

by Major General Spurgeon Ned
DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
WASHINGTON, D.C., 1991

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 72-600264
First Printed 1973-CMH Pub 90-16

Animal Medicine

Routine care

Initially, in 1965, routine professional veterinary care for military dogs, in Vietnam was provided by three small veterinary food inspection detachments then in-country. Each of these units was authorized one veterinary animal specialist, in addition to its food inspection specialists. At that time, approximately 350 Army and Marine Corps sentry dogs were assigned to some 10 locations throughout the country.

With the buildup of US forces and the accompanying increased use of dogs in field operations, the dog population rose from the 350 in 1965, to more than 1,200 in 1968, dispersed widely throughout Vietnam. With more veterinary support required in the forward areas, additional veterinary detachments arrived in Vietnam, but without a comparable increase in the numbers of animal specialists. Veterinary food inspectors from the forward detachments were used to augment the small number of these specialists.

Utilizing the services of these additional veterinary enlisted men was, at first, hampered by their inexperience in animal medicine and by the lack of veterinary medical equipment sets in the food inspection units. This situation was remedied by training food inspectors locally in certain animal specialist skills, and by obtaining equipment from the veterinary hospital and dispensary detachments.

The need for fewer food inspectors and for more animal specialists and animal medical equipment sets in Vietnam constituted a significant change in the operation of veterinary service detachments. To reflect this need, appropriate changes were subsequently made in the veterinary service tables of organization and equipment.

Hospitalization and Evacuation

The 4th Medical Detachment maintained a small-animal clinic in Saigon for the emergency care and treatment of military dogs and for mascots and animals privately owned by U.S. Army troops and other authorized personnel. All animals requiring extensive treatment were evacuated to Saigon, except Marine Corps dogs which were evacuated to Da Nang.

In January 1966, the 936th Veterinary Detachment (ID), a veterinary small-animal hospital, arrived at the Tan Son Nhut Airbase to provide definitive medical care and hospitalization for all military dogs in the II, III, and IV CTZ. Additionally, it provided a consultation service to the field, monitoring all dog medical records, requisitioning and issuing all veterinary drugs to area veterinarians, and collecting and evaluating veterinary military dog statistics. On 19 October 1966, a small-animal dispensary detachment, the 504th Medical Detachment (IE), arrived in Da Nang. Although organized as a dispensary, this unit provided complete veterinary service for scout and sentry dogs in the entire I CTZ. In 1966, also, the veterinary department of the 9th Medical Laboratory became operational, making available comprehensive veterinary laboratory diagnostic services and investigations of animal diseases of military and economic interest.

In 1968, with the arrival of additional small-animal dispensary detachments, the three echelons of veterinary care and treatment of military dogs—unit, dispensary, and hospital,—became clearly established. Particular emphasis was placed on improving administrative procedures to provide more definitive data on the health of military dogs. An expanded monthly morbidity and mortality reporting system was developed, and completion of detailed admission reports for hospitalized dogs, was stressed.

Deployment of scout dogs in 1966 resulted in casualties suffered in action. To insure prompt treatment, dogs were evacuated by air to the 936th Veterinary Detachment (ID). Handlers were evacuated with their dogs, and remained with them until treatment was completed.

During 1969, difficulties were encountered in evacuating military dogs from dog units and veterinary dispensaries to veterinary hospital facilities. Accordingly, a firm evacuation policy was established. All dogs requiring treatment for more than 7 days, were evacuated. In addition, a veterinary medical regulator was designated to direct the flow of dogs to the hospital facilities. Evacuation of military dogs was co-