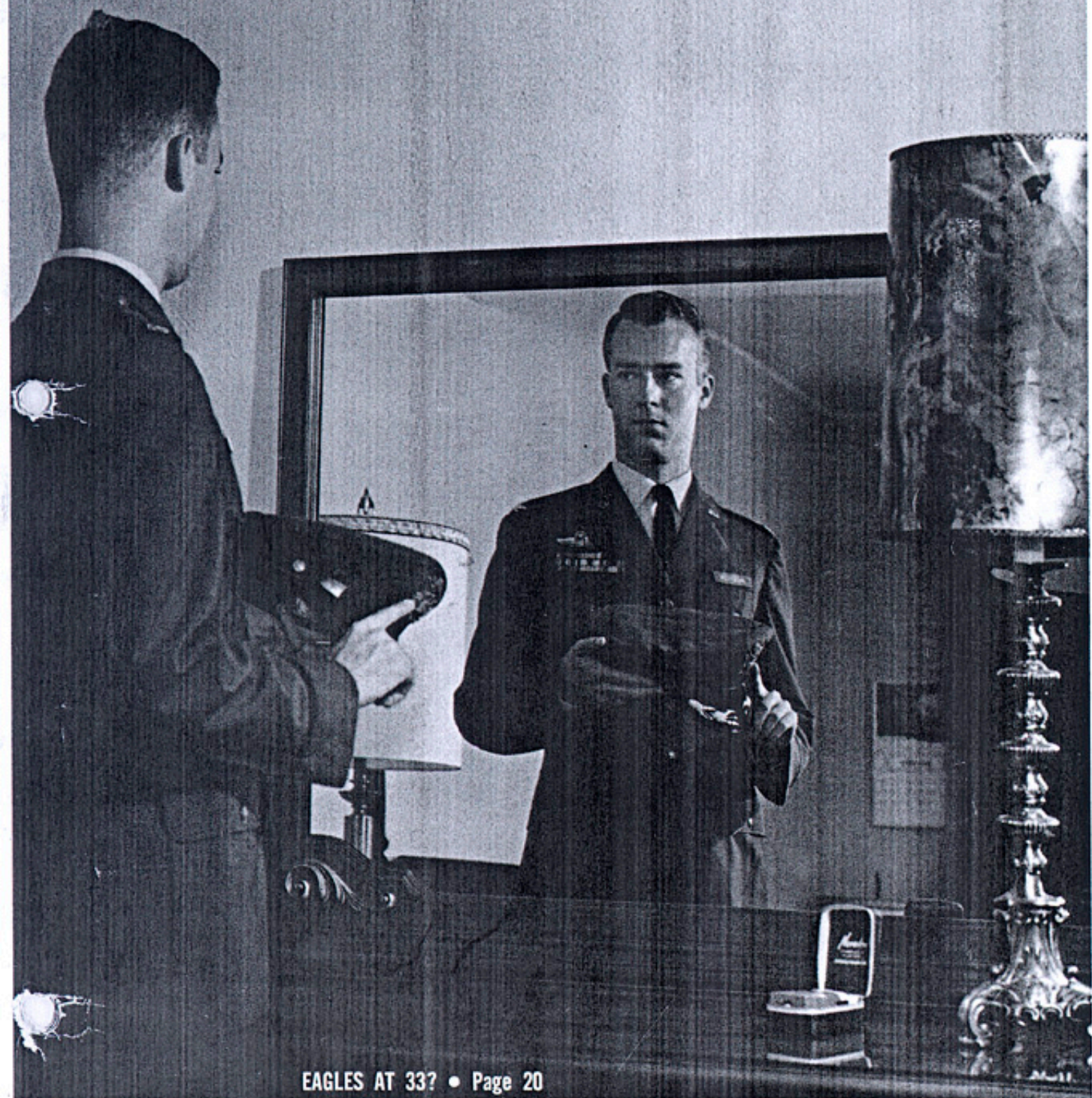




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Air Force security policemen and their sentry dogs pass in review during rare formation photographed at busy Tan Son Nhut AB, Vietnam.

They patrol the perimeters.
They have four eyes and four ears.
They can smell the enemy. That's why

THEY WORK THE NIGHT BEAT

by SMSgt. JAMES A. GEORGE

JIM Condrey calls them "the guided muzzles." And Condrey, a staff sergeant with a large mustache and a Virginia drawl, knows sentry dogs just about as well as anyone in the Air Force. He received his first dog back in 1954 at Langley AFB, Va., and has been an Air Force security police/dog handler since.

Condrey knows the young men who work perimeter defense, too. He understands their moods and is acutely aware of what it costs these young policemen, psychologically, to patrol the darkness night after night. Condrey speaks slowly, evenly, his thoughts and words measured, his eyes and mind evaluating everything and everyone around him.

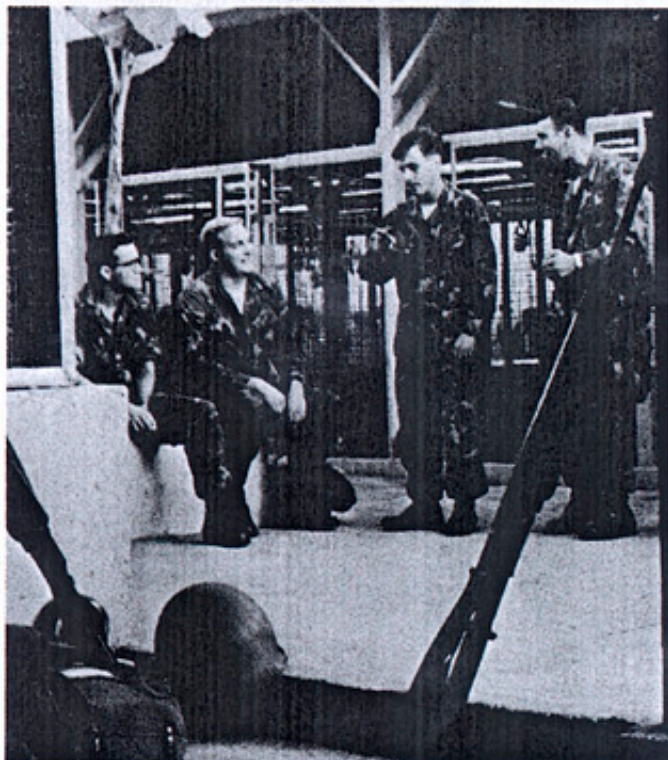
"This is a hard job," he said as he drove the two-seater pickup over ruts and winding roads around Tan Son Nhut Air Base. "It takes something out of a man, that's true. You don't move around out here night after night, listening to every little sound, wondering if this is it, without sacrificing a part of yourself each time. But on the other hand, this job gives a young man something he may never have gotten in any other way — the kind of slow-but-sure confidence that makes him a man who will stand and be counted when a fight starts."

And the dogs?

"They get the best care and training money can buy," Condrey says around the pipe that never seen to get smoked out. Condrey's an experienced hunter, and dog owners in the Langley area used to seek



Armed with .38 caliber revolvers, M-16 rifles, grenades, sentry dogs and two-way communication sets, dog handlers prepare for night duty.



If Tan Son Nhut's night beat policemen have any jitters about patrol duties on outer perimeter of base, small talk works as group therapy.

his help in training their hounds for the hunt.

"The man and the dog are part of each other. Our dogs have taken some hits that were meant for their handlers. Snake bites, too. We've had a couple incidents where a dog took a lethal dose of venom from a snake that his human partner didn't even see."

We were working a section of the perimeter at Tan Son Nhut, dropping off the security police handlers and their dogs at intervals. They had been in the rear of our truck when we started out with Sergeant Condrey to post the night defenses. MSgt. Manuel A. (Joe) Collaso, THE AIRMAN photographer, and I were riding up front with Condrey. There was very little sound in the back.

Earlier, at the kennels, the airmen who make up the base's first line of defense had talked, laughed, traded jibes and shop talk like any other group of young men getting ready for a night of work. Except that there was an almost unnoticed nervousness. Not in their voices, but in the studied casualness which they seemed to have. Or maybe I was just nervous for them, anticipating the long night ahead for each.

Joe, who has shot pictures in tough places around the world for 26 years, was doing what he always does — getting close to his subjects. He stuck his cameras in hostile faces filled with long, sharp teeth, and ignored the barking and straining of heavy leashes as he looked for just the right angle.

"We should put him in a helmet and strap a dog to

him," one of the men joked. "Yeah, he could blind 'Charlie' with flash bulbs," another added.

The security policemen reported for duty about three hours before going on perimeter patrol. They looked after their dogs, checking a scratch here or a sore there, conferred with TSgt. Scotty Linney, (NCOIC of the Kennels) about such items as collars, special diets, weapons, and so on, or otherwise passed the time as the sun headed west.

It was almost completely dark as we stopped to unload each man and his dog in the area which they would patrol that night. (The posting is done at varying times from day to day to prevent the enemy from taking advantage of an established pattern.) At each stop Joe jumped out to get a few pictures. His flash bulbs were triggering radio queries from other perimeter defensive positions, which are manned around the clock on a shift basis. Sergeant Condrey used his radio to clear the way for us.

The Night Has a Thousand Eyes

We asked these men, point-blank, about any fears.

"No, I don't think I'm ever nervous, or secretly afraid," a young airman told me. I stood on his other side — away from the dog, even though the man had not yet slipped the muzzle from his partner.

"I'm wide awake. Alert would be a better word, I guess. I get a few butterflies, sometimes. But if the day ever comes when I have to fight myself to walk

around out here . . . that's the day I'll ask for another job. I'd owe every man on this base that much.

"But to be honest about it, every one of the men I've worked with out here was ready for this job before he ever took it on. We've all had experience. Mostly at Stateside bases, yes. But you walk the night with a dog anywhere for a year or so and you've got the feel for this duty."

His dog sat quietly, looking into the night. And the night was beautiful, starry. But deadly. We moved on in the truck, across an aircraft parking ramp where maintenance men worked on C-130s and C-123s, readying them for hundreds of missions. Past construction areas, where a new runway was planned. Past lone, dark men who sat silently in bunkers, patting their weapons, sniffing the night, and counting the stars.

A1C Leon Senecal clambered over the tailgate, then lifted Nemo out of the truck. It was Nemo's first night back on duty after several weeks of convalescence. About a month before our visit to the kennels, Nemo had taken a Viet Cong rifle shot in the muzzle. The wound was healing under the expert care of veterinarian Dr. Ray Huston, who tends about 175 dogs at several bases in South Vietnam.

Nemo had lost one eye to the VC bullet. His handler, A2C Robert A. Thorneburg, had been medically evacuated to Japan to recover from wounds he had suffered in the same VC attack on the night of December 4, 1966.

Leon Senecal took his place. At first he just talked to Nemo through the bars of his cage. And fed him

Security policeman and his partner pause for a few moments during night patrol, perhaps to ponder the night life of C-130 technicians.



Patrolling deep shadows along outer perimeter fence at Tan Son Nhut AB, A2C Leonard Bryant and sentry dog learn to recognize night sound.

his three pounds of ration each day, plus a little extra which Doc Houston prescribed to help the dog recoup the weight he had lost. Gradually, Nemo accepted Senecal, who soon had him out and moving around on a leash, getting the strength and resiliency back into those canine muscles. Now they were going to work.

Their patrol area was in the boondocks. It was the same area where the Viet Cong had begun their December 4th infiltration to set up mortars. The elephant grass had been higher than a man's head, then. Men of the 377th Security Police Squadron had since cut it down. Three of their members had died to stem the assault that night. Twelve other young men had been wounded. Three dogs had given their lives, too. Three Silver Stars had been awarded, and 13 Bronze Stars with "V" device for valor. Twenty-eight Viet Cong were killed, and four captured.

One of the men we had dropped off earlier, A2C Leroy Marsh, and his dog King, had been in the forefront of the VC attack. Marsh had turned in one of the early alarms to the Central Security Control (CSC). The alarms of Marsh and other perimeter guards had triggered instant action, for the man/dog teams are not alone, even though they are on the outermost limits of the base.



The Ready Reserves

The night security shift for Tan Son Nhut is a long force of security policemen and sentry dogs. This force is backed up by alert teams armed with M-16 rifles, machine guns, mobile communications equipment, grenade launchers, flares, and other items. These teams are mobile and fast and they can respond quickly to reinforce any sector.

Central Security Control is the hub of all security operations, and the night duty force at CSC includes the duty officer, a map plotter, and a communicator.

If a dog team is "alerted" by the dog's keen senses, the handler first uses his portable two-way radio set to inform CSC, then moves in to investigate. The dog leads the way. If the handler makes a positive identification of a hostile unit he informs CSC. The security alert teams are immediately called into action and sent into the sector to assist the handler and his dog.

During a major attempt by the enemy to infiltrate the base defenses, CSC can commit the entire security police force. In addition, the US Army has standby forces committed to assist the 377th Security Police Squadron during a major attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base. And since our visit, Tan Son Nhut Air Base has gained a hardened Joint Defense Operations Center, which is manned 24 hours a day to insure coordination of all friendly defensive forces, US and Vietnamese, both on and off base.

Included in the night force are security policemen who patrol the flight line and occupy strategically located defensive bunkers. These, too, are lonely beats — jobs that call for a special kind of adaptability.

The Quiet Americans

The dog handler knows the backup forces which are his at a moment's notice, if he should need them. But he also knows that for that force to be alerted he must get word to them. For that reason, when his dog alerts, he radios the CSC before moving into the night world to investigate. And if forced to release his dog, he knows that there's a very good chance his animal might be killed.

If his flares detect hostiles the handler's first responsibility is to relay the important information — number and location of enemy forces — to the CSC. Then he grabs a piece of earth and starts slugging it out with his weapons, knowing that alert teams will be with him in a very short time. And if necessary, armed helicopters and AC-47s with miniguns and flares will be overhead within minutes. It's those minutes that can age a man who faces attack.

Tan Son Nhut security policemen successfully turned back two major assaults within an 11-month period. There are some young men who breached the gap early in the fight, until dawn's first light. Several others died buying time for backup defenders. The youngsters who fought through the night of December

4, 1966, were years older by the time the seven-hour battle ended.

These are the young old-timers who protect our airmen and aircraft throughout Vietnam, at every base. By day they dream young men's dreams and care for their animal partners, for without his dog, the man is only half a team.

These are the teams we have going for us at our Vietnam bases — young men who are experienced and well trained; and some of the most intelligent, superbly trained dogs in the history of warfare. They work the night beat. So other men can rest easy. Somebody has to do it.



A2C Robert A. Thorneburg, wounded in the December 4, 1966 Viet Cong attack on Tan Son Nhut AB, says goodbye to Nemo, his canine partner. Nemo lost an eye, but remained behind to go back on perimeter duty. Airmen Thorneburg was evacuated to Japan to recover from his wounds. Nemo received get-well cards from many youngsters in the States. This one came from Jeffrey William White, of Seattle, Wash.

Dear Nemo. My friend sent you a letter December 5. Her name is Marta Lee Coumbe. I am sending this letter because I love dogs and the last dog I had died at the age of four months. I hope you get well. Your friend, Jeff White.

(Note: After this story was prepared, THE AIRMAN learned that Nemo was being returned to the States. His wounds required further treatment and he was airlifted to the Sentry Dog Center at Lackland AFB, Texas.)