



# DOGMAN

A Brotherhood of All Combat Veteran Dog Handlers



VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 32 - NUMBER 3 - SEPTEMBER 2025

## 2026 VDHA Reunion Set in New Bern, NC

*By Steve Lemish*

*Dogman Editor*

VDHA dog handlers generally get together every two years for a reunion. We are excited to announce our next reunion will be held in beautiful New Bern, North Carolina, from May 28th to May 30th, 2026.

As many of you know, our reunions rotate across the country, moving between East, West, and Middle regions to make it easier for more dog handlers to attend. The upcoming gathering will bring us to the East Coast, offering a chance for members from that area and beyond to come together once again.

With each passing year, we are keenly aware that our numbers are dwindling. While we cherish the memories of those who are no longer with us, we also recognize the importance of the time we have left to connect.

These reunions offer a unique opportunity to rekindle the powerful bonds we forged during our service in Vietnam, alongside each other and our loyal canine partners who stood by our side and saved the lives of so many.

The reunion will be held at the New Bern Doubletree by Hilton (Waterfront) located right where



the Neuse and Trent rivers meet. For those who are driving, the Doubletree has free parking and you can make arrangements with the hotel to bring your dog. They also have an outdoor pool. Christophs on the Water has lunch, brunch and dinner and room service is available during limited hours. Drinks are available at the bar/lounge or at the pool bar. There is a fitness center and smoking areas.

Many of the rooms have excellent views of the rivers and the marina is steps away. It is close to the city center, Tyron Palace and Union Point Park. Marine Corps Air Station, Cherry Point is down

the road about 30 minutes by car. The nearest airport is Coastal Carolina Regional Airport (EWN), about three miles away by car. You can also fly into airports at Greenville, NC (48 mi), Wilmington, NC (96 mi), Raleigh, NC (131 mi), Myrtle Beach, SC (176 mi), Richmond, VA (216 mi), or Charlotte, NC (287 mi).

The Neuse River is the longest river in North Carolina, stretching 248 miles. At its mouth, it is the widest river in America at six miles across. New Bern was the first capital of North Carolina and has historic charm. You can take a tour of nearby Tyron's Palace.

*Continued on Page 12.*

# Invite to South Carolina From the President

*By John Harvey, VDHA President*

John Homa, VDHA V.P. Thailand Units and the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum would like to extend an invitation to VDHA members and friends to take part in the 10th Anniversary/Rededication of the Columbia, SC War Dog Memorial and the Columbia Veterans Day Parade on November 10-11. The Museum will also be sponsoring two events at the host hotel the evenings of November 10-11.

The memorial with its dog and handler, designed by Renee Bemis, was the inspiration of Vietnam dog handler Johnny Mayo of Columbia, SC.

The Museum events will take place at the Hampton Inn & Suites Columbia/SE Fort Jackson, about seven miles from Memorial Park of Columbia, SC.

The Rededication of the Memorial will take place in Columbia, SC on Tuesday afternoon, November 11th.

The Veterans Day Parade will take place Tuesday morning prior to the rededication. Handlers and family members will have the opportunity to ride in the Columbia, SC Veterans Day Parade on a first-come first-served basis depending on the number of vehicles available.

The Museum will have a pizza/fundraiser event on Monday evening at the hotel. On Tuesday evening they will have a fundraiser/dinner by Mission BBQ catering. The Museum is planning a raffle with some nice quality items, a 50/50 raffle and a silent auction on both nights. There will be a large supply of museum store items on site for sale. The event registration fee of \$65 covers both evening meals per attendee.

The museum is looking for quality raffle and auction items to be donated for the fund-raisers. The events and hotel registration, along with details and PDF links, are on the Museum website at <https://mwdheritagemuseum.org/events/columbia-sc-war-dog-memorial-rededication/>

Please contact John Homa at [jhomatdh@vdha.us](mailto:jhomatdh@vdha.us) with any questions or for additional information.

## Author Seeks Stories and Photos

*By David Keeton,  
981st MP*

I am looking for veterans who served in Vietnam. I am writing another book and would like to share your stories and pictures. Any pictures will be returned. Interested vets should contact me by September 18, 2025 at: David L. Keeton, P.O. Box 414, Athens, MI 49011-0314.

Summer is now ending. Days are getting shorter. The grandkids are gone and headed back to school. Our excuses for not getting out and walking because of the heat have left us. So, we have a few weeks to get out and move before the fall rains come along with the winter snow.

I am looking forward to this year's 250 year anniversary of the Marine Corps, and the rededication of our memorial in Columbia, South Carolina, organized by the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum and VDHA member Johnny Mayo. The dates are November 10-11. You can find links to registration materials in the left column.

Your VDHA officers and directors have organized our next biennial reunion for May 2026. Over the years we have made several attempts to have it in the East. Well we finally made it happen. It will take place in New Bern, North Carolina. You can find registration forms in this issue of *Dogman* and links on our web site. I encourage everyone to register early.

I hope everyone is as well as can be. God Bless America, and our VDHA family.

## Member Information Notice

VDHA officers do not give out member information. We have had requests for contact information, i.e., phone numbers, email address, etc., from other members trying to get in contact with a specific member.

Each member's information that they themselves have requested to be 'PUBLIC' is on their profile page.

If you are looking for another member, sign into the website and click on 'WAR DOG UNITS' tab and search from there.

Members are responsible for updating their profile information to keep it up to date by logging into their account on the website with their login (member number) and password (known to you). You can change or correct the information such as your address, email address and phone number, etc. Once you enter your new information you will need to scroll down to the bottom and SAVE it.

If you have a problem, contact Bob Palochik at [bobpalochik@vdha.us](mailto:bobpalochik@vdha.us), or if no computer, call him at 702-557-3538 for help.



## Vice President's Report

# Reunions are Made, Not Chosen

*By Ernie Ayala*

I have seen what we have to do to have a reunion every other year (and every year in the early 2000s). Once upon a time, the president selected a city based on what the majority of the members wanted and plans went into gear to make it happen, whether it was Washington D.C., St. Louis or San Diego. When you have over a thousand members and their wives to wave in front of a booking director to a hotel, you could get what you want. The lowest rates, free meeting rooms, the lowest banquet prices, breakfast included and complimentary rooms for speakers or special guests.

The tradition of hosting a reunion in the East, West and Central parts of the country gave us a guide to where we might be headed to next. Our next stop is New Bern, North Carolina. This is the first reunion we've had in North Carolina, the Tar Heel State. Like me, many people do not even know where New Bern is (and I'm the one who suggested it). It's located near Wilmington, NC and near the beautiful beaches of the Atlantic Ocean where our hotel features many rooms with an ocean view, actually a view of the Neuse River that flows into the Atlantic.

Planning a reunion is not an easy task anymore, as many of our members are in their 80's or approaching the golden age. Considerations are made for weather, distance from airports, hotel rates, interesting outing sites and the business to be conducted there.

Luckily for us, the two most talented travel agents we have, who have been working these reunions for almost 25 years are Robert and Deborah Palochik. What does it take to be a good travel planner? Bob answers, "Decide on a location then check the shuttle service to the hotel, will they take you to the airports, amenities, restaurants, is breakfast included? What about attrition? How many rooms do we have to guarantee the hotel booked? If we say 50 and only book 40, do we have to pay for the ten empty rooms? Will they hold our rates for three days before and three days after? That's for those who want to arrive a day or two early or want to stay later because of the rates or just include a vacation.



*Bob and Debbie Palochik at our Reno reunion.*

Debbie added, "the number one consideration in an agreement is the proposal by the hotel. We have dropped a few hotels because while they gave us the rates we wanted and the free hospitality room, they balked at other things like allow us to bring in our own refreshments or withdrawing complimentary items or such."

Let's all give a hearty thank you to the Palochiks. They start to plan the next reunion two weeks before current one begins and they stay working the entire time while others enjoy a great time there. It would help asking them at a reunion if there is anything you can do to make things easier for them. They would really appreciate that.

But who knows? This may be our last hurrah so please plan to be there. If not, plan to be at the next one. It will be as good as it can possibly be thanks to Bob & Debbie.

# 2026 VDHA Reunion

## New Bern, NC

### INFORMATION



AIRPORTS: New Bern NC airport code is EWN / approximately 4 miles to New Bern  
 Wilmington NC airport code is ILM / approximately 98 miles to New Bern  
 Raleigh NC airport code is RDU / approximately 129 miles to New Bern  
 Charlotte NC airport code is CLT / approximately 221 miles from New Bern  
 (There are Ubers and taxis available from New Bern Airport-approximately \$10-\$15 one way)

**Reunion is scheduled**  
**Thursday, May 28th through Saturday May 30th, 2026**  
**CUT OFF DATE FOR REUNION REGISTRATION WITH PAYMENT**

**MAY 1, 2026**

As with previous reunions, there are a limited number of blocked rooms  
 90-minute trolley tour Friday May 29th  
 Buffet dinner on Saturday evening May 30th

## HOTEL INFORMATION

### **DOUBLETREE BY HILTON, NEW BERN NC - RIVERFRONT**

100 Middle St., New Bern NC 28560  
 1-252-658-9000

Rate \$202-night (inclusive) Tuesday May 26th, Wednesday May 27th, and Thursday May 28th  
 Rate \$213-night (inclusive) Friday May 29th, Saturday May 30th, and Sunday May 31st

**INCLUDES CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST @ CONFLUENCE RESTAURANT (2 per room max)**

<https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/ewnmsdt-doubletree-new-bern-riverfront/>

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

**PLEASE NOTE: Hotel reservation "Cut-Off Date" is **MARCH 31, 2026****

**Rates WILL NOT be honored after **MARCH 31, 2026****

|       |         |          |
|-------|---------|----------|
| Tues  | 5/26/26 | \$202.00 |
| Wed   | 5/27/26 | \$202.00 |
| Thurs | 5/28/26 | \$202.00 |
| Fri   | 5/29/26 | \$213.00 |
| Sat   | 5/30/26 | \$213.00 |
| Sun   | 5/31/26 | \$213.00 |

**ALL INCLUSIVE**

Call **1-252-658-9000** for reservation(s)

When calling to make reservation(s) you **must reference**

**GROUP CODE 90T (nine zero T) and**  
**VIETNAM DOG HANDLER REUNION 2026**

**OR**

**ONLINE**

<http://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/ewnmsdt-90t-2e749d2f-5b4d-492a-9623-2ac73fbcd0f3/>

**HOSPITALITY ROOM****(Hawks Room First Floor)****Registration**

Thursday May 28th 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Friday May 29th 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

(closed for lunch 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm)

**REGISTRATION PACKAGE WILL INCLUDE NAME BADGE(s) \* REUNION PIN(s) \* HOSPITALITY ROOM ACCESS \* AGENDA**

Hospitality room will be open Thursday, May 28th, 9:00 am–10:00 pm

Friday, May 29th, from 10:00 am–10:00 pm

(after general membership meeting @ 9:00 am)

Saturday, May 30th, 8:00 pm–**2:00 pm**

Open again after dinner until 10:00pm

**\$70/pp****VDHA BX**

BX Manager, Mike Hurder, will not be attending the reunion due to health issues.

BX merchandise will still be available to purchase. There will be a binder in the hospitality room with photos of merchandise to view along with order forms including VDHA Logo hoodies.

*Payment can be made by **cash** or **check** only*

Orders will then be forwarded to Mike for fulfillment in a timely manner.

**POSTAGE WILL BE WAIVED FOR PURCHASES MADE AT THE REUNION****OFFICER'S MEETING**

Thursday, May 28th, 2026, 3:00PM

Officers will be notified of location

**GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING***(Hospitality Room-Hawks Room First Floor)***Active VDHA Members Only**

Friday, May 29th,

9:00 am – 10:00 am

**TROLLEY TOUR**

90 Minute New Bern Trolley Tour

(Time to be determined)

**Sign up on registration form****\$35/pp****LIMITED SEATING**

## **BUFFET DINNER**

**\$65.00/pp**

(Grand Ballroom-First Floor)

Saturday, May 30th, 6:00 pm – 10:00 pm

Open cash bar 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm



## **LOW COUNTRY BOIL**

**Seasoned Local Shrimp**

**Seasoned Crab**

**Smoked Sausage**

**Sweet Corn**

**Red Potatoes**

**Corn Bread Muffins**

**Caesar Salad**

**Seasonal Vegetable Medley**

**Roasted Turkey Carving Station**

(with mushroom sauce)

**Prime Rib Carving Station**

(with au jus – horseradish cream)

**Classic Cheesecake**

***Please join us!***

***Let's make this one of the best!***



## NEW BERN, NC

## 2026 REUNION REGISTRATION FORM

Thursday, May 28<sup>th</sup> –Saturday, May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026

## DOUBLETREE BY HILTON NEW BERN - RIVERFRONT

| DATE                                                                                                                                                                                               | EVENT                                                     | COST/pp                  | # ATTENDING | TOTAL               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Reunion Registration Fee                                  | \$70/pp                  |             |                     |
| FRI - 05/29                                                                                                                                                                                        | 90 Minute Trolley Tour * Limited Seating                  | \$35/pp                  |             |                     |
| SAT-05/30                                                                                                                                                                                          | Low Country Boil Buffet (6:00 pm Cash Bar/7:00 pm Dinner) | \$65/pp                  |             |                     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                           |                          |             | <b>TOTAL DUE \$</b> |
| <b>NAME</b> (as you want it on badge)                                                                                                                                                              |                                                           |                          |             |                     |
| VDHA Member Number                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                           | UNIT                     | -           |                     |
| <b>SPOUSE</b> name (If attending)                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                           |                          |             |                     |
| <b>GUEST</b> name (if attending)                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                           |                          |             |                     |
| Street Address (member)                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                           |                          |             |                     |
| City                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                           | State                    | -           | Zip                 |
| <b>EMAIL ADDRESS</b> (Required for Confirmation)                                                                                                                                                   |                                                           |                          |             |                     |
| <b>MEMBER</b> phone #                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                           | <b>EMERGENCY</b> phone # |             |                     |
| NOTE: Only <b>ACTIVE VDHA MEMBERS</b> will have access to the General Membership Meeting.<br>You will be notified if your membership is <b>NOT ACTIVE</b> when your registration form is received. |                                                           |                          |             |                     |

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

**CHECK/MO MUST BE MADE PAYABLE TO VDHA**  
**NO PAYPAL OR CREDIT CARD payments accepted for Registration**

Completed registration and payment are due **ABSOLUTELY NO LATER THAN MAY 1, 2026**

Registration cancellation (with refund) will be accepted up to and including **May 06, 2026**

To add/cancel/modify your registration or have any questions, please email Bob Palochik at [bobpalochik@vdha.us](mailto:bobpalochik@vdha.us) or call 702.557.3538 or 702.845.2944

**INDIVIDUAL HOTEL RESERVATION(S) FOR DOUBLETREE BY HILTON**

RESERVATION(S) CAN BE MADE BY CALLING

**1-252-658-9000**

Tues 5/26/26 \$202.00  
 Wed 5/27/26 \$202.00  
 Thurs 5/28/26 \$202.00  
 Fri 5/29/26 \$213.00  
 Sat 5/30/26 \$213.00  
 Sun 5/31/26 \$213.00

**YOU MUST REFERENCE GROUP CODE 90T(nine zero T) and**

**VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION REUNION**

**OR online - copy and paste following link**

**<https://www.hilton.com/en/hotels/ewnmsdt-doubletree-new-bern-riverfront/>**

**CUT OFF DATE FOR HOTEL RESERVATIONS IS MARCH 31, 2026 RATE WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE AFTER THIS DATE**

**WILL YOU BE STAYING AT THE DOUBLETREE BY HILTON WHERE THE REUNION WILL BE HELD?**

**YES** ☐

If yes, how  
many nights

**NO** ☐



# The Tip of the Spear; A War Dog Story

*Editor's Note: This is the final installment of this multi-part story. It details his journey from college to Vietnam and working with his scout dog Skipper (X268). The last episode detailed their final mission, the death of Skipper and some final notes from Vernon's time in country.*

*By Vernon J. Roman*

*Scout Dog Handler*

Unknown to me, with all the heat in that crater, Skipper's tongue got burnt. I was told by the Vet Tech the next day that during the night Skipper swelled up like the Pillsbury dough boy. They medivac'd him to Saigon for emergency surgery.

When Skipper went down, I was getting close to the end of my tour. So, a new dog was not practical. I got to spend my last 30 days driving garbage to the dump, being a shit burner and a few other various chores that they came up with.

I knew going in that Skipper and I would part at some point. When I had him off leash, the purpose was to save all our lives. If he got in trouble, better 50 yards away from me than next to me. Yes, a lot of guilt comes from that. We used a living animal's loyalty to save our lives. Then, emotionally and later on physically, we all abandoned them.

I am ashamed to say that I celebrated the injury with Daryl. Skipper was so well trained that he even knew when it was time to get injured....Gooooood Dooog. Chances now were pretty good that I would make it home. Daryl was a good friend here and he was not jealous or offended by the celebration but understood. He still had to go to the field. His tour also got cut short when he and Butch got blown

off an APC. He was injured and spent the balance of his time working back in camp.

If Skipper died while I was still in Vietnam, they never told me. Once Skipper shipped out to Saigon, I never asked about him again. Years later, I looked him up and found he had died of Red Tongue. When the topic came up many years later with Daryl, I was told that Skipper was also a carrier of IHS, the bleeding disease that they could get. He got it while working down South. For some reason, Skipper then got moved up North, and the IHS did not go away but was manageable. The Vet Techs never told me any of this.

Red Tongue got him the surgery, but then the IHS kicked in. Skipper never recovered. Knowing now what was in store for the dogs that would survive and the horrible end they would come to, I am very grateful that Skipper died in the manner he did. He at least died an American Hero in American hands. He did not have to suffer the indignity of abandonment.

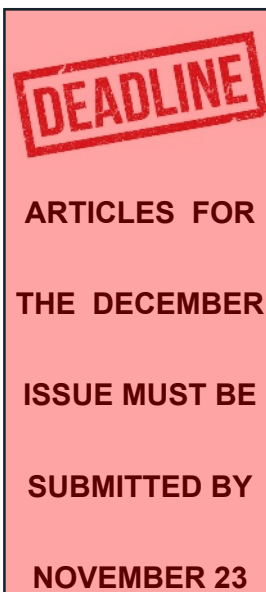
I did receive a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star and all the other medals that came with being in combat, but would gladly exchange them all for a good night's sleep.

You do carry the torment of combat with you for the rest of your life. However, if you're very fortunate, you may partner/ marry a person who is very understanding and very supportive so that you are able to manage those demons and go on to live a productive life. We owe a big thank you to those wives/partners that supported us after we got home. A very special thank you to my loving wife of 49 years, Rose.

*Continued on Page 11*

## Vietnam Dog Handler Association Officers

|                 |                |                                                              |              |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| President:      | John R. Harvey | 3000 Holiday Dr., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316                  | 860-796-7813 |
| Executive V.P.  | Ernie Ayala    | 4000 Pierce Street #143, Riverside, Ca. 92505                | 626-862-2667 |
| V.P. Trackers   | Vacant         |                                                              |              |
| V.P. Thailand   | John Homa      | P.O. Box 204, Hixson TN 37343                                | 423-368-4493 |
| V.P. Units      | Vacant         |                                                              |              |
| Secretary       | Billy Barnes   | P.O. Box 1061, Hayfork, CA 96041                             | 530-945-2832 |
| 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 |
| BX Manager      | Michael Hurder | 986 Coronado Way, Livermore, CA 94550                        | 925-518-0318 |
| Webmaster       | Jim Stiles     | 7413 Jacksonville Cutoff Road, Lot B, Jacksonville, AR 72076 | 501-952-5904 |
| Deceased        | Dave Broeker   | 1712 Crescent Dr., Pekin, IL 61554-1637                      | 309-202-5542 |
| Dogman Editor   | Steve Lemish   | 4723 Rolando Blvd, San Diego, CA 92101                       | 619-417-0954 |





# So, You Want to be a Dog Handler?

*Editor's Note: This is the fourth installment of Rick's multi-part adventure as an Air Force dog handler. In this episode, he arrives at Cam Ranh Bay and meets his sentry dog, Rin.*

*By Rick Marty*

*USAF, 1964-1968*

We made two or three stops to drop off supplies and personnel and then the Cargo Master informed me the next landing would be Cam Rahn air strip. We landed and taxied for a long way and when the cargo doors opened they threw out a few boxes, my duffle bag and me. Nobody else is getting off at this stop.

It was fully dark by now, the plane turned and taxied away down the ramp and in the far distance I watched it take off. I'm standing in what I had to assume was a combat zone, on a PSP ramp in my class A's in the pitch dark, fifty feet from the tree line with not a light in sight.

My only weapons are a Zippo lighter and a pocket knife. After what seemed like hours, probably only 20 minutes really, I saw a set of headlights coming towards me, a SAT team came to pick me up.

I reported to the Squadron Ready Room and was assigned a hooch and ordered to report to the First Sergeant the next morning at 0800 hours. After a couple of days of in-country briefing, I was finally able to report to the kennels and get on with my duty assignment. Poisonous snakes, wild animals and Viet Cong seemed to be the main topic directed at the several new K9 handlers attending the briefings. Sounded like it was going to be a fun-filled year.

I don't remember the name of the NCOIC of Kennels when I first arrived at Cam Ranh but later Sgt.

Don Varney took over and after he rotated out Sgt. Cunningham took over. Both were good men and leaders but Sgt. Varney was a special person and friend. Years later, at one of the first VDHA Reunions held at Lackland AFB, I met Don Varney again as he was working as a Civilian Charge of Kennels at Lackland. It was a great reunion for him and several of us there that had worked under him at Cam Rahn.



*Rick and Rin at Cam Rahn Bay.*

The kennel facility at Cam Rahn, when I arrived, was pretty new, all concrete and chain link wire with wash down troughs and support buildings like offices, refrigerated feed room and armory. There were approximately 70 dogs assigned and near the same number of handlers.

It was a huge K9 section compared to what I had been exposed to in the past. Even after months I still didn't know some of the other handlers because we were

on different flights and worked different shifts.

I was assigned to Sentry Dog Rin #3A92, a three-year-old black and brown shepherd of about 80 pounds. At first contact he struck me as being a good dog but nothing super special. He was alert and intelligent and seemed to be aggressive enough, although I was in his kennel and in physical contact with him the first day. After several days of get-acquainted time and some drill and training, we pulled our first night's post together.

First night jitters were really bad even though we were on an interior, more secure post. But still, a pitch-black night in the bush of Viet Nam and my dog was acting a little strange, I couldn't put my finger on it but something was wonky.

After 3-4 nights of work I began to notice that Rin spent a lot of time watching the sky and I assumed the stars. How about this, a dog with an interest in astronomy. The next night however something occurred that gave me a very bad feeling about this Sentry Dog.

Puff the Dragon ship made a firing sweep on a ridge across the bay from our post, firing what looked like a continuous stream of light, tracer rounds, as it made it's run. Rin dived under a bush and put his paws over his head and started whining and crying. I stood there with my mouth hanging open, Rin was gun shy and not just a little bit, he was falling apart scared to death gun shy and incapable of performing his duty.

Upon reporting this information to the NCOIC, it was decided that just some extra work would make everything OK.

*Continued in the next issue.*

## Letters to the Editor

### Dog Handler Interviews Needed

My name is Michelle Mattei, and I am a graduate student at The Citadel pursuing an M.A. in Military History. My capstone paper will explore military working dogs (MWDs) and their handlers during the Vietnam War.

If members are willing and interested, I would like to speak with former handlers from different branches of service and their associated specializations. I want to learn about the daily life of a MWD and their handler from the start of U.S. involvement with MWD teams to their final departure, including the tragic story of the canines left behind. This encompasses everything from the selection of the dog and their handler stateside to their training.

Once in the country, what obstacles did these invaluable teams face in general and from their own command? How did the DOD view the dog teams? Who decided to deploy a dog team on a mission or in an ad hoc situation, and how was that decision made? How could missions have been more successful if higher-ups had listened to the dog handlers? What did the VC and North Vietnamese regulars think about the dog teams?

Additional questions could focus on the opinions of U.S. dog handlers regarding ARVN troops and ARVN dog handlers, and vice versa? How did the dog teams evolve during the war? What were the main similarities and differences between U.S. military branches in their use of MWDs with specialization?

I am also open to other relevant feedback and information not covered in these questions. Several additional areas of interest include the veterinarians and staff members who served during the war, as well as when civil groups went in with scent dogs after the war to attempt to find and recover the remains of downed US airmen.

Thank you in advance for your interest and consideration. I can be reached at [mmattei@student.citadel.edu](mailto:mmattei@student.citadel.edu) or (845) 671-8968.

## U.S. War Dogs Anniversary

U.S. War Dogs is celebrating its 25th year anniversary on October 18, 2025 in San Antonio, TX. They are inviting anyone who has supported or benefited from War Dogs' care to come to the special event to celebrate its birthday and take a look back at the organization over the past quarter-decade.

The location and other details are still to be announced. Stay tuned to their website for more information: <https://www.uswardogs.org/war-dogs-turns-25>.

### MAKE PLANS TO ATTEND

### OUR VDHA REUNION

### IN NEW BERN, NC

**MAY 28-30, 2026**

## 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](mailto: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 War Dog Story

*Continued from Page 8.*

Being in a war zone exposes one to all different sights and sounds. You do not have to be in a battle to be impacted by what you see or hear around you:

1. When first entering Vietnam, we were out walking the dogs. A group of Vietnamese ladies walked by and offered us "Boom Boom" for something like a dollar. Not shocking. Then, they said for 50 cents more, they would do the dogs. Not sure about the money amounts, but you get the idea. I was taken aback.

2. We shared a mess hall with the Rangers. While standing behind two Rangers in line, I listened to the one Ranger explain how he was again looking forward to cutting the throat of an NVA soldier because he liked watching how they jiggled.

3. We had a lieutenant that was not liked. I was back in the rear when someone placed a live grenade in his sleeping quarters as a warning. This stuff actually happened.

4. I walked by and glanced in an open tent of South Vietnamese soldiers. They had an enemy combatant hooked up to battery cables and were torturing him. I moved on past up rapidly.

5. The segregation problem blew up while I was in Nam. I was told that black soldiers fragged the main mess hall. I never ate at the main mess hall. They did Black Power hand gestures every time they met up with each other. Our two black dog handlers could not go to the mess hall to eat because there was too much time doing gestures of Black Power. They started having meals brought back to their hooch to them so they would not have to go to the mess hall.

6. The rats that ran the rafters at night were as big as cats.

7. Only once in base, the enemy started to mortar us. We had a small corrugated shelter-like storage garage with sand bags covering it. That's where we went when there was incoming. Late one evening, we got shelled and headed to the shelter. Our company clerk came totally nude except for his helmet. We saw this totally naked white body running toward the shelter with that really dark helmet on. It was a sight. We told him that he was protecting the wrong area.

8. I did get to see Bob Hope which was great. Once we had a visit from the Donut Dollies (Red Cross

Ladies). It was nice to see normal size people. Did I mention you could probably carry two or three Vietnamese under one arm? They were very small people.

9. To this day, I have trouble drinking water. Iodine pills in water taste terrible. I put everything and anything in my water to improve the taste. It never worked. God, I loved those cold Cokes and still do.

10. While at a forward fire base, either Alpha One or Charlie Two, a soldier with a pair of binoculars, let me look. I was able to look across the DMZ and see the North Vietnamese in their chow line. We could look but not shoot.

11. While at those fire bases, I listened to the spotter several times pointing out the enemy on the road leading into our camp who was installing land mines. We could not get permission to fire on them. At least we knew where they had been putting them. So in the morning, our soldiers could get more experience removing them. You cannot defeat an enemy if you're not allowed to fire upon him, despite the fact that he is out there trying to set a device to blow you up. Heck of a way to fight a war.

12. I could not believe how easy you got infected. I received a small cut in my knuckle. In a day, it swelled up nice and big. I had to have the dang thing lanced. Left untreated, I could have lost the whole hand. Just a filthy place to be; I was always looking forward to the day I could use a real toilet and take a real shower.

## Time to Go Home

I never worried about getting hurt or killed the whole time I was in country. If I was going to die, then so be it. However, when I was sitting in that plane seat at Tan Son Nhut Airbase waiting for loading and take off, I did get a little nervous. I had a window seat again, just like when I came. I could not help thinking while I was sitting on the plane that it's really going to suck, if I made it all this way, and Charlie drops a mortar in my lap.

I did not breathe easily until we were out of Vietnam air space. Then, I promptly went to sleep and had my first real peaceful sleep in nine months. I was safe for now. Thank you God for providing Skipper. I was his fifth handler; that's a lot of lives he had impacted! Thank you God! Thank you Skipper!



# Treasurer's Report

CHECKING \$41,413.48  
 SAVINGS 5,074.00  
 TOTAL \$46,487.48

## 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](mailto:vdhapaypal@vdha.us). Please include member name and/or member number in NOTE area in PayPal.

Merchandise: PayPal payments are to be sent to [merchandisepaypal@vdha.us](mailto:merchandisepaypal@vdha.us).

Remember, if you pay for merchandise through your personal PayPal account, your completed order form must be emailed to our BX Manager, Mike Hurder, at [bxmgr@vdha.us](mailto:bxmgr@vdha.us) for completion.

## March Field Memorial

The 25th anniversary celebration of the War Dog Memorial at March Field near Riverside, CA is being still postponed again due to the Air Museum's plan to re-design and landscape the area.

We will publish an announcement in *Dogman* when more information becomes available. Also watch our VDHA website for updates.

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

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## VDHA Reunion Set in New Bern, NC

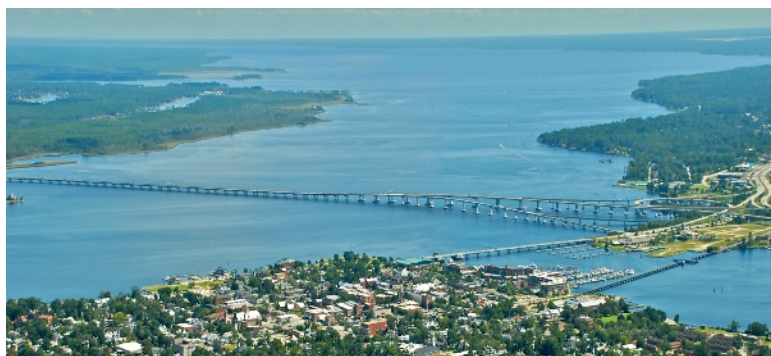
*Continued from Page 1.*

It was the Royal Governor's Mansion before the revolution and later housed the state capital and beautiful gardens. Pepsi-Cola was invented there in 1898 by a local pharmacist and you can visit the site, have a Pepsi and get souvenirs.

Join us in New Bern to share stories, photos, laughter, and camaraderie with your fellow dog handlers who truly understand the unique experiences we shared. Let us honor the past and create new memories together.

You can find details regarding registration, accommodations, activities, banquet, and meeting schedules are displayed on pages 4-6 and you can use the form on page 7 to register for the reunion. More information regarding the reunion, including the reunion pin design contest, voting for officers, awards and other details will follow in future issues of *Dogman* and on our website.

We hope to see you there.



*New Bern is the site of our next reunion. Hailed to be a town of southern charm, it is nestled on the banks of two rivers near the North Carolina coast.*