



# Medical Care for Military Dogs in SEA.

Military dogs have always received the best possible medical care available. Their treatment was far better than what military medicine supplied to their handlers. Each base in Vet Nam had a veterinarian and a veterinarian technician assigned. The dogs received frequent physicals and periodic teeth cleaning. The vet was always available for emergency treatment. In the early days (at the new bases in SEA) they worked under primitive conditions. Early clinics were tents until permanent structures were erected.



Photo Above: Sick Call (1965) at Da Nang AB Air Base,  
Republic of Vietnam. Handler: Phil Norwich

For special procedures such as X-rays, the dogs would be sedated and carried into the military hospitals. At Da Nang AB Air Base, we would sneak the dogs in the back door of the clinic. The Air Force would eventually have surgeons or even dentists assist the base veterinarian with dogs that had special medical problems. In the early days of Veterinary Dentistry, this was often accomplished without official approval.

The base veterinarians had a special relationship with their canine patients. The base veterinarian was responsible to the military base commander (not the Security Police Squadron Commander) to ensure that the dogs were healthy and not harmed by working conditions. It was common for a base veterinarian to order that *his dogs* not be exposed to certain post conditions. In the case of dogs assigned to bases in cold climates (North Dakota, Maine, etc) if it was too cold, the dogs were not allowed outside. In those cases, the handlers left their dogs in the kennels and went out on post without them. There was no one to speak up on their behalf.

At Da Nang in 1969, monsoon rains flooded most of the dog post in the swampy, snake infested, perimeter areas. The base veterinarian ordered that his dogs were to stay in the kennel that night. He would not have his dogs wading or swimming thru high water all night.

*"NO, MY DOGS ARE NOT GOING TO SWIM IN THAT POLLUTED SWAMP WATER!"*

So I spent the most miserable night on post that I can remember. Without our dogs, we waded through water as high as our waist, crawled on top of our little K-9 bunkers, and listened to splashing all night long. We could only imagine all the cobras, kraits, and bamboo vipers searching for the high ground that we were occupying. We were all happy when the water drained away the next day. We would not be alone on post the next night. Our best friend would be with us.

Most handlers also had a good relationship with their base veterinarian. Base veterinarians also inspected the military dining halls and the food serving areas of the clubs on base. They were often able to assist in the "donation" of food for section parties. I remember one party with grilled steaks at Da Nang AB courtesy of our vet. At Phu Cat Air Base (1969-70), the base veterinarian would often ride at night with the K-9 Flight Chief (Shift Supervisor). The kennels would allow him to carry one of our GAU's (submachine version of the M-16, with a shorter, heavier barrel for sustained firing, and a collapsible stock). He would always carry a medical kit. He always seemed concerned about the health of both the handlers and dogs. When a handler and dog were killed in a relief truck accident (Early 1970), he reached the scene on the perimeter before the ambulance arrived and provided first aid to the handlers. Handlers from other bases have told me similar stories about their veterinarian.

The DOD Dog Center at Lackland AFB, TX the Air Force has a fully equipped hospital for the dogs. In the early 70's, the clinic staff provided medical care for over 600 dogs at a time at the DOD Dog Center and approximately 200 dogs in training at the Medina Complex. At that time, the veterinarians at the DOD Dog Center, Lackland AFB, TX, consisted of a Colonel, a Major, and several Captains. Colonel Paul Husted (Detachment Commander) was famous for his love of military dogs, his medical expertise, and his absolute lack of fear around aggressive dogs. Although he had a full staff of experienced veterinarians assigned to him, he always treated the dogs with special or rare ailments.

On weekends (when the main clinic was closed), he would often appear at the hospital. He would give a list of dogs for the kennel attendant to bring in for examination. The Center had a small group of highly experienced handlers that transferred dogs between kennels and took dogs to vet appointments. However they never worked on weekends. The weekend kennel attendants were never happy to see him, knowing that he would give them a list of dogs to bring in to the clinic. Instead of having a quiet Saturday, they had dogs to bring into the clinic. Some dogs would be easy to bring in, some would not. There was always the danger of getting bit. No dog liked a trip to the vet.

When his *special dogs* were in training at the Medina Annex, he would come out to the Medina clinic and hold sick call. He would treat very aggressive dogs without absolutely no regard for his own personal safety. I witnessed him start to take the muzzle off a sentry dog. The dog was on the exam table, and growling. I cautioned him, "This is a sentry dog". He continued to unloosen the straps holding the muzzle in place. I repeated my warning, but added "Colonel, that is a bad dog". He continued to unloosen the straps. As I stepped back, I repeated "Colonel, that is a really bad dog". He finally rebuked me with a stern comment. I moved away from the table, expecting to see a Colonel get bit by the dog. The dog stopped growling after the uncomfortable muzzle was removed and stood still like a friendly puppy. Anyone else touching him would have been torn apart.

The dog school located in the Pacific (PACAF Military Working Dog Training Center, Kadena Air Base, Japan) had its share of good veterinarians also. In the late 70's, Captain Gary Farwell provided excellent medical care not only for the military dogs but also the pigs raised on leftover dog food. The pigs were used for the two or more pig roasts held at the school every year. The cookouts were also attended by Dr Farwell and his veterinary technician. Prior to his completing vet school and commissioning as an Air Force Officer, Captain Farwell had been an enlisted sailor on a nuclear submarine. He wore his Dolphins with pride, even on his hospital scrubs. Dr. Farwell had entered the Air Force, after completing medical school, because the US Navy did not have veterinarians.

In the early 1980's the Air Force made major manpower changes. The USAF veterinarians were phased out and replaced by US Army personnel. The veterinarians were offered the choice of transferring to the US Army or retiring if they were eligible. The veterinarian assigned to Andrews AFB, Maryland (a Lt. Colonel) was replaced with a US Army Captain. I assume that the veterinarian technicians were retrained to other career fields. If so, this was a loss. The vet techs. loved the dogs as much as we did.



Photo Above: Teeth Cleaning for Boots 645M  
Maj. (Doctor) Frank C Fraunfelter (right), Korat RTAFB Chief of  
Veterinary Services and handler A1C John M. Homa (left)

USAF Photo by SSgt Carl Bailey, 601st Photo Flight  
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Above Photo: Dr. Clothier (another veterinarian at Korat RTAFB) is treating Rex 7198. Rex had a hematoma in the right ear, which could result in a floppy ear.

Photo Courtesy of David Adams





Captain James Dale (Veterinarian) & MWD Tarzan



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