

Dear Mike;

26 June 2000

I'm very sorry I haven't followed through so promptly by sending you the information I promised concerning Showa Dog School and my friend Kouhei Tanaka. My job as a Corrections Officer does keep me rather busy, but now I am finding the time to put matters into perspective. The items I am sending you concerning Sentry Dogs at Showa, should give you an idea of what training was like. The Sentry Dog School was manned by U.S. Air Force personnel, Veterinarian and office personnel, and Japanese Trainers (JT's). Kouhei (pronounced "Ko-hay") began as a JT at Showa in 1954. He began as a Kennel Support JT, which required daily kennel sanitation, feeding dogs, exercising non-handler assigned dogs, grooming, taking dogs to Vet Sick Call and putting dogs through their training regimes. Upon being assigned to handlers, the JT's would then assume the role of trainer and begin training the teams in their various training phases. From 1952 until 1965, Sentry Dog teams were primarily trained for deployment to bases in South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, Okinawa and Guam. In 1965, South Vietnam and Thailand were added to the list. As you read through the material I've enclosed (sorry about the quality, but most was reproduced by Mr. Tanaka from what he had) you can get an idea of what the training system was like and training methods used.

Mr. Tanaka began working at Showa in 1954. He remained at Showa as a JT until June 1969, when Showa was closed due to a shift in mission assignments. The Sentry Dog School was then relocated to Kadena Air Base, Okinawa. When the Air Force began to train its own Patrol Dogs and handlers in 1969, Kadena became the Pacific Air Force (PACAF) major command base for dog training. Along with Lackland AFB and Kadena AB Okinawa, Weisbaden Air Base Germany, was the United States Air Force in Europe (USAFE) Dog Training Center. Mr. Tanaka is still searching for old pictures and memorabilia of his years at Showa. Sometime later this year the JT's who served at Showa (those still living) are having a reunion. I have been trying to get Dennis Herrick to do a small article in "Dogman" in attempts to contact any Sentry Dog handler who trained at Showa.

Mr. Tanaka and I spent 7 years together during my second tour of duty in Japan. Being all of 5'5" in height, Tanaka-san was as fierce a handler as anyone I ever knew. By that, I mean he could handle the meanest, nastiest Sentry or Patrol Dog and never bat an eyelash. When new handlers were assigned dogs, Tanaka-san usually brought the handler his new dog from the kennel, dog muzzled, and gave the handler the dog with instructions "don't take off muzzle for 3 days". Those who removed the muzzles before the 3 days were up, usually went to the hospital with severe dog bites. This is how I was introduced to Sentry Dogs myself in 1972. When I arrived in Japan in 1972 on my first tour of duty, there was 30 assigned dogs. 25 were Sentry Dogs handled by Japanese Handlers and 5 Patrol dogs worked by American handlers. From June 72 until Dec 72, the 25 Sentry Dogs

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were required to be "re-trained" into Patrol Dogs. Of the 25 Sentry Dogs, only 10 were successfully re-trained. The other 15 dogs were "administratively" re-trained. I was formally trained on Patrol Dogs in 1971 at Lackland. Patrol Dog School was 3 months. Sentry Dog School was only 4 weeks long. The first time I had to choke a Sentry Dog off of an agitator, I nearly lost an arm. The dog missed me by inches, but I had to change my pants that day. All Sentry Dogs were reassigned to American handlers in 1973 and all Japanese Handlers were forced to retire. This is another sad story. Many of the Japanese Handlers were trained at Showa in the early 50's and 60's and assigned dogs throughout bases in Japan. They worked many years as Civilian Guard Police Dog Handlers. I had the pleasure of working with many of these Japanese CG Handlers. In 1972 the USAF was still operating about 10 – 15 bases throughout Japan and most bases utilizing Military Working Dogs were employing Japanese Handlers. As at Yokota, when these bases closed, the Japanese Handlers were forced into retirement. A large number of these Japanese Handlers served many years in service to the US and Japanese governments.

I don't know the official number of dogs and handlers trained at Showa Dog School and deployed to Vietnam, but I believe it was several hundred. Tanaka-san would tell me stories of handlers and dogs trained at Showa, yet he never learned of their fates. It's only now that Tanaka-san knows of a "War Dog" Memorial in Riverside. Tom Mitchell was kind enough to send me 2 COPIES of the dedication video, one of which I sent to Tanaka-san. I have also sent Tanaka-san a copy of the "War Dogs" video, a copy of your "War Dogs" book, and a copy of John Burnam's "Dog Tags of Courage". I have also sponsored Tanaka-san as a supporting member of the VDHA, which he is extremely proud of. If I had the time, ability, and expertise as you and John Burnam have at being published authors, I would seriously consider writing a book about the Japanese Trainers, Sentry Dogs and Handlers who were part of the Showa experience.

Its hard to believe that only 7 years after the surrender of Japan, Showa became one of the prime training bases in the Far East. The JT's trained numerous dogs for combat support bases in South Korea and other bases as part of the Korean War effort. Very few people are aware of the involvement of the Japanese in helping to train dogs for America. The sacrifice, dedication, and devotion these men have given to our country is a noteworthy story, which I feel should be told. I hope I didn't rattle on too much Mike, but I always do when I tell of my Japanese friends. I run in a very small circle of friends, all of whom are "dog buddies". I spent 20 years in the Air Force MWD Program. Those 20 years were without a doubt, the best years of my life. Nothing has equaled this, before or since. I hope this gives you an idea of what Showa was like.