

The SV Empire Builders

Jim Engel, March 8, 2014

In the great nineteenth century colonial empire building era Germany, which emerged as a major European power only with the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, was aggressively expansionist, relentlessly building military potential and seeking colonial territory on a par with the French and British empires. Wilhelm the Second and Adolph Hitler, prime movers in this expansionist zeal, have passed into ignoble history, and post WWII Germany has played nice on the international scene, achieving European dominance through hard work, economic productivity and prosperity rather than war. Germany was aggressive and on the move, but distance, culture and war delayed direct entanglement in American canine affairs through much of the twentieth century.

In the early years, through the 1970s, German influence was driven by American solicitation, that is Americans taking advantage of relative prosperity to purchase and import innumerable German Shepherds for breeding and exhibition purposes, often among the best dogs in Germany. Occasional German judges were also invited to serve at conformation shows, but there was little overt attempt to directly influence American affairs.

Beginning in the 1980s, the SV¹ gradually sought increasing influence in the affairs of other nations in furtherance of their own agenda. The primary impediment to SV expansion in America was and is fear of AKC retaliation, which in the most serious form would involve restrictions on registering imported German Shepherds. SV interests have focused on control of the American market, the evolution of the breed in terms of character and structure and the money involved in dog sales and registrations. This is, however, a struggle over an ever shrinking world, as annual GSD registrations have been falling precipitously in both nations for twenty years.

The greatest German dream, and the worst AKC nightmare, would be direct worldwide SV registration of all of these dogs, and the lucrative registration fees, and revenue from conformation and working events, flowing into Germany, bypassing the grasping AKC bureaucrats. Since AKC registrations have been three or more times those in Germany, total SV control over American GSD affairs would effectively quadruple their size and power. The fact that the AKC is not an FCI member nation gives the Germans a freer hand, but fear of AKC reprisals in the form of restrictions on registration of imports, when AKC registration remains as the standard of quality in the public mind, for the moment limits overt German interference.

Although losing two catastrophic wars and persistent push back from the FCI and their affiliated national clubs has thwarted SV ambitions in Europe as well as America, they have always believed themselves entitled to control of German Shepherd affairs, and had the desire to operate colonial offices – national distribution subsidiaries – responsible directly to Germany, in all other lands. This was the primary reason for the WUSV,² which emerged in this time period.

Through the latter 1970s the American working dog movement had been perceived by the establishment, that is, the bureaucrats and conformation people at the AKC, the American German Shepherd community and the Europeans with dogs to sell, as essentially harmless, irrelevant and impotent. Prior attempts to establish a

¹ *Verein für Deutsche Schäferhunde*, the German Shepherd Club in Germany.

² World Union of German Shepherd Clubs

working culture had consisted of a group of quaint Americans at NASA with their own rules and self-appointed judges or groups subservient to the Europeans such as the DVG. This perception was largely on target; on one occasion a NASA judge allowed a handler to put down a blanket for her Doberman on the long down in obedience so she would not get cold, or miss her blanket, and that was generally characteristic of the organization.

By early 1979 the fledgling American Schutzhund movement was in shambles. The AKC had just slapped the GSDCA down hard for their tentative involvement in Schutzhund, forbidding all future association, like you would chastise a child for using naughty words. The American based DVG activity was awash in confusion, recrimination and power struggles and NASA was increasingly perceived as lame and irrelevant.

At this point the movement was on the brink of failure, well could have floundered and passed into oblivion. Instead there were a series of meetings in California leading to the foundation of the *United Schutzhund Clubs of America* (USCA) in the fall of 1979. In a move of great consequence, foreseen and unforeseen, they sought and obtained affiliation with the SV in Germany. This provided the immediate perception of legitimacy, international recognition of titles and access to German judges both as teachers and to conduct trials. Thus from its inception Schutzhund USA was a German Shepherd club, and there never was any secret, for it was spelled out in the constitution from the beginning.

As so often happens, significant historical movements emerge from the confluence of seemingly unrelated trends and social imperatives. The AKC and GSDCA had for many years been predominant in canine affairs, effectively buffering German influence. By the 1970s Americans were breeding their own German Shepherds, and German imports and influence had dried up, was at low ebb. But new currents were flowing, and American police canine activity was stirring and emerging just as burgeoning Schutzhund interest put the focus on German imports emphasizing working character rather than show credentials. This unexpectedly gave the Germans a powerful new mechanism for extending influence in American affairs. For the next several decades, it would be German Schutzhund judges and working line breeders that would come to have influence in America, changing the dynamics of the American community in unforeseen ways. The GSDCA may have turned their back on Germany, but in the end the Germans would regain influence through newly found friends and advocates in the Schutzhund movement, outside of the GSDCA show community.

In retrospect the emergence of USCA was a watershed event, for they were destined to become much more than a dog training organization. It would emerge as substantially larger, much more relevant and much more resonant with the heritage of the breed than the GSDCA, or the SV for that matter, and was to threaten the AKC in the only way they can ever really understand, money. It would enmesh the SV in a perpetual international political morass. The third of the USCA membership with other breeds were convenient and useful because the primary need was increased participation to achieve economy of scale, to grow the organization in terms of building local clubs and thus minimizing travel distance and expense.

The fact that the words "German Shepherd" do not appear in the name has had ongoing ramifications. In a certain sense, there was an element of deception: there was the tendency to project the big tent, that building the American dog training culture was the important goal, that we were all in this together, that this was the home for everyone who just wanted to train their dogs. Those were the days of camaraderie, of everybody working together to build our own culture and traditions.

While the USCA leadership never quite overtly obscured the German Shepherd affiliation, many local clubs were explicitly promoted as all breed oriented, and in

spirit generally were. This sometimes generated animosity and confusion, as people who were drawn into an apparently all breed local club sometimes felt betrayed when they eventually came to perceive that they were members of a national German Shepherd breed club, that in reality they were welcome as long as useful and needed, but expendable when expedient in terms of German Shepherd politics. The perception of USCA as the big tent, the long-term home for all trainers, was never a realistic expectation but only temporary expediency, and the perceptive among us always knew this. This was one of the primary reasons I and others eventually created the AWDF.

The emergence of USCA had immediate repercussions. The AKC affiliated national club, the GSDCA, became severely insecure and threatened, and under the guidance of George Collins shortly thereafter, in 1982, spawned an affiliated *Working Dog Association* (WDA), in order to compete with USCA. The primary GSDCA-WDA leverage was the WUSV membership, the formal relationship with Germany. This led to a bizarre duel universe where the same set of people with one hat on continued to hold AKC conformation shows for the old American lines, which never used German judges, and then with a WDA hat run an entirely separate set of shows, which virtually always use SV judges.

WDA commitment to work was never real or sincere, was superficial at best, with member clubs running very few Schutzhund trials, some going years without holding one. The primary motivation for the GSDCA in forming the WDA was to project dominance, gain control of USCA, force them into subservience, force them to go through GSDCA officers in dealing with the Germans, ultimately bringing them ultimately under the edicts of the AKC. This set the stage for decades of strife and conflict. The GSDCA thus became the proverbial dog in the manger: although they were not in resonance with the spirit of von Stephanitz, spiritually not really a German Shepherd club, for reasons of politics, profit and individual aggrandizement they clung tenaciously to their WUSV seat.

During its first quarter century USCA was essentially what its name said it is, an organization devoted to training for and competing in Schutzhund trials. In this era, although USCA was technically a German Shepherd organization, in practical reality other breeds, about a third of the dogs being trained, were equally comfortable and well served.³ But in 2011 USCA repudiated the rest of their membership when they ceased issuing score books for other breeds. (Adding insult to injury, they were quite willing to issue a book without indicating a breed, essentially a book for mongrels or cross breeds.)

This was a turning point, for USCA was in reality being transformed from a working dog organization into little more than a marketing agency for the SV show dog cabal, in effect *SV Show Dog Distribution America, GmbH*. More and more emphasis on German style conformation shows, and ever more embarrassing performances by the show dogs in the protection tests prior to these shows, as seen widely on the internet, eroded credibility. Routine pathetic performances of show line German Shepherds with Schutzhund titles made it abundantly clear that these titles are fraudulent, there is simply no other word, and the fact that USCA leadership in the Lyle Roetemeyer era increasingly condoned and participated in this eroded credibility as a working dog organization.

This was a difficult period, for although there had been rough patches in the middle 1990s, the word crisis would not be inappropriate, and then later the Roetemeyer tenure, for many years the leadership was generally admirable in terms of honesty, diligence and enthusiasm, and tended to resist the corrupting influence of the SV. The USCA judges program in particular was of real value, bringing

³ I was a USCA member for thirty years, and only gave up membership in 2011 when they ceased issuing score books for the other breeds.

honesty, competence and a sportsman like attitude to the trial fields of America, something often not true of the German SV judges in all three areas. Beginning about 2008 this began to erode as the leadership became more elitist and entrenched, more responsive to the SV than the membership and gave ever-increasing priority to the promotion of the emasculated show lines, betraying the original working culture.

When this all began, in the early 1980s, the expectation had been that, since USCA was a working trial organization, much more serious about character than the GSDCA, the Germans would use this as a lever to enhance working character as the expectation in America, promote German Shepherds as actual police service capable dogs rather than play dogs for pet homes. This expectation turned out to be unfounded: our perception of the SV had been an illusion, based on naiveté and wishful thinking, for by this time SV commitment to every German Shepherd being a serious police candidate had long since eroded, primarily because the money and fantasy prestige were in the show and companion dogs. When all of the posturing and propaganda are stripped away, the SV and the GSDCA were then and are today birds of a feather, both show and companion dog driven, using the police dog persona as a promotional facade without any real commitment to the working heritage.

Interestingly enough, when you take a long look back, it was the incipient American Schutzhund movement which provided the wedge for SV intrusion into American canine affairs. As USCA gained momentum and prospered into the 1990s, the WDA languished as an irrelevant backwater. USCA was emerging as the largest, most active and most prestigious German Shepherd advocate in America, putting the hypocrisy of both the GSDCA and the SV in the spotlight. Over time these organizations gradually came to perceive USCA as both an evolving threat and an opportunity; so these strange new bedfellows, the SV opportunists and the old line AKC establishment, were feeling increasingly threatened and impotent.

Thus there was a relatively quiet period until the middle 1990s, when the emergence of the Internet and more affordable international travel began to create renewed interest in the German show lines. In Germany the SV elite, under the Martin boys, became more overtly commercial and much less committed to work and character. They saw a golden opportunity, and began playing the WDA and USCA off against each other to force promotion of their show lines, the banana dogs, and show line infrastructure such as the Koer reports.

The SV began to push USCA hard to promote their banana dogs through increasing emphasis on conformation shows with SV judges (who were also dog salesman traveling on USCA funds), Koer classing, and German style registry activity. The WDA began to push its own German brand of conformation show, with SV judge/salesmen in abundance.

Somehow, the old line GSDCA people could not see that their own bastard child, the WDA, was poisoning their well, undermining the credibility of their AKC show lines and American conformation shows by promoting and conducting their German oriented shows. It literally became a three ring circus, with ongoing GSDCA American style shows, USCA shows and WDA with yet another set of Germans running their shows and sales fairs. And the SV was the ring master, cracking the whip.

Over the years the most persistent and antagonistic conflict came to be the selection of the American teams for the WUSV IPO championship. Although the SV had recognized two WUSV member organizations, USCA and GSDCA, this did not entitle each of them to their own teams; only one was permitted per nation. This

became a real sticking point.⁴ In the early years working affairs were de facto under the auspices of USCA, which designated the teams to go to Europe. But under the banner of unity, meaning asserting their authority, the GSDCA began to flex its muscle and demand control, resulting in a series of compromise solutions, usually involving some sort of split team with each organization having so many slots to fill. The result was often USCA members participating in a GSDCA qualification trial to make up part of the team, since WDA had little in the way of trainers and competitors. The result of these conflicts has been escalating hostility and political maneuvering, with more rules concerning which judges are eligible to officiate at particular events and who is eligible to participate in activities of the other organization. In 2010 USCA for all practical purposes declared warfare, banned WDA members from concurrent membership, meaning that the numerous dual members were forced to choose one or the other, the infamous and provocative "Johannes Amendment" named after the prominent USCA politician, Johannes Grewe.

The result of this is that only German SV judges are eligible to do all Schutzhund trials, which suits the Germans perfectly. Thus USCA seems destined to remain a quasi-legitimate part of the world shepherd community because that is exactly where the show-oriented elements of the SV leadership want them. Sure, they will throw them a bone from time to time, allow them to send teams to the world union championships, or give some of their judges pseudo SV status, but America is going to remain divided and weak as long as they are able to make it stick.

The primary reason the GSDCA became active in SV and WUSV affairs was to marginalize the USCA, which in terms of membership numbers, public perception and links to the original heritage was beginning to eclipse the legitimacy of the establishment and thus became an increasing threat to the ongoing credibility of the GSDCA. Thus their manipulations to keep full control of American German Shepherd affairs, place USCA under their thumb, illegitimate as a national German Shepherd entity. Politically the GSDCA has the upper hand because of their AKC status. While this convoluted situation is awkward for the SV, it is the lesser of alternative evils; a divided American community is relatively easy to control and manipulate. Throughout history European elites have had a preference for dominating colonies rather than sharing power with partners.

So USCA is between the proverbial rock and hard place; in order to be a player on the world scene they would have to merge with the GSDCA, but since the GSDCA has no principles to preserve it would be on their terms, which would mean repudiating everything USCA has ever stood for. And in a way all of this is moot, for real participation in world German Shepherd affairs would mean linking the registration systems. The fact is that the AKC is never going to give up its power and the registration cash flow and the FCI is never going to make this an issue, or seriously rock the boat in any other way. Any sort of full FCI affiliation through the AWDF or any other mechanism is and always was virtually impossible.

From a long term strategic point of view, the desire of USCA to be recognized and establish European links was a twofold problem. One route to Europe, discussed to this point, was establishing a link to the SV through the WUSV, which would provide recognition and access to the WUSV Schutzhund or IPO championships. But since America is not an FCI affiliated nation, and since in the working dog world the FCI is the highest common denominator, USCA would still be on the outside looking in as far as FCI affairs went. In particular, the FCI IPO championship was emerging as by far the most comprehensive and prestigious event in the working dog world, and American trainers had an increasing desire to compete.

⁴ There have come to be a number of these peculiar and irregular situations: Belgium, Ireland and other nations also have two WUSV member organizations, and the British have three.

Thus in order to become a full-fledged player on the European working dog scene it would be necessary for USCA to, somehow, gain access to FCI activities, directly or indirectly. Which of course was a primary reason for Paul Maloy's interest in the AWDF in the later 1980s. But direct USCA affiliation was never in the cards, for the one thing nobody in Europe is ever going to do is challenge the ultimate AKC control over American canine affairs. No matter how crass and commercial the AKC may be, most Americans continue to perceive AKC registration eligibility as the prerequisite to legitimacy. The SV as a standalone entity might be willing to go against the AKC, because the attraction of the control and registration money is enormous. But they are afraid, with very good reason, of FCI reprimand, that is that the FCI would expel the SV or the VDH (the German AKC equivalent), resulting in a second German Shepherd club in Germany, one with FCI affiliation.

Although they were very slow to comprehend it, for the GSDCA all of this ultimately turned into their worst nightmare, for the German dominated WDA conformation shows – and the confirmation events forced on USCA by the SV – put the dagger in the heart of their AKC show lines, regional clubs and breeding tradition. Thus in recent years the GSDCA has become smaller, older and much less influential as conformation events run by USCA and the WDA, under heavy SV (German) influence and generally using SV judges, became much more popular, especially among younger enthusiasts. The GSDCA regional clubs especially have faltered and their shows have withered, become fewer and much smaller.

This German Shepherd family quarrel extends much further, for it is a serious impediment to the emergence of an overall self-sustaining and independent police dog breeding and training community in America, since the first requirement would be a clear leadership structure which could deal with government entities across the board, as for instance exists in the in the Netherlands where the KNPV has very close cooperation and formal ties with the amateur training community.

In recognizing and encouraging USCA the SV created a dilemma, for they came to have two children in America, USCA and the GSDCA-WDA, where in principle ultimately only one could become blessed and the other thus implicitly declared a bastard and cut off to die. Forty years later this is still playing out; being cut off to die has turned out to be a long, drawn out and ugly process. Currently USCA and the GSDCA-WDA are in direct conflict: both running conformation shows, both conducting IPO trials, both seeking to place members on European competition teams, both seeking to outdo each other in groveling for SV favor. As a consequence, Schutzhund/IPO in America is increasingly stagnant and elitist: ever more out of reach financially for the ordinary working class person, especially the younger people, ever more irrelevant to on the streets police dog service, less and less an influential factor on the national working dog scene.

[Angel's Lair All Breed](#)

[Angel's Lair Schutzhund](#)

[Police Dog Book](#)