

## **AMERICA'S GOLDEN GUN DOG**-- Dr. Ivan S. Osborn ©1959

-- from the collection of Marion Coffman; transcribed by Diana L Boggs.

The Vizsla belongs in dogdom's aristocracy; he shows it in dignified bearing and proves it in recorded history. While the Vizsla is new to the Western World it is perhaps the oldest bred of the great European Vorstehund group of shorthaired pointing and retrieving dogs. The Vizsla achieved recognition as a breed centuries ago. However, the breed was never popularized in an American sense, but was rather restricted to the nobility. There is a long though unheralded history behind this unusual breed. - Primitive carvings in stone in the Carpathian regions - estimated 1,000 years old - show the Magyar hunter, his falcon and his Vizsla.

The Magyar Vizslas (Hungarian Pointers) honor their nomadic masters who roamed the Carpathian plains and valleys ten centuries ago. Herdsmen and hunters, these early Hungarians began the development of companion-hunting dogs to find, point, and retrieve native game, and to tract (sic) wounded large game. Successive generations continued the development of the breed and by the Thirteenth Century the beautiful golden Vizsla was a distinct breed, recognized and prized as a companion-field dog.

The word Vizsla, according to the Hungarian Etymological dictionary by G. Bordi, is documented first in the writings in the year 1350 as the name of a village on the Danube indicating that Vizslas may have been found in its environment. With the meaning "dog" it is documented in the Berstence Glossary compiled toward the end of the 14th Century. It is supposed to have come from the oldest layer of the Hungarian language, from a root—Vis-- which means "to search."

Credit for revealing the Vizsla's claim to ancient and honorable lineage is due to the former Secretary of the Hungarian Kennel Club, who may well be one of the last living experts on the breed, and fortunately is now in this country. Prior to the occupation of Hungary by the Russians during World War II, the Hungarian Kennel Club began a search of family records and heirlooms for documentary proof on the history of the Vizsla. A priceless collection of evidence was compiled. Private documents, drawings, paintings, and sculpture confirmed the Vizsla's existence in the 10th Century. Its history throughout the Middle Ages is confirmed in letters written in the 15th and 16th Centuries now in the National Archives in Hungary.

The Vienna Chronicle, a manuscript of the early Hungarian codes and laws dating from the time of King Lajos (Louis) the Great (1342-1382) contains a chapter about the falconry of the nobility with a picture of the Vizsla. Hungarian historians mention the favorite Vizslas of their heroes. Documents of the Turk occupations of Hungary (1526-1686) deal with the Vizsla breed chiefly in the correspondence between the Danubian provinces and the court of the Sultan of Istanbul.

The breed existed beyond question of doubt in the 1200's as the "Yellow Pointer." As the breed became progressively more popular, "Hungarian Pointer" gradually replaced the term "Yellow Pointer." Throughout the 100 years of Turkish Occupation, the now famous all-purpose dog frequently was mentioned in correspondences of the era. By the 16th Century we find "Vizsla generally accepted and used as the breed name.

One Janos Gyulai writes in Latin, in 1563, to Kristof Batthyani; "We know that your Honor possesses smaller sized hawks. Don't leave us without one or two of them. And do send us please a bird-chasing Vizsla too. (Sed et canem odoranium vulgo fyrejre valo Vizslath nobis dare velli)."

Mihaly Komlossy writes his brother, Tamas, on August 15, 1515: "...besides, my beloved brother, I ask you for a good Vizsle (sic), fit for birds. And let the squire know that Janos Koesis is in the know about the falcons because he worked with the falconer of Kristof Krassy and had to handle them." (Lampeath, Old Hungarian Letters 202).

Early in the 18th Century, Zolton Hamyay (landowner of the county Gomor) and Istvan Barczy de Barczihaza (landowner and Cabinet Councilor) established purebred records in the form of a studbook, and the now famous "Golden Vizsla" was documented as "Magyar Vizsla."

The golden Vizsla was the favorite companion dog of the early barons and warlords and, with the evolution of the nobility and large landowners, the breed was preserved in its purity through the centuries. There is little doubt that its ancestors were the hunting dogs of the various Asiatic tribes that invaded the lands of Central Europe until the 10th Century. The Vizsla presents several specific breed-marks, apart from the characteristic rusty-gold coat, that have never been found in any other variety of pointer. The Vizsla was an established and recorded breed at least 300 years before the Nobles of the Courts of Weimar set out to develop the Weimaraner around the year 1810, or before the first English Pointers were introduced into the Hungarian Kingdom in the year 1880.

Throughout the ages the Vizsla has been known as a "Gift of Kings" and breedings were restricted to the Nobility of the Greater Hungarian Kingdom, which covered Hungary and Czechoslovakia prior to World War I. To receive a "Royal Golden Vizsla" was an honor bestowed to only a very select few, such as the Queens of Italy and Spain, and Princess Iolanda di Savia, daughter of the King of Italy. The Vizsla bears the official title of the "National Pointer of Hungary" and the breed is especially protected by the Magyar Ebtenycstok Orsagos Egyesulete, whose purpose is to maintain the high standards of the breed.

The Vizsla is a rather privileged canine and holds a very high place in Hungarian sporting circles and is not expected to sleep outside at the finish of its day of work. The Vizsla always lived with the family, and was as much a part of the family as the children. It has been said that the Vizsla must live

with the family if the family is to benefit (deserve) the loyalty and affection the Vizsla has to bestow. This breed has an exceptionally good disposition, is very affectionate, and instinctively fond of children. They are an apartment-sized family hunting dog.

The Vizsla is striking in appearance and never fails to attract attention. They have a very beautiful and distinctive shorthaired rusty-gold coat as well as a dignified and aristocratic bearing which sets them apart. They present the picture of versatile aristocrat, well balanced and with a look of intelligence and animation; a dog of great driving power, stamina, rugged constitution, in which the desire to hunt and the well-defined pointing and retrieving instincts are deeply ingrained. They have extremely high intelligence potentials and are exceedingly tractable and willing to obey whenever they understand. They have a rare adaptability to new conditions.

The Vizsla is a robust animal of considerate skill at its work, a shade taller and some pounds heavier than the English Pointer, and has a dominant natural instinct to point and retrieve. They are medium-sized, males generally weigh from 45 to 57 pounds; females about 10 pounds less. Height at the withers is generally from 19 ½ to 23 inches. The head is fine featured and aristocratic. The color of the iris of the eye should correspond to the lighter or darker hue of the coat. The ears are carried pendant, wide at the base and rather low set. Their tails are generally docked to about 6 inches giving the animal a unique appearance and at the same time avoiding the danger of having their flags whipped raw in heavy cover. Legs are straight, slender but well muscled. The feet are cat-like rather than hare footed. The carriage is deliberate. In action the Vizsla is extremely fast, yet its movement is so smooth and graceful as to appear effortless.

Through centuries of careful selective breeding, the patient and thorough Hungarian breeders developed a dog of great versatility. He is able and willing to track down game with the gameness and keen nose of the bloodhound; to point instinctively his feathered game with the sure location and staunchness of the Pointer and Setter; and in addition, with the strength and fortitude to brave rough and icy water in retrieving waterfowl. The Vizsla possesses all three traits.

They are dogs of unusual stamina and courage, no matter under what conditions they are called upon to hunt. They have been used to hunt partridge, pheasant, ducks, geese, rabbits, wolf, bear, deer, and boar. Their nature is to work the ground carefully and pick up with their keen nose, the faintest scent, working it out to a contact with game. Their superb nose proves ideal for man trailing.

The Vizsla is trained to search diligently rather than to range too quickly, to seek, track, point, and retrieve, thus serving a multiple purpose. The robust Vizsla is commonly used for retrieving the huge 10 pound European hares as found on the edge of the Hungarian puszta. He is a natural retriever and is equally at home on land or water.

On upland game the Vizsla really comes into his own and combines the duties of the pointer and retriever. He is very fast, extremely birdy, has an exceptionally good nose, a finely discriminating bird sense and points by instinct. He possesses an ideal "soft mouth" that does not mar the game in any respect.

John Fogarassy-Wallner (famed Hungarian born artist) states as follows: "They had to take every hardship a human being could take; they had to stand the heat of our August sun; sit with us in a goose pit; swim icy waters after ducks; chase down wounded jack rabbits and retrieve them from half a mile away at times. Be absolutely obedient, and serve just one Master, so far as hunting was concerned. They were members of the family and we loved them but they had to have good manners and they had to behave".

Comparisons are said to be rather "nefarious." However, to properly classify this breed, it probably is essential to quote from Continental descriptions which compare the Vizsla with other pointing breeds. A European source states that the German Shorthair, English and Vizsla pointers have excellent noses. The English pointer is extremely fast, the German the slowest and the Vizsla swift and not as wide-ranging as the English, but persistent on trail. The English is a poorer retriever while the German and Vizsla are excellent retrievers and the Vizsla more gentle mouthed. The Europeans also compare the Vizsla with the Weimaraner and state the Vizsla pointer is smaller, much faster, has more pointing instinct, is a more gentle mouthed retriever and is of a distinguished color more suitable for use in the field.

To summarize, it appears that the Vizsla occupies a position between the extremely fast English pointer and the slower German shorthair; combining some of the known excellencies of both breeds together with a very distinctive color, type and dignified aristocratic bearing which sets him apart. The finely discriminating bird sense is deeply ingrained, in that the Vizsla's home country is and has been for centuries, the low lying Danube Valley and broad Hungarian plain where the grey partridge thrive on the grain bin of Europe. The Vizsla breed has survived the Turkish Occupation, the Hungarian Civil Wars, World Wars I and II, and the Russian Occupation. The spread of the Vizsla to other parts of the world had changed little from the Middle Ages until 1945. As late as World War II the Vizsla enjoyed protection in selective breeding, as only the remnants of the aristocracy and the large estate owners were permitted by custom to breed.

At the end of World War I, the breed was almost extinct, but was preserved by such men as Dr. Polgar Koloman and Dr. Kubes of Southern Czechoslovakia, Dr. Ferenc Korbas, Count Esterhazy and the large landowners of eastern Hungary. Under the leadership of Dr. Koloman, careful selection re-established the breed between World Wars, when, once again, the Vizsla was threatened with extinction.

Throughout the ages the expert breed masters were far more interested in fieldwork than show types. Hunting abilities were always paramount.

Breedings were carefully considered to produce only the best puppies and never on a commercial scale. There were no so-called "puppy factories." Only the best pups were saved from a litter and those that were undesirable were destroyed.

The Vizsla was so closely held by the nobility of Czech and Hungary that it wasn't until the Russians came that the specimens were taken out of the country. When the Russians came in 1945 the nobility feared for their lives and made an attempt to escape from the country. Many were put into prison but others did escape, a few taking their favorite Vizsla as a most cherished possession. The first Vizsla in America came with her master, the former leader of the Hungarian Democratic Party.

In searching through the various countries bordering the iron-curtain we were able to find a handful of Hungarian emigrants who had brought their Vizsla with them. Such emigrants were found in Austria, Germany, Yugoslavia and Italy. However, these people left in such haste that they neglected to bring their official pedigrees and registration papers with them. Thus the offspring of these fringe Vizslas were without a complete and official pedigree.

In most instances they were forced to breed dogs of practically no pedigree. In some instances only the common "call names" were listed and their breedings were forced to take place without their once famous studbook. Incomplete pedigreed pups of this undetermined ancestry can now be found in certain pocket areas where these refugees settled in countries bordering the iron curtain. Marshal Tito is one of the Yugoslavian enthusiasts of this breeding.

In the fall of 1951 we located some of the refugee breeding in Austria and made arrangements to import a pair of pups. These Austrian Strain bore the names of "Hess von Schloss Loosdorf" and "Marika Drvavolgy." They were the direct descendants of "Betyar" and "Panni". However, their pedigrees were only two generations and thus they could not be registered in this country. Registration of a dog refers to the recording of its ancestors in a studbook. "Betyar" and "Panni" have established the Austrian Strain since the War and several of their descendants have been imported into the United States. This lack of complete pedigree with the Austria Strain was an unfortunate circumstance as they were not eligible for registration.

It was our earnest desire to obtain complete pedigreed breeding specimens eligible for registration in this country. Upon contacting a colleague at a European College of Veterinary Medicine, we were informed that it was impossible now to find complete pedigree specimens even in iron curtain Hungary, as the records of registration of the Hungarian OVC had been destroyed in the war. They further advised that there was just one studbook in the world that now registered complete pedigreed Vizslas. This studbook was the Czech SPKP, however, breeding specimens would be extremely difficult to obtain as they would have to come from a small section, deep

behind the iron curtain, in Southern Czechoslovakia on the north Hungarian border. These Vizslas, as registered with the SPKP, were considered to have considerable breeding advantages in that their specific strains were line-bred on a basis of championship field stock. Certain strains were also said to be entirely free of any hereditary faults.

My colleague immediately made contact with a refugee Veterinarian, an ex-count refugee and former high official of the SPKP Stud Book and about a year later, in the spring of 1953, they were able to bring out my first complete five-generation stud. This first specimen came from 700 km (434 miles) behind the iron curtain, directly from the Pusta. He was especially line-bred on the basis of their best Field Champion bloodlines. His pedigree bore the names of 11 ancestors with the rating of Champion. Among them were Champion Vegvari Betyar, Champion Mira, Champion Ripp, Champion Szirka, and one of the greatest of all time, Champion Leanyvari Barat, his grandsire. This import was classified as very, very sharp and with him were orders that his bold disposition, raggedness and hunting instinct were to be preserved at all costs.

By working with the Veterinary College, we have since been able to import over forty other Vizslas from behind the iron curtain, all of complete pedigree and of the absolute very best championship breeding of their motherland. This is the first recorded large scale Vizsla importation from their native land behind the iron curtain. One of these specimens was import Rex-Selle "S.G." top winner of the European International Vizsla Exhibition, and at this writing the only rated import Vizsla in the country.

This import breeding stock was registered with the original listing by the American Field Dog Stud Book. A total of 36 specimens were registered for the entire country, 18 domestic bred pups and 18 import and FBAB (Foreign Bred American Born). We registered 14 of the 18 in the import and FBAB group, including 4 out of the 5 original import brood bitches.

Perhaps one of the greatest advantage of these genuine iron curtain strains is not only the champion background or the complete six-generation pedigree but the fact that we have been furnished with a complete breeding and evaluation record on the ancestors of each animal. This will perhaps not interest the novice, but the initiated or experienced will be able to read the pedigree and thus be able to concentrate certain valuable and desirable points of an ancestor or ancestors.

Under the guidance of these iron curtain Vizsla breeding experts, the first known litter of complete-pedigreed Vizslas to be bred outside of the iron curtain, was born here in Minnesota in the first quarter of 1954. This was truly a championship litter as the pedigrees bore the names of 37 ancestors with the rating of Field Champion. There no doubt would have been many more had not the political situation of the iron curtain prevented the formation of new champions since the War.

The Vizsla is just now getting a start in this country and it is slated to be a mighty rare specimen for a good many years to come. They are extremely rare now, even behind the iron curtain where a Vizsla house dog is taxed at the rate of 840 forints (\$70.56) per year. The same law restricts general dog breeding to pedigreed stock only and stipulates that all mongrel males over one year must be sterilized. It is estimated that today there are less than 50 different Vizsla bloodlines behind the iron curtain. Less than 100 Vizslas per year are registered with the official stud book of the SPKP.

The records speak for themselves on the ability of our stock in field trial competition with established breeds. Just about all of the famous winning Vizsla bloodlines in the country stem from importations by this kennel. They have won at so many trials that we have actually lost count of the wins. At this writing, the three top winning Vizslas in this country were either imported or raised by this kennel. The greatest winning Vizsla in the country was bred by this kennel and his record 19 wins with outstanding pointers, and setters, weimars and shorthairs stands alone by itself. At Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, he came in "runner-up" over 18 pointers and 3 setters, nine of which were field champions with a total of 146 wins or places. In 1957 he came in "runner-up" at the mixed breed Champaign Shooting Dog Classic and in 1958 he came in "first place" winning over 38 representatives of just about all going breeds. The same dog came in "runner-up" in the "Amateur All Age" stake at Charleston in open competition with 18 pointers. A sister to the same dog placed in the derby of the official all-breeds "Canadian Saskatoon Chicken Trial" and a few months later won first on the class at the International Dog Show in Chicago. The sire of the above two specimens won the Silver Trophy at the European International and is America's only rated import. He has sired more field trial winners than any other stud outside of the iron curtain. Another of our studs has a record of 13 wins including 4 first place wins at the National. His record stands alone by itself and may never be equaled.

We believe our imports represent the outstanding foundation stock outside of the iron curtain today. We are America's largest importer of the Vizsla and to date we have imported more Vizslas than all other importers combined. As yet, only one other importer, a Chicago individual, has been able to penetrate behind the iron curtain to obtain their genuine registered stock. Our breeding stock has been hand chosen from a field of over 40 genuine iron curtain imports and from the absolute very cream of their offspring of over 50 litters.

The genuine iron curtain registered bloodlines of Olca, Selle, Mavidio, Kubis, Hans, Povazia, Karpat, and Zabokreký all stem from original importations by this kennel. We have introduced these bloodlines to the American Sportsman and we believe they will leave a mark on the breed for good many generations to come.

*The following annotated notes are provided by Diana L Boggs.*

*One must be careful going through old Hungarian literature and giving credence to the Hungarian Vizsla being the "Vizsla" mentioned. Inside Hungary the word Vizsla is used interchangeably with the word "Pointer." In the USA a GSP is a German Smooth Pointer, in Hungary the phrase GSP means "German Vizsla." Unless literature notes the word "Magyar" or derivatives of "sarga", the writer might not mean the Hungarian Vizsla.*

*The Vizsla is not a "breed" until it became self-colored. That most likely did not happen until Vizslas were crossbred with Turkish hounds. Turkish occupation lasted until 1675. It is said the Hungarians were so incensed with the Turks for 150 years of occupation and wanted to create a hunting breed unlike any other that the Vizsla became self-colored. War supposedly paved the path for the Magyar Vizsla, however after much research I consider the breed was created and re-created because of nationalism.*

*That the town of "Vizsla" was created because of a hunting breed is not likely. Towns were often named for people or in this case "people who seek." According to Hungarians who have hunted near the village of Vizsla, the terrain is too harsh and filled with briars that do not favor smooth or rough coated dogs.*

*Yellow is perhaps the most misused quality about the Vizsla in the USA, as well as in its home of Hungary. The Hungarian Vizsla is supposed to be a yellow (bright gold with rustic highlights on hair shaft). It is truly ironic that in the USA and Hungary the preferred color upon initial registration with the two respective breed Standards as preferring rust. In the USA, "darker shades preferred existed for 20 years before it was changed. Hungary was not to know their "rust" mistake until a Hungarian lady translated the original Magyar Standard which clearly identifies "yellow" not rust not the preferred color. It appears promising that Hungary will change that part of their breed Standard to the original "yellow." We saw how difficult it was living with a not ideal breed color for 20 years in the USA, just imagine changing the Hungarian Standard for those who have bred for rust...over fifty years. Irony has been a recurring thread for the Vizsla decade after decade, century after century.*

*Osborn mentions Zolton Hamvay (landowner of the county Gomor) and Istvan Barczy de Barczihaza (landowner and Cabinet Councilor) as possessing the studbooks. The Magyar Vizsla in 1920 only had 6 to 12 "purebred" Vizslas. Purebred in Hungary is defined as verifiable ancestors. The primary reason that the re-creation was needed was from the crossbreeding both noblemen did by crossbreeding the Vizsla with the English Pointer (introduced by Hamvay in 1880 and Barczihaza to the Irish Setter) were these two fellows. It is assured that these gentlemen could document past ancestors of their dogs and some of their dogs did receive an "A" pedigree. Again...irony wielded a rustic plague.*

*Osborn mentions docking. Tail docking began after 1920 to prevent tail injuries, another decision of the Orszagos Vizsla Club (all-breed pointing breed club).*

*Dewclaws aren't mentioned by Osborn. Maybe because he understood the Hungarian definition of dewclaws. In Hungary dewclaws are only on the rear legs. They are indication of crossbreeding. The front 5<sup>th</sup> digit (what the USA calls dewclaws) was never removed.*

*Rakk Selle, son of Rex Selle (50s foundation import), was the mentioned famous field trial dog. There were two kinds of imports, those with foreign blood born outside the USA and those with foreign blood born inside the USA. Rakk Selle is one of the latter & is possibly of greater importance to Osborn becoming a "master breeder" and what direction that USA breeding would likely take.*

*The USA couple that Osborn mentions as being behind the iron curtain was Charles & Millicent Hunt. (Joan Hunt wedded Charles after Millicent died). At that time, the Hunts imported Morho z Povazia and Asta z Povazia.*