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**MONUMENT HONORING ALABAMA WAR DOGS AND THEIR HANDLERS
TO BE ERECTED AT U.S.S. ALABAMA MEMORIAL PARK IN MOBILE**
War Dog Memorial Task Force Based in Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM, AL – The Alabama War Dog Memorial (AWDM) task force announced today its plans to erect a memorial to war dogs and their handlers at the U.S.S. Alabama Memorial Park in Mobile; AWDM leaders hope to have the memorial installed by Memorial Day 2007. One of only a handful of memorials like it across the nation, the site will honor the countless dogs of various breeds and their handlers who have faithfully served and continue to serve the United States Military as dog teams most prominently since the early 20th century.

According to John O'Malley - AWDM President/Executive Director and USMC Sergeant who served the U.S. in the Vietnam War - honoring war dogs and the men and women who train and lead them is a tribute to a kind of war hero few know much about.

"I admit when I was first approached to be a part of this project, even I as a veteran had a very limited knowledge of military working dogs and their handlers," says O'Malley. "I quickly realized that helping to honor these unsung life-saving heroes of our armed forces is truly a worthy cause. Dogs served in every war of the 20th century, and continue to serve in combat today."

O'Malley and the AWDM task Force, along with representatives from Memorial Park and builders of the monument – Clarke Memorials of Birmingham – will hold simultaneous press conferences on DATE to unveil an artist's rendering of the monument and to answer questions concerning those servicemen and dogs the memorial will honor.

The Birmingham press conference will be held at the Greater Birmingham Humane Society at 10 AM; the Mobile press conference will be held simultaneously at U.S.S. Alabama Memorial Park. The actual rendering of the AWDM will be unveiled in each location at that time.

The monument was designed by Clarke Memorials based on input from the task force's dog handlers; the granite will come from Georgia and the figures will be cast in bronze in Italy. It will depict an actual Alabama war dog, Little Joe and the men he gave his life for and saved on February 22, 1970 in Vietnam - his handler, Charles "Wade" Franks-an Alabamian-and other combat patrol riflemen.

Project leaders are currently accepting donations to cover the cost of the memorial from corporate sponsors, seed donors, companies and individuals. In addition, school and churches can get involved with the Patriot Pennies Fundraiser, which entails collecting and donating money for the AWDM fund. To aid in fundraising efforts, guest speaking engagements and Alabama War Dog presentations are available for schools and other groups.

"We are asking for help with this worthy memorial. There will be a National War Dog Memorial in Washington D.C., but it is many years away from completion," says O'Malley. "Until that time comes and even after it does, our state memorial and others like it will pay homage to our dogs and handlers as well as

the memory of all those across the nation and in all wars.” Seven Alabamian dog handlers lost their lives in the Vietnam War.

About War Dogs

Military canine teams guard perimeters, lead combat patrols, fight and die beside men and women of all services. U.S. military dogs not only served in World War I and II, the Korean War, The Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, but also still serve in the Iraqi War, Afghanistan and in peacekeeping missions abroad. These dogs are highly trained, efficient and loyal, serving the nation by putting their lives on the line to save both military personal and civilians alike. In Vietnam alone, experts estimate these four-legged soldiers saved over 10,000 American soldiers.

The Story Behind the Monument – Little Joe and “The Alert”

February 22, 1970, just after 4 PM. A combat patrol climbing a heavily vegetated and rugged mountain trail in the Northern part of South Vietnam in Thua Thien Province near the Laotian border, an area known as The A Chau Valley. It’s a Monday afternoon.

Charles “Wade” Franks of Huntsville, AL was handling Little Joe - a German Shepherd; together they formed one of the best dog teams in Nam. Little Joe and Wade were leading-walking point; they were part of the five-man point element of a U.S. Rifle Company comprising over 100 men. The unit was moving up through dense foliage along a jagged jungle trail that snaked up a precipitous mountainside to the top of the ridge where they planned to set up a night defensive perimeter.

As Wade and Little Joe drew closer to the top of the ridge, Wade noticed that the trail emptied into a large clearing of open terrain, before disappearing again back into dense smothering vegetation. Experience told Wade this clearing is a good place for an ambush. Just then, before entering the clearing, Little Joe stopped and "alerted." Wade, in a concerned whisper, hissed, "hold it" to the slack man who raised his hand to signal the patrol behind him to pause.

In a split second Wade yelled “get down” as he himself dove off the trail into the underbrush. At that moment, enemy soldiers located about 40 meters in front of Little Joe and Wade realized that the American Unit was not going to walk into the kill zone. With their ambush blown, the jungle spit forth machinegun and AK-47 automatic weapons fire from concealed positions around the clearing. The enemy started to pour it on, sweeping the clearing and down the trail with knee to waist high fire.

As Wade and those in the forward position were taking rounds, he caught a glance of Little Joe to his front; during other firefights Little Joe had always crawled back to his handler even if wounded, but not this time. Today was different. For some reason - perhaps he was already mortally wounded - Little Joe stormed toward the enemy in a hail of bullets and disappeared. The firefight went on for over an hour. It was almost dark before the American unit drove the enemy off.

Wade finally found Little Joe lying on the ground in the middle of an enemy position; it had taken five rounds to kill him, but in sacrificing his life that day he saved many more lives, including his own handler’s.

Future AWDM Plans

Phase I of the foundation’s plan is the memorial; however more is planned in the future for all dogs of service, not just war dogs. According to O’Malley, he and the foundation hope to purchase a minimum of 10 acres to construct a service dog retirement center (Phase II). Dogs who will be welcome will have served mankind in combat as well as in police, fire and life-partner service roles (seeing eye dogs, etc).

For more information on the AWDM in Mobile, to become a major sponsor or donor, to schedule a War Dog Presentation or for further information, log onto www.awdm.org or contact John O’Malley at 205.995.8495. For questions concerning the press conferences, please contact Ashley Fulmer at 205.933.8893.

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