

Kokomo man shares war dogs history with Anderson students



ANDERSON – In the Vietnam War, John Meeks joined the 42nd Scout Dog Platoon, 101st Airborne Division, and attended Scout Dog School at Fort Benning, Georgia, to become a handler.

When he arrived in the southeast Asian country, Meeks became the sixth handler to an experienced scout dog named Artus. The German shepherd was killed in action on Dec. 11, 1970.

“The dogs of Vietnam, the dogs of today all serve with honor and courage and loyalty,” the Kokomo resident told about 100 students at an assembly Thursday at Anderson High School.

As executive director of Chapter 3 of the United States War Dogs Association, Meeks keeps alive the memory of Artus and other canines, known formally as military working dogs.

Made up of former and current U.S. military dog handlers, the Indiana chapter of the War Dogs Association, which serves the Midwest, is one of only four local chapters nationwide.

According to the U.S. War Dogs Association, canines have been used for military operations since ancient times in Persia, Assyria and Rome. In the United States, their service dates to World War I.

Military dogs serve as sentry, scout, casualty and messenger functions. Some also are trained to detect explosives.

“They found that units that utilized the dogs had a lower casualty rate than units that didn’t,” Meeks said.

He said military dogs often aren’t treated with the respect they deserve. For much of their history, they have been treated as equipment and left behind once the human troops are recalled, he said.

Meeks tells the story of Chips, a World War II military dog who famously almost bit off President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s hand when he went to pet him, who had received a Silver Star.

“Dogs are still considered equipment, so they took back the Silver Star. You can’t give medals to equipment,” he said.

AHS juniors Brody Pickering, 17, and Caroline States, 16, attended the assembly for their advanced placement U.S history class. They said Meeks’ presentation enhances their understanding of a little-known area of U.S. history.

States said she hadn’t been introduced to the idea of war dogs prior to the presentation.

“There was a lot of historical value in the lives they saved and the part they played in our wars,” she said. “I thought it was really interesting that people could donate their dogs.”

Pickering said he had heard of war dogs before but wasn’t aware of the details of their service.

“I didn’t know that much about the lives that they saved,” he said. “A lot of people don’t realize the sacrifice a war dog makes.”

Care packages

The national U.S. War Dogs Association has supported more than 3,000 dog teams by sending 16,000 care packages that include treats, cooling vests, goggles and booties for war dogs.

Indiana's chapter collects donations for care packages. John Meeks said the chapter sent 60 cooling vests at a cost of about \$100 each.

To make a donation, visit [www. Supportourpaws.com](http://www.Supportourpaws.com).