

Thank you for your interest in America's war dogs. The recent article in "Parade" magazine raised awareness of the heroism of dogs who served as guards, scouts, messengers, and fighters during wartime and highlighted some of the obstacles in providing a national tribute to the thousands of dogs who served U.S. veterans over more than half a century. The response to the article has been tremendous. The Veteran's Dog Handler's Association (VDHA), a nonprofit organization, continues to publicize information so that public support will provide the momentum needed to succeed in obtaining national recognition to the war dogs and their handlers.

The members of the VDHA are those who served as dog handlers, trackers, veterinarians, veterinary technicians, or served in a war dog unit in Vietnam or any war. The VDHA organization has existed since 1995. Membership is currently at (#'s). More information regarding the VDHA may found online at the website address: www.vdhaonline.org.

Dog lovers in various organizations have built monuments dedicated to the War Dog throughout the U.S. such as those at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas; Hartsdale, New York; and Guam. The VDHA spearheaded the effort which led to completion of two monuments, one at March Field in Riverside, California, and the other at Ft. Benning, Georgia. The monument was sculpted by Thomas Schomberg and depicts a soldier and his dog emerging into combat with an architectural setting providing a quality of light, which is meant to illuminate the comradeship, protection, sacrifice, and love between man and dog. Yet no one has been successful in persuading any branch of the Federal government (not even the U.S Postal Service) to memorialize the courageous acts of heroism performed by these war dogs.

The VDHA with (then) President Jeff Bennett helped develop "War Dogs, America's Forgotten Heroes," nationally televised on Discovery Channel in 1999. The documentary encompassed stories told by the members of the VDHA who provided thousands of photos, yearbooks, diaries, letters, personal films and memories. Proceeds from the sale of the "War Dogs..." video and sponsorship from Nature's Recipe Dog Food were used to fund the monuments at Ft. Benning and March Field. The "War Dogs ..." video and its accompanying fundraising effort are no longer available. The current VDHA President (John Burnham) is continuing to rally support for a memorial to serve the nation as the canine combat veterans did. Recognition on a national scale would provide a lasting tribute to the war dog as a significant part of our nation's history, the incredible bond between both the handler and the dog, honoring the thousands of lives they saved through their teamwork and courage.

The VDHA has received letters from across the nation with monetary donations, poems, designs and stories. There seems to be no obstacle to overcome except the lack of support from the Federal government.

You can help by writing to your political representatives urging them to support national recognition of a memorial to these courageous canines. Write or speak to local police department canine units, security agencies employing dog handlers, the American Kennel Club, or any agency that might help.

Michael Lemish, author of the book "War Dogs, K9s in Combat," and a member of the VDHA, is our primary contact of the commemorative stamp drive. Two previous requests to the Stamp Committee for a War Dog stamp were rejected. The request of December 2000 was expanded to include a stamp honoring K-9's, Search-and-Rescue dogs, and Service Dogs (seeing-eye, therapy and assistance). This four-stamp proposal will expand the involvement to millions more people urging support of the postage stamp commemorative. For information or petitions, call Mike at

Or you may write to the United States Postal Service (USPS) committee that determines which subjects become stamps: USPS Citizen's Stamp Advisory Committee, Room 4474-E, 475 L'Enfant Plaza West, SW Washington, DC or write online to:

It is the goal of the VDHA to provide recognition of our canine heroes and their handlers on a national scale. Initiatives such as planting a commemorative tree at Arlington National Cemetery, erecting a monument in Washington, D.C., or issuing a commemorative stamp have, so far, met with failure.

It is the vision of the VDHA that the Federal government will approve an appropriate tribute, such as a monument depicting a canine on alert watching over the Vietnam War Memorial. Funding will be used to publicize the effort, then to design a monument or purchase a tree after approval is obtained for national recognition. Checks may be made out to The National War Dog Memorial Fund c/o Vietnam Dog Handler Association, P.O. Box 5658, Dept. P, Oceanside, 92052-5658. IRS 501-3 Ruling for Tax Deductions xxxx.

The following eulogy appeared in September/October 2000 Heartland USA magazine:

"As Senator George Vest said in a memorial to his dog, Old Drum, back in 1870: 'The one absolutely unselfish friend that a man may have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him and the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous, is his dog. And when ... death takes the master in its embrace and his body is laid away in the cold ground, ... there by his graveside will the noble dog be found, his head between his paws, his eyes sad but open in alert watchfulness, faithful and true even to death.'"