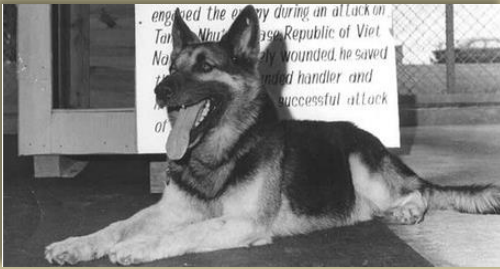


# VIETNAM WAR - NEMO



## Nemo A534

Among the dog teams that departed Lackland AFB for Vietnam in 1966 was a black and tan German Shepherd named Nemo.

Nemo partnered with Airman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Robert Throneburg as a sentry dog team of the 377th Air Police Squadron at Tan Son Nut Air Base near Saigon. These teams made up the base's first line of defense. Each man and his dog patrolled 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, and it was the dog team's job to see that this didn't happen.

Throneburg and Nemo worked well together. This was important because their lives depended on each other. Throneburg said, "You put your heart, soul, and trust in your dog when you are working in that environment. They are your best friend."

## December 3, 1966 Attack

In an early pre-dawn attack, two Vietcong units tried to infiltrate the base. The sentry dog teams alarmed of the invasion. The 377th fought hard, but the victory came at a cost. One airman, George Bevich, and three military working dogs, Toby, Cubby, and Rebel were killed in action.

The next day, Thorneburg and Nemo pulled duty near an old Vietnamese graveyard about a quarter mile from the air base's runways. Side by side they walked among the tombstones. Six-foot blades of elephant grass surrounded the graveyard, adding to the spooky, closed-in feeling. It was a clear, starlit night. Nemo paused by a shadowy Vietnamese shrine and signaled that something lurked ahead. Throneburg whispered into his radio, informing the command center of Nemo's alert and their whereabouts. Then the soldier unclipped Nemo's leash. A bullet struck Thorneburg in the shoulder. Nemo attacked. A bullet entered under the dog's right eye and exited through his mouth. Nemo, jaws snapping, pounced on the enemy until he lay motionless. Throneburg had passed out from the pain. Wounded and blinded in his right eye, Nemo crawled back to his soldier, covering his partner with his body.



When the security police arrived, Throneburg lay unconscious, with 85 pound Nemo still draped over him. They needed the coaxing of Nemo's first handler, Leonard Bryant, to get the dog off of the soldier. Back at base, the veterinarian performed skin grafts on Nemo's torn up face and remove the dog's right eye.

Thorneburg had to be evacuated to the United States Air Force Hospital at Tachikawa Air Base in Japan to recuperate. While lying in a hospital awaiting his flight, Throneburg had a chance to say good-bye to Nemo. The dog licked his face. To Throneburg, the dog's expression seemed to say: *Okay, here I am boss.*



Nemo flew halfway around the world accompanied by returning Airman Melvin W. Bryant. When the C124 Globemaster touched down at Kelly Air Force Base, Texas, on July 22, 1967, Capt. Robert M. Sullivan welcomed the canine home. As the officer in charge of the sentry dog training program at Lackland he said, "I have to keep from getting involved with individual dogs in this program, 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.

Due to his heroic actions, 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. Looking back, Throneburg credits his faithful companion with helping the military working dog program to grow. He said, “Capt. Sullivan and Nemo started a recruitment program and developed the war dog program that has evolved into what it is today. It makes me very proud.”

Nemo died on March 15, 1973 at Lackland, where his memorial kennels and stone stand today in his honor.

By Nancy Roe Pimm

Nancy Roe Pimm is an award-winning author of nonfiction narratives for young readers. She is a Choose to Read Ohio author and her books have been chosen as Junior Library Selections. Pimm’s newest title, *Bonded by Battle: The Powerful Friendships of Military Dogs and Soldiers from the Civil War to Operation Iraqi Freedom* explores the unbreakable bonds formed by military dogs and soldiers as they face life and death in the war zone. These heroic, intelligent four-legged soldiers are always full of courage and a whole lot of heart. Open the pages of this book to meet a bunch of unforgettable canine commandos.

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

