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As 'Taps' plays, 78-year-old Allen 'Jake' Jacobson gently weeps behind Quantico's War Dogs Memorial, sculpted in the likeness of his dog Kurt, who was killed during the liberation of Guam in July 1944. It was unveiled this week at the Marine base.

Honoring a Marine's best friend

Quantico unveils memorial to war dogs

By PAMELA GOULD
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

"Semper Fidelis—Always Faithful." It's the motto for the men and women of the Marine Corps and an apt description of the canine recruits that have unwaveringly supported them since World War II.

At Quantico Marine Corps Base this week, the four-legged faction was recognized for its skill, its loyalty and the countless lives it has spared.

It was an honor begun in 1989 when former Marine Capt. and veterinarian William Putney returned to the shores of Guam, where he had served alongside the war dogs more than 50 years ago.

"I was just devastated," the Farmville native said Wednesday as he recalled the grown-over graves of the dogs killed during the liberation of that Pacific island in an

engagement that started July 21, 1944.

"I left thinking some day I want to find a way for the military to take care of those warriors the same way as they take care of the others of us who died in the conflicts," Putney said.

A cemetery to those dogs was dedicated at Orote Point on the U.S. naval base at Guam in 1994. Included in the dedication was a bronze, life-size statue of a Doberman pinscher, the primary breed then enlisted by the Corps.

The statue, sculpted by California artist Susan Bahary, recalled the names of the 25 dogs slain on the island and their service as sentries, messengers and scouts.

Wednesday morning, a copy of that statue was unveiled inside the Marine Corps Research Center at Quantico. It was a gift of retired veterinarian David

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Bob Forsyth

World War II dog handler

McLaughlin and his wife, Mary Lofetto "Do" McLaughlin, a Doberman breeder and exhibitor.

The couple from Barrington, Ill., was eager for a way to honor the things that have meant the most to them in life. Those

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"things," according to 62-year-old Do McLaughlin, are their country, the military, dogs and veterinarians.

"It's not often you can honor everything you want with one fell swoop—and to have it be a Doberman to boot," she said.

Among those on hand for the unveiling were World War II dog handlers Allen "Jake" Jacobson of Livingston, N.J., and Bob Forsyth of Pinehurst, N.C.

For Jacobson, now 78, the ceremony was a wonderful experience—until the Marine band played "Taps."

That brought back memories of other dog handlers who had not survived. And it reminded him of his own brush with death.

"I'm very fortunate to be here," he said after pausing to compose himself.

Jacobson took a piece of shrapnel near his spinal cord. His dog, Kurt, was the first canine killed on Guam.

Like all of the other dogs used in World War II, Kurt went through training at Camp Lejeune, N.C. And, like other Marines, he had a service record book that listed his rank, duty, qualifications and citations.

Jacobson's was one of many cases where the canine recruit outranked his handler.

"Every morning," Jacobson said with a smile and a crisp salute, "I said, 'Pfc. Jake reporting.'"

Forsyth, who was with the first platoon of dog handlers deployed, said they were considered an experimental unit—but one the service grew to appreciate. They saved hundreds of lives as they traveled ahead of the infantry, scouting for the enemy and explo-

sives.

"They could tell us when the enemy was there that we couldn't see or hear," Forsyth said.

And, as Putney said during this week's unveiling, the dogs were never fooled.

"Throughout the war, every time the dogs were disbelieved, there was some kind of tragedy," said Putney who this spring released a book, "Always Faithful," that recounts the war dogs' role.

Dogs were used sparingly in the Korean War, but are credited with saving more than 10,000 lives in Vietnam, according to retired Maj. Gen. Donald Gardner, who heads the Marine Corps University Foundation.

They continue serving the needs of military police units at bases around the world. And by no means are their skills outdated.

In the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, dogs were posted at both gates to the Quantico base.

Within days, a dog alerted his handler to explosives on a UPS truck making a base delivery.

It turned out to be legal ammunition for hunting season headed to the post exchange, but it once again proved the accuracy of the canine corps, Gardner said.

And that is a skill some are hoping will be employed in the efforts to track down terrorist leader Osama bin Laden.

Putney reminded this week's crowd that more than 50 years ago, dogs proved their prowess at detecting the enemy and explosives inside the caves of Okinawa.

"Far be it from me to advise the Marine Corps," Putney said, "but before any Marine enters a cave, I hope he has a dog with him."