

MESSENGER DOG REGULATIONS



Background Information
General Regulations
Performance Requirements

**American Messenger
Dog Association®**

Effective March 1, 2019

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CHAPTER 1 ABOUT MESSENGER DOGS

Throughout human history, dogs have been by our sides and in our hearts, serving as both companion and help mate. They have tended our flocks and protected our homes, kept vermin at bay, and helped us hunt and procure food for our families. They have carried milk and medicine (and contraband), and have found those who are lost or in need of rescue on sea and on land. And they have played a pivotal role as messengers during times of war (as well as peace), allowing us to communicate with each other in an era before cell phones and personal devices.

Section 1. Messenger Dogs in World War I

In the January 1, 1930 edition of the *American Kennel Club Gazette*, author John Meteer told the story of Taki, the first dog believed to have carried a dispatch under fire during World War I (WWI).

Taki was one of 25 Belgian Sheepdogs trained as messenger dogs by the French Army. Carrying a “tiny document in code,” Taki was dispatched by troops trapped by the approaching German army and unable to get word to the front lines by telegraph or telephone. Making her way through treacherous terrain under heavy fire, she successfully reached the trenches and delivered her message, thereby saving the men in her unit.

Taki continued to faithfully serve Allied troops for four more years until Armistice Day. In 1918, she received an honorable discharge from the King of Belgium and eventually retired to live out her days in Long Beach, California.



Messenger dog and handler in France during World War I.

(Source: National Library of Scotland)



Both purebred and mixed breed dogs served as messenger dogs during WWI. Corporal James Coull is shown here with (left to right): Nell, a Setter cross; Trick, a farm Collie; and Buller, an Airedale.

All three dogs served with the 2nd, 4th, and 5th Australian Divisions, as well as with Divisions of the British 8th Corps. Military records indicate that Trick's service was particularly meritorious.

(Source: Australian War Memorial Collection)



British messenger dogs and their handler in France during WWI.
(Source: National Library of Scotland)



Journalists visiting a messenger dog depot on the British Western Front in France. These dogs were trained in England, relocated to the main kennel in Etaples, France, and then sent to sectional kennels behind the front lines. (Source: National Library of Scotland)

Section 2. U.S. Messenger Dogs in World War II

Although Allied forces had successfully used messenger dogs during WWI, it was not until World War II that the United States began to utilize dogs in earnest for military duties. In January of 1942, immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor, a dedicated group of dog breeders, fanciers, and professional handlers established Dogs for Defense, Inc. With the support and endorsement of the American Kennel Club, this new organization was able to provide all branches of the armed services with dogs and training funds.

The first five regional training centers were located in Virginia, Nebraska, Montana, California, and Mississippi. Through effective advertising across the country, Dogs for Defense was able to procure more than 20,000 dogs. Some came from breeders, some from shelters, and some were volunteered by their owners. Most of the 10,425 dogs who graduated from their military training classes were employed as sentries or scouts rather than as messengers. This was due in part to technological advancements in the area of telecommunication, and in part to the fact that messenger work required a unique combination of abilities and skills that few dogs possessed:

Loyalty was the quality most desired in the messenger dog since he was motivated by the desire to please two masters between whom he carried messages. He also had to possess great speed, stamina, strength, endurance, ability to swim and superior powers of scenting and hearing. (Waller, 1958)

Not surprisingly, such dogs required specialized training and were in scarce supply. In fact, only 151 messenger dogs served during WWII. Their service was particularly invaluable in the South Pacific, with several receiving special recognition for their outstanding work. These included:

- *Teddy* (T115, Marine Raider Regiment of the Sixth Army), who was used continuously for messenger work over a four month period and never failed to complete a mission;
- *Sandy* (B11, Cape Gloucester Campaign), who – when walkie talkies failed and troops were surrounded by enemy forces – traveled through tall grass, swam a river, and climbed a barbed wire fence under heavy mortar and tank fire to deliver a message that allowed his handler to successfully redirect artillery fire and advance on enemy combatants; and
- *Buster* (A684, “F” Company 155th Infantry Regiment), who carried two messages under massive machine gun and mortar fire that saved the lives of an entire patrol of 17 men.



1944: Message delivered - A handler of the Marine War Dog contingent participating in the Peleliu action reads a note just delivered by his canine messenger.

(Source: Photograph Collection (COLL/3948), Marine Corps Archives & Special Collections; USMC Archives from Quantico, USA [CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)])

Section 3. Messenger Dogs Today

Today, dogs are no longer used as military messengers. However, their unique abilities, innate intelligence, and enduring loyalty continue to make them invaluable in service, military, and police work.

In addition, canine performance sports such as agility, obedience, rally, scent work, carting/drafting, and barn hunt (among others) provide venues for dogs and handlers to build and demonstrate skill and teamwork.

Of all the contributions dogs have made and continue to make to our lives, perhaps their greatest is the companionship they so willingly provide.



Playmates

(Source: James Lyle © 2009)

CHAPTER 2

THE GOALS OF THE MESSENGER DOG PROGRAM

The American Messenger Dog Association (AMDA) is proud to honor the service of these brave, faithful messenger dogs, many of whom gave their lives in carrying out their invaluable duties.

The goals of the AMDA Messenger Dog titling program are threefold: (1) to recognize the contributions that military messenger dogs made during WWI and WWII; (2) to highlight the role that teamwork between dog and handler(s) plays in successful messenger work; and (3) to allow current generations of dogs and their handlers to learn and to demonstrate these historically valuable skills.

We hope that participating in this program allows you and your dog to connect on a personal level with one incredible part of our shared history.



Santa Rita, Guam (Oct. 27, 2006): Petty Officer 2nd Class Blake Soller, a Military Working Dog (MWD) handler, pets the head of his MWD Rico at the War Dog Cemetery located on Naval Base Guam.

(Source: U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd class John F. Looney [Public Domain])

CHAPTER 3

GENERAL REGULATIONS

Messenger Dog is a sport designed to acknowledge and honor an important part of our shared history with working dogs. As such, it is essential that handlers and judges act with integrity and in a way that reflects credit on the sport. At all times, handlers and judges are expected to demonstrate the highest standards of good sportsmanship.

Judges, remember that exhibitors often are nervous, and a friendly, pleasant demeanor from you can help to instill confidence and to calm “ring nerves” or performance anxiety.

Handlers, remember that dogs are your companions first and foremost, and they have good and not-so-good performance days just as people do. Please remember to be kind and courteous to your dog as well as to your fellow exhibitors.

Section 1. Eligibility

Messenger Dog is an inclusive sport. Purebred and mixed breed dogs are eligible to participate. Blind, deaf, and differently abled dogs (including amputees and/or dogs who use mobility carts) are encouraged to participate. Remember that messenger dogs frequently had to work under conditions in which hearing and seeing were difficult; they had to rely on their handler’s signals, their own sense of smell and direction, their previous training, and their courage. Any dog able to move with or without mechanical assistance and able to respond to the handler’s signals and/or commands may participate in the sport of Messenger Dog.

Bitches in season may participate in Messenger Dog tests; however, they must compete after all other teams have competed.

Section 2. Excusals

Messenger Dog is an active sport and the safety of dogs and handlers is of paramount importance. Dogs who are bandaged, appear hurt or unfit, or are limping or injured are ineligible to compete. If lameness or another injury occurs during competition, the dog must be excused and the team will not earn a qualifying score. It is the judge’s responsibility to immediately excuse a dog who appears hurt or unfit in any way.

Messenger Dog requires that the dog be under control at all times during the test. A dog who is out of control, unmanageable by one or both handlers, or who barks excessively must be excused and the team will not earn a qualifying score. A dog who is aggressive (e.g., growls, lunges) or who attempts to attack or does attack a person (including the handler[s]) or another dog must immediately be excused and will not earn a qualifying score.

All dogs must wear acceptable equipment (see Section 3 below). A dog without acceptable equipment is ineligible to compete and thus cannot earn a qualifying score; however, the judge may choose to score the team if suitable equipment can be promptly procured.

Messenger Dog is a sport that requires both teamwork and sportsmanship. Handlers are reminded to refrain from the use of excessively loud or harsh commands or signals. Such actions will be penalized and may result in an excusal at the judge's discretion. Handlers are not permitted to verbally or physically discipline or correct the dog. Handlers may not use electronic or prong collars or, in the interest of safety, martingale or slip collars. They may not use or have on their person any food, treats, or toys during the dog's performance. These actions will result in an immediate excusal and an automatic non-qualifying score.

In sum, the following situations result in ineligibility and/or excusal:

- Dog is bandaged, hurt, unfit, limping (lame), injured
- Dog is out of control, unmanageable, barking excessively
- Dog is aggressive or attempts to attack/attacks a person or other dog
- Dog is not wearing acceptable equipment (Note: may be corrected and allowed to compete)
- Handler uses excessively loud/harsh command or signal (penalty and may be excused)
- Handler verbally or physically disciplines dog
- Handler uses unacceptable equipment or has food, treat, or toys during testing

Section 3. Equipment

All dogs must perform wearing a flat buckle collar (small identification tags are permitted). No slip or martingale collars (and no electronic or prong collars) are allowed in the interests of safety, sportsmanship, and teamwork.

All dogs must begin and end the test on leash. This leash should be of appropriate material and size for the height and weight of the dog.

Dogs at the Novice, Advanced, and Excellent levels must deliver a message using one of three delivery methods: (1) by mouth, (2) by collar tube or pouch, or (3) by body pack.

Section 3a. Message Holders

Taki, the first official WWI messenger dog, delivered a coded message in a waterproof capsule that she carried in her mouth. Most messenger dogs, however, wore leather buckle collars with attached metal or leather tubes (see image). Today, many military, police, and other service dogs wear body packs (e.g., vests, daypacks, backpacks) when carrying out their duties. Any of these three forms of delivery

(mouth, collar, body pack) and message holder are acceptable for use in Messenger Dog tests.



In selecting a message holder, handlers should keep in mind the comfort of their dog, the level at which the team is training and performing, and the ease with which handlers can access the message.

The capsules, collar tubes, and other holders used by messenger dogs during earlier times are not readily available today. However, there are a number of inexpensive and lightweight substitutes that can be used in their place.

For mouth delivery, handlers might use small canvas tool or storage pouches, letter or passport holders, wallets, eyeglass cases, plastic containers or tubes, or other objects a dog can easily grasp, hold, and carry over distance.

For collar delivery, handlers might use dog “waste bag” holders (particularly those with easy-open tops), small coin purses or wallets, plastic film canisters, plastic tubing (with cap ends), or plastic test tube containers for spices/beads/etc. These items can be attached to the dog’s flat, buckle collar using a clip, tie, or lightweight carabiner.

For body pack delivery, any vest, daypack, or backpack that allows freedom of movement is acceptable. Many of these contain zippered pockets that can be used for message storage. If the body pack does not contain a suitable compartment, messages can be placed in a holder that is attached to the body pack.

Section 4. Scoring Guidelines

Each level is scored pass/fail. Participating teams are not evaluated against each other for placements. To pass, the team must receive a passing score on each component of the exercise and must not incur any of the automatic non-qualifying penalties listed in Section 2.

The handlers should be smooth and gentle in managing and dispatching the dog and

when receiving the message(s), and the dog should be under control. Although the performance is not timed, the dog should carry out the delivery briskly, willingly, and efficiently. A dog who wanders, does not go directly to the message recipient, or moves at an excessively slow pace must be significantly penalized (and, depending on severity, may receive a non-qualifying score).

Section 5. Judging Eligibility

In order to earn a title, teams must successfully pass the elements of each level twice under a qualified judge. With the exception of the Elite title, teams may pass (earn qualifying scores) under the same judge to earn their title.

Judges are expected to have good “dog sense,” a solid understanding of canine performance sports, and sound knowledge of the rules governing Messenger Dog. Any person who is licensed to judge any canine performance event (including Canine Good Citizen® tests) by any national dog sport organization (e.g., American Kennel Club®, United Kennel Club®, Australian Shepherd Club of America®, Do More With Your Dog!®, National Association of Canine Scent Work®, USDAA®) is eligible to judge Messenger Dog tests.

If an eligible judge is not available, two witnesses or one witness and a video submission to AMDA are acceptable. See title application form for submission criteria.

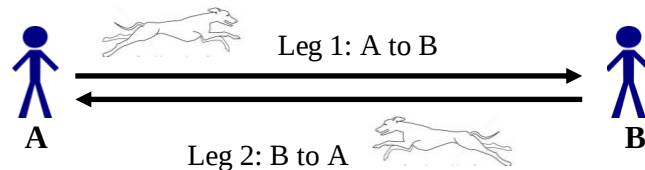
CHAPTER 4

HOW MESSENGER DOG “WORKS”

Messenger dogs were used to deliver important communications between groups (e.g., troops on the ground and command center). Thus, each messenger dog served two separate handlers – the sending handler (e.g., in command center) and the receiving handler (e.g., on the ground).

In order to maintain historical accuracy and allow the dog to demonstrate the ability to successfully deliver a message, *each competing team will consist of the dog and two separate handlers* (one who sends the dog with a message and one who receives the message from the dog).

A complete and successful message delivery consists of two “legs:” (1) Handler A sending the dog to Handler B, and (2) Handler B sending the dog back to Handler A.



Each titling level has specific distance and message delivery requirements (see Chapter 5).

CHAPTER 5

PERFORMANCE REQUIREMENTS AND TITLES

Messenger Dog has four levels of performance and corresponding title achievement, each distinguished by a successively more challenging set of skills. To earn a title at a given level, the team must earn a “passing” score on two separate occasions (these may be under the same judge and/or at the same venue).

Messenger Dog tests may be conducted in enclosed or open areas (e.g., ring, gated arena, fenced or open field). They may be conducted inside or outside. It is the judge’s responsibility to ensure that the testing conditions are safe and appropriate for the team’s performance level. This is particularly important for levels in which the dog travels greater distances and is out of sight of the handlers.

Section 1. General Requirements

At all levels, the message delivery exercise begins with the dog on leash and sitting, lying, or standing under control at Handler A’s side. When Handler B is in position, Handler A will place the message in the holder (depending on performance level) and remove the dog’s leash. S/he may lightly and gently hold the dog’s collar; however, the dog must remain under control.

The judge will ask Handler A, “Are you ready?” Upon receiving an affirmative reply, the judge will order Handler A to “Dispatch your dog.” Handler A will send the dog to Handler B using a command and/or signal. The dog must move briskly and directly to Handler B. This is a delivery; the dog must bring the message to within arm’s length of Handler B but need not sit or execute a “front” as in traditional obedience.

On arrival, Handler B will remove the message (depending on performance level) and verbally indicate “Message received.” S/he may praise the dog briefly. Handler B will then position the dog facing Handler A and will send the dog back, again using a command and/or signal. Note that the judge will not give another dispatch order.

When the dog returns to Handler A, s/he will verbally indicate to the judge, “Message received.” The judge will order, “Exercise finished; attach the leash and maintain control of your dog.” This completes the message delivery.

Handlers may send and receive the dog from a standing, bending, or kneeling position. Note that handlers may need to hold the collar or pack while inserting and removing messages; however, the collar or pack must remain on the dog at all times.

Section 2. Beginner Messenger Dog (BMD)

This is the introductory level of messenger dog performance. At this level, the dog travels from Handler A to Handler B (and back). The dog must wear a flat buckle collar (and may carry or wear a message holder) but no message is delivered at this

level. The dog may perform on or off leash. Handlers have the option of attaching a long line to the collar but should be vigilant about safety issues (e.g., if the test is conducted in tall grass, a dragging leash or long line may pose a safety risk).

Handlers are positioned directly across from and facing each other approximately 40 (and not more than 50) feet apart. Each handler may call or send the dog on each leg of the message delivery (e.g., Handler A may send and Handler B may then call the dog on the first leg). No more than two separate send/call attempts are allowed per handler per leg. One verbal word or phrase of encouragement while the dog is traveling to deliver the message is allowed from either handler on each leg (e.g., “Good dog!”).

Section 3. Novice Messenger Dog (NMD)

Dogs with the BMD title are eligible for this performance level. At this level, the dog delivers a message from Handler A to Handler B. The dog must wear a flat buckle collar. A suitable message holder is required (see Chapter 5, Section 3).

Before the exercise begins, Handler A will write a brief message and insert it into the holder for delivery to Handler B. When the dog arrives, Handler B will take the message out of the holder and then send the dog back to Handler A. If the dog has carried the message by mouth, Handler B will keep the holder. Handlers are responsible for notifying the judge that the message is ready for delivery (Handler A) and that it has been received (Handler B) prior to sending the dog.

Handlers are positioned directly across from and facing each other approximately 100 (and not more than 150) feet apart. Handlers will send the dog to each other but may not call the dog to them. No more than two separate send attempts (command and/or signal) are allowed per leg. One verbal word or phrase of encouragement while the dog is delivering the message is allowed per leg from the sending handler (e.g., “Good dog!”).

Section 4. Advanced Messenger Dog (AMD)

Dogs with the NMD title are eligible for this performance level. At this level, the dog delivers a separate message to and from each handler. The dog must wear a flat buckle collar. A suitable message holder is required (see Chapter 5, Section 3).

Before the exercise begins, both handlers must have a brief message ready to present to the judge for inspection. Once the handlers are in position, Handler A will insert Message A into the message holder and send the dog to Handler B. Handler B will take this message out, replace it with Message B, and then send the dog back to Handler A. Handlers are responsible for notifying the judge that the messages are ready for delivery and that they have been received.

Handlers are positioned directly across from and facing each other approximately 150

(and not more than 200) feet apart. Handlers will send the dog to each other but may not call the dog to them. No more than one send attempt (command and/or signal) is allowed. No additional commands or signals are allowed.

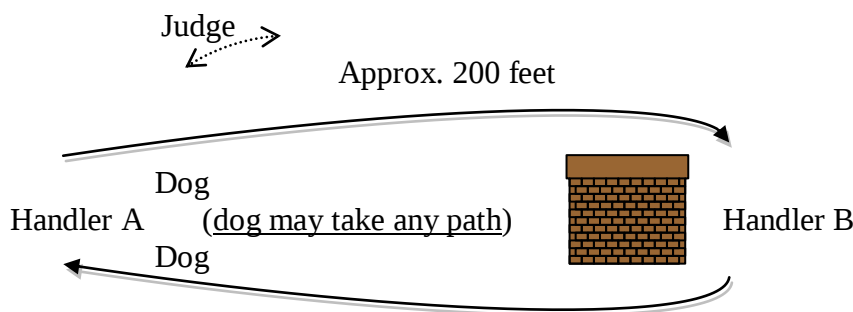
Section 5. Excellent Messenger Dog (EMD)

Dogs with the AMD title are eligible for this performance level. At this level, handlers are not in sight of each other and the dog must deliver a separate message to and from each handler. The dog must wear a flat buckle collar. A suitable message holder is required (see Chapter 5, Section 3).

Before the exercise begins, both handlers must have a brief message ready to present to the judge for inspection. Handler B will then leave and move to position out of sight. The dog may watch Handler B leave. Once both handlers are in position, Handler A will insert Message A into the holder for delivery to Handler B. When the dog arrives, Handler B will take this message out, replace it with Message B, and then send the dog back to Handler A.

Handlers are positioned approximately 200 (and not more than 250) feet apart and not in direct line of sight of each other. They may be separated by trees, buildings, walls, tents, hedges, solid fencing, etc. The distance from the barrier, object, or blind (e.g., building) to each handler need not be identical. Handlers will send the dog to each other but may not call the dog to them. The dog must respond promptly to the first delivery command and/or signal. No more than one delivery command and/or signal per leg is allowed and no additional commands or signals are allowed.

Judge's positioning. A good position for judging this performance level is to the side and between the two handlers, but not in the dog's direct path of travel. Some movement will be necessary in order to observe the directness of the dog's path as well as each message delivery (A to B, B to A). Consequently, it is important for judges to maintain adequate distance so as not to interfere with the dog's performance. It is equally important for handlers to expect and to train for some movement on the part of the judge.



Section 6. Elite Messenger Dog (MD-Elite)

Elite Messenger Dog (MD-Elite) is a title of distinction. On successfully earning five “passing” scores at the Excellent Messenger Dog level, dogs will achieve the designation Elite Messenger Dog. Teams must have earned passing scores under at least two different judges and in at least two different venues/locations to earn this distinguished recognition.

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

If you are interested in learning more about messenger dogs, as well as the ways in which dogs are entwined with our own human history, please consider the following resources.

Coren, S. (2002). *The Pawprints of History: Dogs and the Course of Human Events*. New York, NY: Free Press.

The Dogs of War: A Short History of Canines in Combat (November 8, 2012). Online at <https://militaryhistorynow.com/2012/11/08/the-dogs-of-war-a-short-history-of-canines-in-combat/>

Frankel, R. (2015). *War Dogs: Tales of Canine Heroism, History, and Love*. St. Martin's Griffin.

Lemish, M. G. (1996). *War Dogs: A History of Loyalty and Heroism*. Washington, DC: Brassey's.

Thurston, M. E. (1996). *The Lost History of the Canine Race: Our 15,000-Year Love Affair with Dogs*. New York, NY: Avon Books.

The United States War Dogs Association, Inc. (<https://www.uswardogs.org/>)

Waller, A. M. (1958). *Dogs and National Defense: Study on the History of War Dog Training and Utilization During and After World War II*. Department of the Army, Office of the Quartermaster. Online at <https://www.uswardogs.org/war-dog-history/world-war-2/>

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