

DASPO Covers Scout Dogs

The Wolfhounds, the 1st and 2nd Battalion, 27th Infantry of the 25th Infantry Division was home to several Scout Dogs at the outset of one of three combat operations, either Cedar Falls, Gadsden or Junction City, that I covered while assigned to Vietnam with DASPO in 1967. The Public Information Officer (PIO) appeared to love giving the dogs lots of attention. I was personally dismayed that one company having the trained canines would attract five reporters, all chasing one story

Each combat infantryman is trained to not only protect himself, but cover the squad member to both his right and left of him. A unit can aptly include one or two non-combatants within their lines and maintain adequate overlapping fire-power from the combat troops to nullify the void create by the press corp within their ranks. On this particular venture, the one Wolfhound Company had five interpolaters, including the two DASPO Team, there was a stateside T.V. news crew and a French lady free lance journalist. I heard her tell the other press that the French Paris Match Magazine bought many of her stories. With five reporters in one unit could mean disaster, with voids in the arc of overlapping fire, was my concern.

The press corp and one Scout Dog held in reserve were all in the vicinity of the company commander, about midway in the column of advancing G.I.'s. Using the standard tactical interval of 10 to 15 feet distance between soldiers meant roughly 75 to 80 troops ahead spread out over about 800 feet area. The other Scout Dog and handler was at the lead of the unit acting as point man. I heard the Scout Dog handler state that the U.S. currently had three catagories of dogs in Vietnam. Beside Scout Dogs, there were guard dogs and I think I heard him say attack dogs.

The dogs were specifically trained to sniff out the enemy troops. Just exactly how that was accomplished to differentiate American smells from that of the VC or NVA oder is a mystery to me. I doubt I ever asked or heard much about the Scout Dog Training criteria. I do remember the handler telling the other presss members, that the training was a joint venture between dog and handler, and that he was the only handler the dog would have, and that he had to carry extra rations of water and dog food, besides his own requirements. To be here in the jungle they must have passed the Scout Dog training procedures.

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From our initial drop off point, the company was in the jungle and enemy territory barely two hours, when the lead Scout Dog alerted the presence of enemy forces in the immediate area. I remember the entire column came to a complete halt, while the point dog was sent back to the rear and the alternate canine was sent forward to confirm the enemy's presence. That dog failed to alert and the initial canine was sent forward the second time and again alerted. With conflicting alerts, the unit advanced cautiously. Within minutes a brief fire-fight erupted. Since the canine's alert, the Wolfhound had contacted a FAC (Forward Air Controller). The unit broke off contact with the enemy with the FAC flying overhead, tossing a pre-determined color smoke grenade toward the enemy fire.

The color smoke grenade was pre-determined, because the Viet Cong frequently stripped weapons and equipment from dead or wounded americans on the battle field. They would throw any color smoke grenade they had at the american position attempting to confuse the FAC and bomb the friendly position.

We in the press backed up hardly 200 feet as a sortie of F-100's circled overhead. The FAC marked the target with an (HE) high explosive rocket for the planes to see. From their orbit altitude, the fighters one at a time went to after-burner starting their bomb run. After all the bombs were dropped and the FAC and F-100 sortie cleared the area, the Wolfhounds made a sweep of the region retrieving one dead VC body.

We were on the edge of a clearing, it was easy for a helo to land and take the body back to Cu Chi. The lady reporter and T.V. crew jumped on the chopper with story in hand. To this point I had shot some film, but too far away to get the fire-fight. Our DASPO coverage was restricted to the FAC marking the target and the F-100;s dropping their bombs. We heard loud explosions and saw brown smoke rising after each blast, which we filmed.

Without veterinary skills on location, it was reasoned the second Scout Dog had nasal congestion or stopped up nose as why he failed to alert of the enemy. We DASPO Team having film stayed with the Wolfhounds several more days without further enemy contact.

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Written Mar. 2004