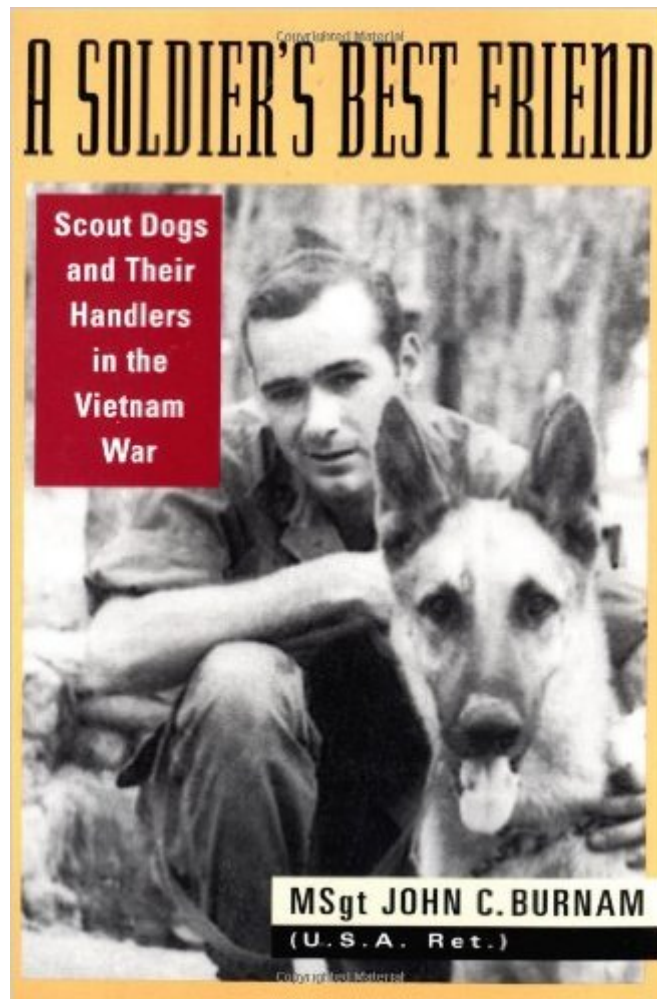


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# A Soldier's Best Friend: Scout Dogs And Their Handlers In The Vietnam War



## Synopsis

In a Vietnam War memoir unlike any published before, John C. Burnam recalls his service in-country as a scout dog handler in the 25th Infantry Division's 44th Infantry Platoon (Scout Dog) with his canine comrades, Hans, Timber, and Clipper. Like 10,000 other young combat infantrymen, Burnam loved and cared for his dogs, literally carrying their food and water into battle, as they located injured GIs, searched out Vietcong weapons caches and deadly booby traps, and alertly thwarted enemy attacks and ambushes. More than 57,000 Americans lost their lives in Vietnam, and countless others were wounded, taken prisoner, or reported missing in action; thousands more would have fallen victim had it not been for the use of German shepherds for scouting, sentry, and patrolling and Labrador retrievers for tracking. Yet these intrepid animals' service has been largely forgotten. In fact, the nearly 4,000 American war dogs of Vietnam were classified as "equipment" at the war's end. Deemed expendable despite the impassioned pleas of their handlers, thousands were abandoned to unknown fates. Vietnam War Dogs is a stirring war story but one that honors the courage of real men and their real best friends. 8 pages of black-and-white photos enhances this superbly written testimonial to the strength and courage of America's soldiers and the heroics of their dog teams during the Vietnam War. "An authentic and compelling story by a two-tour combat infantry veteran. Read this magnificent book." #151;Lieutenant General Harold G. Moore (U.S.A., ret.) co-author of We Were Soldiers Once and Young: Ia Drang, The Battle that Changed the War in Vietnam

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A Soldier's Best Friend" is about John Burnham's experience as a Scout Dog handler for the 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam. This review drops the "Master Sergeant" from his name because he writes as a "short timer" enlisted man, not as the career non-commissioned officer he became. SBF is a 3-part tale. The 1st concerns the author's original tour in Vietnam as an infantryman with the First Air Cavalry Division, known to vets as "The Cav". He is wounded, medevaced to Japan and reassigned to Okinawa. Thanks to the vagaries of the Army personnel system, he is assigned as an "OJT" guard dog handler around a Chemical Warfare dump. His time on that island is the 2nd segment. The 3rd part concerns Burnham's return to Vietnam-after he re-enlists for another combat tour to get away from the chemical dump. (Stranger things have happened! This reviewer knew a guy who reupped for the 173rd Airborne in Vietnam because he was miserable in Wurzburg, Germany!) Burnham becomes a Scout Dog handler with the 25th. A handler and his German Shepherd almost always walked point in the field. They were the lead in the line of march and therefore highly vulnerable. Scout Dogs searched for trip wires, mines and other booby traps, injured GIs and sensed Viet Cong laying in ambush. They saved thousands of Americans casualties. The author himself acknowledges that without his main dog, Clipper, he would be another name on The Wall in Washington DC. This reviewer has not read a combat tale where I felt as close to the ground as in SBF. The author has a very simple and direct style that takes the reader right to the core of a patrol. I loved the recounting of Clipper zigging left, zagging right, dutifully leading a platoon around a series of booby traps. Small wonder that handlers said they felt safer with a good dog than another GI! SBF ends sadly as Burnham is forced to leave his buddy Clipper behind in Vietnam. Their final parting is wrenching to read. Unlike the Korea and WW2 conflicts, the US military forbade repatriation of dogs when a handler's tour was over. They were left behind for the "duration" or until they were killed. Their fate had to be cruel as Vietnamese regarded dogs as a source of food, not pets. The Appendix lists the 288 dogs killed in action as well as the 285 handlers who made the ultimate sacrifice. SBF is highly recommended for its very personal look at one soldier's combat experience. It is further recommended for yet another unique look at the Vietnam War that affected so many of us. Just when one thinks he has heard every Vietnam story possible, along comes a book like SBF to show that he hasn't. If the book has a weak spot, it is a common one: NOT ONE SINGLE MAP! Why do publishers constantly make this omission? This merits a reduction in rank for SBF from 5 stars to 4. That complaint aside, SBF rates "Number One"

Burnham's book was both informative and exciting to read. I initially picked it up because it was such a unique subject. The book is seemingly broken into two parts: Before the Scout Dog assignment

and after. I thought that it would be dry getting to the Scout Dog portion. Not So! Each page is filled with an honest look at Vietnam as experienced by a young kid from the Mid-West. Not to ruin it for others, I won't mention them here, but there are several portions that are a hoot and some that are hard to read -emotionally. Burnam holds nothing back for sake of posterity or politics. He explains the military use of dogs in Vietnam and -sadly- the result of their service in how the U.S. Government chose to view the dogs and 'release' them from service. I've read several books about Vietnam and this has been the first one that has given such an honest view of a fairly unknown (to the general public) portion of the military's arsenal. An excellent read!

I found this book by accident on and was surprised to see in the excerpts a Lieutenant Fenner. I was more surprised that it was my father. It has been a wonderful experience to be able to read someone else's impressions of my father during that period of his life. We are both reading the book and it has been amazing to listen to him remember his time with the 44th Calvary. He told me about the bakery and then 2 chapters later I was reading about it.

A good book. He wrote specifics about some of his firefight missions with the NVA and Viet Cong. Very sad when one thinks that all of these dogs spent their entire lives, often on point, in Vietnam until they died or until the war was over. Over 4000 scout dogs were used during the Vietnam War, and many were killed for food when the U.S. left. They were considered equipment just like their jeeps, etc. A few editorial problems.

enjoyed reading it. i love dog stories and also interested in what really happened in VN war and all wars. lots of good stories in this book and written well. As you read on you can't wait to find out what happens to main character at the end. I kept holding my breath that he wouldn't be killed. although if he had I guess he wouldn't have written this book.

I'm a child from the Vietnam War and my parents are still together to this day. I've always been very interested in their history as my Dad served three tours in 'Nam and my mother was born there. I recently attended a 173d Airborne Reunion and talked to a scout dog handler. Since I formerly trained police K9s and still train my own, my interest was completely taken with scout dogs. I ordered most of the books I could find on the subject! This book touched some sensitive strings due to my family history but I could not stop reading it. The author talks about his experiences and writes them down in a way that made me feel like I was there with him. At times it was horrifying! This book

is awesome and I would recommend it to anyone interested in how dogs work with the military because it provides an inside view on how the young men handled their dogs and the sad experience of leaving the dogs behind.

If you love dogs and enjoy reading about working dogs then this is the book for you. It tells of a story of military working dogs and their handlers working together in some harsh and dangerous conditions, I enjoyed the book very much and would highly recommend this book to you.

Wow! What an exciting book! I feel like I was with the author on all of his exploits into Vietnam with his trusted dog. It made me realize the value of these dogs in combat and the thousands of lives they have saved. There are tearful moments as well as times of amazement.

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