

Military working dogs have a nose for trouble

Awards and decs for retiring canines

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60th AMV Public Affairs

After years of assisting with narcotic seizures, locating bombs, protecting foreign dignitaries and the Presidents of the United States of America and patrolling overseas camps, three members of Travis' 60th Security Forces Squadron retired Sept. 30.

After almost a decade each of dedicated service, three Travis military working dogs were presented with their retirement papers and commendation medals for meritorious service at Bldg. 381's auditorium at 6:30 a.m.

From Operations Desert Storm and Shield to Operation Enduring Freedom, they have led highly stressful lifestyles but have served with honor and have served well.

Lord, Bon and Robby are part of today's dogs of war. Members of the 60th SFS Military Working Dogs section, they are part of 10-dog teams assigned to Travis for specialized missions to include narcotic and bomb detection.

Two of these highly skilled dogs - Lord and Robby — are being placed up for adoption. Robby, a Belgian Malinois, and Lord, a German Sheppard, are very dependable dogs.

"They're loving, loyal and make great watchdogs," said Tech. Sgt. Kurt Killian, 60th SFS kennel master. Bon, a German Sheppard — who is unadoptable due to age, aggravated medical issues and an overly aggressive temperament — will be put to sleep.

Under an act of Congress passed in 2000, military working dogs can now be adopted at the end of their useful working lives.

"We'll likely give preference to local and military law enforcement officials first, however, each interested person will have an opportunity to interview for these dogs," Killian said. "We are retiring these three dogs for various reasons, but it is primarily age and medical issues that are catching up with them now because of the physically demanding nature of their jobs."

The bomb and drug dogs at Travis are trained primarily in odor detection. They are expected to maintain high levels of job proficiency.

"Bomb dogs are currently trained various odors and are expected to maintain an exceptionally high percent find rate over all on their quarterly training reviews," Killian said. "Our drug dogs are also trained on various odors and are required to maintain a high find rate percentage. These dogs have small margins for job error."

Travis' Military Working Dog team sniffs out trouble not only on base, but off-base as well.

"We have a good working relationship with our local communities and assist them whenever necessary," Killian said. Killian also mentioned there is always an on-call dog and handler should incidents occur after normal duty hours.

A military working dog's value is typically around \$25,000, including the initial cost of the dog, training, care and handling.

Staff Sgt. Thomas Burns, Lord's handler, said he's glad Lord is retiring. "I wish I was!" he joked. Lord received a pacemaker in January to assist with heart problems, but was back on the job shortly after his operation.

"Lord is a great dog, one of the best bomb dogs here," Burns said. "He's just slowing down a bit with age."

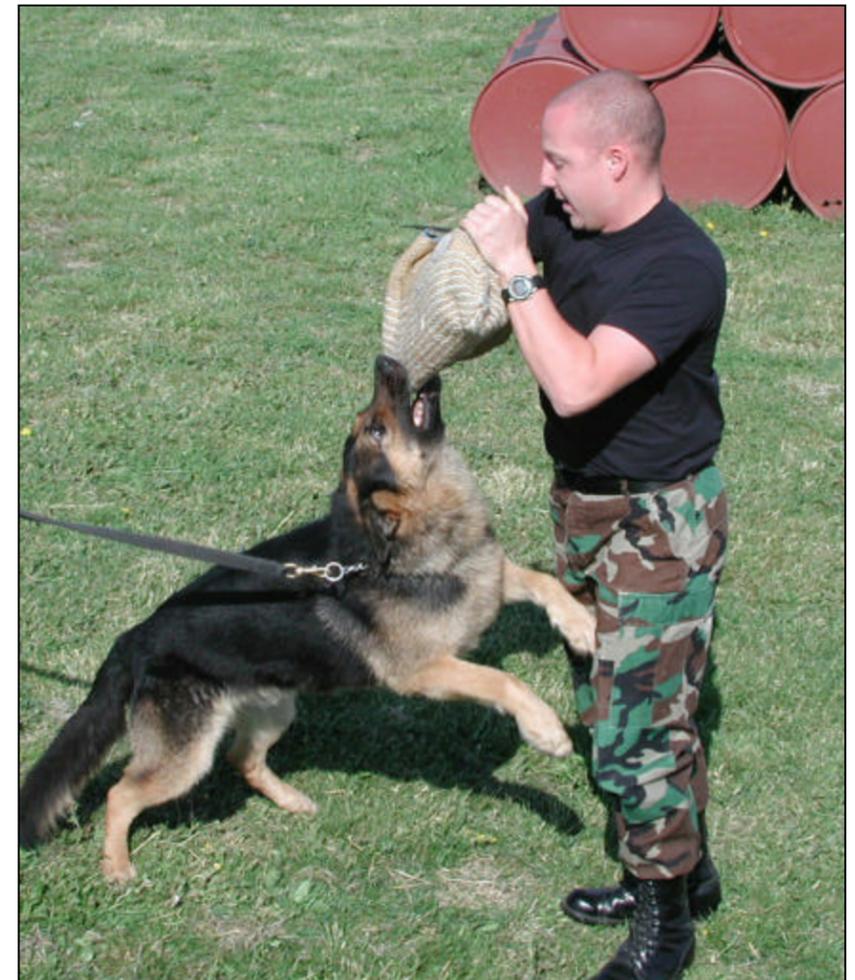
Burns says some of the highlights of Lord's career include deployments to Southwest Asia and Albania and support of 24 Secret Service missions. "I wish I could adopt him, but I already have a dog and Lord is an 'Alpha' male and doesn't get along as well with other dogs as he does with people."

Staff Sgt. Albert Branch, Bon's handler, said that Bon is his first dog. "I've been working as a dog handler for a year now, and Bon is my first dog," he said. "We learned a lot together, and I've personally never had any problems with him. I will definitely miss him when he's gone."

Bon distinguished himself through his years of service as a patrol and narcotic-detection dog in such locations as Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, Cuba, during the detention of the Haitian and Cuban refugees. In addition, while deployed to Kansas City International Airport, Mo., Bon was directly responsible for five drug seizures consisting of 391 grams of cocaine, 100 pounds of marijuana and \$3,900 in drug money.

Robby also has a list of significant contributions to the United States military and country's freedom. Highly deployable, Robby was used for narcotic sweeps in U.S. Coast Guard facilities in California and conducted searches at California state prisons, resulting in 23 illegal narcotic finds.

During deployments to Texas, Robby was responsible for 42 drug seizures consisting of 77 pounds of cocaine, 3,771 pounds of marijuana, 140 grams of heroin and 5 grams of methamphetamines. He was also deployed to Cuba, providing security and deterrence at Camp X-Ray, helping in his own way with America's continued campaign against terrorism in Operation Enduring Freedom.



(Above and left), Military working dog handler Staff Sgt. Thomas Burns and his dog, Lord, team up to perform an explosive search on a vehicle. Explosive searches on vehicles are done randomly at the gate, for VIPs and aircraft as another means of force protection, protecting base personnel and assets. (Top right), Bon, practices his bite-and-hold with Senior Airman Kevin Parham one last time, before he officially retired Monday. Bon specialized in patrol and narcotics and has a career littered with drug seizures as well as service in locations such as Guantanamo Bay Naval Station, Cuba, during the detention of the Haitian and Cuban refugees. (Right), Staff Sgt. Albert Branch trains with Bon on bite work techniques. Parham acts as Bon's victim; the military working dogs are trained to bite and hold until the handler calls them off, with minimum use of force. Handlers train dogs both on and off leash.