

Air Force Dog Handler Tom Shambo

In 1965 Vietnam really started to escalate. **Tom Shambo** was a senior in high school and the son of a World War II veteran. He really was interested in how he could get involved and what he could do. He decided that when he graduated that he would join the Air Force. He wanted to be an air traffic controller, but they gave him the option of either cooking or being a cop. He enlisted as a security policeman, something that became a lifelong career path and passion.

His first station was Turner Air Force Base near Albany, Georgia, for six months. While there Tom noticed a poster recruiting canine handlers. Having grown up with a German Shepherd, he was immediately interested. He soon underwent an eight weeklong formal dog training at Lackland Air Force Base.

After losing his first dog to heartworm, Tom transitioned to the role of a mock intruder for training exercises, attempting to evade fellow dog handlers. This experience deepened his understanding of how to position himself and his dog to effectively guard perimeters. This knowledge proved invaluable during his tour at Phan Rang Air Base in Vietnam, where he spent a year safeguarding the perimeter—a stretch up to half a mile wide and 150 yards deep. Assigned to night duty, Tom recalls many nights when it was so dark he couldn't see his hand in front of his face. He vividly remembers three firefights during his tour and is grateful to have returned home "without any holes."