

**Military Canines: Contrast and Comparison Across Countries**

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### **Abstract**

Canines are utilized in the military across many countries including the United States, Australia, and Britain. However, the specific purpose, breed, and training of military canines differ slightly across these countries. The goal of this research is to conduct a systematic literature review of various databases which include information pertaining to the purpose, breed, and training of canines in the military across multiple countries including the United States, Australia, and Britain as well as analyze the history of canine use in the military branches within those countries. Research has shown that the most common breeds used today in the military, across the United States and Britain are the Belgian Malinois, German Shepherd, and Labrador Retriever, while in Australia instead of focusing on a specific breed, they select a dog based on certain traits and tendencies that are optimized for their particular role. The prominent roles military canines fulfill include bomb and drug detection, security, patrol, and tracking in each of these countries. The training of these dogs varies based on their specialty, and the duration of official training is different in each of the listed countries. Highlighting these aspects of canines in the military brings attention to the importance of their role in the line of duty as well as the comparisons and differentiations of usage across various countries. The results of the systematic literature search after excluding studies that did not meet the criteria were 27 articles appropriate to use in this literature review across the Oklahoma State University library databases.

## **Military Canines: Contrast and Comparison Across Countries**

Internationally, canines are incorporated into the military serving multiple purposes such as drug detection, sentry and patrol, scouting, and bomb sniffing. The outstanding sensitivity of the canine olfactory system is evident and has been recognized by using drug and explosive detection dogs in the military (Lesniak, 2008). Throughout military history, various dog breeds have been utilized based on breed characteristics, receptiveness to training, and common behavior. Today, the two most utilized dog breeds in the military are the Belgian Malinois and the German Shepherd. Although they are not as popular today, other breeds such as the Doberman pinscher, Mastiff, Jack Russell Terrier, and Labrador Retriever have also been utilized in the United States military during the Civil War, Vietnam War, as well as World War I and II (Colston, 2019). By World War II, the United States implemented a training program for canines called the War Dog Program which was officially established in 1943 (Crippen, 2017). In Australia, units in the military used canines as early as the Korean War and during the Malayan Emergency as patrol and tracker dogs but were not officially introduced as part of their military until 1954 (Says, 2017). The British Army established its first dog regiment in 2010 as part of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps named the 1st Military Working Dog Regiment (British Army, 2020). In military history, canines were not always considered and treated the same as human soldiers, instead, they were merely viewed as weapons and equipment even after the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Today, in the United States, canines serving in the military are treated as fellow warriors that have the same respect and treatment as human soldiers (Harris, 2020). In Australia, canines are considered an integral component of their assigned units (Says, 2017).

The duration of training for military canines varies across different countries and the specialty the dog is being trained for differs as well. In the United States military, the training for canines starts when the puppies are still nursing but their official training starts when they are about a year old with a training duration of 120 days in order to officially certify the canine into the military. The United States trains its canines for dual purposes, but in the Australian Army, their dogs are trained for specific specialized canine capabilities such as early warning and tracking. In the Royal British Army, their canines are trained for deterrence and detection as well as sub-lethal force (British Army, 2020).

This literature review will compare and contrast military canines across various countries, but due to the quality and amount of information accessible, the main comparisons and differentiations will focus on the United States, Australia, and Britain. The objective of this review is to compare and contrast the different types of breeds that are utilized, training the canines endure, as well as the types of operations the dogs are used for in each of the country's military.

### **Method**

The data for this literature review will be obtained by using a systematic literature search of various databases including Google Scholar and the Oklahoma State University library database system including the following: AGRICOLA, Air University Library Index to Military Periodicals, Catalog of U.S. Government Publications, Military and Government Collection, Science.gov, Scopus, and TOPICsearch. In order to search full texts of journals and articles, I will use the Boolean search method containing these key terms: (dog OR canine AND military OR war), (dog\* AND military), and (dog AND military training). Additionally, I will conduct further research using the same Boolean search method using these key terms and phrases: (dog

AND military AND United States), (dog AND military AND Britain), (dog AND military AND Australia), to include information for each country to compare and contrast military canine training, purpose, and breeds utilized across the United States, Australia, and Britain.

### **Results**

The selection of articles appropriate to use in this literature review included the inclusion criteria of being published between 2000-2023 and written in English in order to get the most accurate and current information available. The exclusion criteria contained full texts, news pieces, and images in order to limit the search to articles only. After excluding studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria designed to increase the accuracy of my literature analysis, there were 27 papers were meeting the criteria appropriate for this literature review. The number of articles used from each database with the specific Boolean search method is shown (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Total number of hits per Boolean search method used in each database meeting the inclusion criteria. The total amount of articles containing appropriate information to use in the literature review is shown in the last column.

Databases	# hits for (dog OR canine AND military OR war)	# of hits for (dog* AND military)	# hits for (dog AND military training)	# hits for (dog AND military AND Australia)	# hits for (dog AND military AND United States)	# hits for (dog AND military AND Britain)	# articles appropriate for this review
AGRICOLA	57,635	89	8	1	15	1	10
Air University Library Index to Military Periodicals	32,627	99	4	0	9	0	1
Catalog of U.S. Government Publications	19,596	26	1	0	11	0	0
Military & Government Collection	198,973	1157	16	4	556	18	6
Science.gov	1,143	740	0	535	752	514	2
Scopus	1,760	1175	134	4	160	7	7
TOPICsearch	11,589	14	0	0	5	1	1

## Discussion

The main breeds used for Military Working Dogs are similar in each of the countries, however, there are some differences. In the United States military, the most utilized dog breed is currently shifting to the Belgian Malinois rather than the German Shepherd, which was formally the most popular breed in the military. The United States Department of Defense (DOD) recruits its canines through select elite breeders around the world, however, 13% of the canines recruited are born and bred through the DOD Military Working Dog Breeding Program, also known as the Puppy Program. This program is only found at the 341st Training Squadron at Joint Base San Antonio in Texas, and about 50 to 90 puppies are born into the program each year (Dawson, 2001). The Belgian Malinois is the only breed that is born and bred in the Puppy Program since this breed is considered ideal for the military due to its “multiple desirable characteristics including high energy, strong senses, trainability, speed, agility, drive, work ethic, loyalty, and fierceness” (DOD, 2023). Compared to the German Shepherd, Belgian Malinois are more compact and have an overall lighter build making them fitter for agility. Additionally, the Belgian Malinois is less prone to genetic health issues, unlike the German Shepherd, making the Malinois the healthier breed of the two. Both the Belgian Malinois and the German Shepherd are used in all the branches of the United States military. The German Shepard is still considered a valuable breed for the military, and they continue to excel in performance with their intelligence, loyalty, athleticism, and their innate protectiveness. Surprisingly, in the United States Marines Corps, the Labrador Retriever is also utilized. The Labrador Retriever is considered a diligent worker with an even temperament and easy trainability which makes them suitable for certain military tasks (Coronel, 2020).

The breeds utilized in the Australian military are the German Shepherd, Labrador Retriever, and mixed breeds. However, the Royal Australian Air Force is moving to replace German Shepherds with Belgian Malinois since this breed is better suited for extreme temperatures (Says, 2017). The British Army utilizes multiple breeds including the German Shepherd and Belgian Malinois since both are extremely strong and loyal with an innate guarding instinct. Additionally, the British military uses Labrador Retrievers and Springer Spaniels due to their exceptional sense of smell (Vallis, 2014). Overall, the Belgian Malinois, German Shepherd, and Labrador Retriever are each utilized in all three of the country's military, The two exceptions are mixed breeds which are only used by the Australian military, and the Springer Spaniel which is used by the British Army.

**Table 2:** Shows the comparison of the breeds used in the United States Military, Royal Australian Military Force, and the Royal British Army. The "x" marks the breeds the military uses.

	German Shepherd	Belgian Malinois	Labrador Retriever	Mixed breed	Springer Spaniel
United States	x	x	x		
Australia	x	x	x	x	
Britain	x	x	x		x

The United States Military utilizes canines in each of the branches: Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard, as well as special forces within the branches. When a canine is assigned to its branch, the dog will stay in that branch for the rest of its military career which can be after four to five deployments or when the dog is about ten years old (Harris, 2020). In Australia, their military utilizes canines in each of its components including the Royal Australian



Engineers, Royal Australian Corps of Military Police, Royal Australian Air Force, Royal Australian Navy, as well as the Army and special operations. For the Special Operation Military Working Dogs used in Australia, their canines are specifically selected based on certain traits, rather than a breed, that their handler wants to ensure that the canine is optimal for the particular role it will serve (Says, 2017). The British Army and the Royal Air Force Police are the only branches that utilize canines in the British military. Overall, the U.S. military utilizes canines in each military branch, similarly, the Australian military uses dogs in all of their branches including military engineers (Table 3). However, the British military only uses canines in two of its branches: the British Army and Royal Air Force. The Royal Navy and Royal Marines do not utilize canines in their operations.

**Table 3:** Shows the military branches in each country and marks branches that utilize canines. The “x” marks the branches that use canines. If marked with “NA” that specific military branch is not applicable to the country.

	Army	Air Force	Marines	Navy	Engineers	Coast Guard
United States	x	x	x	x	NA	x
Australia	x	x	NA	x	x	NA
Britain	x	x			NA	NA

Canines in the military go through various training exercises and must pass certain requirements in order to become official military working dogs. However, consistently more than half of the candidate dogs are rejected for behavioral reasons or incompleteness of training in each country (Sinn et al., 2010). In the United States DOD Military Working Dog Breeding Program, the caregivers start exposing puppies to stimuli as early as the nursing stage. Exposing puppies to stimuli this early in their life helps the caregivers get a feel for personality traits that could be promising in a military service dog such as inquisitiveness, sociability, and eagerness to play

with new objects, as well as testing the puppies' aggressiveness or fear level (DOD, 2023). In this Puppy Program, the dogs are released to foster families at about six to eight weeks of age for about six months to gain proper socialization skills and learn independence away from littermates. During this time, the pups are also worked once a month by the 341st Training Squadron to develop their basic hunting instincts as well as stability and adaptability to different environments (DOD, 2023). Once the dogs leave their foster family, they begin an intensive training phase. During this training, the dogs will learn and practice basic obedience, bite work, releasing objects when told, as well as odor response work. The dog trainers will also introduce different environments that are similar to combat zones during this phase. Around the age of one is when the official evaluation of a dog for entry into the Military Working Dog Training Program occurs (DOD, 2023).

The United States Military Working Dog Training Program has been in service since the 1950s and is located in San Antonio, Texas at Lackland Air Force Base. The training is a 120-day program that qualifies military canines for dual purposes, either as a patrol and explosive detection dog or as a patrol and drug detection dog (DOD, 2023). The only dogs that can qualify for entry into this training program are those who pass the consignment test and are then purchased by the DOD. Identifying canines that display a favorable response to threats, such as little to no fear, is optimal for potential Military Working Dogs (Foyer et al., 2016). Once officially in the training program, the dogs are assigned a soldier who went through canine handler school. As soon as the handlers and dogs are paired up, they will take a week to get to know each other and start to form a bond. When the canine is comfortable enough with its handler, official obedience training begins (Harris, 2020). In basic obedience training, the dog will learn to respond to hand signals and verbal commands as well as suppress barking so that

the dog is silent during combat situations. The most common method of training used during this phase is operant conditioning (Haverbeke et al., 2008). Meaning if the dog does the correct behavior, it will be rewarded. Another crucial part of canine military training is exposure to loud sounds like exploding shells, gunshots, and other noises a dog would hear during combat. This extensive training regime is not successfully completed by every dog accepted into the program; the pass rate is about 45 to 50% passing (Crippen, 2017). Those who do not pass every phase of training or have a negative reaction to combat scenarios can be transferred to other duties if applicable like sentry duty. The average cost of training a dog can range from \$20,000 to \$40,000 depending on the dog's specialization (Harris, 2020). After the successful completion of official military canine training, the paired dog and handler will stay together on all future missions and target destinations regardless of the military branch.

In Australia, the introduction of service dogs occurred in 1943, but the first canine military training center was not officially created until 1954 (Says, 2017). The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) also has a dog breeding program in place to produce dogs as potential military canines. Before a dog is purchased or selected by the RAAF, the dog is assessed through two tests called the environmental soundness and suitability assessments (Says, 2017). The dog must pass both tests successfully to be accepted into the Military Working Dog training program. The Australian Military Working Dog training program is a 10-week course, which is about 70 days. The Australian canine basic training focuses on obedience, obstacle negotiation, and basic maneuver and combat tactics (Powell, 2016). The obedience tasks the dog must successfully complete unleashed are heel, sit, stay, distance control, and recall. The obstacles the dog has to successfully negotiate off leash are a one-meter-high hurdle jump, walking a three-meter raised plank, traveling through a small tunnel between two and four meters long, going up and down

stairs, and successfully completing a confidence jump through a hoop on fire (Powell, 2016).

The last part of Australian canine basic training is the tactical requirements which also have to be completed off-leash including intruder detection, search and protection, man-trailing, building search, and a cease attack. The average success rate of RAAF military dog training is 53% (Powell, 2016). Meaning about half of the dogs that go through the military training program are considered competent on all operation standards in all training categories.

In Great Britain, the Defense Animal Training Regiment is made up of several components including the Canine Training Squadron and the Equine Training Squadron. Both squadrons are responsible for delivering highly trained animals and handles or riders to units within the Ministry of Defense. The canine training squadron delivers trained military working dogs to the British Army, Royal Air Force, and other customers in the Ministry of Defense (British Army, 2020). There is currently a yearly requirement for over 200 trained military working dogs for the United Kingdom armed forces (British Army, 2020). Military canine training conducted by the Canine Training Squadron is about a 180-day program. A high proportion of potential working dogs fail to make full operational status and pass the training, with about a 50-70% failure rate (Brady et al., 2018). Unlike the United States military and RAAF, the British Military does not have a breeding program in place to gain military dogs. Instead, the Royal Air Force and Army gain their dogs either through public donations or dog rescue organizations (Vallis, 2014). However, some of these potential Military Working Dogs are bought between one and three years old, and about 58% present fearfulness due to either having been roughly handled before arriving to the Army or not having much human interaction (Haverbeke, 2010). This may present some evidence of the low pass rate of training. The Defense Animal Training Regiment routinely has about 230 dogs on-site, with 150 dogs in

training, and the rest either working alongside soldiers on base or receiving veterinary care (Apthorp, 2017).

Alongside the basic training military dogs receive, some dogs will be trained for a certain specialty or a specific job. When selecting a drug or explosive detection dog, certain behavioral and physical characteristics are favored over others such as trainability, athleticism, physical capability, and desire to work (Jamieson et al., 2017). In each country, military canines are trained for similar specialties (Table 4). The United States has many different specialties for military canines including explosive and drug detection, sentry and patrol duty, scouts, or dual purpose (Worldwide, 2023). Each canine may have different capabilities and operational uses, but every single dog will share the same mission: minimizing the threat to Soldiers (Roche and Pettit, 2007). Modern war dogs receive special equipment just like their human handlers. Depending on the specialization and type of operation, some dogs wear vests that protect them from bullets and knife wounds as well as other equipment like a GPS and infrared night-vision cameras (Altamura, 2015). Dogs can also be equipped with “Doggals”, which are goggles made to protect their eyes from sand or for when canines jump from planes with their handler (Smith, 2021). In Australia, the specialties for military canines are explosive and drug detection, tracking, scouts, and sentry (Says, 2017). The specialties available for military canines in Great Britain are more exclusive and based on certain breeds. The specialties include Arms Explosive Search, which is mainly Labrador Retrievers and Springer Spaniels, High Assurance Search also known as explosive detection dogs which are mainly Belgian Malinois, patrol dogs which are both the German Shepherd and Belgian Malinois, and vehicle search dogs which are Springer Spaniels (British Army, 2020). Although each specialization is unique in its own way, the success of the job is purely due to the advanced sense of smell, hearing, and predator instincts

dogs have compared to humans. Dogs can be a force multiplier in the current operating environment (Dewey, 2011). When trained to detect certain smells, canines have the ability to detect “land mines, improvised explosive devices, undetonated munitions, and other explosive materials that may pose a risk to civilian and military populations” (Lazarowski and Dorman, 2014).

**Table 4:** Shows the areas of specialty available for canines in each of the country's military. The ‘x’ marks that the country utilizes the specialty for dogs.

	Drug Detection	Explosive detection	Sentry	Patrol	Scouts	Dual Purpose	Vehicle Search
United States	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Australia	x	x	x		x		
Britain	x	x	x	x			x

### Conclusion

Canines continue to be a major asset to military branches around the world including the United States, Australia, and Great Britain. In each of these countries, Military Working Dogs have their own role to play in a variety of specialties ranging from explosive detection to sentry and patrol. The most common breeds utilized in each of the countries are the Belgian Malinois, German Shepard, and Labrador Retriever. However, Australia incorporates mixed breeds into its military and Great Britain continues to use Springer Spaniels for their keen sense of smell (People, 2003). The training of Military Working Dogs varies in each of the countries. In the United States, the training program is a 120-day course covering basic obedience and exposure to combat-like situations. The training program for military canines in Australia is only 70 days long but has three parts: obedience, obstacle negotiation, and basic maneuver and combat tactics.

Great Britain's canine training is the longest compared to the United States and Australia, with a duration of 180 days. Military dog breeds, training, and types of specialties available across the United States, Australia, and Great Britain have some similarities and differences but they play an essential role in each of the country's military.

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