

Military Dogs in PACAF

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PACAF; The Early Days

PACAF traces its roots to the World War II activation of the Far East Air Force (FEAF) on 03 August 1944, at Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. FEAF, subordinate to the U.S. Army Forces Far East, served as the headquarters of Allied Air Forces Southwest Pacific Area- By 1945, three numbered air forces -5th, 7th and 13th-supported operations in the Pacific Theater. At that time, the Army Air Forces in the Pacific was part of the largest and most powerful military organization ever fielded by any nation.

After World II, FEAF and 5th AF remained in Japan- 7th AF operated from Hawaii and, 13th AF was located in the Philippines. In the post-war years, FEAF was, designated the theater air force for the Far East Command. Thus, all air force units in the Far East and Southwest Pacific were placed under one Air Force commander for the first time.

When the North Koreans crossed the 38th parallel June 25, 1950, FEAF consisted of 5th, 13th and 20th AF and the Far East Materiel Command. Four years after the Korean War armistice, FEAF was re-designated Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) and transferred its headquarters to Hickam AFB, Hawaii.

History of the PACAF's Military Working Dog Training

“The sentry dog program was one outgrowth of the Korean War that survived when the Air Force abandoned its plan for an organic local ground defense. Internal security measures of the mid-1950s featured sentry dogs at bases storing nuclear weapons. The Air Force became the single Service to procure and train them. As Air Force Units deployed into Viet Nam bases, Security Police was tasked with guarding the bases. “
Reference A

Military Dogs in PACAF

By 1960, PACAF maintained a combat-ready deterrent force of some 35 squadrons, operating from 10 major bases located in half-dozen countries.

The PACAF MWDTC had its beginning during 1948 when the idea was born in the Office of the Provost Marshal, Far East Air Force (FEAF). Discussions were held between HQ FEAF and USAF concerning the possibility of using sentry dogs on FEAF installations because of the pilferage loss being suffered by all bases. In the latter part of 1949, the Provost Marshal General in Washington advised the Commander, FEAF, that the availability of Army trained dogs for FEAF utilization would be extremely limited and recommended that thought should be given to establishing a training center in the Far East.



Photo Above: PACAF's first dog school, located at Showa Air Base, Japan, Courtesy of Larry Haynie

On 5 December 1951, HQ FEAF authorized the Far East Air Logistic Force, Japan, to establish "Project Kennel." On 10 March 1952, construction of facilities that included 50 kennels was started at Showa Air Station, Japan. On 17 March 1952, the final arrangements were made for the purchase of

Military Dogs in PACAF

50 German shepherd dogs from the Nippon Police Dog Association, Tokyo, Japan. On 1 April 1952, the first 50 German shepherd dogs were purchased in Tokyo. A total of 200 dogs were procured through the Nippon Police Dog Association during the year.

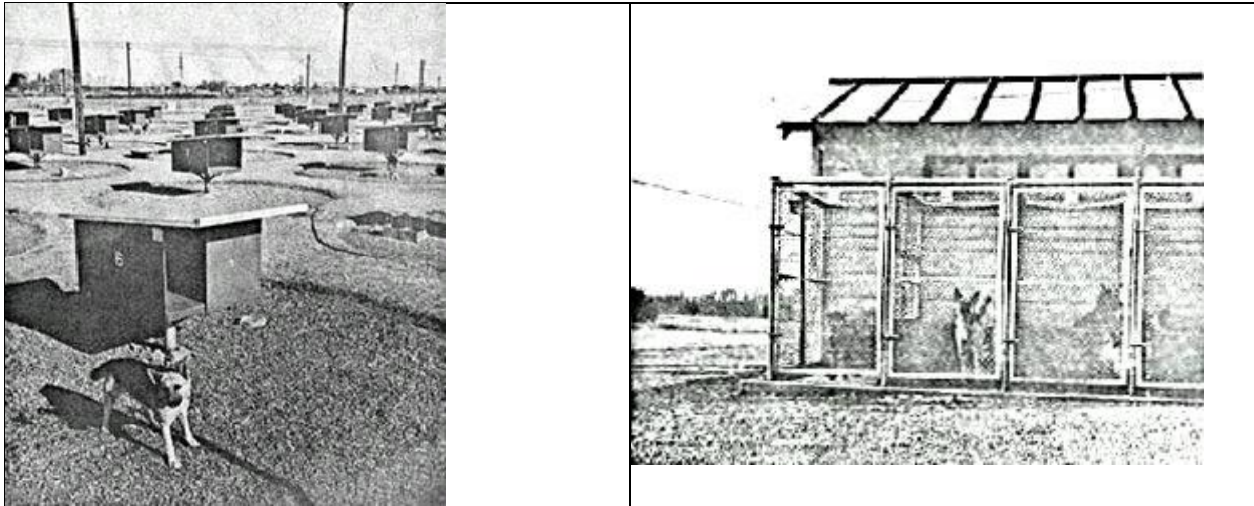
By virtue of FEAF Regulation 5-8, 16 December 1952, 'Project Kennel' officially became known as the FEAF Sentry Dog Training Center at Tachikawa Air Base. The center had the primary mission of procuring and training sentry dogs for FEAF-wide assignment as well as training Air Force sentry dog handlers. On 13 March 1953, construction of 30 new wire kennels was started. They were completed in May 1953.

On 1 July 1957, due to reorganization of the United States Air Force in the Pacific and Far East Theater, the FEAF Sentry Dog Training Center was officially designated as the PACAF Sentry Dog Training Center (SDTC). A new contract for the purchase of 160 dogs was made with the Nippon Police Dog Association. Only 12 dogs were bought in the Tokyo area in January 1961. This contract was cancelled because of the difficulty in delivering qualified dogs meeting required specifications. Because of these difficulties, stateside procurement was initiated.

In February 1961, 70 new temporary kennels were constructed in the eastern area adjoining the fenced training yard. In May 1961, the first 50 dogs were procured at the Lackland Military Training Center, San Antonio, Texas, and airlifted to Tachikawa Air Base, Japan on 12 May 1961. On 1 July 1961, the 6100th Support Wing assumed responsibility for the operation of the PACAF SDTC. In January 1962, the PACAF Sentry Dog Training Center (SDTC) received authorization to procure dogs from military personnel and Department of Defense civilians in the PACAF area. The center was eventually moved to Showa Air Base, Japan when Tachikawa was turned back over to the Japanese government. Japanese handlers were used to pre-train dogs that reduced the TDY time needed by military students.

One early type of kennels was known as bird cages. The dog wears a thick leather collar and is chained to the post supporting the dog house. A bed of gravel provides a mud free area with good drainage. These kennels were also safer for the handler, no gate to open or close. Sentry dogs by nature did not readily accept new handlers. In many cases getting in and out of a fenced in kennel was a challenge (Personal Experience). The dog school at Lackland used this type until the mid 70's. Junior classes would move into the permanent kennels as senior classes graduated. At this time Lackland had a classes graduating and a new class starting each week.

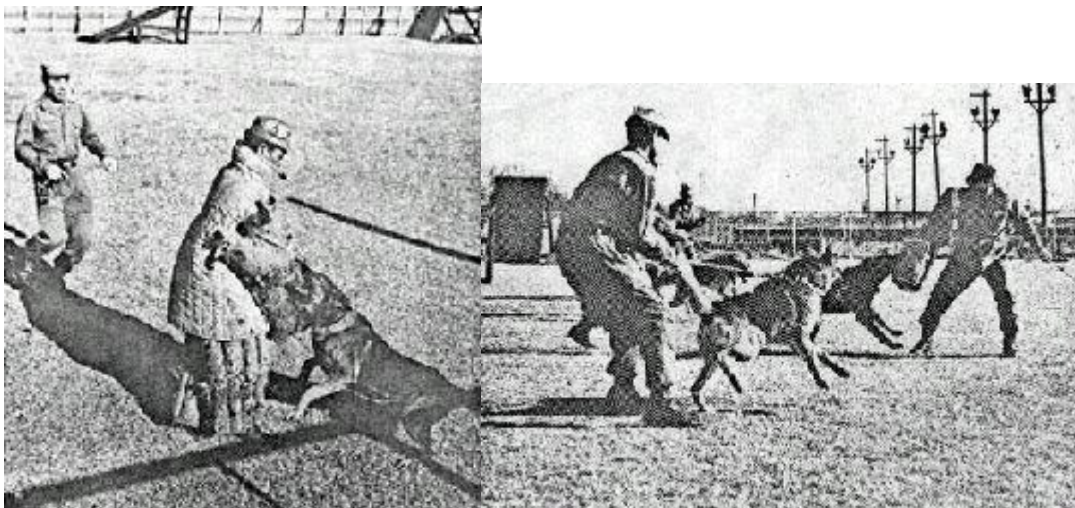
Military Dogs in PACAF



Photos Above: Old & New Kennels at Showa Air Base, Japan

Off leash attack training was conducted with the decoy wearing a very heavy, thickly padded suit. The suit did not protect the feet or the head if the dog knocked the decoy over. The attack suit sometimes conditioned the dogs to attacking only someone wearing a thick and bulky suit. On several cases dogs that seemed to be aggressive failed to bite human intruders.

The dogs then received training wearing a special attack muzzle. This muzzle was tighter and more secure than the normal basket muzzle used during transportation and vet exams. The dogs were released on a unprotected decoy to see if they would actually attempt to attack. It would be a heart stopper for the decoy when a dog stopped and attempted to remove the muzzle.



Military Dogs in PACAF

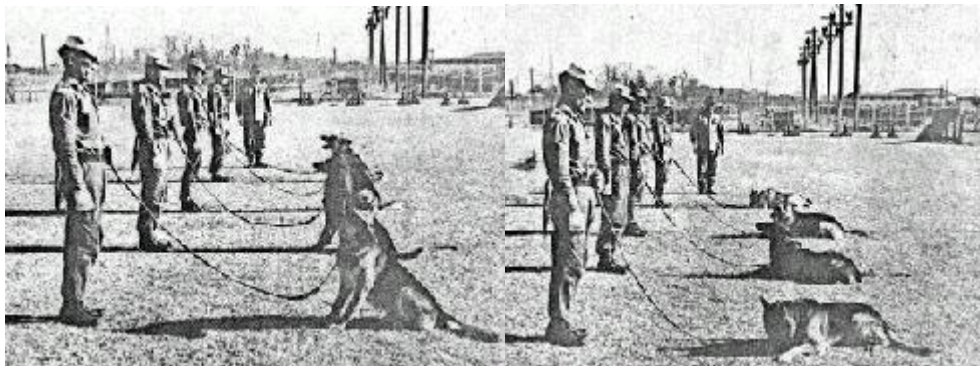
Photo Above (Left): Handler scrambles to retrieve dog from off leash attack.

Photo Above (Right): Line agitation conducted with the dogs receiving a on leash bite on a decoy. Handlers acted as decoy for each other.

Photo Below: The dog was not required to release his bite on command. Handlers usually had to choke the dog by closing the dog's windpipe to force the dog to open his mouth. The procedure required the handler to hold the dog collar with his left hand. The right hand was used to pinch the windpipe and force the dog to open his mouth. It was not uncommon for a dog to release, turn and bite the handler. This could occur so fast that it was difficult to prevent. As far as the dog was concerned, the handler was a unidentified human attempting to hurt him.



Photos Below: Japanese Handlers/Trainers Conducting Basic Obedience



Military Dogs in PACAF

Photo Below: The obstacle Course was physical exercise for the dog and a chance to develop trust and confidence in the handler



While in Japan the Center had trained approximately 4,000 sentry dogs for all US Forces in the Pacific command. The mainland Japan location was outgrown due to the rapid buildup of Viet Nam K-9 sections, starting in 1965. In FY 65, 49 handlers and 150 dogs were trained. In FY 66, 150 handlers and 171 dogs were trained. In the first half of FY67, 160 handlers and 156 dogs were trained.

Training Center Moves To Kadena Air Base, Japan

In July 1969, the PACAF Sentry Dog Training Center was relocated to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan. Showa Air Base joined the list of WW II bases returned to the Japanese Government. The Center operated out of Quonset huts pending construction of a new facility. Operational control for the school was through PACAF HQ Security Police, located at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii.

On 1 January 1970, the Center was officially renamed the PACAF Military Working Dog Training Center (PACAF MWDTC), necessitated due to the expanded use of dogs in the Air Force. On 28 December 1970, the Center moved into a newly constructed facility.

The facilities had approximately 4,000 square feet of administrative and support floor space. It was the most modern dog training facility possessed by the military. In addition to a completely equipped and staffed Veterinary Clinic, it had 100 permanent (indoor) kennels that included eight hospital isolation kennels. The school was located in the cleared 2,000-ft. buffer zone surrounding a huge bomb dump located north of Kadena AB. This

Military Dogs in PACAF

allowed larger training areas. Civilian handlers were again utilized to provide initial training to dogs.



Photo Above: PACAF MWDTC, End of Indoor kennels with kitchen in center. The support building containing two classrooms, administrative office, and the vet clinic is not seen in this photo.



Photo Above: Lower Training Area, The Quonset Huts (right background) were also used as the former barracks area for students. In the late 70's it was used for detection training and building search by patrol dog classes. Building in the far left background was the kennels belonging to the Kadena Air Base's Security Police Squadron (18th SPS).

Military Dogs in PACAF

In the late 70s, the PACAF MWDTC conducted four formal resident courses of instruction: Patrol Dog Handler, Patrol Dog Handler Supervisor, Patrol /Drug Detector Dog and Patrol /Explosive Detector Dog course Drug Detector Dog classes used as training areas the numerous Army, Navy, and Marine installations, located on Okinawa. The Center also conducted mobile field training and staff assistance visits as approved by CINCPACAF/SP (for civilians that is was the military term for the senior ranking Security Police Officer in the Pacific theater, or as I often referred to him, the *Great Head Shepherd*). The training center operated under one fixed rule, "Provide as much support as possible to all field units".

The Center procured dogs from the DOD Dog Center, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, and occasionally accepted local donation dogs. Dogs shipped from the DOD Dog Center were always slow in arriving.

The Small Dog's

The General in charge of PACAF, a pilot and dog lover, decided that small cockpits and the tight areas on aircraft called for small drug detector dogs. With only his authorization, the Center started the Small Sniffer Dog (SSD) Program.

Small dogs were procured from the pet shelters on base and trained as Narcotic Detector Dogs. No dogs were purchased, no funds spent. The PACAF MWDTC however simply took the "a dog, is a dog, is a dog" approach. Small dogs found on Okinawa were trained as drug detector dogs using the same training methods as used on their German shepherd cousins. These dogs were shipped throughout the Pacific area to search aircraft and other areas for illegal drugs.

Less than 100 dogs were trained, with each base receiving several dog. The dogs were successfully used on the flight line to search arriving and departing aircraft. These dogs were trained using the exact same methods as their German shepherd counterparts. Most were trained using a ball or a toy reward; very few, if any, were trained using food reward. The dogs were even given their own brand numbers, like their big cousins. Their serial number started out with the letters SSD (Small Sniffer Dog). Several were even returned to civilian life in the late 1970

In at least two cases, the dogs returned to temporary active duty. Two dogs were adopted by dog school instructors. They returned to the school to be handled by student in drug detector dog classes. The original dogs belonging to the students were eliminated from the course due to substandard performance. By continuing with the SSD's, the students could graduate

Military Dogs in PACAF

and return to their bases. They could be assigned to a trained drug detector dog, and start working. After completing the courses, the two dogs returned to civilian life. Both dogs were adopted by MWDTC personnel.

Butch SSD (Small Sniffer Dog) # 56, was adopted by my wife (SSgt Cathy Moore, MWDTC Instructor) & myself. He was aggressive but adopted well to home life with us. He returned to active duty once to assist a handler's whose dog had had not progressed in training. Butch would go to school with us, and be turned over to his temporary handler. Butch remembered his days as an AF drug detector dog and the handler completed his course.

Several years after the start of PACAF's program, the Lackland Dog School researched the concept of training small breed dogs to determine if poodles, beagles, terriers, and miniature schnauzers would be better detector dogs. The school purchased registered purebreds dogs and spent several years training various small breeds as drug or explosive detector dogs. Nothing came of their test program. The PACAF small dogs did not have the pedigree of Lackland's small dogs, but they were working dogs not a research project.



MWDTC Staff (In Fatigues) & HQ PACAF SP Staff (In Blue's) Circa 1980

Politics is Rough

In 1979, a political struggle ensued that eventually led to the end of the PACAF MWDTC. A large shipment of dogs arrived from the DOD Dog Center without the accompanying mandated full sets of dog equipment. DOD Dog Center regulations stated that each dog would be shipped with one complete set of dog equipment. The DOD Dog Center was reminded of this via message. The DOD Dog Center complained about the tone of the message to Headquarters AF Security Police. This became the catalyst for great changes to PACAF MWDTC. A meeting was held at PACAF HQ to determine the future of the school. The decision was made to turn the school over to Air Training Command (ATC).

In late 1980 Representatives from Lackland Air Force Base Dog School arrived to inspect the Center. The ATC inspectors were not pleased to discover that the school was not using their Course Materials. The school had rewritten all materials for the local conditions found in the Pacific area. Request for course materials from the Lackland Dog School had never been complied with. The majority of the PACAF MWDTC instructors had taught at the Lackland Dog School and had adopted their course materials to local conditions.

The inspectors were also displeased to discover that the school had been shipping drugs to all bases in the PACAF area for use in narcotic detector dog training. The drugs would be shipped to the dog school from other overseas bases that had made large seizures. The drugs were shipped by registered US mail from AFOSI/NIS to the AFOSI detachment on Kadena AB, Japan. The drugs were tested, carefully weighed, and shipped to bases that needed samples for their drug dogs.

Also the forms used were an issue. The MWDTC did not request drug training aids using a DEA form. Our logic was simple: The DEA could not ship drugs to overseas bases. Why use a DEA form? Stateside bases procured their drug training aids from DEA sources. The Lackland Air Force Base Dog School would not ship training aids overseas either. So it was a "Catch 22" situation. Note: Google "Catch 22" if that is an unfamiliar term!

Air Force Headquarters had never provided for drug training aids for overseas detector dogs. That problem had always been left up to the individual commands to solve. Training aids were shipped by our AFOSI to the units AFOSI/NIS detachment. We supplied all military branches based in the PACAF Theater that needed training aids.

Military Dogs in PACAF

The PACAF MWDTC has filled the void by both supplying the substances and by auditing the training aids during yearly staff assistance visits. We called it a visit; the bases called it an inspection. We provided a written report to the Security Police unit commander and Headquarters PACAF Security Police.

The school also had a long tradition of sending instructors to bases to teach classes that was also not well received by the ATC Inspectors. The "traveling" dog school courses had been a very cost-effective method for units to train dog handlers and reduce student-training costs. It was far less expensive to send one or two instructors to a base than a greater number of students and their dogs to Kadena.

PACAF MWDTC instructors went to Air Force bases throughout the Pacific area. Courses were taught for the US 8th Army at Camp Carroll, Korea, and the US Navy at Subic Bay, RP, and several classes at Clark AB, RP. The school even taught members of the Honolulu Police Department. Because of Hawaii's strict quarantine of all dogs (military working dogs included), it was cheaper to send an instructor to teach an explosive detector class for one dog than ship the dog to the mainland. In later years, the quarantine restrictions would be relaxed for military dogs.

During one field course taught at Osan AB, Korea, 14 students were trained from all the in country bases. The bases split the funding for the two instructors; all the students stayed in the Osan Security Police barracks. Thus, those drug detector dog teams were available at a minimum cost to the bases. During the course, the instructors saved 12 Army Sentry Dogs. One afternoon, an U.S. Army truck loaded with the dogs in shipping crates pulled into the Osan AB kennels. The dogs were from an Army Air Defense battery that had been turned over to the Korean military. The dogs were declared excess and were en route to an Army veterinarian to be put to sleep. Accompanying Army handlers desperately were searching for an U.S. military kennels that sign the receipt for the dogs and save them from death. One of the dogs was less than 2 years old and had been in country less than 6 months.

There was no time for any long distance decisions or approval from the DOD Dog Center. As NCOIC of the PACAF MWDTC, I took it upon myself to sign for the dogs; the Osan Kennelmaster offered extra available kennels for the dogs. The drug dog students volunteered their free time to retrain the sentry dogs into patrol dogs. Afternoon patrol dog training commenced after the morning's drug detector training sessions. Controlled aggression was successfully introduced to the dogs.

Military Dogs in PACAF

The dogs were then assigned to air bases in Korea with the longest standing orders (MILSTRIPS) for patrol dogs from Lackland. MILSTRIPS were the military term for a supply request, with dogs being considered a supply item. Several MILSTRIPS were years old. Before the class was completed, I had the opportunity to brief the Chief of Security Police for PACAF. He was passing thru Osan, AB on his first visit. I explained the situation, and received his blessing.

The ATC representatives, who inspected the Center, informed us that the dogs had been the Army's problem and should have been put to sleep. Before ATC takeover, staff assistance visits had been conducted at all PACAF bases with dogs. These were not merely the IG-type inspection. Assistance was given to the kennels to solve problem areas and the Military Working Dog Supervisors Course was taught at all locations. This course was geared toward the non-dog handler to ensure proper utilization of dogs.

In early 1981, the PACAF MWDTC was converted to an Air Training Command (ATC) Field Training Detachment, under the control of the Lackland Dog School. The followings policies were immediately implemented:

1. ATC staff at Lackland AFB, Texas would determine all class schedules.
2. Instructors were no longer allowed to travel to any base and teach classes locally. The TDY cost would no longer be an issue.
3. No longer would the training center be allowed to ship narcotic training aids. However ATC would not ship training aids to the PACAF bases. Prior to the changeover date, the MWDTC staff shipped drug training aids to all the kennels in the PACAF bases. Availability of training aids would not be an immediate issue.

The school was informed that no exceptions would be allowed. Under ATC, the school would never again provide the same previous level of support to PACAF bases. ATC's stranglehold and policy changes slowly reduced the student load over several years and enabled the closure of the former training center, citing its diminished use. Air bases were then required to send students back to Lackland for training, which dramatically increased TDY costs. Bases lacking funding would just have to live with dogs sitting idle in their kennels.

Within a few years, ATC had the justification to close the school. It was the end of an era. The dog school in Germany was closed in the early 70's. PACAF's school lived roughly another decade.

Military Dogs in PACAF



Photo Above: A young NCO John Probst at the training center (Circa late 70's.) He is now Colonel Probst. He completed a tour as commander of the Lackland Dog School, prior to his promotion to Colonel. This was his second tour at the dog school. His first tour was as an instructor in the explosive detector dog course in the early 80's.

Military Dogs in the Vietnam War

In 1960 the US advisers to the South Vietnamese military recommended that a dog program be established. Sentry dogs would protect military bases and scout dogs would enable the troops to attack the VC. The program was a huge failure. The dogs had major health problems, the majority died from malnutrition. Many of the Vietnamese handlers were Buddhist and did not develop a relationship with their assigned dogs. The cost to feed a dog was more than the cost to feed the handler. Within a few years, several hundred dogs had been turned over to the Vietnamese military. At this time the only Air Force involvement had been supporting (with the US Army) the Vietnamese Sentry Dog program. The Vietnamese military never had an effective dog program.

The communist military strength and firepower in Vietnam increased. As a result, PACAF began a buildup in the area with the addition of troops and better arms and equipment.

Military Dogs in PACAF

Top Dog was the program in Viet Nam to test Sentry Dog's effectiveness for base security. It was launched days after a successful Viet Cong attack (July 1, 1965) on Da Nang Air Base. Forty dog teams were deployed to Viet Nam for a four month test period. Dog teams were placed on the perimeter in front of machine gun towers/bunkers. The sentry dog teams were tasked with early warning. An alert was followed with a rapid response of reinforcements. The test was successful. Handlers returned to the US and dogs were reassigned to new handlers. The Air Force immediately started to ship dog teams to all the bases in Viet Nam and Thailand. **Safeside** was a test program where infantry weapons and tactics were used by a specially trained Security Police unit. Security Police dog teams were trained as Scout dog teams. They led Security Police patrols in offensive patrols in the surrounding jungle. The unit was responsible for the complete defense of a new base. Phu Cat Air Base was developed as a test location.

That the test was successful would have been no surprise to anyone knowledgeable about the capabilities or military history of dogs. One of the early arguments was that dogs could not handle the tropical heat. The fact that dogs had been used in the Pacific Theater during WW II was ignored. Some in the military have the ability to remember past programs and recycle them. Of course they often take the credit for the *new* program. That credit is then used that for promotion.

“The care and maintenance of sentry dogs in South Vietnam differed little from that required in the southeastern United States. With but few exceptions, the chief concern centered on kennels, working conditions, and climate. Through the hectic buildup phase, nearly all the sentry dogs were quartered in shipping crates until security police undertook self-help projects to make kennels. In time at most bases, these kennels were replaced by ones of professional civil engineer construction. At the four new bases (Tuy Hoa, Cam Ranh Bay, Phan Rang, and Phu Cat), kennels that closely conformed to CONUS standards were part of the base facilities constructed by civilian contractors. Comparatively speaking, sentry dog kennels by the close of 1967 equaled or excelled the quality of security policemen's barracks.” Reference A

Heat posed a problem from the outset. There were many cases of heat prostration wherein the dog's body temperature could not be controlled and death occurred. Security police handlers wisely trimmed base defense training to the required minimum and conducted it as a rule in the cooler night hours when the dog was on post. The furnishing of kennels having enough shade and air circulation further slashed heat-induced illness, ” Reference A

Military Dogs in PACAF

Over 1966 and 1967, inferior food was the culprit in numerous gastrointestinal upsets. The food became tainted and weevil-infested because it remained too long in the logistic chain. The death of eight sentry dogs due to spoiled food sparked actions that went far in wiping out the problem. Procurement switched from yearly to monthly. A brand-name food (Gaines) was bought in lieu of the cereal-based ration usually specified. Refrigerated storage retarded spoilage and weevil buildup. The addition of horsemeat or beef made the dogs' diet tastier and diminished bloat." Reference A



Sentry Dog Team in RVN Photo from Air Base Defense in the Republic of Vietnam, Reference A

Military Dogs in PACAF

Webmasters Comment: Feeding the dogs at Da Nang AB consisted of mixing a bag of Gaines with a case of canned dog food and salad oil in a large metal can. Each dog was given amount specified by the veterinarian and one vitamin pill. At Phu Cat, dog food came in a can (actually a large bucket) of a medicated food called Maximum Stress Diet (MSD). No mixing, just feed the required amount.

Working conditions held a host of hazards. In designating sentry dog posts, scant or no attention was or could be given to dog and handler comfort. Stubble, rocks, deep sand, marshes, and dense coarse grass bred foot injuries. Snakebite was common, but fortunately it was the dog and not the handler who in most cases was bitten. Swift injection of antivenin and sensible treatment usually saved the animal's life. In hauling dogs to post, too few vehicles often meant crowding that led to bruises and scratches when the dogs attacked each other. Letting dogs jump down from high vehicles broke bones, mangled paws, and tore claws (especially dewclaws). Complete daily grooming was vital to detect and treat such injuries as well as to ward off skin disorders. Nightly at every air base, sentry dogs were deployed as a detection and warning screen in the zone separating combat resources from the perimeter. Experience forged the common practice of working the dogs in two overlapping shifts. This put twice the number of dogs on post during the hours when the VC or NVA forces were prone to attack. Besides being detectors, the dogs were a psychological deterrent as evidenced by the training of enemy sapper and reconnaissance personnel." Reference A

Among the base defense forces, sentry dog handlers found the M-16A1 rifle wanting. Their criticism was first documented in the after action report covering the Tan Son Nhut attack of 4 December 1966. It was suggested that the sling be attached to the top rather than the underside of the rifle. This would let the handler sling the weapon from his left shoulder and carry it in a firing position on his right side. By so doing he could more easily manage the dog and still stay at the ready. Then, too, the overall length of the rifle was in itself a problem. Colt surmounted these objections by coming up with a modified M-16A1 having an 1 1.5-inch barrel, telescoping stock, sturdier flash hider, and reworked hand guard. Called the CAR-15 and afterwards the GAU-SA/A submachine gun, it became the authorized weapon for sentry dog handlers. The Seventh Air Force Director of Security Police reported that both the M-16A1 and the GAU-SA/A were dependable in combat and "well liked by all field troops." Reference A

The Viet Cong forces feared all military working dogs. A bounty was placed on the lives of dog teams. Interestingly, the bounty was higher on the dog

Military Dogs in PACAF

than the handler. The tattooed ear was proof of the dog's death. A leash was proof of the handler's death.

“One sapper captured during a penetration of Phu Cat in February 1969 told how his company commander discussed at length the dangers presented by dogs. The commander stressed that they (the dogs) were very intelligent and were to be respected. If any man heard or saw a dog he was to lie down immediately, hold his breath, and remain motionless until the dog left. To conceal their scent from sentry dogs, sappers even smeared their bodies with a garlic-like herb before going into action. It did not work! ‘Reference A

The buildup of forces in Viet Nam created large dog sections at USAF Southeast Asia (SEA) bases. Four hundred sixty seven (467) dogs were eventually assigned to airbases in the Republic of Viet Nam. They served at Bien Hoa, Bien Thuy, Cam Ranh Bay, Da Nang, Nha Trang, Tuy Hoa, Phu Cat, Phan Rang, Tan Son Nhut, and Pleiku Air Bases. Airbases in the Republic of Thailand were soon assigned military working dogs. Within a year of deployment, attacks on several bases had been stopped when the enemy forces were detected by dog teams. The success of sentry dogs was determined by the lack of successful penetration of airbases in Viet Nam and Thailand. Sentry Dogs were also used by the Army, Navy, and Marines to protect the perimeter of large bases.

“Upon completion of the buildup, replacement dogs for losses through combat or natural causes were furnished by the PACAF Sentry Dog Training Center, situated at Showa, Japan, and later at Kadena AB, Okinawa. This setup shaved costs and speeded response. From this high, the number of dogs gradually tapered off. The decline stemmed from the swelling congestion at the six VNAF air bases that compressed the areas where the animals could be productively employed. Another cause was the phased withdrawal of US forces starting in 1969. “ Reference A

The Air Force soon had more dogs in SEA than all the stateside locations. In the late 60s, handlers found themselves facing multiple tours. Many handlers completed a tour, rotated to a stateside base and in a few months had orders returning to Viet Nam. Often handlers received an assignment to Viet Nam after completing a tour at another overseas base.

“From the coming of the first sentry dog teams in July 1965 until 4 December 1966, no known penetrations took place in areas patrolled by dogs. But on the 4th of December, sappers aided by good weather and the terrain slipped through a sentry dog post at Tan Son Nhut. The infiltrators were spotted when they tried to penetrate a second (backup) post. The alarm voiced by the handler at the second post alerted the air base, triggering

Military Dogs in PACAF

a defense force counterattack that staved off major damage and wiped out the enemy raiding party. During the fighting, sentry dog forces in South Vietnam sustained their first casualties: one handler and three sentry dogs killed, two handlers and one sentry dog wounded. In the ensuing years of the war, the sentry dogs saw no combat of this size. Nevertheless, they quietly showed their value as sturdy, versatile, detection devices. At Binh Thuy, Phu Cat, Pleiku, and Phan Rang again and again they gave warning of enemy probes and penetrations. The last, sentry dog to be killed in the war fell during the 29 January 1969 attack on Phan Rang.” Reference A

Nemo, the wounded dog, lost the sight of one eye despite the best efforts of USAF veterinary and medical specialists. By July 1967 Nemo was back at the Sentry Dog Training Center at Lackland. He saw no more security duty but served as a sentry dog recruiter. His myriad of personal television appearances throughout the nation kept the sentry dog “enlistment” rate high enough to satisfy the needs of all Services. Nemo died on 15 March 1973 from a mix of natural causes and war wounds.” Reference A

Nearly all air base defense personnel agreed that the sentry dog rendered outstanding service in RVN. Most of them would allow that of all the equipment and methods used to detect an attacking enemy force, the sentry dog has provided the most sure, all inclusive means.” Reference A

By 1965, the increased of American involvement in the Viet Nam War caused interest in use of scout dogs, mine and tunnel dogs and later tracker dogs. Scout dogs had been so effective in WW II and Korea. The scout dog program eventually ended up to consist of twenty two Army platoons and four Marine platoons. Scout dogs would alert if they see, hear, or smell enemy forces or booby traps. They will alert on scent that is airborne or scent that is located on the ground. Tracker dogs will only work on scent that is already on the ground. The dog must be given a starting point such as a foot print. Both dogs are tolerant of other personnel and never trained to attack.

Australian forces in Viet Nam used several tracker dog teams very effectively. Tracker dogs team expertise was acquired after the British Jungle Warfare School, located in Malaysia, agreed to train several American tracker platoons. The tracker dog concept consisted of one dog team, a visual tracker (soldier trained to observe visible signs left by the enemy) and several soldiers to provide armed support. The preferred dogs were Labrador retrievers. After reviewing the results, the Army started a tracker school at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

Experience in Viet Nam revealed that these additional skills were needed for airbase security. Sentry dog detection capabilities were offset by the

Military Dogs in PACAF

aggressiveness that the dog showed to friendly forces. A sentry dog was a significant danger to friendly forces, when in close proximity. Thus, a new military working dog was needed. With the different training concepts and capabilities as follows:

1. Detect the presence of a force, alert or observe without enemy force detection;
2. Assist security forces by scouting and tracking;
3. Work safely in close proximity to friendly forces on strike teams, reconnaissance and ambush patrols without becoming distracted or agitated.
4. Accept a new handler with reduced training time.

Over 4,000 dogs served our military in Southeast Asia. As American participation in the war ended, former bases were turned over to the Vietnamese Air Force. Dogs were treated as excess equipment. In some cases they were turned over to the Vietnamese military. The Vietnamese military never had an effective dog program. It cost more to feed a dog than it did to feed its Vietnamese handler. Plus, the average dog weighed 75 pounds and the average Vietnamese weighed 90 pounds. Rumors spread of military dogs being the main course at banquets. Dog meat is considered a delicacy in the Orient!

Some dogs were shipped to the PACAF Dog School at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan. These lucky dogs were transferred to other bases in the Pacific area. Two shipments of dogs were made to the DOD Dog Center at Lackland AFB, Texas.

Dogs were shipped from base to base ahead of the base closures. But, it was soon the simple problem of too many dogs. Some excess dogs were reassigned to other Pacific bases, but most were killed. At the end of the American cavalry era, the Army disposed of its horses by machine-gunning them to death. In our war, the dogs were also killed; only it was done in a more modern humane manner by a lethal drug overdose.

The last American bases were in Thailand. Handlers from bases in Korea were sent TDY to assist in the base closures. SSgt John Grammer was TDY to Korat Royal Thai Air Base. He reported that the veterinarian euthanized as many as six dogs every day, sometimes more, until they were all destroyed.

PACAF combat aircraft flew their last strikes in Cambodia on August 15, 1973 and wrote the final chapter to the long, costly history of active American participation in the Indochina War.

After Vietnam

The post-Vietnam era found the command focused on readiness improvement. Studies and concept feasibility tests, which led to a new training curriculum, disclosed that the familiar police dog could perform the required tasks. The patrol dog concept was based on the Police Dog Program of the Washington Metropolitan Police Department, DC. In 1969, the patrol dog concept was adopted and implemented. The dog school at Lackland AFB, Texas, was re-designated the Military Dog Studies Branch, Security Police Academy. Due to the Air Force adopting the patrol dog concept, bases that would have never considered sentry dogs were able to use patrol dogs. No longer was dog use limited to guarding nuclear weapons.

The 60s and 70s were a time of great change in the use of military dogs. The use of dogs had expanded to all the services. The USAF schools were training patrol dogs in drug and explosive detection. The services had specialties codes that identified the duty performed. Senior Army dog trainers had a specific code that identified them for Kennelmaster positions or trainer positions. That enabled an experience base to be developed. The USAF never developed the job codes to that level. Individuals with major experience could end up at bases that either did not have dogs, or did not have positions for their rank. Unfortunately, at the end of the Viet Nam conflict, the Army schools were closed and much of the expertise was lost. The lessons and skills learned would be forgotten.

At the end of the American cavalry era, the Army disposed of its horses by machine gunning them to death. In our war (Viet Nam), the dogs were treated the same way. Only it was done in a more "humane" manner. Over 4,000 dogs served, some were reassigned to other bases and a few were shipped back to the US. However, most were killed in a production line fashion. Liability concerns caused the Department of Defense to order the deaths of all dogs unable to work. Also DOD used the excuse of tropical diseases to explain their no dog return policy.

In most cases the dog's own handler had to take the dog in for this last trip to the vet. This is very hard for a dog handler and is absolutely the worst part of the job. A documentary shown on the Discovery Channel and news stories with interviews of former handlers exposed to the public the fate of Viet Nam service dogs. Due to the public outcry, the US Military pledged never to dispose of military working dogs in such a manner again.

But military dogs were still rewarded with a cruel death once they slowed down with age. The public interest prompted congress to write a law

Military Dogs in PACAF

changing their retirement prospects from a drug induced death to a honorable retirement. In November, 2000, President Clinton signed a bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to facilitate the adoption of retired military working dogs by law enforcement agencies, former handlers of these dogs, and other persons capable of caring for these dogs.

Now the dogs will have a chance to live out their lives if qualified people will adopt them. The key phrase is "qualified people". This is a good chance for ex dog handlers to help. The dogs must go to responsible owners willing to accept the liability that will accompany the dog. The new owner will also be responsible for the medical care of the dog.

As much as we loved the dogs and the military depended upon them, we all let them down in the end. The dogs paid the ultimate price with their lives, despite their loyalties and the protection they provided. Other SEA veterans returned to society or furthered their careers. The dogs were treated as unusable, excess military items. As Vietnam bases closed, dogs were either turned over to the Vietnamese military, shipped to other PACAF bases, or were euthanized. As Thailand bases were later closed, a few dogs were shipped to other bases or the PACAF Dog School. SSgt John Grammer, a former handler TDY to the Korat AB closing, reported that up to 6 dogs a day were euthanized.

Death of a Warrior

By SSGT Cathy Moore, Instructor PACAF Military Working Dog Training Center, Kadena Air Base, Japan

Every time a military dog was euthanized (or "put to sleep," as was the common vernacular), it was a somber experience. The dog was taken out of his kennel for his last walk. The assigned handler usually came in early to give him one last good romp—one last, long do-anything-you-want-Big-Dog stroll. It was normal for his handler to want him to have a last few happy moments since he was kenneled most of his life. They lingered on that walk back, though. The dog was groomed one last time to look his best; then fed a good treat by his stoic but caring handler/partner. And, he was finally permitted one last good WOOF on the military brass as he was casually walked by one of their assigned vehicles. He "saluted" his own tribute to his undignified end before he entered the vet clinic the last time.

Long ago, the dog learned that different locations where he was muzzled meant either a brief inconvenience to be transported on a posting truck or another visit that developed into the associative fear engrained by painful experiences at the vet clinic. (Years later, the former would be known as

Military Dogs in PACAF

“equipment association” and the latter as “avoidance behavior”). He growled and carried on; he even bared his teeth as he was muzzled. He had become keenly alert as he entered the exam room and was lifted onto the table. He anticipated a new pain, another violation of his flesh and his proud, fierce demeanor. He fought; he struggled valiantly.

The vet came around to the business at hand with the infamous “green needle” which got its name due to the lethal drug’s color. The dog was forced to lie down on the table, all the while he struggled against his partner. The dog thought of another tactic—gave his handler that poor-little-puppy-dog look meant to free him—an invitation, a promise that he would behave if taken out of that place. NOW! The vet tech and vet worked in tandem to find a good vein one last time.

He fought; he growled. Then, the needle was inserted; the syringe’s plunger was gradually depressed until all the deadly, cool green liquid was gone. Then slowly, slowly the dog became groggy, fighting the last long sleep as the deadly drug crept through his system. Although he fought less, his partner cradled him and held him closer, as one would a sleepy child. He stirred less and less, as though he was a seemingly recalcitrant toddler who yawned and muttered he didn’t want to go “night-night” just at the last precious moment, not just yet. WAIT! The last mid-breath protest fell silent as all motion ceased. His breathing became shallower still and finally, one last exhale. All done, all gone, all...DEAD. The vet checked his vital signs and annotated a death pronouncement as the final entry on his records. Then came the final insult—the necropsy. All military working dogs were autopsied upon death in accordance with regulations.

Kennel attendants and/or handlers bore this warrior to his final, pre-dug resting place in the K-9 cemetery. A marker with his name and brand number witnessed this last indignity. Aligned with the other stark ones, row upon row, it bore silent testament to the military solution of disposal, his life.

Years ago before his time, it had been said that the coward died many deaths; however, the valiant died but once. Thus, that axiom became his legacy to haunt our thoughts all these years later.

In recent years, a public outcry resulted in a change of policy. First, the US Military pledged never to dispose of military working dogs in such a manner again. Then a change in the law occurred. Now military dogs can be adopted after their service is completed.

Military Dogs in PACAF



We will always remember them!

Reference A: Air Base Defense in the Republic of Vietnam 1961-1973 written by Lt. Col. Roger P. Fox, USAF (Ret.), while assigned to the Office of Air Force History. He brought judgments to his research based on his personal experience as a base security officer during the conflict. Thus, early on the morning of 4 December 1966, he rallied Air Force and South Vietnamese security forces to repel an enemy attempt to penetrate Tan Son Nhut Air Base, the center of Air Force operations in South Vietnam. For his gallantry in action on this occasion, he was awarded the Silver Star.