

Three TCIA Companies Take Part in Pet Project

By Tamsin Venn

Sgt. Spikes fought with the marines in Guadalcanal in World War II. He earned many letters of citation for bravery. But he never received a medal – the U.S. military didn't award medals to dogs.

Sgt. Spikes is a hero buried in the War Dog Memorial in South Lyon, Michigan, among the ranks of four-legged soldiers, mainly German shepherds and Doberman pinschers, who served in World Wars I and II. They did duty as messengers, ambulance aids, enemy detectors and patrollers.

On June 23, Dawn Thierbach, CTSP, Arboriculture Society of Michigan (ASM) secretary, rallied three companies for a Day of Service to clean up the two-acre memorial, which has about 600 headstones commemorating the war dogs. Local volunteers had been clearing the local cemetery for about two years with hand tools.

"We realized we could help them, but if we did a day of service it would be quicker. ASM went for it. Everyone supports dogs," says Thierbach, co-owner of TCIA member Victorian Gardens in White Lake. Also pitching in were Clint Sherrill, owner of TCIA member Camelot Tree & Shrub Co. in Grosse Pointe; and Jason Kappen, CTSP, with accredited TCIA member company Kappen Tree Service of Cass City. All three are also ASM board members.

ASM generously provided insurance from TCIA associate member company Larson's Insurance for the workers.

"We came in and cleared in a day what would have taken two years," Thierbach says.

Camelot's Sherrill says, "I told Dawn, I'd love to do it, just let me know when and where." Three of his employees were thrilled to volunteer, including one of his long-time employees, a new hire, and the woman who runs the office but who had never been in the field.

"We were fortunate enough to be selected by ASM to participate," says Jason Kappen. "We're all about giving back to



Volunteers from the three tree companies involved in the ASM Day of Service pose with the War Dog Memorial marker. Photo courtesy of Dawn Thierbach.

the community, so I jumped at the chance and had a great day. We chipped up a whole load of brush, trimmed out trees, and cut down some." The only downside to the day for some was a nasty rash from poison ivy, which pervades the cemetery.

The companies' crews, equipment and services boosted the volunteers past where they would have been and provided morale for ongoing work. The volunteers had worked tirelessly with hand tools for two years under the direction of Phil Weitlauf, a Vietnam veteran who first discovered the hundreds of grave markers buried in brush in 2009. But when Weitlauf decided the job needed bigger machinery to clear overgrown trees, he sought help from Judy Long, a local Hannabrits German shepherd



A Veteran is a Veteran, whether they are two-legged or four-legged!

trainer. Long then approached Thierbach and asked if her company could take the trees down.

"It was glorious having ASM step in," Weitlauf says. "We tried to do as much as we could with the weed whackers. But that day, I sat there on the cooler just smiling. Look at all the progress we were making in one day! It was such a rewarding feeling. I loved it."

He adds, "All the heavy brush is gone thanks to Dawn and that group."

Victorian Gardens owners Dawn and Jeff Thierbach volunteered because they have a soft spot for support dogs like Hannabrits German shepherds – they have four. Also, Jeff was a search and rescue diver for the Navy from 1981-85 and shared an affinity for the war dogs' dangerous line of work.

Thierbach handpicked the two other tree companies to help, and they went to work on a 90-degree day, spirits high, and well nourished by dog trainer Long, who cooked lunch on the grill for volunteers.

The companies divided the woods into quadrants and each worked on one specific area. All three companies took down trees, chipped wood, loaded wood. Also, with a donated log splitter, the volunteers split

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firewood to donate to veterans and their families for heating. It was truly a communal effort.

The heavy equipment helped move things along quickly. All three companies brought in chippers. Victorian Gardens used a Stihl brush hog FS550 to clear brush.

Sherrill also brought Camelot's lightweight, all-terrain NiftyLift aerial unit to avoid damage to the headstones; and a Dingo loader, "all geared to do a lot of work in a little amount of time."

"Everyone had something to do and made a very big impact," Sherrill says.

The companies worked efficiently and safely. They cordoned off the areas to keep the volunteers away from heavy machinery. Each crew had a CTSP on board.

The War Dog Memorial in Michigan is one of 26 such green retreats in the U.S. that are being newly discovered or created, in increasing recognition of the roles these four-legged heroes played in past wars.



Jake Carufel, CTSP, of Kappen Tree Service; Phil Weitlauf, the Vietnam veteran who started the project; and, Jeff Thierbach, CTSP, co-owner of Victorian Gardens, do some on-site strategic planning. Photo courtesy of Dawn Thierbach.

The leafy memorials also echo new public awareness of the dogs' valuable service in post 9/11 conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The memorial's recovery started by chance. Weitlauf was in Lyon Township on business with his German Shepherd, Cody. Someone asked if he had seen the War Dog Monument down on the corner, and he

replied that he didn't even know it existed.

"We drove down there, and drove right by it, and went back, walked in the woods. There was this huge granite rock, and I could see all these headstones buried underneath this brush, about 35 years of growth. I thought, this is in horrible shape – and something needs to be done."

The following week, he went to his Amvets meeting, and "I stood up and said we need to clean this up, and form a detail, and show some respect for these war dogs." They set up a date for a clean-up and, "People came from everywhere."

The volunteers established a regular schedule for clearing. A county judge even arranged to have about 15 community-service sentenced youths help out.

"We continued doing the best we could with weed whackers, picks, and shovels. We had a couple of dead trees, too close to the road for a novice to cut down."

Weitlauf asked Long to find someone to
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War dogs

(Continued from page 69)

cut down the trees. She made a call to the Thierbachs. Then he got a call saying the ASM had selected the War Dog Memorial for a day of service.

"I was speechless. All three companies showed up, and I was totally amazed. It was the first clean-up where I just stood back and watched."

Weitlauf has spent much of his post-corporate retirement working on the memorial, including its history. (See his award winning video on the project at www.vimeo.com/33994865 and be prepared to weep.) As Weitlauf tells it, Sgt. Spikes was originally buried without a gravestone in a pet cemetery set up by a local vet in 1936 as Happy Hunting Grounds on land donated by the vet's father.

In 1946, word got out about what the war dogs had done. Through a fundraiser, people set up a marker on the huge granite



Jeff Thierbach rigs down a tree. Photo courtesy of Jack & Jane Purslow.

stone and mounted a gilded bronze German shepherd on top (the sculpture had disappeared, and has been replaced) to commemorate all war dogs serving in World War I and II. Spikes was in fact a Doberman pinscher, a breed commonly used in the Asian Pacific in World War II.

The cemetery stayed intact until about 1985, when the aging of volunteers and waning interest led to its deterioration – until Weitlauf's group of volunteers, and

TCIA members stepped in.

The township and the vet never recorded anything.

"We're kind of at a loss to know exactly how many war dogs are there," says Weitlauf, who estimates about 650 pets, along with cats, a parrot, and possibly Admiral Richard Byrd's husky.

"And we know there is one dog, Sgt. Spikes, who fought with the marines in Guadalcanal and Okinawa from 1943 to 1945." When the war was over, the owner did not take Spikes back, possibly out of fear of the dog's behavior. The dog handler took him home, and in 1947 Sgt. Spikes died, and was buried. Citizens decided to make the monument his headstone in 1947, according to Weitlauf.

Weitlauf has now discovered 26 war dog monuments throughout the U.S. The visibility and awareness is coming along, he says, thanks in part to the Vietnam Dog Handlers Association, whose members started publishing the locations.

The working war dogs' roles have changed through the wars. In World War I "ambulance dogs," mostly German shepherds, helped recovery teams locate and bring back wounded soldiers on stretchers from no-man's land, according to Weitlauf.

"Ever since 9/11, the use of canines has tripled, and you're seeing more and more of them," he notes. "That is because of the dog's ability to sniff out explosives." They are now called Military Working Dogs (MWDs) because of the many disciplines they are trained for.

In Afghanistan, 600 dogs are deployed, with more expected. They walk ahead of the patrols and convoys and sniff 95 percent of IEDs in the road. Explosion of roadside bombs are much rarer due to the dogs' work, notes Weitlauf.

Plans for the Michigan War Dog Memorial include fencing in the two acres, and having a non-profit organization take it over, to fund and maintain it.

"The community has realized what we're doing, and is very supportive of returning it to what it used to look like," Weitlauf says.

Meanwhile, the three TCIA companies plan to continue the renovation. The



Jake Carufel of Kappen Tree Service rigs down a tree, careful not to damage the cemetery markers. Photo courtesy of Dawn Thierbach. Photo courtesy of Jack & Jane Purslow.

Thierbachs plan to return in August with a truck and chipper to clear more brush and uncover more gravestones.


"The feeling was addicting. You can't help but feel good about yourself while you're there," says Sherrill. Camelot plans to help out in the winter and continue to excavate the back part of the cemetery.

"Some of the brush is coming back and the stumps were never treated," says Kappen. "I explained I would love to send back a brush hog, and clear the area and mulch it up. And after that do a chemical application to take care of the invasive species, and get it back to nice grass with the beautiful trees that are left there."



Jeff Thierbach uses a blower to clear off some of the newly exposed grave markers. Photo courtesy of Dawn Thierbach.

Of the war dog memorials, Kappen says, "I honestly never even knew they existed. It's just amazing what awesome creatures the war dogs were. They're real soldiers."

Thanks, in part, to three TCIA tree care companies in Michigan, Sgt. Spikes and his canine companions will get the resting place they deserve. 

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DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORIES
THE WAR DOG
CREATED BY VETERANS OF WAR
AND THE NATIONAL
BLACK POWERS' CLUB
AND THE
1914-1918
WORLD WAR I

ALL THINGS
GIVEN BY
GOD

DOG



DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF
THE WAR DOG

ERECTED BY VETERINARIAN, HUMANE
ORGANIZATIONS AND THE DOG-LOVING
PUBLIC TO PERPETUATE KINDNESS TO
MAN'S MOST FAITHFUL FRIEND FOR HIS
HEROIC SERVICES

WORLD WARS I & II







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ORGANIZATIONS AND THE DUTY-LOVING
PUBLIC TO PERPETUATE REMINDERS TO
HONOR MOST FAITHFUL FRIENDS FOR HIS
HEROIC SERVICES
WORLD WARS I & II



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SCOTTY BABY
ERECTED FOR THE
SERVICE OF
SERVANTS & R. SCOTT
BY HIS DEVOTED CARETAKER

BABY BUTT
LITTLE BUTT
SERVING HIS MASTER
SERVANTS & R. SCOTT

TERRY
SERVING HIS MASTER
SERVANTS & R. SCOTT

HUSKY
SERVING HIS MASTER
SERVANTS & R. SCOTT

PRINCESS













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 ORGAN
 PUBAN
 MANS
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 BEST
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DOG
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 COUNTRY



ENDOY
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 BUSTY
 1961 - 1977
 BRUCE
 APR 26 1941 - OCT 18 2000
 WHITE BAY
 1958 - 1987
 BOBBY
 1957 - JULY 26 1990
 TERRY
 SEPT 21 1964 - DEC 9 1997
 GOD LOVE YOU
 ROOGUE
 BOBBY
 TERRY
 BOBBY







DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF
THE WAR DOG

ERECTED BY VETERINARIANS, HUMANE
ORGANIZATIONS AND THE DOG-LOVING
PUBLIC TO HONOR THE KINDNESS TO
MAN'S MIGHTY FRIEND FOR HIS
SERVING IN
WORLD WAR I AND II





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BROUGHTON
BORN SWEDEN
DIED 1845

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