



# PSI Salutes Our Military Veterans



On November 11, Veterans Day is celebrated across the United States. In recognition of this important national observance, PSI salutes all of our members who have served in the military prior to becoming professional pet sitters. Here are some of their stories.



**Cynthia Johnson**  
**Copy Cat & Dog Care, Lebanon, OH**  
I served for 10 years in the U.S. Air Force and am a disabled veteran



(service connected, 50 percent). I served active duty in the USAF from 1985-1995: Staff Sergeant. I took my Basic Training and Tech School in Texas and then was stationed at Hickam AFB, HI, for four years and Griffiss AFB, NY, for six years.

After I left the service, I was a city mail carrier for the U.S. Postal Service (a mini-military!) for 12 years. I had the opportunity to take the lead at an existing pet-sitting

service (Copy Cat & Dog Care) in 2008 and I jumped at the chance. I've never looked back! (When I become age eligible, I'll be able to collect a small retirement for my 22 years of federal service.)

I absolutely think my military training/experience is proving to be invaluable as a professional pet sitter. Discipline, respect, attention to detail, problem solving/thinking on your feet, team building and cultivating relationships – these are skills I learned while in the USAF. And they have served me well in operating my business.

I do promote that I am a veteran-owned business. At a recent consultation, I was wrapping up and casually asked the pet parent if he had any additional questions, etc. He asked me what I did prior to pet sitting. When he learned that I was in the military he started shaking his head as if to say, "Yes," and he had the **biggest** smile on his face. He said that he wasn't surprised at all. He went on to explain that my presentation was on point, my t's were crossed, my i's were dotted and my attention to detail was impressive.

### **Michelle Romano** **Waggs & Purrs, San Antonio, TX**

I went into the military when I was 19 years old. I served two years on active duty and four years with the U.S. Air Force Reserves as a chaplain's assistant. I worked in the chapel assisting the chaplains, parishioners and my squadron with all their spiritual needs. It was the best decision I ever made in my life. I absolutely loved the military life.

It took many years after my military career to decide to do pet sitting, but using the skills I learned, I knew I could be an awesome entrepreneur. My military training definitely helps in my pet sitting—accepting the early visits, long hours, endless scheduling and rescheduling, knowing how to speak to clients and ultimately being able to provide the best care for their pets. I am **on time**, every



time. I do what I say I'm going to do, always doing extra. I learned those skills by being a member of the USAF.

Since I live in a military town, not only do I tell clients that I am a former military member, which speaks to my attention to detail, integrity, dependability and moral character, but I also give a 10 percent military discount to all military families.

I have the compassion and abilities to care for animals, dedication and high moral values. I provide the utmost quality pet care for responsible pet parents. I'm very proud to be a veteran of the U.S. Air Force.

### **Cliff Lemke** **Anne and Cliff Lemke, Ace Pet Care, Austin, TX**



I come from a military family. My father was a Seaman First Class in the U.S. Navy and served in World War II. I enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1971 during the Viet Nam War and retired in 1992 after Desert Storm. I retired with the rank of Technical Sergeant. My younger sister also enlisted in the U.S. Air Force.

As a child stray dogs were always following me home and I loved nothing better than to train them to do tricks to impress my friends. So, I was delighted when I was assigned to the European Theater working in law enforcement and handling military working dogs. I've worked with the military working dogs in England, and in Italy handling MWD patrol/narcotic detector dogs. I worked in Germany as a trainer and kennel master. As a kennel master I oversaw the well-being, safety and training of all working dogs assigned to that station.

After I retired from the Air Force I spent a few years training police service dogs and personal protection dogs. I've trained Belgian malinois, German shepherds, Bouvier des Flandres, Labradors, and Rottweilers as military working dogs and police service dogs.

I think there was divine intervention in my coming into pet sitting! My wife had passed away. All during her illness my wife kept making me promise that I would get married again and although I made the promise, it was half-hearted. One day, quite accidentally, I crossed paths with Anne and I knew I wanted to meet her. Over time, as we got to know each other, Anne would talk about her pet-sitting business: the cute things that happened and any problems she might be having with a pet. I enjoyed giving her advice and it wasn't long before I found myself wanting to be a pet sitter too. I realized that I had been missing working with furry friends. I started helping Anne at nights and on weekends. Eventually Anne and I married and I became a full-time partner in Ace Pet Care. We both really enjoy working together and caring for our clients' fur kids.

As a kennel master I had to learn a lot about the care and welfare of dogs, much of which is similar to the care and welfare of all types of pets. As a trainer of the military working dogs, police service dogs and private protection dogs, I had to learn various training techniques – I had to be able to assess temperament; I had to learn to work with and motivate different breeds. I needed to be proficient at giving my charges a sense of trust, security and well-being. I also needed to recognize hazardous situations, and to pick up on any health issues that I might be seeing. I had to learn to work through pet-behavior issues. All of this experience is put to great use as a pet sitter.

We are appreciative of our brave service members who protect our country and do offer military discounts. We don't use my military service as a means to promote Ace Pet Care. I am very proud of my service and I am delighted to talk about it with anyone who asks, but it is not a means for finding pet-sitting clients.

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Military working dogs and the police service dogs put their lives on the line for their humans every day. They work in difficult environments



performing courageous acts. Often they get hurt and need extensive physical and mental rehabilitation. A nice way to observe Veterans Day is to help our K9 soldiers by making a small donation to help with their care. There are a number of 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations that cater to the care, rehabilitation and adoption of these very brave souls. Here are a few:

- The Warrior Dog Foundation.** <http://wariordogfoundation.org/>
- Military Working Dog Foundation.** <https://www.facebook.com/MilitaryDogs>
- Mission K9 Rescue.** <http://missionk9rescue.org/>

credentials. They just tell me, "We are happy to have found you, you're hired!" I offer ongoing discounts to seniors, military, teachers and any professional that saves lives for a living.



**Laura Woods**  
**Woods Pet Care, Murfreesboro, TN**

This is a great idea! I don't know how much I can contribute as the only place I was stationed was San Diego and I had to leave the Navy on a medical discharge in just under three years. I was in the Navy, E-4, in the supply field, as a storekeeper Petty Officer. My service was May 1975 – Feb 1978. I was stationed at the Fleet Intelligence Training Center at the Anti-submarine Warfare Base in San Diego as part of the staff. Since my ex-husband was also Navy, there was a large close knit Navy community in San Diego. I often cared for pets for others for free.

**Vicky Minneti**  
**Dog Walks 'N More LLC, San Diego, CA**



I served honorably in the United States Marine Corps for 20 years (1975-1995). I retired as a Gunnery Sergeant, with two military occupational specialties: Purchasing Agent and Drug & Alcohol Counselor. On my final tour I was assigned duty in Fort Bliss, TX, working as a purchasing officer on an anti-drug covert task force where then-Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell was our head.

After retirement, I worked several years as a contract specialist with both the U.S. Border Patrol and with the City of San Diego. In the summer of 2003, I was diagnosed with stage 1 breast cancer and knew I had to reduce my stress and get healthy. I gave up the office jobs, and a dear friend helped me realize my innate love for animals could be turned into a new career path – pet sitting! We had a pajama party and checked out my pet-sitting competition in my area of San Diego. There was one sitter. So I called her up. She said, "This is crazy timing, as I am giving up pet sitting due to a bum leg. I will refer to you most of my client base." I thanked her and never looked back.

My military training helped with many of the skill sets that I employ as a professional pet sitter/dog walker. I was able to complete my Bachelor's degree in psychology and numerous business courses while in the Corps. These skills crossed over nicely to my business relationships with my pet parents and running the behind-the-scenes business aspects of Dog Walks 'N More.

While in the Corps, I lived and worked in many different countries and learned about many different cultures. While in the Philippines, I learned the gift of laughter; while in Okinawa, Japan, I learned the gift of patience; and throughout my career, I learned the true meanings behind the words honesty, integrity and leadership.

Learning life-saving techniques and first aid were vital crossovers into the pet-sitting world and learning self-defense techniques was priceless training, if ever I had to use that as a pet sitter.

I absolutely do use my military service in the promotion of my pet-sitting business. I advertise this fact in local base newspapers, on my website and Facebook page. I get so many military based jobs that the military pet parents usually don't bother looking at my professional

I did not go right into pet sitting professionally after my discharge. My training in the Navy allowed me to go directly into federal civil service. In my 27 years working for the Navy as a civilian I was a secretary, warehouse worker, packer, data transcriber, supply clerk, supply technician and, lastly, a system analyst. After an early forced retirement at 47 (because my last activity was privatized, and no similar job on the horizon), I worked a couple years at a similar job in the same activity as a government contractor. I should mention that during the period of about 1980 – 1988, thanks to the GI Bill, I also completed two AS degrees. With a military move in the mix, degrees took a little longer combined with working. The military enabled me to get AS business and marketing degrees at the same time. This is where I first started my plan to own my business. Many of the courses such as accounting, small business management and marketing were extremely

helpful. Computers of course were still in their infancy at that time, so most of my computer skills came from on-the-job training, with a few brush-ups at a local library.

In 2004 my new husband-to-be was transferred from Jacksonville, FL, to Smyrna, TN. There are no Federal Government Department of Defense jobs here, which is all I was familiar with. I stumbled from one low-paying job to another. On the day of my wedding reception, that's when I reflected, "Laura what do you really want to do?" And it was crystal clear: I wanted to be a professional pet sitter! Relatives thought I was crazy, but I have been so successful they had to eat their words. That was early 2005 and I have never looked back.

My military training gave me leadership skills, flexibility and an empathy I never had growing up in a very small community in Wisconsin. Before the Navy, I had never been on a plane, only been in three states and didn't know anyone of another race. I knew shortly after high school there was something more out there than that small town. When I enlisted, I was told I could put in the paperwork to save my lousy factory job after discharge. I told them, "No thanks; I won't be back."



I do use the Veteran Owned Business logo in my cards and on my website. That is pretty much the extent of it. I do not offer military discounts. For me, the military pay was pretty good. If I did, it would be more of a, "Thank you for your service."

**Jay Pattiz**  
Pampered  
Pet Sitting,  
Warrensburg, MO  
I was an Airman First



Class, U.S. Air Force (1968 – 1971). My main occupation was as an avionics instrument technician performing most of our diagnostic, repair and replacement services inside the cockpits of B-52 Bomber aircraft, KC 135 (Boeing 707) aircraft and Huey Helicopters.

I was stationed mostly at Ellsworth AFB, South Dakota. I never went overseas; I had orders for Vietnam, but they were canceled so I could attend school full time to learn college electronics, math, stats and flight computer instruments.

What I learned in the military that helped me later in business and my pet-sitting careers were advanced math principals and applications, using stats for practical applications, and most of all, the attitude that "change is going to and will happen – so deal with it!" I also learned some about running pet events while being a volunteer worker at the youth center on base.

After military service I went back to finish college, graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in commercial recreation. I then worked a variety of occupations involving statistical analysis, taxes and accounting for more than 20 years before beginning our pet-sitting business in April, 1997.

Being in the military was a great benefit to me overall and helps me to this day. Military service helps you mature quickly and teaches you responsibility in a hurry. It also teaches you to take pride in your work and yourself – In my case, the lives of the people who flew in the aircraft I worked on depended on me doing my job right the **first** time.



**Michelle Boden**  
Sweet Creatures Pet Sitting Services  
LLC, Fairfield, OH

When I enlisted in the Army in 1980 as a veterinary assistant, I planned on taking care of animals, only to find out a few weeks later that Army veterinary assistants actually worked as *meat inspectors*. [I am thankful that] my wise and patient recruiter arranged for me to make an audition tape for a broadcast journalist slot. Unknown to me at that time, this was one of the most coveted and hardest jobs to get in the military. It was life altering that I passed the audition.

My 15 Minutes: Nine months of training later, I was sent to the Republic of Korea and was immediately put on a news set. I was the only American woman on TV every day, anchoring the 6:00 and 10:00 P.M. newscasts and the sign-off at the end of the viewing day. Westerners on TV in Korea were rare and I became a big TV star in a country of more than 40 million people – more viewers than New York City! I was recognized everywhere I went. It was mind-boggling to deal with being famous. Once was enough, thank you.

This extremely exciting job gave me access to many situations unavailable to others of my rank. My active duty assignment lasted for three years and I was Honorably Discharged as a Sergeant. I went to college soon after I was discharged and got a journalism degree from Northwestern University. Within a few years I began running our family business in Chicago, which lasted for more than 11 years. After my dad retired I "ran away" to St. Augustine, Florida, where I knew no one and bought a 1925 cottage in the historic district. I worked on my house and yard daily and also devoted a great deal of time and resources to animal rescue and rehabilitation.

I ended up getting married and moving to Cincinnati, where I tried a variety of different jobs in a six-year period. I finally read something that prodded me into exploring pet sitting as a business. It hadn't occurred to me that this could be a viable career. I read a dozen

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books, including Patti Moran's *Pet Sitting for Profit*, got my CPPS and went to the national conference in Winston-Salem, NC, three months before I opened my business. Once the ball started rolling it wouldn't stop. My whole world opened up when I became a PSI pet sitter. I was finally going to do the kind of work that I'd wanted to do all along.

I wish I had discovered that this was possible decades ago, but I understand that I arrived at this juncture when I was supposed to. Things happen when they're meant to and we hope we're prepared. My military training prepared me for everything that followed. No environment had ever built me up before or recognized my value like the military. I became a stronger, more confident person as a result of that experience. Ever since the Army, nothing has been that hard for me. I was near the bottom of my class in high school, and then managed a B+ average at Northwestern while working full time and supporting myself. I was second in my class in a very demanding law program.

I can't tell you what a source of pride this is for me. I'm one of five kids (and the only daughter) and the first in my family to have a university degree. The military made me feel like I could do anything I wanted. What a gift! I don't promote it but I do tell people about it. It's in my bio on my website. I'm proud of the experience and feel it says a lot about me.

### **Brenda Dennison** **Lucky Paws Pet Services, Findlay, OH**

Thanks for thinking about us. The military is always a part of me. I am an Air Force veteran, serving from 1980-1986. I was a sergeant and my job title was intelligence operations



two days in 2012. Someone reminded me how good I was with pets; the next day friends asked me to watch their pets while on vacation. They would pay me for it....lightbulb moment! They also mentioned I should start a business and showed me a business class that the Hancock Community Action Center had to help low income individuals open new businesses.

I did some quick research on sitters in the area and I called about the classes and I was in one within two days. I had great support from the Community Action Center; I could have never done it without them.

And then ....BOOM...I was a pet sitter. **A professional pet sitter.**

My military training and experience has definitely helped me as a professional pet sitter. I will go through any weather, disaster, come up against coyotes or strangers for the pets. The military teaches us how to manage; how to get the job done and get it done right. It also teaches patience for working with others (like ICs, clients, etc.) and that no matter what comes up in our lives, the job has to be completed. It also helps teach us how to be calm in a dangerous situation, which helped with a dog attack I had happen.

We also learn Honesty, Integrity and Grit. It also taught me I had self-worth...which I needed at the time. It certainly helps the clients trust us more also.

I have my service record on my website, in my brochures and I always mention it somehow during a meet-and-greet. I also have veteran tags on my car which clients frequently ask me about. I do offer discounts to the active and retired military.

I'm not sure I would have grown my confidence and more importantly, my self-worth, without the military, which is why I believe I was courageous enough to start a business. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't have thought I could do it if I hadn't been a veteran. **psw**

specialist. Basically, part of my job entailed briefing, debriefing and training fighter pilots for their missions (like the character "Charlie" in Top Gun).

My specialty was Escape and Survival, which included teaching pilots how to survive in the wilderness or in villages with people in that country, if shot down, or how to survive if they were captured and became prisoners of war. Other jobs were reading all top secret messages and deciding who they go to (we had no computers, all Intel work was done manually); learning to speak Russian to keep an eye on them; I also had a knack for learning and reading everything Middle Eastern at a time when we worried about it, but our country did not. So I traveled a lot to get information and to give briefings when needed. We also worked with President Reagan on the 1986 Libya Bombing.

Why am I saying all this? Because pet sitting is so much more fun! I didn't go straight to pet sitting after the military. It took me years to get here. But I wish I had figured it out right away. I became a pet sitter during the last recession because no one would hire a woman here who was older. (Yes, that's the truth for me and many others).

I wanted something I would be happy doing instead of something to "just bring in money." It literally happened over