

# The Bandera PROPHECY

May 12, 2023

A final Texas reunion

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On the early morning of 5 May 2023, as the historic town of San Antonio began to rise in preparation for the celebration of Cinco De Mayo, a band of warriors journeyed southward to the Gateway of the Air Force for a celebration of their own. This was not their first visit to the crucible where Airmen are made and Defenders are born, nor were they alone in their journey. They traveled here this day accompanied by beloved wives they had met and married since coming here as young men so long ago.

Here in this place called Lackland, these men in their youth had answered their nation's call. Here they had become Airmen. Here they had become Defenders. Here they had become K9! In this place they were trained to work as one, a seamless pairing of man and beast dedicated to the security of the forces.

From here they were sent to a place, many of them had never heard of before, Vietnam. They became members of a special fraternity called the 366<sup>th</sup> Security Police Squadron K9 assigned to Da Nang. Their time here together created a bond of brotherhood spoken of in the writings of poets, playwrights, philosophers, and kings.

It was this bond that brought them once more to this place now called JBSA-Lackland. Their trip here was coordinated by the 37<sup>th</sup> TRW PA and the Airmen Heritage Foundation who saw it as a great honor to serve those who had served us and blazed a trail for others to follow. Their first stop here would be the TSA Canine Training Center where they learned the history of the National Explosive Detection Canine Team Program which began in 1972 and had been a part of the 341<sup>st</sup> TRS DoD

MWD Training School. They were also given a demonstration of Passenger Screening Canines in a simulated airport environment complete with role players as passengers.

After seeing how the place that had trained them had created a whole new entity responsible for airline travel around the nation and the standard around the globe, they next traveled to their old alma mater, the 341<sup>st</sup> TRS. Here they were briefed on training techniques and shown the inner workings of the kennels and the breeding facility, ending their time here by meeting the newest future canines living in the whelping facility. Famished from a day full of relived memories, stories of then and now, and the placement of many footsteps of familiar ground, they stopped to rest at the Gateway Club for lunch before continuing their journey. Once filled and refreshed they traveled to the Security Forces Museum and learned that their career field was unique in that it was the only one with its own museum. Inside they met a fellow warrior in Col Mel Grover who had chewed similar dirt as they had in his time at Tan Son Nhut and Airman Ken Neal, a Sentry Dog Handler who served in Thailand during the war. These two warriors provided an all access tour of the Museum to include the kennel of MWD Nemo, hero of Tan Son Nhut which stands today just outside the museum doors.

After bidding farewell to the Museum and its staff, these warriors and their wives mounted the bus for one last stop. It was a stop that they had looked forward to since their days of service. Not one of them had ever forgotten the furry warriors they served with and the honor bestowed upon them in being allowed to hold the leash. Thus, it was a great joy for them to end their day at the U.S. Military Working Dog Teams National Monument and to see the “Never Forgotten Fountain” that is dedicated as part of the Monument to all the Vietnam Handlers and the Canines they left behind. Here they learned a truth that lightened a burden many had carried since leaving Vietnam behind. They learned that because of them, their tireless efforts, and the stories they had shared, that never again would an MWD ever be left behind by the U.S. Military.

So, with the setting of the sun these comrades left a patch of dirt in the South Texas Plains where one can still hear the warriors call “Remember

the Alamo!” It is the place where Teddy Roosevelt and over a thousand Rough Riders left for San Juan Hill, many to never return. It is also the place where this band of brothers, known as the 366<sup>th</sup> SPS K9, began their own chapter in history and joined the lineage of warrior brotherhoods born in Texas.