

Cyril O'Brien War dogs



# ALWAYS FAITHFUL

THE CENTENNIAL OF THE DOBERMAN PINSCHER IN THE UNITED STATES



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### VIPS

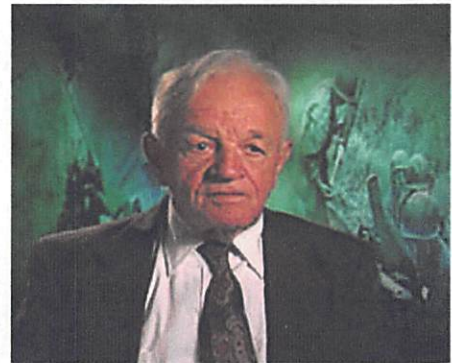
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## CYRIL O'BRIEN

Captain O'Brien covered Bougainville, Guam, and Iwo Jima as a World War II combat correspondent. He is retired as Director of Media Affairs at Johns Hopkins' Applied Physics Laboratory.



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### Marine's Best Friend

by Captain Cyril O'Brien  
US Marine Corps (Retired)

The familiar watch and guard skills of dogs at war would not be nearly enough for what Colonel Keller E. Rockey envisioned in 1942 in planning the role of the proposed new Marine Corps battle arm, the War Dog Platoons. Marine war dogs for "direct contact" with the enemy was a quantum step from camp boundary sniffers, gate guards, or trespass pickets. The Corps sought in the dogs a custom designed infantry weapon honed on discipline and obedience, which could be used with expected results. The dog with a man would form a single combat unit that would train and fight together and fit in where needed.

The war dog concept materialized fast under emergency pressure. On 24 November 1942, Lieutenant General Thomas Holcomb, Commandant of the Marine Corps, initiated the War Dog Training Program, and by war's end, more than 1,000 dogs served stateside and in campaigns from Bougainville to Okinawa and in all Marine Corps divisions. General Holcomb invited volunteers to an accelerated three- to four-month course as combat dog handlers. He admitted that there was no such expertise at Marine Corps Headquarters but found help from the United Doberman Club of America (NOTE: Should be Doberman Pinscher Club of America) and Doberman devotee Roslyn Terhune, who was instrumental in getting the

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program started. Advice, hands-on help, and recruiting assistance also came from the American Kennel Club, the Professional Handlers Association, and Dogs for Defense. The Corps enlisted the help of Jackson H. Boyd, Master of Hounds. He was made captain in the Marines and went with 19 enlisted men to the Army's dog training school at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. They returned with the basics and 42 dogs in December 1943.

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Opened in early 1944, the 1st War Dog Training School quickly grew to 50 men and nearly as many dogs, mostly Doberman Pinschers and German Shepherds-although there was no official Navy or Marine Corps breed. In fewer numbers were Belgian Sheepdogs, Malamutes, Siberian Huskies, Mastiffs, Bouviers, Labradors, Rottweilers, and Retrievers. The Corps did not accept every applicant. Reemits had to be 25 inches to the shoulder, weigh 50 pounds, and have a agreeable personality.

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The 14 week dog training school was grueling-with padded enemies attacking out of the bush and dynamite charges showering man and dog with dirt and debris. The right stuff was determined there for man and dog, and both formed bonds that lasted for life. The dogs became expert in scouting, pointing for patrols, and monitoring the line for infiltration or even mass attack; the handlers became advanced infantrymen, scouts, and snipers. Man and dog ate together, trained together, and fought together. Words-never physical reprimand- praised, stroked, and corrected as fulfilled dogs wiggled hinds in pride and joy and licked extended hands.

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The 1st War Dog Platoon shipped out for Camp Pendleton in May 1943, and the Marine Corps kept the dogs in mind when planning future campaigns. Platoon commander Lieutenant Clyde A. Henderson called them "living radar"-at Camp Pendleton and later in combat, dogs detected troops a quarter-mile away. Besides critical scout and front- line guard roles, dogs carried messages through the enemy, delivered blood plasma, and even found wounded Marines isolated by fire or confusion. But the most universal boon was an allowance for sleep; the hair-triggered wet-nosed sensors allowed a man to get a few winks even if the enemy was in shouting distance-as he often was. The lines were never surprised, and there was never an ambush of Marines where dogs were on watch. "A lot of times they were killed instead of us," said veterinarian Lieutenant William W. Putney, who planned the advanced realistic training, executed much of it, then headed the 3d Dog Platoon overseas.

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"Hair triggered wet nosed sensors allowed Marines to sleep--even when the enemy was within shotgun distance. Here Pvt. Rex Hester of 7th War Dog Platoon naps under guard of his dog Butch."

Training of dogs and handlers to fill the 2d and 3d platoons was recharged with even more realistic indoctrination. Dogs under intensified training soon were tearing at restraints and frothing at the mouth. Fury could be summoned, yet dogs would freeze like a board on command and signal intent by only a subdued cough in the throat. Attack was minimized, because the Marines were there to do that. Some dogs cringed, howled, and ran away, but nearly 98% persevered.

The 1st Platoon transferred to the South Pacific to train around Tetere Beach, Guadalcanal. With the 3d Marine Division, they then went to Bougainville, home of 40,000 Japanese soldiers. Dogs and handlers landed with assault waves onto Empress Augusta Bay and periphery at 0830, 1 November 1943. The site was an impenetrable swamp consisting of waist-high water and a jungle of vines and barbs that formed natural barbed wire. Bougainville was impassable 30 yards inland--with only two hints of a track and one trail off the whole 7,300 yards of invasion front--and the dogs, with their keen senses, became invaluable. Lieutenant Henderson's 67-pound Doberman Andy bounded right off the beach in the point down the Pi va trail (the Japanese approach to our invasion beach) 1,500 yards inland where the Raiders wanted to set up a road block. On the way, Andy spotted Japanese positions 75 and 100 yards up trail. In such terrain, Caesar, an 87-pound German Shepherd, bounded back and forth from an isolated frontline company stripped of communication for a total of 31 miles. The Japanese knew the dog was doing them in, tried and tried, and eventually nailed him. The doctors pulled Caesar through, and the shepherd went stateside to help sell war bonds. Corporal Paul J. Castracane's German Shepherd Jack, sliced deeply in the back, gave the only warning his battalion received about a cut-off company of Marines surrounded by Japanese. When Jack reached Corporal Castracane at the other end of the battle trail, the bleeding courier dropped exhausted at his handler's feet. No dog patrols on Bougainville ever were ambushed. In company with Andy, Caesar, and Jack were other heroes such as Liney, Torri, Rolo, Duke, Fritz, Prince, Topper, and Frieda von Brickley.



The 1st Dog Platoon was attached to the 4th Marines (which joined the 22d Regiment to form the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade) for the invasion to recapture Guam.

At 0830, 21 July 1944, the 1st Dog Platoon, with 30 dogs and 20 men, joined with assault waves of the brigade. The 2d and 3d Dog Platoons, with 60 dogs and 110 handlers, went ashore with the 3d Marine Division, facing the defended heights of Chonito Ridge. When the Marines broke through Guam's mountain line at Asan-Adelup and reached open terrain, the dogs became precision instruments of battle. If there was a strong point, the dogs found it.

Guam was the scene of the great Japanese wanton, the all hands suicide attack or Banzai. Marine intelligence knew they were coming, but it took a dog's nose and ears to fix the precise moment-such as when Private First Class John V. Rich's dog Fritz, with stiffened ears and raised nostrils, struck the moment of the big Banzai. At 1230, 26 July, 5,000 Japanese-screaming, yelling, even laughing-s-inundated the U.S. lines. In the brigade sector, they flooded onto the 4th and 22d Marines and the 1st Dog Platoon. Over Chonito Ridge, they fell across the 3d Marine Division. Private First Class Allen S. Jacobson's pinch-faced 65pound Doberman Kurt, just forward of the 21st Marines (3d Division), sniffed and snarled silently into the air. They were coming and were mere yards away. Suddenly, Japanese mortars and grenades rained onto the Marine division, and Kurt's back was scraped to the spinal cord by a mortar sliver, while Private Jacobson caught the fragments of a rifle grenade. He refused medical assistance until Kurt was carried to the rear. As the bearers brought in Kurt, Lieutenant Putney was returning from his own patrol. With plasma and scalpel on a makeshift operating room he tried to save Kurt until well into the morning. "I soon knew it was no use, and cradled him in my arms to absorb through the night the jolts of those exploding I-I-inch naval shells. Kurt died before dawn. I was so tired, I put my head on him and went to sleep."



"Veterinarian Lieutenant William Putney operates on a war dog during combat on Guam." NOTE: We know that the assistant is Ivan Hamilton (original photo in Quantico Archives)

When Corporal Marvin M. Corffs patrol stopped for a break, he and his Doberman Rocky continued ahead of the group and discovered a Japanese patrol also taking time out. Rocky

alerted Corporal Corff, who delivered fast fire from his M1. A vet that could even be bored with warfare, Rocky racked up 50 patrols, broke up three ambushes, and helped defend against a score of suicide attackers. Corporal Harold A. Tesch believed that his dog Tippy could smell snipers in the trees. "I could almost aim my rifle where he pointed, and the enemy would be there," he recalled. On one patrol, a mortar round hit Corporal Tesch and blew Tippy 20 feet. With hind legs paralyzed, Tippy crawled back to rest his head on his wounded master. Of the 60 dogs that landed with the 2d and 3d Platoons, only 15 survived unhurt; 25 war dogs died.

The dogs did not make the 15 June 1944 landing with the Marines and Army on Saipan, but 15 dogs and 30 men transferred from Guam to mop up the island that November. In an early patrol, Sergeant James Brooker and his dog Prince trapped eight Japanese on Mount Tapotchau; Kenneth Malone's dog Mitzy von Zeleny nabbed nine more "easier than rabbits"-those in addition to the 27 Japanese she sniffed out on Guam.

On Peleliu, dog patrols became the order of the day as soon as there was land to cross. The dogs found snipers, pillboxes, and the most ingenious little man-size scoop-outs under the roots of banyan trees. Private First Class Tom Price of the 4th Dog Platoon went ashore with his Doberman Chips to a hail of small-arms fire. Chips never barked, only growled, and paid his way early by smelling out two successive ambushes almost by the second sunset. Corporal Harold N. Flagg and his Doberman Boy, walking ahead of a patrol, found unwary Japanese in an ambush they had not yet triggered. The two cut into it as the rest of the patrol came up.

On Iwo Jima, the Marines did not need dogs to sniff out the enemy. Everything was close on the island, and 23,000 Japanese were everywhere. It was not dog country, but the Marines who were saved from surprise attacks and ambushes did not care. They thanked God for the dogs and volunteered to dig foxholes just to keep the handlers around. Casualties among handlers on Iwo Jima were high. Private First Class Walter Josefiak and his dog Rusty encountered a group of Japanese near the mouth of a cave. Private Josefiak killed three of the enemy, but was mortally wounded by a mortar round. Rusty moved in to protect his wounded master but was torn across the middle by the fragments of a grenade. On another patrol, Private James E. Wallace of the 5th Division was killed by a mortar and his German Shepherd Fritz was wounded. A recovered Fritz later sniffed out three infiltrators before they were close enough to fling grenades.

Private First Class Raymond N. Moquin's Doberman Carl was "snorting and grabbing the breeze with his nose" to signal a Banzai. But as Private Moquin recalled, "There was nothing out there. We even tried to calm Carl down, but he wouldn't. Then, all hell broke loose with a screaming Banzai attack coming right up out of the ground. We were ready, thanks to Carl. The Japanese really fell."

On Okinawa, the 1st, 4th, and elements of the 2d Dog Platoons faced the bitter last stand of a falling foe. But the grueling battle did not slow Doberman Fritz, that nailed nearly 50 Japanese there on crags, caves, and crannies, using his old routines. Many Marine dogs distinguished themselves on Okinawa. Private First Class Robert Targett's dog Comet urged a Japanese from a cave and was praised when he went back for six more. Corporal Stephen G. Salata's dog Goodie uncovered a covey of Japanese so strong it took a combat patrol to oust them. Corporal Bruce S. Wellington's Doberman Prince sniffed out Japanese waiting in ambush beneath sugar cane ground cuttings, and Marines dug up the cane floor with automatic fire. Corporal James A. Chesson's dog Sampson never forgot the enemy soldier who bopped him on the head and got away-and caught up with him later. Sampson also faced a line of sword-swinging, bayonet-poking Japanese on one patrol, and with the help of a few Marines subdued them all.

The overseas combat record for dogs was closed on Guam in November 1945 when 232 dogs

and 270 enlisted men returned to the States. A total of 1,047 dogs served in the Marine Corps in World War II; 29 dogs were killed in action, 25 on Guam alone. There were some minuses to the war dog patrols. The surprises and uncertainties of battle unhinged some of the dogs, which then attacked friend and foe alike. But such cases did not compare with the countless Marines saved and protected by the well-trained war dogs.

How do you make a house pet again of an animal that had seen the horrors of war and from whom even friendly Marines shied away? Dr. Putney would not harbor the thought of destroying them, and he wanted the dogs brought back to American firesides as honored heroes. The detrainng at Camp Lejeune took one year, but there was not a single case of bite or injury by a war dog that returned to civilian life. "I can tell you these are some of the greatest warriors the Marine Corps ever fielded," said Dr. Putney during the ceremonies honoring the 50th anniversary of the Liberation of Guam in 1994. "I was proud to have led them into battle 50 years ago, and I am just as proud of them today."



"In memory of the Marine dogs killed in service, a war dog cemetery is part of the Naval Air Station on Guam. The original burial site became overgrown, but Dr. William Putney decided to give the dogs a place of honor. On 21 July 1994, the 50th anniversary of the Liberation of Guam, Marine Corps Commandant Carl E. Mundy helped dedicate the new dog cemetery, calling all the dogs "Marines." The dogs are memorialized by a life size bronze image titled "Always Faithful," by Susan B. Wilner. Its model was Kurt, the Doberman that died in Putney's arms, and inscribed on the sculpture are the names of the 25 war dogs that died in service on Guam: Skipper, Blitz, Jurt, Nig, Missy, Bursch, Yonnie, Poncho, Prince, Arno, Cappy, Pepper, Koko, Tubby, Fritz, Duke, Silver, Ludwig, Bunkie, Rickey, Hobo, Emmy, Max, Brockie, and Tam. Back to Guam for the ceremonies were handlers Mason Wachstetter, Earl Wright, Thurman Clark, Raymond Tomaszewski, Dale Quillen, and Harry Brown. photo courtesy of the author."

You can click on any of the names below to read their amazing stories

[Lawrence Schurz](#) · [Francis Pastusic](#) · [Bruce Wellington](#) · [Thurman Clark](#) · [Kenneth Shepperd](#) · [Samuel Harvey Winstead](#) · [Robert Forsyth](#) · [Ed Adamski](#) · [Frank Sutton](#) · [Dale Quillen](#) · [John Mahoney](#) · [Walter Marx](#) · [Ivan Hamilton](#) · [Richard Reinauer](#) · [Earl Wright](#) · [Cyril O'Brien](#)

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