

AUSTRALIAN ARMY Tracker Dogs



SOUTH VIETNAM 1967 - 1971

Following the successful use of tracker dogs during the Malayan Emergency and with Australia's troop commitment to the conflict in South Vietnam imminent, in 1965 the Australian Army began a training program at the Tracking Wing of the Infantry Centre, Ingleburn, near Sydney, New South Wales. The dogs, all black labrador or labrador cross breeds, were sourced from public donations and dog pounds. Trained to follow a scent, usually at speed, these dogs were to become the core of the Combat Tracker Teams that were used from 1967 until the last combat troops were withdrawn in late 1971.

Each Tracker Team, consisting of (although there were variations) a tracker dog and handler, coverman (machine gunner), team commander (visual tracker), signaller, visual tracker and a rifleman, operated on standby out of Nui Dat or the battalion fire support base. Usually called out to follow up enemy tracks or locate suspected enemy hideouts after a contact, the teams would be airlifted by helicopter into the area of operation. Once on the ground, the tracker dog would be put on to the scent of retreating enemy. This meant that the Tracker Team would lead actual fighting elements towards the enemy - one of the most dangerous jobs in any war, requiring both excellent scouting skills as well as absolute confidence in the tracker dog's ability to sense the enemy before actual contact was made.

The dog would follow the scent until a location was found, at which time he would indicate in a 'point' facing the suspected enemy. The handler and his dog would then fall back while the rest of the section searched the area, often finding wounded enemy or recently occupied bunker systems that would otherwise have been missed. Apart from their success in locating enemy and their support systems, the dogs saved the lives of their handlers and team members on many occasions. Although not trained to detect mines, the dogs were intelligent and sufficiently well trained to do so.

Eleven tracker dogs were deployed to South Vietnam during the Vietnam War - Caesar, Cassius, Janus, Julian, Juno, Justin, Marcian, Marcus, Milo, Tiber, Trajan.

AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE TRACKERS & WAR DOGS ASSOCIATION