

Extract from:

The Police Dog: History, Breeds and Service

Copyright James R. Engel

December, 2018

Chapter 12

The Protection Dog



Stick broken over back of KNPV Malinois. Dog is Renzo KNPV 439 pts. Owner John Kessel, helper Donne Scheidt, photo Peter Gubbels

Earlier chapters explored the ethological foundations and ramifications of canine aggression for police dog breeding, training and deployment. Here the focus shifts to more general societal implications of canine aggression, that is, breeding considerations, training and legal ramifications for civilian applications that employ dogs to enhance security of person, home or in commerce and business.

Suppressing much of overt canine aggression through breeding selection has been a major focus of the domestication and civilizing process. While aggression was and is fundamental in many working and service roles, people in general now keep dogs for diverse purposes requiring a much more passive and compliant animal: most of us today do not need, do not want and are not prepared to deal with extreme aggression in dogs.

This makes all the sense in the world, and the aggression level of each breed or line needs to be set and maintained according to the purpose through breeding selection. A relatively low aggressive potential is generally appropriate for mainstream home companions, particularly in more urban areas. The problems arise when people seeking a more assertive or virile image acquire dogs out of serious police or military service lines without the knowledge, skills and personal vigor to deal with dogs at this level: many breeders pander to this by evolving lines of soft dogs for profit, by selling the image, pretend working dogs, rather than

the real thing. Entire breeds can and do become emasculated through this process.

Well into the nineteenth century farm families made up the vast majority of European and American populations. The farmstead was isolated, that is lacking electric lights, telephone service or routine police patrol. In this world a good dog was a ubiquitous element in home and farm security, often the mere presence causing potential intruders to reconsider and desist or move on down the road seeking more vulnerable opportunities.

Farm dogs announce visitors and provide a first line of security, particularly at night. The dogs also deter predators such as a coyote or fox on the prowl for an easy meal, literally keeping the fox out of the hen house. Although there has always been

variation according to local custom and personal preference, these were not in general huge or especially fierce dogs but often rather typified by the old-fashioned farm collie so often portrayed in paintings of country and pastoral scenes. Although many of the livestock dogs, particularly the tending style shepherd's dogs such as the progenitors of the German Shepherd, were with the flock or herd exclusively, it can hardly be doubted that there was significant overlap between the herding dogs and those present in the farmyard. There were regional variations, the American Bulldog for instance evolving out of the traditional yard and farm dogs of the rural southern United States existent prior to the Second World War. As the population shifted from rural areas to cities and then suburbs as a result of industrialization people took their dogs with them, to serve as watch dogs and sometimes more aggressive guard dogs as well as family companions.

Prior to the resurgence of American police canine units and civilian Schutzhund training, roughly the 1970s, people in urban or suburban areas who felt, or actually were, insecure would have a watchdog or perhaps some sort of a guard dog to alert and bark, which would announce a guest and perhaps deter a more sinister stranger. Those wanting or needing more would tend to a bigger dog with a deeper bark. Beginning in the 1920s the upwardly mobile, perhaps needing to impress friends and family, had the more expensive option of one of the purebred police or protection breeds recently imported from Europe, one with AKC papers, perhaps a German Shepherd or a Doberman Pincher.

Those not quite certain that they were getting the real deal only had to ask the breeder, who would steadfastly assert that his dogs were exactly like the better police dogs except for a little bit of training, which he personally had never gotten around to actually participating in. If doubt persisted, he would provide innumerable anecdotes of valor and courage in everyday life, just like Lassie or Strongheart in the movies. A little later in this era professionally trained area protection dogs – junkyard dogs – were sometimes provided for subscribing businesses and there were a few marginal professional protection dog trainers, not especially sophisticated, typically utilizing the old-fashioned pillow suit. Very few civilians of any social strata had dogs that were trained specifically for protection in this era, that is, prior to the 1970s.

In America the increasing popularity of Schutzhund and the market for police dogs and training services greatly increased the supply of more robust and aggressive dogs and more sophisticated training. The Vietnam War occasioned a substantial resurgence in military applications, resulting in an increasing demand for better dogs and a legacy of former servicemen with training experience and an ongoing interest in civilian applications. As a consequence, those with an especially urgent need for security or just deep pockets came to have the option of a professionally trained protection dog, generally expensive to acquire and maintain but an elite status symbol. There was and is variation in quality among such dogs, for it is difficult for the novice to know if what he is being offered is a legitimate investment in security or, all too often, a scam, a mediocre dog with only superficial training.

Civilian canine protection applications can be broken down into three general, overlapping classifications, each with its own requirements in terms of the character, training and deployment of the dog:

The home and family protection or guard dog, the companion who also provides elements of security on the home premises, the dogs many of us grew up with and which routinely share our lives.

The personal protection dog, whose focus is on the full time protection role, which extends off home premises to provide protection to the individual in his routine daily life. Often provided and trained by professionals, such dogs can

be very expensive and require great care and research in order to identify an honest and competent trainer and an appropriate dog. The area protection dog, the proverbial junk yard dog, whose function, working in the absence of human support and back up, is to deny the intruder physical access to a specific area, such as a warehouse, automotive dealership or department store.

In the next three sections we will discuss these facets of the protective canine. Police and military service will be covered in detail in subsequent chapters.

Watch and Guard Dogs

Many companion or family dogs fulfill an ancillary guardian role, that is alert to unusual activity, persons or vehicles, on the property or premises. This is typically a natural rather than formally trained response, and the most desirable situation is where the dog comes to ignore routine activity according to circumstances, that is as in the city dog ignoring passing traffic but the country dog far up a long driveway vigorously alerting with the approach of any vehicle or person. It is generally desirable that the dog be more aware and quick to alert at night when activity is more likely to be suspect, and in general have moderately above average suspicion and alertness. Such behavior is typical of the watch dog, and is usually sufficient, all that most of us really need. The key to domestic tranquility is that the dog becomes reliably acclimated to the normal pattern of life and refrains from barking at innocently passing pedestrians or vehicles. Even if recreational barking is not annoying to the owner or family, in the urban or suburban setting the incessantly barking dog is a nuisance and a visit from animal control is just a matter of time.

Thus the effective watchdog will act proportionately, that is announce a visitor approaching the door with a perfunctory bark but respond vigorously if someone were to open the door or enter the yard, most especially at night. When the watchdog has alerted the household and in particular continues barking when a stranger enters unbidden, he has fulfilled his duty. A really intense, persistent dog, especially a small dog, who continually backs up just out of reach and intensifies his barking, is a serious problem for the intruder, for he usually is not sure who else is in the house and cannot know what the dog will do, that is, if he actually will bite. And of course, while this is going on, someone might well be calling the police or loading a revolver. The savvy intruder has good reason to move on to the next opportunity when faced with such a situation.

The guard dog takes the protection role one level up, is expected to respond with physical aggression against a persistent intruder not deterred by the vocal threat. In an otherwise empty house, especially in an isolated setting, extensive barking may not deter an intruder, and in the urban neighborhood a barking dog may be a nuisance but is not likely to cause the neighbors to call the police in a timely matter, who in any event may have higher priorities than another barking dog complaint.

While the guard dog does provide more protection or deterrence, that is postures more seriously or actually bites, there is also more need for training and supervision. Most people with a bit of canine experience can accomplish this by selecting an appropriate breed and individual pup or young dog. Such dogs should have reasonable obedience training and perhaps some specific aggression enhancement if it needs to be at the serious end of the aggression scale.

The reality of home and family protection is that a good dog functions like the lock on the front door, which could easily be picked or broken by the determined burglar but will likely send a random intruder down the street to a more vulnerable residence. No dog and no lock is invulnerable, serving primarily to deter the casual,

less determined or well prepared adversary, and buy time when he cannot be deterred.

The prerequisite for the success of the family companion and home protector is that the dog be a good match and a good companion. Care of a dog in terms of feeding, access to the outdoors for the calls of nature, exercise and play is a small price willingly paid by the dog enthusiast, but those with no particular affinity for canine companionship may soon find that the dog acquired for protection has become an ongoing burden and inconvenience. Lack of interest in the dog is likely to result in his devising his own means of entertainment, such as chewing household objects, incessant pacing or recreational barking. If this causes the dog to be confined to a run or otherwise contained for owner convenience the protective function is essentially nullified. Often the result is yet another dog abandoned to a shelter, that is, the place where they kill your dog for you because you have found him to be inconvenient.

The incremental cost of a good watchdog is nominal to those whose normal way of living includes a dog; is basically a matter of using a little more care in selection and training. This does not have to be an overly expensive dog, the world is overrun with perfectly good German Shepherds and other breeds turned in for "rescue" by people who have gotten in over their head or just lost interest once the novelty has worn off. Also, there is nothing wrong with the carefully selected mixed breed from a shelter or elsewhere, although an inexperienced person would do well to have a competent friend evaluate the dog or pay a professional trainer for an evaluation. Those who want more than a casual watch dog should identify an appropriate trainer before the acquisition; not only is this likely to avoid a poor selection, the trainer who has participated in the selection is going to be more committed to success as a matter of professional pride. (The trainer's inclination to disparage other dogs in order to sell one of his own is an issue that the customer needs to be aware of and work out according to specific judgments and circumstances.)

In general the best protection dog for the typical family is the breed or mix that they are comfortable with in terms of preference, training and maintenance. Labrador, Golden, Flat Coated or Chesapeake Bay retrievers can be perfectly adequate, and there is no urgent need to seek out one of the traditional guard breeds such as a German Shepherd, American Bulldog or Rottweiler. Those with a preference for one of these guardian breeds would seem to have an obvious choice, but this is not always the case as many individual dogs and lines are of such weak breeding that they no longer exhibit the requisite character and physical attributes. On the one hand many are fearful, timid and insecure and on the other they may be too difficult for family members to deal with. A well-adjusted retriever in the living room is a much more effective deterrent than an aggressive and unmanageable dog confined to a run behind the house. Smaller dogs most certainly have their place, can make a whole lot of noise and be evasive enough to present a real problem to an intruder, who does not want to spend a lot of time trying to catch and silence the yippy dog.

If one does decide on a traditional police breed, and is going to purchase a pup or young dog, it should be from a working line breeder who has been made to understand that you are looking for a confident dog of moderate drive. Again, if training is to be involved, identify the trainer before buying the dog.

For those who otherwise would not own a dog, a watch or guard dog in the end will tend to become expensive in terms of maintenance such as feeding and medical care and particularly in terms of a newly restricted life style. Every venture away from home, even overnight, requires arrangements for the care of the dog, and the dog is going to seek attention and companionship which the owner finds to be a burden rather than a joy. Those ambivalent to dogs in general, not likely to own one

strictly as a companion, are well advised to forgo a dog in favor of an alarm system or a residence in a more secure neighborhood.

Training the home watch dog is in general a matter of obedience and manners, with particular care to avoid intimidating the dog and thus blunting his natural tendency to take responsibility for home and family. The traditional farm dog lives out of doors and provides an energetic warning when visitors approach. Unfortunately, in the country training sometimes consists of acquiring relatively cheap dogs until one is found who will stay on the premises and is lucky enough to become car smart before being hit by a vehicle and killed.

Watch or alert dogs on the one hand and actual guard dogs on the other are not entirely separate types but represent the end points of a continuum. Dogs just do not come as neatly specified commodities like a bolt or nut in the bin at the hardware store, each one functionally equivalent. Even the better lines in a protective breed may produce pups which, because of genetics or inappropriate imprinting, are destined to become timid, soft or difficult. The dog acquired as a household watchdog may turn out to be a real guard dog when the chips are down, and this of course enhances the general deterrent effect of having a boisterous dog in the house. But on the other hand such a dog might prove to be difficult in terms of discipline and training for a timid or inexperienced owner.

Those who have a real need or desire for a much more assertive guard dog, one that can be relied on to respond with serious physical aggression, need to carefully select the breed, and especially the blood lines, for the unfortunate fact is that many dogs with German Shepherd or Doberman Pincher on the pedigree are no longer serious working dogs and likely to fail to respond to training or an actual encounter. In general, the breeder proud of his conformation show wins and the champions in the pedigree is a poor choice. Those seeking such a serious dog, unless qualified themselves, should work with a trainer, and identify the trainer before acquiring the dog.

Such a dog really does need to be trained and tested to provide control and confidence that there actually is something under the hood; the false belief in an inadequate dog may render the owner more rather than less vulnerable if he becomes careless, that is lax in locking doors, maintaining security lights and other routine measures. Training should involve practical obedience and then sessions with a decoy or helper, that is the man with a sleeve or suit. The dog needs to reliably engage and persist, and must not be run off by the adversary shouting, showing aggressive posture or striking the dog with a stick. If the dog is sound in terms of basic breeding and rearing as a youngster this need not require the extensive training of the police or Schutzhund dog, since the elaborate search, obedience and distance attacks are not necessary. The capstone, the final test, is to have a stranger, not the trainer or someone the dog has seen, with a sleeve or suit, or much better a hidden sleeve, actually enter the house unannounced to insure that the dog will reliably engage. The really robust and aggressive guard dog is not a commitment to be taken lightly, becomes a lifetime responsibility and an ongoing expense to maintain alertness, aggression and discipline.

The presence of children or other household members intimidated or made personally insecure by the dog creates an entirely new layer of complexity. One issue is that a child may inadvertently allow the dog to come into contact with outside people, often other young acquaintances, without adult supervision. Although most dogs will bond with the family and relate well to children, there are some dogs which would be fine in other circumstances, often outstanding workers, which simply should not be in an environment with children. Every breed proponent will of course claim that their dogs are absolutely wonderful with children, but this is not and cannot be universally true of any breed.

We always had aggressive dogs in the house when our children were younger with no difficulty; but both dogs and children need to be carefully evaluated, acclimated and trained in order to insure a safe situation. In my opinion it is never, ever safe to have children alone in a home with the expectation that a dog will provide security and protection; there are just too many ways for a situation to spin out of control with tragic consequences. Exactly when a child evolves into a young person able to deal with such a situation is of course difficult to discern, and a source of anxiety for every parent with kids and dogs.

Finally, effective utilization of a guard dog in the home should be as part of good overall security plan. People, especially breeders, sometimes pander a dog as an overall solution, saying that with one of their wonder dogs on duty you no longer need to worry about locking your doors. This is nonsense, and more specifically dangerous and stupid nonsense. If doors and windows are secured, then the time and noise of breaking and entering will likely rouse the dog prior to entry. Once in the house the intruder has a lot more at stake and is much more likely to shoot, stab or club the dog, and no dog can ever be sure of defeating a man, especially one with a weapon.

The Personal Protection Dog

Searching the internet for personal protection dogs brings forth page after page of evocative full color photos, friendly, handsome dogs lounging in upscale family settings side by side with pseudo fierce dogs lunging at the whip wielding man with a protection sleeve. Warnings of rampant crime on the streets, abductions and home invasions are standard fare; all of which are best repulsed by an elite personal protection dog from their secret European sources or exclusive wonder dog breeding program. For those with the need for more, and the implied prestige, there is of course the executive protection dog. Price is usually not mentioned up front – and varies over an enormous range. Many of the dogs are trained European imports, sometimes with an actual KNPV or IPO title and sometimes pandered as "trained for" without the actual title, leading the skeptic to wonder what does actually happen to all of the dogs that wash out of Euro training programs.

But the reality can be quite different. A few years ago I had the opportunity to buy a European dog for a very low price, a few hundred dollars, but was advised not to. A little later the dog was featured by one of these dealers as a \$50,000 executive protection dog, and still later the dog was relinquished to a rescue operation out west. While I doubt that anybody actually paid anything near the asking price for this particular dog, it is unfortunately within the realm of the possible: difficult as it may be to believe people do actually get taken in by such things.

So, what, exactly, is a personal protection dog?

So many sorts of dog with such diverse background and training are given the designation that it means virtually nothing about the attributes, potential, state of training or usefulness of the dog. Unfortunately, there are no universal criteria or credible, objective standards that could lend legitimacy or establish value. There are no licensing requirements for trainers and dealers and no realistic certification programs, and the people involved like it this way. The consequence is that dogs are sold for whatever the market will bear, often at incredible, even astonishing prices.

In the police dog market brokers or breeders generally establish an ongoing relationship with their customers, deal with experienced police handlers or administrators who understand training, deployment and market value. When they deliver an inadequate dog they are expected to make good, and the broker who misrepresents or fails to stand behind his dogs quickly comes to have a poor reputation, making it more difficult to sell to any police agency. Even when the

recipient is wrong, that is when the dissatisfaction is in his perception rather than the quality of the dog, most vendors will cheerfully provide a replacement because it is just plain good business. The civilian market however consists of less sophisticated customers, little repeat business and relatively little contact among the usually clueless customer population, which means that there is much less impact of a poor reputation. Bad police dog suppliers tend to go out of business quickly, suppliers of poor personal protection dogs can go on finding new marks perpetually.

Thus there is an enormous range in terms of honesty, competence and quality among those offering personal protection dogs. Many skilled police level trainers also serve a select civilian market, and are generally reputable and deliver good dogs and training, but there are also numerous con men whose business is living off of the gullible, naive and ignorant.

In addition to these commercial vendors there are all sorts of people playing around in back yards, training mostly having to do with macho posturing and fun with the dogs rather than selling dogs or services. Much of this activity is amateur and informal, individuals and small groups getting together with a sleeve or training tug and playing at what they like to call personal protection, putting up endless videos on the internet of dogs on a harness jumping up and down in front of a guy waving a sleeve. Adult refreshments and dramatic music for the internet video generally contribute to the atmosphere. Sometimes these are people unwilling or unable to prepare for a serious sport trial, or have dogs which might seem animated or even aggressive but in reality are not confident and strong enough for the longer distance engagements with a strong decoy or stable enough to demonstrate impartiality in the presence of passive people or other dogs

In many ways a legitimate, serious personal protection dog is equivalent to a top end police dog; that is a vigorous German Shepherd or Malinois with advanced training including food refusal, serious distraction work and intense control under realistic conditions of stress and unknown surroundings. The primary difference from a police dog would generally be less emphasis on the long distance pursuits, searching and tracking, although these things can be part of the package. Such a fully trained and tested dog will cost upwards of ten thousand dollars, roughly the price of a good street ready police dog, although many people out there will take more, much more, from those gullible enough to give it up. But this is just the upfront money; in order to utilize such a dog effectively the owner must be personally equivalent to a good police canine handler or hire someone who is. In the longer term the dog will require ongoing maintenance training and testing costing thousands of dollars yearly.

A good watch or guard dog in the yard and a shotgun or hunting rifle in the front hall closet has been the foundation of rural American security, and for most of us remains perfectly viable today. The reality is that few of us need, can afford or are able to effectively deploy much more than the ordinary watch or guard dog; the so called personal protection dog thus often being little more than conspicuous consumption, a status symbol.

But there are a few people, such as those in a sensitive political or corporate office, which actually can be in danger from powerful, far-reaching adversaries such as a major criminal organization or terrorist group. Those susceptible to abduction or kidnapping, or with similarly vulnerable families, may well find that a good dog or several dogs may be part of an integrated security solution, but dogs in and of themselves cannot provide stand-alone security. Such things are well beyond the scope of this book and my area of competence; it is sufficient to point out that those in real need are well advised to seek out appropriate professional services, and to be very careful about how they go about selecting them. What I can say for certain is

that if someone is trying to sell you a dog to provide this level of security you are being conned, and much more than your money is at stake.

The fundamental problem is that there are no standards, since there is no licensing system literally anyone can hang out a shingle or tack up a diploma from a mail order school and become a professional protection dog trainer. Sometimes dogs are taken in for several weeks, given just enough perfunctory training to support a demo of the dog on a short lead lunging at someone waving a sleeve, perhaps the kid who had been "working" him all week. The reality is that such dogs often offer relatively little in the way of enhanced protection, and the business is based on the fact that the customer is generally unable to evaluate and understand what has been done to his dog and what can realistically be expected should a confrontation occur.

In summary, a good dog properly selected, raised and trained can be a real asset to family security as a watch dog or medium level guard dog without excessive expense, inconvenience or changes to life style; many family companions function effectively in this way. Those with a higher level of risk, a business executive under kidnapping or assignation threat, personally or for the family, may benefit from a comprehensive professional solution, which may very well include a good dog in addition to other protective measures. Such a situation is going to involve a lot of money, and the most difficult step is to determine who to trust, for there are many less than marginal vendors offering services, and the risk of poorly spent money is small in comparison to a failure to protect when a threat actually materializes, for there may be no second chance.

The Area or Premise Protection Dog

Beyond police applications and family or personal protection, dogs historically have been used to protect business or industrial premises, at the crudest level the old-fashioned junkyard dog. Often such dogs were provided as a service, being dropped off in the evening at the close of business and picked up in the morning. In addition to the proverbial junk yard, such dogs were used by automobile dealerships, department stores, factories, warehouses and other places of business where there was a need for nighttime security by unsupervised dogs roaming the premises. The primary requirement of such a dog is that he be loud and threatening so as to deter a potential adversary, that he be constantly on the move rather than finding himself some secure nook to sleep in and finally that he make good on his threats with a strong reaction to any intruder; reputation is essential to the effectiveness of such a program, a rapidly spreading word on the street after an incident is the best long term deterrent.

But such applications are diminishing because of the effectiveness of modern electronic alarm and surveillance services and because of the potential for legal repercussions. The legal liability and consequent insurance expense tends to expand as the courts become more likely to regard aggressive dogs as a disproportionate response to the threat of theft and vandalism, reasoning similar to that which makes booby traps, such as a trip line on a fixed shotgun, illegal in most jurisdictions. Accidents, the employee with a key returning for a personal item for instance, also are a potential problem. The supplier's expenses in terms of vehicles, gasoline and employee expenses for the larger vendors, and especially their own insurance costs, render the nighttime guard dog increasingly problematic.

Technology has been a huge agent of change; electronic intrusion detection and very cost effective and reliable television surveillance means that all areas of a plant can be under observation from central, remote locations many miles away. Sophisticated motion detectors can bring an incident to the attention of the people in the central control site, who can quickly bring the scene up on one or several television monitors and summon local security personnel or the police as necessary.

From the business owner's point of view, police intervention is far preferable to a response by a dog or an employee, for all of the legal liability and potential bad publicity falls on the agency. This is socially desirable in that our system is based on police intervention rather than private action, which can quickly evolve or be perceived as evolving into vengeance.

© Copyright 2018, James R. Engel

Police Dog Book

Angel's Lair All Breed

Angel's Lair Schutzhund