

Chapter 2

MILITARY WORKING DOG HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

History books recount stories of dogs accompanying ancient armies, serving as sources of companionship and performing valuable sentry duties. Dogs also fought in battle alongside their owners. Over time, however, the role of canines as war dogs diminished, especially after firearms became part of commanders' arsenals. By the 1800s and up until the early 1900s, the horse rose to prominence as the most important military animal; at this time, barring some guard duties, dogs were relegated mostly to the role of mascots. It was not until World War II that the US Army adopted broader roles for its canine service members—uses

which grew and changed with subsequent US wars. Currently, US forces utilize military working dogs (MWDs) in a variety of professions such as security, law enforcement, combat tracking, and detection (ie, for explosives and narcotics). Considered an essential team member, an MWD was even included in the successful raid against Osama Bin Laden in 2011.¹ (See also Chapter 3, Military Working Dog Procurement, Veterinary Care, and Behavioral Services for more information about the historic transformation of the MWD program and the military services available for canines.)

COLONIAL AMERICA AND THE CIVIL WAR

Early American Army dogs were privately owned at first; there was neither a procurement system to secure canines for the military, nor a great desire to increase their numbers. Even though George Washington adored dogs, he did not see a need to use them in battle.² Still, dogs infrequently followed their owners to war during the American Revolution and other frontier conflicts.³ On the rare occasions when dogs accompanied their owners' units, these animals sometimes performed sentry duty; however, standardization for training, care, or use in performing military-related tasks did not exist. Instead, these dogs were mostly kept as personal pets or unit mascots. (The practice of soldiers and units maintaining mascots or keeping animals on the battlefields extended throughout America's early conflicts [Figure 2-1] and, to a small degree, continues today; see also Chapter 12, Rabies and Continued Military Concerns.)

The minor role of canines working in the US mili-

tary continued throughout the next century and into the American Civil War. With the advent of field (mobile) artillery and these weapons' transportation requirements, horses far exceeded dogs in terms of military importance. In fact, because of their significance to the 19th century premechanized Army, horses and mules were the only US government-owned animals. Horse and mule procurement programs also were developed, and new soldier specialties and tasks were created to provide care and maintenance for military working horses and mules (eg, cavalry duties). (None of these newly developed soldier tasks were conducted by licensed animal doctors, however. At this time, there were no accredited veterinary colleges in America. See Chapter 1, Military Veterinary Support Before and After 1916, for more information about the development of the US Veterinary Corps and the growth of its groups of specially trained animal care providers.)

WORLD WAR I

When the United States entered World War I in April 1917, the American army still had no official military dog program, even though other armies had organized canine programs in place before the war began in 1914. Germany, in particular, devoted a fair amount of resources to its canine war efforts, initially bringing 6,000 dogs with its army as it advanced on the Western Front. Britain, France, and Italy followed suit, gathering thousands of dogs for their armies, looking for similar advantages on the battlefield.⁴(p949)

As years of war in Europe depleted the continent's horses, dogs also were used to move small wagons, carts, and supplies. Belgium, its horse population particularly ravaged by the war, used dogs in many sectors of civilian life as well. At this time, dogs were

deemed of such importance that canine gas masks and chemical protective suits were developed by both the Allies and Central Powers (Figure 2-2).⁴(p950)

Studying the British and French army models, leaders of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF; the name given to the US armed forces sent to Europe to aid the Allies in World War I) also saw some potential for using canines, but recommended plans, including placing these animals under the control of the Army Medical Department, were not employed.⁵(pp22-24) Unofficially, local commanders and soldiers procured a few dogs from local French sources for limited service.⁶ While some breeds were better suited for their appointed duties than others, at this time, breed was not as an important a criterion for selection as intelligence and loyalty.⁷



Figure 2-1. American soldiers attempt to put one of their gas masks on Taps, their pet terrier (1918). Photo courtesy of the US Army Chemical Corps Museum, Ft Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Some of the selected canines served as sentries to detect nighttime incursions in the trenches and as couriers for transporting messages. Though not officially in the Army's inventory, Red Cross dogs or "mercy dogs" assisted in locating the wounded.⁶ But the majority of AEF dogs still served mainly as mascots and pets; in fact, despite many stories of canine heroics (eg, fighting the enemy or delivering vital messages), overall dog use by the AEF was minimal and always unofficial.^{4(p949)}

At the close of the Great War, the state of animal use by armies was in flux. As previously mentioned, horses were scarce in Europe; mule populations also were decimated. Although remount stations of the US Veterinary Corps kept significant numbers of these animals in service during the last year of the war, their decline was inevitable and coincided with the growing production of motorized transport. While pigeons remained in military inventories and would be used as messengers in the next war, these birds were being outpaced by technology too.

WORLD WAR II

World War II marked the beginning of real change in the use of US military dogs. Since America was committed to total war on many fronts during this time, dogs gradually were viewed as more than just mascots or pets; they began to be seen as another means to save vital manpower. In the current Army lexicon, they became "force multipliers."



Figure 2-2. German-produced canine gas protection suit and mask (1941). Photo courtesy of the US Army Chemical Corps Museum, Ft Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Despite their small role during World War I, canines received significant praise and attention after the war, garnering news releases on multiple occasions.⁸ Some dogs—such as Sergeant Stubby and, most notably, Rin Tin Tin—also appeared in books and movies and on radio programs and were considered war heroes.^{5(pp24–27),9} However, this increased public popularity did not lead to heightened US military interest in dogs or development of an organized canine program. The US Army of the 1920s and 1930s was still too small to explore this option.^{10(p615)}

In the late 1930s, the Army increased its dog numbers only slightly by expanding a sled dog program. However, as the United States became more involved in World War II, interest in military dogs accelerated. Overseas participation in the war and security concerns within America's borders precipitated the need for several rapid-succession dog program overhauls:

(a) on March 13, 1942, the secretary of war approved the acceptance of 200 trained guard dogs offered by the American Theater Wing Incorporated program, a civilian project consisting of volunteer dog owners and trainers; (b) this program was soon replaced by the War Dog Program; (c) under this program, Dogs for Defense was named as the agency in charge of the procurement of non-sled dogs; and (d) finally, in July 1942, the US Army Quartermaster Corps became the sole agency providing trained dogs for the military and other federal agencies.^{10(p616)}

Americans were enthusiastic about the growing need for military canines. An estimated 40,000 dogs were voluntarily donated to the Dogs for Defense program (Figure 2-3). However, because this number was so large, uniform standards to screen war dog candidates for the newly formed (and colloquially named)



Figure 2-3. Clyde Porter gives his dog, Junior, to the Texas recruiting station for Dogs for Defense, August 1942. Accepting the dog for the Army is dog trainer First Sergeant Bill Bryant. Although standardization of use, training, and care began during World War II, origins of the dog program had volunteer roots.

Photo courtesy of the National Archives (A-19043), cover picture from *On Point: The Journal of Army History*, issue 17.1, Summer 2011.

K-9 Corps had to be quickly implemented. The need for standardized curriculum and guidelines for veterinary caretakers also required immediate attention. In response, the US Army Veterinary Corps conducted thorough examinations and culled unhealthy animals or those with limited potential, while the Quartermaster Corps established training schools and published a formal technical manual about war dog care.¹¹

Unlike previous military dog guidance, the new standards contained strict breed and size requirements. At this time, only the following breeds of dog were generally accepted into military service: German shepherd, Belgian sheep dog, Doberman pinscher, farm collie, Siberian husky, Malamute, Eskimo, and crosses of those breeds. Ideally, all dogs selected for military service were to weigh between 40 and 80 pounds and be between 14 and 24 months old. Although some exceptions might be made for breed and size—usually dependent on the dog’s projected tasks—good health and dependability were continual requirements.^{10(pp618-619)}

Trainers and dog handlers also had to conform to new standards and received standardized training via a specialized program. The Quartermaster Corps paired the dogs and their prospective handlers, training them in different specialties at one of several state-side “dog centers.” During World War II, these centers were located at Front Royal, Virginia; Fort Robinson, Nebraska; Cat Island, Gulfport, Mississippi; Camp Rimini, Helena, Montana; San Carlos, California; and Beltsville, Maryland. Camp Rimini was designed primarily for sled and pack dogs. The Cat Island facility trained many Pacific theater-bound dogs.^{10(p617)}

Because invasion and sabotage were major concerns during the early years of World War II, the trained dogs and their handlers were first tasked with providing security at US depots, transportation hubs, and factories. During this time, the Coast Guard received 3,174 trained dogs to patrol US beaches and ports.^{10(p619)}

As war efforts moved overseas, US military planners studied feedback from use of the American-trained canines on various foreign battlefields. Early results from North African operations were not favorable: the war dogs were bewildered by artillery fire and other battle noises that exceeded their stateside training around firearms and were unable to perform their duties. Canine mine detection missions also were tried in various foreign locations during World War II but were similarly deemed unsuccessful.¹²

However, there were certain jobs that dogs seemed “made” to perform. For example, the dogs’ heightened senses enabled these animals to detect enemy activity, even across the nonexistent battle lines of World War II. (This finding later shaped the effective use of canines during the Vietnam War.)

War dog detachments and platoons also were successful in other direct combat roles, including serving as scouts, guards, and messengers. These special dog and handler teams were attached to Army and Marine units and acted both as scouts searching for the enemy and as early warning detectors against snipers or ambushes. The majority of these teams served in the Pacific and enjoyed a fairly good reputation, receiving requests for further support (Figure 2-4).^{5(pp131)}

In Europe, dogs guarded airfields and assisted with medical evacuations in snow-covered areas.^{10(pp630-631)} Until American dogs arrived in France in mid-1944, most of the dogs used in Europe came from and were trained in Great Britain. Although lesser known, messenger dogs also provided beneficial service in several World War II theaters.¹³

After World War II ended, many people hoped that the dogs originally donated for service in war could be returned to their previous owners. Although it was not possible to return all of the animals, some canines—including the most famous war dog of World War II, Chips—were returned home. (Chips received the Silver Star and Purple Heart medals for charging and capturing a machine gun nest during the invasion of Sicily. The medals were later rescinded because Army policies do not permit service animals to officially receive war decorations designed exclusively for human service members. Chips would also infamously [and harmlessly] bite General Eisenhower upon meeting him, although the dog continued to receive accolades even after the incident.)^{5(pp74-77)}

The dogs that did not return home to owners after their World War II service ushered in another era in



Figure 2-4. A well-known image: A Marine with the 7th War Dog Platoon, 25th Marine Regiment, takes a nap while Butch, his war dog, stands guard, Iwo Jima, February 1945. Dobermans were favored in some jungle environments. Sentry and scout dogs were sought out after it was determined that they could find snipers and would-be attackers before ambushes. Photo courtesy of the National Archives website. <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1996/fall/buddies.html>. Accessed July 10, 2012.

canine military history. A corner was finally turned: serving as sentries and scouts, guarding prisoners and America's shores, this generation of service dogs had impressed the military enough to remain authorized even after the massive post-World War II disbandment.

KOREAN WAR AND THE EARLY COLD WAR

In the years following World War II, the military continued to use canines, even though most dog training centers closed, and the soldiers needed to maintain these facilities were largely demobilized. The sole remaining dog center, Front Royal, was relocated to Ft Riley, Kansas, in 1948.¹²

As the Korean War unfolded, the need for military dog facilities and trained scout dog teams grew. In 1951, proponency of the Army dog program shifted from the Quartermaster Corps to the Military Police Corps, and the new proponent moved the dog training facility from Ft Riley to Ft Carson, Colorado. On July 11, 1951, a war dog receiving and holding station was also activated at Cameron Station in Alexandria, Virginia. Newly purchased dogs were processed and conditioned here before they were shipped to the Army Dog Training Center in Ft Carson.¹²

Scout dog teams operated during the Korean War

but on a much smaller scale than in World War II (Figure 2-5). The 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon is the most notable of these Korean War canine-soldier teams. Reports indicate this platoon performed admirably, receiving a meritorious unit commendation.¹⁴

Despite such successes, the dog program was not expanded after the Korean War, and scout dogs were not trained again until the United States became involved in Vietnam. Prior to the Vietnam War, in the early stages of the Cold War, the dog program underwent several more changes in addition to the aforementioned shift in proponency in 1951: (a) the German shepherd was chosen as the standard breed for military dogs; (b) the Army continued sentry dog training at Ft Carson until closing this dog school in 1957; and (c) the US Air Force saw value in continuing a school and began training all Department of Defense sentry dogs at Lackland Air Base, Texas, in October 1958.¹⁵

By the sixties and seventies, reasons for keeping dogs in the military arsenal diversified. The Army military police and Air Force and Navy security forces maintained dogs for sentry service but also started to

train dogs for law enforcement activities. Taking the lead from canine utilization in the civilian world, the various branches of the US military also began training dogs for narcotics detection.^{5 (p244)}

VIETNAM WAR

Major growth and more recognition for military working dogs occurred during the Vietnam War. A school for combat tracking teams was established at Ft Gordon, Georgia (the location of the Military Police School), in 1967 and was modeled after the British Jungle Warfare School in Malaysia.^{5(p212)} (The school in Malaysia also hosted training for the teams during the formative years of the program.) Another scout dog school was established at Ft Benning, Georgia.¹⁶

While the German shepherd was still the standard breed for the majority of tasks, the revisited function of combat tracker allowed for the inclusion of another dog breed in military service during the Vietnam War: the Labrador retriever. Early combat tracker teams trained for use in Vietnam were built around the dogs and focused on visual clues as well the dogs' abilities to follow scent trails. Although the tracker dogs

were trained to be protective of their teams, this dog's mission was only to detect enemies, not attack them (Figure 2-6). During Vietnam, canines also served as mine and tunnel detection dogs and contraband (ie, drug) detector dogs.

The dogs used by the military in Vietnam were also employed for psychological reasons. Many US troops felt a familiar connection to the trained canines in the units, bonds similar to the ones felt for the pets they owned before entering military service. Also, the large sentry dogs, which were trained attack dogs, were used to intimidate enemies. A case illustrating the advantageous use of this tactic occurred at a battle on the American Embassy grounds during the Tet Offensive.

On the morning of January 31, 1968, a Viet Cong "sapper" (a term used to describe Vietnamese saboteurs and explosive carriers) was unaware that an American sentry dog was guarding the area between the US Embassy in Saigon and the wall surrounding the building. When the sapper climbed over the wall, he was attacked by the dog. US military police then



Figure 2-5. Locally produced and misspelled pin ("SO-HOOL" for "SCHOOL") made for the 820th Military Police Platoon in Korea, late 1960s. Labeled "Four Footed Radar," the dogs from this platoon monitored the demilitarized zone, and the pin honors their small sentry training center in Kimpo, Korea. Photo courtesy of the US Army Military Police Museum, Ft Leonard Wood, Missouri.



Figure 2-6. Handler and dog of the 49th Scout Dog Platoon, 199th Infantry Brigade searching for the enemy in Vietnam. Reproduced from the *Army Digest*, February 1969.

cordoned the area, followed the wounded sapper's blood trail, located his dropped weapon, and captured him.¹⁷ An enlisted Army photographer took an iconic

picture of the captured Viet Cong sapper and his US military police escorts (Figure 2-7) after the US sentry dog initially deterred him.¹⁸

THE MILITARY WORKING DOG

When the Vietnam War ended, the military repeated its previous patterns of demobilization and reorganization. The scout and combat tracker programs for dogs were largely abandoned; however, canine use for law enforcement applications expanded. While sentry dogs used in Vietnam were trained to alert their handlers and attack the enemy, the growing numbers of the military's newly trained "police dogs" were tasked with stopping criminals through intimidation and nonlethal bites. The growing professionalism provided by this new training led to two new labels for military service dogs; each term added to perceptions of canine usefulness. In 1977, canines were referred to in Field Manual 19-35 as "military police working dogs."¹⁹ In ensuing years, the name was shortened to the now familiar "military working dog" (this term appears in Field Manual 19-35, *Law and Order Operations*, from 1987).²⁰

Although dogs continued to serve as drug detectors in both civilian and military policing agencies, as terrorism concerns surfaced in the 1980s, breeds that had previously been excluded from military service (eg, beagles) also were tasked with searching for ex-

plosives. Military and civilian dog handlers became very familiar to the public as they patrolled areas with their canine partners.

By the time of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, MWDs were considered vital members of the US military forces. Although the German shepherd had long been the standard breed for most MWD tasks, the Belgium Malinois rose to prominence during this timeframe as another multitalented breed capable of performing a number of military tasks.

With the onset of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, the US military further expanded its dog programs. For example, scout and combat tracker dog training was revisited and again reinstated. Because of the growing threat of improvised explosive devices in Afghanistan and Iraq, mine detection training also resumed (Figure 2-8). Dogs became members of forward deployed teams, served with airborne units, and were transported by helicopters when needed.²¹ (See also Chapter 4, Medical Evaluation of the Military Working Dog, for more information about the duties, transportation, and combat care of today's MWDs.)

CONCLUSION

Whether they are remembered historically as the "K-9 Corps" or "War Dogs"—or by their more modern vernacular, the MWDs—it appears that canines will continue to serve in the military. Humans are con-



Figure 2-7. US Army military policemen escort a Viet Cong sapper away from the US Embassy in Saigon after a military working dog helped make this enemy capture possible. Photo courtesy of former Army photographer Specialist 5 Donald A. Hirst.



Figure 2-8. A military police officer and her military working dog conduct a security assessment of the customs yard being built near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in the Spin Boldak district at Kandahar province, Afghanistan, April 8, 2013.

Photo by Staff Sergeant Shane Hamann and courtesy of the US Army Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System.

tinually rediscovering that technology cannot match many canine senses and other inherent abilities, and they also realize that dogs continue to remain loyal even as equipment and conflicts evolve around them.

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