

# No mongoose were harmed in the writing of this editorial - OK, just one...but he asked for it

by Staff Sgt. Dave Lankford

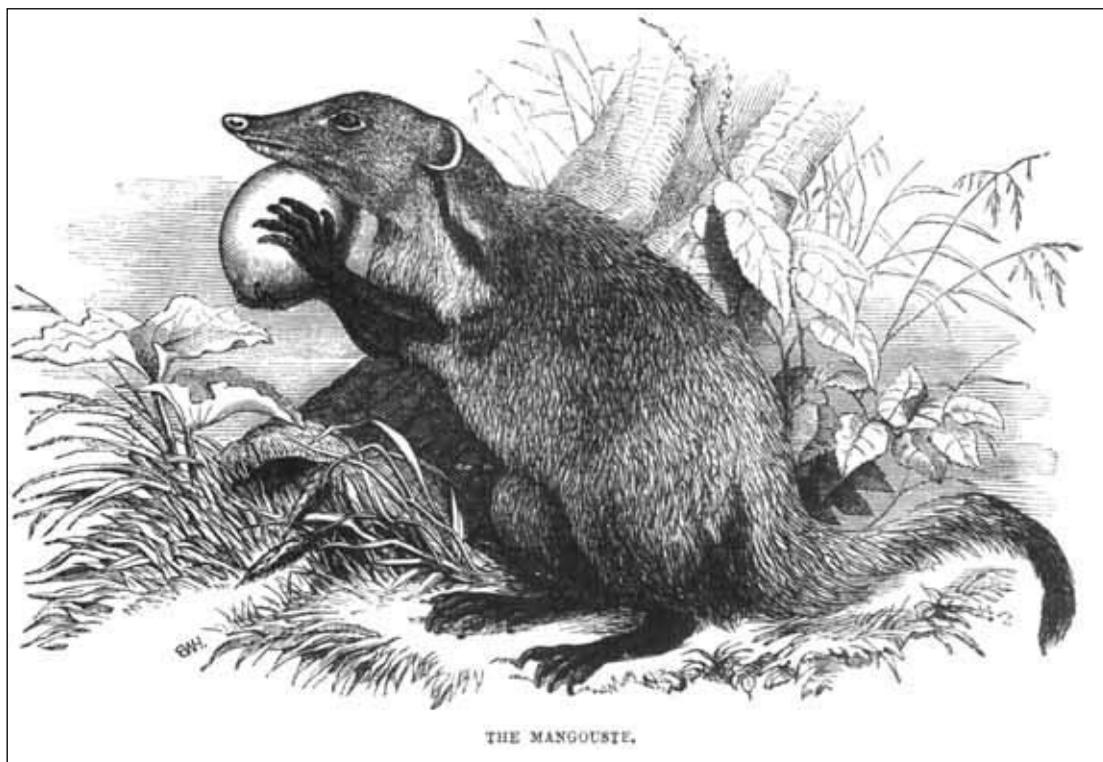
Anaconda Times staff

**LSA ANACONDA, Iraq** — Dear Mrs. Lankford, we regret to inform you that your son was killed by a big friggin' bird...

It may sound crazy, but back in '96, I spent a few months with the 2nd Royal Australian Regiment in Townsville, Australia. Naturally, we had numerous safety briefs before we left. But of all the creepy, crawly things that inhabit the otherwise spectacular country, the one a lot of us feared most was a very large, flightless bird called the cassowary. This thing looks like a cross between a six-foot tall, blue turkey and a T-Rex, and from what we were told, it kills more people in Australia every year than crocodiles or sharks.

Fate has a lot of options when deciding how we meet our maker. Some people slip away peacefully in their sleep while others go out in a blaze of glory on the battlefield. One thing I know for sure, I don't want my headstone to read, "He put up one hell of a fight, but in the end, Big Bird took him out."

So what's the point? There are no killer birds in Iraq. This is true, but it has just come to my attention that some of the local mongoose population may have joined the insurgency. One of the little buggers is now chillin' with 70 virgin varmints at the big habitrail in the sky. I know what you're thinking; it was just a cute,



Web Image

fuzzy little mongoose. But this little critter was packing a serious payload...rabies.

According to Dr. Charles Rupprecht, Chief of the Rabies (from rabies) Program at the Centers for Disease Control, rabies is an acute progressive encephalitis. All mammals are potential carriers and can transmit the virus through a bite or scratch. Bats and carnivores are among the most common reservoirs.

"More than 55,000 people die each year, usually in developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Rabies has the highest case to fatality rate of any infectious disease. Once clinical signs appear, death occurs within 7 to 10 days. There is no cure," said Rupprecht.

Now, Dr. Rupprecht is an expert in his field, but let's face it, anytime a medical doctor says the words "no cure," I'm going to get a second opinion from someone I know and trust. So, I asked Master Sgt. Patrick Cavanaugh, the 316th medical operations noncommissioned officer in charge, for a second opinion. I didn't like his answer either.

"You're gonna die. It's 99.9 percent fatal. There's a few cases of people that have made it through and not died, but for the most part it's guaranteed," Cavanaugh said. "You're

gonna die."

Now, I've known Master Sgt. Cavanaugh long enough to know that when he gives you his medical opinion you can pretty much bet the farm on it. But don't worry; I'm not going to give you the bad news without the silver lining.

Everyone has heard horror stories of the endless series of rabies shots in the stomach required to treat the virus, but that's not even the worst part.

"In the old days the shot was made of horse serum, and you could have a reaction to the horse serum; it was pretty gruesome, but it was still better than death," said Cavanaugh.

Yeah, just barely if you ask me. But, here's the silver lining I promised you; the shots are no longer made of horse serum and they are no longer injected in the stomach. The best part is, when the rabies vaccination is administered before clinical signs appear you will live. I say again, you will live.

As always, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The best advice is the same thing you've been told since your first days in the military...leave the wild life alone. An animal's normal behavior is to avoid humans. Very rarely will a wild animal approach a human. So what appears to be a sign of affability or even affection may be symptoms of rabies, Cavanaugh said.

A person who is bitten

might say, "it wasn't afraid of me, so I was going keep it as a pet," or, "I love all animals...even if they're foaming at the mouth." Cavanaugh has heard it all before, and is not one to mince words. His response to excuses like these is simple; "You're an idiot. Don't handle the wildlife."

Now, my understanding is that the Soldier bitten by the insurgent mongoose was not doing anything wrong. The sneaky little varmint infiltrated his building, and when the Soldier politely asked it to leave it bit him right through his boot. The next time, instead of the mouth, the Soldier needs to put his boot in the mongoose's fourth point of contact.

It may seem like I'm singling out our little mongoose friends, but Rikki Tikki Tavi isn't the only offender. Again, any mammal can contract and spread rabies. The important thing is to watch the animal's behavior, and if you are bitten report it. Sure, it is against regulations to keep pets here, but you will heal a lot quicker from an article 15 than you will from being dead.

As Soldiers, we all know if something does not look right it is probably not. Stay safe out there, and leave the wild-life alone.



Staff Sgt. Dave Lankford

## Combat Stress Control

785th Medical Company (CSC)

# 433-2402

- Individual counseling by appointment or walk-in
- Command referrals
- Services for combat and operationally stressed soldiers

### RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

MONDAY TO SATURDAY  
3:30 TO 4 P.M.

### STRESS MANAGEMENT

MONDAY AND THURSDAY  
10 TO 11 A.M.

### HOME FRONT ISSUES

MONDAY AND THURSDAY  
5 TO 6 P.M.

### CONFLICT RESOLUTION

WEDNESDAY AND SATURDAY  
11 A.M. TO NOON

### ANGER MANAGEMENT

TUESDAY AND FRIDAY  
11 A.M. TO NOON

### ANXIETY AWARENESS

WEDNESDAY  
3 TO 3:30 P.M.  
SATURDAY  
10:30 TO 11 A.M.

### SLEEP HYGIENE

MONDAY AND THURSDAY  
6 TO 6:30 P.M.

### GOAL SETTING

MONDAY AND THURSDAY  
11 A.M. TO NOON

### DEPRESSION AWARENESS

WEDNESDAY  
2 TO 3 P.M.  
SATURDAY  
10 TO 10:30 A.M.

### COMMUNICATION SKILLS

TUESDAY AND FRIDAY  
10 TO 11 A.M.

### RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

WEDNESDAY  
9 TO 11 A.M.

for more information,  
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[tammy.phipps@us.army.mil](mailto:tammy.phipps@us.army.mil)

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