

# An Historical Review Of Military Dogs

By

Captain Caleb Archer



Never before in the history of our country has the use of dogs been so important to the security of our global defenses. It has become increasingly difficult to effectively secure the vast areas covered by our missile launching sites, missile complexes, aircraft parking areas, isolated radar sites, and many other similar locations. This has in itself increased the need for our employing military dogs as assistants to those whose job it is to protect our country.

## Prior to World War II

Throughout the history of warfare, from the days of the Medes and the Persians and the conquests of the Roman Empire, to the present action in Vietnam, dogs have gone into combat at the side of their masters or have been used in direct support of combat operations.

The first organized use of dogs in warfare was by the Greeks and Romans. The Gauls, and some other nations, developed an armor for their war dogs, made with jointed plates of metal and light chain so as to permit freedom of movement. These dogs were also equipped with a broad collar, to which was attached many spikes or curved knives.<sup>1</sup>

Alyattes, King of Lydia, maintained battalions of fierce war dogs which saw hard service in his campaigns. It was at the battle of Thymbria that Alyattes' dogs met their match in the greyhounds of Cyrus and victory was largely attributed to Cyrus war dogs.<sup>2</sup>

With the invention of gunpowder and the consequent change in military tactics, the value of dogs as combat soldiers steadily diminished. During World War I, vast numbers of dogs were employed as sentries, messengers, ammunition carriers, scouts, sled dogs, and casualty dogs. It is estimated that Germany alone employed over 30,000 dogs for such purposes, and approximately 20,000 dogs served with the French Army.<sup>3</sup> The American Expeditionary Forces had no organized dog units, but borrowed a limited number of dogs from the French and Belgians for casualty, messenger, and guard duty.

Several years before the beginning of World War II, the German military authorities, again foreseeing an approaching conflict, began to build a canine force to be used in the front lines of warfare. It was estimated that they had 50,000 dogs trained for active service before Pearl Harbor. The majority of these dogs were trained at the Military Kennels at Frankfurt, established in 1934, where some 2,000 animals were constantly being trained.<sup>4</sup>

It was in March, 1942, several months after Pearl Harbor, that the War Department recognized the need for military dogs. The civilian organization, "Dogs for Defense," was appointed the official procurement agency for the United States. This organization operated five War Dog Reception and Training Centers scattered throughout the country and during the course of the war trained approximately ten thousand dogs. In all, over 250,000 dogs served with the armies of the Allies and the Axis Powers during World War II.<sup>5</sup>

## Korean Conflict

Before the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, the Army was using dogs in Seoul for sentry duty around warehouses and storage areas. More than one hundred dogs were stationed there and their work proved extremely beneficial in reducing theft and pilferage.

When fighting began in Korea, there was one Infantry scout dog platoon in training at Fort Riley, Kansas, which was sent over there to assist combat patrols. This platoon, the 26th, saw almost continuous service and opened the eyes of many regimental commanders to the potential value of dogs attached to patrols.

As a result of the outstanding service rendered by the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon, recommendations were made and approved for the activation of a scout dog platoon to be attached to each Division in Korea, but the war reached the "peace talks" stage before five additional platoons were trained and shipped to Korea.

Presently, sentry dogs are used by the Army and the Air Force for guarding bases and supply points in Korea and Japan. The school at Waegwan, Korea, lasting approximately twenty-four days, graduates almost five hundred students and dogs each year.

## Vietnam

Army sentry dog teams now working in the Republic of Vietnam have reached 140. The equipment and personnel were flown to Tan Son Nhut Air Base, Vietnam, during August, 1965. The dogs made the flight without difficulty and adjusted to the tropical climate within a few days. Within one week after the first contingency arrived, dog teams were operational at Pleiku.<sup>6</sup>

The dog teams presently employed in Vietnam are used to provide internal security to sensitive signal facilities, ammunition dumps, Army flight lines, and important logistical supply

points. Since many of these types of facilities are situated on the perimeter of installations the sentry dog teams guarding them have become an integral part of the installation perimeter defense.<sup>7</sup>

Probably the most serious difficulty encountered in Vietnam has been maintaining a sanitary environment for the dogs. No kennels were available upon arrival in Vietnam so the dogs were housed temporarily under general purpose tents. This was during the peak of the monsoon season and the dogs were constantly wet. Medical support was also a problem until January 1966, when a fifty dog Veterinary Hospital arrived. Prior to this time medical facilities were not available for the dogs.<sup>8</sup>

Sentry dogs are on duty with handlers at United States bases in Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines, Korea, Germany, France, Spain, North Africa, Vietnam, and the United States. The largest concentration of sentry dogs, however, are on guard in the United States. More than one thousand sentry dog teams are stationed at Nike Hercules Missile Sites around our major cities and at air bases where nuclear bombers might be kept. All the dogs used in the Continental United States are trained for eight weeks at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas; while those used in other countries are trained at any of the sentry dog schools at: Showa, Japan; Wiesbaden, Germany; or Waegwan, Korea.