

The Last Sentry Dog

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There has been some discussion as to when the last sentry dogs were trained. It was my privilege to be one of the handful of AF dog school instructors to teach sentry dog classes after the military conversion to patrol dogs.

Sentry dogs guarded nuclear weapon storage areas and/or uploaded bomber aircraft at SAC bases. These bases were noted for their far northern latitudes and cold climate at bases such as Ellsworth AFB, SD; Minot AFB, ND; Loring AFB, ME; Plattsburgh AFB, NY, etc. With the end of the Cold War, many of the bases are only memories. Patrol dogs were assigned to bases that had never needed sentry dog sections due to different missions and assets. For example, Keesler AFB, MS (home to the electronic tech schools) had two patrol dogs and two narcotic detector dogs. In early 1976, it received a Miniature Schnauzer explosive detector dog from Lackland's ill-fated small dog program. Fritz was an aggressive big dog trapped in a small dog's body. He would bite an ankle on command and release on command. It was great for demos. The small dogs were returned to Lackland for disposition at the end of their program. I often wonder if they met the same fate of far too many Vietnam sentry dogs.

When I arrived at the dog school in late 1971, I was promptly assigned to the sentry dog course. I was only Sentry Dog Qualified from an OJT course taught at Da Nang AB, RVN, by the kennelmaster, SSgt Carl Wolfe. I had only seen one patrol dog in Viet Nam. The classes were small and usually

The Last Sentry Dog

had only one instructor. My first class was with an Army E-6 instructor named Jim Webb. Other Army instructors were E-6's Clyde Morgan, and Henry Yates. A few of the other AF instructors were Jim McIlwain, Jon Kidwell, and Donald Parkinson. Lackland utilized an apprentice type training system for first time instructors assigned to the school. After a few classes and my first instructor evaluation, I was given a class to teach alone. I fell into my element.

I loved the classes and the Army students. It was the latter years of US military involvement in Vietnam. Army students removed from technical schools were automatically reclassified as infantry and given rush orders to Viet Nam. No MP dog school students were in a rush to do that. So we had absolutely no disciplinary problems. For a young AF NCO, I could teach without having to deal with any problem children. The Army policy of promoting the honor graduate of every class was also a big incentive for students to work hard. Conversely, patrol dog instructors worked as part of a instructor team and were supervised by the Team Leader. All of the team leaders were experienced TSgt's or Army SFC's.

In the early 70's, the Army returned many sentry dogs to Lackland for retraining as the missile batteries were closed. The Army had located Nike sites containing ground to air anti-aircraft missiles that ringed major US cities. Sites were located on the outskirts in rural areas and were protected at night by sentry dog teams.

I know from personal observation that Washington DC had at least two sites. One was located in Waldorf, MD and another site was east of Upper Marlboro, MD, near the Patuxent River. When the Waldorf site closed, its base housing came under the authority of Andrews AFB, MD. The upper Marlboro site became a HUD housing project. Ellsworth AFB, SD, also had several missile batteries.

The returning sentry dogs had three "career" paths.

1. Young sentry dogs were retrained as patrol dogs and shipped out.
2. Older dogs nearing the end of their useful life were used as training aids for either a patrol or a sentry dog class.
3. Dogs unable to be shipped or used as training aids were euthanized. That sounds so much nicer than killed.

At that time all classes spent the first few weeks in the temporary kennel area before moving into the permanent kennel area. Dogs were chained to the fence using a heavy leather collar and a special chain that included a swivel. The dog had a heavy aluminum shipping crate for shelter. A strip

The Last Sentry Dog

of target cloth nailed to a wood frame provided shade. It was safer for an inexperienced student handler to enter and leave the dog's kennel because there was no gate to open and close. After the relationship had developed, the classes were moved to the permanent kennels. It was then safe to use the standard dog kennel with an attached house.

Sentry dog students were rarely bitten by another handler's dog. The most dangerous time occurred during an off-leash attack. The critical time was when the dog first sensed the presence of a human approaching from its rear. It was a simple case of "my bad guy, don't interrupt my bite." The dog would show his displeasure by biting the hand that was picking up his leash and interfering with pleasure of biting. Usually the dog would release his bite after he realized that it was his handler, but not always... by that time the handler probably had several punctures on his arm, hand or other body parts.

Patrol dog students received a higher percentage of dog bites than sentry dog students due to discontinued use of the sentry dog suit. Patrol dog students usually were bitten while decoying during attack training. At that time all attack gear was homemade. The Federal stock numbers were for large padded attack sleeves and sentry dog suits. Patrol dog attack gear consisted of ace bandages and fire hose scrounged from the vet and the fire department, and canvas target cloth. The parachute shop on base was a great place to have attack gear (called wraps) sewn. Since Lackland had no parachute shops, our wraps were really crude. Elastic bandages were wrapped around the arm then a layer of light cloth (called target cloth) or heavier canvas was added. Students always had bruises after catching a few dogs.

The patrol dog was required to bite and hold, but not bite any specific part of the body. The decoy's job was to present the protected arm and not allow the dog to bite any other part of his unprotected body. If the decoy did not do his job properly, oh well! We did have free medical care. During this time, the hospital gained a lot of experience in treating dog bites.

Patrol dog students were in awe of the stories of the aggressive nature of sentry dogs. Some of the dogs were truly famous.

- King #M000 was a large beautiful brown & black shepherd. An NCO from DOD Dog Center (I think Joe Balboa) pointed him out to me. It was with respect as if we were watching the heavy weight champion of the world. He was famous for his aggression. King arrived at Lackland from Fort Carson, CO and was assigned to five (5) patrol dog classes between Feb 1973 and Jan 74. He was shipped to Homestead AFB, FL.

The Last Sentry Dog

Marty Jones (Kennelmaster) told me that King would take his chow bowl to the back of the kennel and dare you to come in. Marty also told me that they had a long stick (complete with bite marks) used to retrieve it. He was euthanized on March 3, 1976, for medical complications.

- Satan Unknown #: He never completed a patrol dog class. Every time stand-off was introduced, Satan just quit biting. So he would go back to sentry dogs as a training aid. He was a small, scrawny-looking silver and black shepherd with a heavy gray muzzle. He looked like he had been the runt of the litter. In the temporary kennels, he would sit at the end of his kennel chain with his back to the center aisle. He'd growl over his shoulder at everyone who walked down the center. New classes would come down to see the infamous Satan. Satan would sit there at the end of his kennel chains and growl at the tourists. Instructors would tell the students not to pet him, but some foolhardy kid would always try. The student would squat at the edge of the Satan's kennel and reach out to pet the dog's back. Satan would look over his shoulder and with a low growl slowly take a little step forward. A few pats later, he'd have some slack in the chain. This kept up and ended in one of two ways—Satan either had enough slack in his kennel channel and nailed the offending arm or the student would decide that he had tempted fate enough and stopped petting Satan. At that point, Satan would turn around and throw slobber on the offender with a snap of his jaw.
- Sebastian, Unknown Brand #: Sebastian was as large brown and tan dog with hound dog ears. He had about as much German Shepherd in him as you or I do. He was just plain mean. He did not like anybody telling him to stop taking a bite. I had him in a sentry dog class, handled by an Army student named Larry Dixon. And yes, Larry was bitten on the hand while choking Sebastian off of a decoy.

At the time of my arrival, a sentry dog class graduated every Friday and a new class started every Monday. By mid-73, the class schedule changed to reflect the Vietnam draw down and the Nike site closures. Instead of starting every Monday, there might be a gap of several weeks before a sentry dog class started. This gave me a chance to work with several patrol dog teams and learn from such accomplished dog trainers as TSgts Robert Leek, David Robinson, Carl Wolf (my kennelmaster from Da Nang), and my last team

The Last Sentry Dog

leader, Donald Bizic. Then after a class or two, I would return to teach a sentry dog class. I was given a patrol dog diploma after teaching several patrol dog classes-- military logic!

I started teaching my sentry dog classes some of the things that I learned in patrol dog classes. My sentry dogs knew how to search buildings. There were some buildings on sentry dog posts, so it made sense! I used patrol dog attack gear so that the dogs were not looking for someone wearing a big suit. Whenever possible, I planned long scouting problems down the middle of the creek than ran through the sentry dog area. The dual purpose was to teach handlers to move silently through water and in the Texas heat, handlers & dogs loved it to cool off.

Towards the end of my time in the sentry dog course, I received a special opportunity. CMSgt Robert Riley, the sentry dog course chief and later head of the PACAF dog school, arranged for me to work with a retiring patrol dog team chief. Patrol dog teams were almost secretive about their techniques used to train problem dogs. CMSgt Riley told me to learn as much as I could from TSgt Ed Marcinko. Ed had spent over 12 years at Lackland and forgot more about dogs than most trainers ever knew. Ed had the nickname Rocky. The name was earned by youthful behavior of some fame among older dog handlers. He never told me how that nickname came about.

The very first thing he taught me was that dogs never exhibited a behavior without a reason. It may be very difficult to find the reason, but it was there. As strong a motivator as food reward was, Ed looked upon it with distaste. He felt it was a poor substitute for a strong relationship between the handler and dog. He thought that the quick use of food was only good for clown dogs. He used that phrase to describe circus dogs that licked their lips after each trick.

But, food reward did have usefulness. The normal theory was that gun-shy dogs were un-trainable. Ed said that was not true. Food reward could be used to teach a dog to ignore gunfire. At his request, the kennel support staff would reduce a gun-shy dog's rations by half. We had gunfire training every day. The whole class bought in bacon scraps from the chow hall. The handler would get the hungry dog's attention with a piece of god old greasy bacon. At a signal, someone would fire one blank round in the distance. At that moment the dog was wrapping it's hungry lips around food and had the choice to eat or be scared of gunfire. We started at a distance of 100 yards and decreased the distance every day. I used it several times, it worked!

Another Marcinko method for gun green dogs was using two thirty foot leashes to keep a dog swimming in the center of a pond. The dog could

The Last Sentry Dog

either swim or worry about the gunfire. The key was to take the dog's mind off the gunfire and gradually reduce the distance between the gunfire and the dog. Ed used that as a last resort if food reward failed. I never had to use that technique but the theory sound good.

Ed taught convection in building search and scouting for years before it became accepted. Convection is the heating of scent particles that rise and travel a distance before sinking as they cool. He also felt that chase was the best confidence builder for a under aggressive dog to enhance its prey-kill instinct. After weeks of chases, one day the decoy would stop and place the wrap in the dog's mouth. The handler would immediately apply lavish praise for the dog's actions. He would instill in decoys the need to never cause a dog pain during attack training and always allow the dog to win.

I learned more from Ed Marcinko in eight weeks than in the rest of my time at Lackland. He taught me that understanding animal behavior was important. I wonder what he would say at the current trend to use a play toy for reward for basic obedience. I was surprised to see that. Has a decoy ever thrown balls at the dog during an off-leash bite? I have seen dogs pick up an attack sleeve and carry it around instead of biting a decoy. Will a toy trained dog do the same? Seems highly likely...

My next few sentry dog classes were a complete blast. Working alone gave me the chance to teach what I thought my handlers should know. My sentry dogs were used to biting small concealed wraps. The big heavy sentry dog suit was brought out so that young dogs would not be surprised by its bulkiness for class evaluations. My dogs always came out on command. It was safer for the handler, but like a bullet, they could not be called back. The last class that I taught was in 1973 or early 74. A Marine in the class went to the Mediterranean area and the Army students went to Korea. The retrained Army sentry dog Sunny mentioned later in this article was in that class.

Do you know that dogs exhibit some of the same behavior patterns as wild dogs of Africa, Australia, and American wolves? When a canine is approached by an alpha male or female, it will lower its ears, tail, and cower for a split second. This shows submission. A dog will exhibit the same behavior to its handler. Watch your own dog!

I first saw the behavior on a National Geographic Special on wild dogs of Africa. The next day, I noticed a class of sentry dogs exhibit the same behavior at the approach of their handlers. After that, I used that to judge when it was safe for a handler to enter a cage. Every now and then, a dog

The Last Sentry Dog

would not show the behavior until the handler was actually inside the kennel. That required a leap of faith from the handler.

In my time, I did run into a few dogs that were prone to attack their own handler. I was puzzled by a few cases where the dog would seem to just turn around and "nail" their handler for no reason. No commands given, no warning growl, just a quick bite. I wonder if those dogs ever showed the submissive behavior or were they true "Alpha" males. A patrol dog named Hasso (Clark Air Base, Republic of the Philippines) comes to mind.

I had untrained or green dogs in a sentry dog class only once. That class was scheduled to ship to Korea with their dogs. Every other class had a few dogs that were failures from patrol dog classes. Some dogs would be under aggressive, refusing to bite. A few would be old sentry dogs, too old to ship, but still healthy enough to be training aids. And there were always the dogs considered too aggressive to be patrol dogs.

Normal theory was to introduce attack work almost immediately after a few days of agitation. On known weak or "no biters", I used several weeks of chases. The killer dog was able to woof at the bad guy and the decoy ran away in mortal fear. Then the handler gave the dog lavish praise. Days later, the decoy would suddenly stop and place the protected arm in the dog's mouth. It was common for the dog to release the bite and look at the handler for approval, sometimes with a confused look on their face that seemed to say, "I can bite a human!" Usually, when shown that the behavior was okay, each bite would subsequently be stronger, harder, and longer.

Some dogs would be overaggressive, fail to release on command, and/or attempt to bite their own handler. In those cases, harsh or creative corrections techniques were used. The key was timing. A water balloon upside the head when the dog heard its handler yelling "No!", was a very effective surprise correction. Another good thrown aid was an aluminum soda can filled with noisy nuts and bolts and taped shut. An accurate hit on the side did not hurt, but made a lot of noise. The key was the proper timing of both the physical and verbal corrections. Initially a kennel chain was connected to a tree. The handler could step outside the marked circle if the dog was prone to attack for "interfering" with a bite. It seemed strange telling the decoy to step inside the circle to get bit and for the handler to step outside before commanding the dog to release. But it worked. Gradually, the same method would be worked with a 360 inch leash.

The official AF answer was to kill any dog that was entered into training and failed to qualify after a suitable number of classes. Nothing was as bad as

The Last Sentry Dog

knowing that you were dog's last chance. The sentry dog classes were the last refuge for some dogs. Make it or else; do or die! Towards the end of the sentry dog era, only a few Army instructors were left. Classes were taught as needed. Army instructor E-6 Clyde Morgan went from teaching sentry classes to becoming a patrol dog team chief. He joined E-6's Terry Bennet and Roberts as patrol dog team chiefs.

I did get in trouble at Lackland. I had started calling patrol dogs "Puppy Dogs". There was no disrespect, only stating the facts that the PD classes had young untrained dogs, and sentry dogs were often old, gray-muzzled dogs. Many times I felt that a decoy might be able to outrun a dog. However, heaven help him if he fell. A pass-on was soon read from the back office that the term "Puppy Dogs" would not be used to describe patrol dogs. After that I really made it a point to call them Puppy Dogs and refer to sentry dogs as "big dogs".

The majority of the patrol dog teams in the early 70s felt that the best patrol dogs were ex-sentry dogs. Most ex-sentry dogs when "broken" down into patrol dogs usually maintained a better bite. Young untrained dogs were first taught that they could bite humans, and then within a week started receiving corrections when introduced to controlled aggression to come out on command. After this training segment, the amount of pressure exerted during a bite would actually decrease on many dogs. During the PACAF Security Police Conference (1977 or 1976), there was some discussion about the need for sentry dogs in the PACAF area. CMSgt Robert Riley, Superintendent, PACAF Military Working Dog Training Center, Kadena AB, Japan, mentioned this to me. His comment was that at first he had been a supporter of that, but after some thought he realized that patrol dogs had been responsible for the growth of the USAF dog program.

Patrol dogs in PACAF (even after Viet Nam) were closer to sentry dogs than stateside patrol dogs. Even drug detector dogs at Clark AB, RP were "overaggressive" by AF standards. My first day as NCOIC of Clarks drug detector dog section, I was bitten by one of the drug dogs. SSgt John Probst (now Colonel Probst, the last former Clark handler on active duty!) was the day flight chief. He was showing me the security procedures for the departure of a Flying Tigers DC-8 passenger aircraft. As I entered the front passenger seat of the section's crew cab Dodge Power Wagon, a dog in the back seat reached over and bit my left arm when I rested it on the seat back. Such was my introduction to "tolerant" PACAF drug detector dogs. It was not a bite and hold situation, just a snap to remind me that the truck was "his truck" and I was an intruder. Coming in from Stateside, I wanted all the dogs to meet the controlled aggression requirements and conducted the training myself.

The Last Sentry Dog

Within a few months, the patrol dogs of Clark were in the midst of a diplomatic incident. Theft of property had always been a major problem on Clark. Even trash was valuable. The kennels had a carpenter paid with empty dog food buckets. The Security Police Group had a whole village that was paid by giving them access to the base dump. They cut the grass among the perimeter with machetes by hand. An intruder was severely bitten by a patrol dog named Sun. President Carter had been exerting pressure on Ferdinand Marcos, the dictator of the Philippines Islands over his poor human rights record. The bite gave the Filipino government a chance to throw stones at the US.

The theft problem on Clark was almost uncontrollable. For example, when the Manila airport was being expanded, three patrol dog teams were used at night to protect the runway and taxiway lights from theft. A base fire truck was stolen, driven to Manila, and sold to the airport. The Manila airport happily bought items that could only have come from Clark Air Base. Underground electrical and communication cables even had to be guarded.

The embassy started asking questions about the dogs and demanded to see Sun. Manila newspapers ran stories about the nasty dogs tearing up poor Filipinos for stealing garbage from the wealthy base. The kennelmaster replied with a CYA letter that stated that he had just become aware that some dogs might be overaggressive. He also quoted the AF regulation calling for euthanasia of overaggressive dogs.

My drug dogs were okay, so I volunteered to help the training section with problem patrol dogs. I soon found myself dealing with some real dogs. Harsh corrections failed on some of the dogs. I had thought for some time about electric shock for corrections. The timing for a correction is critical. The correction must be applied while the improper behavior is in progress. If it is applied after the behavior has stopped the dog will not associate the correction with disobedience. I approached the kennelmaster MSgt Billy Owens with the thought of using a shock collar. The kennelmaster gave me his blessings if the vet approved. I knew the vet from Lackland. He was not anxious to kill dogs for doing what they had been trained to do, so he gave me his okay. His only request was that I had to use it on myself first.

The electronic shop on base that repaired all test equipment (PMEL) made me a simple transformer that could be upped from 6 volts DC to about 50,000 volts. They insisted that it did not have enough amperage to kill. With me holding the leads and someone hitting the switch, it resulted in what could best be described as a religious experience. The parachute shop made me a 30 foot nylon leash with a flexible coax cable running down the center. They also mounted two brass electrodes on a leather collar. I

The Last Sentry Dog

demonstrated it on myself to the base veterinarian and the kennelmaster and received their blessings. Resources Protection, "C" Flight handler, SrA Paul Newman, chalked a cartoon of a dog seated in a electric chair being shocked by yours truly in the kennels break room and gave me the nickname "Dr. Frankendog."

I started working on the patrol dogs. The purpose was to apply an "electrical" correction after the dog heard the verbal correction "No!" from the handler. It was like God reached out and touched the dog. Where earlier the dog had ignored its handler, now the dog would spit out the decoy out. A few runs and I would have to repair electrical connections. Within a few weeks, I had worked with most of the really hardheaded dogs. Until then, some dogs never would do a standoff. Physical corrections were ignored; the dog would just close its eyes and bite harder.

After a few months, diplomatic pressure seemed to be relaxing towards the base. I told the kennelmaster that the dogs were okay. He seemed more than happy to "play along". No dogs were killed to meet AF regulations. The collar worked, but was not rugged enough to handle the impact. The electrical connections were the weak link. Sadly, the helpful Superintendent of the PMEL lab was killed several months after his shop helped me. He was stabbed during a nighttime robbery attempt in his home.

We also lost a dog handler at Clark to armed Filipinos. SRA Bob Gray was stabbed to death. His dog Casey was shot with Bob's revolver that one of perpetrators had taken after Bob was stabbed and incapacitated. Filipino thieves used knives because under martial law, guns resulted in instant jailing with long sentences. Thus, Casey was shot rather than Bob. It was never a question of harmless thieves at Clark.

Years later Louis (Robby) Robillard, told me of his experience while attending the Supervisors course at Lackland. He witnessed a "new" training technique with a remote control shock collar at Lackland. He didn't tell them of my collar used years before at Clark where he was C Flight Chief.

The very last sentry dogs handled by USAF Security Police handlers occurred over 10 years after the conversion to patrol dogs. At Osan AB, Korea in May-June 1980. SSgt Cathy Moore, Instructor, PACAF MWDTC, (also my wife) and I were TDY to Osan teaching a drug detector class. TDY funds were tight for the units and it was cheaper to pay our TDY to Korea than the TDY costs for a whole class to Kadena AB, Japan. We had one student from Taegu AB, and several from Kunsan, Kwan-Ju, and Osan air bases.

The Last Sentry Dog

Several days into the course, I was asked to return early to the kennels by the Kennelmaster Robert Smith. In the kennel area two Army trucks stacked full of dog shipping crates. An Army Hawk site was being closed down. The dogs were declared excess and were being shipped to an Army veterinarian for euthanasia. With no further need for them, neither the Army nor the Korean forces wanted the dogs. The Army would not ship the dogs back to Lackland. The handlers on the truck would give the dogs to anyone willing to sign a hand receipt. They did not want to see their dogs killed. The kennelmaster could not sign the hand receipt for dogs that the Army no longer used.

However, as NCOIC of the PACAF MWDTC, I could change the Federal Stock Numbers on the dogs from Sentry to Patrol dogs. I had recognized one dog on sight-- Sunny had been in my last sentry dog class and had shipped to Korea with his handler. One dog was 2 years old and had been in country less than three months. I did not have time to ask permission from DOD or anyone else. The Army handlers needed to leave for Seoul to get there before curfew. I reviewed the health records and decided to retrain most of the dogs. Our drug dog students volunteered to work their drug dogs in the morning and work the sentry dogs in the afternoon. I assigned dogs to handlers based on their assigned bases' dog shortages. One SrA in the class held the distinction to be the first AF female handler to be assigned a sentry dog. Sunny still came out on command. We did attack work and I soon had all of the dogs releasing on command.

Standoff was iffy on some of the dogs, but the kennelmasters could work on that. Many other "patrol dogs" in PACAF had shared that trait. The dogs were used to fill slots in Korea that had been open for years. Every AF base in Korea (except Taegu) received a few patrol dogs. The Chief of Security Police for PACAF was on a tour of Korea. I had a chance to brief him on the dogs and obtained his blessings. He was happy to hear that I had filled long open requests (called MILSTRIPS in AF speak). Since, the school "worked" for HQ PACAF, we were okay. Later, when the school was converted to a ATC field training detachment, I was told that we would no longer do "things" like that

It has been 20+ years since I retired from the AF. I have observed a few dog demonstrations at reunions. Attack wraps have evolved in size. They are now bigger and harder to hide under clothes. The bulky sentry dog attack suit was never used for patrol dog attack training. But now a tight leather suit is used. It appeared to me that the dogs were being trained to look for scuba divers in wet suits. The toy (mentioned earlier) being used as a reward for obedience, would cause some old time dog trainers to shudder. Some of the early drug dog instructors felt that the ball reward was crutch.

The Last Sentry Dog

If a handler could grab a ball and throw it the dog would get a reward. The end of sentry dogs was the birth of patrol, drug detector, and explosive detector dogs. But sentry dogs will always be "big dogs" to me.



**Duke 759E was one of the first dogs in Vietnam.
His last handler was Bob Hubbard, 1970-71
Photo Courtesy of Bob Hubbard**