



DOGMAN

A Brotherhood of All Combat Veteran Dog Handlers



VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 28 - NUMBER 2 - JUNE 2021

Lansing War Dog Memorial Dedication

By Ron Werneth

For the veterans I know, Memorial Day isn't really a "happy" day; it is about remembrance, sacrifice and appreciation for all our military service members who died in the service of our nation. Last Sunday, May 30, 2021 was a day that one can't forget. Clear, sunny skies and a large crowd set the tone for the War Dog Memorial dedication to follow. This event was the culmination of years of work in all respects from the fund-raising to construction of a new War Dog Memorial in Lansing, IL, which is actually an "addition" to the superb Lansing Veterans Memorial at Lansing Municipal Airport.

This War Dog Memorial came about in an unexpected way. Several years ago at the annual Kokomo Vietnam Veterans reunion, United States Marine Corps Vietnam veteran Tom Luberd, former president of Lansing Veterans Memorial Committee, happened to buy the autobiography of Vietnam Army scout dog handler John Meeks (42nd IPSD): *Before, During & After Vietnam*.



John Meeks and his K-9 Artus (42nd IPSD) at a Fire Support Base circa. July 1970



The GSD statue dedicated to Artus and all military working dogs, nestled on a secret path around the larger Lansing Veterans Memorial.

Tom was moved by Meek's story of serving with his loyal canine Artus (K012) who was killed in action on December 11, 1970. He wanted to do something to honor this loyal scout dog and all of the K-9s who served in Vietnam. Tom contacted John Meeks and together they began to brainstorm how a War Dog Memorial could be incorporated into the already-built Lansing Veterans Memorial.

Some considerations while they planned this project were: how should the dog be properly displayed and where could this special project be incorporated into the existing memorial? Their solution made complete sense; "in the bush" where the scout dog teams worked together in Vietnam.

After several years of fund-raising followed by delays in the production and then the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2021 would be the year for their joint project to be officially unveiled and dedicated on Memorial Day weekend.

This War Dog Memorial is unique in that visitors may not know that there is a fairly concealed (and
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

By John R. Harvey
VDHA President

“Back in the saddle,” that is probably the most remote saying I could ever come up with. I have only ridden a horse five or six times in my life. The last time was probably 28 years ago when my son was ten. But the saying seems to be appropriate for the times. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the saying as “doing something you stopped doing for a period of time.” As we emerge as a society from the year 2020, it is difficult to imagine an America post-vaccine. At times we wonder if we can ever start over again.

Just three months ago, we closely followed the “news” in order to obtain information to help us determine if we had yet qualified to get the vaccine. First, it was first responders, then convalescent home residents, then those over 75 years of age, then 65, then 45, then 16, then 12. We scoured the news papers to figure out which web sites we needed to access to find that elusive appointment.

We experienced the gratitude and disappointment when a spouse or relative scored that appointment when sixty seconds later we accessed the same web site only to find that all of the appointments were taken. We look back on a year that witnessed us losing friends, loved ones, and relatives to the “virus.” We wondered if life would ever get back to normal, whatever normal was before the pandemic. We were told to continue wearing our masks, then told we didn’t need to wear our masks, of course unless we were in an airport or on an airplane or in church or politically-correct specialty grocery stores.

We look forward and wonder if we have the drive, energy and ambition to get back in the saddle. Two months ago, your board struggled in good faith with scheduling our next reunion. October 2021 was less than a year away. Knowing the details that go into planning a reunion, we decided to move our reunion to April or May 2022. This was before the travel surge we witnessed this Memorial Day weekend. Many states were still under various degrees of lock down. At the time we did not know what a 2021 participation and interest there might be.

It appears that America has enthusiastically decided to get back in the saddle despite the increase in the price of gas, airplane tickets and hot dogs. Your board also struggled with the next location. It was finally decided that we will be going to New Orleans, AKA, the Big Easy. We are in discussions with a number of different

venues. Please visit our web site for additional information as it develops.

In the meantime, our rodeo is not over. Let’s get back in the saddle, even if it means having to use a step stool with handles to climb up. Welcome Home.

TRACKER REPORT

By John Dupla

I received information from Chuck Steward that he and Frank Merritt will be in Utah for the unveiling of the “SEEK ON” statue honoring the combat trackers. It depicts a Vietnam soldier with a Labrador Retriever. It’s been in the works for several years and with help from the State of Utah and GoFundMe money it is now ready for the public. I’ll have to get a photo of it for publication in the next issue.

Also, I was able to give a Zoom interview with Dixie Whitman, who volunteers for the National Military Working Dog Heritage Museum. They are collecting stories about MWD’s and their handlers from all services and eras. She has been working years in the background supporting MWDs and handlers. In the past she organized efforts to collect and send needed supplies to dog teams in the current war on terrorism. Tracker Dick Baumer and Estel Matt has also assisted her.

My zoom meeting concerned my knowledge of the tracker program. With the help of my son setting up the computer for the meeting, Dixie and I connected. We talked for two hours during the interview. We covered a lot of ground and it required a second meeting that took three hours. One main reason is that I have in my possession documents and actual physical material. This includes the black parachute pajamas we wore at night and the parachute-made sleeping hammocks that we slept in.

I also have in my possession the actual training schedule with names and times. Along with this, I have three maps that pinpoint the actual camp sites while in the jungles of Malaysia. I had more to share and we talked about it all. That being said, Dixie is looking for more dog handlers to share their stories to be archived for future references. I highly recommend anyone interested in participating contact me or Dixie to contribute your stories.

One last note, the trackers are having this year’s reunion in Lexington KY in the next few weeks. I can’t make it but I will get information to pass on later.

Until next time, SEEK ON.

The Tip of the Spear; A War Dog Story

Editor's Note: This is the first installment of a multi-part story submitted for publication by Vernon Roman. It details his story from college to Vietnam and his dog Skipper (X268).

By Vernon J. Roman

Scout Dog Handler

Letter to the Editor

It's very interesting reading the different stories in *Dogman*. Each one of our trips over the pond, and our subsequent experiences with our dogs, are very varied and unique. If I base my own experience as being the norm for a Scout Dog Handler, I would and do state that being a Dog Handler is a very lonely position.

Our position, and what we do, does not promote getting together but, at least in my case, it was based on no ties and a constant separation from others. The dog was not a pet. Once Skipper and I were done for the day, we were always off to some space just with us, with very little interactions with others. Even when preparing for an assault, the only occupants of a dugout fox hole, was Skipper and me.

Even back at our base, my spare time was hanging out with the dog and fine-tuning skill sets that came in handy in the field. Relationships with others was something I wanted nothing to do with. They might not be around tomorrow and that would just be one more thing that had to then be dealt with. So, it's very interesting to see the social components others experienced.

In any event, to honor my dog Skipper, I had his name placed on a Memorial at High Ground Veterans Memorial Park. As part of the process, they wanted a written account. I wrote one. And now seems appropriate that I should share this story with our association. In any event, it does represent another different perspective of what it was like to spend your days walking point. We were professional Point Men, and it became very routine to lead groups of men wherever you were told. Without that dog, getting back home was a very, very long shot. With the dog, it still took some divine intervention to make it home.

Forward

During the period of 1966-1973, it is stated by Wikipedia, that approximately 5,000 U.S. war dogs served in the Vietnam War. (The US Army did not retain records prior to 1968). It is estimated that about 10,000 human lives were saved and avoided being on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall as a result of the actions of those war dogs and their handlers. Many

consider that number of saved lives to be a "low" estimate. It was a well-known fact that the enemy placed a bounty on both the handlers and their dogs. Approximately 350 dogs were killed in action with many more wounded. It was reported that 263 handlers were killed in action.

In Vietnam, American Forces used dogs for everything from base security to detecting ambushes to hunting down fleeing enemy units. The Scout Dog team was the Gold Standard. Search-and-destroy missions used a handler and his scout dog to walk point, go out in the jungle, and to raise an alarm about an ambush long before the unit was in danger. The scout dog handler would determine the distance to the danger based on the dog's state of "alert." Thus, the unit avoided walking into a trap and had the ability to adjust their offensive posture so that they could obliterate the enemy position instead of vice versa.

When our politicians elected to leave Vietnam, the military had classified the dogs as *EXPENDABLE EQUIPMENT." Because of the classification, a major tragedy occurred, and the majority of our war dogs were abandoned.

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VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Ernie Ayala

Speaking as a former and probably still Vice President of Units (because no one has stepped forward to take the position), I just want to highlight a unit that has been close to me since 2000. In the twenty-plus years I have belonged to the VDHA, I have had the pleasure of seeing the Army Sentry Dogs become so organized that everything has its place and someone is always working on organizing.

One such person is Gary Smith, who served with the 981st MP Co. 71-72. I first met Gary in St. Louis during our 2002 VDHA Reunion. He came to volunteer to host our next Sentry Dog Alumni Reunion since we hadn't had but two and the last one was in 1998. He went on to host two reunions in Kansas City and two in Springfield, Missouri. When our webmaster, Jack Duffell suddenly passed away in 2012, he stepped in to take over the Alumni website and keep track of the members for Larry Majeski, our founder and director. Gary then helped create the Sentry Dog Alumni Facebook Page and all this time he has been keeping track of members when newsletters were returned. Another great find was the use of an application that finds missing members but he used it sparingly because of the cost. Then he met a former dog handler/company clerk that had a treasure-trove of names from the 981st MP Co. This member, Steve Dragovich, had stories to tell and had access to finding the whereabouts of hundreds of members, dead or alive.

I recently turned over ten pages of obituaries found by Dragovich to Dave Broeker. Those of you who look through our message board will see I have put up hundreds of members names who passed away. I had to stop because I had so many I can't sit and write everyone. Sadly, many died without ever knowing there was a VDHA, Sentry Dog Alumni or died alone with no one to report it to us. I have expanded my obituary page on my newsletter, The Sentry to two pages to pay homage to these fine gentlemen who served us well and were our brothers.

Back to Gary. He helped Bob and Cookie Bouslaugh of Bayfield, Colorado host, yet another Alumni Reunion in Durango, Colorado in May as the pandemic was ending. When the weekend was over, Gary went to work on getting someone to host the next reunion in either Phoenix, North Carolina, Tennessee or Branson. Either way, the Sentry Dog Alumni is lucky to have a leader like Gary Smith making sure we stay together and on top of all that is news about us.

This is what a unit should be like. Some have disbanded and some just lost interest. It takes a little work to keep your guys together, unit directors. Find out where

your guys are. You don't have to be intrusive just say, "I'm just checking up on you. I want to make sure you're okay. That's my job." If we don't do that, the VDHA will slowly fade away. We are the grandfather of all dog handler groups and the best to get things started from our very beginnings. Let's not drop the ball and allow apathy to swallow us up whole. Care about your unit. Don't let them finish you until you can verify they won't be coming back. Find new members to join us. They'll love us. We are not Army Handlers, Air Force Handlers, Navy or Marine Handlers. We are the Vietnam Dog Handlers Association and we are all brothers of the leash.



Gary Smith, 981st MP Co., with Cookie and Bob Bouslaugh, 212th MP Co. 67-68 conferring with the hosts of the 2021 Sentry Dog Alumni Reunion in Durango, Colorado.

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, 152 W. Park Avenue, Suite 150, El Cajon, CA 92020 (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.

Lansing War Dog Memorial Dedication

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realistically) landscaped path that goes around the much larger Lansing Veterans Memorial. Once a person finds the opening "in the bush," a visitor follows the trail that leads to the German Shepherd along with two separate black granite memorial markers. One of these markers tells the story of loyal scout dog Artus while the other (an upright one) explains the contributions military working dogs have made throughout history. As I visited this memorial, I was very moved by the overall presentation (in the realistic setting); truly magnificent.

My family attended this special Memorial Day dedication and were truly touched by the event program, the speakers who participated (including John Meek's and his powerful story of Artus and the history of military working dogs) along with just visiting the Lansing Veterans Memorial itself. The memorial

section facing the local road/traffic has a restored Huey helicopter depicted in a realistic setting with a statue of Vietnam veteran carrying a wounded buddy on his shoulders. The inner (plaza type) portion of the memorial tells the stories of several wars and contributions of local veterans including the ones who paid the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of every American. If you have not visited the Lansing Veterans Memorial, I would urge you to stop by; it is really a hidden treasure. For more information, visit: <https://www.enjoyillinois.com/explore/listing/lansing-veterans-memorial>.



The Lansing Veterans Memorial (front) with a Huey and a statue of a combat medic carrying a wounded soldier. The memorial is dedicated to veterans of every war and service including many fallen military service members from the local community. It is at Lansing Municipal Airport (Lansing, IL.).



John Bush served in Vietnam as an Army Scout Dog handler (50th IPSD - 1968-69) and John Meeks (42nd IPSD) with one of the granite memorials dedicated to the Dogmen & their K-9 partners of Vietnam.

Vietnam Dog Handler Association Officers

President:	John R. Harvey	3000 Holiday Dr., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316	860-796-7813
Executive V.P.	Ernie Ayala	13862 Mardi Gras Lane, Riverside, CA 92503	626-862-2667
V.P. Trackers	John Dupla	904 Chetwood Dr., League City, TX 77573	281-332-2163
V.P. Thailand	Dave Broeker	1712 Crescent Dr., Pekin, IL 61554-1637	309-202-5542
V.P. Units	Vacant		
Secretary	Vern Anderson	9343 Jamaica Beach, Galveston TX 77554	409-737-9085
Treasurer	Bob Palochik	10125 Skye Saddle Ave., L.V., NV 89166	702-557-3538
Assoc. Director	Dennis Lewis	PO Box 699, Pikeville, NC 27863-0699	919-242-9620
Sgt. at Arms	Michael Duran	124 Smotherman Ct., Murfreesboro, TN 37129	615-907-9084
Chaplain	Steve Janke	413 First Street., Carlstadt, NJ 07072	201-334-7676
Membership	Randy Kimler	2225 Merriman St., Port Neches, TX 77651	409-722-0889
Webmaster/BX Mgr	Dave Broeker	1712 Crescent Dr., Pekin, IL 61554-1637	309-202-5542
Asst. Webm./BX Mgr	Michael Hurder	986 Coronado Way, Livermore, CA 94550	925-518-0318
Historian:	Vacant		
Dogman Editor:	Steve Lemish	152 W. Park Ave., #150, El Cajon, CA 92020	619-444-5525

DEADLINE

**ARTICLES FOR
THE
SEPTEMBER
ISSUE MUST BE
SUBMITTED BY
AUGUST 23**

A Quick Note from the Facebook Team

By Mike Hurder

I don't know about you, but there are times in my life when I wish there were someone out there who would talk to me. Someone who knew what I know; someone who has "been there." I've hoped that I could open a door and there would be a bunch of brothers right there to hang with for a few minutes.

It wouldn't have to be an all-nighter or a pity-party. It could just be a friendly chat where we find out what's up with each other. We could say hello and see what the other guys look like today. Are they healthy? Do they look happy? Is someone else struggling? What are they doing about it? If the opportunity arose, I could tell my story or say what's bugging me. Maybe a brother has a suggestion about how to deal with the situation. Perhaps if I just had an ear or two to chew on for a minute, I'd feel better.

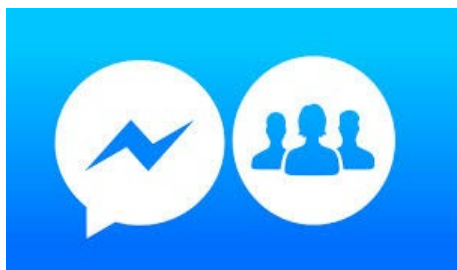
Wouldn't it be nice if it was that easy? Just open a door, and BOOM, instant brother support.

Did you know you can start a chat room right from our VDHA Facebook page? Yup! That's right. That door we're looking for is right there. Anytime you feel like having a gabfest, talk about an upcoming event, coordinate a meeting in the future, prepare for the next reunion - all you have to do is "Create a Room."

From the home page of our Facebook Group, right under the main image, there's a tab named: "ROOMS." Click on that tab. A new window will open that gives you the option to name the room and set a time for the room to be open, or open it right then. You can describe what the room/chat is about if you want to give it a theme. Then start it up. An announcement will be made on our Group page. The room will be available to anyone who happens to be browsing our page, and they can join in with a click.

Why hash it out alone if you don't have to? Open a portal for your brothers to walk in and say, "Howdy, what's up?" Remember, there might not be anyone around just then. Don't take it personally if no one can respond. Try again later.

That's all I have for now. Be well, Brothers and Sisters. Shorty sends -



The Tip of the Spear

Continued from Page 3.

Less than 200 dogs made it back home. The rest were euthanized, turned over to an allied army, or in some cases, just left to fend for themselves. What a terrible ending to our valiant warriors.

More recently, our country has been giving recognition to the 50 year anniversary of the Vietnam War. FINALLY, as a part of all the other fanfare about the Vietnam War, attention is being given to our valiant fellow soldiers that happen to walk on four legs instead of two. It is very sad that it has taken all these years for the public to discover their importance. They finally appreciate the major contribution these brave animals made to help ensure that many of us soldiers were able to return home to our country to live a full life instead of making that journey home in a flag-draped coffin.

Of course, when you have a society that spits on its returning soldiers, calls them baby killers, and ostracizes them for several decades...then there is not much chance that they're going to care about a few dogs. In any event, I know for a fact, that I am here on this earth today because God placed me with an exceptional dog that not only saved my life many times but those of the many men in the units that I led. I was lucky to be *ONE* of those men who served our country in the capacity of a Scout Dog Handler in the Republic of South Vietnam.

So, knowing the job description of a Dog Handler/Scout Dog Handler, it is a very logical question to ask why anyone would want to take on such a dangerous position. The life expectancy of a Point Man /Dog Handler in a fire fight was calculated in milliseconds. Being a "Professional Point Man" for every working day of your life in a war zone does not, on the surface, seem like a very brilliant move. So, why would anyone in his right mind be a Scout Dog Handler?

Continued in the next issue.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Checking: \$32,558.50

Savings: 5,074.23

Total: \$37,632.73

Sometimes You Find Reptiles Around Your K-9 Post

By by George Cartter

31st SPS K-9, Oct. '67 - Oct. '68

Dogs, like people, seem to have a wide range of attitudes towards reptiles. Vietnam has a different lineup of fauna than stateside (I suspect that some of you may have noticed this also). One of our first nights together at Tuy Hoa Air Base, my dog King and I had a post adjacent to a fallow rice paddy. Just off the deuce-and-a-half posting truck, doing an initial post clearing, we came upon a small snake, not much bigger than a pencil, at the paddy's edge. This was in Phu Yen Province, on the South China Sea coast, North of Nha Trang, South of Qui Nhon.

The snake looked like a young krait, a highly-poisonous snake, but not usually dangerous under most situations. King didn't pay it much attention as it crawled off down into the paddy.

In the summer of 1966, just before joining the Air Force, I worked as a horse wrangler at a summer camp for kids in rural northern Los Angeles County. The ranch camp manager had a half German Shepherd-half Collie dog named Smokey. Smokey had a lump on his nose, a souvenir from an encounter with a rattlesnake.

Being close to some hills and oak woodlands where I grew up in the East Los Angeles area, I was familiar with snakes and lizards, an interest of several other guys in the neighborhood. I'd had a California Kingsnake as a pet for several years. With alternating dark and light bands, a young Kingsnake has some resemblance to a young krait; but a different posture. I knew that the snake King had ignored was not a homey.

A few months later, maybe June of '68, King and I had a quiet beach post. About midnight, we took a short, C-ration lunch break on the downwind side of the post. After lunch, we walked out to clear the post and hadn't gotten more than thirty or forty yards down the beach when I spotted tractor tracks in the sand. The tracks were about the same size as the ones made by the old Ford tractor I had used at the ranch camp. I was profoundly startled.

There had been reports of an amphibious attack at a base in Qui Nhon a few months earlier. Quickly I flicked the safety off my M16A to semi auto, then I looked to my left and noticed the tractor tracks stopped just a few yards inland. Immediately, I looked right and there, at the water line, was the back end of a large momma sea turtle, heading back into the South China Sea after having just laid her eggs. King hadn't alerted on her at all. Neither of us heard her making her deposit

in the sand. King, a.k.a. "Gramps," was trained to find human beings. Walking to the kennels from the K-9 hootch a few weeks later, there were lots freshly hatched sea turtle youngsters on the sand, trying to make their way to the water.

Another night, King and I had a post on the inland side of the base. After being dropped off, I took King's muzzle off, put his patrol collar on, and loaded my weapon. We did a patrol pattern that cleared the post, then we checked out the 4'x4' bunker. The bunker, about three feet deep, had wooden sides, topped off by a couple rows of sandbags. We wanted to check the bunker to make sure it was clear (i.e., no rats).

This night, there was about a three-foot long monitor lizard in the bunker. King wasn't interested, but I was. The lizard, because it was a cool night, apparently wasn't up to exiting the bunker. I picked him up to look him over. The world only has a couple species of venomous lizards and they are native to the Sonora desert, the Gila Monster and the Mexican Beaded Lizard. What I didn't know at the time was that, while not technically venomous, monitor lizards host a rather nasty group of germs in their saliva. A monitor lizard bite can be dangerous.

So, while I'm checking out this lizard, along comes the K-9 shift sergeant, Wiley Neal, driving a jeep with the lights off, checking posts. As per protocol, I halted the jeep, reported my post secure, and then said, "Hey, sarge, look what I found." Then I pulled this heavy bodied, three-foot long monitor lizard from inside my field jacket. The sergeant let out a loud, shrieking holler. He just was not expecting a show-and-tell experience with a monitor lizard. And he wasn't a city guy. He was from Wyoming, as I recall. He just wasn't anticipating meeting a cousin of the Komodo Dragon on a K-9 post at 9:30 at night.

The Komodo Dragon and the South East Asian monitor lizard are of the same genus, *Varanus*, but the ones in Vietnam don't usually get bigger than six feet.

Anyway, this Phu Yen Province native seemed to have been happy getting warmed up for a few minutes under my field jacket. It gave him enough energy to continue on his way. That and the rude greeting from Sgt. Neal.

King seemed fine with letting the lizard go. Maybe the thought was, again, "reptiles—not my department." I've also wondered how Sgt. Neal remembered the story. I imagine it got filed into the "Checking K-9 posts in the dark was often a challenge" category.



Kokomo Indiana September Reunion

By Ron Werneth

Every September, the usually sleepy Midwestern town of Kokomo Indiana hosts its annual reunion. With the improvement of the COVID Pandemic conditions and the success of the vaccinations, the reunion will go on as planned this fall. Frankly, if you have never attended before, it is even hard to imagine.

Visualize thousands of veterans of every service branch, ranging from Vietnam to our modern-day warriors descending on the appropriately-named "Healing Field" which is a part of the Howard County Vietnam Veterans Organization. Imagine flying Hueys, live music, a memorial, military vehicles/displays and vendors - most importantly, the amazing veterans.

Every year a large contingent of Vietnam Dogmen, trackers and veterinarian veterans take part in the event. It is a unique opportunity to reconnect with your fellow veterans and simply have a great time. For attendees that prefer not to camp or stay in an RV, it is usually possible to find a hotel nearby.

This is a must-do event if you have never done it before and well worth the effort to attend. This year the annual reunion will be held from September 13-19, 2021. For more information: <https://hcvvo.net/reunion-event-info/sept-all-veterans-reunion>.

Vietnam Dog Handler Assoc.
c/o Randy Kimler
2225 Merriman St.
Port Neches, TX 77651-4302

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Paper Dog Available Soon

Paper Dog by John Kubisz will be available for sale on June 26. (See review in last issue.) It can be purchased from Amazon and all major booksellers in digital or hardcopy formats.

