



DOGMAN

A Brotherhood of All Combat Veteran Dog Handlers



VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 33 - NUMBER 2 - JUNE 2026

New Bern Reunion Was a Trek to the South

*By Ernie Ayala
VDHA Vice President*

Our 2026 reunion was just held in the South; North Carolina to be exact. It was in a little town called New Bern, named after the capital of Switzerland. In German, Bern means bear and you would hard pressed to find a business in town that doesn't pay homage to the bear by statue, flag or souvenir items like t-shirts, hats, magnets, etc.

Many members checked in early. I checked in Wednesday night (27th) after a grueling 18-hour, four-airport, three-airplane experience that got me to the Doubletree Hotel at 9:30 pm. It was one flight after another and my wife Fran and I never had a chance to have even a bite of food. We figured the hotel had room service or a restaurant but they were closed by the time we arrived. Our only subsistence was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, microwave popcorn and some trail mix.

We were happy with the view outside our window at the hotel. Almost every room had a river view. (See the photo to the right.)

Thursday was ours to relax, except the officers had a 3 p.m. meeting as we always do every month to discuss VDHA business. Treasurer Bob Palochik was ill and couldn't attend but we got him on the phone and he participated in the discussion. We wished him well and let him know he was missed very much.

We had our official General Membership Meeting on Friday morning. We were delighted that most of the members attended the meeting. President John Harvey asked the room how many were attending their very first reunion. The majority of the room raised their hand. He then asked how many drove here from their home. Again, the majority of the room raised their hand. So we discovered a whole missing portion of our membership and they are great people. I had the pleasure and honor of meeting them personally. After the introductions, John went into the importance of



The hotel rooms each had a spectacular river view.

continuing to see each other and maybe not wait two years before we have another reunion. He suggested that the next meeting take place in October, 2027 (we generally have it in October). I reminded him we had a long-time agreement that the VDHA would only have reunions on even-numbered years so the membership can attend their units' reunions on odd-number years.

Officers John Harvey, Steve Lemish, John Homa, Frank Wehner and I listened to suggestions from our membership for our next reunion as to both times and locations. The next reunion must take place in either the Central or Mountain time zones. These are the top cities in consideration for our next get together, in no particular order: Omaha, Nebraska; Memphis, Tennessee; Indianapolis, Indiana; Dayton, Ohio; and Kansas City, Missouri. We listened to the pros and cons on each city and the rest shall be explored by our travel specialist, Deb Palochik for contracts, room rates, airport feasibility, attractions and restaurants.

Continued on Page 3.

From the President

By John Harvey
VDHA President

Our 2026 reunion is over. I believe all those in attendance appreciated the comradery. We had several attendees who had never attended a VDHA reunion. Their appreciation was overwhelming. The weather was absolutely fantastic. What was supposed to be a weekend of rain turned out to be wonderfully hot and sunny.

Having been previously nominated by a voice vote, Ernie Ayala has been reelected to the position of Vice President, and Bob Palochik to the position of Treasurer at the general membership meeting. Unfortunately, Bob could not make the reunion but his wife Deb and two of their beautiful granddaughters were there to coordinate all of the activities. Without Deb's hard work and devotion, it would be almost impossible to put together such a fabulous weekend. So, thank you Deb.

Our members meeting also included a lengthy discussion about the location of our next reunion, and the timing. The location is to be in the Central or Mountain time zones. Possible sites included Nashville or Memphis, TN, Kansas City, MO, Indianapolis, IN, and Omaha, NB. The timing was discussed at length, including May of 2027, October of 2027, and May of 2028.

Many of our members have severe difficulties in traveling, and to be honest, none of us are getting any younger to the best of my knowledge. For many of us in our late 70s and 80s, how many more opportunities will we have to experience the love and comradery of our fellow handlers? If you have any thoughts on these matters please contact one of your officers such that the board may take your opinions into consideration.

Albert Johnson, President of the Military Working Dogs Heritage Museum, was the reunion's guest speaker. He discussed the mission and accomplishments of his organization. The attendees and their family members were encouraged to consider the museum as a permanent repository for any pictures, letters or memorabilia related to our war dogs in Vietnam.

Many of you are aware of the hard work and devotion put in over the years by our prior web master, Dave Broeker. The website was a proprietary system designed to fit the needs of our organization. We have been notified by our service provider that effective June 30, 2026 they will no longer be able to continue

servicing our needs. The board is in discussions with two individuals in order to determine whether we should migrate the entire software program to a new provider, or whether we should try to identify the data files most important to our organization and simply migrate that data to a new off-the-shelf web design. Whichever approach the board decides on, it will represent a significant monetary investment by our organization.

Finally, a number of Vietnam War organizations are discussing what their legacy should be when no one is left to their membership. If you have any views or convictions of winding up the VDHA, please express them in a Dogman article or letter to the editor.

Welcome Home.



Albert Johnson, president of Military Working Dogs Heritage Museum, was the keynote speaker at the reunion banquet. Mr. Johnson urged the families of war dog handlers to donate their artifacts and gear from the war to the museum where they will be honored and remembered always.

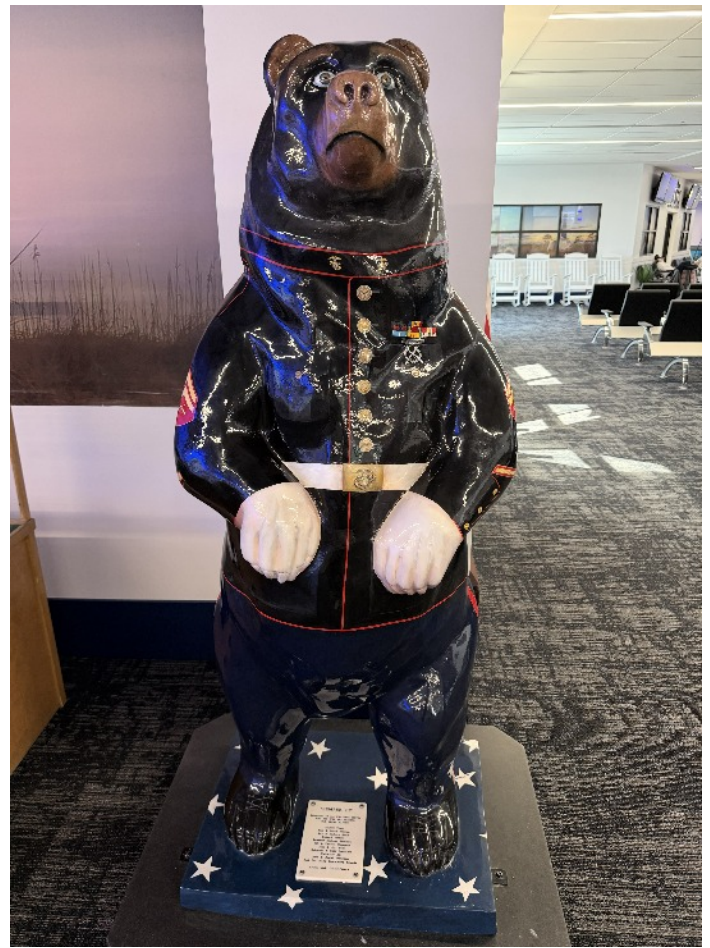
New Bern Reunion Trek

Continued from Page 1.

The gathering was a great opportunity for all members to be heard about helping decide the next reunion location.

There was also quite a discussion about what to do with the VDHA once it outlives its members. Some members are also members of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). Their national organization and chapters seem to be at odds and no one quite has a plan of how to wind down their organizations. It was suggested by the members that we should start planning now for the day when the VDHA's members are gone. Many members expressed how proud they were to be a member of this organization and one member read a piece about war dogs and their handlers saving so many lives in Vietnam and how it was one of the most dangerous roles in the war.

There were so many questions about New Bern and those were answered on our Trolley Tour. The quaint little town had cobblestone streets and 300-year-old homes and mansions. It was featured in the TV show "Outlanders." Our trolley tour experts told us about many of the older homes in town as we passed them. There were stories of their original owners and the ghosts that still haunt various houses. Special thanks to our guide Mike and our driver Diane for the memorable tour. There also was no shortage of restaurants or souvenir businesses in town. It was an experience having grits for breakfast. If there was any doubt of my suggestion to have New Bern host our reunion, it was not questioned after this. Deb Palochik made sure this was a reunion to remember.



This "Semper Fi" bear, located at the airport, was dedicated to all who have served and are serving this great nation.



VDHA member Ernest May and wife Doris with Fran and I pictured with one of the hundred or so bear statues around the town.

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.



2026 VHDA Reunion Banquet Photos





John Harvey Awarded Warriors Medal of Valor

*By John Homa
VDHA Vice President
Thailand Dog Handlers*

Two Warriors Medals of Honor are generally awarded every two years at the VDHA reunion. This very special honor recognizes VDHA members' exceptional efforts to make a difference in their communities, organizations or, for past military actions that they may have not been given due credit.

The award was originally created by Native American Marshall Tall Eagle Serna. Marshall Tall Eagle is a Vietnam veteran who served for 14 years in the Army and Air Force. He designed the medal in 2002. Soon after, it was approved as the official medal for presentation for all tribes desiring to use the medal to pay tribute to and honor all veterans and current military personnel regardless of their cultural background.

This year, there was only one nomination for the honor and the medal was awarded to our current president, John Harvey. Past recipient Vice President Ernie Ayala presented the medal at the reunion in New Bern. The following information about John Harvey was read at his presentation by John Homa:

In 1966 just six days after graduating from high school John Harvey joined the Marine Corps. During his time with the 26th Marines at Phu Bai he was Medevac'd out for medical reasons just before the Battle of Khe Sanh. Since he missed being in country during Khe Sanh, John wrote a letter directly to the Marine Sergeant Major requesting to return to Vietnam as a Dog handler to be on point for his fellow Marines.

Something obviously worked because he was assigned with Bob Stockman as Platoon Leaders to lead 24 marines through training as Scout Handlers at Ft. Benning. They were later assigned to the 3rd MP Battalion at Da Nang.

While there, John's dog Prince was KIA and he picked up Baron with whom he continued to walk point. John concentrated on on-going training and upkeep and kept meticulous notes since he had observed many handlers were wounded on their first time out on patrol. He saw to it that they were well adapted before going out in the field.

One training subject John and Sgt Stockman developed was map and compass training. They made



Warriors Medal of Valor recipient John Harvey (left) stands next to presenter Ernie Ayala. Mr. Ayala is a proud prior recipient of the award.

changes in policies like not carrying 30 days of food and had the handlers carry three days worth instead. A 11 S-4's were instructed to know with whom the dog team was working with and ensure they were re-supplied at the same time as the troops they were working with. Remarkably, every member of that unit came home. They also carried with them 14 Purple Hearts and a Navy Cross. Always on the lookout for the troops, one handler, Karl Gross, recalled John tried to get a newly promoted E2 handler an instant Meritorious Lance Corporal promotion to E3. It was denied. He kept trying though.

After his 4 years in the Marines he became a CPA and then later, at the age of 60, he graduated from law school. He became a member of the VDHA, and in 2000 CNN did a piece about the Riverside K9 Memorial with John's commentary.

While with the VDHA, he was the first chairman of the National War Dog Memorial Committee and helped to raise over \$100,000 that was donated to the organization that took over the program. He became vice president in 2016 and sadly took over as president in 2017 because of the untimely death of then President Perry Money.

John represents the VDHA and speaks at events such as the rededications of war dog and working dog memorials. John is married to his wife, Innies. He also has a son and daughter and three granddaughters.

New Bern Reunion Moments



Sitting around the Hospitality Room



Taking Naps



Taking the Trolley



General Membership Meeting



Out on the Deck

SPECIAL WEBSITE NOTICE

**THE VDHA WEBSITE WILL BE
UNDERGOING A MUCH-NEEDED
UPDATE AFTER 16 YEARS.**

**AS OF JULY 1, 2026, THE SITE WILL BE
SHUT DOWN.**

**WE DO NOT HAVE A SPECIFIC TIME
FRAME AS TO WHEN IT WILL BE BACK
UP AND RUNNING.**

**A MASS EMAIL WILL GO OUT WITH
UPDATES, CONTACT NUMBERS OF
OFFICERS, BX INFORMATION, ETC.,
WHILE THE SITE IS DOWN.**

**PLEASE BEAR WITH US WHILE WE
COMPLETE THIS MUCH-NEEDED
UPDATE TO THE SITE.**

**YOUR PATIENCE WILL BE
APPRECIATED.**

**VDHA FACEBOOK WILL CONTINUE TO
BE ACCESSIBLE DURING THE WEB
DOWN TIME.**

New Bern Trolley Tour Was a Hit



Many members and their families went on the Trolley Tour at New Bern and learned about much of the history and many of the very old houses of the small southern town. One fact: early in the civil war, the town was taken and occupied by the Union army because of its availability as an important confederate port. However, unlike many other southern towns and cities, it was not destroyed but rather preserved at the end of the war.

Author Seeks Stories and Photos

David Keeton, 981st MP, is looking for Vietnam veterans for another book he is writing. He would like to share your stories and pictures. Any pictures will be returned. Interested vets should contact David L. Keeton, P.O. Box 414, Athens, MI 49011-0314

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So, You Want to be a Dog Handler?

Editor's Note: This is the sixth installment of Rick's multi-part adventure as an Air Force dog handler. In this episode, he details some stories about his time in Nam with his sentry dog Rinny.

*By Rick Marty
USAF, 1964-1968*

The day before Christmas in 1967 President Lyndon Johnson arrived at Cam Ranh Bay for glad-handing and photo ops. The dog teams spent 19 straight hours on post; two boxes of C-Rats and a couple of cups of lukewarm coffee were brought around by the Strike Team, and it rained the whole damn time.

I think anybody that walked dogs at Cam Ranh Bay remembers the Monastery posts; 4-5 Sentry Dog posts scattered along the wire between the base perimeter road and the Buddhist Monastery and village grounds. On this particular night, about halfway through our shift, one of the handlers radioed in that his dog was on a strong human alert toward the wire and the no-man's land between the fences.

As I was on the next post North, Rinny and I started working our way in that direction. The handler then radioed in that he had released his dog on attack and was following up, "get a strike team here quick." The next radio message was, "found my dog, down and injured, where the hell is the strike team?", Charlie's running across the fields toward the Monastery."

About that time two strike teams arrived on scene, one from security that immediately secured the area around their Jeep and the road, and the other from K-9, led by Sgt. Kenny that went down to the wire and assisted the dog team. Sgt Kenny called in and said that they were pursuing the people that had attacked our dog team and led the strike team through the wire, across the no-man's land and onto the Monastery grounds.

Watching all this from the high ground on the end of my post I was amazed to see the strike team follow those suspected Cong right into the buildings and up the stairs. All of a sudden the whole area turned bright, a slap flare was fired along the outside veranda lighting up a crazy scene. Four or five Vietnamese were running down the veranda with the strike team in hot pursuit. Shots were exchanged and the Vietnamese disappeared through interior doors. About that time a Security Officer arrived on scene, up on the road by the Jeep, and ordered the strike team to return immediately. Mostly the end of the story but not quite.

Debriefing.

The K9 strike force was censured for its overly zealous defense and support of the K9 team but not severely. A whole lot closer attention was paid by K9 to the Monastery and village area after that night and eventually the area was cleaned out.

At a reunion some thirty years later, I was sitting in a hotel room with this handler and both our wives, reminiscing about this night when he said "look here" and pulled a pencil box out of his suitcase and showed me the dart that had injured his dog that night. The "dart" was an Asian Porcupine quill about 8-9 inches long and the diameter of a pencil. The dart had entered his dogs face beside the nose and traveled along the bone and poked out below his left ear. The official report indicated an animal encounter.

I have seen a lot of dogs "Porcupined" over the years, before then and since, and have never seen a dog get just one quill. Granted my experience is limited to American porcupines, not Asian, but all of us that were around that night have no doubts that the quill was not placed in that dog's face by an animal.

Continued in the next issue.



Finally off duty after 19 hours, the day the president came to town.

Treasurer's Report

CHECKING \$37,210.21

SAVINGS 5,074.00

TOTAL \$42,284.21

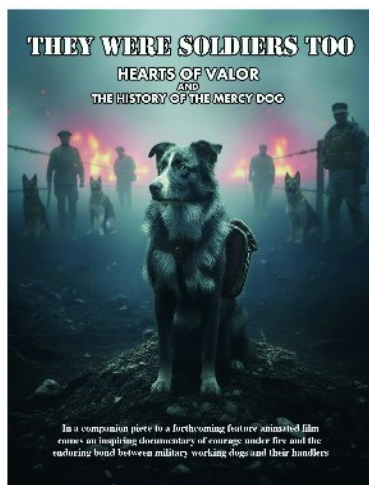
Screenplay: Forever Forward

By Michael Lemish

Former VDHA Historian

It was my honor to be the official historian for the Vietnam Dog Handler Association for 13 years. I'm fortunate to tell your story with two books: *War Dogs: A History of Loyalty and Heroism* and *Forever Forward: K-9 Operations in Vietnam*, along with many magazine articles.

I have been blessed that I can move your story to the big screen. My screenplay "Forever Forward" was accepted by two film festivals, the Beverly Hills Film festival and also Military Showcase and was a finalist at the SlateList Screenwriting Competition. It was also selected as a quarter finalist at the L.A. International Screenplay Awards. We have not won any top awards (yet)! I will continue to polish and edit the screenplay. This has been a project for over six



those who don't have the website it is www.michaellemish.com. You can find more info about the project there.

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Albert's Keynote Address

By Steve Lemish

Dogman Editor

One of the highlights of this year's reunion banquet was the speech by Albert Johnson, president of the Military Working Dogs Heritage Museum. In it, he announced their new physical space in Virginia which is a massive step forward for the museum. He also indicated the museum must be mobile, so it can travel across America. He has a plan to take it to schools to educate the next generation, to military bases to inspire current handlers, corporate sponsors and, most importantly to veterans events. The goal is to raise \$200,000 to make it happen.

They are also conducting interviews over Zoom with veteran dog handlers to preserve first-hand accounts for upcoming generations. Dog handlers' stories cannot be lost to time. He asks VDHA members to contact him and get on the schedule to be interviewed.

The museum is also always on the hunt for new war dog artifacts; not pristine museum pieces, but the real things dog handlers carried during the war. They can be old uniform items, pieces of dog gear, personal photos, historical newspaper articles or old field manuals. He asks if members have these items and want them preserved, protected and proudly displayed for future generations to honor, please him or John Homa.

Albert invited VDHA members to join the museum in honoring fallen dog handlers next Memorial Day in a virtual reading of their names. He also welcomes members to check out the museum's website MWDHM.org and also sign up for their newsletter *The Paw Print*. Finally, Albert thanked Vietnam dog handlers for paving the way for the dog handlers of today and tomorrow. As always, K9s lead the way.