

# VSES Success Story:

## “Rony - A Canine Hero”



### **Rony**

Rony was a 6 year old male German Shepherd who was seen at VSES for chronic kidney failure and protein-losing nephropathy (PLN). Originally from Germany, Rony was adopted by the military and was trained to sniff out potassium based bombs. Rony was based at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, and while there developed a cataract in his left eye, which eventually made him blind on that side. Because Rony could not see out of this eye, he sometimes would bump into things. Rony still got around fairly well, but his impaired vision made it too dangerous for him to be in the field sniffing out bombs. Rony was such a great dog though, that the military found another job for him – training the new handlers for bomb sniffing dogs. Since Rony already knew what he was doing, he made it easier for the handlers to learn.

Rony was diagnosed with kidney failure in December 2005, although his symptoms were mild at that time. Ultimately, Rony’s kidney failure became bad enough that the military honorably discharged him. As a veterinary technician for military dogs, Tricia first met Rony in 2007; with Rony’s warm and friendly personality, it did not take her long to fall in love with him. Thanks to “Robby’s Law”, passed in 2000, retired military dogs can be adopted by people capable of handling them. When Tricia heard that Rony was up for adoption in 2009, she jumped at the opportunity to make him part of her family.

Rony presented to VSES with severe chronic kidney failure in the spring of 2010. This causes the “kidney values” (BUN and creatinine) to become elevated as the kidneys cannot clear them (or many of the body’s other waste products) from the blood stream properly. In early stages of the disease, the patient may have no symptoms or he or she may just be urinating more than usual. In later stages of the disease, the patient may have vomiting, diarrhea, stomach ulcers, a decreased appetite, and high blood pressure. Rony had symptoms of his kidney failure but they were much milder than one might expect by looking at his blood work; since his disease progressed slowly, his body was able to adapt and compensate for the changes. With chronic kidney failure, medications can be used to decrease nausea, decrease stomach acid (to decrease the risk of ulcers), and increase appetite. Special diets that are formulated for patients with kidney disease can be used to help support the patient. Since these patients can become dehydrated, they should be encouraged to drink as much as possible.

Rony was also losing protein through his kidney, a disease called protein-losing nephropathy (PLN). Protein loss occurs because of disease and damage to the part of the kidney called the glomerulus. Therefore, the concentration of albumin (main blood protein) in the blood becomes low. This protein loss can lead to muscle wasting and weight loss. Albumin is important to help keep the fluid component of the blood within the blood vessel. When this protein’s blood concentration becomes low, fluid can leak out of the blood vessels, which can lead to edema (swelling of the body, especially feet and face) and effusion (fluid build-up in the chest or abdomen). PLN can also lead to high blood pressure and an increased risk of developing blood clots. Medications can be used to try to change the blood flow to the kidneys in an attempt to slow protein loss.

Both chronic kidney failure and PLN are usually progressive but different animals progress at different rates. Some dogs and cat worsen quickly while others will hold fairly steady over a number of years. Rony did fabulously with these diseases for many years prior to coming to VSES. After Rony first presented to VSES, we were able to start him on medications that made him feel significantly better. He became less lethargic and was eating better for awhile. Until the very end of his life, during which his diseases were extremely progressed, he had an excellent quality of life. Ultimately, his diseases became so bad that he did not respond despite aggressive medical care and his family decided to put him to sleep so that he would not have to suffer. This decision was obviously a very difficult one for them to make, but was one made out of love after discussions between his family and his medical team.

Every pet is special. Through their individual personalities, they bring love and happiness to their families and friends. Rony was no exception – he made friends every where he went. Rony was more than that, though. He was a national hero – a military dog who did everything he could to help this country and his fellow Americans (human and canine). Through helping train military dog handlers, the impact of his efforts has been far reaching. Every day, brave service men, women, and animals (dogs and horses mostly) work hard and risk their lives for our country. VSES would like to thank Rony and his owner Tricia (an assistant in VSES’s surgery team) for their service for this country and all of us. While Rony may not be with us any more, he will not be forgotten.