Military Working Dog retires with full honors, finds new home

By Joseph Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

A nine-year veteran of protecting U.S. Navy personnel and property, Military Working Dog (MWD) Bak retired from active duty service Dec. 16 during a ceremony here in the Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) headquarters auditorium. Bak reached the end of his career as a patrol-explosive dog and is ready to find a new home.

Bak was first stationed and served almost exclusively in Japan, with duty stations at Naval Air Facility, Atsugi and CFAY. He also completed two deployments in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Bak received three Navy Achievement Medals, two Army Commendation Medals and a Letter of Appreciation during his deployments with nine different handlers.

In the Navy, MWDs usually rank one pay-grade higher than their handler. Bak's last handler was Master-at-Arms 1st Class Allan McGathey, making Bak a chief when he retired. McGathey spoke at Bak's retirement and reflected on the time they spent working together.

"He's an outstanding MWD, he's the model MWD," said McGathey. "He's a patrol explosive dog, probably the greatest honor you can be for a military working dog. He always worked to the fullest and I'll be sad to see him go."

MWDs don't always get a full retirement ceremony when they complete their time working with the U.S. military, but Bak worked hard and his handler felt the service was well deserved. For his work Bak was presented with a shadow box highlighting his career and one other award.

(Left) MACS Ricky Neitzel, MA1 Allan McGathey and MAC Anthony Gonzales display the shadow box Military Working Dog Bak received during his retirement ceremony held Dec. 16 in the CFAY headquarters auditorium.

Photo by Yuji Kawabe

"He received a Navy commendation medal from [CFAY Commanding Officer] Capt [David] Owen for his service here at Command Fleet Activities Yokosuka, just recognizing all the hard work he has done here and protecting the base," McGathey said.

Before Bak retired, he was approved for adoption. Master-at-Arms 1st Class Marcel Martinez, Yokosuka kennel trainer, said that the process of adopting a dog that was trained for combat can be difficult but rewarding.

"We screen these dogs after they reach a point in their career where they are reaching the end of their serviceable years and if they are in good health and are tolerable of other people and they are not overly aggressive then we like to get them adopted [by a] suitable family," Martinez said. "So, they can enjoy the end years of their lives in a good, comfortable environment."

Sitting in the front row during Bak's ceremony was Master Chief Master-at-Arms Paula Necaise. She applied and was approved to adopt Bak. McGathey gave Bak's leash to Necaise after the service.

"I couldn't be any happier," said McGathey. "Master Chief at one time was a working dog handler and she's taken great care of the MWD division as the [operations] officer and she's taken great care of Bak and will continue to."

Necaise was obviously happy to take Bak home, laughing with other handlers and sharing some stories of working with MWDs.

"I am guaranteed to take him home now and forever, I think that was the best part about it," Necaise said.

Start New Year off right by committing to reasonable resolutions

By Dan Bowen, CFAY Public Affairs

It's 2011, and if you're old enough to be reading this, you probably cannot help but sit back and marvel at how much has changed since those first New Year celebrations you experienced when you were younger. From high-definition or 3D TV sets and iPods to those extra wrinkles and pounds you have acquired through the years, each new year brings with it optimism for what can be as well as regret for the things we have yet to accomplish.

A popular tradition, the New Year's resolution, is one of the best known manifestations of the profound influence the idea of a "new" year has on our society. The magic of Jan. 1, an arbitrary day set as the beginning of the new year by the ancient Romans with the establishment of the Julian calendar, is the feeling that we get a chance for a fresh start. Across the world, individuals, families and communities are assessing 2010 and planning for 2011.

while many people are busy planning what their resolutions should be for the year, many others have resolved to never make a New Year's resolution again. It can be demoralizing to fail to live up to the changes we would like to make in our lives year in and year out. But we shouldn't be so quick to give up on ourselves; meeting personal challenges and achieving the goals and resolutions we set for ourselves can prove to be a truly rewarding experience.

"Any time you set a goal and achieve it, that is good for your mental health, and it's good for your psyche; you're going to feel good about yourself," said Commander Naval Forces Japan Force Chaplain Capt. John Swanson.

According to Swanson, individuals should be careful that the goals they set are achievable; so that, they will not only be able live up to their New Year's resolutions, but also to make certain that they will be able to consistently realize the goals they set for themselves.

"I think that is the key, anytime you set a goal for yourself, it needs to be achievable - it needs to be realistic. That's probably why a lot of people don't attain their goals," said Swanson. "They make their goals so large and so unattainable that it is easy to give up. I think the key to achieving goals when you set goals, or resolutions, is that you have to keep them short term, measurable on a daily or weekly basis. Instead of saying I need to lose 50 pounds, it would be more realistic to say, 'I'm going to lose a pound a week.'"

Setting realistic goals is not the only way individuals can help ensure that they will actually follow through with the goals they set for themselves. People also need to remember that there is a difference between a good idea and a goal. A good idea is something that would be nice to have, but a goal should be a plan of how you are going to actually make that dream a reality. Individuals should write their goals down, visualize their goals, think about what it is going to feel like when they achieve their goals and to set a concrete timeframe for achieving goals.

"If you want to be successful when setting a goal or creating a resolution, it shouldn't just be something that you want to do, you need to get other people engaged in your goal in your resolution so that you're going to have someone to help keep you motivated, keep inspiring you and keep holding your feet to the fire, and keep you accountable," Swanson said.

The editor asks:

"***Did you know***, according to Naval Administrative Message (NAVADMIN) 420/10, released Dec. 29, in order to comply with Department of Defense policy, members separated from the Navy after Jan. 1 solely for failing the physical fitness test (PFT) portion of the physical fitness assessment (PFA) will not be authorized involuntary separation pay?

"Policy for involuntary separations before Jan. 1 did not distinguish between separations for failing the PFT and separations relating to weight control.

"Members separated for failing the body composition assessment (BCA) in any of three PFA failures may receive one-half involuntary separation pay as long as they are eligible for such pay in all other respects, including the requirement, if qualified, to serve in either the selected reserve or individual ready reserve.

"Members who have been involved in misconduct or who are not performing satisfactorily must be separated for those reasons, not for weight control."