

Soup enjoys the meaty treats she was often given by crew members locking through Lock and Dam 13.

A Matter of Company

Story by Justine Barati, Public Affairs

On the south end of the lockhouse at Lock and Dam 13, a dog lies buried in a handmade coffin. Her name was Dusty, but to the people at the lock who loved her, she was known as “Soup.”

Dusty’s story began 13 years ago with the arrival of Ernest Jackson, the new lockmaster at Lock and Dam 13.

“They had always had a dog at the lock. However, right before I started, their dog had died,” said Jackson. “The lockmaster told them they had to ask the new lockmaster for permission to get another dog,” he said.

Within weeks of Jackson’s arrival, they had a new puppy at the lock and dam. Dusty was part of a litter of black Labrador and Irish Setter-mix puppies being given away by an area farmer. Leonard Hebel, a lockman at Lock and Dam 13, brought the small puppy to the lockhouse when she was 10 weeks old.

Soon after her arrival, Dusty had the run of the lock and dam and became “everybody’s friend,” said Jackson.

“When she was young, she would hunt,

run, ride on the back of the lock scooters, and greet tows and boats as they locked through,” he said.

Dusty soon became a fixture at the lock and dam. She was known by everyone who worked there, as well as those who locked through.

She acquired her nickname Soup because of her love of food ... especially soup.

“One day, one of the guys said, ‘Come here Soup Hound,’ and it just stuck. After that, we just started calling her Soup,” said Hebel.

Soup also had a lot of fans on many of the barges and boats that lock through Lock and Dam 13.

“Many of the boats had packages for her when they would come through,” said Hebel. Packages that consisted of steak bones and other meaty tidbits, he said.

“Her favorite boat to lock through was the (Motor Vessel) Twilight. Somehow she knew when that boat was coming through and would get excited as the boat reached the lock. Each time they locked through, they brought Soup a pound of roast beef,” he said.

Soup’s role as man’s best friend

was most evident during the long winter months. When the river was frozen over and traffic stopped, each eight-hour shift was staffed by one worker only. The

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worst shifts occur deep in the winter months, late into the night. One worker sits alone in the lockhouse late at night, as the cold January wind whips around the building. They also occur during the holidays, working alone during Christmas and the New Year.

"These shifts are the longest and the loneliest at the lock, and this is still true today," said Jackson.

"Soup made it a lot less lonely," said Hebel.

"Dogs are good companions for the guys in the winter, when no boats are going through and a single man runs the shift alone," said Jackson.

"She was always there and was a nice companion during one-man shifts," said Hebel. "She made it easier to come to work, because you always knew she was there, waiting for you."

For the last few months of her life, the lockmen knew something was wrong with Soup. She was getting thinner and less energetic.

"We talked about putting her to sleep, but we just couldn't do it," said Hebel.

One of the employees of the M/V Twilight took her home and gave her therapy, as the pet chiropractor had ordered, and she seemed to get better for a time, but then she went downhill again, he said.

On arriving to work one July morning, the assistant lockmaster found Soup lying down beside the lock. That was unusual, because she always greeted people as they came in for their shift. But that day, Soup wasn't there wagging her tail, looking for a pat on the head, or simply there to make the day brighter, in fact, that day she wasn't moving at all ... Soup had died.

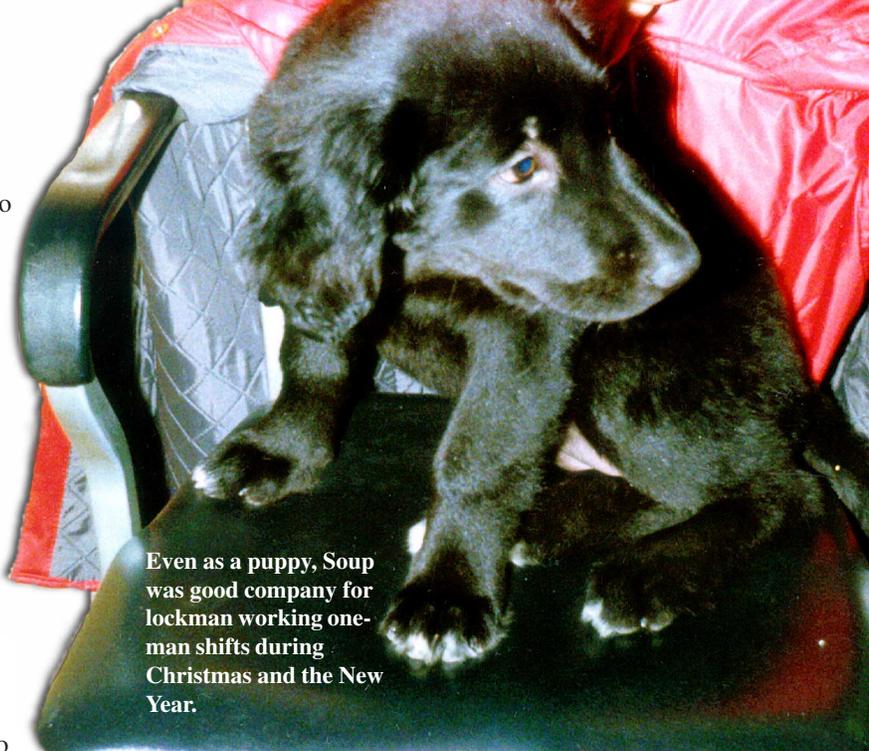
The lockmen built a small coffin for Soup and buried her next to the lockhouse and close to the hearts of the men

who loved her so dearly.

Now, the staff at Lock and Dam 13 anxiously await a phone call from the Clock Tower telling them they can get another animal companion; however, until that call comes, they continue to explain Soup's disappearance to all the tows and boats locking through.

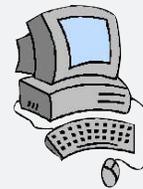
"People are constantly asking about her and bringing her packages. It's hard to tell them that Soup is dead," said Hebel. "She gave the men on the barges something to look forward to as they locked through, and they miss her a lot, almost as much as we do."

Until they get another animal, the men can know the loneliness that faces them this winter on their single-man shifts without Soup by their side. 🐾



Even as a puppy, Soup was good company for lockman working one-man shifts during Christmas and the New Year.

November 5 – 11 is National Animal Shelter Appreciation Week, for more information, please visit your local humane society or the Humane Society of the United States on the Internet at the following website.



On the Internet

<http://www.hsus.org/>



Soup in her favorite spot ... right next to the lunch room table.