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Updates on Finn & Albie



Message from the President

Welcome to the February 2017 edition of VMF's eNewsletter! VMF's Board of Directors had a very productive quarterly meeting in early February. During its meeting, the Board reviewed the various initiatives currently underway within VMF and initiated a strategic review of VMF's organizational structure, including developing a plan for organizational evolution and future growth. The Board also decided to solicit applications for new board members.



We proudly welcome two new SDiTs, Mickey and Doug, into the VMF Family! Thank you to our partners at Guide Dogs of America for donating these incredible puppies - read more about Mickey and Doug in our Feature Story.

Congratulations to our Canine and Veteran Teams. Service Dog Finn was recently placed with his veteran, Bob, from Rhode Island. Check out their story below.

A hearty welcome to VMF's new **Development Director, Jeanette Townsend!** Jeanette is no stranger to VMF, having been a member of our Canine Team since 2013, and a Puppy Raiser for three of our dogs, Storm, Cobey and Mac. You will learn more about Jeanette and her new role at VMF in next month's newsletter.

Ken Dowd
President/CEO
Major General (R)

In this issue:

[Meet VMF's Newest Service Dogs in Training](#)
[SDiT Updates](#)
[SDiT Updates](#)
[Featured Volunteer](#)

Meet VMF's Newest Service Dogs in Training (SDiTs)

Guide Dogs of America (GDA) generously donated two Labrador retrievers, half-brothers **Mickey and Doug** to VMF. **Suzanne Ager**, our Assistant Trainer, and **Terri Hill**, Doug's puppy raiser, picked up Mickey and Doug in California and returned with both puppies via United Airlines to Dulles on 8 February. **Thank you GDA, Suzanne and Terri; and welcome to VMF's newest SDiTs, Mickey & Doug!**



Mickey and Doug

SDiT Mickey is named in memory of **Sergeant First Class Mickey E. Zaun (U.S. Army)**. SFC Mickey Zaun was a chemical operation specialist assigned to Headquarters and Headquarters Company, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, at Fort Bragg, N.C. He died January 28, 2005 from injuries sustained while deployed in Iraq. Mickey loved dogs and had a passion for serving others. He would be proud to see SDiT Mickey continuing to serve veterans in his honor.



Sgt. First Class Mickey E. Zaun

SDiT Doug is named in honor of **Sergeant Douglas Alexander Groff (USMC, Retired)**. SGT Doug Groff enlisted in the US Marine Corps in 1998 as a field musician. He graduated the Armed Forces School of Music in Norfolk, VA and was stationed with the Marine Corps Logistics band in Albany, GA and with the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force Band at Camp Foster, Okinawa. During his time in the Corps, Doug performed at numerous events, including the Edinburgh Military tattoo, where he performed for the Queen of England. Doug was medically retired from the Marine Corps in 2006.



Sgt. Douglas Groff

[Back to the top](#)

SDiT Updates

Congratulations to **SDiT Albie and Puppy Raiser Leann Siegfried**, who passed their AKC Canine Good Citizen test on 4 Feb!



Albie

Congratulations to **SD Finn and his Veteran, Bob**, for completing their five-day, Veteran-SD training on Sunday February 5th. Training was conducted at VMF's Canine Training and Veteran Support Center in Dulles, and in various local community locations including Wegmans, Target, and Petsmart. One of the training highlights was the outing to Dulles International Airport where our training team, Finn and Bob were escorted by members of TSA's VIP team and our friends at United Airlines. Finn and Bob learned how to navigate through airport security, ride the "people mover" and the tram, and board a plane similar to the plane they would travel on during their return trip to Bob's home in Rhode Island.



Bob with Finn

It was a busy and exciting day for our entire team, designed to ease Finn and Bob's 6 February departure on Jet Blue. VMF is very appreciate to **Nora Abbey and her team at United Airlines** and to **Janene Shaw and her TSA team** for making the training experience at Dulles International Airport an extremely positive experience for both SD Finn and his Veteran Bob.



Finn with Bob, Nancy, Michele and United Airlines Personnel

[Back to the top](#)

Volunteer Highlight: Meg Foreman, Finn's Puppy Raiser

Moving forward with Finn

When SDiT Finn, a gangly, goofy mass of black fur and love, bounded into my home for a puppy sit, I had just begun transition leave after **almost 28 years of active duty Army service**. I wasn't sure whether there was really a life after the Army.

I had previously 'discovered' VMF through a social media feed while deployed to Afghanistan two years earlier, and attended VMF's annual fundraiser shortly after I returned home. When I heard the stories of these life-changing dogs and their forever-changed veterans, I knew **I had found my second calling**.

I volunteered to be a puppy sitter - that seemed manageable. Observing training, I was touched by the passion with which the VMF trainers talked about SD Buckles, who had just been placed with his veteran, and how the veteran's life had changed dramatically since Buckles entered his life. With retirement just months away and no idea what I was going to be doing for work, one thing was absolutely clear: **I needed to raise one of these amazing dogs** and be part of an amazing story like Buckles.' Michele Kkol then introduced me to Finn.



Meg with Finn

Michele often says "it takes a village" to raise and train these dogs, and this "village" became my new source of grounding. The process of adjusting my life to Finn's needs and commitments forced a balance that had never before existed. When I wasn't sure how Finn would respond to a new task, Michele would tell me to "trust his training," a mantra I had heard many times while in uniform. With a lot of support from VMF's trainers, I gained the confidence to bring Finn to my new job with me, and he immediately became a fixture at the office: colleagues came by just to see him; security guards greeted him by name and asked where he was when I didn't have him with me. Co-workers wanted to know, why isn't Finn here today?

As a military retiree, what I miss most about the Army is being in a position to change lives. Being a soldier wasn't just what I did; it was who I was. So when we started Finn's transition training earlier this month, **as hard as it was to let this wonderful dog move on, seeing Finn connect with veteran Bob made clear Finn's greater purpose in life.** It also brought a realization that raising Finn for Bob isn't something that I did; it's who I am.




Meg and Finn

But for all that I gave Finn, he gave back so much more: he taught me the importance of unambiguous messaging, non-verbal communication, and positive reinforcement; and he reminded me every day of our soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen who suffer invisible injuries that only dogs can sense.


I know that Finn has changed Bob's life and will continue to do so in ways I cannot imagine. **Thank you VMF for the opportunity to keep serving ... and thank you, Service Dog Finn, for helping both of your veterans move forward.**

[Back to the top](#)



Veterans Moving Forward (VMF) is a veteran-centric, non-profit foundation and 501(c)(3) charity dedicated to providing trained service dogs and canine therapy services to veterans with physical and mental health challenges across the full spectrum of needs. Your **tax-deductible donation** to VMF will help us with this mission.

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