

Language and Literature Reading Assessment  
**Semper Fido Part Two** by Lt Col. Jay Kopelman with Melinda Roth  
*1,969 words*

Your Notes

*In part one of this narrative, Lieutenant Colonel Jay Kopelman, a marine serving in Iraq, befriends a stray puppy. This is strictly against military regulations. In part two, we learn how he deals with this dilemma.*

I started calling friends and family, telling them about Lava and asking for help. At first I thought that the silences on the other end were the usual international lags on a cell-phone call. But I soon realized that my friends back home were trying to place the word puppy in the context of war.

When I called one of my best buddies back in San Diego, Eric Luna, and asked him if he knew how to get a dog out of Iraq, I heard nothing for a long time but some static. "Hey, Easy E, you still there?" I said.

"Yeah, man, I'm here. What did you just say?"

"Puppy. I have a puppy. Can you help me figure out how to get him out?"

Eric collected his wits. "Sure, man. Yeah, anything you want."

I returned to the main base with Lava on Thanksgiving Day in a Humvee -- which, after serial bombardments, firefights and crashes, looked more like a secondhand stock car. Lava loved the loud trip; he perched on my lap and drooled. Once safely at Camp Fallujah, I spoke to the military dog handlers. The working dogs made up an elite unit that out-specialized any weaponry or high-tech mapping systems the U.S. armed forces possessed.

When I asked if Lava could hide out in one of their kennels, the handlers shook their heads. "Can't help you, sir." They said that the closest military vet who could give Lava vaccinations worked in Baghdad -- some 40 treacherous miles away. They doubted he'd be able to help. They wished me luck, though, and gave me what I suspected was some very expensive dog food.

When I contacted the military vet in Baghdad, he respectfully reiterated General Order 1-A, adding that diseases such as leishmaniasis, hydatid disease and rabies were common among stray dogs in Iraq. "My apparent lack of concern isn't due to not caring," he wrote. "I'm simply following orders."

Well, shoot. But I wasn't about to stop there. I'd already snuck Lava into the officers' building, where he slept with me on a cot. On the computer, I was googling anything I could think of -- puppy passport, help Marine help puppy. I felt frantic about Lava's fate. Yes, I was a Marine, brave to the point of insanity. But I'd be damned if I was going to let anyone shoot my puppy.

## **Daring Rescue Plan**

For most of January and February 2005, I worked at the Joint Task Force in Balad, replacing a lieutenant colonel there. I had great accommodations: a trailer with a real bed, a refrigerator, a wall locker. We also had a gym and plasma TVs in our command center. It might have been a great mission, except I worried about Lava. I knew he was safe with the Marines back at Camp Fallujah, but I was trying to save his life.

For a while Corporal Matt Hammond watched him, even building him a little plywood hooch, which the guys filled with toys and blankets and hid in the commanding general's personal security detachment, the last place on earth anyone would think to look. Then we came up with a plan to get Lava to Baghdad, where he would be vaccinated. The guys managed to convoy there, and at a prearranged time and place handed Lava off to journalist Anne Garrels, whom I'd become friendly with and who promised, by e-mail, to watch him for a few weeks at her National Public Radio (NPR) compound.

The hand-off was a bit of an ordeal, I heard later. Matt struggled to remain emotionless, while Anne grabbed Lava and left. Lava didn't have a collar or a leash, so she had to carry the now-large puppy back to the car. Luckily her Iraqi driver didn't object; most Iraqis did not like dogs. When I read Anne's e-mail from Baghdad, not even Patton's presence could have kept my tears from flowing. "Just to confirm that Lava is safely with me..."

Was I a gutless wimp? Maybe.

Anne would e-mail me with updates whenever she could: "Lava is happy." "He's incredibly affectionate." "He sits beautifully."

Meanwhile, a man she knew in Iraq, someone I'll call Sam to protect his identity, managed to locate a vet and get Lava all his shots and proper documentation. Before long, Anne had to leave Baghdad, while I was assigned to patrol the Syrian border until leaving for the States. By now, I had learned about Ken Lichelider, who owned Vohne Liche Kennels in Indiana. He was a former U.S. Air Force police-dog handler who trained dogs for search-and-seizure work; many of his dogs were used by the military to sniff out bombs in Iraq. There was a chance that Lava could fly out with Ken's dogs and handlers to the United States. "It means putting Lava on a transport with them," John Van Zante told me.

John, of the Helen Woodward Animal Center in California, and Kris Parlett, with the Iams dog food company, were my link to Ken. Iams had even offered to pay all the transport costs. Now we just had to sneak Lava out of the Red Zone in Baghdad, where he was hiding with journalists, to the military base in the Green Zone, the walled center of the city. John and Kris would take it from there. Me, by e-mail: "Thanks, John."

John: "We may actually put Lava on a plane. I hope this is it!"

Then, a worry. The kennel's overseas program coordinator: "Can you confirm

## Your Notes

that Lava has all his health and shot papers in order? Recently we ran into a problem with one of our dogs, and the military vet would not allow the dog to leave the country for an extra thirty days. I don't want that to happen to Lava." Neither did I. On top of that, I was leaving soon.

Sure enough, in early March I left Iraq, spent three days in a tent in Kuwait, and then flew to Shannon, Ireland. I was on my way home, but all I could think about as I drank pints with a bunch of other Marines was this: I just didn't see Lava making it to California to be with me. The plan to fly him out seemed too easy. "You only get so much luck", my thinking went.

But as the weeks passed, the plan was cemented. In the Green Zone, David Mack (not his real name) reviewed Lava's documentation, including an international health certificate for live animals. Security around the Green Zone was cinched tighter than usual after reports of "irregularities" with the Iraqi elections. Demonstrations raged; mortars were launched.

At the NPR compound in the Red Zone, Lava was smuggled into a vehicle with a cameraman, since no animals were allowed to pass through. The vehicle drove to the first checkpoint. Sam waved goodbye. More mortar rounds were launched into the Green Zone. I sat at home in California and waited for an e-mail. And paced. And worried.

The vehicle sped through the dangerous streets, inching toward the checkpoint line. The driver stared forward. The cameraman counted rolls in the coiled barbed wire outside his window.

A bomb dog circled the vehicle as a guard reached through the window to check the cameraman's pass. The pass was good; it was the bomb dog's possible detection of Lava that was so threatening. But he was in search of only one thing, and when he didn't find it, he was off to the next vehicle. The guard scanned the pass and waved them into the Green Zone where, at that moment, the Iraqi government extended the country's emergency state by an additional 30 days. All of us waited. I paced some more.

Iraqi police patrolling the parade ground watched a vehicle trailing dust approach a location in the Green Zone and stop. They watched one man get out and shake hands with another, watched the two men exchange papers, watched a dog jump out of the car. They approached the vehicle and asked to see the papers. What was the dog's purpose?

"He's a working bomb dog," one of the men said. "I'm taking him back to my compound." They examined the papers, the dog, the man's face.

A motorcade then sped to Baghdad International Airport. One vehicle contained David, Lava in a crate, other people, and gunmen in bulletproof vests who guarded the doors and windows. The vehicles zoomed along on a highway where 12 people had been killed by bombs in the last month.

Finally, my dog arrived at the tarmac near a truck loaded with gear. "This is Lava," David told Brad Ridenour, a dog handler for Vohne Liche Kennels and

## Your Notes

another vital link in the chain. Soon after, I received a new e-mail.

I stared. I opened it and read. "As of 1600 hours," it said, "Lava is out of the country." For the second time in my adult life, I broke down and cried.

Brad flew with two other dog handlers to Amman, Jordan, where they passed through customs. They spent the night in a hotel in Amman, while the dogs were kept in an underground garage. As a result, Brad spent most of the night down there. Lava bounced around and wanted to play.

In the morning, the dog handlers were taken to Royal Jordanian, which would fly them to Chicago's O'Hare airport. Ken Lichelider, meanwhile, drove to O'Hare, where he met up with John, Kris and others. They waited in the baggage area. Finally, Lava's crate came through.

John later explained, "That's when the dam just broke." He told me how he rushed Lava outside and exclaimed, "His first pee on American soil!"

And about Lava's behavior once they got to the hotel room, which John described as "Running around and around the room in circles. Wow."

And then John was finally calling me and saying, "He's here. He's safe. He's an American dog." John, Kris and Lava flew into San Diego the next day.

Surrounded by the media, I waited at the Helen Woodward Animal Center. Reporters asked me how I felt. Before I could answer, the airport van pulled up. I could see Lava through the window, see how big he'd gotten. I saw the same face, the same goofy look in his eyes, the tongue hanging out.

When Lava hopped down, stopped and stared at all the reporters, and then turned toward me, I looked a little above his head. That way I didn't see the recognition cross his face, didn't see past and future connect in his eyes. Because if I did, I knew I'd lose it then and there, and none of my comrades in the U.S. Marine Corps would ever speak to me again.

I'd wanted him to be alive. I wanted to know he was breathing and leaping after dust balls. If he was alive, then he would make it here to California and run on the beach and chase the mailman instead of strangers with guns. I'd wanted him to be alive almost more than anything I could think of.

Now Lava was headed my way. Fast. As fast as his legs could carry him. As I bent down to deflect the crash, that's when I saw the look in his eyes. It was an older version of the look he gave me when I first spotted him that day in Iraq: "I am going to kick your butt."

Film footage showed a dog barreling toward a well-composed Marine in uniform who bent down, caught the dog in mid-leap, stood up and turned circles with his face buried in the dog's fur. Lava was safe. He was home.

1. Name one dynamic character in this reading and explain why they would be considered dynamic.

\_\_\_\_\_ : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Why is “Semper Fido” an appropriate title for this narrative? Consider “Semper Fidelis” means “Always Faithful”, and it is the motto for the US Marine Corps.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Put the locations of Lava's journey from “Daring Rescue Plan” to the end of the reading in chronological order. The first location is marked for you.

- 1. Lava is with the Marines at Camp Fallujah
- 2. Lava spends a night in a Jordan hotel’s underground garage
- 3. Lava arrives at the Helen Woodward Animal Center
- 4. Royal Jordanian flies Lava to Chicago O’Hare airport
- 5. A NPR cameraman smuggles Lava into the Green Zone of Bagdad
- 6. Disguised as a bomb dog, Lava is taken to the Bagdad airport
- 7. Lava gets his shots while in the Red Zone of Bagdad

4. At many points in this story, Lieutenant Colonel Kopelman expresses his doubt about the success of this operation, saying, "You only get so much luck". Why do you think he feels this way?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Why do you think this story is told in narrative form from the soldier’s point of view? How does the narrative make the story interesting to the reader?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. After reading about this rescue, someone might ask, "Why would all these people risk their lives, jobs, and reputations for this puppy?" Explain what you think the answer might be.

---

---

---

7. After considering what this story tells us about humans in war, explain one theme that you found in this selection.

---

---

---

---