

The ultimate sacrifice by a 'best friend'

A dog bridges the gap between a soldier and the enemy

World War II was not won by men and machines alone. Animals played a little known, yet important part in the quest for victory. Horses were used by the field artillery in the early days, pack mules of the 10th Mountain Division were used in the rugged Apennines of Italy, bats affixed with tiny incendiary devices were destined to be air dropped on the bamboo cities of Japan, pigeons were used to send coded messages in Italy and Burma, and dogs were trained for search and sentry duty.

This week we digress from the usual veteran's story to give a remarkable account of a veteran of a different kind — a war dog — that served two opposing masters.

—Nicholas Loveless

Kiska or Moose: two times a hero

By James J. Hewitt

Butaritari is a tiny strip of sand and coconut palms rising slightly from the Pacific Ocean in the Gilbert Islands. On Nov. 20, 1943, as a machine gunner for the 98th AAA Gun Battalion attached to the U.S. 27th Infantry Division, I was part of the invasion force that landed on this six-mile-long island as the Second Marine Division also landed at Tarawa to the south. After three days of heavy fighting, the islands were secured. For the next few months we were kept busy by air attacks by the Japanese that occupied the Marshall Islands to the northwest.

In February, 1944, the Army and Marines invaded the Marshalls, and our unit remained at Butaritari and life became somewhat routine except for an occasional fly-over by a Japanese observation plane.

One warm day my gun crew and I were relaxing on a quiet beach enjoying a few bottles of captured Japanese beer, when a Navy cruiser approached the island and a small launch came ashore by us. There were two sailors aboard and a large dog that bounded up and down the beach and in and out of the surf and seemed happy to be on firm ground again. The sailors explained that they

VETERAN PROFILE

Nicholas Loveless

were instructed to find a new home for the dog as it was against regulations to keep the dog on the ship. I thought the dog would be a welcome addition to our outfit, and after considerable negotiations, we swapped ten bottles of captured beer for "Kiska," the name that had been given to the dog by the crew of the ship.

Before the sailors left, I wanted to know more about the dog, and a very interesting story unfolded. In June, 1942, a Japanese task force captured the Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska. A year later, U.S. forces recaptured Attu after a bitter 18-day battle. In August, 1943, landings were made at Kiska, only to discover it had been abandoned by the Japanese, who left much of their equipment and a few of their military dogs behind. One of the dogs was captured by the landing party and given to the crew of a cruiser as a trophy. The dog was promptly named "Kiska" and was hostile for a long time, but gradually accepted his fate as a "prisoner of war" and became the ship mascot. When a new commanding officer was assigned to the cruiser, he ordered the crew to get rid of the animal at the next inhabited island. It was now February, 1944, and that island happened to Butaritari.

Thursday, July 13, 1995



Kiska, decked out in uniform, with his new owner, Jim Hewitt, on Butaritari Island in the Pacific, June, 1944. He was later re-named Moose and his status changed from prisoner of war to a member of the U.S. Armed Services.

mates resting on his bunk, who yelled, "Get this moose off of me!" From that moment on, the dog was renamed "Moose," which he accepted, and Captain Mason made him an honorary private and issued him a serial number to go with it. Moose stood all military formations and even went on night beach patrols as part of his duties. He even improved the moral of our unit.

In August, 1944, our unit was no longer needed on Butaritari and we were to return to Hawaii for jungle training school. There would be no place for Moose, and since he was accustomed to military life, Captain Mason suggested enrolling him in the K-9 training school in Honolulu. It was an emotional parting when I had to leave Moose, but the commandant assured me he would be returned when the war was over. I visited him on several occasions but could not make personal contact as it was against regulations. I was proud of his performance and that he was now a real member of the U.S. Armed

I reported back to Captain Mason, our C.O., and with a grin he ordered that since Kiska was a prisoner of war, he would be handled under the terms of the Geneva Convention, and he was placed under my supervision for the duration of the war. The dog appeared to be a purebred German shepherd and had a tattoo in his left ear, indicating he was a Japanese military dog.

We became inseparable as time passed, and I felt the dog needed a more suitable name. One day he playfully jumped on one of my tent-

The Lawrence Ledger

Thursday, July 13, 1995

Sacrifice

Continued from Page 2A

was informed that Moose had graduated and was now in a forward combat zone with his handler. I also received a letter from his handler, Pvt. Richard Nowell, with an impassioned plea to give Moose to him, as they had become an inseparable team. I also received a Certificate of Proficiency that was awarded to Moose for completing the course at Ft. Armstrong.

Things happened fast in the spring of 1945. Our commander-in-chief died, Germany surrendered, I was discharged from the Army on June 13, and also got married.

The celebration was cut short when I received a letter from Major General H.T. Burgin, Central Pacific Base Command Headquarters, that began with those sorrowful words, "It is with a deep sense of regret that I must inform you of the death of your dog Moose, who was killed on the 20th day of June, 1945, in action against the enemy." The letter continued, "While scouting an enemy-held village with his handler, Moose located and surprised two Japanese soldiers concealed in the grass, one of whom threw a grenade landing within two feet of his handler. Moose knowing it to be a weapon, leaped on the grenade as it exploded, fatally wounding him, but saving the life of his master."

Somewhere on the Pacific Island of Okinawa, where Moose died, there is a grave marked "Moose, U.S. Army K-9 Corps, Army Serial Number OX-79. Killed in action against the enemy on June 20, 1945."

There is a question in that wording. This hero dog faithfully served two nations in a war against each other, and died for one. He died for a nation that he never knew existed, and was laid to rest in the earth of his Japanese homeland. We may ask, "Who was the enemy?"

Had Moose been human instead of a dog, his heroic deed would most certainly have won him the highest of military honors, including the Purple Heart and perhaps the Medal of Honor. Instead, he was decorated with the U.S. Army War Dog Certificate of Merit, which states: "The War Dog Moose, Tattoo No. OX-79, having

died while serving with the Armed Force of the United States of America, is hereby awarded this Certificate of Merit."

This adds another chapter to the history of dogs at wars.

And to Moose — A Well Done!

EDITOR'S NOTE: In recognition of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, Lawrence Township Memorial Committee, in cooperation with the Ledger, will feature a column each week during the anniversary year profiling a Lawrence resident.

The Veterans Memorial Committee is asking veterans from World War II and other conflicts to provide a photograph in uniform, along with their name, present address, branch of service and unit, where and when they served, their principal assignment and summary of their service. Their individual experiences or unusual stories are also welcomed. All photographs will be returned. Families of deceased veterans are also encouraged to submit articles. All materials should be sent to The Lawrence Township Veterans Memorial Committee, P.O. Box 55966, Trenton, N.J. 08638. Inquires may be made by calling 882-9108.



Kiska

...a portrait by Ray Brashears

Forces.

In February, 1945, I was rotated back to the States and assigned to Ft. Hancock for harbor defense of New York. I wrote to the K-9 school and

See **SACRIFICE**, Page 3A

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