

Good Evening Mayor Beri, and council Members

I'm here tonight with my German Shepherd Niki. Niki was instrumental in the start of my program since she created such a stir during the Memorial Day Parade last year. You see she had been geared up as a MWD to support her 4 legged soldiers as we remembered and supported ours. It was seeing how she reacted to the crowd and the crowd reacted towards her that I decided to go full force in supporting our nations K9's and get involved in getting March 13th designated as K9 Veterans Day.

It is quite obvious from the proclamation read by the mayor that these outstanding dogs have been at times the lifeline for our troops, police, and civilians alike ever since Sgt. Stubby during WWI who one night saved hundreds of soldiers from a mustard gas attack. If it weren't for their courage and loyalty towards their handlers many brave Americans would have lost their lives. There are so many stories about the courage of the Military K9's over the years. One donated dog named Chips who gained fame in World War II, serving in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France and Germany. He eventually served in eight separate campaigns across Europe and was credited for numerous saves and the capture of enemy soldiers. Another, named Nemo, while on patrol near a Vietnam graveyard Nemo alerted his handler and a shot rang out. Sgt. Thorneburg released his dog and then charged firing into the enemy. Nemo was shot and wounded, the bullet entering under his right eye and exited through his mouth. Thorneburg killed one VC before he was shot in the shoulder and knocked to the ground. That might have been the sad end of the story. But Nemo refused to give in without a fight. Ignoring his serious head wound, the 85 pound dog threw himself at the Vietcong guerrillas who had opened fire. Nemo's ferocious attack brought Thorneburg the time he needed to call in backup forces.

And most recently and close to home for me was one dog from the 332 ESFG/K9 named Ikka. Ikka served for many years with courage and valor with his handler SSgt. Campos. He was described by TSgt. Ochoa as a love bug. Ikka was not KIA but had succumbed to a disease that most likely came from his service to his country and was buried with full military honors just like any other soldier in November 2009.

Like the stories of Sgt. Stubby, Chips, Nemo and Ikka there are hundreds of K9 stories of how they have served and protected both here at home and abroad. From Military, Police, Search and Rescue, Fire and therapy dogs, they are too numerous to mention here tonight.

Ask anyone who has served with a K9 or been saved by one how valuable they are. During this proclamation ceremony I requested to expand on the reason for the K9 Veterans Day and I would like to thank council for granting me that permission and to thank those who have helped me facilitate my program here in West Milford by not only remembering the K9's but by assisting me with my support program. As of this date we have been able to send out over \$2500.00 worth of materials to the 332 ESFG/K9 in Balad, Iraq, by purchasing everything from cooling vests, toys, treats to poo-poo bags for the dogs and the necessities for the handlers as the handlers deem necessary, along with just a card or letter of thanks from a stranger. You can only imagine how it makes a soldier feel to get that letter from back home, from a complete stranger. That knowledge that they are truly appreciated makes them able to do their job better and in turn makes for a better MWD Team. This has been accomplished in part by assistance from Kayla Ward and Natalie Certosimo of WMHS DECA, the Macopin Student Council, students and staff and generous donations and assistance from many township organizations and businesses including, but not limited to, the WMPBA, WM Elks, WMHS DECA, Greenwood Lake Animal Hospital, Sears Hardware, A&P, DeMarcos Pizza, Walgreens, JR's Screenprinting and many, many residents too numerous to mention, I thank them all. The 332 ESFG/K9 thanks them all (Expeditionary Security Forces Group /K9). TSgt. Mark Ochoa, their Kennel Master would like to have done it personally but obviously that is logistically impossible so he asked me to relay their message of thanks and appreciation. He stated, and I quote in part,**"I'm taken by the level commitment by your organization, students, staff and community toward the Military Working Dog program here at JBB. In past deployments I cannot recall very much support if any.".... "I'm a true believer that community involvement sets a great foundation for tomorrow's leaders."**

Kayla, Natalie, Macopin Middle School and the rest of the supporters of "Support Our 4 Legged Soldiers" and K9 Veterans Day. Thank you. And remember. When you see a soldier, a soldier's family, thank them, thank them for your safety and your freedom! And remember the 4 legged soldiers who unselfishly serve and protect their handlers and therefore us as well.

Mayor Beri, Council, thank you for the privilege of being here tonight as to bring to light and touch on the story of the MWD, their partners and all the working dogs of America. May God Bless us all, and protect our troops!