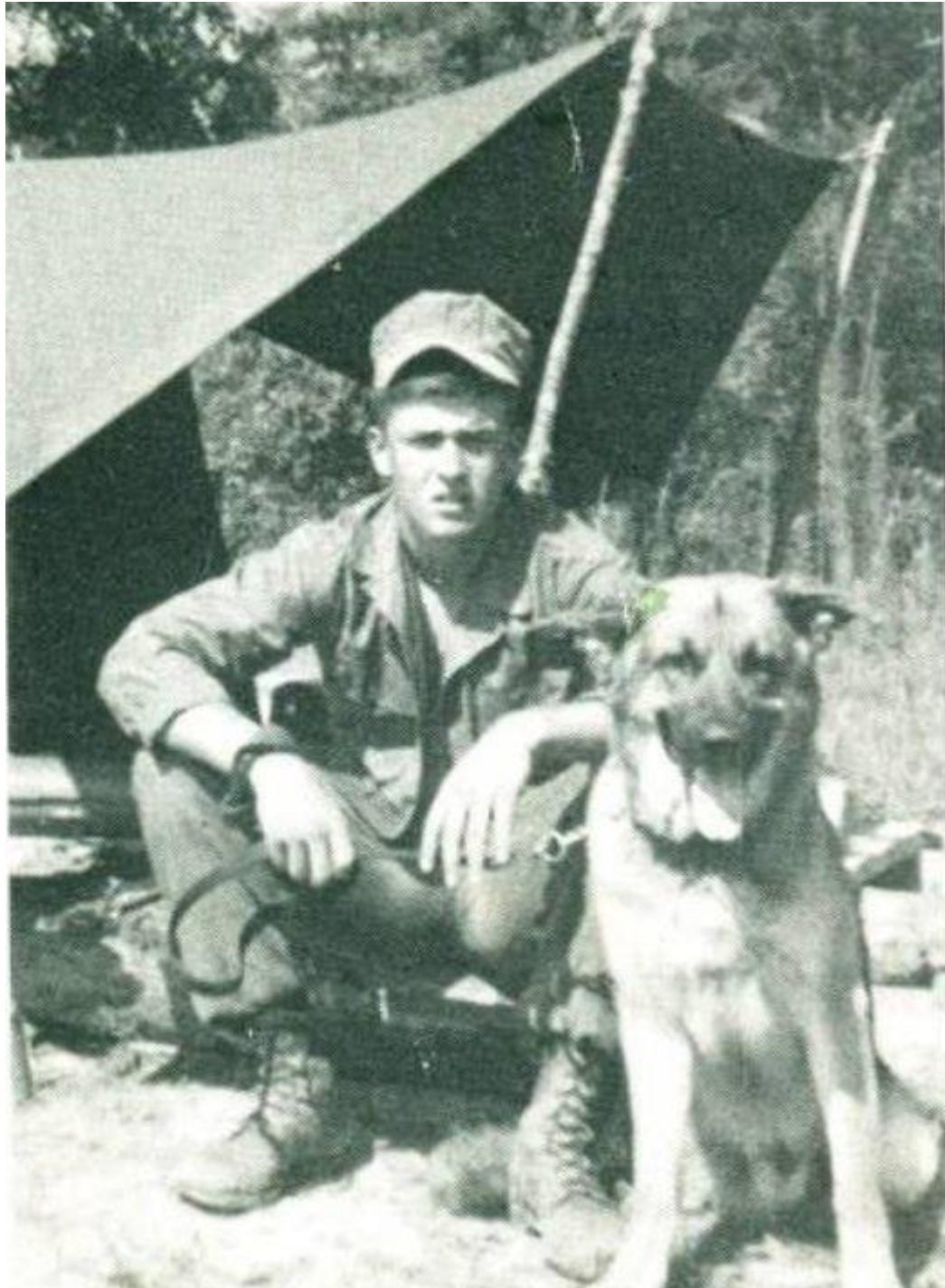


Fort Atkinson memorializes war dogs and one of its own

[Meg Jones](#) , Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 1:00 p.m. CT June 23, 2017



They are veterans of mean streets and war zones whose only reward is a treat plus the unconditional love of their handlers.

Military and law enforcement dogs have saved countless lives and proven themselves indispensable for decades. Few memorials honor the sacrifices of four-legged soldiers and cops but the city of Fort Atkinson is unveiling a poignant monument on Sunday in the memory of one of the city's own who died in Vietnam.

The K9 Veterans Memorial will feature a larger than life-size bronze sculpture of a German Shepherd with its paw on a military helmet surrounded by three large black granite panels featuring a poem for working dogs, an etching of a canine battlefield cross and picture of Terry Beck and his beloved German Shepherd, Seato.

Beck was a Marine dog handler who arrived in Vietnam in October 1967. German Shepherd mixes were the most common military dog in Vietnam, where their keen sense of smell, astute hearing and excellent eyesight were invaluable in the dense jungles.

Roughly 4,900 working dogs served during the Vietnam War and are credited with saving an estimated 10,000 lives, sometimes sacrificing their own - 232 dogs and 295 handlers were killed in action in Vietnam.

The dogs and their handlers lived together and became extremely close.

"As a handler and a dog, we bonded as a team," said Jerry Witt, an Army dog handler from Menomonee Falls who spent a year in Vietnam supporting 1st Cavalry Division infantry units.

"We took care of one another, we looked after one another. That bond is something that's very difficult to even try to explain to people. You felt closer to them than you did with your wives and girlfriends," Witt said.

Because of their importance in detecting booby traps and the presence of enemy forces, said Witt, the Viet Cong frequently targeted the dogs.

"We know there was a bounty for the dogs and handlers. If they could come back and cut off the ear of the dog, because their ears were tattooed with their numbers, and take the dog tags they would get extra pay," said Witt, whose first dog was killed by an explosion.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, dogs are used to patrol bases, sniff for explosives, track missing people and comfort wounded service members.

Inspired by the memory of Beck, the Kennel Club of Fort Atkinson began raising money for a memorial after successfully campaigning in 2015 to get March 13 proclaimed as K9 Veterans Day in Wisconsin. The group raised \$63,000 and chose McCoy Park for the location, hiring Fort Atkinson sculptor Mark Dziewior.

Dziewior, a University of Wisconsin-Rock County art professor who specializes in animal sculpture, decided to use a Vietnam-era war dog to honor Beck. So instead of the bulletproof vest worn by dogs in Iraq and Afghanistan, he used a harness and helmet of the type from Vietnam.

Researching other war dog memorials, which often featured a dog at attention or walking with a handler, Dziewior said he didn't want to use a sculpture of a human because it would take the focus away from the animal.

"I wanted to do something that hadn't been done before - having the dog with its paw on the helmet and looking up like 'I got you.' I wanted the bond," said Dziewior, whose brother-in-law was high school friends with Beck.

Sunday afternoon the memorial will be unveiled in a ceremony featuring law enforcement dogs pulling down a curtain covering the granite slabs, speakers, music and a reception.

Among the guests will be Beck's sister and brother. Connie Wald remembered her younger brother Terry wanted to serve in the military from a very young age and joined the Marines right out of Fort Atkinson High School, volunteering to be a dog handler.

"He just absolutely adored the military. Loved the structure of it, loved the uniforms, loved the idea of protecting the country. He was very much a loyal American," said Wald, whose father was a Navy lieutenant commander and Pearl Harbor veteran.

Wald said her brother visited her at UW-Madison in September 1967 before leaving for Vietnam. He recorded letters on cassettes he mailed home, talking about his life in Vietnam and his homesickness at Thanksgiving. Several cassettes arrived after Beck's death. Even though it's been almost 50 years, Wald still can't bring herself to listen to them.

Wald was home from college on Christmas break when her mother heard about her son's death on the radio. That night the family got a phone call notifying them that Beck had been shot to death by a sniper. His dog Seato was also killed. Beck was 18.

"Nineteen sixty-seven to today - it still doesn't go away. Vietnam is just part of my generation. It's not resolved," said Wald, who lives in Texas. "The thing that I love about

this particular memorial, they're not only honoring the dogs but they're also honoring the soldiers."

If you go: The ceremony unveiling the K9 Veterans Memorial starts at 1:30 p.m. Sunday with shuttle service provided from the MATC parking lot, 827 Banker Road, Fort Atkinson, to McCoy Park.