

HI

By Gary R. Hoffman

The day we got Hi as a puppy, I really can't remember. I was too young. The day my father shipped him off to the army, I can't remember either. Hi was sent to the army because World War II was in full swing, and the army was calling for anyone with a young German Shepherd to let the army have them. The dogs were needed to help win the war against the Germans in Europe.

The day Hi was discharged, I do remember, vividly. I was six years old at the time. My family received a telegram from the war department stating that Hi had been discharged since the war was over. He would be shipped back to our family by train. We were to go to the Kirkwood train station on a certain day and time to pick him up. The army said we were to bring the telegram with us as proof that the dog was ours.

We got to the Kirkwood station in the middle of the afternoon. The train was to arrive at three o'clock. When the train got there, two large wooden crates containing German Shepherds were unloaded. One held Hi and the other another German Shepherd who belonged to a family in Webster Groves. Both crates had a packet of papers wired to the front. Across the front of each packet were the words--Read First!! My Mom removed the packet before we loaded Hi.

My Dad with the help of a couple of railroad guys loaded Hi and his crate in the back of our pickup for the ride to Brentwood. On our trip home, Hi sat calmly in his cage. He was looking around as if this was just another phase in his life. Mom was going through the packet of papers. It was mainly do's and don'ts for dealing with this very highly trained animal.

When we got Hi to the house, my grandpa and grandma came over to meet us. Grandpa was also going to help us unload the crate. My father had rigged up a couple of large boards to slide the crate down to the ground. As

they were getting the crate to the ground, Mom and Grandma were finishing looking through the papers.

"Ok," Mom said, "it says here that the crate he was shipped in was used as his dog house during his debriefing period. He now knows it's his house. It is recommended that we keep it that way, at least for a time."

"His what period? " Dad asked.

"Debriefing period. It says here they debrief them to make them into a pet dog again rather than a killer dog."

"Oh, that's comforting," Grandma said. "What if it didn't take?"

"Well, then we wouldn't have gotten him back," Dad said. I think he was trying to assure himself as well as the rest of us.

The crate was now on the ground and sitting in our fenced back yard. "Now what?" Dad asked.

"Just says to open the crate, let him out, and welcome him home," Mom answered.

Dad slowly opened the door on the front of the crate. Hi stood up, shook himself, and walked out into his new world, wagging his tail and panting. Dad gave him a pat on the head. Hi responded with a lick to his hand. Hi then made his rounds to all of us. We all petted him, told him what a good dog he was, and welcomed him home.

He then started to make his rounds of the yard. He got about three feet down the fence before he lifted his leg and started marking his territory. As we watched him get acquainted with his new yard, Mom was telling us some more of the stuff that came in the packet. His discharge papers were there, along with a Purple Heart, a Medal of Honor for Valor, and more instructions on how to handle him. This was the first time we knew about his getting wounded in action and helping to save a soldier's life by directing a medic to the wounded man.

Hi was now back by us wanting more pats. Of course, we were all eager to give them. As I was petting him, my grandmother reached over to look at the shipping label that was also attached to the front of the crate. Hi took her hand his mouth, very softly, but firmly, and moved it away from his home. Apparently it was "his" house, and right now, we weren't supposed to be messing with it.

During the next few days, we discovered that the fence around our yard was virtually useless if Hi decided he wanted to leave the yard. He could easily jump it. Dad saw him do it, told him he was "bad," and that was the last we had of that problem. I also discovered that the do's and don'ts sent with Hi were there for a reason. I did a major "No No." I walked up our driveway from where I had been playing in the street with some of my friends. We had been playing with cap guns. Hi was sitting by the fence, with his back towards me, as I came into the back yard. I shot off the cap gun at him. He turned, lunged, and put one of his fangs through the end of my nose. I guess he quickly realized who I was because he backed off immediately. That scar is still on the end of my nose today.

That little episode brought me to the doctor and a discussion between my Mom and Dad as to whether they should keep the dog. Of course, me being six years old, I promised never to do anything stupid like that again. I cried and begged them not to get rid of my dog and what had now become a neighborhood hero. They agreed to give me a chance.

The next month was great. We had a small grocery store just a block from our house. Mom would let me go there for something she had forgotten or used up. I usually got to take Hi with me. When he was told to heel, he would walk with me, right at my side. I never had to put a leash on him. While at the store, he sat outside and waited for me on the "stay" command. It didn't matter who or what walked by him--he stayed! I was the envy of all the kids on the block because I had such a great dog.

Unfortunately, the kids on the block and I did not always get along. One day, I had done battle with one of them, and we ended up throwing rocks at each other. It was such a vital thing that I can't even remember why now. I ran up the alley and into my back yard through the gate. Billy followed me, but stayed in the alley. He heaved another rock at me. I ran toward the house. Hi was standing there. "Sic em!" I yelled. Hi took off across the back yard. Billy literally froze in his tracks. Hi had reverted at that command and was on a mission to kill!

Fortunately, my mother was looking out a back window and it was summer so the window was open. She yelled, "Halt!" I can still remember the skidding halt Hi came to. "Stay!" Mom yelled. Her next command was to me. "You get your butt in this house, now!"

That was the end of me having the coolest dog in the neighborhood. Now, of course, I can understand why. At the time, of course, I begged and cried again, but, this time, to no avail.

My Dad had done some remodeling work for Christian Brother's College a few miles from our house. It was called a college, but was actually a private, prep high school. They had been having some problems with break-ins at the school. Hi was sent off to them to act as a night watchman. That was a Friday.

The following Monday, a man was caught hiding on top of a huge industrial water heater in the basement. Hi was lying on the floor in front of him, paws crossed, just daring him to come down. The man was extremely grateful to be arrested for burglary because he said he had been there since Saturday night.

Hi lived out his years at Christian Brother's, having a very full and productive life.