

U.S. Air Force Information Sheet

MILITARY DOGS

DECEMBER 1967

INTRODUCTION

Within the military there is a need for increased security of such areas as aircraft parking locations, ammunition dumps, warehouses, billets, missile complexes and isolated radar sites. Consequently, our Armed Forces are using trained dogs to assist sentries in guarding such areas. In Southeast Asia, where base perimeters must be protected against enemy infiltration, the need for trained sentry dog teams has increased considerably.

The Sentry Dog Branch, Department of Air Police Training, Lackland AFB, Tex., was established in 1958. Today, sentry dogs are trained at Lackland for all U.S. Armed Forces. The Air Force is the Department of Defense's sole procurer of sentry dogs for the Armed Forces.

THE SENTRY DOG TEAM

A sentry dog team consists of the volunteer handler (a security or military policeman) and his dog. ~~Intelligence, resourcefulness, patience and dependability~~ are primary considerations in the selection of handlers.

All sentry dogs are German Shepherds, chosen for their intelligence, size, strength, alertness, fearlessness, agility, adaptability to varying climates, and unique ability to detect intruders at great distances.

TRAINING

Sentry dog teams are trained at Showa AS, Japan; Wiesbaden AB, Germany; and Lackland AFB. Scout dogs are trained at Fort Benning, Ga. They are used primarily by the U.S. Army in daytime operations.

Handlers from all services attend an eight-week course, which includes the psychology of dogs, prevention of canine diseases, first aid for dogs, care of dogs, and principles of dog training.

Each handler is assigned a dog with which he trains and which he takes back to his home station upon completion of training. Should the handler leave his unit, the dog must be retrained with another handler. If the handler has been previously trained, this usually requires about one week.

Sentry dogs are trained in obedience, agitation, attack, and scouting. The handler must train with his dog to learn the appropriate vocal commands and hand gestures.

In obedience training the dog always wears a choke chain collar, while a leather one is used for agitation and scouting. Thus, the dog comes to associate the leather collar with work. He can be put "on duty" or "off duty" by switching collars.

Most of the commands given by the handler are one syllable words. Though a word may have no meaning to the dog, he learns to associate the sound with the exercise he is to perform.

Agitation exercises are used to develop aggressiveness in the dog. During this phase of training, the handler must have complete control of his dog. A person, other than the dog's handler, teases the animal to the extent that he will bite. The agitator wears protective clothing, or an attack sleeve which the dog can bite into. He carries a burlap bag or a leafy, supple switch, which enables him to provoke the dog without actually striking him.

Both the agitator and the handler play vital roles during these exercises. The agitator's job is to make sure the dog is always the winner and is never backed down. The handler's job is to encourage the dog when he shows aggressiveness toward the agitator.

Some agitation exercises are set up so the wind will carry the scent of the agitator to the dog. The dog does not see the agitator, but is allowed to catch the scent. By repeating the exercise, the dog begins to associate the smell of a concealed person with agitation, thus he becomes more alert.

There are several ways in which a dog may indicate that he is alerted. His body may become tense; his hackles may rise; his ears may prick up; or his panting may cease. Other signs of alertness may be recognizable to the handler, who must observe closely as his dog searches out the decoy.

During attack training, the dog learns to attack and apprehend, with or without command, when the handler's life is endangered. In this exercise, when the handler and his dog are only a short distance from the agitator the latter breaks cover. The handler orders the agitator to halt and place his hands over his head. When he ignores this order and attempts to run, the handler drops the leash and gives the command "Get him!" Upon this command, the dog attacks the agitator. The trained dog heeds and obeys orders given only by his handler.

CAPABILITIES OF SENTRY DOGS

The German Shepherd, besides having an IQ comparable to that of a seven-year-old child, has a capacity for learning about 100 commands. The average dog has a bite equal to 700 pounds per square inch of pressure. Aggressiveness cultivated during the training period remains a part of the dog's nature. Sentry dogs are trained to be far more aggressive than those used by civilian police departments.

A dog's sense of smell so far surpasses that of man's that it is nearly impossible to comprehend the difference. Experiments in Germany determined the ratio to be 10 million to one, and even higher for specific substances.

If a dog wishes to examine an object, he moves downwind to take advantage of his keenest sense -- smell.

A dog's hearing ability is about 20 times better than that of man. He can detect sounds above and below the pitch a human is capable of hearing.

This sense of hearing is the principal medium through which his handler communicates with him. Some dogs appear to understand very accurately the feelings and wishes of their handlers as they are conveyed by voice. Usually an encouraging word spoken in the proper tone will elate the dog, while a cross word will tend to depress him. Since the dog will normally be used at night, it is important that he respond to a number of oral commands. He soon learns to associate the sound and tone of a word with the desired action.

Besides learning to react correctly to voice commands, a dog must also learn to obey hand gestures.

With the exception of his ability to detect movement, a dog's vision cannot be compared favorably with that of the normal human. To the dog everything probably appears to be constantly out of focus. He is most likely unable to discriminate between colors. He sees everything as a black and white or grayish picture. He can, however, detect a moving object when it is moved ever so slightly and will respond to this movement.

Because sentry dogs are used primarily at night, vision is of limited importance during working hours. While working, a dog's effectiveness depends mainly upon his senses of smell and hearing.

USE OF SENTRY DOGS

The sentry dog's detection ability is obviously vastly superior to man's during periods of limited visibility. Since there are fewer distractions during the hours of darkness, there is a proportionate increase in the dog's ability to detect intruders. A sentry dog team seldom operates during daylight hours, except under emergency security conditions.

These teams are generally used in support of essential installations and around warehouses and similar areas to prevent thefts. They are used mainly in controlled areas where anyone who enters is immediately suspect.

Warning signs are posted along the perimeter of an area in which a sentry dog team is being used. The signs forewarn the innocent and unwary and serve as psychological deterrents to unauthorized entry.

The trained sentry dog can be compared to a dangerous weapon and must be handled as such. Outside of combat zones, the handler goes through the same challenging procedures required before firing a weapon. Only then does he release his dog to apprehend an intruder.

The health and comfort of sentry dogs are considered in the construction of kennels and runs. Drainage, minimal noise, an approved water source, and access to proper fire fighting equipment are given careful attention.

SENTRY DOGS IN VIETNAM

Forty sentry dog teams were sent to Vietnam in July 1965 from bases in the United States. The teams went on a trial basis to determine the dog's ability to adjust to Southeast Asia's climate.

Trained to detect, attack and hold intruders, the dogs have proved extremely valuable in guarding installations against infiltrating Viet Cong saboteurs. The experiment was so successful that the sentry dog force was increased to more than 500 permanently assigned teams.

There have been many instances of sentry dog teams performing heroically in the face of danger.

The war in Vietnam ended in December 1966 for sentry dog Nemo. On Dec. 5, 1966, Nemo and his handler, Robert A. Throneburg, then an A1C, were on a routine patrol at Tan Son Nhut AB. The base had been hit the day before by a Viet Cong mortar attack. The main enemy force was turned back by the 377th Security Police Squadron's main line of defense. But four infiltrators eluded detection by earlier search parties and hid inside the base's perimeter.

Throneburg and Nemo were assigned to search for the intruders. The search ended when Nemo detected the hidden Viet Cong. At Throneburg's command Nemo lunged savagely for the enemy. The pair quickly killed two of the enemy. But before additional security police could reach them, handler and dog were both wounded.

~~Nemo was credited with saving the life of his handler and preventing further destruction of life and property at Tan Son Nhut.~~

The pair parted company when Throneburg was flown to Japan for intensive medical care. Nemo recovered from his wounds, but lost an eye.

Because of extensive sentry dog use in Southeast Asia, an Air Force veterinary support facility has been constructed at Cam Ranh Bay. The Army has a similar facility in Saigon and badly wounded or sick animals may be air evacuated to either of these installations for veterinary medical treatment.

RECRUITING

The increasing need by the military for scout and sentry dogs, both abroad and in the United States, has stimulated a new recruiting campaign. The Air Force needs 2,000 more dogs for training.

Dogs must be German Shepherd (but need not be pedigreed), male or spayed female, one to three years old, weigh 60 pounds or more and stand at least 23 inches at the shoulder. Females must have been spayed for at least 90 days.

White dogs are not accepted because they are likely to reveal the position of a sentry at night, and they are more prone to skin disorders.

Owners who wish to sell or donate German Shepherd dogs should contact the USAF Sentry Dog Branch, Base Procurement Division, Lackland Air Force Base, Tex. 78236.