

From Mascot to Marine: The Long Walk to the American Military Dog Program

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Introduction

“People who haven’t been at the front don’t know what a little companionship means to a man on patrol duty, or in a dugout, or what a frisky pup means to a whole company . . . If we can’t get a dog we’ll take a goat, or a cat, or a pig, a rabbit, a sheep, or, yes, even a wildcat . . . We’ll take anything for a trench companion – but give us a dog first.”¹ During the First World War, British Lieutenant Ralph Kynoch articulated a fact of warfare known intrinsically by soldiers for generations: there is a unique place on the battlefield for man’s best friend, the dog. From ancient conflicts to the Medieval era, dogs participated in war as active combatants, fighting alongside their human counterparts. When militaries began developing at an accelerated rate, especially with the acquisition of gunpowder, war dogs fell out of fashion. By the time of the colonization of America, dogs could no longer be found among the European or fledgling American military forces. While American dogs were relegated to life as strays, pets, and hunting partners, European dogs maintained a working position essential to the functioning of society, which centuries later permitted a simplified transition back into military service. Aside from a small sled dog program located in Alaska in the first decade of the 20th century, the United States did not officially initiate a military dog program for the first 166 years of the country’s existence. It took the tragedy of Pearl Harbor and the ingenuity of civilians to initiate the first military dog program in the United States in 1942, propelling the American military structure into a modernized and equitable counterpart to European forces.

During the first century and a half of American history, the value of war dogs was still felt even in their absence from the battlefield. Individuals at the highest levels of colonial

¹ Ann Bausum, *Sergeant Stubby: How a Stray Dog and His Best Friend Helped Win World War I and Stole the Heart of a Nation* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2014), 43.

American society called for their reintroduction into military service. Benjamin Franklin, in a letter written in 1755, noted the value of scout and attack dogs in campaigns against Indian populations.² Franklin wrote, “Dogs should be used against the Indians . . . In case of meeting a party of the enemy, the dogs are all then to be turned loose and set on. They will be fresher and finer for having been previously confined and will confound the enemy a good deal and be very serviceable.”³ Historians have noted this recommendation likely originates from Franklin’s study of the Spanish conquest of South America rather than any military experience.⁴ A more official role was held by the lauded bloodhounds who served as sentry and tracking dogs, most notably at prison camps. Bloodhounds had been used to track runaway slaves for decades prior to the American Civil War, and upon its start their skills translated seamlessly to the prison environment. Slaves and freemen alike quickly grew to dread the creatures because of their ferocity in locating runaways. Even still, the bloodhounds and their like never held official military roles during the Civil War, but their use established a precedent for later sentry dogs.

Informal use of war dogs in American forces emerged during the Civil War. In 1861, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lee Scott acknowledged the value of dogs as messengers.⁵ Throughout the war, both Union and Confederate soldiers adopted dogs as “mascots” or companions for themselves and their compatriots. The mascot dog did not need to possess formal training, filled no official capacity, and, in many cases, broke regulations through its mere existence within a military unit.⁶ As would also be seen in later wars, the dog has a unique ability to circumvent military rules in a manner not afforded to any other being. Mascots showed a

² Quoted in Michael G. Lemish, *War Dogs: A History of Loyalty and Heroism* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 1996), 6.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Joan E. Cashin, “The Dogs of War: Canine Exploitation in the American Civil War,” in *Animal Histories of the Civil War Era*, edited by Earl J. Hess (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022), 172.

⁶ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 24-25.

tendency to transcend the place of a companion to facilitate the use and potential of a military dog, albeit in a rudimentary and instinctual fashion.

In the years spanning from the Civil War to World War I, dogs continued to serve alongside soldiers in unofficial mascot capacities. One American dog grew to international fame during the Spanish-American War in 1898. “The commander of one cavalry troop, a man by the name of Captain Steel, made every patrol in Cuba with a dog named Don in the lead.”⁷ Steel and Don would “walk point,” at the head of the patrol, to scout for potential threats, and the patrol never suffered an ambush under Don’s watchful eye. Steel claimed, “Dogs are the only scouts that can secure a small detachment against ambush in these tropical jungles.”⁸ Historian Michael Lemish noted that this event serves as an early parallel to the use of dogs in the Pacific Theater during World War II, where American troops encountered similar conditions made passable only through the keen senses of their canines.⁹ Coincidentally, it was at this same time that the U.S. military made its first steps towards official utilization of dogs. At the turn of the century, Army personnel began developing a sled dog program to compensate for travel and logistics difficulties due to the extreme weather conditions of the Alaskan wilderness. While this program was small, little known, and easily forgotten, it made valuable contributions in both World Wars for the Allied efforts. It remains the first official use of dogs by the United States military, even if the dogs themselves were never called war dogs in their own right.¹⁰

The American soldier’s experience with dogs reached a turning point in World War I. When the American Expeditionary Force arrived in the trenches in France in 1917, it

⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁸ Quoted in Lemish, *War Dogs*, 9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Charles L. Dean, *Soldiers & Sled Dogs: A History of Military Dog Mushing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 2.

encountered a diverse selection of fully trained military dogs within the French, British, Belgian, and German ranks. These military dogs were trained to serve as sentries, messengers, Red Cross search and rescue animals, as well as ambulances, transportation, and pest control. The fully trained military dogs made beneficial contributions to the war, with some canines saving hundreds of lives in a single battle. Germany astutely noticed the value of military dogs and began developing a military dog program in the 1880s that would gain renown, even being reported on in American newspapers.¹¹ Other nations, such as Great Britain and France, would institute military dog programs to meet wartime challenges. France's Red Cross dogs, trained in search and rescue, saved many lives and brought much needed attention to this fledgling program through intense and emotional propaganda. Britain's military dog program was fully instituted halfway through the conflict by Lt. Col. Edwin Hautenville Richardson, a man who had been independently creating a war dog school and recruiting dogs on his own accord for training. As such, although the British military dog program was implemented rather late in the war, it had a solid foundation that enabled a quick and efficient integration of dogs and handlers on the battlefield.¹² When the American soldiers arrived in Europe, they were able to benefit from the established military dog programs of their allies, as well as the mascot dogs of their compatriots, especially when faced with Germany's fierce dogs on the other side of the trenches.

American mascot dogs, whether smuggled abroad or found in the war zones, had nothing comparable to the extensive training of the European military dogs, and while the mascots often learned the tasks of their counterparts, the distinction between the mascot and military dog remained clear. However, mascots adapted and absorbed the tasks of the military dog through a

¹¹ "War Dogs of Europe," *Galveston Daily News*, January 1, 1894, 6.

¹² E. H. Richardson, *British War Dogs, Their Training and Psychology* (London: Skeffington & Son, Ltd.), 55, 57.

combination of training and basic instinct. They learned to alert to threats whether human or mechanical in nature and gave their men time to shelter and defend themselves from attacks they would not have sensed on their own.¹³ When the radio and telephone technology proved fragile in combat zones, dogs were trained to carry messages between the front lines and command centers; on multiple occasions, it was only the dog's message that arrived. Furthermore, small terrier breeds improved morale and trench conditions by attacking the overwhelming rat population that tormented soldiers throughout the day and night.¹⁴ It was a seamless transition for mascot dogs to integrate themselves into military life and they became indispensable to the mental and physical well-being of their soldiers. However, petitions by military personnel and civilians for Americans to create a military dog program fell upon unwilling ears. The pervading belief that American involvement would expedite the end World War I made the creation of an entirely new military structure appear superfluous and a needless expense. A few tentative forays into such a program were begun by civilians and Red Cross staff, but the anticipated end of the war arrived quickly, ending the need for any further work on such a project.¹⁵

Despite these experiences and the indisputable benefit that dogs brought to World War I, it would not be until World War II that the United States officially implemented a military dog program through the collaboration of the government-run K9 Corps and the civilian organization Dogs for Defense, Inc. Prior to the creation of the K9 Corps on March 13, 1942, the work of dogs on the battlefield was strictly informal as soldiers acquired dogs to act as mascots for their regiment. The sled dog program maintained by the Army in Alaska was little known, even within

¹³ Grant Hayter-Menzies, *From Stray Dog to World War I Hero: The Paris Terrier Who Joined the First Division* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 24-25.

¹⁴ Emily Green, "Five Dog Breeds That Served in World War I," *The United States World War One Centennial Commission*, <https://www.worldwar1centennial.org/index.php/communicate/press-media/wwi-centennial-news/6789-five-dog-breeds-that-served-in-world-war-i.html#:~:text=Many%20terriers%20were%20used%20as,still%20played%20a%20vital%20role.>

¹⁵ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 22-23.

military circles, and to all appearances did not possess any great value to the larger military structure. The integration of fully trained military dogs into the Marines, Army, and Coast Guard during World War II was accomplished by thoroughly preparing both handler and dog prior to their deployment. They effectively served their units as scouts and messengers, protecting their men not only by detecting threats but also attacking the enemy directly when the situation demanded it. The establishment of an official military dog program in the United States during World War II was a critical and inevitable step in the development of the country's military. Through the creative collaboration of civilians and military personnel, the K9 Corps and Dogs for Defense organization produced trained military dogs that had immediate positive impacts on the battlefield and laid the foundations for a permanent military dog program within the United States.

While scholarly interest in the working dog has increased, the amount of literature remains limited. Most of the well-known research into military working dogs exists in the stories of individual dogs written within popular histories. The exploits of Sergeant Stubby in World War I, Rin Tin Tin in the interwar years, and Smokey in World War II are examples of well-known war dogs that have been documented in biographies.¹⁶ In the late twentieth century, interest began to rise in the military dog institution, resulted in the writing of articles and books on its development and legality. The twenty-first century brought a rise of popular histories on military dogs as studies were conducted on the remarkable stories of individual dogs, but the larger story of the military working dog remains sparsely explored. With the rise of animal rights

¹⁶ See Bausum, *Sergeant Stubby*; Hayter-Menzies, *From Stray Dog to World War I Hero*; & Damien Lewis, *Smokey the Brave: How a Feisty Yorkshire Terrier Mascot Became a Comrade-in-Arms During World War II* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2018).

activism, scholars have begun to question the ethics of utilizing military dogs.¹⁷ Issues surrounding the inherent danger of military service and the dog's ability to understand and consent to the work are prevalent, as well as concerns about mistreatment and status within the military structure.¹⁸ Conversely, many of the most popular dog breeds for military use were designed for active, purposeful work, and a sedentary civilian life could be classified as mistreatment of its own.¹⁹ The combination of these works provides a more comprehensive view of the history of military dogs.

Many of the earliest works on the military dog program consist of memoirs and journal articles recording firsthand experiences with the dogs. Most of these writings were favorable to the dogs, since they were written by their trainers, handlers, and fellow servicemen who had reaped the rewards of their selfless service. Captain William W. Putney wrote a memoir of his experiences with military working dogs through World War II as the veterinarian and commanding officer for the 3rd War Dog Platoon. *Always Faithful: A Memoir of the Marine Dogs of WWII* recalls his work at the first Marine military dog school at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, serving in combat alongside the dogs in the Pacific Theater, and fighting for their right to come home after the war. This last battle, initially won in 1945 when Putney helped develop the Marine Corps detrainning program, would reawaken from the final days of World War II until 2000, with President Bill Clinton's institution of H.R. 5314, "Robby's Law" protecting military dogs right to a retirement.²⁰

¹⁷ "The Changing Welfare Concerns of Military Working Dogs: Ethics of Animal Use," *University of British Columbia*, https://blogs.ubc.ca/aileenm/?page_id=56.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Belgian Malinois," *American Kennel Club*, <https://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/belgian-malinois/>.

²⁰ William W. Putney, *Always Faithful: A Memoir of the Marine Dogs of WWII* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 224.

The beginnings of the military dog program would not have been possible without the Dogs for Defense organization which spearheaded efforts to recruit dogs for military work from 1942-1945. Written by Fairfax Downey, *Dogs for Defense: American Dogs in the Second World War, 1941-1945*, was published in 1955 as the Dogs for Defense organization's official accounting of its work during the war.²¹ This work contains not only the internal record of Dogs for Defense efforts, but also images of original documents, newspaper clippings, and letters pertaining to their work. Beyond the immediate importance of the Dogs for Defense history, this book also provides a glimpse into the larger picture of American military dog development in the Second World War. It was one of the earliest publications released by any of the agencies at the head of the military dog movement and formed a foundation for scholarship only ten years after World War II's end.

With the passing of time, those who served with the earliest military dogs began passing away, handing their story to a new generation of scholars who did not possess that intimate bond. *Police and Military Dogs: Criminal Detection, Forensic Evidence, and Judicial Admissibility* by lawyer John Ensminger explores the legality and ethics surrounding the use of police and military dogs. He collaborated with professional dog trainers, handlers, and scientists to provide the most relevant information on numerous legal aspects of military dogs. As Ensminger explains, "This book described police procedures, forensics studies, and the law that has been applied to evidence produced or affected by police canine work."²² Ensminger articulates the workings of military and police dogs as well as how their efforts fit into the functioning of

²¹ Fairfax Downey, *Dogs for Defense: American Dogs in the Second World War, 1941-45* (New York: Daniel P. McDonald, 1955), III.

²² John Ensminger, *Police and Military Dogs: Criminal Detection, Forensic Evidence, and Judicial Admissibility* (Baton Rouge: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), xxiii.

society. It is currently one of the foremost sources on the legality of military dogs and the practical aspects of their work.

Other studies of military dogs include Seth Paltzer's article "The Dogs of War: The U.S. Army's Use of Canines in World War II." Paltzer traces the American military dog program from its inception with Dogs for Defense through the end of the war in 1945, providing a concise history of the first official American military dog program and its effectiveness in combat. He argues that the collaboration of the military dogs and their handlers was an "invaluable contribution to the American war effort."²³ His research is detailed, presenting the large-scale scope of creating a military dog infrastructure while also cataloging the names and service information for soldiers and their dogs. Paltzer recounts not only the facts of military dog training and deployment, but also personal stories of their service alongside American forces abroad, providing a thorough introduction to the American military dog program in World War II.

Charles L. Dean presents a focused study of the American sled dog program in his book *Soldiers & Sled Dogs: A History of Military Dog Mushing*. This little-known part of the military was the earliest official military use of dogs in America. Dean surveys the program's century of work in the United States, revealing its importance to World War I and World War II as well as the later conflicts of the twentieth century, including the tension-filled decades of the Cold War.²⁴ Military records reveal the logistics of the sled dog program, and personal accounts from the dogs' handlers record the realities of life for dog and man. Although this program was largely centered in Alaska and the Arctic regions, it was of vast importance to American efforts in these

²³ Seth Paltzer, "The Dogs of War: The U.S. Army's Use of Canines in World War II," *On Point* 17, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 41.

²⁴ Dean, *Soldiers & Sled Dogs*, 92.

regions in times of war and peace as the sled dogs transported supplies, assisted with patrols, and formed close bonds with their fellow soldiers.²⁵ The sled dog program was unique because it was the only canine contribution made by the United States to her allies on the Western Front in World War I. Through a secret smuggling operation, the sled dogs were transported from Alaska to the trenches of France and mountains in Europe to assist in transporting supplies, as the existing horse and vehicle teams were unable to cope with the winter conditions.²⁶ Dean describes how these dogs assisted in saving numerous lives in World War I and how their pioneering search and rescue work during World War II established a system for dispatching military dog teams by plane and parachute, a tactic that remains in use in the twenty-first century.

Recent historians and journalists have found a balance between the endearing remembrances of the early memoirs and the analytical scholarship of successive publications by providing an empathetic retelling of the dogs' stories while also utilizing scholarly sources to study the institution that employed them. It is here that the biography of the military dog thrived, sparking public interest in the dogs of the past and those currently serving the United States. Published in 2014, *Sergeant Stubby: How a Stray Dog and His Best Friend Helped Win World War I and Stole the Heart of a Nation* by Ann Bausum is one of the most recent contributions to the topic. Although it is a popular history, Bausum's work combines an array of both primary and secondary sources in the effort to bring a forgotten war hero to light. She takes Stubby's early life through his days on the front lines of combat and concludes with his final years touring the nation.²⁷ While Bausum's book focuses on Stubby, it reveals common realities of American

²⁵ Ibid., 33.

²⁶ Ibid., 4.

²⁷ Bausum, *Sergeant Stubby*, 202-203.

mascot dogs smuggled to Europe. Stubby's story is itself significant because he was the first dog to be officially awarded an official military rank in the United States. Sergeant Stubby formed early American perceptions of military dogs and the value they could have to military efforts, cementing his importance to research and study of American military dogs.

A second biography, published in 2011, is Susan Orlean's *Rin Tin Tin: The Life and The Legend*.²⁸ This biography tells the story of Rin Tin Tin, a dog from German forces, who was discovered in the trenches of France as a puppy in the aftermath of World War I and brought to America, where he became a Hollywood icon. While she focuses little on the war itself, Orlean's work is valuable because it records the life of one dog after the conclusion of the war. The years between World War I and World War II are important because of the potential for development in humanity's understanding of dogs and in the creation of official military dog units. It is likewise important to record the lives of these dogs after the war ends, as many were abandoned or euthanized. Rin Tin Tin's story is unique among these dogs and serves as a sharp contrast to the twilight years of other military dogs, establishing a precedent for retiring and rehoming canine veterans after their service has concluded.

A third biography chronicles the life of a mascot dog in World War II, the time of greatest transition for military dogs as they moved into official positions. *Smoky the Brave: How a Feisty Yorkshire Terrier Became a Comrade-in-Arms During World War II* by Damien Lewis studies the life and service of a small dog named Smokey. Although Smoky was not among the ranks of the trained military dogs – rather, she was a remnant of the great mascot dog tradition – she nevertheless proved the tenacity, intelligence, and loyalty demonstrated by dogs for those who cared for them. American airmen discovered Smoky, weighing no more than four pounds,

²⁸ Susan Orlean, *Rin Tin Tin: The Life and the Legend* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

in the jungles of New Guinea and adopted her to be their mascot. By the end of the war, Smoky had risen into the ranks of the greatest military dogs with her aptitude for sentry work and her remarkable act of threading a radio cable through a pipe underground for seventy feet. Smoky earned eight battle stars in the course of her service and stands among the ranks of dogs such as Stubby in her importance in the history of military dogs.²⁹ In the time of the first official military dog program, Smoky was a mascot who demonstrated their continued value to military operations, revealing a remnant of the old ways even as new methods for utilizing canines in the armed forces were being developed.

A valuable survey of the American military dog institution is *War Dogs: A History of Loyalty and Heroism*, written by Michael G. Lemish and published in 1996. This work chronicles the history of military dogs in the United States from World War I to Vietnam. At the time of writing, Lemish evaluated eighty years of military dog experience in the United States and accessed official military training manuals, declassified reports, and memorandums that expanded the depth of his research. Due to this large scope, Lemish summarizes many aspects of military dog history out of necessity, but as a result his work stands as one of the premier surveys on American military dogs. It encapsulates the most critical moments in military dog history in the United States and reveals a clear timeline of developments aided by collaboration with European nations, predominantly Great Britain, who shared their experience to accelerate the development of American military dogs.

A second survey is *Doing Their Bit: The British Employment of Military and Civil Defense Dogs in the Second World War* by Kimberly Brice O'Donnell. This work studies the British use of military dogs in World War II as it "traces the development of the British military

²⁹ Lewis, *Smoky the Brave*, synopsis.

dog in the first half of the 20th century, examines why and how military and Civil Defense dogs were trained and employed, analyses canine performance in training and on operations during the 1939-1945 conflict and considers the legacy of the Second World War military dog scheme.”³⁰ It is valuable because many techniques and practices for modern military dogs originated in Germany and in Great Britain under Lt. Col. E.H. Richardson, who devoted his life to the creation of a well-equipped military dog force.³¹ As the American public was aware of European military dogs as early as the 1880s, their practices would have been invaluable to the fledging American military dog forces in the First and Second World Wars. In World War II, direct collaboration between American military personnel and British military dog experts greatly benefited and accelerated the development of the American military dog program. Studies such as Brice O’Donnell’s are essential to understanding the development of the American military dog program within its global context.

This historiography provides a brief overview of the available literature on American and European military working dogs and their work during the First and Second World Wars. While the scholarly inclusions are thorough and well-researched, they are limited despite the growing interest in popular histories and biographies of military working dogs in the public domain. The personal stories of individual dogs combined with the scholarly surveys of the military dog institution provides academic and intimate analyses of the inaugural ranks of military dogs in the United States. Each book and journal article contributes another valuable element to the topic of military dogs. Michael G. Lemish and Kimberly Brice O’Donnell both provide thorough surveys

³⁰ Kimberly Brice O’Donnell, *Doing Their Bit: The British Employment of Military and Civil Defense Dogs in the Second World War* (Havertown: Helion & Company, Ltd., 2019), xvi.

³¹ Rebecca Frankel, “The Dog Whisperer: How a British Colonel Altered the Battlefields of World War I, and Why His Crusade Still Resonates Today,” *Foreign Policy*, October 22, 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/10/22/the-dog-whisperer/>.

of national military dog programs, and the works of Ann Bausum and Grant Hayter-Menzies complement such surveys by bringing individual dogs to the forefront. Despite the growing number of journal articles, books, and studies, there are still gaps remaining in the available literature, as most studies remain narrow in their focus. It is key that America's military dog program be understood within the context of the place of dogs in American history. Furthermore, one cannot understand the creation of the first K-9 Corps without evaluating both the military and civilian actors involved in its creation. Dogs for Defense must be studied in tandem with the K-9 Corps, for only in tandem can the workings of these complex organizations in their very infancy be quantified. Until the time when technology can replace canine senses and instincts, there will be a place for military dogs alongside human troops. The creation of the American military dog program in World War II laid the foundation for the continued utilization of the military dog, served as the proving ground for the capabilities of dogs, and expanded the understanding of how dogs might be used on the battlefield.

Chapter One

From ancient times, footprints and pawprints have appeared side by side.¹ The colloquialism of the dog as man's best friend is firmly rooted in truth. Whether as a beast of burden, a household guardian, or compatriots in battle, dogs and humans are able to form unique, enduring bonds. As societies have changed, so too have the roles of canines. With more understanding of the abilities of dogs, humanity is better able to train and utilize them for the betterment of both parties. The concept of the war dog found rebirth in the twentieth century. The fragile components of the radio, telephone, and telegraph proved unreliable on the battlefield. Furthermore, when faced with attacks of gas and chemicals, soldiers had little time to react before the damage was dealt. In these areas, dogs were recognized to possess superior abilities to humans in detecting threats, carrying messages, and saving the lives of the wounded.

American soldiers did not exist in isolation from trained dogs of war, as they were able to work alongside and even borrow canines from their allies in World War I. These experiences instigated discussions within civilian and military circles regarding the formation of an equitable American program and established precedents for the abilities and limitations of canine soldiers.² In the United States, the role of the dog was predominantly in the shadows until World War II forced the desperate hands of civilians and military personnel to create a defense against ever growing horrors of war. In 1942, dogs were once again granted the privilege owned by their ancestors to serve on the battlefield. However, prior to the creation of the K-9 Corps and Dogs for Defense, dogs still found their way to the front lines and into the lives of soldiers. It is

¹ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 8.

² "Red Cross Dogs for the Army," *Army and Navy Register* (May 20, 1916): 655, Articles/ Extracts: Army Sources, C.A. 1912-2003, War Dogs Articles, Clippings, Collection 5440, Box 4, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

therefore crucial to understand not only the place of dogs within American society, but also how dogs were used by Western nations during World War I to fully grasp the formation of the American military dog program in 1942.

During the colonial period, dogs found employment as trackers, hunters, guardians, and pets, with the alternative life as a stray. The latter was most perilous, as dogs were feared to be carriers of rabies and exterminated in droves within areas of dense human populations.³ For those dogs given dedicated roles, they were well-trained and carefully bred. In the lives of the landed gentry, it was a matter of pride to possess kennels full of well-bred dogs. George Washington maintained kennels at Mount Vernon for over forty years, procuring fine French hounds from his friend the Marquis de Lafayette in 1785 that gradually spread through their descendants amongst Washington's acquaintances.⁴ Other Founding Fathers, including John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, held dogs in high esteem. Contrasting to Washington, who bred his dogs for hunting, Jefferson utilized his dogs as livestock guardians, and carefully began breeding his own stock from the French sheepdog during his time stationed abroad.⁵ Although genetics were still little understood, trial and error gradually led to breeds becoming standardized and refined in the United States over the following decades.

Dogs were not only companions and farm stock at that time. Slave-owners understood the potential of dogs as trackers for runaway slaves, and many plantations had ample kennels full of specially-trained canines.⁶ These dogs, a number of them hounds, would follow the scents of slaves until they found their quarry. Once their victim was cornered, the dogs would either "tree"

³ Mark Derr, *A Dog's History of America: How Our Best Friend Explored, Conquered, and Settled a Continent* (New York: North Point Press, 2004), 75.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 73, 76-77.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶ Lorien Foote, "The Dogs Ought to Be Exterminated: Dogs Slavery, and the Consequences of Emancipation" in *Aniaml Histories of the Civil War Era*, ed. Earl J. Hess (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022), 188.

them, forcing them into the branches of foliage for protection, or set upon them with their teeth. These dogs were feared for their ferocity and tenacity, as once they were given a task, they would set themselves on the trail of any target, even slaves who had been their caretakers. Bloodhounds became creatures from nightmares, as can be seen in the writings of freed or escaped slaves, such as “Former slave Harriet Jacobs,” who “invoked these dogs frequently in her autobiography, with one especially vivid quotation from her uncle Benjamin, who said that when a runaway ‘is hunted like a wild beast he forgets . . . every thing,’ even God, ‘in his struggle to get beyond the reach of the bloodhounds.’”⁷

During the Civil War, bloodhounds were used to guard prison camps and locate runaway prisoners of war. They served as sharp deterrents for escape at prisons such as Andersonville, where daily patrols served as a reminder of the canine presence at the camps.⁸ The unconscious threat of the bloodhound filled soldiers with terror, as “One Yankee prisoner felt horrified by its ‘deep ominous bay,’ echoing across the landscape, its persistence, and its lack of mercy. Many troops had a visceral fear of these dogs, comparing them to ‘monsters,’ and dreading what Federal soldier John Geer described as their ‘powerful jaws; bearing ‘large, terrible teeth.’”⁹ Bloodhounds’ effectiveness at locating missing persons was unmatched at the time, and they retained their positions as sentries and trackers for the duration of the Civil War.

The return of dogs to military roles was a drawn-out process forced by the outbreak of the American Civil War. However, it was not a military dog force that spawned from the conflict, but the rise to prominence of mascot dogs. The mascot dog is a pet, comparable in function to a

⁷ Quoted in John Campbell, “The Seminoles, the ‘Bloodhound War,’ and Abolitionism, 1796-1865,” *The Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 2 (May 2006): 259.

⁸ Joan B. Cashin, “Canine Exploitation in the American Civil War,” in *Animal Histories of the Civil War*, ed. Earl J. Hess (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022), 173.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 174.

therapy dog, meant to provide comfort and companionship to soldiers as they faced the horrors of the battlefield. Brevet Major George Ward Nichols noted of the menagerie of mascots, “These pets are watched, fed, protected, and carried along with a faithfulness and affection which constantly suggest the most interesting psychological queries.”¹⁰ These dogs, a majority of whom began life as strays, revealed the enduring tendency of mascots to supersede the bounds of companionship and through a combination of instinct and informal training learn to contribute in valuable ways to the war effort. Some, such as Battery of the 1st Illinois Light Artillery, would attack enemies when threatened.¹¹ Many more served as companions to the wounded and dying, as was witnessed in Sallie, the mascot of the 11th Pennsylvania Infantry; Sallie is one of the only mascots of the Civil War to be memorialized on a battlefield, and her statue is one of the many at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.¹² Unfortunately, most mascots did not survive long enough to develop the battlefield instincts essential for survival; however, their presence provided the soldiers around them with valuable moments of comfort.

Soldiers were not the only demographic to forge special connections to dogs, nor were they the only party to make contributions towards what would become military dog structures. There was a rising surge beginning in the 1870s of interest in the dog fancier community. These individuals were passionate about producing the best possible canines, and many found specialties within specific breeds. The dog show also grew in popularity as it served not only as a display of the finest dogs, but also as a gathering of likeminded individuals who could debate new findings, practices, and ethical considerations of breeding respectable dogs.¹³ The dog fancy

¹⁰ George Ward Nichols, *The Story of the Great March From the Diary of a Staff Officer* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1865), 76.

¹¹ Charles G. Worman, *Civil War Animal Heroes: Mascots, Pets and War Heroes* (Lynchburg: Schroeder Publications, 2011), 74.

¹² *Ibid.*, 71-73.

¹³ Harriet Ritvo, “Pride and Pedigree: The Evolution of the Victorian Dog Fancy,” *Victorian Studies* 29, no.2 (Winter 1986): 240.

focused on “breeding and showing pedigreed animals – was a series of finely graded differentiations, which functioned both to establish the unique character of each breed and to assess the relative excellence of dogs of the same breed.”¹⁴ To meet the demands of this niche community, groups came together to begin official organizations that established firm parameters for the breeding and competing of dogs. The American Kennel Club, which was founded in 1884, provided stability to the dog fancying society and created standards surrounding recognized breeds, pedigree registries, and competitive events.¹⁵ Within these organizations rose individuals who helped formalize and regulate breed standards through selective breeding practices, training regimens, and outreach into the greater world.

By the turn of the century, a new and sharper distinction had arisen between these formalized breeds and the strays and mutts who ran rampant through America. As later wars would demonstrate, both purebred and mixed breeds had the potential for military service; the former, however, typically provided greater consistency for the demands of combat. It would not be the military, but dog fanciers, who served as the expert consultants on the suitable breeds as the dog fancying world cemented itself within American society throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Coincidentally, European governments also began developing interest in the abilities of dogs for military service. The rebirth of the war dog was soon to be at hand, and it would be a phenomenon that contributed to the formation of modern warfare practices.

A few nations, such as France and Germany, began experimenting with training dogs for military service in the 1870s and 1880s, but most Western countries did not have official canine

¹⁴ Ibid., 229.

¹⁵ “History of the American Kennel Club,” *American Kennel Club*, February 8, 2023, <https://www.akc.org/about/history/>.

units until the 1910s.¹⁶ The French possessed a well-equipped war dog program that was created in 1906, briefly discontinued in 1914, and reinstated in 1915 coinciding with the replacement of Marshal Joseph Joffre.¹⁷ However, it was Germany who possessed the most established and refined war dog program in the Western world. Begun in the 1880s, the German war dogs brought international recognition at the turn of the twentieth century.¹⁸ These canine experiments were well-documented in the American press, if accessible only by a niche audience in scientific and military journals. *Scientific American* reported news of war dog studies on numerous occasions from the 1880s through World War I. A July 1887 issue, after reporting details of the experimental German military dog program, predicted,

And they are truly wonderful for the present, though bidding fair to become a commonplace institution in that great machine, the German army. The consequences and possibilities of the shepherd dog service are apparent to all who know anything of military science, and make their citation superfluous. One thing is certain, that a future war between Germany and any of its neighbors will not be conducted without its dog regiment, which, though not employed in concerted action, will perform service more valuable than the cats of ancient Egypt.¹⁹

While Great Britain and the United States were both dismissive of numerous proposals for the creation of military dog units, the latter began a microscopic dog program that, while not producing war dogs, created an equally valuable product for the context of the First World War.²⁰ The U.S. Army found a weakness in its logistical system that dogs were perfectly equipped to fill. In 1901, the Army personnel stationed at Fort Egbert, Alaska were given a nigh impossible charge: create the structures for the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph

¹⁶ Chris Pearson, “‘Four-Legged *Poilus*’: French Army Dogs, Emotional Practices and the Creation of Militarized Human-Dog Bonds, 1871-1918,” *Journal of Social History* 52, no.3 (Spring 2019): 731.

¹⁷ Michael Lemish, *War Dogs: A History of Loyalty and Heroism* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 1996), 14.

¹⁸ “German War Dogs: The Methods Used in Training the Canines for Campaign Purposes,” *Daily Picayune* 60, no.228 (September 8, 1896): 12.

¹⁹ “Military Dogs,” *Scientific American* 57, no.3 (July 16, 1887): 37.

²⁰ Rebecca Frankel, “The Dog Whisperer: How A British Colonel Altered the Battlefields of World War I, and Why His Crusade Still Resonates Today,” *Foreign Policy: Washington* 208 (Sep-Oct 2014): 92.

System in a maximum of five years. This project would have been a simple one to accomplish in most terrains in the United States. However, the brutal Alaskan winters made transporting and installing the necessary materials nearly impossible. The standard equine transportation, while practical in the summer, could not function during the winter. Lieutenant Billy Mitchell, the commanding officer overseeing the project, utilized the expertise of local populations to harness their standard winter transportation system of sled dog teams. He quickly built up a permanent kennel of two hundred dogs by using local training and breeding practices to create an efficient and healthy collection of sled dogs.²¹ Through “teams of men and dogs,” hauling “cables, poles, and other equipment,” Mitchell oversaw the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System “completed in only two years, three years ahead of the original schedule.”²² Rather than disbanding the sled dog teams after the project’s completion, Mitchell and his successors ensured that it continued serving as a primary system of transporting men and supplies.²³

When World War I broke out, the militaries of Europe were ill-equipped for the combination of snowy and mountainous terrain, leading to supply deliveries taking two weeks or more. Captain Mufflet, a French soldier, had witnessed the Alaskan sled dogs in action and in 1914-1915 suggested utilizing their skills to improve their transportation systems.²⁴ Scotty Allan, a veteran sled dog handler, worked with the French government to transport one hundred and six sled dogs, equipment, and necessary personnel across first Canada, and then the Atlantic, in complete secrecy.²⁵ When the Canadian government added three hundred more dogs and their supplies, Allan’s task grew exponentially more difficult.²⁶ Upon their arrival in France, he

²¹ Charles L. Dean, *Soldiers & Sled Dogs: A History of Military Dog Mushing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 3.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

trained fifty French handlers for the dog teams. The dogs proved to be the answer long needed, as they “were far more economical than horses. Two seven-dog teams could do the work of five horses in the formidable terrain.”²⁷ In one instance, sled dog teams were able to decrease a two-week supply run by horse to only four days by dogsled.²⁸ These dogs proved invaluable to ensuring the success of Allied forces not only through their own work, but also by forming a foundation for future European sled dog teams. At the conclusion of the war, the American sled dog program faded into the background, surviving in the vast reaches of Alaska until it would be needed again.

It was during the First World War that numerous governments took note of the work carried out by dogs and acted on their potential for military service. Britain established a military dog program at the beginning of World War I under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Hautenville Richardson. At the outbreak of the war, Belgium transitioned its plethora of everyday cart dogs into a valuable battlefield transportation system.²⁹ In the context of trench warfare, dogs had many advantages over horses, vehicles, and even humans, as they were cheaper to maintain, had increased maneuverability, and were harder targets for the enemy to pinpoint. A transition occurred that saw the instinctual work carried out by the strays smuggled by soldiers to the Western Front become recognized and respected as assets to the Allied war efforts. Official training methods were developed by the British military through experimentation with the abilities of dogs in order to better understand how they could serve in a time of warfare. The dogs of the Western Front contributed invaluable service through transportation, sentry duties, carrying messages, and working with the Red Cross, which established precedents that

²⁷ Ibid., 5.

²⁸ Ibid., 4.

²⁹ Jean-Michel Veranneman, *Belgium in the Great War* (Newburyport: Pen & Sword Books Limited, 2019), 29.

would save countless lives during the war and in the following decades through their replication in the first American military dog program in World War II.

In order to understand the roles dogs were given on the Western Front, it is essential to understand the general perceptions of dogs that every military shared. While certain countries saw greater success in their use of military dogs than others, there were similarities throughout all in the training processes and their selection of breeds. Through trial and error, the British, French, and German militaries determined that certain breeds were best suited to specific roles.³⁰ Terrier breeds, collies, and retrievers were the ideal messengers as they were fast, able to traverse the battlefields and trenches with ease, and difficult to identify, especially from a distance. Terriers were also exceptional ratters, catching and killing dozens of rats throughout the trenches per day and making at least a small difference in the conditions suffered by soldiers. One dog trainer, quoted in a September 1916 *Vanity Fair* article, stated,

hunting dogs in general made poor war dogs, but that many breeds of the non-hunting type are represented in the French army. Except for the draught animals, French breeds are in the majority. Many come from the region of the Beauce; other excellent types, capable of standing any amount of rough going, are shepherd dogs and mountain dogs from the Pyrenees. Some of the best of the war dogs seem to be mongrels.³¹

Larger breeds of huskies, retrievers, and mastiffs were the ideal Red Cross, sentry, and transportation dogs due to their size and instincts. A necessity of most roles for dogs at the Western Front was speed and agility, two attributes in which dogs are superior to people. The average Border Collie and German Shepherd can run upwards of thirty miles per hour due to their lean frames, while stockier breeds such as the St. Bernard will average nineteen miles per hour.³² The larger dogs could pull heavier loads but at a slower pace, while the leaner dogs could

³⁰ Chris Pearson, "Dogs, History, and Agency," *History and Theory* 52, no. 4 (December 2013), 140.

³¹ "Dogs of Battle and Dogs of Mercy," *Vanity Fair*, September 1916.

³² American Kennel Club, "Fast Cat Top 20 Fastest Dogs By Breeds."

https://www.apps.akc.org/apps/fastcat_ranking/

arrive at their destination faster, provided conditions allowed for them to reach their top speeds. Other breeds, including Labrador Retrievers and Siberian Huskies, are best at maintaining speed; while they only average ten to fifteen miles per hour at their top speed, they can move at a steady pace for hours. In the Belgian army, their transportation and sentry dogs were “chiefly of a large size, short coated and” possess “a strong mixture of Great Dane blood, although they usually show a less graceful build and a heavier head than the pure Dane.”³³ By contrast, Germany employed a diverse collection of breeds, including “the Shepherd dogs . . . Airedales, Doberman Pinschers, the Rottweiler, a sort of cattle dog, and the Boxer,” and “A few Dachshunds, which have almost come to be symbolic of German dogdom. . .”³⁴

In their training, it was essential that proper methods were followed to ensure that the dogs were ready for service in active war zones. Lt. Col. Edwin Hautenville Richardson was responsible for single-handedly pioneering the British military dog program and developing training regimen.³⁵ These methods would become the established practice for training military dogs throughout the following decades, with many still permeating K-9 academies in the 21st century. Richardson’s love for dogs allowed him to understand that they responded better to kindness than to brutality; as such, his practices focused on a reward-based system.³⁶ When the dogs performed a task properly, they were given praise, treats, or toys as a reward, which instilled in them a passion for their work because it was a pleasant experience. These practices were later replicated in the American K9 Corps during World War II, when trial and error

³³ “Dogs of Battle and Dogs of Mercy.”

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Frankel, “The Dog Whisperer,” 91.

³⁶ Pearson, “Dogs, History, and Agency,” 141.

revealed that harsh treatment resulted in fearful and inconsistent military dogs, but praise and rewards created a confident and dependable canine partner.³⁷

Throughout his years working with a variety of dog breeds, Richardson came to favor Airedales “for the particular needs of these pre-war years” because he found the breed to be “an all-round, courageous, reliable and hardy individual, could not be beaten, and the extraordinary way in which he is able to adapt himself to both northern and southern climates is exceedingly remarkable and useful.”³⁸ This favoritism continued throughout the war, noted in *Vanity Fair* in 1916: “The Airedale with his hardy constitution and gameness, coupled with intelligence and a coat that helps him resist the rigors of trench life, has made a record for himself among war dogs.”³⁹ Decades later, when the United States began identifying the ideal breeds for military service, Airedales were included among the list of thirty-two acceptable breeds.

Although he was the only British military officer working on a military dog program in the early years of the war (a program that his government did not officially support), Richardson believed that “we had the advantage in this country by the possession of a better choice of dogs for the work” over Germany.⁴⁰ The military dog program in Germany had become well established in the first decade of the 20th century, far exceeding in quantity anything Richardson alone could produce, but he believed the quality of his dogs was much higher; the truth would be determined on the battlefield. Although there were many hurdles faced in the creation of military dog programs, Richardson identified “The inability of our people to recognize that a dog is capable of real work and is worth taking seriously” as a “stumbling-block in many cases” that led

³⁷ War Department, *TM 10-396 Technical Manual for War Dogs* (Washington, D.C.: War Department, July 1, 1943), 58.

³⁸ E. H. Richardson, *British War Dogs, Their Training and Psychology* (London: Skeffington & Son Ltd., 1920), 52.

³⁹ “Dogs of Battle and Dogs of Mercy.”

⁴⁰ Richardson, *British War Dogs*, 53.

to “the capabilities of these valuable and highly-trained dogs . . . being inadequately recognized.”⁴¹

One of the earliest uses of dogs in sections of the Western Front was to transport equipment and supplies. Belgium made this transition with ease, as it possessed thousands of fully trained cart-pulling dogs.⁴² In the Great War, as Europe forged a new modern form of warfare, all resources were needed to keep the soldiers alive and fighting. An integral factor to the survival of those in the trenches was maintaining supply lines. The successful and efficient delivery of supplies made or broke battles and armies.⁴³ In the second decade of the 20th century, armies used several new technologies across the front. Automobiles were novel technology that could move quickly, but were unable to cope with the muddy conditions surrounding the trenches. Horses could not make the journey between the field headquarters and the front trenches, either becoming stuck in the mud or targeted by enemy forces. Trains were limited to their tracks, which proved prime targets by enemy forces.

A solution to these problems presented itself in the form of sled and cart dogs, predominantly used in Belgium and France during the war. Many of the uses of dogs in warfare transitioned naturally from existing roles; most apparent in Belgium, dogs had been bred and trained for pulling carts. At the outbreak of the war, Belgium had a little less than two hundred thousand fully trained dogs available for requisition and service.⁴⁴ When the Germans invaded, it was only logical to utilize the dogs already trained to pull carts to move weapons and supplies. In September 1916, *Vanity Fair* reported, “The Belgian military authorities found plenty of material

⁴¹ Ibid., 58.

⁴² Pearson, “Dogs, History, and Agency,” 139.

⁴³ Matthew Shaw, “Animals and War,” *British Library*, January 29, 2014. <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/animals-and-war>.

⁴⁴ “Dogs of Battle and Dogs of Mercy.”

at hand, for approximately 175,000 dogs were in daily use in their country drawing the small carts which are a characteristic feature of Belgian streets,” and these same dogs “have been widely used by the Belgian Army to draw machine guns and to do sentry duty.”⁴⁵ They presented smaller targets than horses and automobiles and were already trained for the task. The most important hurdle for these dogs to overcome was the experience of warfare. While they were accustomed to their work, the external factors would have been jarring to the dogs, and it took time for them to desensitize to the sights, sounds, and environment of battle. In *British War Dogs*, Richardson detailed the methods he developed to acclimate dogs to warfare, which were largely accomplished through gradual, increasing exposure.⁴⁶ This process varied with each dog, but typically took between six weeks and two months.⁴⁷

In France, dogs were used by the medics as ambulances, pulling wheeled stretchers from the front lines to the field hospitals.⁴⁸ These vehicles were simple, consisting of a flat board for the wounded soldier to be laid upon, with either two or four large wheels and a harness at the front for the dog. This innovative use of dogs freed the human medics to care for other wounded men instead of spending valuable time transporting the litters back and forth, especially in areas where ambulance vehicles could not travel. French soldier Adolphe Lasnier recounted the development of the military dog program during the First World War. Amongst the trial and error of training methods, the French found that dogs could be effectively utilized to transport the injured soldiers to the hospitals.⁴⁹ Chris Pearson analyzed Lasnier’s work and concluded that it “provides glimpses of dogs as living creatures who display nonhuman agency through making a

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Richardson, *British War Dogs*, 72.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁹ Adolphe Lasnier, *Nos Chiens Sur Le Front* (Paris: Maison de l’edition, 1915).

difference to the conduct of the war and by possessing some level of initiative, skill, and intelligence. The dogs were not purposeless objects that were simply manipulated by human intelligence. Instead, they were agents who were unwittingly drawn into the conflict, but whose abilities and characteristics allowed them to perform varied and skilled work in conjunction with human agents.”⁵⁰

Although no evidence suggests that they were ever officially used on the front lines, Britain began experimenting with their own dog cart teams in December 1914. One soldier, Captain H. Forbes, petitioned the British government ceaselessly for funding and approval to use dogs. His designs were superior to the Belgian dog carts because of their lower weight and convertibility; the latter allowed the cart to be pulled by soldiers if needed and to be temporarily repurposed for transporting other supplies or even moving the wounded.⁵¹ Nothing is noted on the success of this endeavor, or if the War Office ever granted full approval to the program, but it can be presumed that the project never gained much traction. Regardless, Captain Forbes’ ingenuity and passion for these military dogs, akin to that of Richardson, demonstrates the importance of dogs to the individual soldiers and officers fighting in the Great War.

As nations began officially training dogs for military service, one of the most common roles across the Western Front became the messenger dog. Radios and telephones were relied on as the main avenues for communication throughout the trenches, but both technologies were still relatively new. There were constant technical difficulties, especially concerning the wires transmitting the signals. They were easily damaged and destroyed, cutting off the essential timely communication necessary during the heat of battle.⁵² The outcome of entire battles had

⁵⁰ Pearson, “Dogs, History, and Agency,” 129.

⁵¹ “Dog Gun Carriage for the War,” *The Drogheda Argus*, December 5, 1914, 6.

⁵² “War Communication During World War I,” National Museum of the Marine Corps, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10315961v/f16.item>.

been determined by both the successful and unsuccessful delivery of orders and intelligence.⁵³ The solution was training dogs to transport messages between two or more locations. As Chris Pearson explains, “A dog is not only much quicker in carrying these messages than a man, and can cover ground where no cycle could go; but he also has an advantage in being almost invisible to the enemy. If on a leash, he can conduct a man in charge of reinforcements or ammunition to the new position of the patrolling party – sometimes over a distance of several miles.”⁵⁴ The dogs ably carried messages by utilizing their senses to develop an understanding of the terrain and threats in a manner similar to using “mental maps.”⁵⁵ This novel invention of the messenger dog began to be equated to that of the telephone itself in its importance to those fighting on the front lines. Within the Allied ranks one dog, a terrier-Pomeranian mix named Little Jim, “ran so fast, breaking time records of all the other dispatch dogs in his sector, that few soldiers had ever really seen in action, though many had benefitted from his bravery.”⁵⁶

In 1916, Richardson received his first request for trained messenger dogs from the Royal Artillery. The officer who wrote the letter explained their dire situation: “he expressed a great desire for trained dogs to keep up communications between his outpost and the battery, during heavy bombardment, when telephones are rendered useless, and the risk to runners is enormous.”⁵⁷ At this point, Richardson had not yet trained any dogs for messenger service, nor had he received support from the British government, but he quickly began working with his dogs to develop an effective training program. His goal for messenger dogs was twofold: “To

⁵³ Jacqueline Larson Carmichael, *Heard Amid the Guns: True Stories from the Western Front, 1914-1918* (Victoria: Heritage House, 2020), 181-182.

⁵⁴ “The Dogs of War,” *Christian Observer*, November 7, 1917, 1101.

⁵⁵ Pearson, “Dogs, History, and Agency,” 143.

⁵⁶ Grant Hayter-Menzies, *From Stray Dog to World War I Hero: The Paris Terrier Who Joined the First Division*, (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2015), 23.

⁵⁷ Richardson, *British War Dogs*, 55.

save human life” and “to accelerate dispatch-carrying.”⁵⁸ The most important factors in the training of messenger dogs were quickly determined to be the temperament of the dog and of the handler, for the best trained messenger dog would be ineffective without a dedicated and loving handler.⁵⁹ Richardson instituted high standards for handler and dog because of the unique challenges faced by messengers. The dogs had to be remarkably intelligent, capable of rapid independent decision-making, and calm under intense pressure.⁶⁰

During training, dogs were sent with messages over increasing distances and through diverse terrain with numerous obstacles, including water, barbed wire, and smoke.⁶¹ Two Airedales, named Wolf and Prince, completed his program and were sent to France to serve under Colonel Winter of the 56th Brigade.⁶² These dogs distinguished themselves so greatly on the front lines that in response the British government ordered the creation of their first military dog school overseen by Richardson.⁶³ It was established in Shoeburyness in 1917, near a military base, in order to desensitize the dogs to gunfire. Even as Richardson trained the dogs, he also began training handlers for them, carefully selected from the ranks of men fighting on the continent, through a five-week intensive course.⁶⁴ This dramatically increased the performance of the dogs because they, for the first time, had handlers who understood how dogs worked and what they were trained to do.

Dogs were also prominently used throughout the Western Front as sentries. Sentries were indispensable in trench warfare, as they maintained a watchful eye on enemy lines and protected their sleeping brothers. However, human senses are limited, especially at night when the danger

⁵⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 65-66.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁶¹ Ibid., 71.

⁶² Ibid., 56.

⁶³ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 57-58.

of a stealth attack was high. In order to compensate for this weakness and improve effectiveness, dogs began to be trained to aid those on duty. In Great Britain, this process officially began under Richardson in 1917. Some mascots learned by instinct alone to alert to threats from weapons, gas, and enemy soldiers, transitioning from companions to military resources. Canine senses of smell, hearing, and sight far exceed those of humans which allowed them to detect threats much earlier than their human partners.

Sentry dogs could work at any location and at any time, making them the most versatile of the working dogs. Every nation fighting on the Western Front would have had sentry dogs of some caliber; whether they were officially trained, like those of the British and French forces, or learned by instinct, as seen in American units. The incontrovertible truth remains that they saved untold numbers of lives through their quick detection of threats and subtle alerts.⁶⁵ As Richardson recalled, “I have already said that the demand for these dogs came at a time when the man-power question was becoming very serious. It was increasingly difficult for the stores, magazines, and filling factories to be adequately guarded. The advent of the dogs seems to have saved the situation, wherever they were employed.”⁶⁶

In 1914, Britain’s very first military dog dispatched to the front was an Airedale, “trained as a sentry” by Richardson, “which went to manoeuvres with the 2nd Battalion Norfolk Regiment, and on the outbreak of war accompanied it to France, where it was eventually killed by a shell on the Aisne.”⁶⁷ John Anderson, in his recounting of the dogs trained at Neuilly, explained that,

Not only did the dog figure gloriously as a messenger of mercy in the war, but did his bit nobly as a sentinel in the trenches. Mounting guard at a listening post for long hours at a stretch, ignoring danger with all the stolidness of a stoic, yet alert every moment, he played an heroic role . . . Often whole companies were saved

⁶⁵ Ibid., 193.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 192.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 51.

because the dog could reach further into the distance with his senses than could the soldiers themselves.⁶⁸

The most publicized military dog role was the ambulance, or mercy, dog. These dogs worked with the Red Cross in search and rescue operations and were present on both sides of the conflict. In the trenches and in No Man's Land of the Western Front, locating, treating, and recovering wounded soldiers was a fraught endeavor, limited by the conditions of the battle and of the landscape. The medics had to work as quickly and quietly as possible to locate the wounded, and many soldiers were forced to wait for hours for rescue, which left their wounds susceptible to infection.⁶⁹ Dogs trained to aid the Red Cross in these search and rescue efforts gained initial recognition in Germany, where news of their work reached as far west as American shores. Historian Matthew Wills discovered that "One 1916 German publication estimated that 600 dogs saved more than 3,000 lives in the grim zone between opposing forces."⁷⁰ Richardson noted that in the beginning stages of the war, Germany saw the most effective use of the Red Cross, or "ambulance dogs" on the Eastern Front because they themselves ignored the unconscious sanctity of the Red Cross icon. The assumption that the Great War would be one of movement likewise did the ambulance dogs a disservice. Richardson noted, "As it was, however, when the French army hurriedly sent some of their ambulance dogs with their keepers to the front in the earliest feverish days, the first thing that happened was that, although both men and dogs wore the Red Cross, the enemy brutally shot them all down whenever they attempted to carry out their humanitarian work."⁷¹

⁶⁸ John I. Anderson, *War Dogs of the World War* (New York: 1919), 19.

⁶⁹ Xavier Sager, "Letters from the Firing Line," *Scientific American* 111, no. 25 (December 19, 1914): 510.

⁷⁰ Matthew Wills, "Dogs in the Trenches of World War I," *JSTOR Daily*, November 8, 2021.

⁷¹ Richardson, *British War Dogs*, 54-55.

As the war dragged on, the dog trainers and handlers experimented with their Red Cross dogs to refine their training into a form suited better for trench warfare and stealth. Initially, Richardson brought bloodhounds to the Western Front for search and rescue operations. These dogs operated differently from the dogs that would be trained for the same task in the next few years, but their methods are identical to the ones used by modern police K-9 teams. The dog would be released in an area following a battle wearing a long leash, searching until they detected a wounded soldier and leading their handler to them in real-time.⁷² These operations had an advantage over later practices in that the handler was immediately taken to the wounded man, negating the time spent by the dog retrieving an object, returning to the trench, and only then leading the medics to the soldier.

Terms were used interchangeably for the search and rescue dogs and those who pulled the wheeled stretchers for the wounded, with both known as ambulance dogs. The search and rescue dogs distinguished themselves from the others in the Red Cross service through their instincts for telling the difference between wounded, yet living, men, and those who were minutes away from death. A Red Cross dog would stay with the dying soldier, offering comfort and presence, until he passed away; this tendency, never trained but always encouraged, earned the canines the name “Mercy Dogs,” and demonstrates an intentional, instinctual behavior from the dog made through their own reasoning.⁷³

Although all Red Cross dogs were trained in search and rescue, there were differences in how they carried out this task. John Anderson, a man who spent time in Neuilly at the close of the war, recounted the stories of the dogs rescued and trained there in a book called *War Dogs of the World War*, of which all of the proceeds went back to those very same dogs. He recalled how

⁷² “Dogs at the War,” *The Arbroath Herald*, October 2, 1914, 7.

⁷³ Pearson, “Dogs, History, and Agency,” 136.

the Red Cross dogs selected from Neuilly were trained to locate the wounded, ignore the deceased, and indicate their find by bringing an item, such as “his helmet, handkerchief, or some other small article as a token of discovery.”⁷⁴ These dogs also possessed small first aid kits that soldiers could use to temporarily patch up their wounds. The retrieval of a belonging from the wounded soldier became a staple task trained of all Red Cross dogs in Europe. Anderson’s recollections demonstrate the trial-and-error experiments that were being conducted by every army in the use of their Red Cross dogs. It was later decided that the ambulance dogs would be trained to retrieve any item from the wounded soldier, as helmets and handkerchiefs were often not nearby, and led to confusion in the dog.⁷⁵

The ambulance dogs would search across the battlefield for their men, learning to distinguish between those of their nation and enemies, and find them in areas that would have gone completely unnoticed by the medics. Their true strength came at night when medics would comb the field for any survivors but were limited by their senses, as they did not dare use lights. A 1917 article noted, “The dog is especially useful at this work in the night-time, when he can often by his scent discover fallen men who would otherwise be passed over.”⁷⁶ The Red Cross dogs, over the course of their service, undoubtedly saved tens of thousands of lives, although no official statistic was ever released to the public.

Finally, one cannot study the dogs of the Western Front without acknowledging the presence and service of the mascots. These dogs went largely unrecorded because they were not officially sanctioned in the same way as the military dogs. Mascots were

⁷⁴ Anderson, *War Dogs of the World War*, 19.

⁷⁵ “Dogs of Battle and Dogs of Mercy.”

⁷⁶ “The Dogs of War,” 1100.

relatively untrained companion dogs for the soldiers that were adopted by individual units. Most mascots were illicitly smuggled to the front lines, often with the officers looking the other way to allow the men this small luxury.⁷⁷ They provided the smallest glimmers of hope and love in an otherwise hellish environment. While the mascots had no expectations laid upon them beyond providing emotional and psychological comfort to the soldiers, many of them, through their own initiative, learned the jobs of the messenger or sentry. This made them invaluable assets to their men and demonstrated the remarkable capabilities of dogs. Most mascots began as strays, picked up off the street and adopted by the soldiers with no training. Through the experience of life on the front lines the mascots picked up on the dangers of gas, artillery, and enemy forces, and by instinct alone began alerting to them.

Two mascots particularly distinguished themselves through their actions on the Western Front. The first was Sergeant Stubby, a stray pit bull mix from Connecticut who literally stumbled into the lives of the 26th, or the Yankee Division. While they were undergoing training at Yale University in 1917, Stubby attached himself to James Robert Conroy.⁷⁸ They became inseparable, and Conroy even taught Stubby to salute, a trick that would win over an officer upon their arrival in France.⁷⁹ Over the course of his time with Conroy on the front lines, Stubby learned the signs that signaled an incoming attack, and “he’d alert his comrades by barking an alarm and, when necessary, nipping at sleeping soldiers. Stubby’s alert then helped trigger the standard bells of warning for an attack and

⁷⁷ Bausum, *Sergeant Stubby*, 46, 49.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

allowed everyone, himself included, to be more prepared when the gas shells began to fall.”⁸⁰

In tandem with his sentry work, Stubby’s most important contribution to the Yankee Division was in its morale, which he boosted every day with his presence and happy demeanor. He grew so important to the men that when he was wounded by a shell they all fell into a depression, waiting to hear if he would recover.⁸¹ Stubby then went on to learn the job of the Red Cross dogs, locating wounded soldiers who he would “either remain with . . . until help arrived or return to fetch the medics. If someone was dying, Stubby offered companionship so that the man would not die alone.”⁸² At the end of the war, Stubby and Conroy would both survive to return home to Connecticut.

When newspapers learned of Stubby and his heroism, they made him a national sensation, leading to travel across the United States and appearances at events for the final years of his life. Stubby’s death in April 1926 made front-page news, with one notice reading, “Stubby, dog hero of the World War, whose recent death has brought sadness to many a stout-hearted member of the marines, is to be highly honored.”⁸³ His taxidermized body now rests in the Smithsonian Institution, wearing the combined medals of Stubby and Conroy, forever honoring the sacrifices made by the men and dogs of World War I.

The second mascot was a terrier named Rags, a stray dog from Paris who was adopted by the men of the First Division when they, quite literally, ran into him on the street. No firsthand account of this meeting survived, but the story told by Rags’ first

⁸⁰ Ibid., 66.

⁸¹ Ibid., 76-77.

⁸² Ibid., 85.

⁸³ “Dog to be Honored,” *The Burlington Free Press*, April 17, 1926, 5.

biographer, Major Jack Rohan, claimed that a soldier named Donovan began walking away from a bar “when his foot bumped something soft and yielding.”⁸⁴ What appeared to be no more than a bundle of ragged cloth “made sounds – it whimpered at the unintended kick, then stood up and barked.”⁸⁵ Donovan picked up the scruffy mongrel, soon dubbed Rags, who would become the First Division’s mascot.

Rags’ work as a military dog began by accident when “en route to Soissons. He suddenly fell flat, ‘as close to the ground as his little body could get,’ . . . the first time it happened, the men thought this belly flop amusing. When they finally heard the incoming shell . . . they, too, dropped to the ground, and – as Rags clearly expected – the shell exploded close by. From this time on . . . all the men who knew Rags paid close attention to his reactions.”⁸⁶ These instincts of a sentry dog served the men of the First Division well on the front, saving them from life-threatening attacks. Rags also began carrying messages in his mouth, running through the chaos of the battlefield in the same way he dodged horses and automobiles on the Paris streets. Donovan realized that Rags needed a purpose in the war and was successful in training the little terrier for the task, despite Rags contradicting everything Richardson found suitable in a good messenger dog.⁸⁷ In his biography of Rags, Grant Hayter-Menzies makes an observation that “Colonel Richardson knew a great deal about dogs and how to train them. Yet his strict rules didn’t seem to allow for the inborn intelligence that could assist a smart dog and smart handler, like Rags and Donovan, in circumventing formal training standards.”⁸⁸ Although

⁸⁴ Hayter-Menzies, *From Stray Dog to World War I Hero*, 14.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

suffering several wounds during his service, Rags survived the war and went on to live a long retirement until his death in 1936.

The legacy of all these brave canines continues to influence the world today. Beyond the sheer scale of the lives saved through their work, they showed the world the potential hidden within every dog to serve beyond all expectations, even in the worst of conditions. Several nations, including most of those involved in the First World War, established military dog programs as a direct result of the conflict. During and immediately following the Great War, the practical tasks carried out by dogs on the Western Front were uncovered by the public and utilized for propaganda. The book *Nos chiens sur le front* by Frenchman Adolphe Lasnier captures the changing perspective of humanity on dogs. According to historian Chris Pearson, “*Nos chiens sur le front* provides glimpses of dogs as living creatures who display nonhuman agency through making a difference to the conduct of the war and by possessing some level of initiative, skill, and intelligence.”⁸⁹ Awareness of these observations took time but led to the continued experimentation with dogs to understand their capabilities. Humanity has an intrinsic soft spot for animals, which makes them prime subjects for effective propaganda.

Dogs were even utilized to fundraise for their brethren on the front lines. An advertisement posted in the November 7, 1917, edition of the *Christian Observer* shows a Newfoundland wearing a coat labeled “Horses & Dogs” with the Red Cross logo on the back. The caption reads, “This beautiful Newfoundland dog collects money in Canada for the benefit of horses and dogs wounded in the war in Europe. He receives more than \$100 a month.”⁹⁰ This Newfoundland was not alone in its fundraising efforts, for many newspapers record occasions of

⁸⁹ Pearson, “Dogs, History, and Agency,” 129.

⁹⁰ “Please Help the Wounded!” *Christian Observer*, November 7, 1917, 1097.

pets on the home front earning money for those abroad, either through street-based fundraising or through events such as dog shows.

Artwork and fictional stories about military dogs began emerging as well, moving the emotions of the public. The French writer Colette, a pioneering female journalist who reported directly from the battlefield, centered many of her accounts on the military dogs. Colette's writing, according to historian Kathy Comfort, "shows these canine warriors to be the equals of their human comrades, sentient beings capable of agency and whose contributions immeasurably supported the French war effort."⁹¹ This proves a common theme in wartime representations of military dogs. They are equated in their heroism to the soldiers and, in several images, are shown as even more heroic than the men themselves. In the April 18, 1915 issue of *Le Petit Journal*, the cover is dominated by a painting of a Red Cross dog in action. The dog is pictured leaping towards a wounded soldier, drawing the attention of two medics following him. It clearly encapsulates the dog's ability to locate wounded soldiers when the medics could not, showing the heroism of their role and their abilities.

At the conclusion of the war, thousands of canine veterans, some permanently disabled, needed to be placed in loving homes. Unfortunately, few records remain that trace the fate of the average military dog and even less exist for the unofficial mascots that permeated nearly every unit. The more well-known dogs, including Sergeant Stubby, Rags, and Rin-Tin-Tin, have entire biographies tracing the remainder of their lives. Stubby would complete several tours of the United States, meeting presidents and bringing happiness wherever he went. Rags led a far quieter life, moving between several homes but always finding a place with his fellow veterans. Rin-Tin-Tin, only a puppy when taken from the trenches with his sister, went on to become a

⁹¹ Kathy Comfort, "The Real *Poilus*: Colette's War Dogs," *Modern & Contemporary France* 28 (2020), 87.

Hollywood star with dozens of movie credits to his name. Every dog of the Western Front, whether officially recorded or not, completed remarkable work in conditions likened to Hell itself by the soldiers, and they did it while still wagging their tails every day.

In summary, the United States has a long history of employing dogs as hunters, trackers, guardians, and pets, but the military dog remained a far off ideal for over a century since it gained its independence. Precedents for the roles of military dogs were set through the tracking work of bloodhounds and the presence of mascots on the battlefields of the Civil War. However, both were incomplete images of what would later be a critical wartime component. Even as the dogs revealed their own abilities, the humans around them likewise grew in their knowledge and understanding of not only what the canine species can do, but also how to refine specific desired traits within breeds. Those dog fanciers through their expertise provided the guides to identifying the prime candidates for military service and for effectively training them. Independent ventures revealed that the military could coexist with dogs in a manner so productive that European countries recognized its value.

It was on the Western Front that Americans received their first true interactions with trained military dogs. Among all of the animals present at the Western Front, dogs stood as uniquely suited to wartime use through the diverse roles they were able to perform. Even the largest of dogs is thousands of pounds lighter than a horse, making them easier to transport and requiring fewer resources for food, shelter, and medical care. They could be used for transport, moving weapons and supplies across the front lines, and moving wounded soldiers to hospitals so that they could be saved. The assistance they provided to sentries was instrumental in detecting unseen threats that would otherwise have succeeded. Over the course of the war, dogs became the most reliable messengers on the Western Front, delivering information across miles

of terrain even while wounded. The most visible dogs, those who served with the Red Cross, directly saved the lives of the wounded and dying when they were dispatched to the battlegrounds, locating those who would otherwise have suffered agonizing, lonely deaths. They also learned to distinguish between those who could be saved and those for whom death was imminent; for the latter, the dogs would remain with the soldier until he died, ensuring that he was comforted in his final moments. While the mascots, the most familiar canines to American soldiers, had no training, their presence was just as critical to the wellbeing of the men; the military dogs helped protect their physical safety, and the mascots aided their mental stability. Some mascots on their own initiative joined the fight as sentries and messengers, proving that a dog's will and spirit can overcome all obstacles. These traits of unyielding courage and undying love forged inseparable bonds between soldier and dog. While the United States military would not pursue a military dog venture at the conclusion of World War I, the work of these dogs was not forgotten. Soldiers and civilians remembered the bravery of the dogs of the First World War, and when combat erupted two decades later, they knew exactly where to turn to meet the challenges of a second global war.

Chapter Two

“Those who love dogs know that they are truly man’s best friend, and in this instance they are helping men of good will in the task of preserving the democratic tradition, so that the enslaved peoples of the earth can once again walk as freemen.”¹ This patriotic sentiment, written by Thomas Yoseloff in 1944, reveals the power held by military dogs not only on the battlefield, but on the home front as well. In only two years, the American military dog program grew to become a key component of continued success in both offensive and defensive operations. When the United States entered World War II after the attack on Pearl Harbor, there were initially no plans for using dogs in warfare. While European forces had experienced great success with the animals in World War I, the United States had never progressed beyond the small Alaskan sled dog program. It would be through a concerted effort instigated by civilians that the American military dog program would be initiated in early 1942.

Two organizations, one civilian non-profit and one military, were founded to facilitate the introduction of trained canines into the American military structure. Dogs for Defense, Inc., recruited dogs from civilian households, and in an average of three months, the K-9 Corps transformed them into capable soldiers. The integration of fully trained military dogs into the Marines, Army, and Coast Guard during World War II was accomplished by thoroughly preparing both handler and dog prior to their deployment overseas. They effectively served their units as scouts, messengers, sentries, transportation and protected their men not only by detecting threats but also attacking the enemy directly when the situation demanded it. Through the creative collaboration of civilians and military personnel, Dogs for Defense and the K-9 Corps

¹ Yoseloff, *Dogs for Democracy*, 11-12.

were able to efficiently produce trained military dogs that had positive effects on American forces.

It was only in 1942 that the U.S. military accepted what soldiers and civilians had been communicating for decades, which was summarized by Sergeant Theo F. Jager, who wrote in 1917, “The uses of the dog in warfare are as inexhaustible as his heroic self sacrifice and devotion is sublime. I do not say that dogs will win a battle, but I dare claim, that dogs will turn the battle in favor of that army, all other things being equal, that has the best dog-loving units and the largest number of dogs to supplement their own sight and hearing while on ‘fringe’ duty.”² Nearly thirty years later, Jager’s premonitions would be realized when dogs were given the chance to prove their value to American military efforts.

When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States had never possessed an official military dog force beyond the Alaskan sled dog program. The process towards the official U.S. military dog program was initiated with the foundation of Dogs for Defense, Inc., in January 1942. A group known as the Fancy, made up of “breeders, trainers, professional and amateur; kennel club members, show and field trial judges, handlers, veterinarians, editors, writers; in short, people who have to do with dogs – who own dogs and love them,” came together to found the organization.³ These individuals represented the most knowledgeable figures in their fields on dog breeding, abilities, and training practices, which allowed them to recognize the value of dogs to American military efforts at home and overseas.

² Sergeant Theo. F. Jager, *Scout, Red Cross and Army Dogs: A Historical Sketch of Dogs in the Great War and a Training Guide for the Rank and File of the United States Army* (Rochester: Arrow Printing Company, Corp., 1917), 11.

³ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 15.

Alene Erlanger has been widely credited with proposing the idea for Dogs for Defense and promoting its cause during the war.

Prior to 1942, Erlanger was well-known for breeding and training poodles. One of her associates was Roland Kilbon, who published under the pen name Arthur Roland, and worked for *The New York Sun* at the outbreak of World War II. According to Kilbon, it was not long after the events at Pearl Harbor, “so soon that the echoes of the bomb blasts had hardly stopped reverberating,” that he received a call from Erlanger. Kilbon had developed a reputation for reporting on dog related subjects and was highly regarded for his work by dog owners.⁴ When Erlanger telephoned him with her idea for a military dog force, Kilbon was immediately supportive, especially when he heard that the Professional Handlers’ Association “might well make the first move.”⁵

Erlanger was passionate about her idea from the beginning, saying “It’s about what the war means to dogs and fanciers. I have an idea and need your help. The dog world must play its part in this *thing*. Other countries have used dogs for years and ours have not. They’ve got to do it!”⁶ Kilbon contacted the president of the Professional Handlers’ Association, Leonard Brumby, who met with him over lunch the following day to discuss the idea. Brumby brought Mrs. William H. Long, Jr., a recognized expert on obedience training, because “It was obvious that the obedience clubs would be the nucleus around which to build up a program for training dogs as guards and sentries.”⁷ From there, the idea of Dogs for Defense expanded into a movement and a fully staffed organization, with more and more prominent individuals in the Fancy joining in support. It was Brumby who named the organization Dogs for Defense, “which was alliterative

⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Quoted in Lemish, *War Dogs*, 36.

⁷ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 16.

and in key with the times when the country was in no condition for anything but defense – and little prepared for that, as Pearl Harbor had shown.”⁸

The first board of Dogs for Defense included these notable figures, and their ranks were quickly expanded by the most powerful and well-known members of the American dog community. Erlanger served as temporary chairman for the first board meeting, but she would soon become the Director of Finance. Mrs. Long was appointed Secretary Treasurer but resigned the treasurer post in favor of Joseph C. Hoagland, who was quickly followed by Arthur M. Lewis. Brumby took on the role of Field Secretary, and legal matters were handled by William E. Buckley, who was “head of the Suffolk County Kennel Club.”⁹ The two Directors-at-Large were George C. Foley and George S. West. It was the presidency that gathered the most attention, for this role necessitated a strong and charismatic leader who could campaign for Dogs for Defense on a national level and lead it to success during a global war.

Harry Caesar was chosen for the position. He was a director of the American Kennel Club as well as a veteran of World War I, which made him intimately familiar with warfare in a way many of the other board members were not. Caesar was successful as president of Dogs for Defense through his stalwart leadership supplemented by “the tact and diplomacy, exerted through a magnetic personality, which enabled him not only to deal with the military authorities in their less cooperative moments, but to reconcile the aims and opinions of various factions in the dog world which at times are, to put it mildly, conflicting.”¹⁰ These skills would be utilized regularly throughout the Dogs for Defense program, as civilians and military personnel alike misunderstood or remained ignorant of the abilities of canines on the battlefield.

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

While the leaders of Dogs for Defense started marketing their mission to the government, trainers began working with select dogs to qualify them for sentry work. This would allow them to demonstrate the ability of dogs to locate, track, and eliminate threats. The dogs made rapid progress, but the campaigns led by Caesar for official government contracts hit dead ends.¹¹ Canine organizations, including the Professional Handlers' Association, the Westbury Kennel Association, and the American Kennel Club provided legitimacy to Dogs for Defense through financial contributions or, as with the American Kennel Club, through vocal approval of its mission.¹² However, it would be a happenstance campaign by the American Theatre Wing that would connect Dogs for Defense and the Quartermaster Corps for the first time.

Actress Helen Mencken, starring in the American Theatre Wing's production *Stage Door Canteen*, took the organization's offer to provide financial assistance for purchasing a plane to the Quartermaster General, Major General Edmund B. Gregory. He initially rejected the offer, as in early 1942 he was not permitted to accept outside funding for aircraft nor did he have an alternative area to provide funding of that scale.¹³ One of his subordinates, Lieutenant Colonel Clifford C. Smith, had heard of Dogs for Defense and had seen a few of their early sentry dog graduates in action guarding supply depots. Dogs for Defense had begun privately training dogs with the assistance of trainers within the Fancy but found it difficult to place the dogs because they were an unknown quantity to the military and to private sectors.¹⁴ It was not until April 13, 1942, that the first three sentry dog graduates went on duty at the Munitions Manufacturing Company, located in Poughkeepsie, New York.¹⁵ These were followed by nine dogs dispatched

¹¹ Ibid., 19.

¹² Ibid., 18.

¹³ Ibid., 19.

¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁵ Ibid.

to Fort Hancock in New York under the command of Major General Philip S. Gage and seventeen sentries to Mitchell Field on Long Island and to Staten Island.¹⁶ In July, Gage reported that after several months of continual use, the sentry dogs were seen to have an exceptional purpose “during the night blackout when their superior hearing more than compensated for the limited range of the soldier sentries’ vision.”¹⁷ Additionally, the sentry dogs “tremendously boosted the morale of the soldier.”¹⁸ Smith saw their potential and presented it to Gregory, who thought the “dogs were worth a trial.”¹⁹

Recalling Mencken, Gregory accepted the American Theatre Wing’s funding for the purpose of purchasing two hundred dogs for the U.S. Army, but this would be rescinded when the American Theatre Wing’s public relations counsel, Sidney Wain, noted that the dogs did not fit with the mission of his organization. He suggested that instead the Quartermaster Corps connect with the organization Dogs for Defense. As a result, on “March 13, 1942, the Army transferred its authorization for 200 trained sentry dogs to DFD. The date is notable. It marks the first time in the history of the United States that war dogs were officially recognized.”²⁰ Finally, Dogs for Defense had the much-needed military contract, and the first official military working dog program in the United States, the K-9 Corps, began. Quickly, however, logistics and colossal demands would tax the organization’s resources to the fullest, forcing the collaboration with Dogs for Defense closer together in the process of marketing, fundraising, recruiting, transporting, and supplying the necessary dogs.

¹⁶ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 38.

¹⁷ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 19.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

Dogs for Defense initially provided all training facilities, trainers, and resources for their sentry dogs through the collaboration of 402 kennel clubs and over one thousand individuals across the United States, but it became apparent that their system would need to undergo centralization to produce the estimated 125,000 dogs now demanded by the Quartermaster Corps.²¹ To supplement the initial supply of dogs from civilian households, Dogs for Defense briefly implemented a breeding program to produce sentry dogs from the summer of 1943 until December 15, 1943, under the leadership of W. Newbold Ely, a former lieutenant in the Coast Guard.²² The breeding program was brought to an early halt because military demand no longer focused exclusively on the sentry dogs that were being bred, but also on scout, messenger, and casualty dogs, each of which brought different demands that did not fit within the breeding programs parameters. This did not make the breeding program a failure, for it established the foundation for future military dog breeding programs in the United States as well as serving as further evidence of the growing need for centralization and systemization within the Dogs for Defense programs.²³

Such organization became possible once Secretary of War Harold Stimson gave the Quartermaster General permission to expand the military dog program beyond sentry dogs on July 16, 1942. Now military dogs would include “search-and-rescue sled dogs, roving patrols, and messenger services,” and by this announcement it allowed the individual service branches to decide how dogs would be utilized.²⁴ The Army and Coast Guard remained largely identical in their training and utilization of the military dogs. However, the Marine Corps deviated sharply from the other branches, and developed its own practices for recruitment, training, and the

²¹ Ibid., 22.

²² Ibid., 33.

²³ Ibid., 34.

²⁴ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 40.

logistics of outfitting its War Dog Platoons. Stimson also transferred the management of the training of the dogs from Dogs for Defense to the Quartermaster Corps, providing the program with the desperately needed centralization that had weakened it from the beginning. Through the oversight of the Quartermaster Corps, a total of six K-9 training centers were established over the course of the war. Each facility served a distinct purpose and provided opportunities for training simulations through varied terrain. Many of these locations graduated handlers and a small quantity of dogs that could then be transported back to their original stations to continue training other soldiers.²⁵ Through this method, military dog training was able to occur across the country at any military posting. While military dogs were not necessary in every circumstance, such flexibility greatly increased the scope of the military dog program.

Four K9 training facilities were established by the end of 1942 at Front Royal, Virginia; Fort Robinson, Nebraska; Camp Rimini, Montana; and San Carlos, California.²⁶ Two more facilities would be opened soon after at Cat Island, Mississippi and Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Both dogs and handlers would be trained at these facilities, preparing them for their specialized service either abroad or on the home front. While a few of the facilities trained dogs for any military branch and most positions, others were highly specialized by either branch or dog specialty. Camp Lejeune was run by the Marine Corps directly, and all dogs who passed through its training were deployed in one of the Marine War Dog Platoons.²⁷ Camp Rimini focused on producing sled dogs, as the snowy mountainous terrain allowed the trainers to work with the dogs year-round in the conditions they would face in the field. Orders were received in

²⁵ Thomas R. Buecker, *Fort Robinson and the American Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 92.

²⁶ Seth Paltzer, "The Dogs of War: The U.S. Army's Use of Canines in World War II," *On Point* 17, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 35.

²⁷ Department of the Navy, "U.S. Marine Corps. War Dog Training School, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. 12/1942-ca.1946," National Archives and Records Administration. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/10506845>.

September 1942 to transform the old Civilian Conservation Corps facilities at Camp Rimini into a K-9 training center, and the process was largely completed by December 1.²⁸ Cat Island served as the training ground for a large number of casualty and scout dogs, utilizing the terrain to prepare the dogs for the jungles of the Pacific region.²⁹ Fort Robinson and Front Royal training centers received the official designation of “War Dog Reception and Training Centers (WDRTC),” which made them not only training grounds, but also supply centers due to their ability to provide “large quantities of dog food in the form of slaughtered surplus horses and mules.”³⁰ San Carlos focused on producing teams for duties on the coastline.³¹

Once the K9 Corps training centers were established, the enlistment parameters had to be refined, particularly regarding the accepted breeds. In the beginning, the Quartermaster Corps provided broad guidelines for acceptable dogs: “Any purebred dog of either sex, physically sound, between the ages of one and five years, with characteristics of a watch-dog, qualifying under the physical examination and standard inspection of Dogs for Defense.”³² In the selection of breeds, there was some disconnect between the military and Dogs for Defense, as the latter began recruiting from a pool of thirty-two acceptable breeds, but the military narrowed the parameters by 1944 to include only five breeds for general use, “German and Belgian Shepherds, Dobermans, Collies . . . and Giant Schnauzers,” three breeds for sled dogs, “Malamutes, Eskimos, and Siberian Huskies,” and two breeds for pack dogs “Newfoundlands and St. Bernards . . .” which were all carefully selected for their consistent traits that made them dependable resources.³³ The Marine Corps was unique from the other military branches because

²⁸ Karen Fischer, “Training Sled Dogs at Camp Rimini, 1942-1944,” *Montana The Magazine of Western History* 34, no.1 (Winter 1984): 12.

²⁹ Yoseloff, *Dogs for Democracy*, 25.

³⁰ Buecker, *Fort Robinson and the American Century*, 91.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

³² Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 25.

³³ *Ibid.*, 34.

it worked directly with the Doberman Pinscher Club of America to acquire well-bred Dobermans for their K9 teams. Across most branches, purebred male dogs were the standard preference, but dogs who were only slightly crossbred or a spayed female would be accepted as well. The Coast Guard was the exception, as it typically preferred females over male dogs.³⁴

Each dog's temperament and abilities were also taken into account, as regardless of how well-bred the dog was, a dog without a drive to work or with a skittish nature would not be able to perform the functions of any military dog position. The dog had to be physically and mentally sound and able to handle the rigors and stressors of battle without faltering.³⁵ Even if the dogs did not possess any prior formal training, the most important factors in determining their fitness for duty were breed, temperament, and physical fitness. Above all others, temperament and personality were the most important considerations when dogs were recruited into military service. Without the right combination of working drive, intelligence, loyalty, and bravery, a dog would not succeed in active combat and would be a greater danger than asset to the soldiers around it. Initial evaluations were oftentimes faulty, as a dog's behavior while under shellfire could never be truly predicted. The dogs were desensitized to weapons, explosions, and the clamors of battle as much as was possible in training scenarios, but even these experiences could not prevent shellshock and other traumatic disorders from occurring in the canines. As a result, even as war dogs were being sent to the front lines in droves, there was a consistent turnover rate requiring a ready supply of fully trained dogs and handlers, which necessitated the continuation of recruitment efforts across the country.

The Quartermaster Corps and Dogs for Defense determined that the dogs would continue to be predominantly recruited from civilian households. Most of these dogs were originally pets

³⁴ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 42.

³⁵ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 36.

with little formal obedience training, if any at all. The concept of obedience training schools was just as new as Dogs for Defense itself, only spurred into the mainstream by a cross-country tour led by Mrs. Whitouse Walker and Blanche Saunders in 1940 that demonstrated the importance of formal training for pets and working dogs.³⁶ Individuals, including Lieutenant Willy Necker of the Coast Guard, founded independent training and boarding facilities in the decade preceding the war.³⁷ During World War II, Necker's expertise was utilized to train dogs for the K-9 Corps, and he also participated in fundraising events for Dogs for Defense. At the September 26, 1943 Obedience Trial Classic, Necker was the judge for the Utility Class and for Tie Scores, which allowed him to not only bring more attention to the mission of Dogs for Defense, but also demonstrate his expertise and the practicalities of properly training dogs.³⁸

Due to the relative infancy of the dog training field, most of the dogs accepted into the Dogs for Defense program were predominantly untrained, necessitating that their trainers begin from the basics of "sit" and "stay" before progressing to the detailed work that the dogs would be conducting in their military roles. Upon their acceptance into basic training, dogs were transported to their designated facility. In the Marine Corps, dogs were shipped in crates labeled with their originating location and former owner's contact information. They were also provided with food and water for the journey, facilitated through Railway Express train systems, and sent to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.³⁹ Across the military branches, trains were the preferred method of transporting dogs. The longer and slower travel permitted the dogs to be exercised,

³⁶ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 35.

³⁷ Obedience Classic, Inc., "Catalogue: Obedience Trial Classic, Licensed by A.K.C., For Benefit of Dogs for Defense, Inc.," September 26, 1943, 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁹ "Shipping Instructions: U.S. Marine. Corps War Dogs," Box 5, War Dogs Official Pubs, Manuals Reports, War Dogs, Collection 5440, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

rather than confined to their crates for the duration of the journey, which assisted in eliminating some excess energy prior to arriving for training.

When dogs arrived at their designated training facility, they were given a brief period, ranging days to weeks, to become accustomed to military life and allow all screenings to take place, including veterinary appointments, grooming, and finalization of enlistment paperwork. Of all of the military branches, only the Marine Corps designed and maintained record books for each military dog. These books were started upon the dog's enlistment and contained essential information, including the dog's qualified roles, medical history, handlers, service record, and discharge destination, be it a return to its original family or put up for adoption. It also indicated the military rank earned by the dog, which was determined based upon the length of the dog's service.⁴⁰ Private First Class was achieved with three months of service, Corporal with one year, Sergeant in two years, Platoon Sergeant in three years, Gunnery Sergeant in four years, and Master Gunnery Sergeant with five years of service.⁴¹

Typically, the training process for the dog and their handler took between eight and twelve weeks, although certain specialties could take several weeks longer.⁴² It began with basic training that acclimated the dogs to military service and provided foundational obedience training. Once they finished this step, trainers were able to determine which specialty best suited the dog. The remainder of the training prepared the dog and its handler for their specific role. The K9 Corps was aware from the onset of the project that it was just as critical to select the

⁴⁰ "U.S. Marine Corps Dog Record Book of Beau V. Milhell," 33, Container #1 "Entry #UD-WW 100: War Dog Service Books 12/1942-06/1946"; Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps War Dog Training School, Camp Lejeune; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴¹ "U.S. Marine Corps Dog Record Book of Frederick of St. Thomas (Fritz), Serial No. 1," Page 33, Container #1 "Entry #UD-WW 100: War Dog Service Books 12/1942-06/1946"; Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps War Dog Training School, Camp Lejeune; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴² Arthur W. Bergeron, Jr., "War Dogs: The Birth of the K-9 Corps." U.S. Army (March 16, 2016). https://www.army.mil/article/7463/war_dogs_the_birth_of_the_k_9_corps.

proper handlers as it was the dogs, for it would be the K9 team as a unit that produced results, not the dog working in isolation. Furthermore, the trainers had to be highly intelligent, physically fit, and above all, possess “a genuine love for dogs.”⁴³ The trainers knew that to treat a dog harshly would only break its spirit and make it hesitant to perform tasks in the future, especially for the individual who had abused it. Rather, the dogs needed to be treated with genuine love and care. They were to be corrected with only words, never physical punishment, and spend as much time as possible with their handlers to forge the inseparable bonds needed to survive on the battlefield. It was well-known in the amateur as well as international dog training communities that treating a dog with kindness produces the best results. German dog trainer Max von Stephanitz, who is credited with standardizing the German Shepherd breed at the turn of the 20th century, wrote,

The success of all employment as an assistant of man depends in the first place on expert leadership, whereby the dog is always put in just the right place, and where the man is so well-acquainted with the peculiarities of the dog that he always knows how to interpret correctly the meaning of the dog’s signs. A leader without expert knowledge and affection for the dog will achieve only very mediocre results with the best trained dog; while an expert dog-loving leader can achieve good results with a dog of only fair capacity. [In police dog work] the dog and his leader must know each other intimately. The leader must never disturb the dog in his work; he must never interfere, not even when he thinks that the dog is at fault, but he must always remain in close interior rapport with the dog. He must be able to read the meaning of everything the dog reports to him in the manner of his work, by the play of features, and finally, by his success or his failure, which is often only apparent.⁴⁴

Field and training manuals, such as the July 1943 TM 10-396 “Technical Manual for War Dogs,” standardized these training principles for handlers. Traditionally, TM 10-396’s author has been identified as Alene Erlanger, as she had left Dogs for Defense to create films and training

⁴³ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 39.

⁴⁴ Max von Stephanitz, *The German Shepherd Dog in Word and Picture* (Jena: Anton Kampfe, 1923), 334-335.

manuals for the military by the time of its publication.⁴⁵ In addition to following the structures outlined in the manuals and by the trainers, the handlers demonstrated their devotion to their charges by spending their free time working and playing with their dogs to ensure they were prepared for the trials ahead.⁴⁶ The handlers were responsible for caring for all the needs of their dogs including regular grooming, exercise, feeding, and maintenance of their kennels. Not all initial dog and handler pairings were successful, but it was a small matter to move the dogs around until a suitable match was made. It was more important to build a confident team than it was to force the first assigned pairing of soldier and dog. Once the dogs and handlers graduated from their training, they were assigned for duty. There were six military dog specialties, and each had their own distinctions based on the branch they were intended to serve. It was key that dogs were not cross-trained between roles, as this would cause confusion and prevent the dog from adequately serving in its position.⁴⁷

First, the sentry dog was the forerunner to all other military dog specialties. The sentry dogs were trained to guard and patrol a sedentary location such as a plant, factory, or supply depot. Qualified sentry teams of a handler and dog were noted to be “the equal of six men on regular guard duty.”⁴⁸ As defined in TM 10-396, “The sentry dog, as the name implies, is used primarily on interior guard duty as a watch dog . . . This class of dog is trained to give warning to his master by growling or barking or silent alert . . . The dog, being kept on leash and close to the sentry, will also assist as a psychological factor in such circumstances.”⁴⁹ Dogs would patrol with their handler around their designated facility, searching for any intruders in an effort to

⁴⁵ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 54.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁷ War Department, *TM 10-396 Technical Manual for War Dogs* (Washington, D.C.: War Department, July 1, 1943), 96.

⁴⁸ Yoseloff, *Dogs for Democracy*, 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 97, 99.

prevent sabotage or destruction of government property. A unique aspect of sentry dog training was the tight bond handlers were encouraged to forge with their canine partner. Once assigned to the sentry track, dogs were not permitted to interact with any other humans aside from their handler, and the handler could not interact with any other dog.⁵⁰ The goal was to “instill in his dog the idea that every human, except himself, is his natural enemy.”⁵¹ Once successful, the dog would naturally alert to the presence of any human while on duty, protecting his handler from threats long before human senses would have detected them. In a memo distributed by the Headquarters Hawaiian Department on October 14, 1942, it was noted that “The performance of the war dog unfailingly reflects the work habits and attitudes of the master. If the master is exact, energetic, and ‘on the job’, the dog will be the same. If the master is slothful and careless, the dog will, in time, acquire the same characteristics.”⁵²

While the majority of sentry dogs were not trained to attack, they were encouraged to intimidate by lunging and barking at the unknown individual. There was a thorough training process to acquire the right amount of aggressiveness in the sentry dog depending on their natural temperament; if the dog was too aggressive, the handler would work to lower the dog’s natural excitability, but if the dog was timid or too friendly, they would be encouraged to become more aggressive through simulated attacks and in group trainings with appropriately aggressive dogs.⁵³ The key element of sentry dog training was to produce a dog distrustful of all people except for its handler so that they would alert to all threats, whether perceived or real.

⁵⁰ War Department, *TM 10-396*, 101.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵² “Notes on the Handling, Feeding, and Care of War Dogs,” File #1 C-1130 “Animals – Sentry & Warning Dogs” 1942-43; Marine Garrison Forces Correspondence, 1941-45; Index to 1455-40; Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps; National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 103-105.

Once they graduated from the training school, the dog and handler were typically assigned to weapon, vehicle, and supply depots, as well as coastlines where aquatic attacks could be staged. As a result, they became closely intertwined with the Coast Guard, who made heavy use of the sentry dogs throughout the war. In roughly a year, the Coast Guard employed over 1,800 sentry dogs to be stationed on shorelines across the country, but most heavily on the East Coast, where Axis submarine activity had spiked anxiety.⁵⁴ At one time, the Coast Guard possessed the highest number of trained sentry dogs and handlers of any military branch associated with the K9 Corps, with over one third of the total 9,300 sentry dogs of World War II trained for the Coast Guard.⁵⁵

Second, the scout dog worked to detect hidden threats long before its handlers. The scout dogs differed from sentry dogs in that they were not limited to the protection of a single location but were tasked to look after a group of soldiers. They were trained “to detect and give silent warning of the presence of any foreign individual or group.”⁵⁶ Scout dogs would walk point with their handlers at the front of their unit during patrols, movements, or expeditions. In so doing, they were able to detect threats and ambushes from enemy combatants and prevent casualties. A key element in scout training was reinforcing silent alerts, which varied between dogs as some “stood tense, others crouched suddenly. Some pointed like bird dogs. With some their hackles rose or a low growl rumbled in their throats.”⁵⁷ It was critical that the dog learn to avoid barking at all costs, as that would destroy any element of surprise the alert provided the soldiers. The scout dogs were trained to work in reconnaissance patrols, combat patrols, guarding outposts,

⁵⁴ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 48-49.

⁵⁵ Anna M. Waller, *Dogs and National Defense* (Department of the Army: Office of the Quartermaster General, 1958), 21.

⁵⁶ War Department, *TM 10-396*, 113.

⁵⁷ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 56.

and leading scouting groups. They had to be capable of handling diverse terrain ranging from cities to jungles and work at any time of day or night without faltering. While they could work on or off leash, being on leash was always preferred because it provided the handler with greater control of his dog and prompt responses to alerts.

Scout dogs saw considerable action in the Pacific Theatre, where the dense jungles permitted the Japanese to ambush American soldiers. Captain William Putney, who directly oversaw the 2nd and 3rd War Dog Platoons, recorded his experiences with the Marine military dogs in the Pacific in his memoir *Always Faithful*. A particularly painful event took place on Guam. Putney had just finished field surgery on a dog named Kurt when he was informed that one of the handlers, Pfc. Leon Ashton, had been walking point with his scout dog, Ginger, when she had alerted to an enemy presence. The lieutenant leading the patrol doubted Ginger, forcing Ashton to continue forward toward the potential threat. Ginger charged into the tall grass, but when Ashton followed, he was fatally shot through the neck. Ginger was reassigned to another handler, Pfc. Donald Rydgig, but he too would be killed before the war was ended. As Putney recounted, “Ginger alone survived the war.”⁵⁸ Putney recorded many more stories such as Ginger’s, which gradually became more common as military dogs became fully integrated into the armed forces. Handlers would be killed or mortally wounded by enemy combatants even with the scout dog’s alert, and the dog would need to be reassigned to a new handler, if possible. Some dogs could not make the transition from one handler to another and had to be returned to their families in the United States. Even if not all lives could be saved, scout dogs like Ginger minimized the losses that did occur, and without fail became beloved members of their platoons.

⁵⁸ Putney, *Always Faithful*, 164.

Putney recalled a K-9 team that saw action on Guadalcanal soon after Ginger and Ashton's fatal patrol. Allen Jacobson and his Doberman, Kurt, had walked point in front of a group of the 21st Marines, and Kurt alerted to an enemy presence.⁵⁹ Jacobson was able to dispatch two Japanese soldiers, but a mortar shell happened to explode right next to him and Kurt, severely injuring both. Jacobson would be sent for immediate medical assistance, where he was treated for shrapnel wounds "in his back and shoulders," but Putney pronounced that he "would be all right once he got to the hospital ship."⁶⁰ Kurt would not be so fortunate. Putney immediately noticed "a wedge-shaped hole in his back about three inches wide, strangely with very little blood," as the blast and shrapnel had cauterized the blood vessels.⁶¹ The overarching concern was that "the wound would kill Kurt if the tissue over the spine swelled enough to exert pressure on the cord," but continued survival also brought the risk of infection.⁶²

With the scarce medical supplies and limited resources at his disposal, Putney worked tirelessly to stabilize Kurt. Although the wound was closed, Putney's fears regarding spinal pressure were realized, and morphine proved ineffective in halting Kurt's convulsions.⁶³ He did all that he could, but "At 3 A.M., Kurt stopped breathing."⁶⁴ Several hours later, Putney learned that Kurt's alert of the Japanese soldiers had uncovered their outpost for a large Japanese force. In the ensuing battle, at least three hundred and fifty Japanese soldiers were killed.⁶⁵ The report from the Commanding Officer of the 3rd Battalion, 21st Marines, acknowledged that "if Kurt had not discovered the Japanese outpost, his battalion would have stumbled into the main body of the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 165.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 161.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 163.

⁶³ Ibid., 165.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 165-166.

defending force, with great losses.”⁶⁶ Although Kurt’s alert came with the greatest sacrifice, his work was instrumental in saving the lives of hundreds of Marines, and exemplified the work conducted daily by the War Dog Platoons in the Pacific Theater.

Third, the attack dog was a subset of the sentry dog role. While not all sentry dogs were trained to attack, attack dogs were generally trained for sentry work in addition to apprehending targets, be they saboteurs or fleeing prisoners of war. There was a fine balance that had to be struck with the attack dogs, as they had to understand the difference between an enemy and a friend and discern which was to be attacked and which to be protected. The dog “attacks off leash on command, or on provocation, and ceases his attack on command or when resistance ends.”⁶⁷ Critical considerations had to be taken when selecting attack dogs, particularly with their personality. The TM 10-396 manual reported that “In general, a dog which is rated under-aggressive cannot be taught to attack. The dog of average aggressiveness can be taught, though less readily, than an animal rated as overaggressive. The only difficulty in teaching the latter consists in securing prompt cessation of attack upon command.”⁶⁸ Training required a soldier to act as an “aggravator,” teasing and riling the dog, while wearing a densely padded sleeve that formed both the target for the dog’s bite and his reward for successfully “apprehending” the aggravator.⁶⁹ Arms were the ideal target for attack dogs, as they were a non-lethal target that forced the aggressor into submission through the force and pressure of the bite more so than a breaking of skin. Once fully trained, these dogs could assist or replace a sentry dog team and were often assigned to guarding prisoners and transports.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Ibid., 166.

⁶⁷ War Department, *TM 10-396*, 106.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 109.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 106.

Fourth, messenger dogs were trained to supplement radio and telephone technology, acting as a failsafe for when those resources were broken or destroyed, and often providing the only stable means of communication between combat areas and command centers. Messenger dogs were unique from other military dogs because they required teams of two handlers and two dogs. The canine duo was trained to go between their two masters, locating them by scent at distances of up to a mile. For the dogs, this was an exciting “game of hide-and-seek . . . A dog’s delight was evident when he found one of his masters after a long run and hunt. He would obey a command to sit while the message was taken from the carrier-pouch on his collar and, praised and petted, beat a jubilant tattoo with his tail.”⁷¹ The dogs were intended to be a substitute for human messengers because they were faster and harder for the enemy to target, thereby providing a more stable method of communication while preventing the unnecessary loss of human life.⁷² In their training, they were given the ability to work from fixed locations and moving bases during day and night. This enabled them to be utilized to transport supplies ranging from telephone wire to carrier pigeons and in tandem with scout dogs on patrols, on battlefields, and for transport of resources.⁷³

The messenger dogs needed to be trusted to make executive decisions regarding their routes and bypassing obstacles without losing focus on their target. One soldier in the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon, William Garbo, worked as a messenger dog team with his dog, Teddy, while the platoon was stationed in the Pacific. Teddy was frequently used to carry messages from the men back to their Command Post.⁷⁴ Garbo recalled an instance where Teddy

⁷¹ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 56.

⁷² War Department, *TM 10-396*, 121.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁷⁴ Robert Fickbohm and Sandra Fickbohm Granger, *Cold Noses, Brave Hearts: Dogs and Men of the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 14.

had to deliver a message in the aftermath of a deluge of rain. In the midst of Teddy's route was a river swollen with the rains, and the dog was swept "downstream out of sight. He came running back to the CP muddy and wringing wet after finally swimming across somewhere downstream. The message he carried was vital to the intelligence regarding the enemy buildup and subsequent attack. I got the details about Teddy going downstream when I returned with the patrol before sundown."⁷⁵ Without Teddy's endurance and intelligence, the information he carried would have been lost to the jungles, but his training reinforced these qualities and built upon them to create a reliable resource for the men of the 26th Infantry War Dog Platoon.

Messenger dogs needed to develop equally close bonds with both of their handlers to ensure the drive to find them was present when they were on duty. They were trained to associate a special collar with the task. It was designed to hold folded or rolled papers, and only placed on the dog immediately before it was dispatched. Upon the completion of its mission, the collar was removed, indicating to the dog that it was now off duty. The work of the messenger dogs was invaluable, as they were able to function as a back-up when technology failed and at greater speeds than humans were capable; in most instances, messenger dogs were four to five times faster than a human at the same task.⁷⁶ Despite appearing an antiquated system, messenger dogs were an indispensable resource to many American troops, especially those stationed in the Pacific, and they saved countless lives through their dedicated work. Putney recalled his best messenger dog, Missy, "a white German Shepherd" who was "assigned to Pfc.'s Claude Sexton and Earl Wright."⁷⁷ She was one of the fastest Shepherds assigned to their platoon, and had the courage to run through any obstacle to complete her mission, be it "swim rivers under fire,

⁷⁵ William Garbo, *Memoirs*, Quoted in Robert Fickbohm and Sandra Fickbohm Granger, *Cold Noses, Brave Hearts: Dogs and Men of the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 14.

⁷⁶ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 18.

⁷⁷ Putney, *Always Faithful*, 43.

traverse fields with explosions, and crash through jungle vines and brush.”⁷⁸ While Missy did not see extensive use in combat zones, she was the subject of a successful newsreel that showcased the abilities of the messenger dogs.⁷⁹ Messenger dogs numbered amongst the smallest of military dog specialties in World War II, but they remained an essential component of the military structure, one whose existence provided surety in communication and saved the lives of human messengers.⁸⁰

Fifth, the sled dogs were finally called upon for use by the greater portion of the U.S. military. The established sled dog program transitioned into an Arctic search and rescue unit. Unlike the other specialties, which needed to have entire training and transportation programs developed in real time, the sled dogs had nearly four decades of precedent to enable seamless integration into the military dog structure. A manual had been released in 1941, FM 25-6 “Dog Team Transportation,” outlining the care of sled dogs and the logistics of transporting the dogs, handlers, and gear. A revised edition of FM 25-6 would be released in 1944, providing sled dog units with the most current guidance for being most effectively used by their teams. At Camp Rimini in Montana, sled dogs experienced “refinement of the dogs themselves through a breeding program, improved training techniques, and organizational equipment assigned to military units.”⁸¹ Despite being included in the Dogs for Defense program, few sled and pack dogs were donated, as the accepted breeds were a small minority among dog owners in the United States, forcing the government to purchase the dogs from Alaska and Canada.⁸²

⁷⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ War Department, *TM 10-396*, 121.

⁸¹ Dean, *Soldiers & Sled Dogs*, 27.

⁸² Ibid., 27.

Initially, the sled dogs were intended to be dispatched for a planned invasion of Norway, but when the invasion was no longer necessary, they were repurposed to serve as search and rescue teams. The primary overseer at Camp Rimini was M. Sgt. Richard S. Moulton, who had previously been employed by Chinook Kennels in Wonalancet, New Hampshire, which boasted the best equipped sled dog training program on the East Coast. Although Moulton was not the highest-ranking officer at the camp, he was the most experienced, a fact that was acknowledged by all as they allowed him to take the lead in managing the training and logistics of the sled dog program. The greatest struggle facing the sled dog program from the outset was the discord among sled dog methods, as most of the handlers had been civilian sled dog drivers prior to joining the military. Once a unified system was in place, new handlers would be taken alongside the veteran drivers to learn the position in real time. Once a driver was fully prepared, he would be assigned three teams of dogs that he would rotate through in training and deployment. The latter would not begin until 1944, when Camp Rimini was shut down and its sled dog teams split between Fort Robinson, Nebraska and active duty in Canada as members of search and rescue units.⁸³

Even as the sled dogs were put to use in the Arctic regions, the independent sled dog program was being terminated. The existing sled dogs continued working throughout the war, but as support for other military operations rather than as an independent unit. As search and rescue teams, the sled dogs were deployed when an injured or stranded pilot was discovered by air patrols, who then sent the dog teams to the location to conduct a rescue. As this practice was time consuming, military personnel began experimenting to create a canine-safe parachute, so that the dogs, handlers, and equipment could be dropped directly to the stranded pilot.⁸⁴ Major

⁸³ Ibid., 70.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Norman D. Vaughn and Lt. Stuart A. Mace made substantial progress in developing safe harnesses and parachutes for the dogs. Although the sled dog program transitioned into an experimental unit more than an active military service, it still provided immense benefit through the hundreds of lives the dogs saved in their search and rescue operations as well as the work they contributed to developing adequate gear for future military dogs.⁸⁵

Finally, the casualty dogs and mine detection dogs were programs that experienced little success. The search and rescue casualty dogs transitioned out of the traditional Red Cross or mercy dog role of World War I into a formalized military position in World War II. It was a short-lived program, as the training methods utilized during World War II and the circumstances in which the dogs were deployed did not have the same effectiveness of their predecessors in World War I. The casualty dog program was widely considered a failure at the time, but not due to the efforts of the dogs, who succeeded in locating soldiers. Their struggle was in differentiating between the unhurt, the wounded, and the deceased, as the dogs would commence an alert for any soldier they found, regardless of his condition.

Conversely, the mine detection dogs, or “M-dogs” as they were nicknamed, had immense theoretical potential. M-dogs were intended to “locate mine fields, lead the way around them, or point a safe path through them.”⁸⁶ The British had trained mine dogs to great success during the war, building interest and excitement for an American program, but the training methods proved to be subpar.⁸⁷ Trainers utilized “attraction” and “repulsion” methods with the M-dogs.

Attraction was based on the sense of smell, locating the components of state-of-the-art non-

⁸⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁶ “Army’s M-Dogs Detect Enemy Mines,” *Military Review* 25, no. 3 (June 1945): 25, Articles/Extracts: Army Sources, Ca. 1912-2003, War Dogs, Collection 5440, War Dogs Articles, Clippings, Box 4, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

⁸⁷ Waller, *Dogs & National Defense*, 32.

metallic German mines and alerting to their presence.⁸⁸ Repulsion was far less successful because it relied on shocking the dogs with buried wires in an effort to create an association between buried items and discomfort. However, both were faulty strategies from the beginning. After several trial demonstrations, it was revealed the dogs trained in the attraction method were alerting to human odor around disturbed earth, while the repulsion method was doomed to failure, as it was well-known that dogs respond to positive reinforcement over negative stimuli.⁸⁹ Military publications still purported that the M-dogs were “the elite of the K-9 Corps,” in 1945.⁹⁰ In later years, the M-dog program would be restarted “and provide outstanding service. The differences were time, money, and solid information combining for the big payoff.”⁹¹ Although not every military dog program was a success, they all were instrumental in constructing the framework for a stable military dog program that would continue beyond the confines of World War II.

With handler and dog prepared for deployment in their specialty, they would be sent as teams to support American military personnel in the Pacific and European theatres. Fifteen war dog platoons were dispatched by the Army and ten by the Marine Corps over the course of the war to serve overseas.⁹² The Army’s war dog platoons were divided with seven going to Europe, and the remaining eight to the Pacific.⁹³ Marine war dog platoons were also dispatched overseas, and the canine Marines served in “the Bougainville operation (1 November to 15 December 1943) . . . Guam (21 July to 15 August 1944), Peleliu (15 September to 14 October 1944), Iwo

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 94-97.

⁹⁰ “Army’s M-Dogs Detect Enemy Mines,” 25.

⁹¹ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 97.

⁹² Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 58.

⁹³ Bergeron, “War Dogs.”

Jima (19 February to 16 March 1945), and Okinawa (1 April to 30 June 1945),” as well as on Saipan and in Japan.⁹⁴

Once dispatched to combat zones the dogs proved to be life-saving resources for the men in their vicinity, accurately and consistently fulfilling, if not exceeding, their mandates. The most damaging and critical struggles the dogs and handlers faced were rooted in human error. In Europe, the scout and messenger dogs were not fully understood by commanding officers, who dispatched the dogs against their handlers’ recommendations and placed them in poor strategic conditions that prevented their use. In Europe and the Pacific, doubt about the scout dogs’ alerts led to injuries and deaths from waiting ambushes. Such casualties could have been prevented if the scout dog’s initial alert had been trusted, but the scout dog was a new technology, and most of the military was never briefed on proper implementation of the dogs and their handlers. There were also issues with comradery between the dog platoons and the other soldiers, as many of the latter either thought little of the dogs and their handlers or felt resentful. As experienced by Captain William W. Putney, the veterinarian and Commanding Officer for the Marine Corp’s 3rd War Dog Platoon, the Paratroopers and Raider Battalion, both composed of elite Marines, took out their frustrations on the “dog men.”⁹⁵ When the K-9 handlers foiled plans from both groups to infiltrate and humiliate the War Dog Platoon, they finally earned the respect that had been lacking.⁹⁶ In most circumstances, once the dogs were able to prove themselves, their work was trusted implicitly, but it was a process that would only be accomplished through time and experience.

⁹⁴ “War Dogs in the Marine Corps in World War II,” *Reference Branch* (USMC History Division: Marine Corps University).

⁹⁵ Putney, *Always Faithful*, 61.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

To meet the constant demand for dogs and funding during the war, Dogs for Defense creatively marketed their mission to civilians. One of the organization's main catchphrases was "Dollars for Dogs." If civilians could not donate a physical dog, they could donate a dollar or two to provide for the dogs currently in the service and assist in procuring more canines through marketing and purchase.⁹⁷ A brilliant decision by the Dogs for Defense team, led in this effort by James M. Austin, was utilizing symbolic canine enlistments for those who could not or did not want to donate their dog for military training.⁹⁸ Based on the number of dollars donated, the individual's dog would be awarded an honorary rank. For donations to the Army or Marine dogs, the ranks ranged from Private at \$1 to General at \$100, and donations to Navy or Coast Guard dogs went from Seaman at \$1 to Admiral at \$100. Certificates affirming these ranks would be sent to the individual who donated, and each included a note that all dogs could be promoted with the appropriate donation. Furthermore, a dog tag was included with the certificate that the pet could proudly display. Civilians who donated their dog received the highest respect as truly patriotic Americans. Dogs for Defense had no more powerful a weapon than the stories about their dogs that could be exploited in propaganda.

Interestingly, Dogs for Defense marketing targeted children specifically, albeit unintentionally in many instances. Children were motivated to donate their pets or what little money they possessed because it was a tangible way they could support the war effort; for many, having their dog serve in their place was their duty. Included alongside their financial donations would oftentimes be letters. One such note, from a nine-year-old boy seeking to register his dog, Top, for one dollar, read,

I am a boy nine years old. My dad fought in World War I. He is too old to go to this war and I am too young. We are helping at home in every way we can. We get together all the

⁹⁷ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 49.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

scrap we can find and give it to Uncle Sam. We milk cows and raise chickens too. We have a very good helper, Top, my dog. He helps us get the cows to their place. Daddy says we could not do without him. Inclosed please find \$1.00, one dollar, for which I wish to be used to register my dog as a Soldier War Dog. Thank you.⁹⁹

Although a response from Dogs for Defense is not recorded, the organization utilized every marketing avenue open to them to obvious success, including publicizing stories such as the letter from Top's boy, as it motivated children and adults to donate to their cause consistently throughout the war. While Dogs for Defense does not provide the total amount of funding raised for the war effort, the organization calculated that by 1945 more than 20,000 dogs had been donated to Dogs for Defense, at a savings to the government "conservatively estimated at well in excess of two million dollars."¹⁰⁰ The combination of "speeches, radio talks, posters, feature stories, advertisements, cartoons, personal appeals, medals, certificates, announcements at dog shows, and a V-Mail replica called K-9 mail" resulted in the organization drawing in a surplus of funding, especially toward the war's end.¹⁰¹ From every angle, Dogs for Defense had exceeded its original mission of providing 200 sentry dogs to the Quartermaster Corps to create an organization valued in the millions that had saved countless lives over its three years of duty.

The creation of the American military dog program provided a valuable resource, but it was a venture the military system initially undertook reluctantly. The initial order for 200 sentry dogs that exploded into 125,000 demonstrated the immediate impact the sentry dogs had on military personnel. Although the 125,000 dogs would never be procured, 18,000 to 25,000 dogs would be enlisted over the course of the war, and at least 10,000 of that number qualified, trained, and deployed as military dogs.¹⁰² This massive success was brought about by individuals

⁹⁹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰² Waller, *Dogs & National Defense*, 36.

who developed and maintained the organizations and programs necessary for military dogs to be effectively trained, deployed, and demobilized after the end of the war. Military dogs included sentries, scouts, attack dogs, messengers, sled dogs, M-dogs, and casualty dogs all of which made valuable contributions to the future of the American military dog program. Even the lackluster casualty and M-dog programs were beneficial in laying foundations for future programs that would be successful in later conflicts. Once the dogs and their handlers were trained and equipped, it was finally time to put them into action, and evaluate just how valuable the military dog program would be. Through jungles and beachfronts, mountains and snowy plateaus, the performance of the first war dogs in the most extreme conditions imaginable would determine not only the immediate short-term success, but also the long-term place of canines within the American military structure.

Chapter Three

It was a common scene in the Pacific Theater: a small group of soldiers canvassing paths through dense jungle, scanning for threats through the foliage. Ahead of the group walked a mismatched pair, upon whom rested the security of the entire party. The scout dog and his handler walked point, first in the line of danger, searching for threats hidden to human senses. A moment could arrive without warning where the dog froze, directing his handler to an invisible enemy, and their compatriots would rise to meet it. Patrols and scouting parties led by military dogs faced decreased casualties, as the dangers of combat were minimized by the keen senses of their canine partners. Military dogs had demonstrated success wherever they were utilized, be it on the home front, in Europe, or in the Pacific. However, time and experience would reveal that the specialized roles of military dogs were best utilized in distinct terrains. The scout dog proved more advantageous in the dense jungles of the Pacific than in the flat landscapes of Europe, as did the messenger dog in areas where communication devices were unreliable.

One of the greatest challenges faced by the handler and dog teams was a lack of familiarity within the Army and Marine Corps. In many instances, the commanding officers had no grasp of the proper circumstances in which the dogs should be used, and as a result deployed them erroneously in situations that doomed the dogs to failure. A more pervasive weakness was the doubt that filled the minds of every rank. When the war dogs were first assigned to their units, the men had no firsthand knowledge if these dogs would be effective or if they could be trusted. While these doubts dissipated over time, they did have consequences. It was therefore only through trial and error that the U.S. military gradually came to understand the abilities of its canine recruits. As this understanding was gained, changes in the dynamics of the war gradually

reduced the need for the quantity of military dogs, and the U.S. military faced its next challenge in ensuring the canine veterans were prepared for a return to civilian life.

As the war progressed and Allied victories mounted, the military dog program began to be phased back in its scale. The threat of shorefront attacks and sabotage waned, decreasing the demand for the Coast Guard's sentry dog program on the home front. American forces in Europe no longer needed the assistance of their scout and sentry dogs to fight against retreating enemies, especially in the wintery conditions that reduced the effectiveness of the sentry dogs.¹ The Pacific Theater proved to have the most enduring and large-scale impact on the military dog program. In such battles as those for Bougainville and Iwo Jima, the military dogs of the Marine Corps showed their value in the thick jungles and open beaches. In every combat zone, the dogs were not immune to dangers beyond their human enemies, as diseases, accidents, and shellshock affected dogs in the thousands. These factors maintained a steady need for dogs in the Pacific until the end of the war.

While the war was in its last months, military dogs started the process of acclimating back to civilian life. The process of detrainning the dogs took just as much time and effort as their initial training, a lengthy process necessitated by the danger the dogs posed to the public if it was not completed properly. Returning the dogs to civilian life was a costly effort that was covered by Dogs for Defense and the U.S. government. Despite the dangerous potential of the canine veterans, there was no shortage of open homes between the original owners, handlers, and civilian adopters. The public largely regarded the retired military dogs as heroes, sharing their stories in the press, honoring their sacrifices in parades and special events, and providing full

¹ Lemish, *War Dog*, 110.

burials worthy of soldiers.² While most of World War II's canine veterans enjoyed a long retirement, the United States did not end its military dog program upon the completion of the war. The program dramatically decreased in scale, but it was continued as an active component of the military structure. This allowed the military to quickly provide trained military dogs for active service in the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

Without the preliminary experimentation and research conducted during World War II, the presence of American military dogs would have been neither expedient nor as effective in combat. By briefly evaluating the efforts of military dogs on the home front and in Europe, followed by a thorough examination of the War Dog Platoons in the Pacific Theater, it is apparent that the American military dog program in World War II was effective, successful, and a critical component of the American military structure. Additionally, Dogs for Defense played a critical role in ensuring that the canine veterans were brought back to the United States and placed into good homes. The success of this first foray into military dog service established a firm foundation for the continuation of a permanent military dog program in the United States.

Although much of the work of sentry dogs was far removed from the glory of the battlefield, their contributions to the war effort were equally important. Most sentry dog teams stationed on the home front were kept secret and away from the public eye to prevent the enemy from learning of the dogs and adapting to circumvent their presence. The attack on Pearl Harbor and the fear of strikes from both German and Japanese forces formed a considerable threat that human sentries alone were ill-equipped to meet. It was discovered that when strategically placed along a shore or beach front in one-hundred-yard increments, few human threats could slip past a human and canine sentry team. The dog's senses of smell and hearing in particular served the

² "'Taps' For Noted War Dog: Blackout Was a Good Soldier – Succumbed to Shell Shock," *The New York Times*, May 14, 1945, 19.

pair well in ensuring that any potential threat was eliminated quickly. Throughout the war, the Coast Guard trained and employed 2,662 handlers, and in one year alone produced more than 1,800 trained sentry dogs.³ Due to the Coast Guard exclusively employing sentry dogs, their trainers were able to specialize at a far more detailed level than any other branch of the military, thus providing them an opportunity to develop the strongest sentry dog program amongst the K-9 Corps. Not only did the sentry dogs prevent saboteurs from accomplishing their goals, but they also assisted in seaside rescues. A Labrador Retriever based in New Jersey “retrieved the bodies of thirty-four American seamen.”⁴ The sentry pairs also recovered weapons, mines, and detritus that washed ashore.⁵ At the Coast Guard posting in St. Simons, Georgia, a total of nine sentry dogs and twenty Coast Guard handlers were assigned to guard Naval Air Station St. Simons.⁶ The dogs trained weekly in attack courses, including apprehending an attacker and detecting invading groups.⁷ These sentry teams proved an effective deterrent to enemies by foiling any plans before they could come to fruition and preventing the destruction of valuable resources on American soil.

By 1944, the threat to America’s shores had begun to wane, making it practical to utilize only human sentries once more. As a result, the Coast Guard’s sentry dogs were gradually gathered and returned to the War Dog Training and Recruitment Centers for potential dispatchment to theaters overseas, or to begin the detraining process to prepare them for civilian life.⁸ The work accomplished by sentry dogs and their handlers was far from the glorious

³ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 49.

⁴ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 62.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “SSI Archives: Dogs for Defense,” *Elegant Island Living Media Group*, November 3, 2019, <http://www.elegantislandliving.net/history-highlights/dogs-for-defense/>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Army To Keep Dogs Until the War Ends: Few Trained Animals Will Be Released Now, Officials Say,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 1944, 3.

battlefield charges of Europe and the Pacific, but it was just as critical to the safety of the United States. Fairfax Downey, in his history of Dogs for Defense, noted that this unremarkable work was predominantly “weary tramping back and forth amid fair weather and foul . . . But routine duties on the home front are as essential to victory as operations at the front. No major saboteur landings occurred, and to the beach patrol belongs a large share of the credit.”⁹

The Coast Guard was not alone in utilizing sentry dogs on the home front, as the Marine Corps made requests for qualified sentries as early as June 7, 1942, when the First Defense Battalion, Fleet Marine Force requested twelve dogs for use in guarding Palmyra Island in Hawaii.¹⁰ In a message on July 1, 1942, Commanding Officer C.W. LeGette reiterated that these dogs were necessary to supplement the human sentries’ abilities. He wrote,

Due to the constant noise of the surf on the barrier reef, the absence of visibility on moonless nights, and the density of the vegetation on these Islands, it is possible for the enemy to place ashore reconnaissance patrols undetected. It will require a 200 or 300 percent increase in personnel to deny the enemy this very likely possibility . . . It is believed that the use of dogs as indicated above would greatly reduce the chances if not prevent the enemy placing patrols ashore undetected.¹¹

The Marine Corps unit received thirty-nine sentry dogs in December 1942 that were introduced into its patrol structure, and an additional 125 dogs were put in service elsewhere in the Hawaiian Islands.¹² Eleven of the dogs received were evaluated in a report dated March 2, 1943, in which it was determined that four of the dogs were “no good” around .30 caliber machine gun

⁹ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 62.

¹⁰ “Dogs, Request For, June 7, 1942” File C-1130 “Animals – Sentry & Warning Dogs” 1942-43, Marine Garrison Forces, Correspondence, 1941-45, Box 1, Index to 1455-40, Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹¹ “Dogs, Request For, July 1, 1942,” File C-1130 “Animals – Sentry & Warning Dogs” 1942-43, Marine Garrison Forces, Correspondence, 1941-45, Box 1, Index to 1455-40, Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹² “War Dogs Requested Through June 1943, 7 December 1942,” File C-1130 “Animals – Sentry & Warning Dogs” 1942-43, Marine Garrison Forces, Correspondence, 1941-45, Box 1, Index to 1455-40, Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

posts and would need to be reassigned within the First Defense Battalion.¹³ Rather than replacing the dogs outright due to their skittish nature around the guns, John Griebel, the Commanding Officer, thought it more prudent to continue training the dogs for use on their bases.¹⁴

Conversely, the Sixteenth Defense Battalion of the Fleet Marine Force did not see an equal value in the sentry dogs. In his March 5, 1943, report, the Commanding Officer R.P. Ross, Jr. wrote, “War dogs are not considered of great value at this station, but naturally they contribute somewhat to the security during darkness.”¹⁵ The terrain at their posting on Johnston Island was not favorable to the dogs, as there was little shade to protect them from the heat of the day that was exacerbated by the surrounding water.¹⁶ Ross’s resulting decision was to return six of his sixteen sentry dogs to the training facility at Pearl Harbor.¹⁷ Most of the Marine Defense Battalions posted in the Hawaiian Islands found good use for their sentry dogs, especially during night patrols when human senses were at their weakest. A review of the Marine Defense Battalions on Palmyra, Johnston, and Midway Islands revealed a diverse experience. Palmyra and Midway bases both found good uses for the dogs and requested additional dogs to supplement their existing supply, while Johnston’s base was the only one to see the dogs as “not of great value.”¹⁸ These evaluations revealed that not only were the dog and handler critical considerations, but also the terrain and appropriate equipment to maintain the dog’s health and

¹³ “Warning Dogs, March 2, 1943,” File C-1130 “Animals – Sentry & Warning Dogs” 1942-43, Marine Garrison Forces, Correspondence, 1941-45, Box 1, Index to 1455-40, Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “Warning Dogs, March 5, 1943,” File C-1130 “Animals – Sentry & Warning Dogs” 1942-43, Marine Garrison Forces, Correspondence, 1941-45, Box 1, Index to 1455-40, Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ “Recommendations Concerning Dogs, March 22, 1943,” File C-1130 “Animals – Sentry & Warning Dogs” 1942-43, Marine Garrison Forces, Correspondence, 1941-45, Box 1, Index to 1455-40, Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

effectiveness on duty were equally important to the canines' perceived value. One military dog solution, tactic, or program for the entire U.S. military was not be practical nor feasible. Rather, the handlers and soldiers on the ground would serve as essential testing components in the process of understanding how best to utilize a military dog force.

Extending beyond the shores, sentry dogs were also utilized at locations of special interest such as factories, weapons depots, and prisoner of war camps. At the factories and weapons depots, the dogs helped to prevent sabotage from German sympathizers and at prisoner of war camps they deterred escapes as well as tracking any who managed such a feat. It was in the latter that a new category of military dog was developed towards the end of the war. A demand increased in 1944 for "fence dogs," a new utilization of attack and sentry dogs that were trained to walk in-between the outer fences of prison camps. Fence dogs were meant to deter prisoners from making escape attempts through intimidation and fear of the dogs' tracking and apprehending abilities.

Although the fence dogs would not decrease the number of required personnel at prison camps, it was believed that they would serve as a valuable deterrent against escape attempts.¹⁹ In May 1945, the prison camp located in Ogden, Utah requested seventy trained dogs to be used as fence dogs, with the belief that it would be "practical and expedient to use them between the fences of the Compound."²⁰ Each dog had to be assessed for its willingness to attack and apprehend escaping convicts, and the facilities for prison camps were not all suited to the dogs' welfare, as many had fences of barbed wire that could prove hazardous to the dogs.²¹ The camp

¹⁹ "Request for War Dogs, May 28, 1945," War Dogs file, Box 1440, War Dogs to Western Defense Command Sites, Record Group 389: Provost Marshal General, Prisoner of War Operations Div., Operations Branch, Subject Correspondence File 1942-46, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

in Utah contained 25,000 German prisoners of war, necessitating the high quantity and quality of fence dogs.²² Many fence dogs were kept in service after the war ended to continue guarding the German prisoners of war, but their use was gradually phased out as the number of prisoners of war decreased. Alongside the sled dogs, the fence and sentry dogs had the greatest enduring practical use of the military dog programs for a post-war period, which ensured their continuing use and relevance to the military structure.

On the North American continent and branching into Europe, sled dogs continued their work as elite search and rescue teams. The First Arctic Search and Rescue Squadron was formed in 1943 to serve as official forces for locating and recovering stranded flight crews.²³ The process for conducting a rescue was straightforward, albeit time consuming. Once a reconnaissance plane spotted a stranded pilot, they would make note of the surrounding terrain and determine the safest and fastest route for the sled dog team to utilize.²⁴ The dogs, handler, and equipment would be loaded on a secondary transport plane, then flown out as close as possible to the stranded soldiers. After the plane landed, the team would be harnessed and set out to rescue the crew. In most situations, the crew had to walk back to safety alongside the dog teams, as “Dogs had enough to do pulling the load of food and other supplies needed for the party’s survival during the long trek home.”²⁵

Although the process was simple in theory, it took considerable time for each step to occur and for the stranded soldiers to be brought back to shelter. It was recognized that “every minute gained was precious – the crew of the wrecked plane were likely to be injured, freezing,

²² “Requisition No. 42-015-3085-45, December 7, 1944,” War Dogs file, Box 1440, War Dogs to Western Defense Command Sites, Record Group 389: Provost Marshal General, Prisoner of War Operations Div., Operations Branch, Subject Correspondence File 1942-46, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

²³ Dean, *Soldiers & Sled Dogs*, 60.

²⁴ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 67.

²⁵ Dean, *Soldiers & Sled Dogs*, 62.

and starving.”²⁶ Many rescues turned into a retrieval of bodies, as the crew were typically ill-equipped to survive in the merciless Arctic conditions. One rescue of a flight crew downed only twenty-five miles from a base, took one hundred and twenty-nine days to accomplish due to the harsh conditions and unforgiving terrain.²⁷ These concerns instigated the experimentation with parachuting dogs and their gear out of the aircraft, to erase the time needed to land and unload the transport plane. The teams could also be dropped much closer to the stranded personnel without worrying about locating suitable landing zones for the plane and preventing the dogs from having to pass through difficult terrain on multiple trips.

Test drops were conducted with dogs who did not successfully pass the training tests to qualify for sled dog work. The first problem was creating an adequate parachute harness for the dogs, and through collaboration between Major Norman D. Vaughn, the parachute school in Fort Benning, Georgia, and Camp Rimini personnel, an effective prototype called the “Rimini dog parachute harness” was created.²⁸ Once equipped with the harness, it was discovered that dogs could be dropped from planes flying as low as 350 feet above the ground.²⁹ These harnesses were designed to force the dog to land on their back legs first to “better absorb landing shock.”³⁰ Additionally, dropping dogs in pairs allowed the dogs to share this landing shock and balance each other out.³¹ These experiments were predominantly successful in both the development of gear and in the dogs’ abilities to handle the jump, landing, and rescue mission. Very few dogs displayed any anxiety or fear before, during, or after jumps; in many instances, the dogs were viewed to be happily wagging their tails as they glided to the ground, and other dogs eagerly

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 70-72.

²⁹ Ibid., 73.

³⁰ Ibid., 72.

³¹ Ibid.

completed more than five jumps to earn their parachute wings.³² The earliest successful sled dog rescue mission that involved parachuting the rescue team took place in Newfoundland, where a missionary was stranded after the death of his entire sled dog team. Ten dogs, their handler, and equipment were dropped successfully, with a minor issue when one dog landed in water rather than on land, but he was quickly rescued.³³ The parachuting program would be phased out in the 1950s once the helicopter became more reliable, but in the snowy wilderness during World War II their abilities to quickly conduct rescue operations established their continued importance within the American military dog context.

Unlike their scout counterparts, the sled dog teams thrived in wintery conditions. Towards the end of the war, in March 1945 Lieutenant Colonel Norman D. Vaughn oversaw the transportation of 209 sled dogs and their twenty-seven handlers to the Western front.³⁴ The process was undertaken by plane, and the dogs sourced from several stations around the Arctic Circle with such speed that it was only four days after the first order was received that the dogs arrived in France.³⁵ These teams were intended to transport wounded soldiers over rough terrain, including areas of dense snowfall and forestation, that made rescue by any other means a time-consuming process. Vaughn reported that for every one man rescued by conventional stretchers, sled dog teams were able to transport twelve men.³⁶ The dogs could also be used to transport supplies ranging from food to weapons.³⁷ Unfortunately, approval from the commanding officers took so much time that the weather shifted from snow into mud, making the sled dogs

³² Ibid., 75.

³³ Ibid., 71.

³⁴ “Dog Teams Used to Move Wounded: Sponsor of Idea Says It Has Proved a Success – Flew 209 Animals to Europe,” *The New York Times*, March 9, 1945, 5.

³⁵ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 68.

³⁶ “Dog Teams Used to Move Wounded,” 5.

³⁷ “25 Dog-Team Experts Flown to Help Bradley,” *The New York Times*, February 10, 1945: 3.

functionally useless for conducting rescues.³⁸ In comparison with other military dog specialties, the sled dog was an ancient technology, but that did not make it irrelevant, for “No one familiar with the service of sledge dogs in the Second World War would count them as outmoded.”³⁹ Even as technology was improved, the sled dog teams remained the preferred and most effective option for conducting rescues and supply runs in wintery conditions.

One dog distinguished himself and the American military dog program internationally through his work in the European Theater. Chips was a collie and German Shepherd mix who found himself enlisted in the Army in 1942 when his protective instincts led him to attack the local garbageman.⁴⁰ The traits that sent him into military service made him an extraordinary force on the battlefield. Alongside his handler, Private John R. Rowell, he stormed the beaches of Sicily, guarded President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and single-handedly captured a machine-gun nest.⁴¹ The latter incident, which occurred in July 1943, garnered Chips international fame. When Rowell and Chips discovered the pillbox, Chips broke free and stormed the nest, forcing the four enemy soldiers out in surrender. One of the soldiers emerged with “a snarling, slashing fury at his throat,” only called off by Rowell’s order.⁴² Despite suffering a powder burn to his scalp, Chips remained on duty and while on beachfront patrol, he quietly alerted his handler to a small group of Italian soldiers attempting to make landfall that night, thwarting their attack.⁴³

It was this action that brought forth the question of awarding military honors to war dogs. The company commander of the 30th Infantry recommended Chips for the Distinguished Service

³⁸ Dean, *Soldiers & Sled Dogs*, 67.

³⁹ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 68.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73.

Cross, and Chips received both the Silver Star and the Purple Heart.⁴⁴ This was reported to the public on January 14, 1944, and Chips was hailed as “the first canine in the history of the United States to receive the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism in action” with the award issued in November 1943.⁴⁵ However, this news was met with intense outcries against such awards being given to animals. The 1943 national commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, William Thomas, wrote letters of protest to “President Roosevelt, Secretary Stimson and the Adjutant General.”⁴⁶ Chip’s awards were rescinded as the military covered its tracks with the established policy that awards could only be presented to humans.⁴⁷ Animals were to be cited in company orders for heroic conduct, but no other military dog would be eligible for the awards that Chips received. In January 1945, a compromise was released which allowed military dogs to be honored for their service but without utilizing the awards designed for men. Major General E.B. Gregory, the Quartermaster General, presented certificates to the owners of eight dogs who had lost their lives in the line of duty.⁴⁸ These certificates recognized “outstanding performance of duty” by the six scout and two messenger dogs that had fought in the Pacific Theater.⁴⁹ While these certificates were not the Silver Star or Purple Heart, they were an important first step toward official honors for war dogs.

Halfway across the world, military dogs experienced their most diverse use in the Pacific Theater. The conditions present within this theater necessitated the use of not only sentry dogs, but also scout and messenger dogs on a routine basis. Some of the earliest reports of military dog

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Army Dog is First to Win DSC Award: Pleasantville Canine Hailed as a Hero With American Troops in Sicily,” *The New York Times*, January 14, 1944, 4.

⁴⁶ “Award of Soldier Medals to Dogs is Barred by Army After Protest: New Order Permits Citation for Heroism of Animals in the Service – Action Follows Complaint by Ex-Head of Purple Heart,” *The New York Times*, February 16, 1944, 19.

⁴⁷ Lemish, *War Dogs*, 76.

⁴⁸ “Dead War Dogs Cited for Duty as Scouts,” *The New York Times*, January 24, 1945, 23.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

use came from battles in the Pacific. A sentry dog named Hey was present at Guadalcanal in December 1942 with the Marines, and successfully thwarted an ambush from a Japanese sniper.⁵⁰ It was reported in January 1944 that Army messenger dog Caesar was the only means of communication between the front lines and headquarters during the campaign for Bougainville for over two days.⁵¹ It would not be until after his eleventh trip that Caesar finally collapsed from complete exhaustion.⁵² Caesar's work only ended when he attacked a Japanese soldier who threatened the safety of his handler, Private Rufus Mayo, and suffered two bullet wounds. The wounds would heal, and Caesar's courageous work undoubtedly saved many lives through the dispatches he carried for nearly seventy-two hours straight.⁵³ Another messenger dog, Buster, was caught with his patrol on Morotai and surrounded by Japanese soldiers. Buster was the only means of communication for the trapped men. He successfully completed two trips while bombarded with "machine gun and knee-mortar fire."⁵⁴ Thanks to Buster's efforts, reinforcements were sent and the seventeen men in the patrol were rescued as the Japanese force was destroyed.⁵⁵

During the Palau Operation conducted by the Marine Corps, the forces were able to recognize that the sentry and messenger dogs were most effective at night, as during the day they experienced heavy artillery fire that spooked the dogs.⁵⁶ An important development was reported in October 1944 that the Marine Corps had transitioned out of using Red Cross, or casualty, dogs

⁵⁰ H.I. Brock, "Mentioned in Dispatches: The Front-Line Dog Has Proved Himself a Hero. Here are the Stories of His Valor," *The New York Times*, January 23, 1944, 119.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² John M. Behan, *Dogs of War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 80.

⁵³ Brock, "Mentioned in Dispatches," 119.

⁵⁴ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 102.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 102-103.

⁵⁶ "Annex A – Phase II – Special Action Report – Palau Operation Infantry," Page 3, Collection 5440 War Dogs – Special Action Report -Palau Operation ca. 1944 File, Box 5, War Dogs Official Pubs, Manuals Reports, War Dogs, Collection 5440, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

because they were found to be ineffective in the context of the Pacific Theater.⁵⁷ Instead, these dogs were retrained as messengers, a position far more useful in the humid jungles that disrupted communication equipment. The few casualty dogs who were used in combat still served well despite the unfavorable conditions. Jack was one of these dogs, who managed to locate and bring medical assistance to several wounded soldiers despite suffering an injury of his own on the journey.⁵⁸ Deeply attached and loyal, the war dogs would serve their comrades as much as they were able, regardless of the danger to their own well-being.

While fighting on Iwo Jima, the Sixth Marine War Dog Platoon's military dogs immediately distinguished themselves upon landing on the beaches on February 19, 1945. In the early days of the campaign, the dogs were primarily utilized as sentries to detect the Japanese before they initiated their attacks.⁵⁹ On February 23, a Doberman Pinscher named Carl alerted his handler thirty minutes prior to a Japanese attack, which provided the Marines ample time to prepare a defense.⁶⁰ The next day, February 24, routine patrols led by Jummy, a German Shepherd, and Hans, a Doberman-Pinscher, identified the presence of enemy troops that were subsequently defeated.⁶¹ A messenger dog, Duke, was also utilized from February 25-27 to deliver messages and casualty reports from the battalion to the Regiment C.F., a task in which he was successful a minimum of four times.⁶² Through the effective and timely alerts of sentry and scout dogs, combined with the reliable messengers, it was determined that the military dogs were

⁵⁷ "Dog Heroes of the Marine Corps," *The New York Times*, October 8, 1944, 99.

⁵⁸ Brock, "Mentioned in Dispatches," 119.

⁵⁹ "Combat Report of the Sixth Marine War Dog Platoon While Engaged in the Operation on Iwo Jima," File #14, "Information on War Dogs; Combat Report & Training, 1943-45," Box 26, ONI-OCNO File Interviews to Supply Area, 2nd Base Depot, History & Museums Division, Reports, Studies and Plans Relating to World War II Military Operations, 1941-1956, Record Group 127: Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

a valuable asset to the military operations, with the caveat that the dogs were discovered to be of no practical use until ground has been taken through a successful assault.⁶³ The sentry dogs of the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon likewise distinguished themselves, successfully completing more than two hundred patrols and surviving one hundred and fifty-nine air raids during their time in the Pacific Theater.⁶⁴ One sentry dog, Skippy, was sleeping with his handler, Sergeant Rocky Oliver, in a foxhole when Oliver was awoken by Skippy moving and agitated on his leash.⁶⁵ Neither Oliver nor any other man could detect a visible threat in the direction of Skippy's alert, but they unleashed "an automatic rifle burst" in that area, which resulted in the sentry dog relaxing and sleeping once more.⁶⁶ In the morning, their patrol group moved in the direction of Skippy's alert and discovered three recently deceased Japanese soldiers.⁶⁷ It was recorded that from September 17 to November 10, 1944, the scout dogs of the 26th "led more than one hundred patrols, ranging from a five man scouting party to a rifle company of two hundred or more."⁶⁸ Throughout all these patrols, "Not a single casualty was suffered when a dog was along," nor did the dogs ever fail "to alert at seventy-five yards or further."⁶⁹

Despite rigorous training protocols, the military failed to account for the scale of artillery fire in combat zones. The dogs were trained alongside gunfire, vehicles, and faux enemy combatants, but most had never experienced prolonged artillery bombardments. This resulted in a number of dogs being returned early to the United States when they developed shell shock that crippled their abilities to work on the front lines. One such dog was Andy, serial number 71 in

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Robert Fickbohm and Sandra Fickbohm Granger, *Cold Noses: Brave Hearts: Dogs and Men of the 26th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2011), 26-27.

⁶⁵ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 108.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 102.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the Marine Corps, a young Doberman Pinscher who was trained as a scout and attack dog. Andy served on Guadalcanal and Bougainville, where he distinguished himself as “an outstanding point and patrol dog.”⁷⁰ However, his record noted that despite his excellent work, he “would not be good for further combat duty. Due to results caused by shell fire in combat.”⁷¹ Even though Andy, who lost his life in the line of duty, was posthumously given an honorable discharge that noted his character as outstanding, he was not immune to the traumas inflicted by warfare.⁷²

War dogs were also traumatized by the loss of their handlers. Due to the training methods that made the dogs completely dependent on their handlers, many dogs were rendered unusable if their handler died in battle. A reporter for *The New York Times* described the bond of dog and handler, writing that “In this way the intelligent animal soon becomes the alter ego of the man whose range and quickness of perception he so broadly extends.”⁷³ It was not guaranteed that dogs could transition into a partnership with a new handler, and those who could not make the switch had to be sent back to the home front to be detrained. One such dog was a two-year-old cocker spaniel, Pistol Head, who had served for forty-eight missions alongside his handler, Lieutenant Colonel S. T. Willis. Willis was killed in action on his fifty-first mission, and Pistol Head was inconsolable to such a degree that his comrades worried he would die of grief. It was arranged for Pistol Head to return to Willis’ wife in the United States in the hope that her companionship would help him survive.⁷⁴ While nothing further is noted about Pistol Head, many dogs shared similar experiences when faced with the loss of their handler.

⁷⁰ “U.S. Marine Corps Dog Record Book of Andreas V. Wiedehurst, Serial No. 71,” page 19, Container #1, Serial No. 1 THRU Serial No. 76, RG 0127: U.S. Marine Corps War Dog Training School, Camp Lejeune, Entry # UD-WW 100: War Dog Service Books 12/1942-06/1946, National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷³ “Dogs to Aid in War,” *The New York Times*, June 15, 1942, 34.

⁷⁴ “Dog Veteran of War Sent to Hero’s Wife,” *The New York Times*, July 28, 1944, 14.

Miscommunication coupled with a lack of information was one of the most detrimental weaknesses to the military dog program. Qualified dogs and their handlers were both underused and misused in combat. 2nd Lieutenant Wiley S. Isom, the Commanding Officer of the 45th Quartermaster War Dog Platoon, recalled that while enroute to the Pacific Theater, the captain of their ship reprimanded him for the dogs' barking. Despite Isom's assurances that this behavior was instigated by the seamen, as the dogs were trained to never bark, the captain still ordered Isom to handle the noise.⁷⁵ When his platoon arrived to assist the 27th Infantry Division, Isom reported to the Commanding General, George W. Griner, and explained the protocols and tactics for best utilizing the dogs. Isom stressed that the strengths of the dogs were in scouting, but that they could also be utilized for sentry duty if needed, and that the men should be made aware of the functions of the scout dogs.⁷⁶ "This prior knowledge could eliminate some errors that may prove fatal to a patrol," Isom recalled, and noted that the soldiers "must know what they can and cannot expect from the use of the dog team."⁷⁷ He also explained that the dogs "would be of little or no value in a situation where there was a mass movement of personnel, and where constant firing of mortars, artillery and machine guns were being used and personnel moving in all directions around the dog."⁷⁸ Griner envisioned the scout dogs leading attacks, which Isom quickly rejected as a possibility because the battlefield conditions would render the dogs' skills unusable. The final word was had by Griner, who pulled rank as the major general to order Isom to use the dogs as Griner saw fit, leaving him no room for contradiction.⁷⁹ On April 18, 1945, Griner used fourteen dog and handler teams to help lead an attack on Machinato, in which the

⁷⁵ Wiley S. Isom, *Diary of a War Dog Platoon* (Shelbyville: Bible & Literature Missionary Foundation, 1997), 46.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

dogs served far better than was anticipated, but Isom quickly recalled his troops to prevent any further mishaps from occurring.⁸⁰

In every combat theater, the military dogs distinguished themselves and proved their value to military operations. Casualties were inevitable, with many dogs losing their lives in the line of duty, from illness, or psychological breaks from the trauma of their experiences. Those who survived their tour of duty had to begin the process of detrainning. Even while the war was ongoing, dogs were processed through detrainning for a multitude of reasons, including injuries or illness, shellshock, and their roles phasing out. The detrainning process had the dog unlearning all of the skills and tasks that had served their purposes on the battlefield. At the conclusion of the war, there were roughly 8,000 military dogs who needed to proceed through this program. Dogs for Defense came forward to oversee the detrainning and adoption of the dogs, and in conjunction with the government helped to cover the costs for returning these dogs.⁸¹ The adopting households were only charged \$14-24 for the dogs to assist with the transportation costs.⁸² For the Army dogs, over 15,000 adoption applications were received by 1947, but precedent was given to veterans and the homes of those who had donated a dog that had died in combat.⁸³

The detrainning process took several weeks, depending on the dog, and had the dog acclimating to human interaction, the noise and activity of towns, and restraining their instincts to attack when provoked.⁸⁴ One of the final tests to be passed by the dogs was a field test in a busy town or city. There, the dogs would be exposed to a variety of noises, people, and experiences, including an interaction with an aggressive individual.⁸⁵ Should the dog pass all of

⁸⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁸¹ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 109.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 110.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 109-110.

⁸⁵ "Many Army War Dogs Lose Minefield Jobs as New 'Means' Find Non-Metal Detonators," *The New York Times*, January 28, 1945, 7.

these scenarios without attacking, it was considered ready to return to civilian life. Although the number was few, there were dogs who due to their aggressive temperament or traumas could not be rehabilitated and had no other option than to be put down.⁸⁶ Each dog who passed through the detraining program was sent home with a manual outlining the care and treatment of war dogs, which highlighted the commands and behaviors that the owner should in no circumstance use, for their own safety.⁸⁷ The return to civilian life was predominantly a success, and the war dogs were able to settle into a well-deserved retirement.

Despite the fearful mutterings of those concerned about allowing canine veterans back into society, there was no shortage of loving homes and accolades awaiting them. In Rockford, Illinois, the former war dogs were honored by receiving the freedom to wander their city as they pleased, and license fees were no longer applicable to them.⁸⁸ As early as 1944 there was public interest in adopting military dogs for both practical and sentimental reasons. Many households recognized the value of a trained sentry dog for protection, but the demand for these dogs far outweighed the available supply.⁸⁹ The original owners and handlers of the dogs were given first preference in adopting them after they were discharged. Many handlers reached out to the owners to inquire about adopting their canine partner, as the deep bonds forged between them were forged through the flames of training and combat. There were reports in the press that “So far, no owner has refused to give his dog to the soldier asking for it.”⁹⁰

One such fortunate handler was Private Richard Reinauer, who was granted permission to adopt his military dog partner. Rick, Marine dog number 471, was returned to his original owner

⁸⁶ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 110.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁸⁸ “Dog Heroes to Get ‘Key to City,’” *The New York Times*, September 23, 1944, 17.

⁸⁹ “Army to Keep Dogs Until the War Ends: Few Trained Animals Will Be Released Now, Officials Say,” *The New York Times*, February 25, 1944, 3.

⁹⁰ “Many Army War Dogs Lose Minefield Jobs as New ‘Means’ Find Non-Metal Detonators,” *The New York Times*, January 28, 1945, 7.

Robert Bell who transferred his ownership to Reinauer in 1946.⁹¹ Not all handlers were so fortunate, as was experienced in the case of Marine dog Derek, a Doberman-Pinscher, whose owners had to make difficult decisions in favor of their dog. During the war, Derek had two handlers, and one, Private First Class Henry Marsili, reached out to Mrs. Priscilla Dunn, Derek's owner, to request ownership of Derek following the war's end. Marsili had been Derek's handler for two years and inquired to "possibly see some way . . . into letting me keeping him."⁹² He was aware of other handlers who had received permission to adopt the dogs, and was hoping for a similar response, spending much of the letter praising Derek's qualities and great service. Mrs. Dunn was willing to consider Marsili's request, but later decided against it on the grounds of his living situation. As she explained in a later memo,

We drove to New York City with the dog so he could see him. We had decided that although we did not want to give up "Derek" we would do so gladly if he would be happier with his Marine buddy. But the location that he lived in was entirely impossible for a dog like Derek to live – uptown New York City far away from any place to roam or run. So we brought him back to Cambridge and he adjusted overnight as though he had never been away.⁹³

When the time came and orders were given, the military dogs of the United States proved themselves admirably in World War II. Each dog represented thousands of dollars, hundreds of man hours, and countless resources to train and equip for service, but their success was far from guaranteed. However, these dogs proved their value on the home front, in Europe, and in the Pacific. Through their timely alerts, scout and sentry dogs were able to foil enemy attacks and prevent enemy reconnaissance efforts. Messenger dogs allowed intelligence reports to be swiftly

⁹¹ "Letter from H.W. Buse, Jr. to PFC Richard Reinauer, January 23, 1946," Collection 4498 – Personal Papers: Richard Reinauer – Correspondence: Discharge of War Dog Rick, 1946 File, Collection 4498 Personal Papers Richard Reinauer - War Dogs, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

⁹² "Letter from Henry Marsili to Mrs. Frank Dunn, December 15, 1945," Coll 3182 Frank Dunn – Scrapbook (2 of 2) File, Personal Papers, Coll 3812 – Frank Dunn, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

⁹³ "Memo from Priscilla Dunn," Coll 3182 Frank Dunn – Scrapbook (2 of 2) File, Personal Papers, Coll 3812 – Frank Dunn, Archives Branch, Marine Corps History Division, Quantico, VA.

transported from the front lines to commanding staff which kept them informed and enabled them to make swift decisions in the thick of battle. Search and rescue teams ranging from casualty dogs to sled dog teams saved the lives of the wounded and stranded. Although not every dog was successful, owing to the dog's temperament or to faulty training methods, each represented an important step in the development of a complex, adequate, and enduring military dog program. Each hurdle the dogs, soldiers, and military encountered proved another instance for growth and learning to occur, which set up the program for greater success in the future. For those military dog veterans who survived the war, they demonstrated that re-integration into civilian life was entirely possible. The search for adoptive homes revealed the great importance military dogs now had in American society, as the military and Dogs for Defense were overwhelmed with applications. Society continued to honor the dogs long after their service was completed. Through newspaper stories, parades, ceremonies, and military burials, the work of these dogs was recognized for years to come.

Conclusion

On a hot, unassuming day in “one of the most austere environments in the world,” K-9 Ada worked tirelessly alongside her handler, searching buildings and grounds for any trace of explosives.¹ Ada had to be thorough in her work because key figures in a presidential election would soon be arriving, and she was one of the final barriers between them and a terrorist attack.² Ada could have been any dog serving in World War II, Korea, or Vietnam. Like Chips, she protected important figures ranging from presidents to diplomats. In the tradition of the mine dogs, she sought out weapons of destruction to foil plans of sabotage. Owing to the work of handlers, dogs, military officials, and civilians in World War II, Ada was able to fulfill her purpose in 2009 at the Afghanistan Presidential Elections.³ Ada served for seven years in Afghanistan and Iraq without furlough, followed by three years in private security in the United States before her retirement in 2017 at the age of twelve.⁴ In Ada, the endurance, development, and importance of the American military dog program in the 21st century is evident.

Ada is but one of thousands of military dogs who have served the United States faithfully in the eighty-one years since the founding of the K-9 Corps on March 13, 1942. The military dog program of World War II is critical not only because it was the first program of its kind in American history, but because it firmly established a precedent that would be utilized in peacetime and in warfare since that time. The United States was prepared with military dog units for the Korean and Vietnam Wars because of the work conducted in World War II. Through these conflicts, the military was set up for success with their K-9 teams in Iraq and Afghanistan

¹ “K-9 Ada,” Project K-9 Hero.org, <https://projectk9hero.org/pages/k-9-ada>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

in the 21st century. Military working dogs are now an essential component of day-to-day life in the United States. Alongside their counterparts in the police, they screen for explosives prior to large events and gatherings, search for concealed weapons, and protect important figures including the President of the United States. One of the most famous American military dogs of the 21st century was named Cairo. He was a six-year-old Belgian Malinois assigned to the Navy SEALs alongside his handler, Will Chesney, when they were deployed as part of SEAL Team Six on May 2, 2011, to eliminate Osama bin Laden.⁵ Their mission was a success, and Cairo's work to uncover any explosives or traps was essential to the team's survival and completion of their orders.

Cairo's story, one of the first released to the public in the wake of the mission, instantly reawakened interest in the military dog. In the time following World War II, the efforts of military dogs slipped to the wayside as other military programs garnered more attention in the era of the Cold War. This made it easy for the regulations regarding military dogs to be overlooked. Nearly all of the estimated 10,000 dogs who served in Vietnam would be left behind, classified as "surplus equipment." It would not be until 2000 that President Bill Clinton would sign "Robby's Law" into effect, which ended the systemic euthanasia of military dogs when they became too old to work. Through "Robby's Law," retiring military dogs are made available for adoption, providing them the opportunity for a quiet and peaceful retirement after years of dedicated service. Following precedent set by Dogs for Defense, non-profits and other civilian organizations help offset the costs of caring for retired military dogs, ranging from costly medical expenses to the daily necessity of food. The work accomplished in the first steps of the

⁵ Guy McCardle, "The Dogs of War: Remembering Cairo," *SOFREP.com*, November 20, 2022, <https://sofrep.com/news/the-dogs-of-war-remembering-cairo/#:~:text=The%20death%20of%20Osama%20bin,%3B%20Cairo%2C%20the%20Belgian%20Malinois..>

American military dog program was monumental, laying the foundation for future growth of the program into the present day.

The story of the American military dog is one of overcoming adversity and doubt, stumbling through the unknown blindly, and fighting against the worst of odds for the sake of a bond between man and his canine friend. It took over a hundred and fifty years for the first military dog program to be officially initiated in the United States. Through small steps that began with the sled dog program in the Alaskan wilderness at the turn of the 19th century to recruitment measures estimating a need of 100,000 dogs, it was both gradual and inevitable that the United States would initiate an official military dog program. The impetus of the Second World War, combined with the brave and dedicated work of civilians within Dogs for Defense, formed the perfect environment for such an event to occur. Beginning with sentry dogs on the home front, then expanding to sentries, scouts, search and rescue, messengers, and mine dogs, each represented an important development in the military dog institution. Beyond practical uses, the dogs provide psychological and morale benefits to the soldiers with whom they served, revealing the happiness and selfless love that still existed despite the horrors and atrocities permeating their daily lives.

By the end of World War II, the American military dog program had exceeded all initial aspirations. In less than five years, the Army, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard had transitioned from possessing not a single trained dog to training over twenty-thousand canine soldiers, each capable of fulfilling one of a number of specialties. Unlike the precedent set by European military dog programs, the American military dog program was not disbanded when the war ended. It was condensed into four Army platoons that would continue to serve and begin a

breeding program to maintain a supply of qualified war dogs.⁶ The place of military dogs in the United States was now firmly established. Through their dedicated service in the United States, Europe, and the Pacific, the dogs proved their valor and value by serving as a consistent, trustworthy partner to their handlers and the soldiers around them. While mistakes were made, trial and error revealed not only the best practices for utilizing war dogs on the battlefields of World War II, but also how they might be adapted for future use. It became clear that where American soldiers were present, so too should there be a dog. The skills of canine soldiers, combined with their indomitable loyalty, made them a true threat to enemy forces.

Dogs held a unique position in American culture during the Second World War. They provided a rallying point that nearly everyone could support, regardless of personal beliefs, backgrounds, or demographics. The individuals that composed Dogs for Defense were perfectly equipped to not only understand dogs, but also their place in American society and the potential they held for the success of American endeavors in the war. Furthermore, by utilizing the public's empathy and fondness for dogs, Dogs for Defense was able to effectively fundraise and recruit capable canine soldiers. In the latter came the greatest sacrifices in displays of loyalty, patriotism, and selflessness as families gave up their dearest companions to dangerous futures, without a guarantee of reunification. The end of the war brought difficult decisions for many families as the dog handlers begged to be allowed ownership of their canine partners. Regardless of the home to which they returned or found anew, the military dog veterans were given the highest honors and praises available to them in post-war life. Over time, scholars have uncovered the stories of these brave dogs and men who pioneered the first military dog program in the United States. From the works of veterans such as William Putney and Robert Fickbohm to

⁶ Downey, *Dogs for Defense*, 108.

detailed surveys by Michael G. Lemish and Charles Dean, the history of the American military dog program has begun to be documented. This work will continue as more stories are uncovered and documents are declassified.

With the end of World War II, the dogs were promoted to a place of honor amongst the other veterans. In parades, newspaper articles, movies, and books, the accomplishments of these dogs were lauded. Marine dog Derek frequently participated in parades, hospital visits, and interviews surrounding his war service. Canine veteran Thor, a boxer from Altoona, Pennsylvania, was a celebrity in his small town. He visited any business he liked, often receiving treats from the staff, and was transported by taxis and buses.⁷ In 1950, Thor was awarded a key to the city by the Altoona Police Department, revealing the high regard in which he was held by the people of Altoona.⁸ The place of war dogs in American society following World War II can best be explained by Thomas Yoseloff, who wrote in 1944,

This, then, is the story of America's great army of canine heroes. But, in a more important sense, that story can never be told. It is the story of a thousand tearful separations between young masters and faithful animals - of a boy in Brooklyn who trudged silently to the express loading platform and watched with sorrowful eyes while the crate containing his friend was lifted up for shipment - of the dog that 'went A.W.O.L.' in New York City when his 'draft number' came up - of a Boxer on sentry duty near a defense plant in Boston, that attacked and caught a saboteur carrying complete plans for the plant's destruction. It is the story of thousands of sensitive nostrils and straining ears that pierce the night's darkness to guard unceasingly and untiringly the ramparts of American democracy. There is a story behind each record of America's canine heroes - a story that is sentimental or dramatic, humorous or pathetic. And when we have won again our right to live the American way of life, our dog-army will have shared in the battle, and have won the right to a share in the glory.⁹

Whether the dog served in New Jersey or Iwo Jima, alerted to twenty-five attacks or one, guarded the President of the United States or a crate of rations, they each played a pivotal part in

⁷ "Eiche and Thor – About the Collection," Robert E. Eiche Library, Penn State Altoona, <https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/eiche-and-thor>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Yoseloff, *Dogs for Democracy*, 30 and 32.

the success of American military efforts in World War II. In their faithful service during the war and their subsequent retirement, they showed that the bond between man and dog endures all things, even unto the worst of humanity, and that survival through such odds was not only possible, but that the life afterwards was worth living.

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