

The American Working Dog Federation

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The decade of the 1980's was a time of expansion, progress and transition. The *United Schutzhund Clubs of America*, under the leadership of president Paul Meloy, made major strides in bringing structure, order and stability to the sport of Schutzhund in America. The training and certification of American judges was put on a firm foundation, bringing new levels of competence and integrity to our sport fields. USCA, under German pressure, also began to provide breed surveys and other conformation events, thus evolving from its original working heritage into a more comprehensive canine organization. These events, for German Shepherds only, emphasized the changes going on within USCA as it evolved from an organization primarily supporting Schutzhund training and trials into one much more focused on German Shepherd affairs. But change brings consequences, and the emergence of USCA as a conformation and registry organization was a direct threat to the AKC and the GSDCA, for if USCA was to run conformation events based on German judges how could the AKC and GSDCA not perceive it as intrusive and eventually react? Were the USCA registration system to gain traction and credibility to the point breeders began to forgo AKC registration it would have immense international repercussions, likely causing the AKC to demand of the FCI that they bring the SV under control and restore the mutual respect of national registrations. Increasing unease among those participating with other breeds was also a less than surprising consequence.

Make no mistake: the emerging USCA activity in areas traditionally the function of national entities such as conformation evaluations and particularly registration systems has been of serious concern to the AKC bureaucracy. On one level their introduction of an ill-fated working dog program, in about 2004, a diluted copy of Schutzhund, was lame, pathetic and predestined to wither; but the fact that they would so easily abandon their historic scruples concerning overtly aggressive dogs indicates the pressure they felt.

There were from the beginning sound reasons for the inclusion of all breed trainers within USCA: the motivation had been pragmatic, for the working movement has struggled in America primarily because of distance and a lack of knowledge, experience and organizational infrastructure, that is, truly effective local training clubs, the basis of the culture. When you are struggling to achieve critical mass every participant is vital and needs to be accommodated. But SV pressure on USCA incessantly increasing German Shepherd orientation created questions and anxiety in the minds of those with other breeds as to their future within USCA and the canine world as a whole. As USCA became more intimately entangled in international Shepherd affairs, the sense of those with other breeds of being expendable guests rather than real members increased, and questions about the future came into increasingly sharp focus.

Thus USCA, having emerged as the dominant American working dog organization and making real progress in many areas nevertheless suffered from fundamental internal contradictions and divided loyalties. There were four key issues:

- Was USCA ultimately to be under the control of the SV, rendering America subservient to the Germans, or to evolve into an independent organization by and for Americans dealing with foreign entities according to our own national interests?

- Was USCA going to continue emphasis on police level breeding and training or emulate the SV in diluting the German Shepherd in favor of companion and show markets?
- How was a single breed organization, increasingly foreign controlled, going to deal with the substantial portion of its long-term membership with other breeds?
- How was the unstable, adversarial situation of two diametrically opposed entities, USCA and the GSDCA-WDA, coexisting as petulant children competing for the favor of a distant, manipulative mother club going to be resolved?

Although the rhetoric is about noble breeds and preserving the heritage of the founders, ultimately these conflicts are about money and power. In the canine world the fundamental conflict usually revolves around those perceiving themselves as breed founders or their legitimate heirs and the various national and international registration organizations. These prevailing registration bodies generally dominate because of their relative size and entrenched nature; and the inherent tendency of all bureaucrats everywhere to perpetuate themselves and protect their own fiscal security and wellbeing.

Because of the enormous early popularity of the German Shepherd and the social status and autocratic intensity of von Stephanitz the SV more than any other breed club has been able to control their own affairs and act independently of other national and international canine bodies. This has been limited and to some extent diminished over time, as in the example of their losing control of the Schutzhund sport as it transformed into IPO under FCI control. Were the SV to have their own way entirely, they would control absolutely conformation and character standards and evaluations, appoint all judges, and have absolute administrative control. Not only would all German Shepherds worldwide be enrolled in a single SV registry, with all fees going to the SV, they would appoint administrators to act for them in the various foreign nations. Although they will not be able to push the AKC aside in the area of registrations and the formalities of American breed club structure, or upset the delicate balance of power between the FCI and AKC, it is remarkable how much of their agenda they have been able to implement in America, and how much success they have had playing off the AKC, GSDCA and USCA against one another in order to gain influence and control.

Paul Maloy, as USCA president, was the most aggressive and innovative player in this era. His position was difficult and complex, for USCA was the upstart organization in a world where the other entities – the FCI, AKC, SV and GSDCA – had well established formal and informal relationships, held all of the real power. The most vexing problem was that the GSDCA, as the long term AKC breed club and charter WUSV member, was legally as well as in practice the authority for all German Shepherd affairs, national and international, in America; and they were inherently hostile to and afraid of everything USCA represented. Their every move in the political chess game, as for example the foundation of the WDA, was at root intended to preserve and enhance this power, and to marginalize the USCA. The primary USCA leverage was the desire of the SV to gain power and influence in America, and their willingness to bend the rules and condone initiatives in the grey areas of formal relationships and international custom. George Collins, USCA president and WDA founder, and another shrewd politician, was in many ways Maloy's nemesis in these ongoing conflicts.

By recognizing and encouraging USCA, by gradually extending more formal recognition and particularly by encouraging SV judges to preside at USCA trials, the SV was with calculation pushing the envelope in advancement of their own agenda, encroaching on the territory of the AKC and GSDCA, risking adverse reactions. As these conflicts unfolded beginning with the founding of USCA in 1977, there were

likely general expectations that these issues would be resolved within a few years, that there would be winners and losers, old wounds would heal, old enemies or their successors would reconcile and stability and order in a realigned era would return. History has many examples of nations reconciling and moving forward after bitterly fought wars. But some differences are irreconcilable: the Palestinians, expected to move on and make new lives after the foundation of the state of Israel, to conveniently disappear into neighboring lands or quietly die out, persisted for untold decades, ever more determined, ever more hostile. In a similar way, the conflict in America between the AKC culture of replica working dogs, with the motto "things are different in America," and the passion behind the incipient Schutzhund movement of the seventies and eighties has proven to be irreconcilable.

The ultimate irony is that as time went on USCA continually became larger, more dynamic and more relevant than the GSDCA; which created increasing anxiety, fear and hostility in the American establishment. This emerging vigor of USCA provided the leverage for Meloy to act. His strategy was to sidestep both the GSDCA and the AKC by seeking direct FCI recognition, thus gaining political presence and ultimately enticing the Germans to deal with the American working dog movement on its own terms rather than as a client of more easily manipulated AKC entities. Recognition of a new organization in America as a full FCI partner was and is extremely unlikely because even a hint of this would precipitate full out war with the AKC; but the desire was a practical relationship concerning working trials and affairs that would remain under the radar of more traditional kennel club affairs such as registration, breed standards and conformation judges and events.

Thus Meloy needed a multi breed national organization in order to seek an FCI relationship and as a way of resolving the complexities of a German Shepherd organization having so many long-term members involved in other breeds. A new, national level, all breed American working dog entity, with individual breed clubs, had the potential to solve many of these problems, that is, provide a suitable place for all breeds and create a national entity that could represent the American community with a single voice on the international level with the FCI and internally, perhaps with the AKC and potentially with governmental and police canine service agencies.

Paul Maloy was a dynamic and controversial figure on the American working dog scene, a man who looked to the future and took bold actions to get there, and also made enemies and serious errors in judgment. In my personal dealings with him, as long-term leader and president of the Bouvier working club and AWDF secretary, he was straightforward, direct and helpful; if I had a problem he was a phone call away. I regarded him as a friend, and was deeply saddened by the conflicts and events toward the end of his leadership tenure.

In retrospect hopes for FCI affiliation for any American organization were most unlikely to have been realized, but this was not quite as apparent then as now, and Paul was a man willing to take major risks for big ideas; if at times judgment failed him then for me he still stands taller than those who do did not fail because they did not strive; but perhaps this is a perspective more apparent to those who have personally known failure.

While USCA under Paul Meloy was stabilizing the Schutzhund movement and putting it on a solid footing, determined men in other breeds, such as Ray Carlisle for the Doberman and Erik Houttuin and myself for the Bouvier des Flandres, were working diligently for change from within the establishment and their own national AKC breed clubs to make a valid place for working dogs within the AKC scheme of things. Magazines such as Dog Sports, to which I was contributing editor for a number of years, played a key role in the era before the internet, and the various breed club magazines provided a venue for discussion and promotion.

This work within the existing system approach was not self-evidently viable, as the earlier efforts within the German Shepherd community had resulted in the AKC coming down hard, forbidding any protection related activity, eventually leading up to the formation of USCA. Why should those in the other breeds have expected a different result? The short answer is we should not have, but many of the people involved had deep AKC roots and a strong belief that America needed a unified national system open to and accepting of police level breeding, training and competition – that we needed to make the best possible effort for unity before setting up competing and potentially hostile organizations. Ultimately entrenched AKC opposition was insurmountable, so even though some progress was made within the Doberman, Bouvier and other AKC communities working within the system was in the larger picture impossible. Looking back, this was for the best, for although attempts to include primarily show and companion oriented breed enthusiasts were often favorably received, inevitably as they began to realize that their champions were on the whole inadequate in character and a new canine world order would require that they discard much of their breeding stock and adapt new ways of training and selection their resistance would stiffen, as seen in the evolution of the GSDCA-WDA as a counter force to USCA.

Over time it became obvious that viability for the working movement demanded that it stand on its own: allowing conformation and companion-oriented organizations and people a voice in working dog affairs is to predestine failure. It was these events and experiences that led me to change direction, to champion, primarily in my Dog Sports column, a new, national level working dog entity independent of the AKC and its affiliated, conformation oriented, national breed clubs.

But much of this is more evident today than at the time: in the later eighties there were indications – or perhaps illusions – of progress and change. In 1987 Louis Auslander, AKC board member and future president, was so impressed with a Schutzhund demonstration at the Medallion Rottweiler Club near Chicago that he invited the dog, Centauri's Gambit, a Bouvier des Flandres, and an equally accomplished Rottweiler, Pete Rademacher's Dux vd Blume, to put on a Schutzhund demonstration at that year's International Kennel Club show in Chicago. And so they did. Both of these excellent dogs, both AKC Champions of Record as well as Schutzhund III, put on memorable performances before the brightest spotlights the AKC world can provide. (Unfortunately I was in the hospital recovering from back surgery, and my dog Gambit was handled by my wife Kathy at the International demo.)

Men and women in each of the other breeds were gathering together in order to establish their own working dog heritage, preparing to stand separate from the AKC. One consequence was that in 1986 the North American Working Bouvier Association was formed at the annual championships in the Chicago area, and similar new working organizations were being explored by advocates of the other breeds. An exception was the Doberman community, where the AKC affiliated *Doberman Pincher Club of America*, largely under the influence of Ray Carlisle, was prepared to serve as the national working entity.

Beginning in the middle 1980s there was increasingly serious discussion of a formal structure for the American working dog movement, something I highlighted and promoted in my various Dog Sports articles. The needs and desires of the working dog community, which could only be realized through such a national level organization, included:

- International conformation and working event rules and standards.
- Access to international working and conformation events.
- Recognition of European working titles, especially the Schutzhund title.

- Work related conformation and breeding eligibility requirements.

Finally, on June 17, 1989 a founding meeting was held in St. Louis, in the offices of the USCA. Present at the creation and representing their various breeds and organizations were:

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| • Paul Meloy | USCA President |
| • Vernon Crowder | USCA Vice President |
| • Erik Houttuin | NAWBA President |
| • Jim Engel | NAWBA Secretary |
| • Eckart Salquit | USRC |
| • Jacqueline Rousseau | USRC |
| • Ray Carlisle | DPCA |

All are familiar names on the American working dog scene.

After lengthy discussion, the American Working Dog Federation (AWDF) came into existence as an alliance of national breed organizations dedicated to the preservation and advancement of the police style breeds. Charter members were:

- United Schutzhund Clubs of America (German Shepherd)
- Doberman Pinscher Club of America (DPCA)
- North American Working Bouvier Association (NAWBA)
- United States Rottweiler Club (USRC).

Because of his leadership and experience in dealing with the European working dog community, and the predominant position of USCA, Paul Meloy was elected founding AWDF President. Jim Engel became founding secretary and Ray Carlisle the first treasurer.

There were immediate repercussions. The original AWDF Doberman member club was the AKC affiliated *Doberman Pinscher Club of America*. This affiliation, the increase in Doberman Schutzhund activity and the growing acceptance of the membership panicked the AKC old guard. A year later, almost to the day, this precipitated the infamous AKC edict of June 18, 1990 forbidding Schutzhund and all similar protection sports and trials. By this action the AKC demanded that national clubs for these breeds repudiate their heritage; thus exacerbating the already emerging rift within these breeds, with the AKC clubs moving to the solidification of their concept of working dogs as passive companions and show dogs devoid of their working functionality. This generated ever-increasing pressure for the emergence of serious, protection oriented national clubs for each breed. As a result of the withdrawal of the AKC Doberman club from the AWDF, there was an immediate formation of the *United Doberman Club*, which became a full AWDF member in January of 1991.



THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

NOTICE

June 18, 1990

TO: All AKC Licensed and Member Show and Obedience Trial Giving Clubs
SUBJECT: Schutzhund and Schutzhund-like Events

The American Kennel Club's Board of Directors, at its recent meeting, reviewed its position with regards to Schutzhund trials.

AKC has consistently prohibited clubs from holding Schutzhund trials or demonstrations in conjunction with AKC events, or from advertising these trials in any official AKC document (premium list, judging program or catalog).

Over the past few years, the AKC has expended hundreds of man hours and committed hundreds of thousands of dollars in combating breed-specific, anti-vicious dog legislation. Any activity sponsored by an AKC affiliated club which contains an exercise in which a dog attacks, bites, grabs or is aggressive towards a person, creates a public perception that is completely counter-productive to these efforts.

In keeping with the objects of the American Kennel Club, to protect the interest of its members and advance the maintenance of pure-bred dogs, the Board has voted, effective immediately, to prohibit any club which is eligible to hold AKC events, from sponsoring any type of activity in which a dog is expected to act in an aggressive manner towards a person. This would include Schutzhund, as well as any other activity involving the biting, grabbing or attacking of a person.

Failure to comply with this policy will result in the revocation of a club's show and/or trial giving privileges. Any questions concerning this subject may be directed to James Crowley, Director of Dog Events.

THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

In the early years, the primary AWDF function was the annual championship, a Schutzhund trial with three teams designated by each breed club, with the aggregate team scores determining the winning team. Later this format was abandoned in favor of an open trial where entrants competed as individuals rather than members of a breed-oriented team, primarily as a mechanism of selecting teams for international FCI competition. The first AWDF team Championship was held in St. Louis on March 16-17, 1991, hosted by NAWBA, the Bouvier des Flandres working club.

Although USCA emerged in 1977 as a German Shepherd club according to its constitution, as indicated by the absence of a breed designation in the name this affiliation was not prominent in the promotional rhetoric of the era. Many local clubs projected a strongly multi breed culture, and a third of individual USCA members were advocates of another breed. This affiliation was more or less an accident of history, a response to the need for an immediate, credible European affiliation and

reliable, formal access to European judges. None of this was an especially prominent issue in the early years, with the excitement of a brave new world to conquer, and those with a strong preference for a multi breed format had the option of forming a DVG club. But eventually this split persona began to generate ongoing complications in terms of events and other functions; for example the institution of a German Shepherd only national championship was greatly resented by many long standing members with other breeds, belatedly bringing into sharp focus that there were two classes of membership. In more recent years this was exacerbated by SV pressure on USCA to evolve into their American distribution subsidiary, promoting the German Shepherd show lines and other breed specific aspects of mother club programs. One of the primary reasons for the AWDF was to resolve this personally split, provide an orderly transition to a new organizational structure for individual breed oriented national working clubs, clearing the way for USCA to emerge openly as a primarily German Shepherd entity, yet providing for existing all breed aspirations.

Although there was a great deal of initial enthusiasm, over time these alternate breed clubs on the whole failed to prosper, could not maintain and expand the initial momentum. A significant reason for this was the desire to gain size and presence as rapidly as possible, resulting in the tendency to draw in people by offering something for everybody, such as agility events, herding, carting and various styles of obedience. Drawing on personal experience, leading up to the formation of the Bouvier working club in the middle 1980s the argument was that with an overt hard core working agenda such a club would have no more than twenty members; it was said we needed to attract existing Bouvier enthusiasts, unfamiliar with the working culture, in order to build numbers, that these were the people to look to as recruits for the working movement. This meant conformation shows and fun events such as lure coursing for the pet owners and the inclusion of AKC style obedience. The problem is that rather than being converted to Schutzhund these confirmation breeders, pseudo herding enthusiasts and play trainers eventually became the majority and took over the organization, at one point a NAWBA president actually refusing to endorse a protection potential as a necessary character attribute in a legitimate Bouvier des Flandres. We fell into the trap of emulating existing national breed clubs – European as well as American – and emerged as minorities in our own organizations. The net result was the emergence of AWDF member clubs dominated and controlled by people not committed or only weakly committed to the protection or police dog culture. Interestingly enough – although the primary pressure came from Germany rather than the membership – this applies to USCA as a German Shepherd organization almost as well as the other, newer clubs.

Thus as USCA emerges as a German Shepherd breed club – only tangentially committed to a universal police dog character – in everything but name, the other AWDF breed clubs have struggled to build viable cultures and structures. Currently the *American Working Malinois Association* (AWMA) is the most vigorous and successful, running very strong national IPO championships with for instance 18 credible IPO III entries for the 2011 event in the Chicago area, reflecting the vigor of this breed in Europe and the evolving American enthusiasm. The Malinois is pretty much every discouraged alternate breed trainer's second choice, and the refreshing absence of posturing show people creates a more focused atmosphere in AWMA affairs.

The Rottweiler club, the USRC, is probably the next most vigorous, but had only four Schutzhund III entries at their 2011 National championship, not counting a couple of no shows. Current USRC membership is about 100, especially discouraging after the enormous popularity in the 1990s.¹ From personal experience, the Bouvier

¹ There was a dissident national Rottweiler entity founded by Eckart Salquit some years ago, but this does not seem to be a factor in the low USRC numbers.

club, NAWBA, has been in disarray for a decade, with very few championship entries, several times cancelling the event outright because of a lack of interest and support. In 2012 a dissident board group staged a coup, simply expelled the president, vice president and another officer and installed their own administration, making it unclear who the legitimate leaders are. None of the other AWDF clubs have evolved a strong national presence, and a proliferation of AWDF breed and sport oriented clubs even more marginal, empty shells created for political purposes, has diluted the integrity and credibility of the organization.

As an illustration of the fundamental cultural disconnect, one need look no further than the aborted AWDF conformation show planned for the fall of 2001 in the St. Louis area, strongly promoted by Ray Carlisle of the Doberman club. In the circulating information sheet the working requirement was to be specified by the individual clubs; only the Shepherds and Rottweilers were to require a working title for eligibility. The Dobermans and the Bouviers were to be shown, to be eligible for recognition as the best working dog, based on superficial temperament tests and there were virtually no working requirements for the other breeds. The Malinois was not to be included at all. Many, including myself, were strenuously opposed, for the evils of conformation competition without meaningful working prerequisites was one of the fundamental reasons for the American working dog movement, specifically the AWDF, in the first place. The events of September 11 provided a convenient excuse for canceling this show, and apparently it put a well-deserved dagger in the heart, for it has never come up again.

There is of course a place for formal conformation and structure evaluations, for a reasonably uniform and compelling appearance within a breed is conducive to public recognition, in the same way police patrol officers are in uniform. But competitive rankings as an end in themselves, especially in sub populations within a breed lacking a tradition and expectation of real working capability, are on the whole counterproductive. To be credible, conformation evaluations demand a serious working prerequisite, and they should be breed specific only; comparing dogs from various breeds and rank ordering them is pointless and absurd, part of the circus mentality of the show dog set.

The primary reason the AWDF breed clubs have withered is that they were built on a foundation of sand: European breed communities that – in spite of propaganda espousing a working culture – had long since degenerated into show and pet organizations with very few police level dogs, breeders or training clubs. The FCI affiliated national breed clubs in reality provided little more support than existed in America, are in fact little if any better than the corresponding American versions. Serious working elements within these breeds, as for instance the KNPV Bouvier community in the Netherlands, for many years estranged from the FCI and show communities, constituted essentially different cultures and in the longer term tended to evolve into virtually different breeds.

Beyond the lack of a supportive European community, most of these AWDF breed clubs have lacked real focus on serious protection or police level work and tended to offer play training activities such as lure coursing and agility in order to gain popularity and critical mass. Conformation competition, lacking rigorous working prerequisites, has been particularly popular; the possibility of a placement and praise from an exotic Euro judge seeming to have irresistible appeal. All of this has tended to weaken these clubs, making them superficial alternatives to the AKC national clubs without projecting any real excitement, any working persona. Although it is human nature to blame outside elements, it must be noted and emphasized that the failure of these clubs to prosper was neither caused by nor hastened by any lack of support from USCA or the German Shepherd community; in the Meloy era, when I was involved in active leadership roles both within the Bouvier movement and as an

AWDF officer, every effort to provide support and extend cooperation was forthcoming.

The early years the American alternative breed Schutzhund enthusiasts suffered from an exaggerated idea of the vigor and relevance of these breeds in Europe: for instance in recent years only about 700 Dobermans and 1500 Rottweilers have been registered annually in Germany. Given that most of these pups are produced by show breeders, the small numbers and fragility of the respective working cultures comes into focus. In retrospect the European resources for building a strong Rottweiler, Doberman or Bouvier working culture in America were greatly exaggerated in our minds; we had chosen to believe their rhetoric and propaganda about working character rather than observe closely how vigorous their programs were what they were actually doing.

The experience of the past thirty years has demonstrated that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to build strong infrastructure in America when there is not an active European community to provide support in terms of proven stock, cultural identity and leadership. Even though the SV has been increasingly unsupportive of real work, there have always been enormous resources in terms of individual German Shepherd breeders, trainers, judges and local working clubs – prospering in spite of the SV – to provide support to the incipient American German Shepherd enthusiasts. The fact that among the alternative breeds independent European breeding and training cultures were generally too small, dispersed and weak to provide the necessary support was a significant factor in their failure to prosper. In general, all of the FCI affiliated breed clubs in Germany, Belgium or the Netherlands are not serious about work, in reality little if any better than the AKC national clubs. For those involved it proved very difficult to find good breeding stock, trained dogs or trainers and breeders able to serve as mentors. The major exception has of course been the Malinois, which prospered in later years partially because there are no functional FCI affiliated organizations, their origins and support structures being in the KNPV and NVBK, beyond FCI influence.

Just as within America the primary reason for AWDF was to provide access to training resources, judges, score books and all other infrastructure elements in a way balancing unique breed requirements of camaraderie and support through specific breed magazines, web sites and national events with the economies of scale that a national level umbrella organization can best provide, on an international level the reason for the AWDF was the perceived need for an American organization able to speak with one voice for the working community as a whole, particularly through some sort of hoped for FCI relationship. A specific immediate need was to advance USCA aspirations for a place in the international German Shepherd world independent of the AKC and the GSDCA. This international initiative has met with limited success in that AWDF teams regularly compete in FCI international trials, such as the annual IPO Championship, but has not advanced beyond this level. Unfortunately, in retrospect the AWDF was able to do relatively little to resolve German Shepherd world political problems, for the impasse between GSDCA-WDA and the USCA is ongoing twenty years later, with little evident expectation of resolution. Given the fragility AKC / FCI relationship the likelihood of an expanded role for the AWDF in FCI affairs in the foreseeable future is vanishingly small. My opinion is that on the whole we need to deemphasize European dependence and focus on building American infrastructure, culture and traditions according to our own ongoing needs and circumstances.

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