to recuperate. The handler and the dog who saved his life said their final good-byes. Nemo recuperated at Tan Son Nhut. After the veterinarian felt Nemo was well enough, the dog was put back on perimeter duty. But it turned out his wounds needed further treatment. The Air Force decided to send him home to Lackland, where he could receive the best possible medical care.

Nemo flew halfway around the world accompanied by returning airman Melvin W. Bryant. The plane touched down in Japan, Hawaii and California. At each stop, the Air Force's veterinarians examined the brave dog for signs of discomfort, stress and fatigue.

Finally, the C124 Globemaster touched down at Kelly Air Force Base, Texas, on July 22, 1967. Captain Robert M. Sullivan, officer in charge of the sentry dog training program at Lackland, was head of Nemo's welcome home committee. "I have to keep from getting involved with individual dogs in this program," Sullivan said, "but I can't help feeling a little emotional about this dog. He shows how valuable a dog is to his handler in staying alive." Nemo was the first hero of his kind to return from the Vietnam War. The welcoming committee watched him walk down the ramp of the plane that had just landed at Kelly Air Force Base. He was wounded-his right eye was missing and a scar ran from below his right eye socket to his mouth. But his wounds weren't what made him different from other returning Vietnam veterans because he was a dog.



Later life

Due to his heroic actions, after receiving his injuries Nemo was returned to Lackland Air Force Base in the United States where he was given a permanent retirement kennel. He continued working as a recruiting dog and died on March 15, 1973 at Lackland where his memorial kennels and stone stand today in his honor.



Nemo – A534 is one of five amazing war dogs at the AVM War Dog Memorial.