

# A Canine Hero

In the early morning of February 10 Wodan laid his life on the line to save his human partner. Harrisburg Police Officer Michael Lamonto and his canine partner, Wodan, a five-year-old Belgian Malinois, had been called to a disturbance at a bar in Harrisburg. A suspect tried to avoid arrest. The dog went into action and, according to Officer Lamonto, “was shot four times by a criminal attempting to avoid arrest. Wodan’s bravery saved my life and the lives of all the officers in the area as he kept the perpetrator busy even after being shot several times. This gave a fellow officer and I time to return fire as the perpetrator was firing at me. The perpetrator was hit and subsequently taken into custody.”

Wodan was critically injured. He sustained gunshot wounds to both front legs, his abdomen, chest and back. He was rushed to a local veterinary emergency clinic where his life was saved. The muscles, tissues, and blood vessels in his left front leg were torn apart by the bullets. The veterinarian feared that the leg might have to be amputated to save the dog’s life. Every attempt was made to prevent that.

On February 12 a Pennsylvania State Police helicopter airlifted Wodan to Penn’s campus and the dog was admitted to VHUP. Here surgeons attempted to save the leg. **Dr. Jeff Christiansen**, a resident in surgery, removed the destroyed tissue. He inserted antibiotic pellets into the large wound area to forestall infection. The dog also received intravenous antibiotics. No one was sure whether the leg could be saved because of the severe damage to the soft tissues and the blood vessels.

Due to his severe trauma and hemorrhage, Wodan was throwing blood clots to the tissue

the surgeons were trying to save. Wodan was admitted to ICU — he needed to be watched around the clock. He received heparin ( a blood thinner), oxyglobin (hemoglobin, the molecule that carries oxygen. This is many times smaller than a red blood cell and can sometimes bypass clotted vessels that a red blood cell cannot), and vasodilators to increase the diameter the blood vessels. The dog received painkillers, fluids and parenteral nutrition because he would not eat.

Each day the wound needed to be cleaned and debrided. This involved surgery and anesthesia. Wodan, being a police dog, was very protective of his run, despite his injury. He wore a muzzle which was taken off by Officer Lamonto when he visited for a few hours each day. For about ten days it was “touch and go” for Wodan’s leg. For a while there was great worry about the blood supply to the lower leg and the foot, but gradually things improved



and the paw felt warm to touch. Infection was another danger, antibiotics and frequent debriding kept it in check.

The removal of muscle tissue was massive, particularly in the dog’s lower leg. He lost all of the muscles that would allow him to flex his carpus (equivalent of the wrist) Dr. Christiansen

was very worried whether the dog would have control over his foot or whether it would need surgery to stabilize it. Only time would tell.

The turning point came on February 23. Wodan ate on his own! He was bright and alert and very frustrated at being confined in an ICU run. His blood work looked good. Dr. Christiansen decided that the dog would

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recover better at home. The next day a delegation from the Harrisburg Police Department arrived at VHUP to take the hero home. He tried to jump right into his K-9 patrol car. Officer Lamonto gave him a lift and the dog settled in.

Wodan was not healed yet. He needed to come to VHUP every other day for bandage changes and check-ups. His human partner gladly complied. Eventually Wodan’s regular veterinarian, **Dr. Deborah Keim, V’84**, took over the bandage changes and the frequent monitoring. Trips to Philly became more infrequent. VHUP’s nutritionist, **Dr. Cathy Michel**, prescribed a special diet for the dog who had lost a lot of weight. Wodan received hydrotherapy at Dr. Keim’s facility to strengthen his leg. It looks as if the carpus functions normally and will not need to be fused.

The dog has a big scar and he lost the tissue on his foot pads. This has grown back and daily Wodan puts more weight on his leg.

Wodan’s actions and injuries created a great deal of interest in the Harrisburg area. The dog received mail, people donated money to help cover his considerable medical expenses and the K-9 police officers of many police departments offered their support to Officer Lamonto. A web site was set up where his fans could and can follow his progress <[www.wodan.pa.net](http://www.wodan.pa.net)>.

Wodan’s dramatic story illustrated the need for speedy transfer of severely injured police dogs to VHUP. PennSTAR, the medivac service at Penn’s human hospital, has offered to transport severely injured police dogs via helicopter to HUP from where they will be taken to VHUP by Penn’s police force. Everyone hopes that this service will not be needed too often.