

Veterans salute four-legged warriors

BY CHUCK ORMAN
THE SEDALIA DEMOCRAT

A stone monument honoring war dogs that have served America's armed forces over the years was dedicated at the

Pettis County Courthouse Saturday.

"It is a wonderful thing to recognize our canine warriors," said Lt. Col. Rick Turner, commander of the

509th Security Force at Whiteman Air Force Base. "They are a force multiplier and receive as much or more training than their handlers. They are a part of every operation and are used to protect Air Force assets on the ground."

The Air Force unit commander was accompanied by five of his 12 dogs and their handlers. "Others are deployed in southwest Asia," he said.

The ceremony was opened by Sedalia Police Cmdr. Jim Gaertner, who served two tours of duty in Vietnam and credits guard dogs with saving him and others on at least two occasions. "A war dog kept me from springing a Viet Cong boobytrap when I was on patrol," Cmdr. Gaertner said. "Another time, a dog warned us of approaching enemy."

"If it weren't for those dogs, there would be thousands more names on the Vietnam Memorial," the police commander said.

Staff Sgt. Timothy Blair, an Air Force dog handler and dog trainer for 15 years, told of the work that dogs do and the lives they have saved over the years. "And all they ask is love in return," he said.

The War Dog Memorial was organized by Barry Walter of Sedalia and Dick Kraus of La Monte after they had watched a documentary about the dogs and their part in military service.

The two collaborated on the project to honor the animals who detect land mines and protect perimeters of camps. The monument was paid for by donations and bought at cost with the help of Sue Heckart of Heckart/Gillespie Funeral Home.

Mr. Walter and Mr. Kraus placed a wreath at the monument honoring the war dogs of today and yesterday.

More than 50 people were on hand for the dedication ceremony, many of them with their personal canine companions on leashes.

A most interested onlooker was Jack Coutts of Sedalia, a former Pettis County deputy sheriff who handled Cam, a Belgian shepherd, the first law enforcement dog in Pettis County, from 1962 to 1969.

"He was a great one," Mr. Coutts said. "He won five police dog competitions in a row at the Missouri State Fair."

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CHUCK ORMAN/DEMOCRAT

A war dog and handler with the 509th Security Force at Whiteman Air Force Base attend Saturday's memorial dedication.





Randy Kirby photo

For the love of dogs

Barry Walter of Sedalia watches as James Weeks and his son Dewayne Weeks of Holt Monument, Buffalo, Mo., install the new War Dog Monument on the southwest lawn of the Pettis County Courthouse on April 22. Walter, who spearheaded the effort, said a public dedication ceremony will take place on May 17. At far left is Dick Kraus, VFW Post 2591.

Dogs honored for faithful service

By Randy Kirby
Managing editor

A new monument has been erected on the southwest lawn of the Pettis County Courthouse.

This particular 36-inch-tall granite monument honors all the dogs that have served in the nation's military.

"Thousands of men came home (from war) thanks to the lives of the dogs," said Barry Walter.

"Thousands of men came home (from war) thanks to the lives of the dogs' - Walter

Walter, who initiated the idea of a monument, helped raise the necessary funds and watched on April 22 as the gray stone, carved by Holt Monument of Buffalo, Mo., was

installed as a stately reminder of canines' military service.

Also inspecting the installation process was Dick Kraus, a Korean War vet with VFW Post 2591.

All breeds of dogs have historically been used, Walter said, but the basic two breeds are traditionally the German Shepherd and the black Labrador.

"Field tests show they can adapt

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easier than any other dog," Walter noted of the most common war dog breeds.

The two-sided monument, estimated by James Weeks of Holt Monument to weigh about 600 to 700 pounds, features artwork of the heads of a German Shepherd and a black Lab facing each other.

Below the artwork is an inscription explaining the reason for such a monument.

"In memory and honor of our war dogs -- they have served our country with devotion and selflessness," it states.

Walter, of Sedalia, who was raised around dogs and admits a love for dogs, told the *News* he has worked on getting the project completed for the past seven or eight months.

He indicated that he had to secure letters of acceptance from the Pettis County Commission, all area veterans organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion, as well as officials at Whiteman Air Force Base.

The cost of the war dog monument was paid for by Walter and a

host of other contributors.

A public dedication ceremony will take place at 11 a.m. on Armed Forces Day, Saturday, May 17, to thank those contributors, Walter said.

Members of Smith-Cotton High School's a cappella choir are scheduled to sing the national anthem at the ceremony.

Attendees are welcome to bring their dogs with them to the ceremony, but they must be on a leash, he said.

Also inscribed on both sides of the slab of granite is a bit of prose that illustrates what the typical war dog would say if it could talk.

"My eyes are your eyes to watch and protect you and yours, and detect evil minds in the dark.

"My nose is your nose to scent the invader of your domain, and so you may live, my life is also yours."

War dog memorial to be dedicated

Event begins
at 11 a.m. Saturday
on the south lawn
of the Pettis County
Courthouse

BY RON JENNINGS

THE SEDALIA DEMOCRAT

Whiteman Air Force Base Staff Sgt. Staci Funk will speak at the dedication of a war dog memorial at 11 a.m. Saturday on the Pettis County Courthouse lawn.

Ms. Funk is with the canine division of the 509th Security Forces.

Police Cmdr. James Gaert-

ner will also speak at the Armed Forces Day event. Smith-Cotton High School vocalists will sing at the service.

Project instigators Barry Walter of Sedalia and Dick Kraus of La Monte will lay a wreath at the base of the monument on the south courthouse lawn.

The two men collaborated on the project last fall as a tribute to the animals who detect land mines and in other ways have served the military since World War I.

More than enough contributions came in to pay for the monument, with surplus funds

going to a national war dog organization in New Jersey, Mr. Walter said. The monument cost less than \$1,000 after Sue Heckart, of Heckart/Gillespie Funeral Home, waived the standard commission. The Holt Monument Co., of Buffalo, supplied the inscribed marker at cost.

Mr. Kraus said he feels it appropriate the ceremony will be on Armed Forces Day. He and Mr. Walter encouraged people to bring their dogs to the ceremony on leashes.

Mr. Kraus said the monument will be one of a handful in the nation.

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For the war dogs

Sedalia Mayor Bob Wasson is joined by dog lover Barry Walter as the mayor proclaims Saturday, May 17 as a day of recognition for war dogs and their human companions serving the US. A dedication ceremony for the new War Dog Monument will be held on May 17 at 11 a.m. on the Pettis County Courthouse lawn.

Dog lovers, mark your calendars now for May 17. That's when a memorial to American war dogs will be dedicated at the Pettis County Courthouse.

Dick Kraus and Barry Walter encourage all local Fido fanciers to bring their canines to the event. They figure that would provide just the right touch to the observance, which is Armed Forces Day. The Pettis County Commission is set to sign an order Monday authorizing the placement of the memorial.

Although he had nothing to do with Dick and Barry's efforts, Presiding Commissioner Rusty Kahrs said he couldn't help being more than a little interested in the project because he was a canine handler from 1989 to 1991 for Pettis County Sheriff Gary Starke.

"I love it," Mr. Kahrs said. "I think it's going to be wonderful."

Anticipating this action, Dick and Barry have created an account at Third National Bank that already has more than \$595 in it, more than half of the monument's \$1,040 cost. That was enough to order the light gray marker, which will be 3 feet tall, 2 feet wide and 6 inches thick.

Its top inscription will read: "In memory & honor of our war dogs. They have served our country with devotion and selflessness." Beneath, a profile of the head of a German shepherd will be on the right, and a Labrador on the left. Below these two figures will be inscribed the K-9 promise:

"My eyes are your eyes, to watch & protect you and yours. My ears are your ears to hear & detect evil minds in the dark. My nose is your nose to scent the invader of your domain. And so you may live, my life is also yours."

As impressed as I am about the project itself, I was equally happy to learn how it came about its expedient timetable.

On Nov. 1, Barry and Dick didn't know each other. Dick, a Korean War vet, was not aware of Barry's growing gratitude for the wartime sacrifices of American military personnel, including handlers and their dogs.

"It really touches me, all that they endured, how many lives they saved," he told me.

Barry, on the other hand, didn't know how much Dick, a proud member of Sedalia Post 2591 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, loved dogs. His

life was never saved by one when he was in Korea, but that hitch was about the only time he's lived without one.

"I tell people I've only had one excellent wife, but I've had three good dogs!" Dick said, before choking up as he recalled the death of his first one in a freak accident while he was in the service. Fritz, a shepherd, was killed when a load of logs fell from a truck and crushed him.

Dick and Barry got together later in November, after several of Barry's barbershop customers mentioned Dick as a possible contact for something he told them he had in mind. The two got together, shared their mutual interests of canines and the military and then each read a book on war dogs.

Before you could say, "The United States War Dogs Association Inc.," they had designed a monument, set up the account at Third National Bank, gotten OKs from local veterans groups and were on their way. Or,

should I say, are on their way.

There's still some \$500 to be raised, but the two men are confident they will have that amount in hand before the big day. Contributions can be sent to the bank, in care of the Pettis County war dog memorial fund.

The monument will be a short distance west of the Pettis County Vietnam War memorial, where the names of 12 Pettis Countians killed in the war are inscribed.

For my friend Jim Gaertner, who served two tours of duty in Vietnam, it is sacred ground. He especially supports the project because, had it not been for two war dogs, he says there might well have been a 13th name on this list — his.

One saved his life in early 1970, when, as an 18-year-old private first class, he was walking "point" in front of his platoon, on the lookout for hidden wires that could trip land mines. Luckily, a dog and handler were called in. Later, "the dog grabbed my pant leg and growled. The handler then jerked his leash."

Sure enough, a booby trap was detected.

Jim's forgotten the name of this dog, but he vividly recalls his second canine savior, Duke. I've run out of space to recount this exploit, but you can ask him about it on May 17.

He'll be glad to tell you. And I'll bet a dog biscuit he won't be the only one with tales to tell.

Ron Jennings



is a Democrat reporter