

**By Andrea Miller  
Staff Reporter**

**Pike Creek resident Bob Biss says the best job he ever had was in Vietnam during the war. It was so good, he cried at his promotion to sergeant because that meant he had to give it up.**

**It wasn't losing the job, exactly, that brought tears – he certainly wouldn't miss patrolling outside the barbed wire in the dead of night, waiting for North Vietnam guerillas to storm the compound – it was losing King, the German shepherd that came with the assignment as a Military Police sentry dog handler.**

**Biss, a 1964 Mount Pleasant High School graduate, served three tours in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970 in an MP detachment in the Me Kong delta, keeping the perimeter of a helicopter transport base safe for the 2,000 men and women stationed there.**

**While in the war zone, Biss was one of hundreds of Delaware soldiers who corresponded with then reporter Nancy Lynch for “Vietnam Mailbag,” a local newspaper column that aimed to put a human face on the controversial war during the height of America's involvement.**

**Biss wrote Lynch extensively on the use of dogs in the military. The response from readers back home was phenomenal, he recalls.**

**“Everyone loves dogs. When you have one by your side, it opens doors. People approach, they talk. Reading about my service dogs, the hearts and minds of the people reading in Delaware were opened too,”**

**Biss recalls. And they responded. Letters and gifts -- from friends, strangers, college students, even the Diamond State German Shepherd Club – poured in.**

**Biss took up correspondence with several who wrote him, including one young woman whom he returned home to marry 13 months later. Together, they raised two children, and a German shepherd -- named King, of course.**

**The warm reception from those back home is a big part of why Biss still says that “the best place to be from is the great first state.”**

**Everyone from the government to the people treated its soldiers better than anywhere else, he says, providing benefits to returning Vietnam veterans, giving them respect rather than disdain.**

**Reflecting on the war nearly four decades later, Biss doesn't have a lot to say about it, except how lucky he feels to have made it home alive.**

**Even back then, he didn't get involved with heated debates about it. He wanted to serve and come home alive, end of story.**

**Biss' reason for volunteering for the army was pragmatic: he knew that, as a young man unattached to a family and out of school, it was only a matter of time before he'd be drafted. Biss preferred choose how and when to serve rather than leave his life to chance.**

**Biss was surveying his options when he saw a picture of a marine with a German shepherd in a magazine. He had always revered the connection man had with working dogs, and always wanted a shepherd of his own, though he never had one.**

He instantly knew this was how he would do his military duty, if he could.

After seven weeks of handler training in Okanowa, Biss lived two years in a war zone. Most of the time, it was calm, he recalls, punctuated by a few moments of terror, usually at night or on the road.

What was strange about Vietnam, he says, and somewhat similar to the situation in Iraq now – the only parallel he chooses to draw today – is that a lot of time, you couldn't tell the enemy from the people you were defending. During daylight hours, you'd go into town for a beer and conversation with the local girls. Local men would come into the base to do odd jobs. But at night, the same local who had cut your hair might be trying to kill you.

What eased the terror of the unknown for Biss, was King.

It was more than the dog's phenomenal hearing, smell and ability to pick up movement in the dark. It was more than the training that bonded man and dog. It was the constant, unwavering companionship.

Leaving that behind was hard.

“I wish I could take King home with me,” he wrote before his last tour ended in April, 1970. “I don't think there is anything as rewarding as training and working with a dog. Words can't express the feeling of security I have when I have to walk down a completely dark air strip with just King.”

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More of Biss' memories and letters will be featured in Vietnam Mailbag: Voices from the War,

**1968-1972, a collection of original letters and contemporary interviews with those who wrote Lynch during the war.**

**A Memorial Day, 2008 release is planned.**