



DOGMAN

A Brotherhood of All Combat Veteran Dog Handlers



VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 28 - NUMBER 3 - SEPTEMBER 2021

Combat Trackers Dedicate Statue; Have Reunion

By Frank Merritt

Memorial Day - 2021 found the Trackers in Tooele, Utah for the dedication of a statue in their honor. The sculptor, Marvin Hitesman, was inspired by a book about the combat tracker teams in Vietnam. Titled "SEEK ON," the sculpture shares the same name. It portrays a combat tracker dog handler and his Labrador Retriever. The 8-foot bronze statue memorializes this component of the tracker team for the first time. The background and introduction were made by Tooele Mayor Debbie Winn. The mission of trackers and their contribution was explained. Winn told of the way the trackers and Vietnam veterans were treated upon their return home. A shameful time in our country's history which should not be repeated.



SEEK ON combat tracker dog and handler.



Attending Left to Right, Standing: Jack O'Bannon, Don Campbell, Tom Dodd, Lloyd Pursley, Frank Merritt, Steve McDowell - Sitting: Julian Van Dyke, Sculptor Marvin Hitesman, Chuck Steward, Bill Reed.

At the conclusion of the dedication ceremony, veteran trackers were introduced. A standing ovation was given by those attending. Tooele gave the trackers not only a statue, but also a welcome home and thank you for your service. Our thanks to Tooele.

Late June was the time for the annual Combat Tracker Team Reunion. This year marks our twenty-second get-together and was held in Lexington, Kentucky. The end of pandemic restrictions made for great attendance. Veteran trackers, family and friends attended. First-time attendees were there. Some had not seen their teammates in over 50 years. The clock stopped back in Vietnam and started again in Lexington. Good food and drink, a good time was had by all and lots of war stories were told – some true, some not. A marine combat tracker dog handler and a specialized search dog handler were there. It was nice to hear more

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

By John R. Harvey
VDHA President

Today is August 19, 2021. Afghanistan has fallen to the Taliban. As I write, I struggle to find words that would be comforting and reassuring while describing those feelings of loss and uneasiness. My email continues to ping with notices from my American Legion reaching out to those Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who are feeling a sense of loss. I encourage everyone in our family to simply say to members of that community that we understand.

What amazes me are the differences of attitude amongst friends, acquaintances, and family members. There are those who simply shrug their shoulders and actually say, "why do you care and why are you upsetting yourself?" They proclaim that they stopped watching the news back in November 2020. Then there are those who become angry and begin to yell and swear, then break into tears.

As I look out my windows at the ocean I see this darkness beginning to surround me. My wife says that it is the Sahara Dust coming across the ocean. I have a sense that it is more ominous. I don't know what the next days weeks or months will bring. I hope that by the time we go to print there will be a happy ending.

I, for one, reside in the camp that believes that there should be no man (or woman) (or K-9 soldier) left behind. Many of you know my story. I insisted that I carry my Prince out to the next LZ after he saved my life from the shrapnel of a chi-com. He had died in my arms. I refused to allow him to be buried there in the mountains.

Veterans of all our recent wars are processing this turn of events in many different ways. I beg all of you to do a buddy check of not only those with whom you served, but also those who answered the call to duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Regardless of your political beliefs we must not abandon our honor. Please pray for those who remain in harms way. Pray for their safe return. Support those veterans who are having difficulty dealing with their grief, not only Vietnam veterans but also those who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. God Bless America.

On a positive note, your board has established April 18-20, 2022 for our next long-awaited reunion. Please note that unlike reunions in the past, this one will be held on Monday thru Thursday as opposed to a weekend. This difficult decision was made based upon

the overall costs of trying to schedule it over a weekend.

We will be returning to San Antonio, Texas. As part of the overall planning of a successful reunion it is important that we have an idea as to the potential number of participants as early as possible. Your cooperation is respectfully requested. Please send Bob Palochik an email indicating if you plan to attend. We encourage all members who do not have medical conditions which prevents them from receiving the COVID-19 vaccine to seriously consider doing so.



Remember the Alamo? Just one of the sights to see in San Antonio. Let us know if you are thinking of coming. See page 7.

BX Manager Transfer

By Dave Broeker

I have enjoyed serving as your VDHA BX Manager for more than 12 years and my poor health is now requiring me to step down. We are all thankful Mike Hurder will be taking over the reins.

The BX transfer process has already started and shipping boxes are being packed. We want the transfer to go as quickly as possible so, effective immediately, no more orders will be processed until the BX opens back up. An exception to this is for orders that are already in transit to me via snail mail. We do not know that exact date yet, but are hoping for a quick and easy transfer. We will inform our customers as quickly as possible when we know what that date will be. More thorough details will be provided as soon as possible.

The Tip of the Spear; A War Dog Story

Editor's Note: This is the second 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

So, why would anyone in his right mind be a Scout Dog Handler? That's a complex question, and, the answer can be as varied and as different as the many different dog handlers that have gone down this path. My story is just one of many stories that you may encounter, but I do suspect that our various thought processes will probably have a lot in common.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

As a child growing up, I played my share of cowboys and indians, and, I did play soldier. I think that many of us youngsters wanted to be like John Wayne, the Hollywood hero. But, it's one thing to play at being a soldier and a whole other thing to become one. It usually requires a significant event or events that are out of one's control that lead to one making a decision to take time out of one's life plan, go off, and serve your country as a soldier.

I was a senior at Richland Twp. High School in 1964, which is located near Johnstown, PA. I would be turning 19 in September. During the period August 2-4, 1964 those significant life altering events occurred. President Johnson sought Congressional approval for the direct U.S. involvement in Vietnam due to an incident in the Gulf of Tonkin. On my part, in 1964, I was thinking only about graduating and figuring out how to get into college.

At that time, I barely knew who President Johnson was let alone where or what the Gulf of Tonkin was about or where Vietnam was even located. I just wanted to make it into college so that I could someday get a good job, get married, and raise my own family. In 1964, after graduating from high school, that college goal, unfortunately, was somewhat in doubt, and I had to do some very special hoop jumping to get myself into the University of Pittsburgh. I paid little attention to what was going on regarding the Vietnam Conflict.

My first year of college was somewhat challenging, and all my energy and attention was routed in passing all courses and eventually getting a degree. Since I did not have the grades to get in, nor an impressive SAT number, my options came down to ONE.

Jr. Pitt, located in Johnstown, had a program called "Trial By Fire." You get to take three courses during

the summer trimester, which was worth nine credits, and if you managed to pass with a C or better, you were admitted officially into the school. If you failed, then it was GAME OVER.

I managed to pass those three courses with an above-C average and was able to officially enter Jr. Pitt that fall. Then I promptly ended with problems in two courses and ended up on probation which I cleared up the next semester. From that point on, it was clear sailing, and, I even managed to make the Dean's List before graduating from Pitt in Liberal Arts in 1968. The year that I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh, I turned 23.

While I was engaged in my educational pursuit the Vietnam Conflict was expanding, not contracting. In fact, 1968 represented the largest commitment of soldiers to the war. It was also the time of the Tet Offensive, which our military did win, but politically, the American public began major protests to get us out of the war.

While I was in college, I really had no time to be concerned or worried about the Vietnam Conflict. I was looking at four years of schooling, and, I had the misguided opinion that this problem in Vietnam was not going to impact me. I thought four years was more than enough time for that conflict to end. WRONG!

I was looking forward to graduating and getting a good job. I had a degree coming, a girl, and very good prospects for a job. During that time period, college degrees were extremely special, and companies were clamoring to get their hands on those of us graduating. Companies were everywhere on campus trying to recruit us. In 1968, I had my pick of companies. In 1970, when I returned home, getting a job was practically impossible. ...WHAT A BUMMER.

Unfortunately, for me, Vietnam just would not go away. The draft had kept reminding us that Vietnam was far from over. The draft became a great motivator for many students to stay eligible for college, or you would lose your deferment and become the property of Uncle Sam.

When we graduated in 1968, we were looking at immediately losing our draft deferment and becoming eligible for the draft. So, upon graduation, that whole new future and career quest took a u-turn. We got our degree in one hand, but a draft notice was going to be very shortly showing up in our other hand.

There were other options available. We could

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VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Ernie Ayala

Finally after months of deliberation and discussion, it has been decided our next VDHA reunion will be held in San Antonio, Texas. Unlike all other reunions we've had, this one will be different in that it will be held mid-week and not on the weekend. For one, we will avoid the crowds and the dates are April 18-20, 2022 so the weather will be cool for us. Second of all, many of you will be home in time for Easter.

Last time we were in San Antonio we really enjoyed ourselves with a trip to Lackland AFB, dining and shopping at the Riverwalk, visiting the Alamo and the Buckhorn Saloon & Museum.



Riverwalk in San Antonio.

Time flies when you're having fun and there are so many fun things to do in San Antonio. Take a cruise on a boat that takes you the entire length of the Riverwalk or visit the many museums featuring art and especially the old west.

For shopping sprees and exhibits, try La Villita Historic Arts Village located on the south bank of the River Walk. La Villita (the little village) occupies one square block and is on the government's National Register of Historic Places. It's architectural styles range from simple adobe structures to early Victorian and Texas vernacular limestone buildings. Or try the Market Square, a three block outdoor plaza lined with shops and restaurants. Enjoy the sights and flavors of old Mexico. It's the largest Mexican market in the country with more than 100 locally-owned shops and stalls. I bought a cowboy hat there I still wear here occasionally. Good quality.

Last time I was there, we went to Lulu's Bakery and



The Alamo, San Antonio, TX.

Cafe. It was featured on an episode of "Man Vs Food" on the Food Channel. They boast the largest chicken fried steak, about three pounds and the largest Cinnamon Roll, around Two pounds and the Man did not finish eating them in time. Lulu's won! Unfortunately for Lulu's, the Covid-19 pandemic beat them and on March, 2020, Lulu's closed their doors forever.

So sign up now for a very relaxing and informative reunion with your buddies. There is still some business to take care of at this reunion and we need everyone's input and vote. The VDHA needs to continue to serve its members and we can't do it anymore without your help. A little vacation in the middle of the week is just what the doctor ordered. See you in Texas!

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).

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The Tip of the Spear; a War Dog Story

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perhaps get a special deferment for being married and having a child, or we could join the National Guard. Or we could go with option three (which was somewhat popular) just run away to Canada. It was the wrong reason to start a family. You

needed a contact to get you in the Guard (a very popular option). But running away to Canada and being a deserter was not in my DNA.

Option two, joining the National Guard was an available option to me. My mom had the contacts, and I was given assurances that I could

apply and be accepted into the Guard. So, I had an out, but, elected not to take it.

Problem was, I had been raised an American patriot. My dad was a marine and fought in World War II. Whenever I could spy on his story

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The Vietnam Memorial in Bedford County, Pennsylvania recently added a statue of SSG Bob Hartsock and his dog Duke. SSG Hartsock was given the Medal of Honor for his service in Vietnam. The photos were taken by Joe Gajkowski, VDHA member. Joe has been visiting war dog and other memorials around the country.

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DEADLINE

ARTICLES FOR

THE

DECEMBER

ISSUE MUST BE

SUBMITTED BY

NOV. 23

The Tip of the Spear; a War Dog Story

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telling, I would listen intently as he told his brother stories of his service. I loved my country, and the Roman family had a history of supporting the country. No reasonable person wants to do something that can end their life, but, we do lots of things during our lifetime that we do not want to do, just because it's the RIGHT THING TO DO.

Joining the Army ranks was at the top of the list of things I did not want to do, but I had to because I was an American. It was my time to step up and serve my country. Remember President John Kennedy's famous quote: "...Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country...." So, I enlisted. My first job was now not going to be with IBM, but with Uncle Sam.

I elected to take the summer off in 1968, and at age 23, I entered the service that October. I signed up for Armor OCS which meant three years of service instead of two, but I would come out of the service an officer. I think it was only normal to keep in the back of my mind that there was always the possibility that the war would end. I might also avoid being in a war zone. But come hell or high water, what comes, comes. World War I and II were over after several years. Korea came along and ended in a relative short time period. Who could possibly believe that the Vietnam saga would take a full 11 years to play out, taking with it 58,318 KIA, 153,303 WIA, and on top of that, another 150,332 hurt but not requiring hospital care. My thought of the war ending, before I had to participate in it, never had a prayer.

Let's fast-forward to 1969 at Fort Benning, Georgia. Being dumb and stupid, it was good that I had the Good Lord looking out for me. My thought process had been to get in an Armor unit, and if I had to go to war, I could be protected by a big ass tank. At that time, little did I realize what a death trap those APCs and tanks were. So, when they sent me to Infantry OCS, where the only armor I was going to get was a steel pot (helmet), I was not a happy camper. They said Armor was all filled up. Go Figure.

OCS turned out to be very difficult, and at week 12 I was facing the decision to either leave the program or to recycle and try again. Side Bar: The group of recruits that came into the service at around the same time as I did were considered the "SMARTTEST (highly educated) group of recruits the Army ever had at one time. A significant percentage of the group were college educated and much older than the normal 18-19 year

olds entering the service. We were in our 20s. I was now 24. We drove the trainer nuts as we saw through all the mind games, which brings me back to OCS. It's one thing to risk your own life...but it's a horse of a different color when you send others off to their potential death.

Combat Tracker Reunion

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current war stories and we look forward to seeing them again.

We had a memorial to our KIA and to those that passed in the last year. We also had a banquet and then an auction to support our website. Auctioneer Chuck Steward, retired SM (61st IPCT, 557th IPCT) did yeoman's work. Items auctioned included museum quality quilts made by Yvonne Auer, wife of Tom Auer (61st IPCT, 66th IPCT) and fine cabinetry by Bob Konarske (63rd IPCT). We also raised money for the Tracker Scholarship Fund. Don Campbell (557th IPCT) reports that the fund is in good shape.

The 2022 reunion will be held in Kansas City, Kansas. We hope to see you there.



Ladies who attended the recent tracker reunion in Lexington, KY.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Checking: \$31,326.23

Savings: 5,075.10

Total: \$36,401.33

2022 VDHA REUNION UPDATE SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

The 2022 VDHA reunion will be held:

APRIL 18, 19, 20, 2022

LAQUINTA BY WYNDHAM – 303 BLUM, SAN ANTONIO, TX 78205
(Across the street from the Riverwalk)

WITHOUT ANY FIRM COMMITMENT(s) IN ANY WAY, the VDHA needs to gather some tentative information in the way of number of members/spouse(s)/friend(s) who would be interested in attending.

This is a way for us to firm up numbers needed to proceed with blocking rooms, banquet information, tour, etc.

Our last reunion in San Antonio was well attended and we would like to be as prepared as possible for a good turn out this time.

BASIC INFORMATION IS AS FOLLOWS:

HOTEL – Laquinta by Wyndham – across the street from the Riverwalk
(reservation **cannot be made at this time** for the reunion – will advise date later when they become available to make)

- Room(S): \$136/night includes tx
(DOES INCLUDE HOT BREAKFAST)
- There are no shuttles to any hotels in San Antonio. It is about a 20-minute trip from airport. Ubers and taxis are available. Uber approximately \$16-\$36 one way depending on vehicle chosen. Taxi approximately \$20-\$55 one way depending on vehicle chosen.
- Dinner Buffet: \$60/pp

TOUR INFORMATION – We are still in the process of arranging a tour. Will do our best to keep tour costs down.

As stated before, at this point, we do not need any firm commitment, this is not registration, do not send any money at this time. We are just wanting to get a feel for the number of attendees to expect.

IF AT THIS TIME YOU HAVE A REAL INTEREST IN ATTENDING THE 2022 REUNION,
PLEASE SHOOT AN EMAIL TO:

bobpalochik@vdha.us

PLEASE INCLUDE:

THE NUMBER OF ROOMS AND NUMBER OF DAYS NEEDED FOR THE HOTEL

NUMBER OF PERSONS ATTENDING DINNER

NUMBER OF PERSONS WHO WOULD BE INTERESTED IN TAKING A TOUR

WE APPRECIATE YOUR HELP IN THIS MATTER
VDHA OFFICERS



MWD Memorial

*By John Homa
MWDHM Board Member
for Projects and Events*

This past October, the museum hosted a virtual re-dedication of the MWD Memorial at Ft. Benning in Columbus, GA. The presentation is currently on the website at mwdhm.org. The Board of Directors is working towards an onsite re-dedication for May 13-15 of 2022 at Ft. Benning. Information will be available in a few months on its Facebook page, Military Working Dog Heritage Museum, and the Paw Print monthly newsletter.

If you would like to receive monthly copies of Paw Print, please email info@mdwhm.org with your email address, and you will be placed on a list to receive monthly editions.

The Board is looking for any Handlers to do interviews with on video, pictures of handlers and dogs, and volunteers. Don't hesitate to get in touch with us at info@mwdhm.org for any further details.

The Board is also taking donations for its inaugural challenge coin towards future property acquisition building projects. For a suggested \$25 minimum donation to the 'MWDHM,' the museum will provide its inaugural Challenge Coin. (Free shipping via USPS.) Additional coins are available at the suggested minimum donation. Once we receive your order, please allow 7-10 days for delivery. Note: If you are a Dog Handler or past Dog Handler (Military or Law Enforcement), the suggested minimum donation is just \$20 per coin. See the below form or go to the website to order your coin(s).

Please make check donations payable to MWDHM. If using PayPal, scan the below form

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

PRSRT
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit # 309
Pekin, IL
61554

and email John Homa at projectmanager@mwdhm.org. John is a VDHA Member and one of our MWDHM Board Members who handles our coin project. Indicate in your email message that you will be using PayPal. Transfer funds from your PayPal account to John Homa's PayPal account at theextra2@epbfi.com. Please use the Send Funds to Family and Friends category. If not, the Museum must incur an extra fee, so please be aware of how you send us the funds. Thank You. You may also mail your check or money order (NO CASH), with the below form to: John Homa P.O. Box 204, 302 Northgate Mall Dr. Hixson, TN 37343



PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY and mail with your check or money order or, email all information if using PayPal.

Quantity: _____ **Coin(s) & Donation Total Amount: \$** _____.

And or a Separate Additional Donation, (no coin), Amount: \$ _____.

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