

# Advent of the Police Breeds

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The original working partnership between man and dog, involving guardian roles in the primitive band, homestead or village, eradication of vermin or pests decimating crops and participation in the hunt, evolved to include livestock guarding and management as sheep, goats and cattle were subsequently domesticated. These were hands on farmers and herdsman with crops to bring in, livestock to care for, farms to guard and families to support; their dogs were of value according to their contribution to this work.

In time as class structures evolved the nobility and later commercial classes created their own sort of dog – the modern hunting breeds especially, the retrievers and pointers, and their household companion dogs – which were valued more for leisure than work, often more valued than the working men and women whose labor supported their elite life styles. But the working dogs were still there, these herders and farmyard dogs, like their masters, living in obscurity, without written history or elaborate records of decent, beyond the purview of those who could read and write and thus create history.

In the middle to later 1800s the industrial age was awakening in Europe, the peasants and tenant farmers were in the first tentative stage of becoming land-owning farmers in the modern sense and many were migrating to cities to become working men beginning the long struggle toward middle class status. This Industrial Revolution, the demise of an agrarian way of life that had predominated in these regions for a millennium, would bring profound changes in the way men worked with their dogs and the nature of the working partnership.

The population was migrating to the cities and prime agricultural land was often becoming too valuable for open grazing on unfenced land, rendering the herdsman and his dogs increasingly obsolete. Mutton and wool were coming from places such as South America and New Zealand at prices that were dramatically lowering European sheep production, especially in the Low Countries where the police dog emerged.

Throughout much of Northern Europe – in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands – the more prosperous farmers, the veterinarians and indeed men from diverse backgrounds began to take notice that these indigenous herding dogs were disappearing as a thousand year old agricultural culture was evaporating before their eyes. In response they began to establish the herding breeds, that is, to create standards of appearance and character and to keep records of decent. The dog show began as a means of gathering together these men and their dogs, to provide an occasion for the formation of clubs and evolving the infrastructure of the modern canine establishment.

These tending style dogs of the continental shepherd and cattleman, guardian as well as herding dog, medium in size, quick and agile, resolute in defense, would prove to be an ideal base on which to build a police patrol dog culture. The dogs of the British Isles - gathering style dogs such as the Border Collies, the larger terriers and the massive estate guardians – in time proved to be not of the right stuff, not the needed balance of physique and character.

Thus this age old guardian role comes down to us in the form of the police service dog, the military scout and patrol dog and the protection and watch dogs serving farmers, stockmen and families of every sort. In continental Europe especially, nations such as Belgium and Germany gathered together their regional

herders, rapidly becoming obsolete because of the advancing Industrial Revolution, and created the police breeds such as the German and Belgian Shepherds, the Rottweiler and the Bouvier des Flandres.

Beginning in the latter 1800s progressive police leadership, seeking to empower and protect the police officer on foot patrol in industrial city neighborhoods – men such as Konrad Most in Germany and Ernest van Wesemael in Belgium – began programs that have continued to evolve and prosper until this day. This process was facilitated by the establishment of police dog trial systems in cooperation with civilian breeders and trainers, such as the Dutch police or KNPV trials, which began in 1907. This close cooperation between civilian breed founders and trainers on the one hand and the police and military administration on the other was a key element in the rapid European progress in the evolution and deployment of effective police canines.

While the continental Europeans strode forward, the British and Americans wallowed in ambivalence. Although there was a certain amount of early enthusiasm in a few progressive police departments, with American police personnel going to Belgium, buying dogs and establishing programs before the First World War, it was seed spread upon barren ground, sometimes flourishing for a year or two but usually dying out at a change in police administration or on a politician's whim. Police programs, almost always small, came and went. Finally in the early 1950s the last existing program flickered out and for several years thereafter there were no known formal American police canine programs.

The failure of a strong working dog culture to emerge in England and America was fundamentally a matter of historical circumstance and the absence of strongly protective British herding breeds. While the Germans and Belgians were busy establishing their police dog culture – breeding traditions, trial systems and deployment programs – with broad public support and active civilian participation at every level, we procrastinated. In the English speaking world there were no new police breeds to excite and interest civilians and no trial systems to draw young men into training and competition, thus building a residual pool of knowledge and experienced trainers and handlers available for police and military programs.

This entrenched British ambivalence to the protective canine is not rooted in an especially humane culture; for bear baiting, pit dog fighting and other brutal canine diversions had a long national history, and only became illegal relatively recently. Perhaps this pervasive negative attitude springs from over reaction, that is the process of eliminating pit fighting and similar atrocities may have carried over as a general pacifist attitude and an aversion to all forms of canine aggression. Or perhaps this was simply the paternalistic and self-preserving instinct of the British upper class at work, the concept that – although aggressive dogs may perhaps be necessary and useful in police applications – the breeding and especially the training of such dogs should be closely guarded activities, conducted only under the auspices of proper authorities. In this worldview the population in general is to be denied access to such dogs and such training, just as every effort is made to keep lock picking tools and techniques out of reach and secret, and firearms of all sorts forbidden to the population at large. This of course ignores that such restrictions do not keep explosives or firearms out of the hands of foreign terrorists or resourceful domestic criminals.

Strangely enough, although America became the land of opportunity for the gun enthusiast with the greatest per capita ownership in the world of even the most exotic firearms, our attitudes toward the protection dog have primarily been transplanted from the English. In general, English and American police forces, from the politicians providing the money, policy and senior officers right on down through the ranks, have a deep-seated suspicion of and aversion to cooperation with civilians of any sort. The extension of this elitist predisposition to dog trainers and breeders,

as contrasted with the continental spirit of cooperation, plays a major role in the relative lack of sophistication and self-sufficiency of contemporary police canine programs. Ongoing dependence on European sources of dogs for deployment and breeding, training guidance and methodology and sport culture increases operational costs at a time of national economic stress when cost effectiveness is increasingly the prerequisite for ongoing taxpayer support.

These cultural biases and attitudes carry over to the civilian national canine organizations, the *Kennel Club* in Britain and the *American Kennel Club*, which have historically maintained great distance from any aggressive canine propensities. This of course reflects their origins in the upper class elements of British society, primarily interested in their hunting dogs, their lap dogs and their estate guarding and gamekeeper's dogs, that is, the Mastiff and similar breeds.

Indeed, the quintessential police dog, the German Shepherd, was given a new name by the British on the eve of the First World War, along with the royal family who gave up their German name to become the Windsors, in order to avoid seeming too German. The British chose to call the breed the Alsatian, after the province of Alsace, which although under French control subsequent to the First World War was historically, culturally and linguistically as much German as French. Perhaps only the Brits would go to such length to pretend that the German Shepherd is really some sort of French dog, for there is no historical connection between the breed and this border province other than in fertile and insecure British imaginations. Much of this attitude comes through in the world of the *American Kennel Club*, which was from the beginning under tight eastern, Protestant, upper class control.

While police service may be conceded as necessary, and even touted when there is money to be made, breeding of the high class purebred dog in the English speaking world has always been without any selection for practical working potential, especially in regards to the canine protective and aggressive functions. As a consequence the dogs produced are fundamentally useless for their work, and as serious dogs have become necessary, especially in the wake of the September 11th atrocity, they have increasingly been imported from continental Europe, especially the Netherlands and Germany. The consequences of this have been deleterious in that excellent or even marginal dogs have been difficult to identify and purchase and more importantly the American police canine programs have evolved isolated from the training, nurturing and breeding culture so important for effective deployment. Police dog work is a team affair, and just as a chain is no better than its weakest link the effectiveness of even the very best dog is severely limited if the handler is lacking strong canine knowledge and skills in addition to being a first rate police officer. Such levels of skill are simply not provided and maintained by a cursory instruction course for a new, inexperienced handler, and this has from the beginning been the Achilles heel of the American police canine movement.

Indeed, effective management and cost control in the basic and ongoing training process, both for handlers and the dogs, is the key to a viable police canine movement. Over the years, many programs have gone out of existence because they were perceived as not cost effective or simply beyond limited budget resources. The yearly cost for a police officer may be well over a hundred thousand dollars. (This is not what is seen in the paycheck, but rather reflects the overall cost of fringe benefits, the salaries of administrative and support personnel and training time reducing service availability.) Thus the decision to assign an officer for eight weeks of training is generally going to be expensive, perhaps a fifteen or twenty thousand-dollar investment. This may well be a good decision, but certainly not one to be taken lightly. Thus the economic motivation for the purchase of trained dogs rather than starting with untrained young dogs, many of which will inevitably be found wanting and discarded as training commences, are apparent.

Although the emergence of the canine police function was occurring across much of Northern Europe, after a brief flurry of interest in prewar Belgian programs subsequent American attention to these breeds of the protective heritage, commencing with the return of the troops from the First World War, focused on Germany. Cavalry Captain Max von Stephanitz, prime mover for the German Shepherd Dog, promulgated and promoted the foundation principles – that work must come first, that form must be according to function – and this vision has resonated around the world for well over a century.

The pioneering spirit of this German Shepherd culture demanded that a dog possess the moral and physical attributes necessary for his work, which must be proven on the working trial field as a prerequisite to breeding and service. In order to demonstrate and prove these essential attributes such as courage, stamina, working willingness and the olfactory potential these pioneers created a series of tests which eventually came to be known as the Schutzhund trial, in English literally the protection dog trial. Similar trials evolved concurrently elsewhere in northern Europe.

From the time of Columbus the Europeans who came to America brought their dogs with them, and European breeds, philosophy and authority have been predominant even until this day. Actually, this goes back even further; several thousand years earlier, for the American Indians brought their dogs with them across the Bering Strait land bridge.

Following the First World War protective heritage German breeds, beginning with the Shepherds and then latter the Dobermans and Rottweilers, achieved enormous popularity in America, catering to a deep and persistent desire in so many of us for the perceived reflected machismo. The Belgians may have created the police dog, but the Germans knew how to promote and popularize it to the general population as well as the police specialist, for the genius of von Stephanitz encompassed promotion and deep understanding of human nature as well as the canine. Although the German Shepherd had been present in small numbers in America before the war, popularity surged with the return of the troops, peaking at 21,596 AKC registrations in 1926 and then crashing back down with the advent of the great depression of the 1930s.

The fly in this ointment was that American shepherds evolved strictly as show and companion dogs, with no expectation of or realistic appreciation for working capability. There is little doubt that many dogs lacking in courage or overly sensitive to gun shots, of little or no value for breeding or service in Germany, found their way into the American market, and more importantly, into our breeding programs.

The Doberman Pinscher also became a prominent and popular breed in America following the First World War, with many imports contributing to the rapidly expanding American lines and a large and vigorous body of enthusiasts emerging. The Doberman was promoted as a police dog and as a consequence served prominently with the United States Marine Corps in the Pacific during the WWII. The Doberman people were always good at promotion, perhaps a little too good. Other German dogs such as the Rottweiler and similar breeds in the rest of Europe, such as the Beauceron, the Picardy Shepherd, the Belgian Malinois and the Bouvier des Flandres, were rare in America, and in this era shared little of the protection dog aura driving the popularity of these German breeds.

In the better classes of American society, as pandered to, manipulated and encouraged by the AKC, canine aggression has from the beginning been perceived as a behavior problem, something to deal with, rather than a fundamental and useful attribute. It has always been slightly suspect, a touch low class. The use of the dog for personal protection, security, military service or police patrol became a perhaps necessary and useful function, but not something a respectable, upwardly mobile

person would want to be involved in. When the subject came up with a breeder or advocate it would be patiently explained that certainly any German Shepherd or Doberman, even, no, especially, their show dogs had the innate potential for the police or protection role. It was portrayed as a simple matter of a little training, the implication being that such techniques should be carefully held secret among proper police authorities, least lower class elements should unlock the inner aggression for nefarious purposes, just like methods and tools for lock picking should be kept out of the hands of potential burglars.

Thus because of this passive culture encouraged and abetted by the AKC, Americans prior to the 1970s, breeders and owners alike, remained profoundly ignorant of the culture essential to the breeding, training and preservation of these working breeds. There were no Schutzhund trials as tests for breed worthiness, and more importantly no perception of the necessity of incessant testing of breeding stock to maintain the requisite character attributes. Thus many dogs coming to America were those insufficient for breeding in Germany, the timid or those lacking in gun sureness, thus poisoning our well. In America the only criteria for quality was a show ring increasingly deviating from the original breed in form as well as function. The American shepherd and Doberman lines quickly became pale imitations of the original, seriously deficient in both the appropriate athletic working structure and the requisite character for their work. They became, quite literally, pathetic replicas of the real thing.

Americans had been gradually becoming aware of this disparity and sought ways of bringing this German culture, these training and breeding practices that were the real foundation of these breeds, to our shores. Sporadically in places like the Bay Area in California and suburban Chicago, local groups had been forming clubs and training. In 1970 an American oriented national level Schutzhund organization came into existence, and although it faltered and fell by the wayside by the end of the decade German affiliated organizations such as the DVG and the United Schutzhund Clubs of America were flourishing.

Because of the popularity of the German breeds, and half a century of German promotion of their canine culture in the rest of the world, our dream of a sport and trial system in America, which would hopefully bring forth the best in a man and a dog, was focused on the Schutzhund trial. A few of us were determined to free these lines and these dogs from the debasement of AKC style show breeding, to bring a new and better era to America. We had the enthusiasm of the naive, really did believe that we could transplant the heritage according to the vision of the European founders.

Many of us had our beginning in American style obedience, but found it increasingly sterile and empty for dog and man alike, knew in our hearts that there must be something more. We were warned about this esoteric German ritual called Schutzhund, warned by our betters, warned that that it was not the American way, that it was from the primitive past before the canine had been purified and the aggression tamed and submerged. But some of us, drawn by the mystique of the protection heritage, by the vision of dogs capable of more than heel and fetch, sought out these forbidden rituals to see for ourselves.

We were transformed. Sometimes we saw our dogs come alive when given the opportunity to serve the purpose of their ancestors, but often we were dismayed to see that our noble working dog fell grievously short, that membership in a breed, inscribed on a registration form or pedigree, did not in and of itself confer the requisite character. Sooner or later most of us sought out truly advanced and capable dogs of our own breed, witnessed the execution of the work of our breed before our own eyes. For me it was in 1980, outside of St. Louis, where two

Germans with Schutzhund titled Bouviers des Flandres brought over by Dr. Erik Houttuin opened my eyes; I had never imagined that such dogs could exist.

In time we came to believe that we were destined to fulfill the heritage of the protective breeds in America, bring the training and ideals of Europe, especially the Schutzhund program, to our shores to fulfill the age-old destiny of our breeds. As in every revolution, we looked up to and idealized all things European, especially German, and sought to emulate their heritage and ideals. Few of us had actually been to Europe and the early encouragement and pioneering to a large extent came from Germans who had to come to live in America after WWII.

For us Schutzhund came to be the sport for the common man and uncommon dogs, the key to the excellence we saw for ourselves in titled German Shepherds, often imported. These European trial systems held out the promise of being the way in which the ordinary person, the family man with other obligations and limited financial resources, could compete and contribute, and our dream was of making this a reality in America.

Little did we dream that our heroes had feet of clay; that betrayal even then lurked in high places in Germany.

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