



TOMMY VALOR

Tommy, a service dog in training, is named in honor of Tommy Faulkenberry. Tommy joined the US Coast Guard in 1999, where his outgoing personality, work ethic, and natural love for marine navigation accelerated his career quickly. Although he joined out of high school as an enlisted man, he applied and was accepted to Officer Candidate School, where he graduated second in his class. During his time in the Coast Guard, Tommy served on Coast Guard cutters and bowie tenders, on all three coasts of the United States and in the South Pacific. His service included traumatic rescue and recovery efforts in San Francisco, and his boat was one of the first on the scene to render aid in New Orleans in the violent aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. He earned a Meritorious Service Medal for his work during Katrina, and as his last job in the US Coast Guard, he was manager of the service's dive program.

He became ill during a dive school in 2012, and it turned out that he had developed a rare form of muscular dystrophy. His 12 years at sea with the U.S. Coast Guard, multiple medical challenges, and traumatic injuries and experiences made transition to an office and family life very difficult. As the physical toll on him mounted, depression, anxiety, and prescription drug dependence followed, and he sought help at Walter Reed Hospital. He started training service dogs and soon came to realize that he himself could benefit from having a dog of his own. Tommy was matched with Sam, a lovable black Labrador.

Sam was a constant companion through difficult times. Sam is now retired and living in Texas with Tommy's twin sister and her husband, where he continues to bring support and love to three generations of Tommy's extended family.

Tommy was medically retired from the Coast Guard and he found his way to Key West, FL, where he was a dive instructor, boat captain, and studying the restoration and preservation of the coral reef at the College of the Florida Keys. Tommy sadly went missing at sea during a dive on Aug. 2, 2023. Despite an extensive search by the Coast Guard and his many friends in Key West, Tommy's body was not recovered. His family and friends who know him well know that he is at rest in the waters he loved so much. Those that know Tommy well, know that his desires were that when he passed, he wanted to become part of a reef. As his brother so eloquently stated, Poseidon has gained another warrior, and anytime you see the ocean, you will see Tommy.

Tommy's last dive before he went missing was with a family whose boys are on the Autism spectrum, including one who is very uncomfortable in the water. The family reported that Tommy's warmth and love for the sea left a deep impression on them. "Tommy's easy going enthusiasm and compassion broke through barriers and got them to achieve more than they expected. His smile and confidence broke through fears and made a potentially scary experience into a treasured memory...[he] was truly a man of character who unselfishly dedicated his life to making the world a better place."

Tommy's family is delighted to know about Tommy Valor, who is big and strong and who loves the water, just like his namesake. We know he will carry on the selfless love and service that brings hope and healing to the service men and women, and their families, when they need it most.

Valor Service Dogs chose this particular puppy to honor Tommy because at an extremely young age (4 weeks old) this puppy was swimming in the kiddie pool, playing in the sprinkler and splash pad and was an absolute lover of the water. He is big (just like Tommy), kind, loving, affectionate, loyal and so funny. He embodies so many of Tommy's traits and we cannot wait to watch his journey into service.