

"THE SENTRY DOG IN VIETNAM"
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The Vietnam conflict differs from other wars due to one factor - there are no front lines, no rear areas, no real havens of safety. Regardless of place or time, the American soldier is constantly exposed to danger, whether securing isolated encampments near the DMZ or patrolling lonely footpaths in the mountains of Pleiku or strolling leisurely on shaded Saigon avenues. The United States Army has answered this challenge by initiating new and varied concepts and techniques specifically designed to combat guerilla warfare. Among the most successful is the flexible utilization of the sentry dog and his handler by the Military Police Corps.

Dogs and modern warfare are old companions. During World War I the German and French armies between them employed over 50,000 dogs as sentries. The American Expeditionary Forces used some of these animals on a loan basis. In World War II over 250,000 dogs served with armies of the Allies and the Axis. The Russians, who alone used over 50,000, even trained their animals to run under approaching German tanks with mines strapped upon their backs. Upon striking the underside of the tank, the mine would detonate.

The 13th Military Police Brigade, which arrived in Vietnam in September 1966, is fortunate in having under its command the 212th Military Police Company (Sentry Dog). The 212th was activated on 15 May 1942. Since that time it has been stationed in Hawaii, Iwo Jima, Saipan, Japan, Korea, Italy, and now Vietnam. In addition to the two Vietnamese campaign streamers which it possesses, it also was awarded all ten campaign streamers from the Korean Conflict as well as two Korean Presidential Citations.

The sentry dog is greatly feared by the Viet Cong and justifiably so.

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One glance at this handsome German Shepherd, straining at the end of its leash with snarling fury, is enough to quell most antagonists. The average dog is two to six years old and weighs approximately eighty pounds. Trained with his handler for eight weeks in the United States, each dog receives an additional two weeks "refresher" training upon arriving in Vietnam before being placed on actual sentry duty.

The dog, by its very nature, has several distinct advantages over any human adversary. His perception of movement is approximately ten times greater, his sense of hearing twenty times sharper, and his sense of smell forty times keener. Fiercely loyal to his handler, the average sentry dog has the capability of responding to well over one thousand different commands.

Experience in Vietnam has revealed that these dogs are most effectively employed at night, where their highly developed perceptive senses are invaluable in detecting intruders attempting to infiltrate vital installations and supply points. Their effectiveness is somewhat decreased by the use of flares, but they are trained to ignore noise from artillery and mortar fire. These assets more than qualify the sentry dog for his primary mission of detection and early warning at perimeter security sites scattered throughout Vietnam.

Since arriving in the Republic of Vietnam in August of 1965, the 212th MP Company (Sentry Dog), with its 250 officers and men and 200 dogs, has constantly expanded its sphere of physical security protection. It presently has personnel and dogs located at fifteen separate detachments, ranging from Qui Nhon in the north to Vung Tau in the south. Critical airfields, signal sites, supply depots and ammunition points

are among essential facilities afforded protection.

The success of the sentry dog is best evidenced by the fear in which he is held by the Viet Cong. In February 1966 a handler and his dog single-handedly held off some twenty-three Viet Cong attempting to enter the New Meikou Air Base construction area. The handler wounded and captured five Viet Cong prior to the arrival of a reaction force. At the same location in January 1967 a handler and his dog again repelled approximately 12 Viet Cong armed with automatic weapons, armed only with a .45 caliber pistol and his dog's vicious howling, the handler refused access to the enemy and maintained his post, which the Viet Cong were unable to penetrate. The same story holds true throughout the Republic of Vietnam. In Nha Trang pilferage of critical supplies has been sharply reduced because of sentry dog alertness and utilization. In Phan Rang, Qui Nhon, and Ban Me Thuot there have been no successful penetrations through sentry dog areas of responsibility. The 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) requested and received from the 212th a detachment of sentry dogs to help secure its base camp at An Khe. Despite harassing sniper fire and stalling panthers, there have been no successful penetrations through the sentry dog posts at An Khe.

The sentry dog and his handler provide an ingenious answer to many of the problems raised by the terroristic tactics of the Viet Cong. In addition to releasing large numbers of security guards for more mobile offensive operations, indications are that installations and facilities now protected by sentry dogs are more secure than ever. The dogs and their handlers have assumed a tremendous task in Vietnam, and they are performing it well.