



DOGMAN

A Brotherhood of All Combat Veteran Dog Handlers



VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 30 - NUMBER 4 - DECEMBER 2023

Taps: VDHA Loses John Dupla

By Ernie Ayala
VDHA Vice President

John Dupla, our Vice President of Tracker Dogs, passed away suddenly November 25, 2023. It came as a shock to the entire board as he had just notified us he would be missing the November 19 board teleconference meeting due to health problems. He didn't mention how serious they were. He was 76.

John was a well-liked man by everyone in the organization because of his sense of humor as well as his knowledge of war history besides the Vietnam War. He served as a board member since this new millennium began and was the voice of all tracker dog handlers and tracker dogs as well as the history of the VDHA.

He served in Vietnam during the 1968 Tet Offensive with the 1st Cavalry Division Tracker Team, 62nd IPCT. He was sent to Malaysia and the British Jungle Warfare School prior to being dispatched to Vietnam. He worked closely with Tracker Dog Lucky in the A Shau Valley and then was involved with Operation Pegasus that relieved the Marines at Khe Sahn.

He was sent to Fort Benning upon his return from Vietnam where he served as an OCS Student Brigade cadre NCO, assisting JAG officers, instructing them in the United States Military Justice (USMJ) system. After his time in the Army, he became a police officer in Galveston, where he also met his beautiful wife Mavis in 1974. They were married 49 years. Mavis

passed away earlier this year. In 1979 he became a IBEW union electrician working all over Texas in skyscrapers and the Nuclear Plant in Bay City. He retired in 2012. John is survived by son, Chris Dupla (Brandi) and daughter, Renee



SSgt John Dupla, 1947-2023

The Human–Animal Bonds Born in Vietnam

By Richard LaMotte
VDHA Member

In 1970, my personal exposure to the war in Vietnam was guided through the lens of local news stations serving Norfolk and Virginia Beach. The sentiment within our region, highly populated with military, focused on the heroes fighting the

spread of communism and rallying support for our POWs. A few years later, the cool kids at school had aluminum wristbands engraved with the names of POWs. Anti-war attitudes were never a topic of conversation since the focus remained on pride and valor. rarely saw any national I coverage of pro-

tests in California or Washington. Fifty years later, after writing two non-fiction books on another topic, I read a book of short stories about Vietnam scout dogs and their handlers. I was so moved by the true stories I read that I started researching all I could find out about the Vietnam War. I was horrified to learn

about the disgusting treatment of veterans as they returned to their homeland. The mistreatment of our troops and our dedicated warrior dogs inspired me to inform the public through a novel. In *Follow His Lead*, I shifted my attention to the incredible bond formed between a soldier and his dog.

Continued on Page 13.

From the President

By John R. Harvey
VDHA President

Celebrations of life.

Sgt. John J. Sciascia

It is with continuing sorrow that I must report to the VDHA family the passing of one of our long-term members and friend, SGT John J. Sciascia, USMC. Our sincerest condolences go out to his wife Johanna and family. John was VDHA # 113. He was born on June 28, 1947 and passed away on October 1, 2023. His service to our organization was extensive. He held the position of Sergeant of Arms 1999–2000, Treasurer 2000–2002, and President 2002–2006.

John was a member of Class 08027 Lackland Air Force Base which was one of the first Marine Corps Dog Platoons to deploy to Vietnam in 1967. This followed his first deployment to Vietnam in 1965. After John's service in the Marine Corps, he spent a career as a member of the Florida Highway Patrol. Following his stint with the Highway Patrol he went to work for the DOD stationed at various places throughout the United States and overseas.

John's endearing sense of humor was one of his traits that made him unforgettable. After DOD, John volunteered with the DAV as a VSO representative. His assistance in helping hundreds of fellow servicemen apply and obtain disability assistance from the VA will never be forgotten. He was always available at our reunions to answer questions and aid when asked.

I had the honor of being able to attend John's funeral in Enterprise, Alabama along with Vinny and Judy Murante. We were also able to attend his burial at Barrancas National Cemetery in Pensacola, Florida.

John will forever travel with his adopted War Dog Herus F188, the second love of his life after his wife Johanna.

Continued on Page 3.



Sgt. John J. Sciascia, his wife Johanna and their adopted war dog Herus F188.

From the President

By John R. Harvey
VDHA President



Continued from Page 2

Staff Sgt. John Dupla

It is with continuing sorrow that I must report to the VDHA family the passing of one of our long-term members and friend Staff Sgt. John Dupla United States Army. Our sincerest condolences go out to his family. John was VDHA # 14. He was born November 5, 1947 and passed on November 25, 2023.

John volunteered for Combat Tracker training with the 92nd replacement Bat., Bien Hoa, VN in June, 1967. He was sent to the British Jungle Warfare School (BJWS) Malaysia. After eight weeks of the special jungle tracking school, he joined the 1st Cavalry Division tracker team (Team 8, later the 62nd IPCT) as their first tracker replacement. John started tracking in the Bong Son area and throughout the central highlands.

He received a Purple Heart along with Frank Merrit on a mission in the An Lo mountain range. Later, the tracker team moved to Camp Evans north of Da Nang

along with the 1st Cavalry Division. John drove a deuce and a half on a convoy through the city of Hue, two days before the 1968 TET offense. From Camp Evans, John was involved in several missions in I Corps, including the A Shau Valley. He was involved in Operation Pegasus that relieved the Marines in Khe Sahn. John worked tracker dog Lucky.

Upon returning to the World in June 1968 he was stationed at Ft. Benning, GA as an OCS Student Brigade cadre NCO, assisting Army JAG officers, instructing the USMJ system. John served as Vice President of the VDHA, and as Unit Director of Trackers and a director of the VDHA up until his death. He will forever be missed by the VDHA family and me and my wife.

Reunion:

Just a reminder our reunion will be held in Reno, Nevada April 29 thru May 1. This will be the 30th year of the VDHA. Tom Mitchell published our first Dog Man in March 1994. The first reunion was held in November 1994. A debt of gratitude goes to our founding members John Langley, Tom Mitchell, Craig Lord, Mike Cagle, John Taft and Tom Sykes.

Headstones:

For Veterans who died on or after November 1, 1990 the VA will furnish a burial headstone or marker for the grave of any eligible deceased Veteran in a private or local government cemetery regardless of whether or not the grave is marked with a privately-purchased, permanent and durable headstone or marker. Please let your families know that there is available a new emblem featuring the head of a German Shepard dog and American flag.



Seeking VDHA Warrior's Medal of Valor Nominees

By John Harvey
VDHA President

VDHA members are asked once again to nominate active members for the prestigious Warrior's Medal of Valor. Two medals will be awarded to two members at the VDHA Reunion in April in Reno, NV. There are many of our members who deserve to be recognized with this very special honor for the achievements they may have accomplished in the past or are currently pursuing in their lives. It recognizes VDHA members' exceptional efforts to make a difference in their communities or organizations, or for past military actions for which they have not been given due credit. Please take this opportunity to nominate someone deserving. There is no higher honor than to be recognized by a fellow veteran.

The award was originally created by Native American Marshall Tall Eagle Serna of Woodburn, OR. 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.

In 2011, John Homa presented the idea to then-President Fred Door and members attending the Orlando Reunion (see Warrior's Medal of Valor Recipient (vdha.us) on the VDHA web site for a complete background). Through discussions with Marshall Tall Eagle's family and purchases of the medals, the VDHA has been assured of the family's permission to award the medal to its members as appropriate.

The first two VDHA WMV awards were presented in 2013 to Dave Broeker and Johnny Mayo. With more detailed program content and a resolution made by the VDHA Board, the next set of medals were presented at the 2016 Reunion awards banquet to Russell Walters, Al Dodds, and a third to Frank Gavaldon. You can see their nomination text in the December 2016 issue of *Dogman* on page 5. Nominees for 2018 were Vernon Anderson, Karl Goss and Perry Money. You can see their nomination text at <http://www.vdha.us/content29520.html>

Bob Palochik received the medal in 2022 you can see his nomination in the June 2022 *Dogman*.

VDHA nomination criteria:

1. Nominees should be current members of the VDHA and meet at least one or more of the following:
2. The Warrior's Medal is awarded for valor, for an action or actions in Vietnam or Thailand that were never recognized by the Military, or
3. Outstanding service to the VDHA, or
4. Outstanding and consistent or ongoing service to or for deployed troops or veterans, or
5. Outstanding and consistent or ongoing service to or for Military Working Dogs past or present.

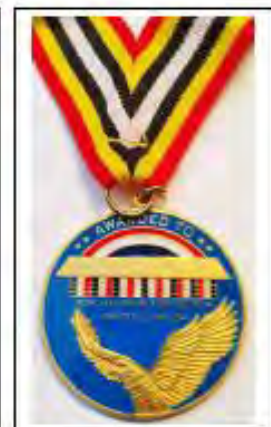
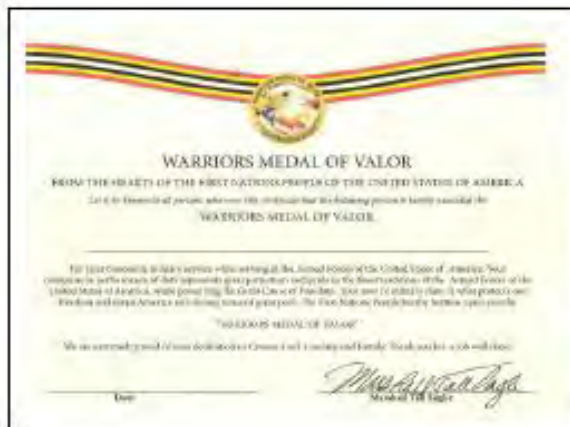
The Nomination Review Committee members for 2024 are:

* VDHA President John Harvey — Marine Scout Dogs, Vietnam

* Johnny Mayo — Army, 39th 39th Infantry Platoon, Scout Dogs (Bien Hoa), Vietnam

* John Homa — Air Force, 388 SPS K-9 Korat & 635 SPS K-9 U-Tapao Sentry Dogs, Thailand

Continued on Page 15.



Vice President's Report

By Ernie Ayala
VDHA Vice President

It was a warm day in November as the Army Sentry Dogs Alumni prepared to take part in the Annual Phoenix Veterans' Day Parade (the largest Veterans' Day Parade this side of the Mississippi).

While the rest of the country was chilling down, temperatures in Arizona still loomed in the high 70s. Too warm for jackets, some 30 former Vietnam dog handlers marched or rode the five-mile parade through the streets of Phoenix. A crowd of about 70,000 people watched, many veterans, waiving at the parade participants and the vets proudly wearing their colors to be recognized.

Having the reunion in Phoenix on Veterans' Day was Jim Frost's idea back in 2021 toward the end of the previous reunion in Durango, Colorado. Frost raised his hand and pledged to host the next reunion in Phoenix where all the handlers could take part in the veterans parade and even walk a dog from the Grand Canyon German Shepherd Club.

Jim Frost is very convincing. He convinced me back in 2003 to march in this parade. So I showed up in my old uniform, steel pot helmet, gun belt with all my MP gear. I was then given a 120-pound German Shepherd (search and rescue dog) to walk (in my old basic training combat boots) in the parade. It was one of the biggest honors of my life but boy, did I pay for it the next day when my body was so stiff it couldn't get out of bed. Frost also played a role in convincing the VDHA to have their reunion in Phoenix in 2004.

I submitted a proposal to award Frost a VDHA trophy to honor his

commitment to the war dogs and it was given to him at a small ceremony at the hotel where the VDHA stayed.

Unfortunately for all of us, Jim Frost's bout with diabetes overtook him last year and the reunion seemed to go down the drain. But the parade officials all wanted the dog handlers to be in the parade and Gary Smith, Alumni admin officer, took over the responsibility and the rest, as they say, is history.

Several of my brother dog handlers did walk in the parade. I stayed in the bus that took us over and waived from there. I learned my lesson 20 years ago. The adrenaline was high to many of our guys who were there from the 212th, 595th and 981st MP Companies.

There were also five cars of former ARVN (Army of the Republic of Viet Nam) soldiers whom we became friends while we waited for the parade to begin.

We also got to take pictures with a former super model who was a Grand Marshal, Kim Alexis. First it was three or four guys in the picture

and by the time the cameras were clicking, there were already 20-25 squeezing into the shot.

There was a first-timer who finally joined the rest of the group. He is a medical doctor specializing in cardiovascular disease and he brought 13 of his kids to the reunion.

He also brought specially made t-shirts for all the dog handlers to wear at the parade. He was so proud

Continued on Page 16.



Former Army lieutenant Jim Frost makes friends with a German Shepherd at a reunion. The parade gave him special mention in his memory.



A large group of the Army Sentry Dog Handlers posed with parade grand marshal, former super-model Kim Alexis before the parade started.

Welcome to Reno, NV

2024 VDHA Reunion Agenda

Registration

HALL OUTSIDE HOSPITALITY ROOM
SILVER BARON ROOMS "D&E"
MEZZANINE LOBBY FLOOR

The VDHA Reunion Registration will open
8:00 am Monday, April 29th & Tuesday, April 30th
8:00 am – 5:00 pm, Monday April 29th
(closed for lunch 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm)
8 am – 4:00 pm on Tuesday, April 30th
(closed for lunch 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm)

Your registration envelope will include:

BADGE(S) * REUNION PIN(S) * PRINTED AGENDA
GROUP EVENT TICKET(S) TO 'MAGIQUE PRODUCTION' * 7-DAY RTC BUS PASS(ES)

(7-day RTC pass is for your use to get around Reno and getting to

'The Theatre' Tuesday, April 30th, where the 'MAGIQUE PRODUCTION' (group event) will be held.)

AIRPORT SHUTTLE

Daily 5:00am – 11:45pm runs every half hour

Proceed to the baggage claim area and follow the signage directing you to the general airport shuttle area to board the Silver Legacy shuttle.

The shuttle stops along the curb, outside the D Doors located North of Baggage Claim, to pick up passengers. The shuttle arrives 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after the hour.

Hotel Information

The reunion is scheduled from
Monday, April 29th to Wednesday, May 1st, 2024

SILVER LEGACY RESORT CASINO

407 N. VIRGINIA ST., RENO NV 89501 / 800-455-4770



Reservations can now be made by calling the **Silver Legacy Resort Casino – 800-455-4770**
(follow the prompts 1 – 3 – 1 or 2 – 1)

You **MUST** provide the following information to receive the group rate
(There are a limited number of blocked group room rates - you may want to make reservation(s) ASAP)

GROUP CODE: **SRVDH4 – VIETNAM DOG HANDLER ASSOCIATION**

OR online at

<https://book.passkey.com/go/SRVDH4>

Hotel Information (Cont.)

Rate \$99/night Monday April 29th, 30th and May 1st
(includes fees and taxes)

DOES NOT include breakfast.

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

PLEASE NOTE: Hotel reservation cut-off date is MARCH 29, 2024

Reservations made after March 29th will not guarantee blocked room rate.

**Please remember to request/book a handicapped room
(if needed) at the time you make your reservation(s).**

HOSPITALITY ROOM – SILVER BARON ROOMS “D&E”

MEZZANINE LOBBY FLOOR

Hospitality room will be open Monday, April 29TH 9:00 am–11:00 pm
Tuesday, April 30TH (after the general membership meeting) from 10:00 am–11:00 pm
Wednesday, May 1st from 8:00 am–**2:00 pm**
(Buffet will be held in this room Wednesday, May 1st at 6:00 pm)

VDHA BX – SILVER BARON ROOM “C”

MEZZANINE LOBBY FLOOR

MIKE HURDER, MANAGER

VDHA BX will be open
8:00 am - Monday, April 29th
10:00 am - Tuesday, April 30th (after general membership meeting)
8:00 am - Wednesday, May 1st

**BX will close Monday and Tuesday at 6:00 pm
Wednesday at **2:00 pm****

The BX will stay open with **these exceptions:**

#1 - 12:00 pm-1:00 pm for lunch on Monday, April 29th and Tuesday April 30th

#2 - Select times when minimal BX sales do not support keeping the BX open (in this event, a sign will be posted as to when the BX will re-open)

#4 - **2:00 pm on Wednesday, May 1st**
shutting down to transport the BX merchandise back to the BX in California.

Do not delay!

Visit the BX early. The longer you wait,
better the chances will be that the item(s) you want may be sold out and
you will have to wait to have your item(s) mailed to you after the reunion.

Officer's Meeting
Monday, April 29, 2024, 3:00PM

Officers will be notified of location



General Membership Meeting
Active VDHA Members Only

Silver Baron Room – (hospitality room)
Tuesday, April 30, 2024, 9:00-10:00 am

GROUP EVENT

Tuesday, April 30th – 8:00 pm
The Theatre – 505 Keystone Ave., Reno NV 89503
1 mile from the Silver Legacy Casino

**YOUR REGISTRATION PACKET WILL INCLUDE YOUR SHOW TICKET
IF YOU SIGNED UP TO ATTEND THE EVENT
ALONG WITH YOUR RTC BUS PASS YOU CAN USE TO GET TO THE EVENT
OR YOU CAN WALK THE 1 MILE IF YOU WANT/CAN**

Magique Production

GROUP EVENT (Cont.)

'Magique Production' is an award-winning resident "show of the year!" featuring 20 illusions, 100+ costumes, and an epic soundtrack and razzmatazz! Great magic and illusions. Up front and personal in an intimate theatre. (Ticket(s) are limited to first come first served basis).

Silver Legacy Resort Casino Western Buffet Dinner Silver Baron Room

Wednesday May 1st 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Open cash bar 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm



Seasonal Tossed Green Salad

Ranch, Thousand Island,

White Cheddar Macaroni and Cheese

Bacon, Crisp Panko Topping

Three Bean Salad

Red Onion, Peppers, Cilantro, Cumin

Western Fried Potatoes

Tangy Cole Slaw

Celery Seed, Onion, Parsley

Seasonal Fresh Vegetables

Freshly Baked Rolls

Red Potato Salad

Peppered Corn Muffins

Cheesecake

Tomato, Cucumber and Watermelon Salad

Fresh Mint Vinaigrette

Jack Daniel's Pecan Pie

Marinated Chicken Breast

Apple Pie

Roast Pork Loin

Pan Gravy, Apple-Cinnamon Topping

Banana Cream Pie

Pan-Seared Salmon

Lemon-Basil Beurre Blanc

Chocolate Fudge Cake

Prime Rib Carving Station

Rosemary, Cabernet Jus, Creamed Horseradish

2024 REUNION REGISTRATION FORM

DATE	EVENT	COST/pp	# ATTENDING	TOTAL
	Reunion Registration Fee - includes 7-day RTC bus pass	\$70		
TUES-04/30	Magique Performance	\$45		
WED-05/01	Western Buffet (6:00 pm Cash Bar / 7:00 pm Dinner)	\$84		
			TOTAL DUE	\$
NAME (as you want it on badge)				
VDHA Member Number		UNIT		
SPOUSE name (If attending)				
GUEST name (if attending)				
Street Address (member)				
City		State	Zip	
EMAIL ADDRESS (Required for Confirmation)				
MEMBER phone #		EMERGENCY phone #		
NOTE: Only ACTIVE VDHA MEMBERS will have access to the General Membership Meeting. You will be notified if your membership is NOT ACTIVE when your registration form is received.				

Complete registration form, print it 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 MARCH 31, 2024**

Cancellation (with refund) will be accepted up to and including March 31, 2024

If you need to add/cancel/modify your registration or have any questions, please email Bob Palochik at bobpalochik@vdha.us or call 702.557.3538 or 702.845.2944

INDIVIDUAL HOTEL RESERVATIONS FOR THE SILVER LEGACY RESORT CASINO

CAN BE MADE BY CALLING

1-800-455-4770

(FOLLOW PROMPTS 1 - 3 - 1 or 2 - 1)

YOU MUST reference GROUP CODE **SRVDH4**

OR on line at

<https://book.passkey.com/go/SRVDH4>

CUTOFF DATE FOR HOTEL RESERVATIONS IS MARCH 29, 2024

GROUP RATE NOT GUARANTEED AFTER THIS DATE

*\$99/night
 Monday, April 29/Tuesday, April 30/
 Wednesday, May 1
 (includes fees and taxes
DOES NOT INCLUDE BREAKFAST)*

WILL YOU BE STAYING AT THE SILVER LEGACY RESORT CASINO WHERE THE REUNION WILL BE HELD?

YES ☐

If yes, how many nights

NO ☐

SEE "AGENDA" FOR SPECIFICS ON MAGIQUE PERFORMANCE AND WESTERN BUFFET MENU

DATE RECEIVED: _____

CHECK#/MO#: _____

AMOUNT RECD: _____

The Tip of the Spear; A War Dog Story

Editor's Note: This is the tenth installment of a multi-part story. It details his journey from college to Vietnam and his scout dog Skipper (X268). This episode details his assignment to a mechanized unit.

By Vernon J. Roman

Scout Dog Handler

On this particular day, we all mounted on top of the APCs. In training, you rode in the carriers. In real life, they were a death trap. So, you sat on top of the APC, and if attacked, you could dive off the unit and seek cover. Skipper and I elected to ride at the end of the convoy. When we arrived at our destination, we began circling up. It was weird in that it was very apparent that we had been coming back to this exact same spot many times.

Fox holes and garbage from the people before us were everywhere. Everyone knows you never give the enemy a pattern to work with, although not if you're a new commander.

Our APC had barely pulled into its position completing the circle, when I heard the sound of metal on metal. You never hear the shot that kills you because sound does not travel fast enough. The metal on metal sounds were bullets banging off our tanks and APCs.

In a flash, everyone on top of the personnel carrier hit the ground. Skipper and I hit the grass, and we could not have landed in a more perfect spot for the enemy. As Skipper and I raised our eyes to look out in front of us after hitting the ground, we found ourselves staring directly at this very big green dinner plate. I had never seen one before, but it was obviously a Chinese Claymore Mine.

Skipper and I were nose to nose with that mine - dead center. I heard tell that your life flashes in front of you right before you die. Well, in my case, the second I looked up and saw that claymore, I knew it was game over. I did not bother to even consider trying to move out of the way or react in any way. I sort of resigned myself to the fact that I was about to die, and there was not a thing I could do to prevent it. Skipper and I just laid there and waited for it to happen.

Amazingly, the dam thing didn't go off. Even more interesting was the fact that Skipper and I were not the only ones staring down a Chinese Claymore. Those mines were strung all around our camp which we had so conveniently driven into time and time again, giving the enemy the opportunity to ruin a lot of our day. I immediately put Skipper into his harness and being



*Chinese claymore mine.
Courtesy of Wikimedia.org.*

in the heat of the moment, it was obvious where the enemy was. I led the group that was following the detonation wire to the detonation point. There were two soldiers lifting and rolling up the detonation wire. Skipper and I were in front, and everyone else behind. As we picked up the wire and fol-

lowed it, we found the reason why the two or three NVA or Viet Cong had not taken most of our unit out.... There was a small break in the detonation wire. The one soldier, who found the break, showed it to me and those near us. A tiny little break in the wire had spoiled the connection. Otherwise, the Army would have had to really spin a tale on why so many of us got killed at one time.

As it was, this encounter with the big green dinner
Continued on Page 15.

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, 105 W. "F" Street, Suite 206, San Diego, CA 92101 (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.

Treasurer's Report

CHECKING	\$37,663.83
SAVINGS	<u>5,072.25</u>
TOTAL	\$42,736.08

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.

Merchandise: PayPal payments are to be sent to merchandisepaypal@vdha.us.

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.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL!

**LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING
EVERYONE AT THE RENO REUNION
IN APRIL, 2024**



2024 Reunion in Reno Pin Contest



By John R. Harvey

You can compete in designing a pin for this year's VDHA Reunion in Reno. The VDHA has formed a Reunion Pin Design Committee consisting of four member judges: Norm Ream (Chairman non-voting), Bill Cummings (voting), Lynn Mastin (voting) and Tim Hennessey (voting).

Your entry does not need to be a "professionally" completed design for consideration. If a somewhat primitive concept is uniquely different and is selected as the winner, we have made arrangements for a professional firm to convert it into a finished design.

Past pin designs (pictured) have incorporated the reunion location and location-related art, the year and "VDHA Reunion." For on-line entries via e-mail, please use acceptable formats, i.e., JPG, TIFF, PDF, or BMP. Send on-line entries to nream@aol.com. Please put "VDHA Pin Contest" in the subject line so your entry does not go to spam.

Make sure you let us know who you are so we are not dependent on your e-mail address only. We will assign a contestant number for voting. For snail mail entries, please send to VDHA Pin Contest, Attention: Norm Ream, 336 Camino De Las Flores, Encinitas, CA 92024.

Entries will be electronically scanned and sent to the judges. Again, make sure you include your name with your entry. The deadline for a design to be considered is December 31, 2023. The winning entry will be announced as soon as possible.

The Human–Animal Bonds Born in Vietnam

Continued from Page 1.

The goal was simple: focus the story on one handler and his scout dog to enable readers to connect deeply enough to immerse themselves in a story where they could recognize the emotional bond our Vietnam troops had with their dogs. Secondly, I wanted them to feel just how difficult it would be to let go of their best friend and protector. Lastly, I wanted the public to know about the incredible loss of these remarkable dogs as we withdrew our troops. Of course, sharing the good news that terrible decision will never happen again is rewarding, as now these talented dogs are put to use in a variety of ways back home.

When the manuscript was complete, I shared it first with a Vietnam vet tech, who was very supportive. Then, when the book was in final review form, it was time to share it with an important veteran dog handler—the author of *A Soldier's Best Friend: Scout Dogs and Their Handlers in the Vietnam War* and founder of the Military Working Dog Teams National Monument, John Burnam. His enthusiastic support has become a true gift.

In his own words, John Burnam had way too many close calls with death during his two tours of duty between 1966 and 1968. Supported by his scout dogs Clipper and Timber, their courageous acts saved many soldiers and—like other dogs—extended future generations of thousands of American families.

For most of our veterans who served in Vietnam, talking about their time in that theater is an excruciating and grim burden. John was originally one of that silent majority who struggled to share or relive those traumatic memories. That is until the day he found out, 25 years after the war, that a dear friend had survived against all odds. John had helped rescue this seriously wounded friend in the midst of a vicious battle. After the battle, John wrote a letter to his friend's family about their courageous and brave son.

Presuming the worst and not knowing what had happened to him, John was elated to find out 25 years later that his friend was alive. When he went to visit him, his family showed John his letter that they had cherished all these years. His friend encouraged him to begin writing down his stories.

After his successful books, this dedicated warrior had another mission to accomplish: raising enough public awareness and funding to make a special dream,



one held by all dog handlers, come true—a national monument for military working dogs of all wars.

Because of its singular focus on military working dog teams, the monument was denied placement on the hallowed grounds of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. John worked with the Pentagon to get it placed at Joint Base Lackland, San Antonio, TX. As the training grounds for military working dogs since 1958, John agreed it was an ideal choice. Lackland is where most of these talented young dogs cut their first teeth—into fresh recruits wearing "bite suits."

Recently, it was my honor to finally meet MSG (Ret.) John Burnam—recipient of two Purple Hearts, Bronze Star Medal, and the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry. After eight years researching scout dog handlers for my novel *Follow His Lead* and extensive polishing of the story, it was ready to submit to a publisher.

Continued on Page 14.

... Bonds Born in Vietnam

Continued from Page 1.

Since John Burnam's books were in my bibliography, I sent my first edited draft for him to review. To my surprise, he returned my call and showed great interest in my book. It was then I learned how sincerely committed he is to letting all Americans know about these extraordinary K-9 warriors. Hearing his stories firsthand was thrilling, as was the endorsement from a real hero that served over there.

When John asked my wife and I to join him as his guests during the 10th Anniversary celebration for the National Military Working Dogs Memorial on October 27, 2023, at Lackland Air Force Base, we managed to get a firsthand look at the monument and finally meet John and his wife. His persistence over so many years, to see this monument come to life, was extraordinary.

I sat down with John the night before the event to talk about his work and war dog stories. The next day, we were part of a large audience listening to his keynote address. His passionate storytelling held everyone's attention, including

the lengthy challenges that finally led to legislation signed by the President of the United States.

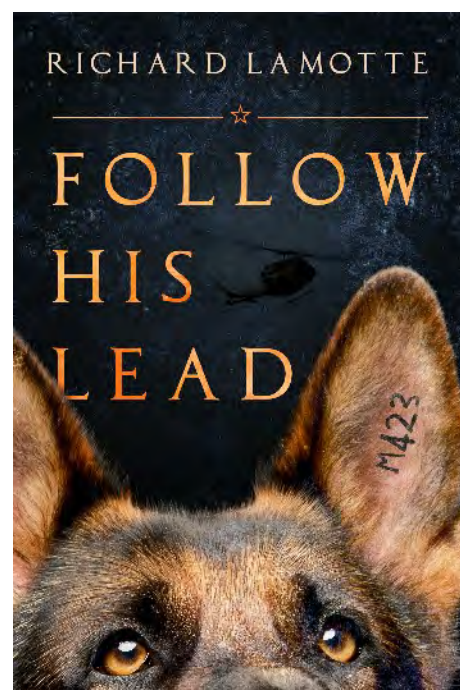
I encourage all those who have not yet been able to document their experiences during that conflict to come forward and give it a try. Writers only need a good editor to help polish their work and leave a legacy for years to come.

Editor's Note:

Follow His Lead has just been released and has already won publishing awards. It has been endorsed by Vietnam veteran John T. Hoffman, Colonel, who was a Vietnam pilot and infantry platoon leader (1971-1972):

It puts you right into the rice paddies, jungle, and high-stress combat environment that so many of us experienced during that war.

His detailed accounting of a scout dog handler's tour, and that of his dog, is quite extraordinary. His ability to capture and convey the experience of combat and its mental stresses, such as gut-twisting fear, survival guilt, and utter physical and mental exhaustion, provide the reader with a real sense of what that war was like to live through."



**HAVE A
WONDERFUL
HOLIDAY
SEASON.**

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DEADLINE

ARTICLES FOR

THE MARCH

ISSUE must be

submitted by

February 23

... The Tip of the Spear Seeking Medal Nominees

Continued from Page 11.

PLATE got added into an ever-growing stack of events that periodically shows up in my nightmares that I get to experience back here in the good old USA. You never forget an experience like this. For those of us who were there that day, it was the Grace of God, along with the poor maintenance of equipment by our enemy, that granted us the gift of another day to live.

The wire led to a small spider hole that could not hold more than three people, and most likely it was just two. There was water dripping down the sides of the hole from something they spilled as they hustled to get away from the area after realizing their trap had failed. I do not believe we went after them, I actually have no memory as to what transpired after that point.

Since we are on the topic of stupid ways to get killed, here is another dumb way. An obvious thing you see immediately when entering Vietnam is that it looks like a lot of people (natives) are on drugs, because they are. I saw men leaning up against the walls just zoned out. The drugs were very bad during the time I was in Nam. They were very easy to get, and they were very powerful. You could get a joint that was really long, and it was most likely laced with opium. One of our dog handlers managed to get himself declared a CO to get out of the field. (He started each day out with the shakes and could not stop shaking until he started in on his supply of pot). He was found with his ammo box totally full of these super potent joints. Unfortunately, he was not the only one who had stashes. Drugs were very easy to get, and nobody seemed to care that they were being used.

It was not uncommon for me to come back in from the field, walk between some of the hooches, and go through a cloud of smoke...it was that thick. The excuse was, "we can't have alcohol because we are underage, so we'll do joints." Getting hooked on this stuff in Nam and going home addicted became a big problem for some soldiers. It was easy and cheap in Nam, but at home it would be a very different world completely. I never touched drugs there or back in the USA.

In any event, it was my last night with a Mech Unit, and we were all circled up and settling down for the evening when the commander came to me. He asked if Skipper and I would be the fourth person on a team that would be going out beyond our lines and spend

Continued on Page 16.

Continued from Page 4.

* Tim Hennessey — Navy, Sentry Dogs, Vietnam

* Janet Mathews — Daughter of USAF Master Sgt. Alvin W. "Sarge" Matthews.

Nominations should be received by the committee no later than January 15, 2024 to be evaluated in time for the Reunion. There will be up to a maximum of two VDHA recipients each Reunion year unless the committee finds and approves by majority vote an exceptional circumstance for a third medal.

Each nomination must contain the name of the nominee, dates of service in Vietnam or Thailand, and unit(s) name and number as best as known. It must contain the name of the VDHA member making the nomination and his contact information. It must identify for which one or more of the nomination criteria listed (numbers 1 through 5) the VDHA member is being nominated.

The nomination text itself should have as much written information as possible (not just "so and so is a great person, I know him well"), describing the event(s) or circumstances or activities past or present for which the VDHA member is being nominated. See example nomination text in the December 2016 issue of *Dogman* on page 5 or the other *Dogman* issues mentioned above.

The nomination should contain the Who, What, Why, Where, When, and How to the best of the nominator's knowledge. Those VDHA members wishing to nominate a fellow member for the Upcoming Reunion in Reno, NV, should send the nomination to VDHA President John Harvey at jrhcpa@hhcpas.com or John Homa at jhomatdh@vdha.us by January 15 of 2024. If you do not have e-mail please send the nomination by letter to President John Harvey, 3000 Holiday Drive, Unit 1101, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33316.



The Tip of the Spear . . .

Continued from Page 15.

the night being a listening post. The rule for this group is complete silence. All communication is done by signaling on the radio by working the on and off signal- or "breaking squelch." If everything was ok, on the hour, every hour, we were to break squelch. If we were picking up intruders we were to immediately break squelch, no voice, just the hand operating the signal control.

Talk about dangerous, it would be bad enough to have to signal about intruders, but much worse, to have the actual intruders come up on top of us. As a bonus, when our buddies behind us open up firing, we were not in a very good spot at all. Being literally in the middle of a fire fight was probably not going to end well for us. There were more than enough potential problems to deal with in this situation.

I was told I would have the third watch and to go to sleep first. Little did I know that these yahoos and their friends, used the LP watch as a time to get stoned. What's worse is that these yahoos arranged for someone else, behind the lines, to Break Squelch for us. This gave a false all clear signal every hour for the yahoos on the LP who got stoned and passed out.

It was Skipper who woke me up, as he was on full hearing alert. We definitely had company. It took me about a nano-second to realize what had happened. I could not get to the radio if I had wanted to without moving bodies around, and I was not about to do that and make any sound.

Continued in the next issue.

Vice President's Report

Continued from Page 5.

He was so proud to be there and took me to huddle up with his kids to tell them what was going on before the parade. We look forward to his next visit with us.

Jim Frost was also a member of the VDHA and worked relentlessly to get the funding for the War Dogs Memorial at Lackland Air Force Base. His group of the Grand Canyon German Shepherd Club has walked in the parade for 23 years and this year the parade was dedicated to him for all his hard work and dedication.

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Flashback Foto



This was from 1968 with my scout dog Major-4X83 at the 34th IPSD, 1st Cav Divison. - Gary Grant, Minnesota