



DOGMAN

A Brotherhood of All Combat Veteran Dog Handlers



VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 31 - NUMBER 2 - JUNE 2024

Reno Reunion: Starry, Starry Nights

By Ernie Ayala

VDHA Vice President

Are reunions really necessary? Reno brought us all together just when we were afraid we were going to be so slow this would be our final curtain. As the days grew closer to reunion time, our numbers got better and finally went over the 70 mark. I can attest to the fact this was one of our best reunions, ever. Thank you, Bob and Deb Palochik, for the wonderful and difficult job of putting this all together and then working throughout the reunion while assuring we all had fun.

It was a relaxing getaway; we never had to leave the hotel with the exception of getting to the magic show. The Silver Legacy Hotel is nestled nicely between two other great hotels, Circus Circus and The El Dorado. You can have breakfast at Circus, lunch at the El Dorado Sports Bar then a fancy dinner at Ruth Chris Steak House in the Silver Legacy.

Our outing was in the old part of downtown Reno. The show was called Magique, I guess that's French for magic. It featured two magicians, seven showgirl-dancers and a guy who cleaned up after every cannon shot of confetti that rained on the audience every once in a while. They were all great, even though the building was a supermarket that went out of business during the COVID

pandemic and the magicians were food delivery drivers during said pandemic. They were totally professional in every sense of the word and this show could have easily brought the house down in Las Vegas.

Finally, at our banquet we paid homage and a toast to two giants we lost last year. John Sciascia, our former president who took over during troubling times and held fast. Also, John Dupla, our first and only VP of Tracker Dogs who passed away suddenly. It was hard on our president, John Harvey because he was a personal friend of John Sciascia. Both were Marines and neighbors in Florida.

After our prayer, it was time to eat. Dinner was so delicious as we dined on succulent prime rib, honey Alaskan salmon, and juicy pork loin as well as salads, side dishes and an array of sweet desserts to go with our coffee.

The return of Tom Mitchell, our second president, was one of our many surprises. He returned to commemorate our 30th anniversary and to say hi to all his old friends. Also joining Tom was Craig Lord, another pioneer who served on the first VDHA board of directors.

Adding to our surprise, we were visited by a Red
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Members and guests who were able to attend the banquet posed for a group photo.

From the President

By John R. Harvey
VDHA President

Pain

Physical pain can be as distracting as mental pain. I am not a medical doctor, but I have had more than my share of twisted ankles and pulled muscles to know when I need help. My biggest problem with a chronic pain issue is the mental distraction.

Project deadlines become problematic unless you keep a To-Do list or calendar that you constantly remind yourself to look at once a day. Shopping trips become a hassle after the third time your wife sends you back to the store for an item you forgot.

Returning from our reunion in Reno, I twisted my back lifting a suitcase off of the turn style. The pain shot down my legs and still has not subsided. The daily doses of ibuprofen 800 helps but the pain remains distracting. Today is May 23rd and I just recalled that my president's letter is due to Mr. Lemish our editor. A review of my emails reveals that I am several hundred emails behind. I have neglected to set a date for this month's officers conference call. And yes, I still haven't completed my tax return that I put on extension last month right before our reunion. My Paris Island drill instructor would simply say excuses are like assholes: everyone has one. To all those who have been affected by my distractions I apologize.

Our reunion was held in Reno April 29-May 1. I believe that everyone in attendance had a wonderful time. One of the highlights was to hear Tom Mitchell, VDHA member # 2 and past president, speak about how our organization began, its goals and aspirations. I also had the pleasure of presenting Ernie Ayala with the Warriors Medal of Valor. It was also awarded posthumously to John Sciascia. Our Sergeant at Arms Mike Duran accepted the award on behalf of his widow Johanna Sciascia.

Congratulations to Bob Palochik on having been reelected treasurer of our organization.

Our next reunion is tentatively scheduled for the spring of 2026.

God Bless America

Opportunity to Serve

The officers of the VDHA would like to take this moment to advise its membership of an opportunity to take a more active role in our organization.

Our current Secretary, Vernon Anderson, has advised the board of his intentions to resign his current position due to ongoing personal and health reasons. If you have any interest in taking over this responsibility please contact myself, Bob Palochik, or Ernie Ayala.



Members and their families enjoying the banquet on the final night of the reunion. (Photo and AI enhancements by Mike Hurder.)

Notes of the General Meeting

By Steve Lemish

The general meeting of VDHA members was held at the Reno reunion. Business included the next reunion, election of officers, and treasurer report.

Generally, VDHA reunions are held every two years. The reunion location changes from the East section of the country to the middle section and then the West. The next reunion is set for the East which generally means somewhere in the Eastern Time Zone. There was a discussion about whether the next reunion should be held in 18 months rather than 24 because our members are getting up in years. Generally, there were no strong opinions either way.

Members were also asked for suggestions for cities where the next reunion might be held. In order to cut costs, it was suggested the reunion city should have an airport with a hub and also an airport shuttle to cut down

on costs to members. Some Cities up for consideration are Dayton, OH, Wilmington, NC, Atlanta, GA and Fort Lauderdale, FL. When given the choice of whether the reunion would be held over a weekend or on weekdays, both options seemed fine to a majority of members.

Officers encouraged all members to contact them with questions or suggestions regarding future reunions. Also, members were encouraged to contact officers regarding any issues or complaints and to report a member's death and arrangements. We can sometimes have a member attend the services if feasible. All the officers' phone numbers are published in each issue of *Dogman* and their email addresses can be found on the VDHA website.

The next business was the election of officers. The offices of president and treasurer were up for election. For president, John Harvey was nominated and he graciously

accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations. A show of hands vote was held and he was elected overwhelmingly. Bob Palochik was nominated to continue as treasurer. He also graciously accepted the nomination and there were no other nominations. A show of hands indicated overwhelming support for his election.

Tom Shambo wants to continue interviewing dog handlers for his War Dogs Podcast. If interested, contact him at Tom.Shambo@gmail.com.

Treasurer Bob Palochik gave an extensive report of VDHA finances. It was noted that dues are down substantially as members age, pass away, purchase lifetime memberships or receive higher disability ratings. There was a suggestion the VDHA should try to obtain a corporate sponsor for reunions. He cited one veteran organization who gets support from Budweiser for each reunion.



Reno Reunion: Starry, Starry Nights



Deb Palochik and granddaughter Kelsey Sharapan worked tirelessly to keep the reunion running smoothly.

Continued from Page 1.

Cross worker who happened to be in Reno with the Women's Bowling Championship Tournament. Joyce worked as a Donut Dolly in Vietnam in 1970 and spoke of her love for veterans and experiences in Vietnam in a wonderful speech at the banquet. *(Editor's Note: There will be photos and a story about Joyce in the next issue.)*

The final order of business was the presentation of the Warriors Medal of Valor which are presented at every reunion. One was awarded to John Sciascia posthumously. It was presented to Mike Duran, our Sergeant at Arms, on behalf of the Sciascia Family for his unwavering valor in Vietnam as a U.S. Marine scout dog handler and his time on the VDHA board and finally President of the VDHA.

The final surprise of the night came as President John Harvey described the next recipient as "a big guy with a funny walk. Ernie Ayala, come up here and get your award." It was put around my neck by our treasurer and also a medal recipient, Bob Palochik.

I never got to thank anyone for this medal but I will now. I accept this medal for the honor it was intended but also for all the dog handlers who served in Vietnam and came home without promotion of rank or medals of valor. We did our job as expected. We joined the

VDHA to honor the 4500 dogs who did not return and whose memory will not be forgotten.

Our next reunion site is unknown as of yet. Some Cities up for consideration are Dayton, OH, Wilmington, NC, Atlanta, GA and Fort Lauderdale, FL.

Here is a list of attendees:

Don Chambers	<u>12th SPS</u>
Fred Cobb	<u>12th SPS</u>
Gregory Helm	<u>12th SPS</u>
Joe Kozik	<u>12th SPS</u>
Rick Marty	<u>12th SPS</u>
Tom Mitchell	<u>12th SPS</u>
Henry Nieto	<u>12th SPS</u>
Jim Sylvester	<u>12th SPS</u>
Tom Urdzik	<u>12th SPS</u>
Richard Ebbs	<u>14th SPS</u>
Bob Palochik	<u>14th SPS</u>
Ernie Ayala	<u>212th MP</u>
James Botts	<u>212th MP</u>
Bob Davis	<u>212th MP</u>
Don Hodges	<u>212th MP</u>
Gordon Wildes	<u>3rd SPS</u>
Gerry Rice	<u>33rd IPSD</u>
Mike Hurder	<u>34th IPSD</u>
John Davis	<u>35th SPS</u>
Don De Meurers	<u>35th SPS</u>
Craig Lord	<u>35th SPS</u>
John Rehnberg	<u>35th SPS</u>
Don Schaeffer	<u>35th SPS</u>
Tom Shambo	<u>35th SPS</u>
Dennis Travis	<u>35th SPS</u>
Carl Walker Jr	<u>35th SPS</u>
Richard Gannaway	<u>377th SPS</u>
Herb Mills	<u>377th SPS</u>
Rick Bruce	<u>37th IPSD</u>
Bill Mindel	<u>388th SPS</u>
Terry Robbins	<u>39th IPSD</u>
Rick Maurer	<u>432nd SPS</u>
Frank Wehner	<u>432nd SPS</u>
Charles Epperson	<u>45th IPSD</u>
Steve Lemish	<u>47th IPSD</u>
Samuel Warner	<u>49th IPS</u>
Rick Aromando	<u>635th SPS</u>
Jesus Bedia	<u>635th SPS</u>
John Coffey	<u>635th SPS</u>
Dale Bladorn	<u>981st MP</u>
John Harvey	<u>Marine Scout Dog</u>
Steve Reichenbach	<u>Marine Scout Dog</u>
Bob Stockman	<u>Marine Scout Dog</u>
Steve Kinne	<u>Navy Sentry Dogs</u>
Michael Duran	<u>USN K9</u>
Keith Johnson	<u>Associate Member</u>



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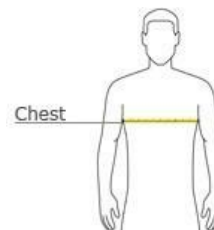
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Information and order form also available on VDHA website



8.3-ounce, 65/35 ring spun cotton/polyester, 100% ring spun cotton face (Solids, Light Heather Grey), 60/40 ring spun cotton/polyester (Heathers, Royal Frost), Jersey-lined, two-piece hood, Dyed-to-match draw-cords with aluminum grommets, Dyed-to-match twill back neck tape, Covered YKK aluminum zipper, Side seamed, 1x1 rib knit cuffs and hem. Tear-away label.

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DEEP ROYAL BLUE	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
LIGHT HEATHER GRAY	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
WHITE	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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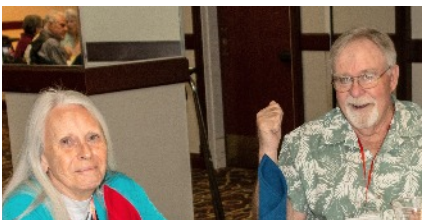
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Banquet Photos



*Taken by
Mike Hurder*



Warriors Medal of Valor – 2024 Recipients

By John Harvey, VDHA President

Ernie Ayala served in the 212th MP Company, November 28, 1967, to November 28, 1968 as a sentry dog handler at Tay Ninh, Long Binh and Vinh Long. While at Vinh Long during the beginning of Tet, Ernie and other handlers established a defensive position at the south gate. While receiving small arms fire during a ground attack, Ernie and other handlers went out 70 yards risking their lives to help civilians, Americans and Vietnamese get into the compound.

Ernie joined the VDHA in 2000. He volunteered to be the Army Sentry Dog Unit Director and worked with Jesse Mendez to raise \$8,000 for a unit pedestal at the War Dog Memorial at Ft. Benning. He served as VDHA Sergeant at Arms, designed VDHA Reunion Pins, and has volunteered at numerous Feed the Dawgs events with Jon Hemp. Ernie is the current VDHA Executive Vice President and has submitted at least one story for each issue of *Dogman* for the past 20 years.

Representing the VDHA and wearing his VDHA hat and jacket, Ernie makes appearances at schools, service organizations, senior centers and military and government facilities giving presentations about war dogs.

In 1970 he was hired by KNX-CBS radio as a writer and community relations representative. He also continued his schooling at Columbia College where he achieved his bachelor's and master's degrees. In 1972 he was one of the first cable TV news reporters at Theta Cable TV Channel 3. He served as an anchor and helped found the Chicano News Media Association. He worked at the Pacoima Skills Center where he taught classes in four different subjects, counseled students and promoted the Skills Center on radio and TV.

In 1982 Ernie worked for the Allstate Insurance Company as an agent for the next 28 years. While at Allstate, he served in the Agent Congress and Political Action Committee for insurance agents. He also served on the Assigned Risk Special Committee that penalizes rogue agents who violate state laws.

In 1992 he was sent to Sacramento by Allstate to persuade Insurance Committee Chairman, Senator Art Torres, to re-think his "Pay At The Pump" bill. Ernie was credited for saving over a thousand agent jobs.

In 1989 Ernie used his skills and experience to facilitate a fundraising effort for his cousins Abe and Mary Ayala. Their daughter Anissa needed a bone marrow transplant. He utilized Abe's experience as a



Ernie Ayala and his wife Fran after receiving the Warriors Medal of Valor.

decorated Vietnam War veteran with the First Air Cavalry and was able to get a personal friend to do a week-long news story on Anissa's life. That turned into an NBC Movie of the week called "*For the Love of My Child*" and raised enough to pay for over 5000 people to get tested. Anissa survived leukemia and a controversial operation. As a result, the Ayala's were on many national and local talk shows.

Ernie's involvement in other organizations includes: the East Los Angeles and Northeast Los Angeles Jaycees (from 1973-1983) where he became Internal Vice President and the Rosemead Chamber of Commerce (from 1986-2008) where he served as president for two terms.

He is married to his wife Fran and father to Joanne (deceased in 2014) and daughter America; also stepfather to Ernest Martinez, Cathy Mendez, Deanna Ortega, Ruben Baldon, Nicole Diaz and Rachel Gonzalez. Ernie has a large extended family with numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Continued on Page 8.

Warriors Medal of Valor

Continued from Page 7.

John Sciascia was presented the Warriors Medal of Valor posthumously. He passed away in 2023.

He was a proud Marine who joined the Marine Corps in 1964. He trained at Camp Pendelton and completed his first deployment to Vietnam in 1965. John returned to Lackland Air Force Base for Sentry Dog Training from January to April 1967 (class # 08027). He deployed to Da Nang, Vietnam in April 1967 as a Sentry Dog Handler with the Sentry, and Scout Dog Platoons.

He served during the Tet Offensive at many different locations and military units. In addition to providing security for the Da Nang Airbase, dog teams provided security for outer defense perimeters, such as the Marine Aircraft Group 36 at Phu Bai. The dog teams worked to detect ambushes and caches of supplies and provide day and evening patrols. John completed his second tour and left the Marine Corps in September 1968.

John joined and served with the Florida Highway Patrol. He served as a state trooper and later as an investigator for the Homicide Division. During his 20 years of service, he received several commendations, including one from Janet Reno.

In 1989, he retired and married his wife, Johanna. John went to work as a Safety and Occupational Health Specialist for the Department of Defense (DOD), United States Army Corps of Engineers Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory. He was promoted to DOD Safety and Occupational Manager for the U.S. Border Patrol and then later his responsibility included the entire Pacific Coast region.

In 2004, still with the DOD, he was transferred to Seoul, South Korea and assumed manager responsibility for the Southeast Asia District. During this period, he was sent to New Orleans to assist after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. For his efforts and actions, he received Certifications of Achievement and Commendation. He participated and was acknowledged as a founding member of the Department of Homeland Security.

John was a life member of the AL (American Legion), VFW, (Veterans of Foreign Wars), VDHA (Vietnam Dog Handler Association) and DAV (Disabled American Veterans). He joined DAV in 2006 and volunteered as a Service Officer for DAV, AL, and VFW. Not only did he help veterans through these service organizations as a VSO representative, but John also made it his purpose to help service men reconnect and find worth and pride in themselves as Vietnam Veterans.



Sergeant of Arms Mike Duran accepts the medal from Treasurer Bob Palochik on behalf of Mr. Sciascia.

John was a faithful and loyal member of VDHA. He was VDHA member #113. He worked extensively for the VDHA and served as Sergeant of Arms 1999–2000, Treasurer 2000–2002, and President 2002–2006. He worked on the creation of the War Dog Postal Stamps, obtained funds for the War Dog Monument, helped veterans to reunite with their friends and recruited dog handlers to join VDHA. Lastly, he served his community as a greeter at his Catholic church and as a volunteer School Crossing Guard.

His love of German Shepherds continued throughout his life. He always had at least one dog all the time, and at one time - three, including one that was a retired MWD. He often stated that he would find and reunite with them all on the Rainbow Bridge.

Mike Duran accepted the medal on behalf of John and will present it to John's wife Johanna.

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, 4723 Rolando Blvd, San Diego, CA 92115 (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.

The Tip of the Spear; A Wardog Story

Editor's Note: This is the 12th installment of this multi-part story. It details his journey from college to Vietnam and his scout dog Skipper (X268). This episode continues the mission where his scout dog was being misused on a road and a soldier was killed.

By Vernon J. Roman

Scout Dog Handler

As far as I was concerned, Skipper was of very little value with all that was going on around us. So we turned left and headed up the road following behind the group that was ahead of us but on the other side of the road.

As I said earlier, for all practical purposes, that patrol ended when we stepped on that road and joined the stream of soldiers heading to the top of the hill. Skipper was still in his harness in search mode, but as far as I was concerned, he had way too many distractions to be of any use.

Wrong, wrong... I saw him very clearly give a quick solid look to our left side. I dismissed the look as being something he just was being curious at, like any dog, and I disregarded the look.....No one would be dumb enough to be that close to us. We took about three more steps then BOOM.

Confetti and debris came floating down on top of Skipper and me. The soldier behind me had stepped on a mine, was blown up, and immediately died. Material from the explosion fell all over the two of us, just like confetti dropped at a sports event. The officer, in

charge, in looking at some of the stuff that floated down to the ground around us, picked up a picture of the soldier and his wife and child. The officer asked me to be sure to keep silent about what I was seeing. It would be a major morale buster if others found out he was to go on R&R the following week to see his wife in Hawaii.

I assumed that death was on me for not stopping and checking on what Skipper had looked at. Thirty years later, I got the rest of the story. Daryl was leading the group on the other side of the road. That soldier that died was not one of mine, but one of his. For whatever reason, the man broke rank, went across the road to our group choosing to break in our line right behind me, and then stepped on the mine that Skipper had alerted on.

So, it is very possible, that if the man had stayed where he was, everyone would have made it to the top of the hill, provided, of course, everyone kept the rule of always following in the steps of the one in front of you.

Not that it's a much better story....as it was still a miss....unfortunately, the reckless move to cross over the road and break into our line was one additional mistake too many. Unfortunately, we do not get do-overs in combat.

In combat, for you to live, someone else, your enemy most likely, has to die. God cannot be on both sides, and he definitely is a factor in the outcome.

Continued in the next issue.

Vietnam Dog Handler Association Officers

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DEADLINE

**ARTICLES FOR
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BE SUBMITTED
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Treasurer's Report

CHECKING \$42,322.64

SAVINGS 5,075.50

TOTAL \$47,398.14

REMINDERS and INFORMATION:

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.

PayPal payments for dues and/or merchandise purchases must be made from your personal PayPal account.

Dues: PayPal payments are to be sent to vdhapaypal@vdha.us. Please include member name and/or member number in NOTE area in PayPal.

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Remember, if paying for merchandise through your personal PayPal account, your completed order form must be emailed to our BX Manager, Mike Hurder, at bxmgr@vdha.us for completion.

Correction: The Howard County All Veterans Reunion will be held September 15-22 in Kokomo, Indiana.



This year's winning reunion pin was designed by Dave Broeker. Everyone at the reunion got one with their registration package and there are still some available from the BX.

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BX Sales Soar at Reno Reunion

*By Mike Hurder
VDHA BX Manager*

What an incredible three days at the reunion in Reno. Great weather, great accommodations, who doesn't like a magic show, and oh yeah, what a great bunch of people we are.

The BX Grossed \$1,932 in merchandise sales in three days. Pretty fantastic! Thank you all. Next time, however, I'm bringing some of you home with me to help unpack.

For myself, the best part was getting to associate faces with names, reacquainting with those I've met before, and meeting so many new friends. And that last meal was pretty scrumptious. Donna and I had a wonderful time.

It has to be said, Debbie and Bob Palochik are superstars. They do so much behind the scenes work, it exhausts me just thinking about it, and once again, I am grateful for all they do. Thanks, you two.

Wherever we end up next time, I can't wait. See you all then. Regards and WOOF from your BX Manager.

Editor's Note:

Dogman Received Numerous Stories!

Thanks so very much for all the new story and photo submissions! We could not fit them in this issue. Please keep them coming!

Next issues will include:

My First Donut Dolly, So You Wanna Be a Dogman, Podcast Interviews and much more.