

Marine Rescues Nubs the 'Miracle Dog'

Maj. Brian Dennis befriends a special dog while on duty in Iraq, and helps bring him home.

By Katy French

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When Marine Maj. Brian Dennis deployed for his second tour of duty in Iraq, he was prepared to train Iraqi forces. But he didn't know that a different assignment awaited him: an international rescue mission.

It was October 2007, and Dennis was patrolling a border fort near the Syrian border when a pack of wild dogs approached his troops. One dog was particularly noticeable – his ears had been cut off by an Iraqi soldier – and though scrawny, only 30 or 40 pounds, Dennis says it was obvious he was the leader. He was also the most sociable. "He came right up to us and played with us," Dennis says. The 2-year-old German Shepherd-Border Collie mix was subsequently nicknamed "Nubs."

The cheerful canine was a constant presence during Dennis's visits to the fort and lifted the team's spirit.

Nubs was always eager to play, but on their third visit to the fort, they noticed him nursing a wound on his left ribcage. Dennis says he heard secondhand from the Iraqis that one of the soldiers was frustrated and stabbed Nubs with a screwdriver.

Worried he wouldn't make it, Dennis and his team tried to doctor Nubs as best they could, but in the 18-degree weather, the odds were against him.

And again, duty called.

"It broke our hearts to leave him," Dennis says. "A lot of people ask, 'Why didn't you stay with him?' But Iraq is the wrong place for a dog lover, and if you stopped every time you saw a sad dog story, you wouldn't be focused on the mission."

Luckily, the team's efforts were rewarded when they returned weeks later to find Nubs on the mend. Dennis was relieved to see Nubs recovering, but the team was headed to a command outpost on the Jordanian border, and he'd have to say goodbye to the dog yet again.

Forty-eight hours later at the outpost, Dennis received completely unexpected news: Nubs was outside.

"It was incredible," Dennis says. Nubs followed the convoy over brutal terrain – through several dog pack territories – to the outpost more than 70 miles away. "When I saw him, he was all bitten up and had been in a lot of dogfights," Dennis says. "It was amazing what he'd gone through."

Some have suggested Nubs may have visually tracked the trucks or followed their scent, but Dennis says it's still a mystery.

After his amazing journey, the Marines fell in love with Nubs, building him a doghouse and making him camp dog. Unfortunately, that was against the rules, and not everyone at base felt the same way about harboring a fugitive Iraqi dog.

"A couple guys who were sticklers for rules," Dennis says. "Well, they told on us." He was ordered to get rid of the dog, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise, Dennis says.

After sending an e-mail asking for help to save Nubs, Dennis raised the nearly \$5,000 it took to transport Nubs back to his home in San Diego. Nubs arrived in the states safe and sound in February 2008, Dennis followed a month later. He worried Nubs might not remember him, but it only took a few sniffs for Nubs to recognize his old friend.

Nubs settled into his new life remarkably well, but he still carried his past with him, not only bearing physical scars, including the stab wound, but harboring emotional scars, too.

"Nubs had to go through a lot of socialization; it's taken a lot work to get him to understand," Dennis says. "Before us,



almost every encounter he had with a living creature was violent.” But with the patience of a dog trainer who donated his services, Nubs has been successfully rehabilitated.

It was an incredible journey for both Dennis and Nubs, and Dennis wanted to share their story but didn’t know how. When approached by authors Kirby Larson and Mary Nethery for a children’s book, Dennis knew it was the right fit.

The book, “Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine & a Miracle,” has brought much attention to Nubs. Now, with national TV appearances, a Facebook page, and a potential movie in the works, Nubs is enjoying a life unlike any he’s ever known. But at the end of the day, he’s still just a dog – and he still loves those belly rubs.

Nubs: The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine & a Miracle,” by Maj. Brian Dennis, Kirby Larson, and Mary Nethery is on sale now.

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