

To Whoever Gets My Dog:

Well, I can't say that I'm happy you're reading this, a letter I told the dog shelter could only be opened by Reggie's new owner. I'm not even happy writing it. If you're reading this, it means that I'll never see my dog again. So I want to tell you a few things about him.

First, he loves tennis balls. Throw them for him and he'll chase them anywhere. Reggie knows his commands, "sit," "stay," "come," "heel." He does "down" when he feels like lying down. He's not always good with that. I trained Reggie with small food treats. Nothing opens his ears like little pieces of hot dog.

Finally, please be patient with him. I've never been married, so it's only been Reggie and me for his whole life. He's gone everywhere with me, so please take him on your daily car rides if you can. He sits well in the backseat, and he doesn't bark or complain. He just loves to be around people, and me most especially.

That's why it's going to be hard for him to live with someone new. And that's why I need to share one more bit of information with you....His name's not Reggie. I don't know what made me do it, but when I dropped him off at the shelter, I told them his name was Reggie. He's a smart dog, he'll get used to it and will respond to it, of that I have no doubt but I just couldn't bear to give them his real name. For me to do that, it seemed so final, that handing him over to the shelter was as good as me admitting that I'd never see him again.

But if someone else is reading it, well... well it means that his new owner should know his real name. It'll help you bond with him. Who knows, maybe you'll even notice a change in his behaviour if he's been giving you problems.

His real name is Tank. Because that is what I drive.

I told the shelter that they couldn't make "Reggie" available for adoption until they received word from my company commander. See, my parents are gone, I have no brothers or sisters, no one I could've left Tank with... and it was the only thing I asked the Army to do when I found they were sending me to Iraq, that they make one phone call the shelter... in case I wasn't coming back... to tell them that Tank could be put up for adoption. My Colonel said he'd do it personally. And if you're reading this, then he kept his promise.

Well, this letter is getting really depressing, even though I'm just writing it for my dog. I couldn't imagine if I were writing it for a wife and kids and family. But still, Tank has been my family for the last six years, almost as long as the Army has been my family. And now I hope and pray that you make him part of your family and that he will come to love you the same way he loved me.

That love from my dog is what I took with me to Iraq as an inspiration to do something selfless, to protect innocent people from those who would do terrible things. If I had to give up Tank in order to do it, I am glad to have done so. He was my example of service and of love. I hope I honoured him by my service to my country and comrades.

All right, that's enough. I have to leave this evening and have to drop this letter off at the shelter. I don't think I'll say another good-bye to Tank, though. I cried too much the first time.

Good luck with Tank. Give him a good home, and give him an extra kiss goodnight – every night – from me. Thank you, Paul Mallory.