



DogMan

An Association For All Vietnam Veteran Dog Handlers



Volume 1 • Number 5 • November-December 1994

Pleiku Air Base - 1965

VDHA News

By John Risse
633rd SPS, 1965-66

I was part of the first 50 Air Force dog handlers to get permanent orders to Vietnam. I reported to Lackland AFB, during the last week of September 1965 for indoctrination and training.

After a week of extra training and classroom instruction we were ready to go, or at least we thought we were.

On October 10th I kennelled my dog Duke, 645F, and tranquilized him for the long trip ahead and boarded a C-130 at Kelly AFB.

We flew out around noon to Travis AFB for processing out of country. We spent the night at Travis, then on to Hickam AFB, Hawaii. We stayed one day at Scofield Barracks where we watered our dogs, but they slept most of the time because of the tranquilizers.

The next morning we flew to Guam where we again spent the night. Finally, on October 17, 1965 we arrived at Tan Son Nhut.

When we opened the doors on the plane the smell and heat literally threw us back a few feet. Once we could get off the plane we began unloading the dogs and our gear. Funny thing is, we were told that they had no idea what to do with us...no one was expecting us! I came to learn that was SOP in Vietnam.

We took our dogs out and walked and watered them. It was very, very hot and we had a difficult time cooling the dogs down. Two of our fifty dogs died the first day in-country of heat stroke. I knew right then and there this was not going to be too glorious a routine.

We were transported to Bien Hoa, where we stayed for the next week providing K-9 security for the air base there.

On October 29, twenty-five of us received orders for Pleiku. That afternoon we packed our gear and boarded a C-130 headed north. Again, upon our arrival, we were told we were unexpected. We just laughed it off and took our dogs off the plane, staking them out between the runway and the rice paddies. The only buildings, in the distance, near the foothills,

post" when we spent our time building a permanent type kennel for our dogs. In 1966, the base started to build up quickly after the first of year. Contractors came in March to build wood barracks and an office building. They built bunkers for us on the perimeter of the base with M-60s mounted on top. In case of attack, we were to use them until the Air Police could

back us up. We soon found out that the M-60s were shipped without firing pins! We discovered it on the firing range - thank God for practice.

One day, when I was kennel master, I told the Vietnamese workers to stay away from the staked out dogs, but of course with our language barrier I only could hope they understood me. As I was sitting in the tent watching them work I noticed a man attempting to walk between the staked out dogs. The dogs were watching him as well. I yelled for him to stop, but it was too late. One of the dogs jumped out at him

and as the worker tried to get away, he jumped closer to another dog on the other side. The dog bit him on the arm throwing him to the ground. I ran out to the kennel area and tried to separate the dog from the man. The man was hitting the dog with a hand saw, trying to free himself from the dogs jaws. I grabbed both the dog and man and pulled them apart. The dog was none to happy about it either. The villager made it out OK. The bite only left some small puncture wounds on his arm. He was a very lucky man...and he knew it. The dog was quite satisfied with himself...I saw him smiling and



ago Tom Mitchell and I were talking about getting this association started, now here we are going to our first reunion.

We now have 731 members in our mailing list. To date we have not figured out how we should go forward with charging dues or subscriptions to DogMan. That is one of the important issues will we be discussing at the business meeting in DC.

Before I talk about that more let's discuss our plan for the reunion. The latest is that we may be able to have a handler and a dog on the stage during the official Vietnam Memorial ceremony on Friday afternoon, November 11. We should know for sure by the end of October, hopefully.

Bruce and Judy Fleming are providing the association with a wreath for the wreath laying ceremony on Friday at The Wall.

After the Friday ceremony we will have a reception at 6:30 pm and dinner at 8:00, followed by dancing. Gordon Long is helping with the disc-jockey and other needs.

On Saturday morning we will have a breakfast followed by a very important meeting. At the meeting we will be discussing many issues, including the anticipated income-expense budget for next year. We will be making many decisions about the future of the Vietnam Dog Handler Association.

But just because you can not make it to the reunion does not mean you don't have a voice. Here are some of the important issues to be decided. Please contact me or Tom Mitchell to give us your input.

- Should we charge dues? If so how much annually?
- If we charge should we charge

different amounts for non K-9 and non-vets? If so, how much more or less?

- Should our members be only Vietnam vets, vets from all wars, all vet handlers?
- Should we incorporate, elect officers?
- Should we have regional officers who would be responsible for regional activities?
- Should the 1995 reunion be at Lackland AFB, if so when? The MP's reunion is in August in St. Louis.
- Should we just have regional reunions in '95 and have the national reunion in 1996?
- What should our goals be? Social or veterans betterment related, or both?
- Should we make our mailing list available to our membership?

I will be arriving on November 7 and can be reached at the Holiday Inn, 703-960-3400. I will be there putting the final touches on the reunion plans. I will leave my home on November 3 and will be on the road until I arrive in DC.

If you need to talk to someone please call Tom Mitchell at 619-588-1441, as he will not be leaving until November 10. I hope to see you in DC!!

John Langley
Membership Chairman



John and Duke were part of the first Air Force dogs permanently assigned to Vietnam in 1965.

were those of the 25th Inf. Div. We soon discovered we were to share those quarters with them for the next month.

There wasn't a place for our dogs to stay, so the first day we began by making temporary kennels for them. We put the shipping crates in two lines and staked the dogs between them. Within a couple of days we had our dogs settled in and we began guard duty at the ammo dump, the fuel storage area, and the perimeter of the base between the runway and the rice paddies.

We lived in tents and worked 12-hour shifts from 6pm to 6am, everyday, although once in awhile we got a day "off

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