

'Dog Days' Begin for the 173rd Airborne Brigade

Dog days have just started for the 173rd Airborne Brigade — scout dog days that is.

For the first time since the brigade arrived in Viet Nam in May, 1965, scout dogs will join the "Sky Soldiers" during operations. The newly arrived 39th Infantry Platoon — Scout Dogs, led by 2LT Michael K. Medlen, will accompany the brigade to the field.

"Our dogs have been trained to act as 'point man' under the guidance of a handler," said Medlen. "We try to put at least two dogs with each patrol, with one dog on point and the other either on flank or rear security. If the terrain is very difficult, it is sometimes best to keep the second dog in reserve, ready to take the point when the first dog gets tired.

A trained dog may prove to be a valuable asset. With few exceptions, it is true that wherever a man can go, a dog can also go.

"The dogs are not the com-

plete answer to the problems of a point man, however. They aren't infallible any more than a human is. All they can do is give an early warning when they detect something nearby. In the wrong terrain and with the wind blowing in the wrong direction they could walk into an ambush just like anyone else," said Medlen.

"The prime importance of the dogs," Medlen continued, "is that they give the patrol an added edge. They won't always detect everything around them, but when they do give a warning, there will be something, even if it is just discarded equipment."

The 39th can trace its lineage to World War II when scout dogs distinguished themselves in three major campaigns against the Japanese in the Philippine Islands. The last time the 39th was overseas was 1952 in Korea. Now there is a new generation of dogs in the 39th trained to carry on.

To become a scout dog, the

dogs go through a rigorous 12-week training program at Fort Benning. "A dog can be trained to do almost anything," said Medlen. "There have been cases where a dog has learned 108 separate commands."

The platoon is presently composed of 27 dogs, all of which are German Shepherds, found to be the best breed for duty in Viet Nam. All of the handlers are volunteers. "Most of my 12 handlers came to me straight from AIT," said Medlen. "They trained with the dogs at Fort Benning. They learned how to handle the dogs by handling them and how to care for the dogs by taking care of them."

Taking care of the dogs is the most important job the handlers have. The dogs require constant attention. "The health of the dog is our biggest worry. Every morning we carefully check their eyes, ears, mouth, feet and pads," the lieutenant said.

"Anything wrong with a dog impairs his ability to function properly. The veterinarian for this area visits us once a month to check the dogs, but it takes 24-hours-a-day supervision by us to keep the dogs fit."

"The important thing to remember about the dogs," Medlen concluded, "is that they are an assist to the infantry. They are not infallible. Even with the dogs along, a patrol must remember to 'keep its guard up'."

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The Big Red One saw nothing but victory in Highway 13 in June 1966. But its greatest moment came on June 30 when the Viet Cong, in reinforced regimental size, returned to the highway for a third time in that month, hoping to score at least one win. They paid dearly for their ill-made plans.

The battle has been described as "classic," "right out of the tactics book," but most of all it has been termed "deadly."

On June 30 elements of the 1st Reconnaissance Squadron, 4th Cavalry, and the 2nd Bn., 18th Infantry moved along the road between An Loc and Loc Ninh.

As the units moved along the highway, just north of the Golden Gate Bridge a report from the lead platoon of

Troop B rang over the radio: "We're receiving mortar and automatic weapons fire." It was 9:38 a.m.

In the next instant the entire column, which was stretched along the highway for almost a mile, began receiving heavy mortar, automatic weapons and recoilless rifle fire.

Soldiers who took part in the battle later described the sound of the fight as being like a continuous roll of thunder. "It was deafening."

The Viet Cong pressed their attack unaware that just minutes away reinforcements were charging to the scene. And from overhead, armed helicopters and jets began slamming the Viet Cong amidst the rain of artillery.

Shortly after 10 a.m. Big Red One commanders established that the main attack was moving from the northwest to the south.

To counter this, Troop B was moved from the highway into a blocking position to the south. The troop was joined by two Vietnamese units and the trap continued to grow.

Now Troop C of the cavalry and Co. C, 2nd Bn., 18th Infantry were on the highway banging into the Viet Cong.

The 1st Division commander, Major General W. E. DePuy, ordered Co.s A and B of the 2nd Bn. 18th Infantry into the area from the north.

Now the Viet Cong were faced with troops to their front, to the north and to the south. Thus, when they tried to escape, they headed right into the block to the south.

It was Troop B and the ARVN units who lay in waiting, and they greeted the fleeing Viet Cong with devastating fire power.

From the north came Cos. A and B.

Company A was moving southwestwardly, while B was moving south, immediately west of the highway.

The noose grew tighter, and the Viet Cong fought and ran in panic.

Company A began meeting stiff resistance.

On the highway Troop C and Company C were no longer engaged. They were joined by Company B.

Shortly after 3 p.m., Company A found fortified VC observation posts and bunkers.

To help, Company C was dispatched from the road to the right flank of Company A. Together the units overwhelmed and drove the VC

from their positions and into the blocking forces to the south.

The Viet Cong were again defeated.

U.S. troops physically counted 507 VC bodies.

Air Forces observers noted that while uniformed North Vietnamese carried on the fight, Viet Cong soldiers scampered along behind them, dragging away the wounded and dead.



SILENT SIGNAL . . . After receiving a silent warning signal from his scout dog, 'Toro,' PFC Carl Dobbins cautiously approaches a suspected Viet Cong position. A platoon of scout dogs is now attached to the 173rd Airborne Brigade and is frequently used on patrols in deuse areas. —Photo by SP4 Berni Zawacki.