

# War Dogs Memorial March Field Museum

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Thanks Press-Enterprise and Reporter Marlowe Churchill!



The Press-Enterprise's Reporter, Marlowe Churchill, pens eloquently of the dedication.

## Rainy tribute to war dogs

► An estimated 2,000 people from across the nation gather for the dedication at March Field Air Museum.

By Marlowe Churchill  
*The Press-Enterprise*



MARCH AIR RESERVE BASE Tom Mitchell hugs the newly dedicated German shepherd statue.

The image is a newspaper clipping. It features a large headline 'Rainy tribute to war dogs' in a bold, sans-serif font. Below the headline is a sub-headline in a smaller font: '► An estimated 2,000 people from across the nation gather for the dedication at March Field Air Museum.' To the right of the sub-headline is a small photograph showing a man in a white shirt hugging a dark-colored dog. Below the photo is a caption: 'Tom Mitchell hugs the newly dedicated German shepherd statue.' To the left of the photo, the author's name and publication are listed: 'By Marlowe Churchill The Press-Enterprise'. At the bottom left of the clipping, the location 'MARCH AIR RESERVE BASE' is printed.

A touching moment for us all...



Tom Mitchell hugs the newly dedicated German shepherd statue.

#### MARCH AIR RESERVE BASE

They were Bingo, Rex, Ken, Max, Duke and a thousand other names — best buddies of soldiers who read them letters and shared cookies and cakes from home while serving on the front lines in South Vietnam.

Those memories of specially trained war dogs evoked tearful responses Monday from more than 100 Vietnam War combat veterans who lined up and lovingly patted the bronze replica of a German shepherd depicted in the War Dog Memorial at March Field Air Museum.

Some in the crowd, estimated at 2,000 people, traveled from all over the country and stood in the rain Monday morning to attend the dedication ceremony for the 18-foot tall bronze statue. The statue depicts a German shepherd sitting on alert, held on leash by a soldier who appears to be moving through a wall — symbolizing moving from a safe zone into harm's way.

"Everybody has a reason for being here," Air Force veteran Tom Mitchell of San Diego told the crowd. "These dogs were everything to us."

Mitchell is one of the founders of the Vietnam Dog Handlers Association that held a reunion over the weekend in Riverside.

When the dog handlers returned home to

resume civilian lives, the 4,000 mostly German shepherds used in South Vietnam were euthanized because the Pentagon feared they could harm people if adopted into the handlers' families.

Mitchell said 279 dogs were killed in combat during the Vietnam War while helping to protect U.S. troops from ambushes, hidden mines and trip-wires. The dogs could sniff scents of the enemy and explosives. Dogs could hear the near inaudible sound of a thin wire vibrating in the wind that was connected to hidden explosives.

The dogs would freeze to alert their handlers by pointing to hidden dangers. The association estimates 10,000 soldiers' lives were saved by the dogs' acute senses.

Mitchell said Monday's rain reminded him of the times in Vietnam when his dog joined him under his rain poncho. He laughed at the memory of the "nice dog smell" of the soggy canine cuddled next to him.

Many dog breeders, along with about 50 canine teams from police departments from throughout the state, brought dogs to Monday's event. The museum's parking lot and a side street were filled with cars.

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William Wilson Lewis III / The Press Enterprise

State Supreme Court Associate Justice Ming Chin, who served in Vietnam as an Army officer, recognizes the service provided by war dogs and their handlers.

**Inspirational... and from the heart. Justice Chin--Vietnam Veteran remembers....**

# DOGS

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The statue brought tears to the eyes of many veterans who paused for a moment, touched the statue and then placed small bouquets at the dog's paws. Air Force veteran Steve Glab of Chicago, dressed in military fatigues, also placed a small packet of ashes at the base of the memorial. He said they were from three dogs he previously owned.

Jack Moore of Alexandria, Va., spotted the War Dog Memorial on the Internet and just had to come cross-country to see the statue and dedication.

The 80-year-old Marine Corp veteran said his dog, Rex, helped him ferret out traps and enemy soldiers in the jungles of Guam during World War II. Rex served him loyally for a year in combat, keeping him safe from enemy fire, he said.

"I brought old Rex home with me and had him until 1963 when I had to put him down," Moore said.

Sculptor Tom Schomberg of Denver, commissioned to create the blackened bronze memorial, was moved by the out-pouring of emotion when his work was unveiled.

He posed for pictures with combat veterans in front of the statue at the end of the ceremony that included a fly-over of vintage warbirds by the March Aero Club and music about the dogs composed and performed by David Glen Elsley and his band.

State Supreme Court Associate Justice Ming W. Chin told the crowd he remembered his combat tour in

South Vietnam as an Army officer.

"There was never any question whether a soldier could count on his war dog," he said. "Let us never make a mistake and leave behind our canine friends again."

Some believe the practice of killing the dogs after the war was wrong.

Steve Janke, an Air Force veteran, said he is trying to ensure that doesn't happen by educating today's young people about war dogs. He has used his Vietnam War experiences as a dog handler in history courses he teaches at a private Christian school in Carlstead, N.J.

"Most people never knew we used dogs in Vietnam," said Janke, a member of the dog handlers group.

When he went to Vietnam in 1970 as a 20-year-old, Janke learned that he could only trust his dog Kobuc. Kobuc's instincts were keen, leashing in Janke's youthful bravado at crucial times.

"He was my friend, a friend that lived on the end of a leash," Janke said. He said he is often overcome by emotion in telling his students about Kobuc, whom he described as a "gift from God."

"This," he said of the memorial, "is very special. This is a place for healing."

The memorial was part of a \$1 million fund-raising campaign by Corona Mayor Jeffrey Bennett, president and founder of Nature's Recipe Pet Foods.

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William Wilson Lewis III / The Press-Enterprise  
Veterans, police department canine teams and other visitors brave the rain to attend a ceremony at the War Dog Memorial at March Field Air Museum.



Dozens of Roses... wreaths... tribute... photos... adorn the War Dog and Handler. A lone Rose at its base--*not fallen*--but placed in awe and humility.

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