



The Paw Print

*The Voice of the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum
& Handler Center*



Volume 4 Issue 6

June 2024

Upcoming Events:

August 26–29, 2024
HITS K9 Training
Seminar Hyatt Regency
New Orleans, LA

September 15-22, 2024
Howard County Veterans
Reunion, Kokomo, IN

September 26-29, 2024
The Smoky Mountains
Cluster Dog Shows,
Knoxville, TN

Army Scout Dogs in Vietnam



Leroy Jackson with Bizz 16M6 and Rick Hong with Ebony 030M. Members of the 47th's finest: taking a break in the field. Teams from the 47th IPSD (Infantry Platoon Scout Dog) received training and deployed from Fort Benning. The Scout Dog program in Vietnam grew under SFC Jesse Mendez's direction. Photo: MWD Heritage Museum Archives via the 47th IPSD.

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In the heart of military operations, you'll find a specialized group of heroes who serve tirelessly alongside our brave men and women in uniform. They may not wear the same uniforms or carry the same weapons, but their impact on the battlefield is immeasurable. We're talking about our beloved US military working

dogs. These four-legged warriors embody loyalty, bravery, and unwavering tenacity. Trained by the best in their field, these remarkable canines play an integral role in safeguarding our troops and completing critical missions around the world.

Beyond their tactical roles, these loyal companions

offer emotional support to soldiers serving far from home. Their presence brings comfort and camaraderie during challenging times, reminding our troops that they are never alone. As we honor the Army birthday, let us not forget our four-legged heroes who selflessly stand alongside Army Soldiers in defense of freedom.

From the President's Desk



President, Albert Johnson



Hello to all our followers.

Summer is upon us, which means fun in the sun and more time spent outside with our lovable 4-legged friends. Ddiaz, our retired military working dog, would agree that summer brings more time to chase the ball and explore all nature offers.

Every year in June, we take a moment to honor the US Army's birthday. The Air Force houses the current military working dog program. However, earlier in the working dog program history, the US Army produced several firsts. The first dog to jump out of an aircraft, the sled dog program, the scout dog platoons of Vietnam, and the combat tracking dog program, amongst many others.

In this edition of the Paw Print Newsletter, you will find a closer look at the 47th Scout Dog Platoon in Vietnam. While we are in awe of what these brave dog teams accomplished in their rich history, we are also very humbled and honored to be the repository of their incredible history.

In this edition, you will also find an article tag teamed by Captain Arthur H. Blair Jr. and Sergeant First Class Jesse Mendez,

a man whose name many of you will recognize. Jesse Mendez achieved a legendary status in the military working dog program. Along the sidebar of this letter, you will find a photo of him and his dog, Pal, as they jumped out of a perfectly good airplane. Like I always tell people, to be a dog handler, you have to have at least a few screws loose!

Also included in this edition is a story about scars. As many of us dog handlers have heard in the past, it's not a matter of if but a matter of when you'll get bitten. Another statement I remember vividly from my early years in the Marine Corps dog program was that you're not an actual dog handler until you have been bitten bad enough to leave a permanent mark. I liken this mentality to military units where a large group of individuals go and get the same unit insignia tattooed on themselves.

While not all the scars are the same, they tend to look alike and carry a unique story each handler holds endearingly close to themselves. A fond memory of a time in their lives in which they had the best job in the entire military.

Please join us as we continue our events across the nation. This month, we are featuring the Florida All-Veterans Reunion and our trip to Alpena, Michigan, to the Army MWD Symposium. These events allowed us to tell the public about our organization, educate them about the heroic deeds of dogs and handlers, and drum up financial support to expand our reach into the future.

I would be remiss if I didn't invite you to volunteer during this exciting growth in our museum organization. Volunteering comes in many forms. We are always looking for staff to help as virtual volunteers with tasks you can complete in the comfort of your own home, or if you like the idea of traveling and speaking to the public about who we are and the sacrifices of the men, women, and four-legged partners, then there are plenty of opportunities like this that arise often.

Thank you for your continued support throughout our growing process, and as always,

K9 Leads the Way!

Albert Johnson

The 47th's Arrival in Vietnam

by Rusty Allen

The grinding sounds of the gears awakened me as they moved the flaps of the C-141 into position for the plane to land. I could tell by the pressure in my ears that we were descending fast. The land below reminded me of the moon, abandoned and full of craters. As the Starlifter moved forward and lower, the villages appeared, along with movements that seemed to be people.

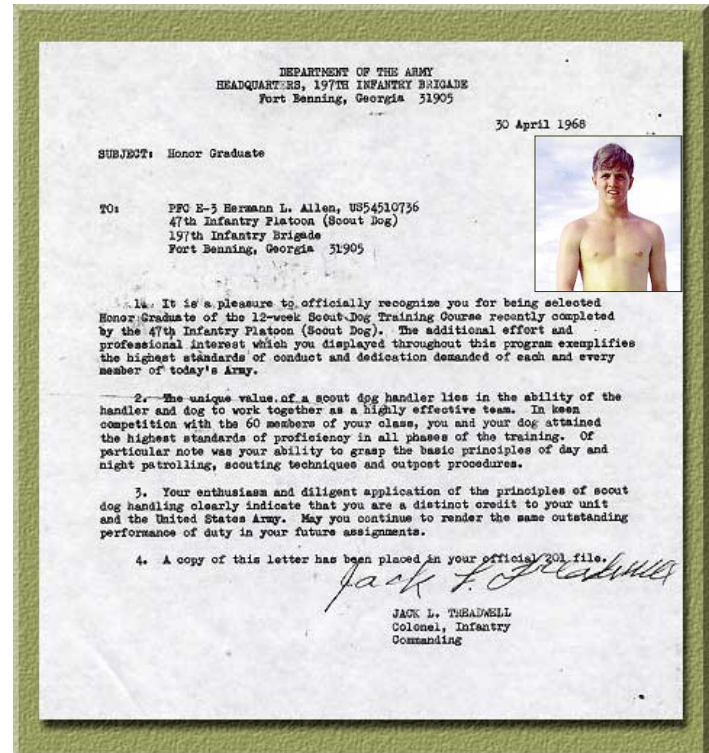
"What are those funny-looking round things down there?" I asked, looking out the small window and pointing. "I think those may be Vietnamese, squatting in the rice fields, with those round straw hats," Jon Wahl said. Everyone seemed to see something different. Little did I know that was one of the Vietnam War's legacies: everyone saw a different war.

"Look over there!" Frank Bagatta said excitedly. "WOW! Those are artistry or mortar rounds exploding below us," Marvin Pearce said, looking slightly worried. "I wonder if they are shooting at us?" Willie Jones asked, a little concerned. "I don't

think so. I don't think they would be falling down there," I said, "That's too straight down," realizing that the trajectory of a round would make it fall farther from the plane to one side or the other.

As I witnessed this scene, my gut began to move around a little. I could tell by the look on the faces of the other guys that they could feel it, too. Uneasiness and fear were in everyone's eyes, although no one would readily admit it. Pearce was even beginning to look a little worried. The hydraulics squealed louder as the gears began to whine loudly. Suddenly, there was a startling jerk as the landing of the big jet locked into the down position. From the looks on their faces, everyone was startled. Odd, I didn't remember the landing gear making such a hard jerk, the squeal of the hydraulics being so noticeable on other landings - maybe because the other times weren't in Vietnam.

The anxiety was building, and butterflies flew in my stomach like they wanted to migrate east. The giant wheels hit the runway with a loud squeal, then



Above: "Rusty" (Hermann L.) Allen's Honor Graduate Letter from Scout Dog Training at Fort Benning, Georgia dated 30 April, 1968. Photo insert: Rusty in Vietnam with the 47th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog). Both the document and photo are from our digital archives.

another as the Starlifter sat firmly on the runway. The massive jets soon began to reverse thrust with a loud rumbling noise; the plane decelerated quickly. Soon, the big jet was taxiing down the runway toward the huge hangers.

Fear and anxiety were at its apex as the large rear ramp began to lower even before the plane stopped. Suddenly, the rush of hot air nearly took my breath away. The sickening smell

of Vietnam was unreal and almost gagged me. The air was heavy, hot, and very wet. I immediately began to sweat. I'm not sure if it was from the heat or the anxiety of Vietnam.

The massive Starlifter circled as the pilot guided it into position on the hot concrete runway. This was Vietnam, our home for the next year and for some, maybe forever.



Four Footed Radar

Reprinted from *Infantry Magazine*. November–December 1966. Article written by Captain Arthur H. Bair, Jr, and Sergeant First Class Jesse Mendez

In the shadow of such giant technological achievements as armed helicopters, long-range missiles, and sophisticated communications, a much less heralded but no less significant event is taking place: once again, man's best friend is going to war.

The recent activation of Infantry platoons (Scout Dog) is a demonstration that this lesson, though at times overlooked, has never been entirely forgotten. And it testifies to the fact that, however much the nature of war may change, the military dog in all combat zones and under the most diverse of conditions is as flexible as man himself.

The primary mission of the scout dog is to detect the presences of a person or object, called detection by live scent, or to detect the spot where a person or object has recently been, called detection by dead scent.

For such a mission, the German Shepherd—male or female—is used because he possesses a high degree of speed, understanding of the spoken word or gesture, a keen sense of direction, intelligence, acceptance of discipline, and absolute faith in his master. Not to be confused with the sentry dog used by the Air Force and Army to guard their installations, the scout

dog is not vicious or trained to attack.

Although he alerts on primarily an airborne scent, he also is sensitive to sound and movement. The dogs' means of alerting their masters of a detection usually vary from dog to dog. One may give an alert only the master will understand, such as lifting his head into the wind; another may grab his handler by the hand and lead him to the origin of the scent. Depending upon the weather and terrain, scout dogs are capable of making a detection up to 400 meters away.

The 41st Infantry Division's summary of operations in the Southwest Pacific Area during World War II, from which the extracts below were taken, point out the value of the canine capabilities:

- Scout dogs gave warning of enemy presence within 30 yards under all conditions. In some instances, warnings were given from distances as great as 300 yards.
- Scout dogs gave timely warning of the enemy and enabled the patrol to maneuver, send scouts forward, and secure or conceal their position.
- Scout dogs warned of the approach of any person, American or enemy.



This image reprinted from the article *Four Footed Radar*. *Infantry Magazine*, November-December 1966, pp. 37–40. No photographer credited.

The authors had extensive experience with scout dogs, both in Vietnam and at the Scout Dog Training Program at Fort Benning. Captain Bair attended the Infantry Officer Career Course. Prior to this he was the OIC of the Scout Dog Training Program. SFC Mendez was the Training NCO for the program. In 1962, he helped the Vietnamese establish their dog training center at Than Tuy Hoa, following this with an assignment as advisor to ARVN dog units.

- Scout Dogs relieved the tension and increased the confidence of the patrol as a whole.

The training cycle through which scout dogs go is divided into six specific phases and includes such subjects as basic obedience, day scouting and patrolling, night scouting and patrolling, special techniques, tactical bivouac, and end-of-course tests.

Training is made realistic as possible. During the en-

tire cycle, the dogs are exposed to gunfire and artillery simulators to accustom them to the noises of the battlefield.

As the objective of scouting is to capitalize on a dog's innate abilities to make use of his keen senses of smell, sight, and hearing, the initial training is designed simply to interest a dog in scouting work and to teach the handler how to interpret a dog's alerts. During these training operations,

an aggressor is hidden about 50 meters from the point where the dog is to begin his scouting. When a detection is made, the handler then walks the dog to within 5 meters of the aggressor, at which time the aggressor attempts to run away. To stimulate the dog's interest in this early training phase, he is turned loose and allowed to chase the aggressor.

But as the course progresses, the chase is eliminated; instead after reading a dog's alert, the handler tells and instructor where the aggressor is, and a two-man reconnaissance element is sent forward to where the handler designates. When this reconnaissance element find the aggressor, a short firefight ensues, after which the aggressor is marched back to the dog, who is given an opportunity to examine his catch.

As the team's ability develops in this phase of the training, the distance between the aggressor and the dog is increased to several hundred meters; aggressors are hidden in trees, in camouflaged positions, and in spider holes and tunnels.

In striving to make the dog versatile, adaptable to meet most contingencies, training is also given in such special areas as expedient river crossings, helicopter and waterborne armor operations, and helicopter rappelling. To pre-

pare dogs to work effectively in even the most active combat zones, they are usually transported to problem areas in noisy, vibrating vehicles.

Because the scout dog depends principally on his sense of smell to make detections, the primary consideration for his employment is the wind. Working on an airborne scent, which flows downwind from the source and forms a cone, the dog will normally give a "faint alert" when he enters the edge of the scent cone; that is, he will gesture to the handler that he is faintly detecting something, and then will attempt to move to the center of the cone where the scent is strongest. Once in the center of the cone, the dog will turn into the wind and give a "strong alert," and the handler, after making the dog sit, will then indicate to the patrol leader the source of scent.

The scout dog is taught to scout when wearing the leather work harness and to heel when wearing the choke chain. When the wind is favorable, or blowing into the dog's face or flanks, he should be positioned in front and upwind of the patrol. No one should be positioned in front of the dog and his handler, but two armed soldiers should flank them for purpose of security and protection. When the handler is working his dog, he de-



A Scout Dog checking out smells. This image reprinted from the article *Four Footed Radar*. *Infantry Magazine*, November-December 1966, pp. 37-40. No photographer credited.

votes full time to that job, so guidance and protection are required.

If, during the course of an operation, the wind blows unfavorably, the dog can be taken from the point or flank and placed in the main body. And if the wind shifts so that it blows from behind the patrol, the dog can be moved to the rear in order to give an alert in the event that the patrol is being followed. If a patrol is to be out for any length of time, extra dogs should be taken along. A scout dog can work up to six or eight hours on fairly open terrain, but through inundated rice paddies, swamps and thick jungle, this time is generally reduced.

In the planning of an operation, the platoon leader should be notified as far in

advance as possible that he will have a scout dog with him. Since some dogs work better than others in different situations, the leaders should have time to select the handler and the dog best suited to the nature of his mission.

When scout dogs are employed by units that have not previously used them, the personnel of these units should be briefed on the capabilities and limitations of the scout dog; also, time should be allotted for the handler and his dog to rehearse with the unit; and dogs should be given the opportunity to get accustomed to the scent of the individual patrol members.

Prior to departing on a mission, the leaders should allow the handler sufficient time to exercise his dog.

Ideally, the handlers should be given time to run short patrols, thus allowing the dog to run off excess energy and be given time to stimulate a dog's interest in the mission.

In reconnaissance and combat patrolling operations, the scout dog can be a valuable aid to the patrol leader in the conduct of his unit's mission. On a combat patrol, the scout dog can alert his handler to hostile positions, thus giving the patrol leader the opportunity to deploy early and surprise the enemy.

On a reconnaissance patrol, the scout dog can be employed to seek infiltration routes through the enemy's defensive positions. The reconnaissance phase of training is geared to prepare a dog for employment in just this kind of role; one scout dog squad is placed in ambush position and another is given the mission of infiltrating undetected through that position.

When scout dogs are used on any patrolling operation, it is imperative that the patrol's movement be coordinated with that of adjacent, friendly patrols. The dog, it must be remembered, does not discriminate in scent detection; he alerts to the presence of both friendly and enemy positions. In consequence, patrol routes which allow friendly patrols to pass unwittingly close to each oth-

er might conceivably give cause to a firefight. It is also necessary that the inner integrity of the patrol formation be maintained, as a dog will also alert to the presence of fellow patrol members should they lose contact momentarily in thick terrain or drift out of position.

In the manning of an outpost or the participating in an ambush mission, the scout dog's keen sense of smell could again prove to be a vital factor in the conduct of an operation.

One of the most difficult missions for a scout dog to accomplish involves the search of a hamlet. With the variety and intensity of both human and animal smells in the village, the dog is apt to fall into confusion. But there are ways to reduce the possibility of confusion and assist the dog in conducting a search of the hamlet. First, after securing the hamlet, the dog should begin to search down wind, allowing the smells of the village to blow toward him; second, all inhabitants of the village, including the domestic animals, should be taken down wind and placed behind the dog, reducing to a minimum the number of scents which he will have to track and investigate.

The patrol leader should be certain to allow the dog to check closely all the structures in the hamlet, giving

him the opportunity to determine if any enemy or equipment are hidden between the walls. In the conduct of a hamlet search, the dog should also be guided to stream beds, canals, rice paddies, pig stys, cattle pens, and haystacks in the vicinity of the village.

This type of thoroughness has paid dividends in the past. During one operation in Vietnam, as a patrol approached a village with a scout dog working on a leash, the dog signaled an alert and ran into a pig pen, where he began to growl and dig into the earth. After the handler led the dog away, the patrol members uncovered an underground hideout containing one Viet Cong, three grenades, an ARVN deserter, and valuable documents.

Although the scout dog's innate abilities to detect hostile positions have been employed with great success in the past, developmental projects are currently underway to sharpen these abilities and to make him an even more useful member of the combat team.

For instance, to extend the range at which the scout dog can work alone on patrol, an animal-to-man communications system is being tested by which he can search hundreds of meters in advance of a patrol and relay information to the patrol via a transistor.



The objective of scouting is to capitalize on a dog's innate abilities, to make use of his keen senses of smell, sight, and hearing.

This image reprinted from the article *Four Footed Radar*. *Infantry Magazine*, November-December 1966, pp. 37-40. No photographer credited.

Another series of experiments is developing a method by which a handler can instruct and direct his dog from long distances. And yet another program is designed, through the use of high-gain microphone sensors and amplifiers, to enhance a dog's already keen sensing abilities.

With this increased emphasis on broadening the utility of scout dogs in combat roles, it seems assured that once more, the dog has secured a beachhead in the mobile, modern American Army. His value to the combat Infantryman, measured in terms of his mission to save lives, is firmly established, and is as priceless today as it has ever been.

US Marine Awarded Jim Kallstrom Leadership Award

Story and photos by Cpl. Darien Wright

A US Marine with Marine Corps Installations Command was awarded the Jim Kallstrom Leadership Award, something only earned by military police personnel on Quantico, May 8, 2024.

Gunnery Sgt. Alfred Nieto, the military working dog program chief for MCICOM, earned the Jim Kallstrom Leadership Award for his contributions to the development of his Marines, loyalty, and mission accomplishment within the unit.

"Gunnery Sgt. Nieto has faced all challenges head-on and with a commitment that is rarely seen by his peers," said Gunnery Sgt. Preston Thompson, a law enforcement quota manager for MCICOM and a peer of Nieto. "His work ethic and dedication to mission accomplishment not only makes a lasting impact but sets the groundwork of what is expected to be a Marine."

The award is named after Jim Kallstrom, one of the former heads of FBI in the New York field office. His service to his country became famous across the bureau, as he made immense impacts on high-profile investigations and cases.

As the chief, Nieto mentored and encouraged his Marines to take positions of higher responsibilities, furthering their capabilities and capacity of leadership.

He was also active outside of his unit, traveling from coast to coast to help train, educate, and lead other MWD handlers while maintaining mission readiness at MCICOM.

"I have a phenomenal group of Marines who make me want to work extra hard, continuously," said Nieto.

"I've had the pleasure of leading Marines in garrison, in combat, and the depot," speaking of his time at a Marine Corps recruit training depot.

"I can't do what I do without you all," he said during the ceremony.

Lt. Col. Michael Sickels, a military police officer with MCICOM and awarding official for the ceremony, nominated Nieto for the leadership award.

"Having him as part of our unit really benefits all of us," he said. "He's highly intelligent, sarcastic, and very witty: everything you want in a gunny."

The Jim Kallstrom Leadership Award recognizes military police who exemplify the ethos of "protect and serve", but also "honor, courage and commitment." Awardees should also be examples of genuine concern for the well-being of the Corps, fellow Marines and the community they serve.



Above: US Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Alfred Nieto, the military working dog program chief with Marine Corps Installations Command, poses for a photo during an award ceremony at the U.S. Marine Memorial Chapel on Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, May 8, 2024. Below: Robert Gleason, a volunteer with USMC Law Enforcement, GySgt Nieto, and his wife, Shantel Nieto. (Photos provided by Cpl. Darien Wright)



Above: During the Global War on Terror, GySgt Nieto served as a Combat Tracker Dog Handler, shown here with his partner, Lucy. (Courtesy photo)

World War II Zig-Zag

On 1-24-44, we boarded the Liberty ship, Benjamin Ide Wheeler, at Wilmington, L.A. (Los Angeles) and discovered we were to share the trip with a casual company of Remount, also consisting of 100 men and two officers, plus four casual officers being shipped over.

None of us knew our destination, but we did know that 208 men, their sleeping quarters, their galley, and their dining area all crammed into the number three hold did not hold the promise of a luxury cruise. Our dogs (108 of them including our "spares") were quartered in their crates in the protection of two large sleds on the port and starboard sides of the ship just aft

of the 'midship house and, when it came to housing, had much the better part of the deal. But neither they nor we had the faintest idea of what our future held, much less that this overloaded freighter would be our home for the next 72 long days and even longer nights.

Completely without escort of any kind, we zig-zagged our way across the Pacific and South Pacific. The food, abominable to start, went downhill from there until finally, we were subsisting on canned salmon that tasted spoiled, soda crackers, and black, unsweetened coffee. On the other hand, our officers, dining with the ship's officers, ate very well in-

by Richard Zika



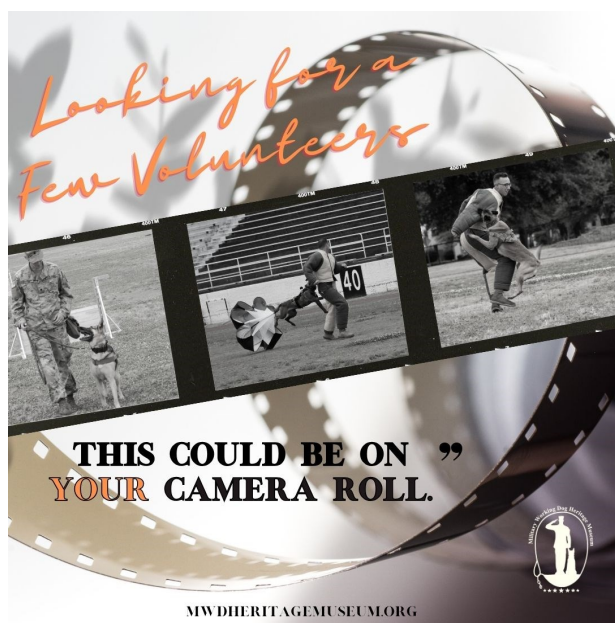
Above: Benjamin Ide Wheeler, a Liberty Ship. Source : NARA

Story source: http://cbi-history.com/part_vi_wardog2.html

deed, and the growing resentment led to a miniature mutiny food riot with "Swill o' the Day" being thrown every which way. It brought the desired attention, but the only result was we were promised fresh provisions would be stocked at our

first port of call (which turned out to be Fremantle, Australia). While it sounded good, it's pretty hard to make a sandwich out of a promise between two imaginary slices of bread, and feelings still ran high.

This Could Be On Your Camera Roll



Do you love K9?

Would you enjoy being in the company of military working dog handlers from every generation?

Would you like to honor a dog or a military member with your volunteer work?

Have you been looking for a chance to make a difference in the MWD community?

As the museum progresses with its goals, our volunteers will have increasing opportunities to participate in a variety of exciting and fun-filled

events and activities. From educational workshops to community outreach programs, there's something for everyone.

The organization seeks committed volunteers and is currently scouting staff for Social Media, Newsletter Editing, and Heritage Discovery.

If you want to start a conversation about how you might contribute your unique talents to the greater good, reach out at:

[volunteer @ mwdhm.org](mailto:volunteer@mwdhm.org).

Army MWD Symposium - Alpena, Michigan

by Dixie Whitman

The Combat Readiness Training Center in Alpena, Michigan, served as the site for the annual Army MWD Symposium from May 11-17, 2024.

This event pulled together subject matter experts in all areas of military and law enforcement K9 areas, from Intro to Gunfire to Advanced Decoy class. The list of instructors included well-known names, from active and retired military K9 ranks to civilian canine experts. The museum sent two volunteers, President Albert Johnson and our Treasurer, Andy Hauser, to

represent us during Vendor Days.

These events often serve as a reunion, where old friends and familiar faces come together. Among the many memorable moments, the presentation of a Challenge Coin to Albert by the Marine MWD Program Manager, Gunnery Sergeant Nieto, stood out as a true highlight, recognizing the shared experiences and bonds formed among handlers.

Thanks to the Army MWD Program Manager, SGM Viridiana Lavalle, for the invitation. A fantastic event!



U.S. Marine Corps Gunnery Sgt. Alfred Nieto, the military working dog program chief with Marine Corps Installations Command, on left, presents Albert Johnson, the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum President, on right, with a Challenge Coin. We aren't saying Albert's an old school dog handler, but Gunny Nieto's description of Albert? *"An OG handler from Pendleton who landed on Guadalcanal with the Dobermans."* Now that's old school!

Photo courtesy: Timothy Timmons



Top photo, left to right: A reunion among friends—Chris Willingham, Albert Johnson, Andy Hauser, Frank Roman, and Rosendo Madrigal.

Second row: handlers from around the country (and beyond) stop to have their photo taken with Albert Johnson.

Bottom row: Guests stop by the table to view the array of artifacts, photos, and literature. Photos courtesy of Andy Hauser.

Vietnam and All Veterans Reunion in Melbourne, Florida

by Dixie Whitman

The Vietnam and All Veterans of Brevard County hosted their final reunion event at Wickham Park in Melbourne, Florida, May 9-12, 2024.

This major Vietnam Veteran Reunion is the 36th time that veterans from across the country have gathered to honor their brothers and to heal.

The reunion activities started on May 5th with a motorcycle escort of the moving wall from Brevard Community College to the reunion site at Wickham Park.

Beginning on May 9th, veterans amassed at the reunion site to enjoy music from the Vietnam era and spend time with fellow veterans.

Two of the museum's Board Members, our Navy/Coast Guard Coordinator Al Dodds and our Army Coordinator Johnny Mayo, were among those veterans.

Johnny brought his War Dog display, which features wooden kennel signs for the K9s of Vietnam. The dogs who were KIA have their signs scattered on the ground in front of the display, but as Al Dodds says, only 204 of the dogs came home — the rest remained forever.



All photos on right provided by Al Dodds and Ruthie Player.



Chicks Dig Scars

by Curtis Hendel



Growing up in southwest Minnesota farm country, I worked for area farmers early in life. Picking rock, walking beans, and endless days baling hay and stacking those massive golden bundles into haymows filled my summers. A bit later, it would be shingling countless roofs with my dad. Each of these employment opportunities afforded countless ways to damage your body, many times leaving you with impressive scars. Even though it wasn't fun to get banged up, my dad and many others in our area summed it up nicely, "Hmm, that's going to leave a scar, but you know what? Girls dig scars." Yes, that was an actual quote from my dad.

To this day, I don't know if it was true or if dads everywhere used that statement to get their boys to suck it up and move on. I never had a cast when I was young, but I remember signing the cast of an accident victim, which was a big deal.

Little did I know I would join a world filled with scars after entering the United States Air Force. Never has it been more evident and heartwarm-

ing than two years ago last summer. I went to the memorial service for a young Minnesota Marine K9 handler stationed in Japan who had died after being caught in the current while swimming, but not before helping to save the three Marines swimming with him. I brought mementos from a few K9 organizations, including the Military Working Dog Heritage Museum, Rocky Mountain Dawgs Project, and Sergeant Caesar. Another veteran dog handler from Minnesota, a Vietnam Veteran named Russ, arrived with me.

After meeting the Marine Corps K9 handler who escorted the body back home, I noticed something that inspired my soul. Russ and the young Marine had rolled up their sleeves and were (can you guess?) - yes, they were comparing scars! Russ' scars were five decades old but still fresh in his mind. The young Marine had been taken to the shed when he was bitten and won the competition, but it was as though these two warriors had been together for years, and the scar comparison was like blood brothers cutting their palms before shaking hands.

Why does it seem embarrassing to admit that I don't have any hard-core scars from a battle with some crazy Red Dog? Old Thor sent me to the ER to get my leg and arm cleaned up, and the residual scarring is

still visible but not worthy of a great conversation in and of themselves, but the back story is epic!

So what about losing a battle with a Military Working Dog, whether it was attached to you by leash or wrap, serves as a badge of honor? And how did getting a good scar seem like part of the upgrade training for a dog handler? Some believed that until you got your first good scar, you had yet to live in the K9 world.

I served towards the end of the single-purpose dog. The Pentagon scaled back the K9 footprint on perimeter bases worldwide in the '90s, and dual-purpose dogs would come to rule the day. Many held the attitude that perimeter/patrol handlers were the 'real' dog handlers and that a year or two on the hump should come before you move on to detector work. Yeah, we were kind of crazy that way! I always thought bite work was king and all else was secondary.

The other main point about the perimeter dog was that the dogs out there alone with their handler every night could have more of an edge to them than dogs patrolling on base. A solid perimeter dog often translated into something other than an easygoing dog. We had several notoriously nasty dogs on the perimeter at Osan, and many had left their handiwork on the body parts of handlers and decoys.

Whatever the case, training Military Working Dogs in Controlled Aggression is still a dangerous life, and scars can certainly still happen. But what about the other types of scars some dog handlers collect during their time in the military and afterward?

This secondary type of scar was another massive failure for me. I can't, for the life of me, figure out why I chose to adorn my upper arms with the scars I had put there. It was during my time at Osan, and I wonder if there may have been other factors to claim. Did I say scars and throw a wrench at you? Well, these scars are much different than those caused by the business end of a dog. These scars are placed there with care, ink, and design; they are the scars of tattoos.

I have seen some great K9 tattoos over the years and some not-so-great tattoos. They range from beautiful artwork depicting either a specific dog or just a breed of dog to names and brand numbers of memorable dogs, great and not-so-great sayings, and simply "K9."

If you have tattoos or scars that carry significant meaning to you, we would love to see the photos and hear some of the backstories. Send information and pictures to newsletter@mwdhm.org. We might use your tales in our newsletter or Social Media. Let's talk!



*Military Working Dog
Heritage Museum &
Handler Center
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Phone: 865-507-8903*

From the Team at MWDHM...

We invite you to join the museum's journey
by signing up for a free *Paw Print* subscription.
Email: info@mwdhm.org

**Military Working Dog Heritage:
Always on Point**

We're on the Web: mwdhm.org

We're on Facebook:

Military Working Dog Heritage Museum

Recycle, please.



Share your story.

Share your vision.

Share your voice.

**Share your copy of
our newsletter.**

Artifacts of the Month



These items, a 33rd IPSD Banner and Tab patch, are from the museum's Mark Hough collection. This collection funded by Linda Standard and Eric Queen.

Historic Pooch Pic of the Month



A dozen soldiers in formation at US Army Canine Reception Center, Front Royal, Virginia during WWII.

Photo: DoD