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# Nubs, the Iraq war dog, arrives at his new home

## Friends will care for mutt until Marine buddy returns

**By Michael Stetz**

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Nubs wasted no time melting hearts.

Big, tough Marines said things like, “Oooohhh,” and gently stroked his fur as they cradled him. Reporters and camera crews swarmed around him.

The German shepherd/border collie mix was sweet, gentle and a little on the scrawny side when he arrived at Lindbergh Field in San Diego yesterday evening. But he should gain a few pounds now that he'll be fed regularly.

Life in Iraq can be tough on a dog. Count Nubs among the luckiest. He got out thanks to a San Diego-based Marine, Maj. Brian Dennis, who befriended him and then had him flown home.

War brings horror, tragedy, the most heart-wrenching of moments. At least, sometimes, along comes something like this.

“It's amazing, he's finally home,” said Capt. Eric Sjoberg, who's going to care for Nubs with his wife Chrissy until Dennis, a Marine buddy, returns from Iraq in the spring.



EARNIE GRAFTON / Union-Tribune

Marine Capt. Eric Sjoberg and his wife, Chrissy, greeted Nubs at Lindbergh Field. They will be looking after the German shepherd/border collie mix for Maj. Brian Dennis.

Nubs licked Sjoberg's face. He panted patiently as cameras filmed and snapped pictures. "You're seeing first-hand why the guys over there fell in love with him," Sjoberg said.

Nubs is about 2. When young, his ears were slashed off because an Iraqi thought that would make him tough and alert.

That's why Dennis named him Nubs. That's all he had left of his ears.

And that was hardly Nubs' worst moment. Once, he was stabbed with a screwdriver. Dennis patched him up as best he could, but didn't think Nubs would make it. The wound was deep. He slept with him that night to keep him warm as temperatures dipped to 18 degrees.

Dennis fell for the dog hard. The e-mails he sent to friends spoke of his life in Iraq and they always seemed to mention this tough little dog, said Maj. Chris Collins, his roommate in San Diego.

"It seemed that something bad would always happen," Collins said. "He'd get into a fight or something. Nubs was always in bad shape."

Dennis, who is based at Miramar Marine Corps Air Station, is serving along the border between Iraq and Syria, where he is helping to train Iraqis. It's rough terrain. Nubs and other dogs lived in an old Iraqi fort and survived on food scraps.

Nubs ran wild. He had no owner, no home, no collar, nobody to play fetch with, no one to bring a slipper to, no Alpo, nobody to scratch behind his ear. No name, even, until Dennis came along.

But even Dennis didn't think the relationship would last. He's in a war zone, after all. When Dennis and his team were ordered to move 70 miles away, he figured life with Nubs was over.

It wasn't. Nubs somehow tracked the Marines to their new location, showing up two days after they did. Dennis was amazed. How'd he do it? He was convinced then that he couldn't leave this dog behind.

He couldn't keep him in Iraq, of course. It's against the rules. So he wrote home, saying he wanted to take Nubs back to the U.S.

"We thought he was crazy. We didn't think it was possible," Sjoberg said.

Friends rallied, raising more than \$3,500, and the wheels were put in motion.

**Yesterday, after a couple stops along the way, Nubs came home.**

**And soon he'll be frolicking in the sands of a local dog beach, far away from the stark desert sands of Iraq.**

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