In 1943, Earnest Archer’s much-loved dog went to war. Even now, in December 1945, Ernest’s heart ached whenever he saw a collie. His hopes of ever seeing Scott again were beginning to fade.

Ernest was 12 now, and he’d given Scott to Dogs for Defense when he was 10 and Scott was 18 months old. He knew when
he gave him away that he might never see him again. He knew – but he’d kept hoping the dog would return when World War II ended. The war was over now – had been over since August. Christmas of 1945 brought Earnest’s sister, Norma, home from the WAVES and his brother, Eldon, home from the Coast Guard, but no gold and white collie came home from the war.

Scott had been Earnest’s dog from the time he was a fluffy ball of fur. Lively and affectionate, Scott had loved playing games with Earnest, especially the game of “chase around and under the dining-room table.” It had been hard to part with his pet, but Dogs for Defense needed spunky, intelligent dogs, and Earnest wanted to help in the war effort. Dogs for Defense, also known as the K-9 Corps, set up several training centers. Earnest and his father took Scott to the center nearest them – Fort Robinson, Nebraska.

There they saw little “barracks” with private entrances and hinged roofs for some 2,000 “dog soldiers.” There was even a hospital for the dogs. Earnest
saw all kinds of dogs there, and one of the instructors told him the breeds who proved best for service were German shepherds, collies and Dobermans. Scott met all the requirements of the K-9 Corps. He was over a year old, obedient, and smart. When Ernest and his dad left Fort Robinson, Ernest knew he would not be allowed to see his dog again until his service days were over. That might be years away. That might be never.

Would Scott be trained to carry messages? To help in hospital service rescue units? Would he be trained for scouting? Would he pull sleds in the Arctic? Ernest would never know.

He did know that Scott would be trained for six weeks by a handler. He heard that the dog handlers learned to love the dogs they handled, that dogs and handlers trusted and respected each other. After “graduation” Scott would receive his uniform - a white rubberized harness – and would then be shipped out to active duty with his handler.

Or maybe he would not complete his training successfully and would be sent home. Ernest, missing Scott so very much, almost hoped this would happen. But it didn’t. Six weeks passed. And then a year. Then two years.

And now, five months after the war ended, Ernest Archer waited for news of Scott.

He read in the newspaper about how dogs served in the Arctic, in Europe, and in the South Pacific. He learned that marines found them helpful in scouting caves and investigating bamboo huts where enemy soldiers might be hiding. He read that having the dogs around boosted the morale of men in the service. And once in a newsreel at the movies, he saw a burial ground in Guam with the dogs’ heads painted on wooden markers to honor the 23 dogs killed in action there. The announcer for the newsreel said that in their line of duty, dogs saved many lives, but that many of them were killed. Ernest worried about Scott.

Ernest found out that many dogs were returned to the United States. He heard that because of their experience, many of them had become killers and could not be returned to their owners. He knew Fort Robinson had set up a demobilization program to try to retrain dogs returned from overseas.
He knew the retraining did not always work and that few dogs were sent back to their original owners.

The Christmas holidays passed and still no news of his dog. Finally, in January, 1946, a phone call came. Mr. Archer answered. Ernest heard him say, "I'll let him speak for himself." He handed the phone to Ernest.

"Ernest Archer?" said the voice on the other end. "I'm calling from Fort Robinson. We have your dog Scott here. Would you like to have him back?"

Would he like to have Scott back! Ernest gave a war whoop.

After two months of de-briefing, a shy, subdued, gold and white collie stepped out of a traveling crate at the Archer home. At first he did not seem to recognize the family. But when Ernest whistled him into the dining room and began the old "hide under the table and chase routine," Scott's tail began to wag. His eyes lit up, and he began to play the game.

Scott had a wound and a frostbitten nose and paws. The Archers believed he had served in the Arctic. And for the rest of Scott's life he would cringe whenever he heard loud noises, especially firecrackers.
Ernest gave Scott up again that summer – for the dog's own good. Scott needed to be away from city noises. He needed space to run. Ernest's sister, Norma, and her ex-Navy-pilot husband took Scott with them to a ranch in Montana. Ernest visited the ranch each summer and was glad to see how much Scott loved ranch life.

Now, almost fifty years later, Ernest Archer still has Scott's picture hanging in the Archer home alongside his honorable discharge certificate, symbol of all the gallant dogs of the K-9 Corps.