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TRACKER DOG PROGRAM

Tracker Dog -- A highly trained Labrador Retriever able to work silently on a 25-foot leash following (day or night) a "ground" scent over terrain not holding a visual sign; to "signal" the handler when it is nearing the subject being tracked; to be an integral part of a reconnaissance element for tracking enemy movement. (Author's definition)

Background

(C) On 4 May 1966, General William Westmoreland and his staff were briefed by the RAC-ARPA representative from Singapore, Mr. Robert L. Hughes, on the British experiences in the use of tracker dogs in counter-insurgency operations. As a result of this briefing, the US Army Tracker Dog Program officially got underway when Brigadier General A. E. Cowan, Director of the Joint Research and Test Activity (JRATA), an agency of the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA); Colonel M. G. Hatch, Commanding Officer of the Army Concept Team in Vietnam (ACTIV); and Captain W. G. Campbell, Jr., from USARV, visited the Headquarters, Far East Land Forces (FARELF) at Singapore and the British Jungle Warfare School in Malaysia on 10-12 May 1966. This trip resulted from two important, complementary factors. The first was an increasingly felt need by the US command in Saigon to solve the problem of re-establishing and maintaining contact with enemy forces after they have broken contact with US units. An attempt had been made to solve this problem by utilizing bloodhounds in tracking-type operations. However, this was unsatisfactory because the noise the bloodhounds made following a track endangered patrol personnel accompanying the dog. The second factor was an awareness of the British success with tracker dogs (Labrador Retrievers) in Borneo against infiltrating Indonesian and Chinese Communist guerrillas.

(C) The purpose of this trip, as directed by COMUSMACV, was to examine in detail the British experiences with tracker dog teams, to seek the advice of the British in the establishment of US Army tracker teams for Vietnam, and to solicit British resource support in getting the program started. The results of this trip were extremely favorable. Through considerable negotiation and joint coordination, the US group and the staff from FARELF developed a "Joint US British Proposal to Train Combat Tracker Teams (CTT) for the US Army," which was approved by Major General H. A. Lacelles, CBE, DSO, MGGS, of Hq, FARELF.

(C) The Joint Proposal was broken down into three phases which were designed to provide a combat tracker capability to US Army units in Vietnam in as short a time as possible. The first phase was directed toward the training and deployment of two US Army Combat Tracker Teams to Vietnam within three months of the training program initiation. Using

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British-trained Labrador Retrievers, US Army personnel would be trained in all areas of the tracker program and then sent immediately to Vietnam for operational evaluation. This evaluation was important, since it was anticipated by US Army planning personnel that the combat tracker team concept would be successful in Vietnam, but that changes in team organization and training would probably be necessary as a result of adapting British tracker concepts to US Army operations. The results of this evaluation would have to be available to ensure the successful completion of phase two, which provided for the training and deployment of an instructional capability within the US Army. This phase of the training proposal would take up to a year, since untrained dogs were going to be brought into the program. The third phase called for the establishment of a Combat Tracker Team Training Center somewhere in Southeast Asia (Thailand or Malaysia). However, this phase of the joint proposal was not planned in detail pending the outcome of the first two phases.

(C) It should be noted that this joint agreement between the British and American military authorities also required diplomatic sanctions. England was a signatory of the 1954 Geneva Convention partitioning Vietnam at the 17th Parallel. For the British to train military personnel for combat in Vietnam might be viewed by other foreign governments as a violation of these Geneva agreements. In addition to British diplomatic interests and considerations, the government of Malaysia had to be consulted, because the British Jungle Warfare School is located within Malaysia at Johore Bahru. The Malaysian government is neutral as far as the war in Vietnam is concerned. Thus, the training of American military personnel by British officers in a neutral southeast Asian country is a diplomatically sensitive situation.

(C) In September 1966, the governments of Malaysia, Britain, and the United States arrived at a political agreement regarding the training of US Army personnel at the British Jungle Warfare School. The political arrangements among these governments were to be in effect for a period which was approximately the amount of time needed to train fourteen US Army combat tracker teams. Phase one of the joint proposal was initiated in October 1966.

(C) In June 1967, steps were taken by USARV to extend the British-Malaysian-American agreements beyond the October 1967 cutoff period. This was necessary if replacement personnel were to be trained and deployed to Vietnam in a manner that would keep all fourteen combat tracker teams operational. Thought was given to establishing a training program in Vietnam to train replacement personnel, but it was extremely doubtful that a secure area of the size needed for conducting the program was available. Therefore, the plan was to extend the politico-military arrangements through November 1968, and at the same time, initiate the required actions to establish a training base within CONUS.

(C) In June 1967, USARV dispatched a message to the Department of Army, Washington, with information copy to USARPAC which briefly

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covered the development of the combat tracker program in Vietnam and Malaysia, and outlined "priority" steps that the Department of Army should take to establish a training base in CONUS. Specifically, this message requested the Department of Army "...to ask an appropriate agency to procure and begin training as soon as possible, Labrador Retrievers as tracker dogs with a goal of about eighty operational tracker dogs to be provided to USARV by the end of FY69 (July 1969)." Also the Department of Army was "...to ask an appropriate agency to develop and establish a training program for visual tracker personnel and combat tracker teams..."

(C) The United States Continental Army Command (USCONARC) was officially brought into the combat tracker program in September 1967, when it was requested by DA to "...develop a training program for tracker platoons, including dog handlers and visual trackers and for visual tracker training for individuals to be assigned to long-range patrols, infantry reconnaissance units and rifle squads." This action was to be taken after USCONARC received more specific information from CINCUSPAC -- namely the organizational structure and total number of platoons to be supported by the CONUS training base and the requirements, both initial and projected, for the visual tracker to be used in other than the combat tracker teams. In response to this request, USCONARC sent a team of officers to Third Army to evaluate potential combat tracker team (CTT) training sites and subsequently assign the CTT program to a proponent agency. In November 1967, a message was sent by USCONARC to Third Army, the student training center at Fort Gordon, and the Military Police School, designating USAMPS as the proponent agency and assigning it the mission of conducting the CONUS-based CTT program. The Military Police School, designating USAMPS as the proponent agency and assigning it the mission of conducting the CONUS-based CTT program. The Military Police School immediately began to develop the CTT program but has not been able to move along as rapidly as planned.

(C) At present the US Army Military Police School has received authorization for some 200 officers and men to begin their training program. In addition, a special request for British and New Zealand experts in visual tracking and tracker dog training has been approved. These allied personnel are now at Fort Gordon, developing the appropriate training literature and beginning the training of Labrador Retrievers which have been procured by the Army.

Organization

(C) Since the US Army is borrowing heavily from British experiences with combat track teams, it is necessary to show how the current US Army CTT organizational structure has developed since the program inception in 1966.

(C) The British developed their combat tracker teams around a ten-man concept, which was subdivided into three team elements; the command, the tracker, and the protection element. The command element was made