

Another New-Comer

**Will our boys in the armed forces bring us new knowledge of the Rhodesian Ridgeback?
asks**

George L. Gilkey



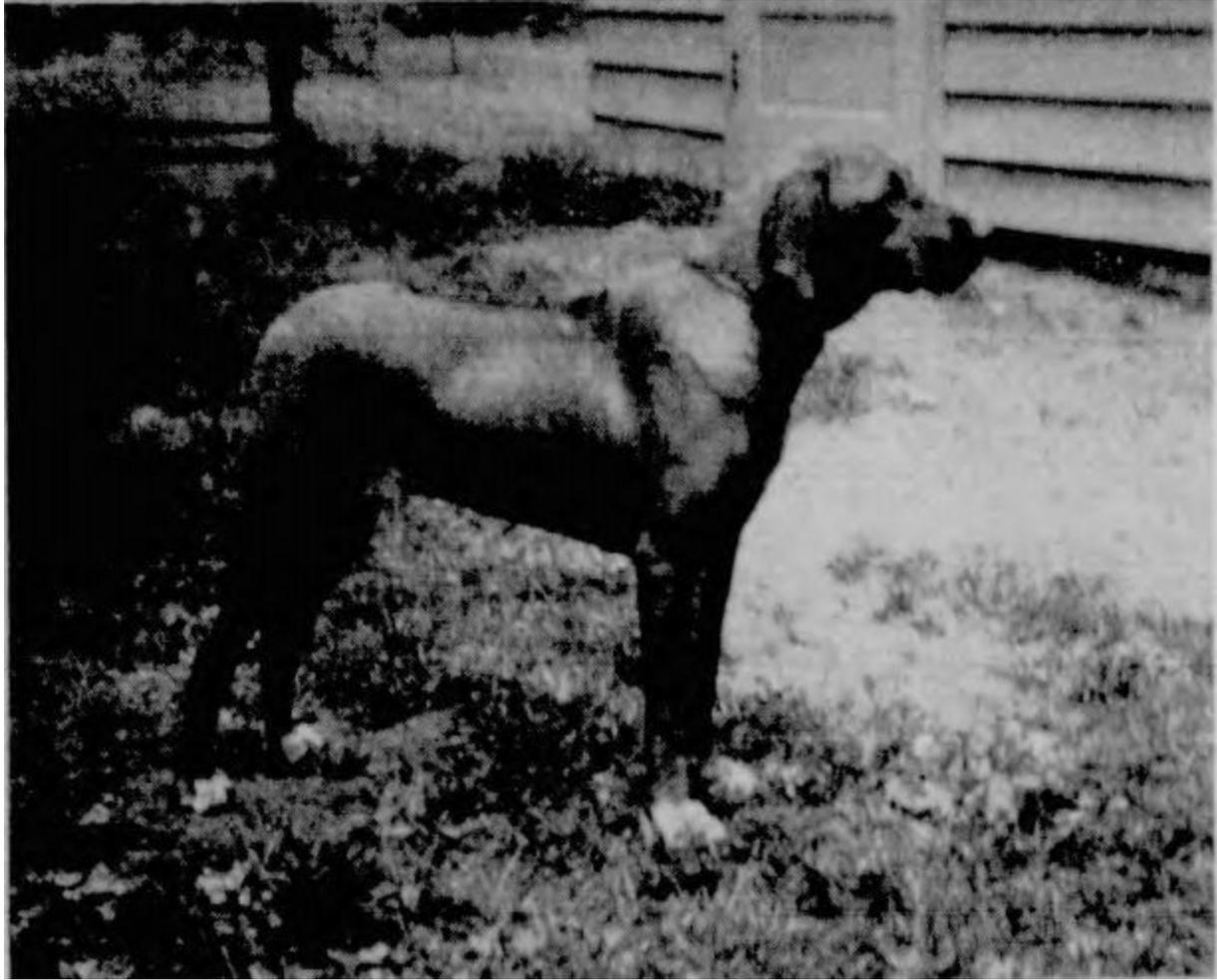
[image of Rhodesian Ridgeback sniffing the ground]

About 1000 B.C. Solomon wrote: "Of making many books there is no end," adding with his usual skill in following up with a "punch line," "and much study is a weariness of the flesh." The more we delve into canine history, the more we are bound to conclude that, even in that distant

day, the man who made the proverb famous might have substituted "breeds" for "books" without subtracting one iota from the truth of his statement. For, as all of us who are devoted to dogs know, the creation of new breeds seems to have begun soon after the creation of the world itself : and while "much study" of the process may not be, to some of us fanciers at least, "a weariness of the flesh," we have a notion the AKC finds the questions of their official recognition or rejection something of a headache.

Under the circumstances, it requires no crystal ball to justify the prediction that the finish of World War II will find an unusual number of "old, rare and curious" breeds landing on our shores. If the numerous dog fans in our far-flung fighting forces fail to bring back with them enough specimens of this kind to make the AKC's official headache even more severe than usual, we miss our guess. Which is why we are taking time by the foreface to discuss such a breed--one that, as it happens, is already here, even if in such small numbers as to be in the "curiosity" class. We feel that it may be a case of "now or never," and that this particular dog is sufficiently individual in type and his history interesting enough to deserve a brief write-up before he becomes lost in the shuffle of post-war arrivals. This dog is the Rhodesian Ridgeback; and the fact that the writer has for some time owned and bred these unique foreigners from South Africa, and for that reason is in a position to offer direct evidence as to their appearance and character, is his excuse for this article. So here does, and "thanks for list'nin," as Kate Smith says.

It is a far cry and a long trek from China to South Africa but the Rhodesian Ridgeback apparently made the journey and did so centuries before the days of modern travel. There is no recorded history of his antecedents, nor of how and when he migrated from China to southern Rhodesia, yet appearances, like actions, sometimes speak louder than words. In this case they consisted of a trio of characteristics--a prick ear, reddish color and blue tongue-- a combination the average dog authority will tell you is found in but one breed, the Chinese Chow. But the fact remains that some ancestor of the Chow transmitted [June 1944, Page 17]



[image of Rhodesian Ridgeback standing]

"The natives also find them invaluable for jackal hunts, in which the blacks find the 'earth,' as Anderson calls it...have their Ridgebacks ready... send in their Basenjis as we use terriers... and the Ridgebacks soon make quick work of the kill..."

these same three characteristics to another breed, the Phu Quoc, a native of the small island of that name off the southwest coast of China's next-door neighbor, Siam. The color of tongue and coat were also transmitted to the Rhodesian Ridgeback. Whether this heritage came to the latter directly from the original ancestor or by means of a "double play," Chow to Phu Quoc to Ridgeback, no one knows.

In any event, the similarity between the Chow and Phu Quoc ended at that point. Down through the ages, the Chow took unto himself a thick, heavy coat, whereas the Phu Quoc developed the short hair more suitable to the hot Siamese climate. But the most important difference of all, and one that not only must have taken place long after the two breeds parted company, but also serves to indicate a very definite relationship between the Phu Quoc and the [Rhodesian] Ridgeback, is a characteristic that only these last two breeds possess. This is a peculiar ridge of

hair running along the back, from withers to loin, and unlike the rest of the coat, growing forward toward the head. If one strokes the dog's back in the usual way, or "against the grain" of this hair, it will stand erect, forming the distinct ridge already mentioned. Normally this hair lies flat and is noticeable only when the light strikes it, causing a slightly different shade of color to become apparent.

Where did the Phu Quoc acquire this ridge and when? No one knows for sure. There is no data to indicate that any other present-day, or even prehistoric animal had such a coat formation, which would seem to dispose of the theory of evolution. As a rule, cases of this kind can be explained only by the word "mutation," which Webster defines as "a sudden variation, the offspring differing from its parents in some marked character-- as distinguished from a gradual variation in which the new characters become highly developed only in the course of many generations. The occurrence of mutations, and the characters so appearing, are well-established facts."

This, then, would seem to be our answer. Apparently, at some time in the dim and distant past and on the little island of Phu Quoc, a native dog gave birth to a litter of puppies, of which one or more carried this strange mutation. Isolation and its consequent in-breeding may have "set" this character in succeeding generations; but the writer is more inclined to the belief that the Siamese people, who have shown no little understanding of breeding principles and appreciation for unusual animals (as witness their white elephants and odd-looking cats) deliberately perpetuated this characteristic by clever selective breeding, possibly for the express purpose of making it the "hallmark" or "escutcheon" of the breed.

Just how the Phu Quoc and his fancy backline traveled from Siam to South Africa is largely a matter of conjecture; but apparently the trip was made in one jump, as no similar dog is to be found at any intermediate point. "Canis," the nom de plume of an English writer and [Page 18; American Kennel Gazette]

authority on canine matters, advances the theory that early Phoenician sailors, whose trade routes carried them past the island of Phu Quoc, saw and fancied these strangely-marked dogs and took some of them along when they started on their long voyage around the Cape. Whether or not this theory is correct, and the dogs escaped or were shipwrecked with the ships' crews, will never be known. In any event, they never reached the desired port, getting no farther than South Africa, where they seem to have run more or less "wild."

Sometime after their introduction there another change in their physical appearance took place, probably the result of crosses with other breeds. By this cross or crosses the dog lost its prick ear and acquired a pendulous one, indicating, with other changes in head structure, a Mastiff, Boarhound or Great Dane cross. The Rhodesian Ridgeback also lost its blue tongue, and its body became a bit heavier; but in most instances, the color remained reddish; although wheaten,

black-and-tan and even blues, are not uncommon today. Yet despite all these changes, the dog retained that all-important distinguishing characteristic, the ridge, and after being known as Kaffir Hound, Hottentot Hunting Dog and Rhodesian Lion Dog successively, was finally and formally christened Rhodesian Ridgeback and officially sponsored by a club bearing that name, formed a few years ago to promote and standardize the breed.



[image of a Phu Quoc Ridgeback, sitting, with its back to the camera showing the ridge]
The Phu Quoc, below, aside from prick ears and a blue tongue, is very similar to the [Rhodesian]
Ridgeback



[image of a Rhodesian Ridgeback in a similar pose showing the dorsal ridge]
In this view of the [Rhodesian] Ridgeback we can see the peculiar ridge of hair which gives the breed its name

This club has its headquarters in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, and its president, H.G. Mundy, tells many interesting stories illustrating the high degree of intelligence and loyalty to their masters that are characteristics of the breed. Among other such incidents is the following :

"My wife," says Mundy, "had one particular dog that was especially devoted to her and was with her at every opportunity, going out with the European nursemaid only when his mistress was not at home. One day, while alone in the house with this dog as her only companions, Mrs. M received a cable that caused her to break down and sob bitterly. The dog tried by every means in his power to console her, but without success. Finally he could stand the situation no longer. He

left the house and went in search of the nurse-maid, calling at several houses where she was accustomed to drop in for a "crack," and finally locating her at his fourth stop. There he took her firmly by the hand, as he had learned to do in play, indicating by his actions that he wished (Please turn to page 174) [June 1944; Page 19]

her to follow him and that the case was urgent. The girl at once sensed the situation, followed the dog to my home and arrived in time to be of real assistance to my troubled wife."

At the present time, the [Rhodesian] Ridgeback, possibly by reason of some of the breeds used in his development, is in reality a sporting dog of more than a little ability. James Anderson, of Fort William, Ontario, who spent several years in the Cape Colony about 40 years ago, writes of his experiences in hunting with this breed, then known locally as Kaffir Dogs. One such experience was a baboon hunt. As he describes it, the baboons, which had become pests in the district, frequented a high, flat-topped hill, known as Hound's Kop, and Boer farmers made up their minds to be rid of them. A hunt was organized, and before daybreak, the party, composed of both natives and whites, assembled for the kill. The natives then made ready a ring of material for fires arranged at intervals around one side of the hill, while the whites formed a similar circle on the opposite slope.

Just about dawn, at a signal from the captain, the circle of fires was lit and the hunters [Page 174; American Kennel Gazette]

began to advance. But baboons are no fools. They had their sentinels posted, and when these watchers gave the alarm, their frightened comrades began a hasty and, as they hoped, well-concealed retreat through the thick brush that covered the Kop, the whites firing at them and the natives, with the efficient help of their Ridgebacks, holding them at bay.

This put the monkeys in a panic and the affair was a "howling" success in more ways than one. Many of the baboons were killed by the shots, and the dogs did their part by finishing off the wounded with neatness and dispatch. That's just one example of their use on game. The natives also find them invaluable for jackal hunts, in which the blacks[natives] find a burrow, or "earth," as Anderson calls it, station themselves outside it, have their Ridgebacks ready and send in their little Basenjjs, which they use as we white men use our terriers, to drive the game out into the open. There the Ridgebacks soon make quick work of the kill, in one instance reported by Anderson, "leaving nothing but the tail."

In a word, this South African is not only a good dog--he's good for something. That's in his favor--in any country.