

Guns & Dogs

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

As mankind emerged from several million years of living based on hunting and gathering, at the dawn of agriculture several thousand years ago, comprehensive social and political hierarchies emerged, a primary purpose of which was restraining and directing aggressive propensities among dogs and domestic animals as well as men. As the Industrial Revolution and twentieth century technology produced ever increasing complexity our social and political institutions exerted expanding control over the individual's freedom to live his life according to his own decisions and preferences.

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 necessary 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 needs to be adjusted through breeding selection according to the purpose, with mainstream home companions having relatively low aggressive potential.

The beginnings of agriculture, when mankind gradually became bound to the land and gave up the nomadic way of life, had enormous consequences in terms of social structure. Prior to this era property was what you could carry and leadership was a matter of who had the physical, emotional and intellectual assets to gain precedence in the band of hunter-gatherers; every man was born with the potential to lead the band. As we became tied to the land it became property, that is, under the control of individuals or groups within an established hierarchical structure. The instinctive aggression of our origins needed to be attenuated, directed and controlled in order to establish social hierarchy, that is, maintain order and cohesion over longer time periods to plant, tend and harvest crops and provide for the storage and distribution of the harvest. Individual ownership of the land meant that social structures for an orderly transfer on an owner's death resulted in the evolution of increasingly complex and dominating legal and governing structures, which ultimately required enforcement mechanisms such as legal and penal systems, police establishments and religious institutions. Notice that the Ten Commandments are primarily about property and commercial rights, especially inheritance, rather than abstract moral principles. Adultery is forbidden because the inheritance consequences, fornication is not mentioned.

As technology evolved more sophisticated and effective weapons came into use and skirmishes between bands and tribes evolved into war between kingdoms and

nations. Increasingly elite ruling classes emerged to establish and maintain customs and laws which limited the ability of the ordinary person to act on his aggressive propensities. Those empowered to enforce law and order tended to use this power for personal ends and preserve it within family and class for generations; power does indeed corrupt. There is inherent in every modern society a compromise between democracy and egalitarianism on the one hand and strong central authority and control on the other: the most severe and repressive national regimes typically have relatively low crime rates among their populations as a whole, the state retaining for itself the use of violence for its own purposes. It is said for instance that the streets of Moscow are much less peaceful and safe today than they were at the height of the Stalin regime. As swords and armor replaced clubs and spears a hierarchical social order meant that most common men had limited access to power and decision making; lived out lives constrained by the circumstances of their birth.

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Historically state of the art weapons in general but guns especially were expensive, especially in the era of craftsman construction prior to the standardized parts and mass production that came into existence about the time of the American Civil War in the 1860s. The propensity of ruling elites to limit access to weapons as a means of maintaining control – and their privileged life style – meant that legal and financial barriers to gun access were at the center of the struggle for the emergence of free and democratic society. The constitutional right of the individual to keep and bear arms was a radical feature of the American Constitution, one whose ramifications and limitations still cause conflict today. The right to bear arms was never unconditional and without limit, and as weapons have become more effective and powerful more limitations have evolved. In the colonial era an especially skilled and practiced rifleman could perhaps load and fire three rounds in a minute, but this was not a sustainable rate. But today an unstable young man can easily and casually purchase semi-automatic weapons with magazines for thirty or more rounds, devastating weapons unimaginable by our forefathers as they created our constitution.

Limitations on access to the instruments of violence are inherent and necessary in every society, and the boundaries are always a compromise between public order and the potential for the people as a whole to limit government, to in the extreme rise up and overthrow an oppressive regime. These are matters of intense emotion and rhetoric, with large and influential organizations – such as the *National Rifle Association* – ever vigilant to maintain and even expand legal access to weapons.

Robust and aggressive dogs are also instruments of aggression, and it is an ongoing social struggle to balance breeding and ownership rights as society strives to place reasonable limitations on this potential for canine injury and inappropriate violence. Just as many types of gun – especially those fully automatic or of large caliber – are illegal for the private citizen, laws banning specific types of dog or particular breeds are created, often emotionally in response to specific incidents. British and American society has – more than the continental Europeans – regarded the potential for canine aggression against human beings as morally and ethically dubious, to be minimized in responsible breeding. Our canine organizations, particularly the AKC and the affiliated breed clubs, have reflected and endorsed this agenda. The consequence of these cultural propensities to suppress and demonize canine aggression has tended to retard the evolution of American police dog service, creating dependence on European breeding lines, training methodologies and deployment practice.

Guns and dogs are similar in their potential to inflict injury or death upon a hunted animal or human adversary, but differ in that a gun is usually employed to kill while the dog is generally used to project less than deadly force, to capture a fleeing or hidden criminal or to run down game for the hunter with his gun, who reserves the pleasure of the kill for himself. Guns and dogs are often deployed together to provide options, that is to take advantage of their individual capabilities according to the requirements of an evolving tactical situation. But the hunting rifle, service revolver or protection dog can also injure or kill the wrong person as in a hunting accident, or a dog kept for home defense attacking the wrong person or in inappropriate circumstances.

Society rightly seeks to minimize inappropriate violence by legal restrictions on the ownership and use of the instruments of violence and requirements for training and licensing. Defining the demarcation between appropriate and reasonable restrictions and infringement of inherent, constitutionally established individual rights is an ongoing part of our political and civil processes. Throughout most of history the most advanced and effective weapons were not commonly in the hands of the population at large because of cost and legal restriction, and because the ruling classes had the power to make it stick.

Even today in nations such as Japan or Norway firearms are unusual beyond the police and the military, to the extent that even the police are often unarmed. In the western world nations such as England are increasingly restrictive and the penalties of gun ownership are ever more draconian. Increasingly, similar restrictive laws ban or restrict canine breeds perceived as inherently dangerous. There is often a tragic price to pay for such policies, for in Norway in July of 2011 an assailant was able to spend an hour and a half leisurely seeking out and executing young people trapped on a small island in a perverse political statement, with total impunity, no concern at all for personal safety. One police officer or citizen with a gun might have brought a quick end to this and saved seventy young lives, and the expectation of possible armed resistance might have averted this tragedy in the first place.

Even the most severe gun laws and the most draconian punishments for possession will never entirely prevent a determined psychopath from obtaining automatic weapons to make war on society, with often tragic consequences. Because of our history as a frontier society, with a hostile indigenous population, American practice and attitude has always been different. In the aftermath of the American Revolution, while maintaining the general British attitudes toward canine aggression, America emerged with enormously more acceptance of civilian firearm ownership and use, among the most permissive in history.

Even today when social and legal restrictions limit the use of guns for home and business defense a good dog can be a credible alternative or adjunct. Those who favor severe gun restrictions often point out that there is a seeming never-ending string of episodes in which a person, usually a disengaged young man, acquires automatic weapons to go on a rampage, killing and maiming innocent citizens on school campuses or elsewhere. When a congresswoman meeting with her constituents in an open forum can be casually gunned down the very fabric of our democracy is in jeopardy; and when jubilant, leering photos of the assailant appear in the press when he is placed beyond justice and punishment because of supposed diminished mental capacity our common social contract, the basis of our civilization is called into question.

Today most police canine operations and civilian use of aggressive dogs implicitly or explicitly necessitate the generation of strategies where guns and dogs in combination can be most effective. One of the primary advantages of the dog is that he represents non-lethal force, often able to affect deterrence or capture without

taking a life, a force that can potentially be recalled when circumstances change or the subject yields.

On the other hand, being shot is an ever-present danger to the dog, and measures to minimize this risk are part of prudent training programs and deployment strategy. Interaction between guns and dogs is an inherent part of every police canine deployment involving the aggressive potential. These dramatic differences in national gun laws and customs mean that police dog selection, training and deployment must be adapted to national and local circumstances in order to make canine use as effective and safe as possible.

Testing the police dog for persistence in the face of firearms, particularly in the attack, has always been a fundamental feature of continental police dog practice as exemplified by the Dutch KNPV trials, clearly demonstrating the existence of guns as a major part of the perceived overall criminal threat. Every police dog and serious civilian protection dog needs to demonstrate impartiality in the presence of gunfire when restrained by handler command and the willingness to persist in an attack in the face of a discharging firearm. Such tests are a major part of all selection, training and trial systems for our protective heritage breeds.

In America gun ownership is pervasive in terms of culture and the overall number of firearms in circulation. On a national level advocating gun restrictions has become a serious political liability, with the highly publicized national limitations on assault style weapons being allowed to lapse in the second Bush administration because even those politicians philosophically in favor of gun control were unwilling to expend the political capital to retain them. While conceptually not impossible, comprehensive confiscation of the millions of guns in circulation would ultimately involve wide scale police home invasion and search, Ruby Ridge and Waco all over again across the nation. Not everybody would resist "until they pry my cold dead fingers from my gun" but significant civil strife would likely be the consequence of an attempt at universal gun confiscation.

In societies where firearms are a prevalent reality most police and civilian high-risk applications of protection dogs involve a strategy of deployment to combine the most effective capabilities of both guns and dogs. Risk to the dog as well as the man is ever present, as a quick search of the internet will reveal that gun related police dog fatalities are almost a routine occurrence, so common that risk minimization is a feature of training, qualification testing and deployment strategy.

One of the primary reasons for the use of the police dog is enhancement of officer safety. Police dogs are put at risk and often perish in order to preserve the life of police personnel; building searches and suspect apprehensions are prime examples. Risk reduction for the suspect is also part of the police dog rationale because every criminal deserves a day in court instead of impromptu street justice; and young, innocent, naive or mentally deficient persons routinely become the object of police interest every day. A primary advantage of the dog over the gun is that as a non-deadly force he can be sent to apprehend rather than kill, can be called back and can capture and detain without killing. The call back as a reality has serious limitations which require discretion and judgment in situations, such as a building search, where the dog is often out of handler line of sight. A bite from a big aggressive dog is always an unpleasant experience, but it is generally not fatal or disabling and thus preferable to shooting a possibly innocent person of interest.

Civilian use of firearms brings forth complex issues. Many Americans, so many that it is a serious deterrent to crime, have a gun in their home, and their willingness to use it is an important backup to the watch or guard dog, and the police patrol for that matter. Indeed, what would be the point of a watchdog if the human being was not prepared to follow up and deal with an intruder? Many intruders would no doubt

be willing to deal with the dog if they were certain that no one would bring a gun into play; many gun control proponents disingenuously seek to minimize the fact that strong gun control and increased levels of violent home invasion go hand in hand. Indeed, in rural America a dog in the yard and a shotgun or hunting rifle in the front hall closet is part of the culture, and when police response is twenty minutes or more away, and much more if there is other ongoing enforcement activity, just a common sense precaution.

While firearms as an element of home defense are widespread and legal, civilian guns on the street and in vehicles are more complex matters. Concealed carry permits are generally available in most states making this a practical part of an overall defensive strategy. Indeed, the right of the civilian to carry a concealed weapon has been rapidly expanding, to the point that by 2012 only Illinois maintained total prohibition, although a number of other states evolved complex laws intended to impede and restrict as a form of creeping prohibition. In 2012 the Supreme Court struck down the Illinois restriction, for the first time establishing concealed carry as an inherent Constitutional right for all Americans.

Many municipalities, including major metropolitan areas, have and enforce very restrictive gun laws, as repressive as they can get away with without bringing down a court ordered mandate to relent. Recent Supreme Court decisions have substantially expanded the constitutional right to the use of guns for protection of person and property, and legal maneuvering on both sides can be expected to continue into the foreseeable future. The so called stand your ground laws expanding the legality of self-defense have been controversial but generally popular.

The person using any means, a gun or a dog, for protection of people or property is always subject to legal restrictions, which vary significantly, as do the attitudes of the courts in various legal venues. As an example, booby traps, guns with a trip mechanism intended to be activated by an intruder, are generally illegal. Whether a watch dog in a closed store falls under this category depends on the applicable laws and court decisions. Those depending on dogs for protection, especially those specifically bred and trained for such use, are well advised to become aware of these circumstances.

In spite of legal restrictions, there will always be those willing to carry a gun on their person or in a vehicle on the theory that they would rather be in court on a gun charge than on a slab in the morgue, but this is an extremely risky way in which to conduct one's life. The fundamental problem is that the ordinary citizen apprehended with an illegal gun, even though it is of no realistic threat to any innocent person, likely faces a felony conviction and thus loss of employment and permanent difficulty in future employment as well as a jail sentence, while the armed criminal essentially gets a pass, for he is most likely already a felon and any gun charges will tend to be traded away as part of the plea bargaining process. There is a fundamental element of truth in the strident slogan that when guns are illegal only criminals have the advantage of a gun.

The decision to have a gun is always to be taken seriously, for no matter how much care is expended in selection, training and deployment there is always the risk that in the end your gun may be taken by an intruder and used against you, your family or an innocent person. Accidents and easy juvenile access are risks obvious to anyone reading newspapers or watching television in America. Suicide by use of a gun is about twice as prevalent in America as murder using a gun, and contributes to the suicide death rate because many other methods are much less effective.

The major advantages of a dog are that he can often detect and make known the presence of a threat, that properly managed he represents less than deadly force and when push comes to shove he is your dog; when an intruder finds or takes your

gun it becomes his gun while a good dog knows which side he is on and will respond accordingly.

For the individual family or person the decision to keep a gun, or an aggressive dog, in the home is a complex tradeoff between the advantage of deterring, frightening off or killing an intruder and the very real risk of shooting the wrong person, having the gun fall into the intruder's hands and used on you and finally the very serious risk that children or other irresponsible people might utilize a gun in an inappropriate way. Sometimes a good dog can be a realistic compromise, tip the balance in favor of bypassing gun ownership.

For the police application or the extreme civilian situation there is much less uncertainty. It is not really a question whether one should employ firearms or dogs but rather creating a deployment strategy where the advantageous attributes of both can be most effectively blended together. For many Americans not at special risk it can be reasonable to make the considered decision that waiting for police response is the optimal strategy in a given set of circumstances.

In recent years the medical community has begun speak of herd or community immunity, that is a form of resistance to communicable diseases such as small pox, diphtheria or polio occurring because the vaccination of a significant portion of a population keeps the disease below critical mass, thus providing a significant measure of protection for individuals without personal immunity.

In a similar way, especially in a rural setting, gun ownership and the willingness to respond can in the aggregate make your neighbors and all others safer because the expectation that most homes have a gun and someone willing to use it can deter the potential criminal from invading any home. In a similar way, every home with a visible and alert yard dog creates the mindset that all yards might have such a dog, even when it is not in view.

The American Experience

Guns and dogs resonate deeply in American culture as symbols of patriotism, vigor and masculinity, as in hunting to provide family sustenance as the frontier was pushed west and as expressions of personal freedom, with the right to bear arms explicitly included in our constitution. Although liberal politicians disparage these values, and the people who hold to them, they run deep.

The advent of the United States constitution did not bring immediate social perfection – for it would take another century and a gut wrenching civil war to resolve the issue of slavery – but it was a major step forward in bringing real power and influence into the hands of the men and women who actually tilled the fields, raised the livestock, conducted commerce and provided the craftsmanship to create the products of trade and a better life. This marked real change, for guns in the hands of common European men were severely limited, both by cost and by the laws of the nobility and upper classes created to maintain their privileged status. The French Revolution, some fifteen years later, marked the advent of similar societal change in Europe.

On the American farm a dog or two generally served to announce visitors as well as a first line of deterrence, particularly at night. Such dogs also served to deter predators such as a coyote or fox on the prowl for an easy meal, literally to keeping the fox out of the hen house. Although there was certainly significant 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, were with the flock or

herd exclusively, it hardly can be doubted that there was significant overlap between the herding dogs and those present in the farmyard. There were significant 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 informal watch and sometimes guard dogs as well as family companions.

The police style breeds, such as the German Shepherd and the Doberman, became enormously popular after the First World War, based on the perception of aggressive potential for home and family security as well as projecting a manly and virile image. These breeds tended to become diluted, less intense and aggressive, an inevitable consequence of popularity because most owners, especially in city and suburban environments, are not especially able or willing to deal with the higher levels of drive and aggression appropriate to police service. This is the root cause of the division of these breeds, evident very early in their history, into show lines and working lines.

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. The upwardly mobile, perhaps wanting to impress friends and neighbors, had the more expensive option of one of the purebred police or protection breeds, one with AKC papers, perhaps a German Shepherd or a Doberman Pincher, just like in the movies.

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, Rin Tin Tin or Strongheart in the movies. In this era professionally trained area protection dogs – junkyard dogs – were commonly 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 actually trained specifically for protection in this era, that is, prior to the 1970s.

The increasing popularity of Schutzhund and the market for police dogs and training services greatly increased the supply of higher-level dogs and more sophisticated training in America. 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 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. There was and is variation in quality among such dogs, for it is difficult for the novice to know if the dog being offered is a legitimate investment in security or, all too often the case, a scam, a mediocre dog with only superficial training. An inadequate dog can be a detriment if it provides a false sense of security and thus encourages less caution in routine, common sense practices such as securely locking doors and windows and appropriate lighting.

The decision to own a gun or an especially aggressive dog is serious and complex. When we lived in a peaceful suburb with frequent police patrols and the friends of children in and out of the house our decision was that a gun would most

likely be more hazard than useful deterrent or protection. When we moved into a much more rural setting with the children grown, and police patrol was provided by the county sheriff, much more sparse, with a probable response time of ten or twenty minutes rather than one or two our decision was to have a gun. Each of us must make personal decisions according to their assessment of risk and real protection provided.

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