

Inaugural Military Working Dog Service Award in Western Region Awarded to Earl Staples

by Gail Snyder

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The level of patriotism in the United States spiked after the cowardly terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. However, even this increased degree of patriotism pales in comparison to the amazing surge that resulted after the bombing of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese on December 7, 1941. Young men reported in droves to their local draft boards to sign up to protect America. One of those men was Earl Staples, who joined the Army and started active duty in February 1942.

When he left his home near Dallas, TX, Earl didn't know where he would end up or what he would do in the Army. After the briefest of basic training periods, he was shipped to Schofield Barracks on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. There he found himself stationed in a bunker on the beach with limited ammunition, assigned to guard against the massive Japanese forces that were expected to attack the island any day.

Life in the bunker was boring and not very satisfying to the young man from Texas who had joined the Army to protect his country. So when an officer came by looking for volunteers with an interest in dogs, Earl Staples signed up right away. Months passed without any further news on the dog assignment and Earl forgot all about it. Then one day he was ordered to report to the Territorial Animal Quarantine Station. When he got there he found a couple thousand other servicemen lined up to be interviewed. Earl soon deduced that the questioning was related to the volunteer dog detail. Each serviceman was questioned about their interest and experience in training dogs – dogs that would be used in various aspects of combat.

What did it take to become a dog trainer? In Earl's case: keen attention to what was going on

around him, a chance meeting, and a little luck. Earl overheard other servicemen explaining to the interviewers about their extensive experience training hunting dogs, the family dogs, or other pets throughout their lives – and noticed that they were promptly dismissed. As Earl neared the front of the line, he noticed a very distinguished looking gentleman whose dapper attire and walking cane were in stark contrast to the sea of drab olive green. The gentleman struck up a casual conversation with Earl and then tapped the interviewer on the shoulder as Earl reached the head of the line. Soon thereafter Earl learned that out of the 2,000 servicemen interviewed, he was one of only seven accepted into the dog training program.



Earl Staples (far left) with the training recruits from Hilo

Earl learned later that the dapper gentleman was H.K.L. Castle, the son of one of the most influential businessmen in Hawaii and later a very important developer and benefactor in his own right.

In August 1942 the Territorial Animal Quarantine Center was assigned to Fort Armstrong, the official dog training center within the Quartermaster Corps. The dog training regimen was developed by Mr. E. Humphreys, famous for his leadership of Seeing Eye Dogs, Inc. in Morristown, New Jersey. The

training methods seemed very odd to the trainers, but the reasons for these techniques soon became evident. It also quickly became obvious why the soldiers with previous training experience were dismissed: there simply wasn't time to "untrain" the trainers.



Earl Staples (far left) with dog trainers on Maui

Initially more than 10 breeds of dogs were accepted into the training program. Some types of dogs were found more effective in certain types of assignments. Training durations ranged from three days for warning dogs to 13 weeks for messenger dogs (the most difficult assignment). Dogs were also used for scouting, patrol, attack, and mine/bomb/ammunition detection. Between 1942 and 1945 nearly 5,000 dogs were trained at Fort Armstrong. The benefit of using dogs for military duty was well documented, as troops supported by military working dogs suffered substantially fewer casualties than those without.

In 1945, with the dog training program winding down, Earl Staples requested and was granted reassignment to front line duty. He was shipped to Okinawa for initial landing, where some of the fiercest fighting of World War II was underway. However, Earl left Okinawa just as the atomic bombs were dropped in Hiroshima

and Nagasaki, Japan, bringing a sudden end to the war in the Pacific. Earl returned to the United States and civilian life.



Of nearly 5,000 dogs trained, this was Earl's favorite - Sparky

On November 28, 2010 in recognition of his dedication to saving American lives through the dog training program at Fort Armstrong, Earl Staples was awarded the United States Military Working Dog Service Award by Gail Snyder, Executive Director of the Western Region, Chapter 1 of the U.S. War Dogs Association. Mr. Staples accepted the award, the first given in the western United States, on behalf of the 5,000 dogs trained at Fort Armstrong.



Gail Snyder (left) presenting Earl Staples (right) with the inaugural U.S. Military Working Dog Service Award