

Sears Johanna

From: Tim Prokop
Sent: Thursday, February 24, 2000 1:45 AM
To: Tom Mitchell; John Sciascia; Lee Stewart; Billy Barnes; Norm Ream; DON CHUBB; STEVE GARFIELD; Robert King; Phil Savage; Jim Watford; colin fallat; Don Ray; Bob Rodocker; Steve Lemish; Lloyd Goodin; Earl McNelly; John Hackett; Don Poss; Gary Hansen; Bert Hubble; Steve Reichenbach; Ron Aiello; John Burnam; James Black; Larry Laudner; Ron Rackley; Steve Janke; Dick Baumer; Vince de Guilio; Dartyne Pettinicchio; James Camp; Joan Elder; Alfred Libby; Douglas Davis; Gordon Wildes; Jerry Walsh; Wilfred Baca; William Putney; Jane Gordon; Larry Chilcoat; Charles Norton; Michael R. Martin; Barbara Mulligan; Dave Cooper; Vic White; John Tyson; Larry Gandy; James Click; Jimmy Gifford; Duane Lynde; Bryon Martin; Jim Ower; John Stark; David Baker; Greg Terry; Richard Humphrey; Daryl Hubble; Dennis Jefcoat; Rob Longacre; Karl Gross; John Harvey; Mike Mc Kelroy; Edward Vymazal; Robert Reese; Gerald Sandvik; Henry Nieto; Thom Thomas; Charlie Cargo; Roy Johnson; John Lidstrom; Jose Serrato; Randy Harritan; craig lord; Vernon Whybrew; Robert Mendoza; Rusty Allen; Richard Marty; Art Peterson; Robert Saracino; Dennis Herrick
Subject: Re: Feelings and thoughts

Hi All,

For those who don't know me, I am not a handler. About 18 months ago I had no idea that dogs had even served in Vietnam. Then I was asked to write and produce a documentary on the subject by Gary Benz and John Drimmer at GRB.

We started with research, trying to learn as much as we could in as short a time as possible. Lots of words and articles and web pages, spearheaded by Mike Lemish's wonderful book. Then we started talking to handlers and that's when everything changed.

I was amazed by what I learned, but the thing that most surprised me was the heartfelt emotion that accompanied people's recollections and the dignity with which it was conveyed. It touched me deeply, and I think that it is this emotional heart that has left its imprint (or pawprint) the memorial.

When we announced the documentary to the VDHA membership and asked for help this became incredibly obvious. The response was overwhelming. We didn't receive one photo, we got thousands—most of them irreplaceable. We also received yearbooks, diaries and letters, personal films and personal memories that were both painful and poignant. The trust placed in us to get it right was so evident, and the emotional stakes so high that it took the show into a realm where television seldom goes. Making it meaningful was more important than making it entertaining—something that was only possible because the show was funded from outside the system by Jeffrey Bennett.

During the dedication, I thought back on the letters I'd read, photos I'd studied, and handlers I spoke with, both on and off the camera. The word that kept coming back to me is dignity, and that's a word I can't help associating with the handlers I feel privileged to know. There was a purity to the emotions that you unleashed that was and is absolutely contagious. It's why so many people stood in the pouring rain. Why David Isely shares his music with joy. Why the memorial got built.

When people cried during an interview for the show, it wasn't from pity but from the recollection of sadness that was there to be shared. And when the memories were good, the joy was also there for the taking. And this emotional honesty came at a price that was unmistakable. I saw Tom Mitchell help others hold it together while struggling to hold it together himself. But as a group and as individuals the handlers accepted the price; so that a piece of all your stories would be told. It's hard to express how much that impressed me. The interviews and letters were

courageous and dignified. And it built War Dogs into something larger than the stories of a few men.

Never having been to Vietnam, I can't ever really know your experiences, but the handlers who wrote and spoke for you conveyed a sense of how the experiences have touched you. And with even that minimal understanding comes both empathy and respect.

I know how much the memorial means to you. It was literally built with emotion. And that makes it larger in spirit than in stone (and it is a huge memorial). It is a fitting and a long overdue tribute. And I sincerely hope that this helps bring some sense of closure; of a goal that is met; of a wrong that has been recognized if not corrected, of a service rendered by man and dog and which is appreciated and will be remembered.

For me, personally, I am so glad to have had an opportunity to help play a part in something this worthwhile. And to have not screwed it up.

One image that I will never forget was the dog biscuits sitting on the side behind the dog, half hidden behind the flowers. I don't know why, but it felt so completely right.

Tim

During the dedication my recollections were my first meeting with Tom Mitchell, when he made his position as then President of the VDHA crystal clear. He was there to help, but his first priority was to protect the members; including protection from disappointment as well as misinformation. Through all that followed, Tom was a voice of reason, conscience and a constant reminder that we would be making a show that meant a great deal to a lot of people.