



A History of the 58th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog)



2/99.

The 58th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog) was in existence, as a war dog unit, for almost four years. The unit did, however, start out as a very different animal. On February 27, 1951, the unit was constituted in the Regular Army as the 58th Infantry Counterfire Platoon, and was activated on April 30, 1951, at Fort Benning, Georgia. Shipping out to Korea, where it earned one campaign credit, "UN Summer - Fall Offensive", the unit was inactivated on October 28, 1951, in Korea.

As the buildup for the conflict in South Vietnam continued, the growing number of ground combat units required a growing number of scout dog platoons to be activated, trained and sent over to South Vietnam to support these infantry units. On September 25, 1967, the 58th Infantry Counterfire Platoon was redesignated as the 58th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog) and was activated, at Fort Benning, Georgia. Unit Orders number 2, dated October 26, 1967, had 1st Lt. Andrew E. Bond assuming command, with SFC Robert A. Siewinski as his NCOIC. The 58th was activated and trained specifically for deployment to the Republic of South Vietnam. The 58th trained in the care and use of scout dogs at the Dog Training Detachment at Fort Benning from October 30, 1967 to January 31, 1968, graduating with a complement of 27 men: 1 1st Lt, 1 SFC, 4 SSgts, 4 Sgts, 1 Cpl, 8 Sp4s, and 8 PFCs. Sp4 James A. Albaugh, handling Herman M417, was the honor graduate. Herman M417 was the only dog to remain with the 58th through that unit's entire Vietnam stay and to be returned to the U.S. when the unit stood down.

On February 16, 1968, the 58th IPSD was deployed to South Vietnam, via C130 Hercules aircraft, arriving in-country on February 18, 1968, at Tan Son Nhut air base. Some echelons actually landed during a ground attack against the air base, during the 1968 TET offensive. The unit was assigned to the 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) and was quartered at Phuoc Vinh, in III Corps, about 30 miles NNE of Saigon. The platoon spent the first few weeks getting settled and undergoing intensive training for their future operations. Their first operations, in support of the 3rd Brigade's battalions (1/506, 2/506, 3/187), were, around Phuoc Vinh. Operations gradually expanded out to the Cu Chi area, where 50% of the teams were quartered, while the balance of the unit, with its headquarters element, remained at Phuoc Vinh.

When they stepped off the C130s at Tan Son Nhet, in February 1967, the men of the 58th IPSD wore on their left shoulder, above the "Screaming Eagle" shoulder sleeve insignia of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), a curved scout dog tab bearing the text "58th INF SCOUT DOG" in black thread on an olive green background. The tab was edged in black thread. Black and olive green were the colors of a "subdued" patch. Since the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile) was the only major unit in South Vietnam that never wore their shoulder sleeve insignia in a subdued version, the men of the 58th, in early 1969, decided to go "full color" on their scout dog tab, the text and border in gold thread on a black background.

Personnel changes occurred with some people being infused into other units, some people being wounded and going home, and some replacements coming in. The first replacements were OJT, trained in the unit. The first Fort Benning school-trained replacements arrived on September 11, 1968. PFC Bobby Schaffer was wounded, in operations near Cu Chi, in July or August, and was medivaced back to the United States. His dog, Rebel M421, was unharmed.

In September 1968, the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile), with division head-quarters, were up in I Corps, while 3rd Brigade was down in III Corps. The decision came down to reunite the division. Therefore, the dog teams in Cu Chi returned to Phuoc Vinh and the unit packed up for the move North. On September 21, 1968, the unit; people, dogs, equipment, and unit vehicles, were all loaded onto C130 aircraft and were flown up to Hue/Phu Bai air base.

The 58th set up at Camp Rodrigez, a subset of the Division base camp, Camp Eagle, about a mile down the road from one of its sister units, the 42nd Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog), which supported infantry units in the 1st Brigade. A third unit, the 47th IPSD, located further North at LZ Sally, handled 2nd Brigade support. Time was spent getting settled in the new area. Marches were held to acclimate the dogs and men to the new type of terrain in I Corps, and bunkers were built. A training lane was set up and just as it was starting to be used the 58th was moved again.

On November 1, 1968, the 58th IPSD made the move North, via unit vehicles this time, through Hue and LZ Sally, to a spot about half way between Quang Tri and LZ Sally, Camp Evans. Camp Evans was the divisional headquarters base camp for the 1st Air Cavalry Division. Although the 1st Cav was moving South to I Corps, to Phuoc Vinh and Bien Hoa, some units were still at Evans when the 58th arrived.

Moving into an area formerly occupied by the 1st Cav's 34th IPSD, the unit quickly set up shop with it's first dog teams going out in early November. On November 11th, the 58th saw it's first I Corps casualties when Pvt Oscar McGhan was wounded and medivaced back the states and his dog Bo Bear 025M was killed. Bo Bear was the first dog buried in the unit cemetery at Camp Evans. Most operations for the 58th at this time were patrols in the mountains in the immediate vicinity of Camp Evans and night ambushes outside the perimeter. Time in camp was spent in constructing bunkers for the men, bunkering the dog crates, and

setting up new buildings. The unit started with an orderly room, two barracks, a vet shack, an outhouse, and a shower. Soon added were a supply room/barracks combination and a third barracks.

Replacements continued to come in to fill up the unit as original members started going home. Not all the original members had the same deros date so there was a gradual phase out of the originals. The last contingent of about 9 men left the unit in February 1969. Some veteran scout dog handlers were infused into the 58th from other units, some replacements were OJT, but most were from the Scout Dog School at Fort Benning. In February 1969, the outgoing CO, Captain Andrew Bond was replaced by 2nd Lt. Eugene R. Amberson, while SFC Siewinski was replaced by SFC Kenneth W. David.

Inspired, after seeing the 47th IPSD's Snoopy "Paw Power" unit sign at LZ Sally, Sgt. Robert A. Kollar designed and painted a unit sign for the 58th in March 1969. To make our Snoopy more warrior-like, he was presented in right-profile, sitting on his dog house roof, wearing a camouflage covered helmet, holding an M16 rifle in his left paw. The right half of the sign had a stylized German Shepherd head, facing left, made up of the words "SILENT" over "ALERT". Above the "SILENT ALERT" logo was "58th INF. PLT. SCOUT DOG" and below was "101st AIRBORNE DIVISION". The unit sign evolved over time. By mid 1971, Snoopy had been replaced by a large paw print, with "PAW" above and "POWER" underneath. The "SILENT ALERT" logo remained, but the text above and below had been removed. In the center were the commanding officer, the platoon sergeant, "58th SCOUT DOG PLT", and "THY SCENT, THY DOOM" at the bottom. In the upper left corner and the upper right corner were the words "HELL ON PAWS".

During April 1969, the 58th IPSD sent their first dog teams into the A Shau Valley during operation "Kentucky Jumper". On April 15th, the support mission for the 58th was expanded to include the 1st Brigade, 5th Mechanized Infantry Division at Quang Tri. Thus, the 58th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog) was now supporting two brigades. During the month of June 1969, the unit had 400 scout team support days, which, to that time, was the most support days ever pulled by a scout dog platoon in a one month period. The 58th supported the 5th Mech until August 20, 1969, when the 43rd Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog), detached from the withdrawing 9th Infantry Division, was reassigned to the 1st Brigade, 5th Mechanized Infantry Division.

Starting around May or June 1969, the 58th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog) started getting, as replacement handlers, men schooled at Fort Benning as off-leash handlers. The numbers continued to grow until the 58th was an all off-leash unit. Even mine dogs were incorporated into the unit. In 1970 there even was a drug dog, Mark (the narc).

July 19, 1969, saw the 58th suffering its first KIA of the Vietnam War. On that date Sp4 Raymon Draper Hales and his dog Rebel X202 were KIA while Sp4 Ronald Malone, walking slack on Hales first time out, was WIA and returned to the states.

By September 1969, the 58th was out of the A Shau Valley and worked the lowlands around Camp Evans. October 1969 saw 58th IPSD scout dog teams working on the DMZ, covering the withdrawal of the Marines from that area of operations. During this time SP4 Steven Tompkins was wounded by a chicom grenade but he recovered and returned to the 58th.

January 1970 saw another change in command as 1st Lt. Timothy E. Bryan took over for the outgoing 1st Lt. Amberson. Lt. Bryan's tour with the 58th IPSD was only six months long. On June 21, 1970, he moved down to Bien Hoa to assume duties as officer in charge of training at the Dog Training Detachment. He was replaced by 2nd Lt. Francis H. Hills Jr.

The second KIA for this unit occurred, on July 4, 1970, when Sp4 William Clayton Ray was killed. His dog Fritz received minor shrapnel wounds. Two days later Sp4 Bruce Bond was WIA and medivaced back to the United States. In August 1970, it was difficult to keep up with the requests for dog teams. At on time the 58th IPSD was supporting five battalions (1/506, 2/506, 3/187, 2/501, 2/502). Sgt. Derek Monty and his dog Rex were both WIA, receiving shrapnel wounds while on patrol with C Company, 2/501.

October 1970 saw SFC John H. Benson replacing outgoing NCOIC SFC Howard W. Ryan. The unit closed out 1970 with 1059 support days.

In February 1971, 2nd Lt. Leo M. Wertin arrived at the 58th IPSD, while 1st Lt. Hills was still in command. Sharing sort of a joint command for several weeks, Lt. Wertin took command of the 58th on March 18, 1971. Lt. Hills continued living in the unit area until his deros in June, 1971, but was performing duties at 3rd Brigade headquarters. The unit had changed. No longer were dog teams ferried out to helo pads, to be airlifted to the field. The 58th made their own helo pad. New buildings were added; a 4th barracks and a day room, and the shower was rebuilt. An obstacle course for the dogs was set up. In June, an actual kennel was started. The last real kennel the 58th IPSD had was back in Phuoc Vinh, in September 1968. But the new kennel never got beyond a concrete floor and the skeleton of a building. On July 21, 1971, the 58th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog) was inactivated in South Vietnam.

Five of the 58th IPSD dogs are known to have made it out of Vietnam. Herman M417 was the only 58th dog to go all the way in the one unit. Some handlers were redeployed to the few remaining scout dog platoons, some ended up in infantry outfits, and some got jobs in the rear.

The 58th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog) was in South Vietnam from February 18, 1968 to July 21, 1971 and served in ten campaigns of the Vietnam War, earning four unit citations. The Meritorious Unit Commendation (Army) was awarded for March 14, 1968 - October 3, 1968. The Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm was awarded for July 19, 1968 - May 14, 1969. A second award was for April 18, 1971 - August 31, 1971. The Republic of Vietnam Civil Action Honor Medal, First Class was awarded for October 3, 1968 - May 2, 1970.

Sgt. Robert A. Kollar (Rebel M421)
58th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog)
101st Airborne Division (Airmobile)
11 September 1968 - 19 August 1969

Robert A. Kollar
2/13/99