



DOG MAN



A Brotherhood of All Combat Veteran Dog Handlers

VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 31 - NUMBER 1 - MARCH 2024

This Reunion Celebrates 30 Years; VDHA History

By Tom Mitchell
VDHA Member #0002

The upcoming Vietnam Dog Handler Association Reunion in Reno, Nevada, will mark the 30th year of the VDHA. We thought it would be a good time to tell the story behind how the VDHA came to be. So let me start with my wife Lynn. (Points!)

In February 1993, I was between gigs so I had more spare time than ever. I spent most of that spare time looking for books with information about dogs used in Vietnam. There were stories about almost everything, but no matter where I looked there wasn't a thing about dogs.

So of course I complained a lot about it and one day my wife told me to stop complaining and do something about it. I replied that I had no idea what to do about it, to which she responded saying, "Well, why don't you write a book using your experiences and maybe stories from your buddies." My first response was to laugh. "Me? Write a book?" After a few days of hashing it around in my mind I decided to at least give it a try --- but where to begin?

Luckily, Lynn had given me the online service Prodigy for Christmas 1992. So I got online, which in those days was mostly junk, nothing more than bulletin

boards (BBS). After searching through the myriad of stuff on the Internet, I finally made contact with a Veterans BBS.

By April '93 I had made contact with Tom Sykes, a handler from the 48th Infantry Platoon, Scout Dog (IPSD). Within a few more days I found Craig Lord, from the 35th Security Police Squadron (SPS). We exchanged messages and they both

483rd SPS at Cam Ranh Bay. I wrote to Steve and he too agreed to help locate other Vietnam handlers. He sent me a list of 35 handlers from his unit.

In May '93, I was told about a guy in Florida who wanted to start a dog handler association. I made contact with John Langley on June 1, 1993. John had been collecting information and names just as I had been doing and on June 20, 1993 we agreed to pool our resources and help each other. John's idea was to start a Military Working Dog Handler Association (MWDHA.) A group that would include anyone who had served in a military dog unit. There would be no dues and the purpose would be one of fellowship...nothing formal. John would be the membership chairman and he would make a line of merchandise available to members.

I would be the editor of the newsletter, chief researcher, secretary, and chief whatever-needed-to-be-done. My "return" would be access to all the handlers we found, and their stories. I, on the other hand, was leaning toward an organization just for Vietnam dog handlers because we all had something in common. None of us was able to bring our dogs home.

In July '93, I made contact with Dr. Howard Hayes of the National
Continued on Page 10.



Looking Back

By Tom Sykes

February, 1968. Shortly after TET had begun I landed in Viet Nam. Fresh out of Scout Dog School at Ft. Benning, Georgia. Dado's start out that way, had meant to be in Special Forces. Special Forces Male. Initial (green) period of the tour, completed Basic at Ft. Campbell and AIT at Ft. Gordon. Orlan had been out for jump school when I realized the Army was going to send me to an Airborne unit and then straight to Vietnam. No matter what was agreed to, we had to wait the Army decided -- they needed warm bodies and who was I, a lonely PFC, to make a fuss. But I DID fuss -- UNsubscribed from Airborne. Hat damn. Dado's think ANYbody could UNsubscribe from ANYthing in the military. But I could -- and did.

The CO at AIT didn't see it my way. Read in the dirt act was pissed and said I wasn't "tough enough" to go Airborne. By then I really didn't care. It was the principle of the thing. So I went up on K2 sitting it out, waiting for a change of orders. But one thing was certain. I was going to Vietnam. No ifs, ands, or buts about it. Just didn't know HOW or WHAT I was to be sent as. Didn't, that is, until the First Ship stopped in.

Top was a pretty decent guy. Already had two tours in Vietnam. He cut a deal, offered me two options. Cut some orders and go straight to Vietnam right now or go to something called "Scout Dog School." became a "dog handler", then go on to Viet Nam some twelve weeks later. Well, "later" sounded better and I told the dogs... so what the hell? Top, make it dog school. Later I found out that a pretty much have a lot of guys wound up in dog school, out of all "civilians" or kinds thing.

In Vietnam, following a conference-building state with the 9th Rep. I was shipped to some place called Chu Lai. In between part of the 48th Infantry Platoon, Scout Dog (IPSD), "Hell On Paws", upon to the 196th Light Infantry Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division recently formed at the American Division in Korea. As the result of Task Force Oregon. My first of many insecure helicopter rides was to LZ Baldy. No dog, we were flying the hell out of there. I was loaded. All I had in my head were visions from the night my back home just before I left. It seemed the VC and NVA were waiting the hell out of everything. Now I was going to be in the middle of it. For a single figure and a wakeup. The term "short" was a long way from becoming a part of my life.

That was twenty-two years ago. Seems like it never happened, feels like it was yesterday. Some nights it comes back when I least expect it, the dreams and the photos. Sights and sounds of the body still evoke strong reactions -- that unexpected crack of an exploded shell burning last month when they were working on the down near the, the moments of a lifetime when I am understanding, walking home.

After my last I still had a little over a year left in my service obligation. Wound up returning to Benning as an instructor at the Scout Dog School. 9 April, 1971. I drove off in my car, never looking back, trying to get as far away as possible from the whole experience. Back home, back to school. 44

Viet Nam K9

"Year of the Dog"

In Viet Nam this is the beginning of the "Year of the Dog." How appropriate that we announce the formation of the Viet Nam K9 Association.

Since I left Vietnam in 1968, through good times and bad, I have felt that the military dog handler, and his dog, has a special place in history. Other it was the K-9 team that determined the outcome of a mission and undoubtedly saved many lives.

Whether we were sentry, trackers, scouts or sniffer we all performed the mission assigned. It didn't matter whether we were Army, Marines, Air Force or Navy. We all were fighters.

We therefore join together as brothers, all the ones, one in all. We join for social reasons, but also to educate the American public about the forgotten K9 teams.

YDK count in this organization. We are not commercial. There are no dues. You joined the minute you put that choke chain, or harness, on your dog.

To get going in the right direction we need positions to assume the crisis of leadership. The association belongs to you and the direction it takes is up to YOU. We need information and input from you. If you have it -- please share it.

Our first reunion is planned for Veterans Day, 1994, in Washington, DC. We will need your help in organizing.

So, let's grab our equipment and meet out, together.

Don't forget, the secretary you made the new country are appreciated by your K-9 buddies. "

God Bless America.

John Langley
Membership Chairman
1300 Aurora Rd., Venice, FL
34293

From the President

By John R. Harvey
VDHA President

AFTER THE TEARS.

What do you do after losing a close friend or loved one? Some cultures perform a wailing ritual as they carry the individual to their final resting place.

Much to my wife's dismay, I do not cry a lot. During our seven years together, she has probably only witnessed me cry three, maybe four times. The first time was when she showed me a letter that she had written to God asking him to bring to her someone who would love and honor her. I quickly volunteered.

The second time was during a trip to Las Vegas. We had tickets to see a band called the "Bronx Wanderers." As a tribute to the veterans in the audience they sang "We've Gotta Get Out of This Place," written by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil and originally performed by the Animals. As we sat in the audience the tears ran down my face, much to my wife's amazement. I was transported back to the rice paddies of 1967.

In that moment, she saw the most tears she has ever seen throughout our relationship. After the show she went to the band and thanked them for allowing her to see a side of me that she had never seen before. Generally, my eyes may swell up and a single tear roll down my face. Most times I am accused of simply looking angry and ready to rip someone's face off.

Three weeks ago, I got on an airplane and flew 1,600 miles to be by the side of my friend. He was also my racket ball team mate of 50 years and business partner of 37 years. As he lay in bed dying of brain cancer, I spent two days standing by his bed holding his hand and reminiscing about the great times we had and the clients we served. He was generally unresponsive but he let me know that he knew I was there by periodically squeezing my hand when I said something he appreciated. When I began to leave, his wife gave me a huge hug and that single tear flowed down my face.

When I returned to Florida to await the news of his passing, my wife met me at the door. She became upset when I did not express to her the deep emotions that she knew that I was experiencing. I simply asked her to leave me alone; that I would grieve in my own way. He passed away four days later. We immediately got back on a plane for the return trip to Connecticut. I was honored to have been asked to be one of his pall bearers. Even though we had spoken throughout his illness, I still felt like I had not done enough to let him know how

much I loved and appreciated him.

The past eight months have been an emotional roller coaster. The VDHA family first lost my close friend John Sciascia in July, and then John Dupla in November. I am sure that there are others I haven't mentioned. The void that is left in our hearts is filled with a sadness. So "After the Tears" my suggestion is that if there is someone in your life that you care about, reach out and tell them, as much as you can.

I would invite everyone to attend this year's reunion in Reno to provide the opportunity to express your appreciation for their friendships. If you cannot join us or know someone, who for health or financial reasons cannot join us, pick up your phone and give them a call. I thank my VDHA family for the chance to say my goodbyes.

I would remind everyone that the election of officers takes place every other reunion. This year, the president and treasurer positions are up for election. We also have several unit director positions to fill.

MWDHM Artifacts on Display

Listed below are dates that the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum (mwdhm.org) will be attending and setting up a partial artifacts display as well as selling museum merchandise. If you are in the area of one of the listed events, please consider stopping by.

Please note that some events require an entry fee, you should check in advance. The artifact displays vary for different events. There could be photos of WWII K9 platoons, Vietnam uniform patches, dog gear and medical equipment, MWDs in Afghanistan or even a messenger dog collar from WWII.

- | | |
|------------|---|
| April 9-11 | Hold the Line K9 Conference, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Htlk9.com |
| May 9-12 | Melbourne Florida Veterans Show. floridaveteransreunion.com |
| May 11-12 | Army MWD Symposium Alpena, Michigan facebook.com/USArmy31K |
| May 25 | North Carolina Veteran Resource Fair www.veteranshealingfarm.org |
| Aug 25-29 | New Orleans, LA HITS K9 Conference www.hitsk9.net |
| Sept 9-14 | Kokomo, IN All Veterans Reunion, Howard County hcvvo.net |
| Sept 26-29 | Smoky Mountain Cluster Knoxville, TN smokymtncluster.org |

Welcome to Reno, NV

2024 VDHA Reunion Agenda

Registration

HALL OUTSIDE HOSPITALITY ROOM
SILVER BARON ROOMS "D&E"
MEZZANINE LOBBY FLOOR

The VDHA Reunion Registration will open
8:00 am Monday, April 29th & Tuesday, April 30th
8:00 am – 5:00 pm, Monday April 29th
(closed for lunch 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm)
8 am – 4:00 pm on Tuesday, April 30th
(closed for lunch 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm)

Your registration envelope will include:

BADGE(S) * REUNION PIN(S) * PRINTED AGENDA
GROUP EVENT TICKET(S) TO 'MAGIQUE PRODUCTION' * 7-DAY RTC BUS PASS(ES)

(7-day RTC pass is for your use to get around Reno and getting to

'The Theatre' Tuesday, April 30th, where the 'MAGIQUE PRODUCTION' (group event) will be held.)

AIRPORT SHUTTLE

Daily 5:00am – 11:45pm runs every half hour

Proceed to the baggage claim area and follow the signage directing you to the general airport shuttle area to board the Silver Legacy shuttle.

The shuttle stops along the curb, outside the D Doors located North of Baggage Claim, to pick up passengers. The shuttle arrives 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after the hour.

Hotel Information

The reunion is scheduled from
Monday, April 29th to Wednesday, May 1st, 2024

SILVER LEGACY RESORT CASINO

407 N. VIRGINIA ST., RENO NV 89501 / 800-455-4770



Reservations can now be made by calling the **Silver Legacy Resort Casino – 800-455-4770**
(follow the prompts 1 – 3 – 1 or 2 – 1)

You **MUST** provide the following information to receive the group rate
(There are a limited number of blocked group room rates - you may want to make reservation(s) ASAP)

GROUP CODE: **SRVDH4 – VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION**

OR online at

<https://book.passkey.com/go/SRVDH4>

Hotel Information (Cont.)

Rate \$99/night Monday April 29th, 30th and May 1st
(includes fees and taxes)

DOES NOT include breakfast.

Each guest is required to provide a credit card guarantee to make reservation(s)

PLEASE NOTE: Hotel reservation cut-off date is MARCH 29, 2024

Reservations made after March 29th will not guarantee blocked room rate.

**Please remember to request/book a handicapped room
(if needed) at the time you make your reservation(s).**

HOSPITALITY ROOM – SILVER BARON ROOMS “D&E”

MEZZANINE LOBBY FLOOR

Hospitality room will be open Monday, April 29TH 9:00 am–11:00 pm
Tuesday, April 30TH (after the general membership meeting) from 10:00 am–11:00 pm
Wednesday, May 1st from 8:00 am–**2:00 pm**
(Buffet will be held in this room Wednesday, May 1st at 6:00 pm)

VDHA BX – SILVER BARON ROOM “C”

MEZZANINE LOBBY FLOOR

MIKE HURDER, MANAGER

VDHA BX will be open
8:00 am - Monday, April 29th
10:00 am - Tuesday, April 30th (after general membership meeting)
8:00 am - Wednesday, May 1st

**BX will close Monday and Tuesday at 6:00 pm
Wednesday at **2:00 pm****

The BX will stay open with **these exceptions:**

#1 - 12:00 pm-1:00 pm for lunch on Monday, April 29th and Tuesday April 30th

#2 - Select times when minimal BX sales do not support keeping the BX open (in this event, a sign will be posted as to when the BX will re-open)

#4 - **2:00 pm on Wednesday, May 1st**
shutting down to transport the BX merchandise back to the BX in California.

Do not delay!

Visit the BX early. The longer you wait,
better the chances will be that the item(s) you want may be sold out and
you will have to wait to have your item(s) mailed to you after the reunion.

Officer's Meeting

Monday, April 29 at 3:00 p.m.

Officers will be notified of location.



General Membership Meeting **Active VDHA Members Only**

Silver Baron Room – (hospitality room)
Tuesday, April 30, 2024, 9:00-10:00 am

GROUP EVENT

Tuesday, April 30th – 8:00 pm
The Theatre – 505 Keystone Ave., Reno NV 89503
1 mile from the Silver Legacy Casino

**YOUR REGISTRATION PACKET WILL INCLUDE YOUR SHOW
TICKET IF YOU SIGNED UP TO ATTEND THE EVENT ALONG
WITH YOUR RTC BUS PASS YOU CAN USE TO GET TO THE EVENT
OR YOU CAN WALK THE 1 MILE IF YOU WANT/CAN**

‘Magique Production’

GROUP EVENT (Cont.)

'Magique Production' is an award-winning resident "show of the year!" featuring 20 illusions, 100+ costumes, and an epic soundtrack and razzmatazz! Great magic and illusions. Up front and personal in an intimate theatre. (Ticket(s) are limited to first come first served basis).

Silver Legacy Resort Casino Western Buffet Dinner Silver Baron Room

Wednesday May 1st 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Open cash bar 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm



Seasonal Tossed Green Salad

Ranch, Thousand Island,

White Cheddar Macaroni and Cheese

Bacon, Crisp Panko Topping

Three Bean Salad

Red Onion, Peppers, Cilantro, Cumin

Western Fried Potatoes

Tangy Cole Slaw

Celery Seed, Onion, Parsley

Seasonal Fresh Vegetables

Freshly Baked Rolls

Red Potato Salad

Peppered Corn Muffins

Cheesecake

Tomato, Cucumber and Watermelon Salad

Fresh Mint Vinaigrette

Jack Daniel's Pecan Pie

Marinated Chicken Breast

Apple Pie

Roast Pork Loin

Pan Gravy, Apple-Cinnamon Topping

Banana Cream Pie

Pan-Seared Salmon

Lemon-Basil Beurre Blanc

Chocolate Fudge Cake

Prime Rib Carving Station

Rosemary, Cabernet Jus, Creamed Horseradish

2024 REUNION REGISTRATION FORM

DATE	EVENT	COST/pp	# ATTENDING	TOTAL
	Reunion Registration Fee - includes 7-day RTC bus pass	\$70		
TUES-04/30	Magique Performance	\$45		
WED-05/01	Western Buffet (6:00 pm Cash Bar / 7:00 pm Dinner)	\$84		
				TOTAL DUE \$
NAME (as you want it on badge)				
VDHA Member Number		UNIT		
SPOUSE name (If attending)				
GUEST name (if attending)				
Street Address (member)				
City		State	Zip	
EMAIL ADDRESS (Required for Confirmation)				
MEMBER phone #		EMERGENCY phone #		
NOTE: Only ACTIVE VDHA MEMBERS will have access to the General Membership Meeting. You will be notified if your membership is NOT ACTIVE when your registration form is received.				

Complete registration form, print it and mail it, along with your check/money order to:
VDHA, c/o Bob Palochik, Treasurer, 10125 Skye Saddle Ave., Las Vegas NV 89166-6546

CHECK/MO MUST BE MADE PAYABLE TO VDHA

NO PAYPAL OR CREDIT CARD payments accepted for Registration

Completed registration and payment are due **ABSOLUTELY NO LATER THAN MARCH 31, 2024**

Cancellation (with refund) will be accepted up to and including March 31, 2024

If you need to add/cancel/modify your registration or have any questions, please email Bob Palochik at bobpalochik@vdha.us or call 702.557.3538 or 702.845.2944

INDIVIDUAL HOTEL RESERVATIONS FOR THE SILVER LEGACY RESORT CASINO

CAN BE MADE BY CALLING

1-800-455-4770

(FOLLOW PROMPTS 1 - 3 - 1 or 2 - 1)

YOU MUST reference GROUP CODE **SRVDH4**

OR on line at

<https://book.passkey.com/go/SRVDH4>

CUTOFF DATE FOR HOTEL RESERVATIONS IS MARCH 29, 2024

GROUP RATE NOT GUARANTEED AFTER THIS DATE

*\$99/night
 Monday, April 29/Tuesday, April 30/
 Wednesday, May 1
 (includes fees and taxes
DOES NOT INCLUDE BREAKFAST*

WILL YOU BE STAYING AT THE SILVER LEGACY RESORT CASINO WHERE THE REUNION WILL BE HELD?

YES ☐

If yes, how
many nights

NO ☐

SEE "AGENDA" FOR SPECIFICS ON MAGIQUE PERFORMANCE AND WESTERN BUFFET MENU

DATE RECEIVED: _____

CHECK#/MO#: _____

AMOUNT RECD: _____

VP REPORT: Reno Reunion Highlights

By Ernie Ayala
VDHA Vice President

Reno is a fantastic city with all its new hotels and casinos out in the plains of Nevada echoing the excitement of its southern neighbor of Las Vegas. It got its nickname back in the 18th century when commercial wagons and settlers traveled the California Trail to San Francisco. Local residents would pick up food and supplies in restaurants, hardware, drug stores and clothing shops before continuing on towards Donner Lake, where the formidable obstacles of the Sierra Nevada began. This caused this little city to become a big city, thus, "The Biggest Little City in the World." It was named after General Jesse L. Reno, who fought in the civil war on the Union side.

I am excited because we're having our upcoming reunion at the Silver Legacy Hotel, a resort built in 1995. At 42 stories, it is the tallest building in downtown Reno. Even though the sign at the door says "Established in 1895," don't you believe it. This date is a nod to the building's Victorian theme.

The Silver Legacy is easily recognized by its white landmark dome, where a giant mock mining rig periodically erupts into a fairly tame sound and light spectacle. The casino's hotel is usually lit emerald green at night and looks like something out of The Wizard of Oz.

Now, about our reunion. It is being held during the week from Monday to Wednesday, April 29 through May 1, although everyone would usually leave on May 2 because our last event is held the evening of May 1. The weather is expected to be in the middle 60's to the middle 70's, which will be nice for the guys coming in from the frozen tundra of the East. Those living in the Southwest might even welcome the cooler weather.

As you enter the hotel you'll be transported to the 18th century as the motif will give you that feeling of the Old West. Everything else is ultra modern. There are 1700 rooms, 18 restaurants, a large heated swimming pool with a waterfall and hot tub. You also can get the Caesar Rewards card for bonuses on your slot machines and game tables and discounts at the restaurants and shops. There are over 1,000 slot machines and 40 game tables so there's no waiting to wager a bet.

We will have a general membership meeting on Tuesday, April 30 at 9-10 a.m. in the Silver Baron Room and it's for active VDHA members only. You can sign

up everyone in your group to attend our group event to see Magique Production, an award-winning resident show of the year. I remember how popular it was in Las Vegas when I was there. It features so many illusions, hundreds of costumes and a wild soundtrack. This will put you in the happy vacation spirit.

There will be a lot of free time to gamble, shop or explore this wonderful city. With your registration you will receive an RTD bus pass that will also help get you to the group event at the theater where the Magique Production is playing.

On our last night we end with a feast to end all feasts featuring prime rib, pan-seared salmon, roasted pork loin, marinated chicken breast, lots of salads and delicious sides. And for dessert we have Jack Daniels pecan pie, cheesecake and about five other flavors of pies.

After dinner our president and officers will introduce our very special guests. Since this is the 30th Anniversary of the Vietnam Dog Handler Association, we have invited our founder and first president John Langley, as well as our second president Tom Mitchell and third president Randy Kimler. The VDHA was started in 1994 with six former Vietnam dog handlers who felt dog handlers were unique in a war zone and special recognition should make us all brothers. Air Force, Army, Navy and Marine dog handlers became united in our group and because of us, many other groups were started across the country and war dog memorials also started appearing world-wide.

If you were a Vietnam dog handler, you deserve to be at this reunion. At our age, there may not be too many more. Be proud. I know our families see us as heroes. Us heroes got to get together one more time, at least.



VDHA Last Man Standing Bottle

By John Harvey
VDHA President

The story goes that under General MacArthur, men of the Michigan and Wisconsin National Guards led the first offensive against Japanese forces. Spencer served in Company C, 125th Infantry Regiment, 32nd "Red Arrow" Division. When the men were deployed, they made a pact to give a bottle of whiskey to the last survivor.

And of course, we have all heard the story of Doolittle's Raiders, the group that carried out a daring bombing raid over Tokyo that represented the first counterpunch by the allies following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Fort Walton Beach, Florida contains a display of eighty goblets one representing each of the airmen participating in the raid. The men would periodically gather and toast the members who had passed away since the last reunion. The goblets would each be turned over as each man passed away. In April 2022 the last goblet was turned over representing Doolittle's co-pilot Richard Cole who had just died in 2019 at the age of 106. It represented the 80th anniversary of the raid.

All of you have heard my praises for John J Sciascia (#113) and the service that he provided to the VDHA over the past many years, as well as his assistance to hundreds of servicemen and widows as a VSO officer of the Veterans Administration. For the short time he was retired, he loved traveling with his wife in spite of the physical challenges he experienced later in life. One such trip was to Maker's Mark distillery in Loretto, KY.

Though John went to mass every Wednesday and Saturday and had not had a drink of alcohol in 20 years, the two of them loved the experience. John's love for the VDHA led him to buy a traditional 'Last Man Bottle' (standing). This was long before I assumed the presidency from Perry Money. My recollection is that he gave it to me at the San Diego reunion and asked me to keep it safe and pass it along in the military tradition of honoring those who had long passed and the few who had survived.

This February there was an extensive discussion amongst the board members as to whether our reunion in Reno this year would be an appropriate place to open it in honor of those we lost in 2023. The decision was made to save it and keep it as long as possible. Our 40th anniversary is in ten years and our 50th anniversary is

in 20 years. I would be 97 years old. I don't have any expectations of being around that long but no one knows what God has for us in his plans. Plus, when I do pass, my wife knows to get it into the hands of the VDHA. Of course, she may need a reminder at that point to go look for it. In the meantime, I am going to reach out to Renee Bemiss and try to get a couple of bottles of rye for a toast at our Reno reunion. Stay safe and healthy, we hope to see you in Reno.



Dogman

Dogman is published quarterly by the Vietnam Dog Handler Association, Inc. Members and their families are encouraged to submit articles, letters, photos, etc.

Letters and stories are subject to editing. Email all submissions to Dogman@VDHA.us or mail to Steve Lemish, Dogman Editor, 105 W. "F" Street, Suite 206, San Diego, CA 92101 (include a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want them returned).

VDHA is a nonprofit corporation exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(19). Contributions are tax deductible. IRS tax ID number #33-0690480.

This Reunion, Celebrates 30 Years; VDHA History

Continued from Page 1.

National Cancer Institute. He was conducting research on the dogs and handlers of the Vietnam War. We agreed to assist him in his research and he agreed to help us locate information on the dogs we had in Vietnam. This is the same information I use today to assist in finding information on dogs for our handlers.

In October 1993, I hooked up with Larry Majeski, the former NCOIC of the 212th MP Sentry Dog Company. He was also collecting information and names of Vietnam handlers. Larry gave us over 400 names and addresses! By February '94, we had over 500 names and addresses of Vietnam dog handlers.

So it was decided to call the organization the Vietnam Dog Handler Association. John and I had long discussions about what type of organization the VDHA should be. We finally decided to leave many of the decisions to the "members." But we also decided to start off with a more formal organization that would only be open to those veterans who had served in a dog unit in Vietnam. This would include veterinarians, vet tech, visual trackers and kennel masters who were not handlers.

Each member would receive a number based on when they joined and a membership card. John said that if I wanted to do the extra work, then go for it! John Langley designed the VDHA patch logo we still use today, and another logo was the image of John and his dog Vogie. I designed the membership card but I finally decided to wait to see how many handlers wanted to "join" before I sent the cards out.

In January '94 we decided to provide a newsletter with information about the organization and stories from handlers like Tom Sykes who wrote the first VDHA story called, "Looking Back." The first few issues of DogMan were four pages long and had no pictures. Using a copier, we used our own money to get us started.

With the help of Dr. Hayes, we were able to contact Vietnam vet dog handlers with information about their dogs. With that ability, the VDHA was able to grow pretty quickly. In March '94 our first newsletter, DogMan, was mailed to 557 "members." By our second edition in May '94 we had over 700 "members." So now in addition to the printing costs we had mailing costs. It was starting to get pretty expensive.

Then, in July '94, a former Air Force dog handler from the 37th SPS, Ray Carpenter, volunteered to print

DogMan on newsprint. Ray was a printer so we could use photos. Overnight, DogMan changed shape. I no longer needed to write a book. DogMan was my book. Finally there would be stories written by Vietnam veteran dog handlers. Damn it felt good!

By October '94, we had nearly 1,100 "members." We needed to make some changes. The organization was growing much faster than we thought and it was getting to be too much for us two. At our first reunion in November '94, attended by 75 dog handlers who served in Vietnam, we voted to formalize the association into a nonprofit organization and to charge dues. We voted John Langley as President; John Taft, Marine scout dog handler, as Vice President; Michael Cagel, 39th Scout Dog handler, as Vice President; Steve Janke as Chaplain and me as Secretary Treasurer and DogMan Editor. It was now official. Most of what VDHA is today started at that first reunion.

We also committed to contact each new member, by phone if possible. This was something I took on and I am glad I did because it brought me so much joy talking, and listening, to each new handler. Sometimes it was difficult. But most of the time it was like the time I found Jimmy Thornton and hooked him up on the phone with his buddy Craig Lord, both from the 35th SPS. With me on the phone they took off talking a mile a minute, not skipping a beat. It was crazy how they took off right where they left off over twenty years prior. I got off the phone and let them talk. It was a very exciting moment in my life.

In February '96, we became a non-profit corporation. As with all corporations, there were benefits but also rules. One required VDHA to come up with founders. We decided to include the officers who had been voted in at the reunion plus Craig Lord and Tom Sykes; now the six former handlers who formed the VDHA. After that, "membership" was not free, we were asking members to dig into their own pockets.

Our hope was to have 500 members by the time of the 1996 reunion. We almost made it too: 471 members. Now the Vietnam Dog Handler Association has thousands of members. When John and I first talked about the VDHA, we never imagined it would become such an important organization that would bring together thousands of Vietnam veteran handlers. It started out as such a small idea.

Thank you John for your vision and Lynn for pushing me. Without it we would not have made it "home."

The Tip of the Spear; A Wardog Story

Editor's Note: This is the 11th installment of this multi-part story. It details his journey from college to Vietnam and his scout dog Skipper (X268). This episode details some different missions.

*By Vernon J. Roman
Scout Dog Handler*

Nothing like a well-trained dog! I never had to worry about an untimely bark. I had my M-16 set on full automatic and my clips were very easy to access. I do not know how many hours Skipper and I stood watch. I spent the night just following Skipper's nose and ears and was prepared for the worse. The movement did not let up until the approach of dawn.

The three yahoos I was with woke up at daybreak. I never said a word to them on my way out nor did I say anything to the commander. I still had a lot of tour left, and I did not need to put any type of negative mark on Skipper and myself. I just would turn down any future request to work an LP. So we all just got up and walked back into our lines. Skipper & I jumped on a chopper that had just landed and headed back to base camp. I resolved we would never, ever, agree to do another LP.

Unfortunately, I suspect there were a fair amount of bone headed decisions like the one we had just experienced happening more times than we would like to admit. Getting high, while being on an LP or active anywhere in the field, is a prescription for getting soldiers needlessly killed. Mistakes do happen. It was 30 years of guilt and finally having a conversation with my Nam buddy Daryl that helped me resolve some of the guilt that I carry.

I asked him, during one of our phone conversations, why was it that we talked about everything but what happened over in Vietnam? This resulted in a conversation and the discovery that he too had been at the same location with me, and that we both had shared in the same experience.

Daryl knew of missing pieces in my information, and the 30 years of guilt was majorly addressed in this one phone call.

Apparently, both he and I were both leading troops on the same hill. He was working on one side with his dog Butch, and Skipper and I were on the opposite side. It was a very hot day and the going was tough, since we were zig zagging all over this hillside. Suddenly, an urgent call came into us that we were to abandon the patrol, work our way immediately to the top of this mini mountain of a hill, and meet up with helicopters that were going to take us to a "HOT" LZ. (A location where troops were engaged with the enemy.)

Our patrol, per instructions, headed up towards a road which we could just follow on up to the crest of the hill to board the waiting helicopters. When Skipper and I were popping out onto the road, we could already see 35 other soldiers walking up the road toward the crest of our mini mountain.

We could hear the helicopter engines, at idle, waiting for loading and taking off. We were now in an area of major activity with soldiers all around us. Skipper, for all practical purposes, was rendered useless as it was like being back at base camp with soldiers

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Treasurer's Report

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Checks are always to be made payable to VDHA no matter if the funds are for dues or merchandise. Our bank will not accept third party checks.

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The Tip of the Spear;

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everywhere. All we had left to do was walk up our side of the road and join the rest of the people already at the top along with the column of people that were already walking up the other side of the road. I assessed our situation. Basically, Skipper was done.

You cannot, in this situation, make a valid alert. It was time to just walk up the hill to those choppers and board one of them; a really big mistake. Those soldiers on the opposite side of the dirt road, were walking one behind the other in single file, walking toward the top. Not until 30 years later did I find out that it was Daryl and Butch that were leading that group on the other side of the road.

Big, big rule - On patrol, you walk in the same spots as the person in front of you unless you are completely sure you're safe and are not going to step on some nasty surprise. Friendly soldiers were in front of me, in back of me, and beside me walking up a road to helicopters that we could hear.

March Dates to Remember

March 13 is K9 Veterans Day. It's a day to reflect on their valor, remember those that have passed, and recognize the tireless efforts of active-duty service dogs.

March 29 is National Vietnam War Veterans Day. It was first declared by President Richard Nixon in 1974, and coincided with the one-year anniversary of the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Vietnam on March 29, 1973. Today, the holiday is officially observed on March 29th and is referred to as National Vietnam War Veterans Day. For us, it is Welcome Home Day.