

# Dear Readers,



Auf dem Titelbild zu sehen ist diesmal:  
„Rowdy vom Traisental“  
Fotograf/Inhaber: Melissa Kroschinski

In March 2025, the tradition of German working dogs was officially recognised as intangible cultural heritage in the Federal Register of the German UNESCO Commission. This recognition honours the decades-long tradition of training dogs for search and rescue operations, protection duties, and to assist people in their daily lives – such as the herding working dog. The tradition encompasses a partnership between humans and dogs, training that respects animal welfare, and the preservation of genetic working traits. It means a wide range of opportunities for working dog training, provided they are actually taken up, and this goes beyond merely hoping for the legalisation of a ‘mainstream’ approach.

Intangible cultural heritage refers to cultural values without physical substance and revolves around the principles of ‘knowledge, skills and transmission’, across several generations. The oldest form of cultural heritage in our club is undoubtedly herding, which in 2026 will celebrate 125 years of tradition. But what significance does the training of rescue dogs hold in our association’s tradition? In 1885, eight ranger and rifle battalions of the Prussian Army had ‘war dogs’ for reconnaissance and security duties. Trainers were also permitted to use eager-to-learn to search for missing persons. The association played a key role in the initial training of dogs for medical rescue services between 1893 and 1946, paving the way for modern rescue dog operations. This represents a significant chapter in the cultural heritage of rescue dog work and for dogs engaged in humanitarian missions. The training aimed to make dogs reliable helpers who could carry out commands in extreme conditions, such as noise and gunfire. Historically, this training was achieved through conditioning (reward/punishment) and utilising natural motives for movement. Specific exercises were carried out to accustom the dogs to gunfire and explosions. Training covered basic obedience and following commands, including without direct visual contact, as well as detecting wounded persons on the battlefield. Contrary to what one might assume, the medical dog service did not arise from an initiative by the military leadership. The main reason for engaging in the training of medical dogs was the horrendous number of missing personnel. The particular focus was on those who were so severely wounded that they could no longer help themselves and were therefore dependent on the assistance of others. In the years that followed, training manuals were written to guarantee that training was as standardised as possible. In 1892, Jean Bungartz published *Der Kriegshund und seine Dressur* (The War Dog and Its Training); in 1894, Ernst von Otto-Kreckwitz published *Der Kriegshund, dessen Dressur und Verwendung* (The War Dog, Its Training and Use). The latter reformed the entire breeding and show system, was an active breeder himself and was regarded as Germany’s most outstanding cynologist. In 1916, the War Ministry finally issued standardised training guidelines for war and medical dogs, but delegated their training to ‘voluntary medical dog handlers’. These handlers were not part of the ‘standing army’, but rather a voluntary militia, although this term was not used in the Prussian army. The First German Police Dog Association in Hamburg, from which the DVG later emerged, and the Verein Deutscher Schäferhunde in Munich signalled their willingness to cooperate. On 21 August 1914, the War Ministry ordered the first recruitment of medical dog handlers. By April 1915, 1,698 search dog teams were already in action. By the end of 1916, the association had provided the army administration with around 2,600 trained handlers and 3,200 trained dogs. For more than four years, it ensured the army was supplied with dogs and qualified handlers. The East and West Medical Dog Squadrons were historic units of the medical dog service in Germany. They were formed in September 1916 and disbanded in February 1918. The unit operated as part of the German military’s medical units, often alongside medical convoys. Due to the incomplete nature of the records, it was impossible to determine the exact total number of medical dogs deployed during the war, not to speak of the post-war period. By the time of the armistice on 11 November 1918, it is thought that around 6,000 dogs, predominantly German Shepherds, were in service. After the war, the dogs were returned to the association to be retrained for other roles such as guide dogs for war veterans who had lost their sight. Overall, the use of service dogs received a wealth of new impetus from the First World War and grew to a scale that had never been imagined before. Odes were written in praise of the ‘faithful comrade, the dog’.

‘The soldier who, once out in the field and facing the enemy when all other means of communication had failed and destruction seemed inevitable, was saved by the keen senses and swift paws of the medical dog; the soldier who lay severely wounded after a fierce battle in a night of agonising dread and feverish delirium, hidden in a thicket where no stretcher-bearer could find him, and who was found and saved in his final agony by a medical dog – they know best how to appreciate the value of this four-legged helper, to whom we have rightly given the honorary title of Comrade Dog.’

In the years that followed, the association remained a reliable partner in the training of rescue dogs, embodying the principles of knowledge, skills and transmission.

Yours truly,