

**TACTICAL K9 LLC**

# **E-COLLAR INTRODUCTION**

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## **OFF-LEASH CONTROL**

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THIS ARTICLE WAS ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN THE POLICE K9 MAGAZINE IN DECEMBER OF 2010. THE ARTICLES WERE A SERIES OF WRITINGS LAYING OUT INTRODUCTION AND ADVANCED OFF-LEASH CONTROL UTILIZING THE E-COLLAR FOR POLICE AND MILITARY WORKING DOGS.

## **Why the E-Collar**

My name is Doug Roller and I am the Chief Trainer for the Los Angeles Police Departments K9 Platoon. I was a handler and Assistant Trainer for approximately eight years and have been the Chief Trainer now almost 14 years. We have been using the E-collar now for about 25 years. With that being said I think it would be safe to say that we have had our share of ups and downs with its use, while at the same time we have honed and shaped its use that has dramatically enhanced our tactical abilities.

Before I get into some of the E-collar training methods, let's talk about the Police Service Dog (PSD) and why we use them in police work. The PSD was initially introduced to make our job safer and more economical, while at the same time locating suspects, missing persons, drugs and weapons that may never have been located by mere humans. Let us expand on that premise. Traveling and teaching at various Departments across the country it troubles me to still see old methods of police dog training being used. Remember that the PSD is supposed to make our jobs safer. We train and train and train our PSD's to locate suspects and bite them when necessary and yet there are handlers out there across the country that cannot recall their partner back their side if a bite has occurred or direct there PSD to an area without the use of a long line or worse yet a short six foot leash.

A tactical search with a PSD should be done off-leash. Your partner should be able to systematically clear an area, building or area in a systematic fashion while you control and direct him to clear the area in question. A handler should not place liability over officer safety; you should have control over your canine anytime and anywhere. If your canine locates the suspect you should be able to tactically deploy yourself and your team while you quickly access the environment, the suspect's tactical advantage and your team's position before recalling your canine back to your side. Yes I said back to your side. You see it makes no sense to have to leave cover and concealment to physically choke your canine off the bite. Your canine should release his bite on command and return to your side in the same fashion. One command should be used for the release and return and not a myriad of preparatory commands to elicit the release off the bite. K9 Handlers search for bad people; we search for suspects who have actively demonstrated they do not want to go to jail. They have usually chosen to run from the police and or conceal themselves from our view even after they have been ordered out. With this in mind good tactics and control of your canine is of the utmost importance for our survival.

### **Why Search Off-Leash**

Remember we are taking the God given talents and abilities of our canines and using them for our benefit. The E-collar gives us enhanced tactical control over our canines in any environment. It allows us to get out of his way and work as a partner during the tactical search. A dog affixed to a long line (unless tracking) cannot problem solve in the same manner that a canine does off-leash. A seasoned canine developed this way learns how to work an area and even how to solve scent problems from his experiences. You will see canines trained in this manner go into a yard and automatically hit the corners and detail on their own because of training and past successes. If trained properly he will learn to false alert less without handler interference or assumptions as he bisects the area into the scent source. The canine learns to use the handler as a team member as they work together to clear areas.

The days of sending your PSD into a building and waiting for the suspect to yell out are gone (and never should have occurred in the first place). When you are searching with your canine it is your job to direct him systematically to cover the corners of the building, yard or large containment area. It is your job as a handler to expose and direct your canine into each and every area where scent might be, it is your canines job to pinpoint the scent source. If he cannot be placed in a position to do that then it now becomes a search team problem as the canine has done all he can do in that particular environment.

This is the mindset that each and every handler should have and if it is not then it is my humble opinion that you need to reassess your attitude toward tactics and officer safety.

Finally the E-collar allows us precise control during situations that require instant response from our partners. What about a citizen who steps out into the search area, or a sleeping transient or distractions such as cats and dogs. Simply put it allows us the ability to correct a dog for disobedience without jeopardizing our safety. Ask yourself this question "What would I do or could I do if my dog encountered an aggressive suspect 30 yards ahead of me with a knife." Could I recall him if needed to prevent him from being stabbed or would he continue his suicide mission?

### **The E-Collar**

As I stated we have been using the E-collar probably longer than any Department I know of. What is little known is that the development of the E-collar had little to do with us (Police Officers). The E-collars development and use was initially started by Hunting Dog Trainers. You see they discovered very quickly the need to have off-leash control with their hunting dogs from great distances. It was their initial training methods that lead to its early use and progression. We have taken these initial methods and developed them for our own uses and needs in police work.

We have heard it over and over again the stories of misuse of the E-collar over the years and how it was used as a punishment tool and not a conditioning and training tool. To move beyond that lets talk about what the E-collar is and should be. You see the E-collar is nothing more than a communication device, just as the leash or long line, tracking harness, clicker or verbal commands are. With this mind set training with the E-collar becomes a much simpler task. Just as I have seen the E-collar overused I have also seen it under used. It is important to use it correctly and consistently. The canine must be conditioned properly and fairly just as you would with any other training device, be it choke or pinch collar.

Many trainers believe it is ok to start a canine on the E-collar with no leash work or other type of compulsion. I will only focus on the methods and techniques that I use. I think it is important for each handler to have a complete understanding of how to properly use the leash and the force and finesse that is needed for proper conditioning of the PSD. It is also important for the canine to understand the connection of the correction between the handler and the canine utilizing the leash. This hands on connection plays an important role later on, especially for the dominant or strong willed canine. This physical connection was established long ago when the canine was a puppy and was corrected with a neck shake by its mother.

Before any outing off the bite or other decoy work is started it is imperative that your canine has a complete understanding of the E-collar. This is taught to your canine in low drive demands such as obedience work. You cannot expect the canine to understand the E-collar as a communication device if you start using it as a punishment tool first. Remember punishment or negative reinforcement should never ever precede learning. This will cause you problems and in many cases can build extreme tolerances to the E-collar because the canine reacts in fight from the pain of the device. This is simply just not fair to the canine and cause much frustration and pain for all involved. The same applies to other methods of compulsion, be it pinch collar or other correction devices. First make sure the canine understands the behavior and the method of correction, be fair.

### **Getting Started**

Placement of the E-collar is also very important as well as proper E-collar maintenance. Make sure the E-collar is on, fully charged and working. Make sure the prods are long enough to make a connection on your canine's neck. The receiver should be placed on the canine's lower left side of his neck, when he is

stimulated this will naturally force him toward the handler's left side. The E-collar should be secure enough to allow contact with the canine's neck. This is sometimes a problem when the E-collar is placed too loosely, allowing for inconsistent stimulation. This is not good and will hinder your training dramatically. Make a check list of these points each and every time you train.

Once your canine has an understanding of all the basic commands that you will be using during his service in conjunction with the leash, then it is time to incorporate the E-collar. Remember just as we taught the canine to understand the verbal command with the leash correction we will now incorporate this into the E-collar. The first thing we must do is determine the correct level to start the canine with. There are many methods that will accomplish this and here are a couple. With a long line attached to the E-collar strap or a separate leather collar, allow your canine to walk about free on the extended long line. When appropriate recall him back to your side while stimulating him with a low level. At this point we are looking for a reaction, ever so slight (neck jerk) nothing more. If your canine verbalizes you are too high. At this stage every canine is different. I have seen hard tough dogs verbalize at very low levels and vice versa. The long line plays an important roll here. If the canine expresses confusion then you will motivate him to your side while pulling the long line and directing him to your side. This is the first step of introducing him to this new correction. If your canine has an understanding of his commands this part goes fairly quickly. The long line and E-collar work in tandem to marry the corrections along with the heel command.

One thing to mention here is the importance of timing as well as when to stimulate and how long to stimulate. If you have a canine that dramatically expresses a sensitivity to the E-collar do not give in. If you place the E-collar on your hand and stimulate yourself with a low level you will understand that this is not a big deal and nor should it be for your canine. So my point is do not back off. Continue to use low level and be thankful you have a canine that responds so easily. Some handlers and even trainers make the mistake by saying "I cannot use the E-collar, my dog is too sensitive", this is non-sense. We have to teach and allow the canine to understand this new type of correction; it is as simple as that. Another important concept is when to let off on the stimulation. When I am teaching the sit for example I will let off when the canine's butt touches the ground. When I am teaching the recall in the beginning stages, I will let off when the canine is making a direct and positive return to my side. If he is too drivey and overshoots I will make a right turn and stimulate him into proper position with praise and motivation. Remember to keep the long line on so you can control and guide him into proper position

Another method is to simply start him off with basic sit and heel commands. Sometimes this works better while avoiding one problem with the long line method. Using the long line too much can cause a problem you will want to avoid and that is teaching the canine that being at your side is the safe zone. If stimulation stops each time he returns to your side then it is easy to understand how this will be interpreted as the safe zone. This use to be the old method, which led to problems later on. Whenever the canine was confused, especially during high compulsion he would respond back to the handler's side instead of responding to the desired behavior. We do not want that. Just as you would use motivation, food, ball or praise the same applies to E-collar work.

I teach the down command by itself. For us this is an important command and one we utilize much during search work. I teach this as one of the last obedience commands. Place the E-collar on top of the canines neck, realize that this area is sometimes more sensitive than the side of the neck. With the leash in hand, give your canine the down command while stimulating him into position and showing him the proper hand signal for the down. Sometimes utilizing a food reward will help in this command. When he is completely down, immediately let off the stimulation, followed by the reward (food or praise). Remember always reward when your canine is in the precise position or he will learn to be sloppy and inconsistent in his obedience. Remember that inconsistency will cost you later in training other behaviors.

## **When Not to Stimulate**

This is a question of feeling and a watchful eye. If the canine is so conditioned that it appears he is almost or beating the stimulation than you have understanding. He is trying to beat the correction in the same manner he may have tried to beat a leash correction. He hears the command of heel and before you can snap the leash he is at your side. The same applies with the E-collar. At this point you can use variable and intermittent corrections. This will actually lock in learned behaviors, while affording your canine to work without constant reinforcement. The E-collar can be used a reminder and not as a training device. A good trainer must recognize this and a good handler should recognize this.

## **Outing the Ball and Motivational Obedience**

Once the basic obedience commands are locked in and your canine has a complete understanding of the E-collar it is time to move on to advanced off-leash work. This part of training can be very fun with you and your canine. I call this motivational obedience as you incorporate the E-collar. When teaching motivational obedience I utilize a lot of ball work. I also make sure the canine is obedient to the ball and outs the ball on command anytime anywhere. This will pay dividends later on when teaching to out from the bite. Many new canines have a problem outing the ball. Much of this problem comes from a failure to lay a good foundation with the ball. The ball is used as a motivator and many trainers make the mistake by teaching the canine that it is OK to go crazy on the ball and continually choke the canine off the ball. This breeds mistrust and disobedience between you and the canine and there is no reason for this. Once the canine understands the concept that it is more enjoyable to chase and catch the ball then to sit and chew on the ball you have won the battle. A canine that likes to chase the ball is usually a canine that likes to hunt; this behavior should be enhanced with your canine.

The problem is that sometimes a canine has become so ingrained in this disobedience that heavy compulsion must be used to teach this "new" outing behavior. Remember a canine that does not want to out the ball probably does not want to out from the decoy either. Choking your dog off the ball each time you play with him takes away from learning, this break up in teaching while trying to reinforce a behavior utilizing the ball as a reward diminishes drastically if the "choke off" is your method of outing. The dog should be taught to trust you in this command. He should understand that the sooner he outs the ball the sooner he gets it again by performing the required task. Once this is understood you can do great things with him.

One caveat here that I would like to mention. If you are experiencing dominance issues, including growling and aggressiveness from your canine, do not use this method. These kinds of dogs must be handled on case by case bases with the possibility of not being suited for police work.

So how do we start? Well now that your canine has an understanding of how to learn with the E-collar then you can incorporate it in all you do. If you have a "crazy for the ball dog" and he simply will not let it out, then here is a method that should work. Place a pinch collar and E-collar on your dog with leash in hand. Utilize a ball with a string on it (for safety reasons). Let him have the ball and try to relax him a bit. Short leash him and stimulate him to release the ball while giving him his out command. Correct him with both pinch collar and E-collar until he releases. Settle him quickly into a sit once he outs the ball. Do not give up, he may fight the first couple of times into a short choke off but continue to use the E-collar. We are showing him a new form of correction with this outing command. We also may be extinguishing locked in learned behavior. The only difference is we are going to win eventually while we diminish the choke off. Once he drops the ball and settles and sits, give him the get it command and point to the ball allowing him to take it again. Do this several times and he should be outing easier each time. Use as much stimulation as needed to make him out. As time moves on in each session try and use less and less

leash correction and allow him to respond to the E-collar correction. I have been amazed how much can be accomplished in one day of this method with the hardest of dogs.

As he outs the ball easier each time start taking the string and play a very short session of tug-a-war with the ball (ball on string). Suddenly stop place him in the sit position and give him the out command. As soon as he drops the ball settle him and let him get the ball again. Repeat this several times and he will soon discover he likes this game. What most canines really want is the fight, by you playing tug-a-war allows him to get this fight. When the fight ends he drops the ball and wants to fight again. You are now a positive part of this equation instead of a negative one. Once the behavior is locked in or even starts to get locked in, mix things up and be creative. Instead of letting him have the ball each time heel him away from it or heel him away and then place him in a down position. Start letting him have the ball from a longer distance and add more obedience to the routine. Now your dog is paying attention to you and not trying to outguess you. This is where we as trainers and handlers make the mistake. As soon as your canine starts to figure out an exercise and anticipates a behavior then mix it up. This will teach him to pay attention to the command and exercise. This simple task will pay off in later man work.

With your canine obedient to the ball you can start doing really fun stuff during your obedience sessions. Teach your canine to down at your side, while you throw the ball as he awaits your get it command. You can later incorporate recalls off the ball or downing in front of the ball or even conducting a search for the ball, all the while utilizing your E-collar to reinforce your commands. This is the best type of training and allows your dog to learn in a positive fashion, while solidifying all his learned commands. This is the foundation for all that follows. You are now ready for advanced off-leash work. This is the start of developing the **Tactical K9**.

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### **Tactical Control with the E-Collar**

In my last article we finished off with the introduction to the e-collar and motivational ball work utilizing the e-collar. Now that this foundation has been laid with the e-collar we can move on to more advanced work. Hopefully after reading the preceding article we are on the same sheet of music in our thoughts about off-leash searching and control of your canine.

Now that your Police Service Dog (PSD) understands the e-collar and is releasing the ball without hesitation we will use this understanding to teach him off-leash control. What exactly is off-leash control? It is important here to ponder on that thought – as it means many things in the tactical world, I will explain what I think it means. Simply stated it means that we should be able to take our partners off-leash and search a contained area in a systematic fashion while exposing him to all areas where scent and the suspect might be. Your PSD should enter an area and be able to systematically bisect it while working the scent cone of a secreted or accessible suspect to his location. If there is a contact (bite) you should have the option of recalling the PSD from a tactically safe position or approach the suspect, leash your dog and recall him back to your side from the bite. You should never have to give up a position of tactical advantage to take your dog off strong. If this is your only method of outing you should revisit your protocols.

There are two areas that must be covered when teaching the out and recall for the PSD. One area will be outing your dog off the decoy in any situation and recalling him back to your side. The other area will be the find & bark if this is your policy (I will cover the “find and bark” in my next article). Let us start off with outing and the recall of your PSD off the decoy (or suspect). With the onset of the Mal’s and Duchies into the police K9 community this has been a problem. Many of these dogs are very hard, pain tolerant

and not properly conditioned for outing and recalls. Countless handlers and trainers have simply given up on this and revert back the common choke off. It has caused a myriad of problems and will persist as this practice continues. This has always been a universal problem with most police K9 units in the United States. If you have completed (and more importantly continued) the prior steps involving outing the ball, retrieving it and recalling off the ball with the e-collar, then you can be sure your canine understands the behavior of outing. There are so many areas here to go into, I will try and make it simple and stick to only a couple. We will first go into methods for outing the canine off the decoy. This will later be followed by methods you can use to teach and reinforce the find and bark. I cannot do justice to instruction in the find and bark behavior in this article and will do so in the next one.

### **Outing the Canine Off the Decoy**

If you had some trouble with your PSD that did not want to out the ball you will probably have some issues with outing off the decoy. One caveat here is many dogs that out from the ball easily, still have issues outing off the decoy; I thought this was worth mentioning. Of course many of you I am sure already realize this fact. Now that your PSD has a thorough understanding of the e-collar we can now employ its use during decoy and man work. We can use the e-collar as a communication device (as it was originally intended) and not a punishment device. Let's clear something up first about punishment and negative reinforcement. We can dance around the word game but sometimes negative reinforcement is punishment, whether it be the e-collar, pinch collar, cattle prod, what have you. Here is what has to be remembered, punishment or negative reinforcement should never precede learning. If you have a dog that already is coming off the bite pretty consistently, than you will be able to advance quickly with the e-collar. We will first talk about recalling off the bite (non find and bark dogs). This is a pretty straight forward behavior and we should not complicate it. This is a pretty straight forward behavior to train if this is your agencies policy. You should use one command and one command only to recall your dog back to your side. I do not agree with the use of long preparatory commands to invoke a behavior, especially coming off the bite. When I want my dog off the bite I want him off now, not after a long sentence of commands directed toward the suspect. There are so many issues here, where do I start.

You should not have to tell your suspect to stand still don't move show your hands and then out your dog, followed by the recall command. Let us think about this concept. Preparatory commands are usually used to de-escalate your dog by getting him ready for the out or recall. In training this works fine but in real world scenarios it simply does not. Additionally it sets you up for situations that you do not want to be faced with. In the heat of the moment this is just too much to have to do for a recall or out. What if your canine has found a non-suspect who inadvertently crossed into your containment? What if there is an accidental bite on an officer. Those precious seconds of calling him off the bite are crucial to avoid unnecessary injury. What if the suspect produces a baseball bat or knife and you want your dog back at your side quickly. One command for the out and recall cuts through all confusion. One more thing is that some dogs upon hearing the preparatory command will actually bite harder with more commitment in anticipation of coming off. They eventually release but it becomes a negotiation instead of a command to be reckoned with. With proper conditioning and reinforcement, the single command should mean one thing only for the PSD, come back to your side. Believe me if you have one those special "hard dogs" it is a beautiful thing to see him respond to a one command out after proper e-collar training. With the e-collar you can have this kind of control. The e-collar also allows for real world training. What do I mean by this? The PSD should not live in two worlds, the world of training and the real world; they should be one in the same. Without consistency this is exactly what occurs. The reason most PSD's do not get corrected in the real world is because a handler cannot turn a situation where the PSD is being disobedient, into a training session.

## **Training and the Real World Are the Same**

With the e-collar trained PSD both environments become one in the same. If your PSD has a distraction problem you can work on it, if he fails to recall or go on a down during a real search, you can instantly recall or place him in a down position, and if he refuses to come off the bite then you can correct the behavior instantly. The PSD realizes immediately that the handler has control and the ability to correct everywhere and anywhere. This actually makes your life and more importantly his life easier and less confusing. Dogs are gamblers and will always gamble if the chance of satisfying a drive overpowers negative reinforcement. With the e-collar and consistency in your training, your PSD will gamble less and less as time goes on. A rule that I have every new handler restate throughout training is "When is your dog in training – always". Never give a command that you do not have the ability to reinforce, the e-collar eliminates this problem.

So let's get started with some methods for outing from the decoy. If you have a new canine there is a high likelihood that his prior training involved KNVP, Ring Sport or Shutzhund work. Even if the dog is young and not titled he probably had some of these sport dog methods of training imposed on him. So when you start your bite work always start with a long line. A good habit is to start all of your sessions with obedience around the decoy. Your PSD should be obedient and manageable at this time. If he needs work because his drive is simply over the top, keep working on it and do not expect to fix it in one or two sessions. Sometimes this has to be a work in progress as your training progresses. With a long line, pinch and e-collar attached to your PSD we can start. Not to be a nag but I will remind you of the e-collar check list. Make sure it is charged, turned on, and fitted correctly on your dog's neck. You will pay dearly if you discover that your e-collar was not turned on after a session of disobedience. You will scratch your head wondering what happened and feel foolish when you forgot to turn the e-collar on. I say this because I have seen it happen to many times.

With your partner at your side send him on a straight hit. As he is on the bite give him the command (a verbal command you have picked that means release and come back to your side). For me this command is simply the heal command. Like I said it cuts through confusion and means one thing, release and come back to the handler's side. Some handlers want to add other options at this time, like the down command and then a heal command if desired. We will keep it simple and make the command a simple heal command. Remember to match the verbal command with the e-collar correction and the long line pinch correction. If you only have a decoy to assist you then you can have him activate the e-collar that will coincide with the verbal heal as you use complete the long line correction with the pinch collar. It is important here for you to have already discussed this with your decoy and anyone else that may be assisting. All parties should have a complete understanding of what you are trying to accomplish during a session. You should also go over options and have a plan B if plan A does not work. If you have the luxury of having a third person to assist, then have him use the long line for the pinch collar correction.

The important thing here is to remember that the corrections are all automatic and married together. We are once again going to marry these commands together (escape training). This will condition the canine for a quick release. Of course if you have a strong willed canine you may have to elevate your level of correction, with the e-collar and the pinch correction. The concept here is to use as much compulsion as needed for a quick release off the bite. With a watchful eye you will have to gauge the level of these corrections. When I first start off I do not want to use to high level e-collar correction. I will use more of the conventional pinch collar because he is more familiar with this form of correction. We will then reverse this as time goes on, less pinch and more e-collar. The important thing here is the canine cannot win and must release (no choke off). This article is focused on e-collar work but I will mention something about decoy work. When teaching your PSD a new behavior in bite work you must use a good decoy.

He should be able to read the dog and manipulate drives to enhance learning. For example if the dog weakens on the bite during e-collar and control work he must balance him out by working him in prey. Conversely if your canine is strong willed he will work him in fight by standing straight up elevating the canine off his front legs to assist in a quick release off the bite. Eventually this will not matter but for learning we must enhance the environment for desired conditioning to take place. My point is a good decoy will dramatically increase your dog's progress.

### **When to Stimulate and When to Let Off**

In the previous article I touched on this. This will depend on your dog and his level of drive and knowledge of the particular behavior. The old method of burning the e-collar into the dog is not what should be used (and never should have been). This is not fair and can actually harden some dogs to the e-collar. Be fair. If you have found the level of stimulation for a release and he is making a positive return back to your side then let off the e-collar, while using motivation to reinforce and reward the behavior. Remember a dog many times learns through self-discovery. If he is quickly learning to recall with little stimulation then let him win and learn in a positive fashion. On the other hand if your dog is hard with high drive you may have to stimulate higher and much longer. You will know he has got it when he decides to test you and return back to the decoy. You will then re-stimulate, if he quickly turns his head and speeds quickly back to you, then you have learning.

Your sessions will vary depending on your canine, his level of drive, how good of shape he is in and of course any prior training that he may have that makes your job easier. Keep your sessions short with learning in mind, and try to finish each session on a good note. Allow your dog ample time to rest and repeat the session. If everything goes right then we will move on to advanced work. As your PSD progresses you should see his release off the bite become quicker each time. At the same time you should be dropping the long line pinch collar correction, while primarily using the e-collar for the correction. If your dog is moving along well, you can at some point drop the long line and use the e-collar when needed for channeling the behavior. Remember to use variable and intermittent corrections to start locking in the release and recall behavior to your side (allow him to win once in a while with no correction at all). Like I said earlier if your policy does not require the find and bark or bark and hold, then this release and return behavior should not be a problem. Once again with a watchful eye you will make the call when you feel comfortable about dropping the long line. One caveat here is to keep the long line on until you are sure he has the behavior locked in. As he drags the long line you will have it there in case old habits manifest themselves or he simply decides to test you. As far as when to stimulate and how much will depend on your dog. For the strong willed canine who continues to test you, do not allow him to gamble or more precisely make him pay for his gambling. The important thing here is to recognize confusion over disobedience. If he knows the recall and decides to start testing you then negative reinforcement is justified and necessary. Increase the level of e-collar stimulation and automatically stimulate. Your mindset should be this – if you know he has been “pushing it” then start your session with the attitude that you will use a higher level of automatic stimulations to correct unwanted behavior, do not give in. If a session creates a slight imbalance in your dog, not to worry, if he is worth his muster we can bring him back in line.

If you see good understanding with the e-collar and your dog, simply stimulate him once again back to your side. If the problem is more serious and you get stuck go back to the long line and incorporate the pinch and e-collar correction again. Remember that very often you will finish the day off with what appeared to be a locked in behavior, only to return the next day, back to square one. We have all seen this before, it is nothing new. Allow time for solid conditioning to set in your dogs mind.

## **Locking In Behavior With Motivation (Keep his Mind Busy)**

Before we move on I would like you to go back to the last article when I went over motivational obedience with the ball. We went over the importance of moving around and incorporating a myriad of exercises utilizing the ball for quick outs and recalls from the ball, downing in front of the ball and downing while sending to the ball. In other words sessions that are “fast and furious”. These sessions can be fun and creative by locking in compliance, while rewarding him with stimulation and motivation as his reward. With proper timing with the e-collar, behaviors can be called upon and channeled with lightening speed. My theory here is why not do this with decoy and bite work to. With the e-collar this can be accomplished. Let me explain.

Once your dog is coming off the bite quickly with the e-collar only be used as a reminder periodically, then we can start to make the sessions more enjoyable for both you and your dog. Now we can incorporate obedience into your “man or decoy work”. As you start your obedience around the decoy you should flow into your bite work with the same mind set and attitude as your motivational ball work. Healing your dog quickly around the decoy and placing him on a down. Then continue on while recalling him back to your side. Use the e-collar throughout these sessions. Be creative and keep him guessing by not allowing him to anticipate what is coming. Suddenly send him on a straight hit to the decoy while changing your position on the field. Recall him back to your new position. At first he may be a bit confused because he has become accustomed to the same old routine of going straight to the decoy and then back to the same old spot where you have always been. This simple added movement accomplishes a couple of things here. The first thing is that it places a bit of stress on the dog. When he releases off the bite he actually has to develop situational awareness and look for you. If you correct him with the e-collar this also corrects him for not paying attention. By utilizing the e-collar and motivation your canine will pick this up quickly. If he is a strong willed dog you can attach a long line and have him drag it in case you need to control his environment and channel the desired behavior. Continuing with this concept, start to mix things up by adding other behaviors you have locked in with ball work into your man work. If you have done your work with the ball then he knows the behavior, you only need to demand it with decoy work to.

Of course I realize that for some dogs adding the decoy changes everything, not to worry – baby steps. Start some of these movements at a distance from the decoy and over time you will be completing recalls off the decoy, downing and healing next to the decoy and recalls from any position as your dog stays down on the field. This can be accomplished with the e-collar because of your ability to correct from anywhere instantly. The dog’s recency of learning is immediate. If you incorporate all these demands on the dog during a simple round of man work, he learns to pay attention. Think about this for a moment, have you ever noticed that with many high drive dogs, the longer and more boring the sessions go that some dogs actually become worse as their drive and frustration increases. Some high drive dogs increase in frustration because they simply do not have enough to think about. You send them on a straight hit and then recall back to your side. A high drive dog needs more than this, he needs to be challenged. We challenge him by movement, while demanding behavior that he can not anticipate. Remember once he has locked in a learned behavior mix things up. These additional demands will actually help regulate his drives and make him more manageable, while allowing him to learn. Your goal should be total control in high drive.

Training with this mind set allows you to have a dog that is ready for police work in the real working environment. Working your dog from various positions and making him pay attention to you is a natural progression to real world scenarios. It is important to keep this mindset when you are training. Once you have locked in these behaviors in training then it is imperative that you take them to your working environment. Your demands must be the same both on the field and in the real world, with the e-collar

this should not be a problem. With this kind of control you can develop movement training with your PSD, while utilizing a decoy during searches or other deployments used by your agency. The e-collar will allow for so many options and the ability to reinforce in any environment. We have now moved one more step to the **TACTICAL K9**.

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## **E-COLLAR TRAINING FIND & BARK / DIRECTION and CONTROL**

### **Why the Find & bark**

In my last article we dealt with the release from the bite behavior. I did not go over the find & bark as it is a subject in and of itself. I separated this into its own section because it can be very involved and it usually conjures up some discussion among dog trainers and handlers. Before we get into training the behavior lets discuss the philosophy of the find & bark, bark and hold, circle and bark, or detainment training. At the Los Angeles Police Department this is what we employ. I would like to discuss a brief history.

During the early 1990's the Los Angeles Police K-9 Platoon did not have a find & bark or bark & hold policy as it currently does. The policy then was handler control. This policy in a nutshell allowed the working canine to locate the secreted suspect and absent a command the canine would engage the suspect resulting in a canine bite. During this same period of time the Los Angeles Police Department as well as the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department was involved in an onslaught of litigation involving civil attorneys representing individuals that had been bitten and injured during K-9 search apprehensions. It was at this time that the K-9 Platoon looked into changing the policy from handler control to find & bark.

At the time many of the same requirements involving training and certifications and the use of the e-collars were in effect. The fundamental difference was the locating and apprehension policy. In an effort to reduce canine contacts and injuries to suspects the area of suspect apprehension was examined. At the time we were utilizing the e-collar to assist us in canine searches. As I have continually stated the e-collar was and always should be used as a conditioning tool rather than a punishment tool. It was not mandated at the time but was offered to teams as an insurance policy during times of high agitation while conducting canine searches. As I have stated it allowed us the ability to recall a canine during such times to avoid unnecessary canine contacts. It also offered us a tool that could drastically diminish accidental bites during K9 deployments. Paralleling the stated onslaught of litigation was the Christopher Commission Study into our Departments use of force policies. This investigation caused our K-9 Platoon to re-examine the handler control and handler discretion policy of locating suspects.

The Training Cadre at the time was headed by Sergeant Donn Yarnall who then implemented the now find & bark policy of suspect apprehension. It was found that this method of canine search work offered the handler time to quickly access each incident when the canine located a secreted suspect and allowed for a recall before a canine contact occurred. Prior to this a handler had to be working much closer with his canine and sometimes anticipate an unnecessary canine contact with the suspect. The reality of a canine search is that there are sometimes moments, no matter how brief that a working canine is out of the handler's site and control. If a suspect is secreted in such a location the opportunity to surrender is not an option and a canine contact would occur. Handler control also placed more stress on the handler to work closer and sometimes unsafely close to his canine to avoid such situations.

The major flaw in the find & bark policy was the handler's ability or inability to correct a canine during real field encounters. The e-collar became the answer to this problem. A working canine could now locate a suspect and if it appeared he was going to be "dirty" and not complete a clean find & bark the handler

could now make an e-collar correction from a tactically safe position. Upon changing our policy from handler control to find & bark the e-collar became an essential piece of equipment. This was also in agreement with Christopher Commission mandates. After this mandate was in place the K-9 Platoon was given a six month period of time to re-train all working K-9 teams to locate and apprehend suspects utilizing the find & bark method. This has been our policy since. This policy along with strict maintenance training has dramatically dropped our contact ratio from 45/55 % to 12/22 % respectively. The policy now allows a canine to make contact during specific incidences. Many searches involve the locating of aggressive suspects. One must realize that the K-9 Platoon is the last effort and tool an officer has to locate a secreted suspect. A suspect that has been given the opportunity to surrender and refused, sometimes aggressively, often maintains that motivation when he is secreted and then located during a canine search. The find & bark gives not only the suspect an additional opportunity to surrender but also the handler time to evaluate the situation and recall the canine before a contact is made.

Many agencies still do not adhere to or agree with the find & bark method. The argument is that it leaves the decision to bite with the canine or a canine learns to bump the suspect in order to make him move to allow him a bite. We have found that this is not the case with the proper use of the e-collar. Additionally, once a canine completes a bark alert it is up to the handler, as soon as practicable to recall the canine back to his side. Proper tactics are then utilized to allow the suspect to surrender. The canine is still available for deployment if necessary. The simple fact is that when a canine performs a bark and hold on a real suspect, it affords the handler the ability to quickly assess the real time event. Any trainer or seasoned handler will attest that the longer you leave a canine in the find and bark behavior the chance of a bite may increase because of suspect movement and or aggression and assault to the canine. If the situation (environment and tactical advantage) allows for it the handler should recall the canine as soon as practicable. Other changes were implemented to maintain this policy. It was found that lack of training and reinforcement of said training would diminish quickly with the find & bark policy. Therefore, the enhancement of the Training Cadre was completed in order to maintain the find and bark guidelines of suspect apprehension. The development and design of current e-collar have advanced in such a way that the level of correction on the collars can be dialed in to a very minor correction to a more aggressive correction depending on the level of disobedience when channeling a desired behavior for any given situation.

A final area to be mentioned is canine control during an aggressive encounter with a suspect. The e-collar offers the handler the option and ability to recall his canine during such times. The first question is why would one need to recall a canine during such times? The answers and situations are numerous to be sure. Many encounters with suspects during canine contacts place suspects in a fight or flight mindset. Once in this state a suspect may be defending himself. A canine in an aggressive state certainly cannot differentiate between self-defense and aggression toward him. It is then up to the handler to recall the canine and allow the suspect a chance to surrender to avoid substantial injury. Additionally, a suspect may be armed with a weapon, such as a pipe, knife or hard blunt object that could indeed cause serious injury or death to the canine. Only the handler has the ability to ascertain the identified danger and recall the canine.

Many canines in a high state of fight and self-defense will not call off in field situations. Once again the handler can tactically recall his canine back to his side during such encounters. In closing one should understand that canine intelligence is based on proper conditioning and the ability to correct. A canine soon learns the difference between training exercises and real field encounters. If a canine is not corrected during field encounters and only during staged training exercises then an association to misbehave in field encounters will quickly be made and ingrained in the canine. Conversely if field situations are treated as training exercises in the canines mind, then conditioning is constant and true.

The e-collar allows proper reinforcement to be completed in any tactical situation. It is this ability to have an invisible leash that allows us such precise and consistent training. In closing I would like to say one thing and that is whether you employ find & bark, handler discretion or find and bite it always comes down to handler control. You are responsible for your dog, his training and his performance. If a real field encounter demands that your dog bite than he should bite, if it does not than he should not and you should have the control to allow it or not allow it. It is really as simple as that.

### **Find & bark Training**

Before we can start find & bark training we must first make sure we have the right dog. You say that goes without saying but not so fast. The fact of the matter is that a true find & bark dog is usually one that has a little more of everything we want in a PSD. The find & bark dog requires more fight drive, as well as enhanced hunt drive. The reason for this is that he must be willing to accept holding his prey at bay in a stable and balanced attitude. Training the behavior sometimes is not as hard as maintaining the behavior. The behavior becomes harder to maintain after the canine has had field encounters where the suspect has hit, struck and attacked the find & bark dog. If your dog is worth his muster he will certainly want to go in strong and hard on his next encounter after this occurs. We must constantly reinforce the behavior to maintain balance and reliability.

If you have a new dog that is titled in KNVP, Ring Sport, or Schutzhund then part of your work is done. What I want to stress here is that even if your dog understands the behavior I still go back to basics and make sure the dog is locked in. We accomplish this once again by controlling his environment, by incorporating a long line in the exercise. With the 30 foot long line attached to his pinch collar (placed behind the e-collar) and the dog at the handlers side we can begin. Remember the check list for the e-collar before we start. Make sure the e-collar is in front of the pinch collar so when the correction on the pinch is made it will not interfere with the e-collars position. One more caveat here is to make sure you are using a good decoy. Now he does not have to be Ring Sport Certified but he must be able to read a dogs behavior and have some semblance of skill and ability to manipulate behavior in a working dog. He should not be weak in nature or conversely to strong and bull headed. Your decoy needs to be strong when necessary and submissive when applicable, coupled with the ability to finesse a dog into proper behavior. I know this is asking a lot but it will save you countless hours in training, trust me. I believe the right decoy can truly make or break a dog.

With your dog at your side and long line attached send him in to your decoy. As he approaches into the hold position, give him a quick snap with the pinch collar and simultaneously nick him with the e-collar correction. Use a level at least as strong as what was used in your obedience work. If he is in very high drive then dial up the correction a bit. Remember that right now we are only marrying the leash pinch correction with the e-collar correction. The e-collar correction is only offered as a communication device so keep the level of stimulation moderate just to get his attention. The pinch correction is what is really stopping him at this point. The decoy should be squaring off at the dog with his hands tucked around to his side. I personally do most of my training with decoys in bite suits. I want to make sure the dog bites anywhere and whatever is offered to him from the decoy (leg, back or arm). There are times when I go to the single sleeve and will discuss that later. I also have decoys hold a soft stick or padded stick and make sure they use it when necessary. As the dog comes in and is nicked by the e-collar make sure he does not get to bite the decoy. He must be made clean in the behavior and it is important that communication between the handler / trainer and decoy is solid. A point here is that many sport dogs will go in and perform a nice hold exercise but have trouble on the recall. Let us discuss this. First of all I train all our dogs to recall from the decoy. Tactically and in the field this is a must. I do not want handlers to have to go anywhere near the dog from a tactically safe position to recall their canine partners or worse yet do the infamous "choke off". There may be times they approach closer and I will get into those times

later but this is not the norm. A titled dog is not (normally) trained to recall. Remember they have been trained to be escorted from the decoy and this behavior has been imprinted in them over and over again. We must allow for this and extinguish such behavior fairly and over time. Once again this is why we use the long line.

So the dog goes to the decoy and sits and barks, the decoy settles the dog and then gives him a bite. The handler or helper has the long line in his hand and then when ready the handler recalls his canine back to his side. Use one command and one command only, the heel command. Simultaneously the dog is stimulated with the e-collar while he is corrected with the pinch and long line. The long line correction should be completed as a snap and not a tug. The e-collar can be used in different ways at this point. What seems to work better is a nick off the bite and then let off, as the dog turns toward the handler because of the long line, hit him again with the e-collar. You can also stimulate him off the bite and keep the e-collar activated all the way back to your side. This is old school method and I find it is usually not as productive as the first method. I have found over the years that nicking him off the bite makes the dog react in a surprise fashion, almost like a quick leash snap. It also allows the dog to refocus and hopefully submit to your verbal command. Once he is off the bite then hit him again with the e-collar until he has made a positive return back to the handler's side. I have found that too much juice from the e-collar, especially in the beginning may send the dog into "fight". Many dogs once in fight will bite harder on the decoy and try to fight through the e-collar. Some very hard dogs will fight through the e-collar requiring other forms of compulsion; this is certainly something to be avoided. A good rule of thumb is to watch your dog with a careful eye and when he displays positive and desired behavior then let off the e-collar. An important point here is to allow creativity and tailoring to your specific dog. No trainer in the world will ever be able to mimic each and every problem that may come up with a particular team. A good trainer will offer you a large bag of tricks and tools to pull from to condition appropriate and desired behavior.

A couple of things to cover here that many handlers encounter during find and bark training and that is what is a good position for the dog to be in during find and bark behavior. Well the simple answer is the sit or the bounce sit position. For the majority of dogs this is not a problem, however, some dogs just have a hard time maintaining it. Here is my answer. As with many other behaviors your particular dog may have, sometimes you have to ask yourself how far do I want to go to get what I want and how much compulsion will it take to get there. For example if your dog goes in and is stable in a half sit and stand position, and is reliable than this might be acceptable. If this position makes him edgy and unstable, then demand the more stable position. Every once in a while I come across a dog that will not consistently stay in the sit position and is dirty (biting the passive decoy). I have on occasion taught these dogs to go into a down position. The down position is not something I am very fond of; there are several reasons for this. In the real environment it may be hard for the canine to go into this position because of the environment. Additionally the down position sometimes takes the canine too far out of drive and if the suspect suddenly bolts or decides to assault the canine then he is at somewhat of a disadvantage. I believe the sit offers the canine more tactical options for the canine in these kinds of incidences.

Before we move on it is only fair that I cover issues that will surely come up with some of you during find and bark training. In some of my prior writings I covered the importance of realizing that the e-collar is not the save all to correcting or more importantly conditioning new behaviors. There are many times that the handler leash correction with his or her canine is vital to creating the correct pack relationship between the two, which often cannot be attained with just the e-collar. Remember when your canine was young and disobedient with his mama. Mama dog certainly did not grab an e-collar to correct unwanted behavior; she simply grabbed her youngster by the neck and gave him a harsh neck correction. This first

learned behavior is something that will always be with your canine, make no mistake. My point is never underestimate the proper use of the leash and correction collar that first got you there.

This leads me to my topic of decoy corrections during find and bark behavior. If you are lucky and you use the e-collar, long line and pinch collar to instill the find and bark and it works, consider yourself lucky and you can move on. However, many dogs need more than just the e-collar. They need to learn to respect the decoy. If you have any time as a handler you have certainly seen what a strong dog will do with a weak decoy. Simply put he will rule his world if allowed. I have seen hard push button dogs over time loose all their good work after being worked by weak decoys. You will not want all your hard work to go down the drain because of this. Remember if your training session is going high and right because of a poor decoy, stop the madness. You will only lock in more disobedient behavior and have a bigger problem later, requiring heavy compulsion to fix.

### **Going Off-Leash**

Making the call to drop the long line and go off-leash during find & bark training is once again going to depend on many factors. A rule of thumb here is to be conservative and make sure the behavior is locked in. Additionally if the find & bark behavior is locked in then the use of negative reinforcement is justified and warranted and more importantly understood by the canine. Remember that negative reinforcement should never precede conditioning and learning, be fair. Some dogs will take to the behavior very quickly and after a day or two they understand it. The dog goes in and performs the find & bark, is given the bite and is recalled nicely back to the handlers side. Keep the long line on him until he is consistent in his release and recall. Also make sure he is solid on the recall where no bite is given. The dog should not be given a bite each time, in fact some dogs will become to frantic with too many bites during detainment training. Remember reward systems are used often when you are teaching a new behavior but should dissipate once it is learned (they should be variable and intermittent). You will have to read your particular canine. A good rule of thumb is to mix it up, if it appears he is demanding a bite do not give it to him and conversely when it is locked in let him have his bite. If this is your dog consider yourself fortunate and you can move on to field and search work. I will get into this later.

### **The Strong Willed Dog**

The strong willed dog will obviously take more work. An examination of his drive level and his tolerance to compulsion will also have to be determined. Often times the strong willed dog will require a good decoy or agitator. I mention this because many trainers make the mistake of thinking that the e-collar can solve all problems, this is not so. It is only one of your tools and many times has to be utilized and coordinated with other methods. The use of a padded stick may be required to correct the dog into the find & bark. If this method is needed it will allow you to marry up the decoy correction with the e-collar and long line correction. It may sound like much to do but it really is not. The bottom line is at some point you will have to drop the long line on the strong willed canine. It may require good stick work to punish the canine off the bite. These types of dogs need to respect the decoy and learn that he is a force to be reckoned with. He needs to perform the find & bark behavior and that is all there is to it. This is the mindset of the team (handler, decoy and or helper). The area of good decoy work is of course a subject in itself. There are many techniques that involve good decoy work but make no mistake if you have a strong willed canine these methods will probably have to be employed.

My experience in the dog training community has always been that these types of techniques are not written about and only discussed. I am not sure why but every dog trainer knows that some very high pain tolerant canines require more compulsion. Like us there are individuals that are not the norm and you must adapt your methods. If you do not you may never have controllable canine, whether he is find

and bite or find and bark. There are some canines that are worked with two receivers on their e-collar. For these dogs anything less is worth the pain to satisfy a drive. It should be noted that if you had these same dogs when they were young and malleable then proper channeling and conditioning could have been done to avoid these behaviors. The simple fact is this; many dogs that are being sold are being brought along way to fast. The trainers and breeders are enhancing prey and fight drives with no control whatsoever. This is producing canines that are hard and look good as potential Police Service Dogs (PSD's) but are very hard and pain tolerant indeed. There is a light at the end of the tunnel though. Many of these strong willed dogs have simply learned to fight through conventional compulsion. If you condition these dogs properly and over time they usually can be channeled correctly. Additionally many of them simply have to know that you have the ability to go to a high level of compulsion. Once this is established you will find that most only need to be reminded of this fact very seldom.

The message here is that if you need it, you have it for the time your dog decides to roll the dice. There are other methods to employ but require special skills and trainers and sometimes it is well worth it to seek out these trainers. Very often they can employ skills that will allow you to salvage your canine who has possibly become a liability issue because you have no control over him, be it the find & bark or simply outing from the man. Some of you may be thinking well I will never go to that level of compulsion. These same trainers are the ones that are quite frankly beating their dogs off the bite. Dogs are coming back from a training session with broken ribs and or permanent neck injuries from constant choke offs and double lining. The use of the e-collar is much less drastic then some of these methods. The important fact here is that it can be used anytime and anywhere with your dog. You will never have to leave cover or concealment in a tactical situation to choke or punish your dog off a bite.

### **The Find & Bark in Search Work**

Once you have developed this behavior on the field then it is paramount that you solidify it in the search environment. You must now reinforce the find & bark during search work. You can also start this like any other new behavior, baby steps. You might be saying well this should be no big deal as he is solid on the field. Remember this is very static and controlling environment and the dog is not in hunt drive. We must now show and teach the dog to be compliant in the find & bark behavior during search work. You can start this on the familiar field as you have the decoy start moving from various positions, behind structures and or barricades. Over time you will start to mimic more the natural environment he will be working in while he is searching for a decoy / suspect.

If you want to incur the expense of a second transmitter, this will assist you in reinforcing behaviors during any search work (be it find & bark or find & bite). Let me explain. I am not sure about other brands but Tri Tronics allow you to marry up additional transmitters to one collar receiver. As you progress it is important to add different body postures for the canine. The decoy should slowly start to place himself in unique hiding locations. The decoy should be able to squat and hide in a seated position. Some canines have no problems with this but many have to be conditioned to this new twist. Some canines will come in to a seated decoy and recognize this as something different and will not detain but bite. So we once again have to take baby steps to instill learning.

If your decoy is in a tight space secreted and equipped with a transmitter, it will allow him to observe and use good timing to correct your dog should he need it. The decoy can use the transmitter to reinforce the find & bark and or the recall from bite. As I have mentioned in the previous articles this ability offers you the handler to reinforce behaviors anytime and anywhere. Your canine quickly realizes this fact and will not try and gamble because of this ability to provide consistent reinforcement. Once your dog is performing the find & bark from various positions on the training field then it is time to move into search environments. I usually try and keep it simple at first by providing pretty cut and dry hiding locations for

the team. Additionally you must make sure that you communicate to your helpers what is expected from them and what you are trying to accomplish during that specific exercise. If it is a find & bark with a bite then all parties should know this or what happens if the dog is dirty and fails to perform the find & bark. What will be the method of correction and what will be done afterwards to correct and instill the proper behavior? These simple instructions should all be counseled beforehand. There is much more to do as it pertains to search work and control, which now places us in the area of advanced training as it pertains to off-leash searching.

### **Why Direction and Control (Off Leash)**

By now I am sure you are getting the fact that I am very demanding in the area of off leash control. How handlers are still working their canines attached to long lines is completely beyond me and it is my desire for all of you to move beyond these restrictions. Before we get into methods, I will like to once again get into the reasons why off leash control is so vitally important. Besides the obvious reasons, like liability and simple control of your canine there are so many others. In the search arena you are the pack leader and your dog is submissive in this relationship. His desire and ability to satisfy drives must always go through you. This relationship is vital and must be thoroughly understood by your dog.

For your partner to develop into a search dog he must be allowed to hunt in as much of a natural state as possible. Your canine is genetically predisposed to hundreds of years of hunting traits that are imbedded in his gene pool. If your dog has the right stuff all that is needed is to awaken these traits and let them work for you. Your control should be valued by your partner and not looked at as an obstacle. Once this is understood searching is a beautiful dance between you and your dog. You both become problem solvers. Yes I said problem solvers. An experienced canine who has been worked off leash for a time in a target rich environment becomes very good at his job. He will enter a large warehouse and run the walls and then with your help you will direct him in a systematic fashion to clear the interior of the location. A tactical search means that your dog must accept being called off scent in order to clear areas leading up to the scent source. You say why not let him go. Well first of all scent source often times does not mean suspect location. Additionally you may have multiple suspects in which your dog may pass while working a stronger scent source for the other suspect. Allowing a dog to run the show during a search will eventually get you hurt or killed. You must be in charge of the search and complete the search systematically. Will there be times when you let him clear an area on his own for a low risk felon, I am sure there will be. This will be your choice and you will allow this to happen and not be at his uncontrolled mercy.

Another fact that experienced handlers will immediately relate to is that some buildings and environments are complicated in their layout. If you do not complete them systematically you will miss areas and miss suspects. Believe me there is nothing worse than missing a suspect once a K9 team has "cleared" the location. Hundreds of successful searches will be forgotten by your patrol officers if you miss a suspect. They may never trust you again. When a K9 team says a building is cleared, well it should be cleared. If there are areas that you could not search then you must be very clear on that point and advise your search team and the Incident Commander of that fact.

There are so many other reasons for off leash searching and here is one more. Many handlers throughout the country are limited to the availability of search team members. Of course working with the Los Angeles Police Department we usually have the required resources for our searches. We always take a minimum of two to three search team members with each team. Instructing throughout the country I soon realized that this would be considered a luxury for many Departments. This is all the more reason for off-leash control. When you are searching for an armed suspect who will do most anything to avoid going back to jail you surely want your hands free. In fact each member of any K9 search team that is

looking for felony suspect should have his weapon in his hand period. The last thing a handler should worry about is his dog chasing a varmint or an engagement on a non-suspect with no ability to recall his dog back to his side. With limited resources and fewer back up search team members, the availability and more importantly the ability to use your weapon properly is imperative during a high risk search. You may have the toughest dog alive that will take care of business and locate anyone, anytime, anywhere. He will do you no good if you cannot control him. You see we use dogs to make are jobs safer as well as finding suspects who might not otherwise be found. Your dog should not drag you into an unsafe environment or situation because you have no control over him, this is simply unacceptable. You would not want a weapon that fires on its own nor should you want a search dog that you cannot control. My next article will introduce methods for developing off-leash direction and control during search work. You are one step closer to developing the Tactical K9.

### **Off-Leash Direction and Control (Getting Started)**

Developing direction and control with your PSD can actually be fun for many teams. If your dog is very high drive we may have to adjust his behavior a bit, for his own good of course. There are many ways to develop direction and control and I will go over a few. Hopefully you have been working toward more advance learning. If your dog has become habituated in glancing at you for direction through hand signals then he will continue this behavior as we move forward. One way of starting direction and control is utilizing blinds or any other natural barrier or obstructions that a decoy can use to hide behind while performing bite and control work. Once again you should learn to be creative in your training and pare this training toward your particular working environment. I will go over several ways and techniques that I have used to develop off-leash controlled canines. Before we start I will assume that all is going well and your partner is doing call offs from the bite and releases off the bite as well as being E-collar trained. It is important that these behaviors are locked in so we are not trying to remedy control issues as we go further into advanced training.

**Note: A few assumptions should be understood. During the explanation of your commands it is assumed that you are using one of many foreign commands that have already been imprinted in your canine. My use of “heel” or “here” commands for example, are used to explain my instruction and not the language that you have chosen to use for your specific K9 team.**

One of the most popular ways of employing off-leash work is to utilize the old fashioned blinds that are used in Schutzhund work. They are easy to set up and can be moved and added for your particular exercise. If you decide to start with blind work you can soon move to other environments and this behavior will progress quickly as the concepts are the same. Start off with two blinds set at a good distance apart (say about 40 to 50 yards). You should start with two decoys and place each one behind your blinds. At this point place the blinds in a position so when the decoy is in the blind the dog cannot see him. Your dog will eventually figure it out but not initially, he will know they are there soon enough. The blinds should be spaced out apart with you the handler and your dog in between the two (the center). With you and your dog in the center between the blinds and decoys, you will face one of them. With the e-collar attached and fitted properly and your dog on a down or sit, point and send your dog toward one of the decoys. As your dog approaches, the blind should be facing away with the decoy out of view of the dog. If your dog needs a vantage point before sending, simply have the decoy quickly display himself for your dog and then send him. This simple exercise will accomplish many things depending somewhat on your Department Policies. If you employ find & bark then as the dog goes into the blind he should perform a find & bark hold on the decoy. The decoy can now discipline the dog with a decoy correction and or you can use the E-collar to reinforce the bark & hold. The decoy will then give the dog a bite and you will perform your recall. If needed use your E-collar for the call off from the bite and return to your

side. As stated before if your dog is making a positive return to your side then let off the E-collar. All the same principles will apply with the use of the E-collar in this exercise.

At this point it is crucial for your other decoy opposite you, to be watchful of your dog. Once your dog has returned to your side and your facing the other decoy, this new decoy will then agitate the dog toward his direction. At this point send your dog and reinforce the same behavior. A point here is that if your dog is so stimulated on the original decoy, that he is having trouble focusing on the new decoy then this decoy may have to stimulate him more initially. Eventually the dog will start to get the routine and refocus more easily as you progress. He will suddenly realize that there is a positive reason to refocus and listen to the handler that is providing and allowing him to satisfy his drive. If your dog is a find & bite dog then this will go faster as you will not have to worry about reinforcing the bark & hold behavior. You will have to gauge your particular canine and see how fast he picks it up. Complete several more exercises going back and forth. You can improvise depending on the progress of your dog. For example if he starts to anticipate and gets too drivey on one or the other decoy then you can resend him on the same decoy twice (the one he does not want to go to). Usually this will be the stronger of the two. This will start to lock in the discipline and your desired control for off-leash work. You can mix things up and sometimes send him right from one decoy to another or you can stop him at your side each time. The point is for your dog to listen to your commands. Here is another point that is very important. I like to use the here command for coming toward me and not the heel command. The heel command is for heeling at my side, the here command is to come toward my direction and voice. If you command "here" then once he is coming toward you give him a pronounced hand signal pointing toward the other blind. He will learn to follow your hand signals which are paramount for this exercise. So the process is "here" and point to the desired location or blind. If you decide to mix it up and want him back at your side then make sure you give the heel command, whether it be fuss, platz or whatever language he is taught in. One thing you will find is that once your dog gets the hang of this exercise he will enjoy it and your e-collar use will probably diminish drastically as you will not need it. The reason compulsion is usually lowered is that the canine is active and positively stimulated allowing him to learn. He is given positive reasons to come off the bite of one decoy for the chance of the fight with another.

One thing I will incorporate quickly is the use of the flashlight. I believe the use of the flashlight in low light or no light environments is imperative during direction and control work. To condition you canine to follow the light is very easy indeed. You can start it during simple ball work as described in previous articles. Simply do you sessions at night with very low light. Utilize a strong flash light with a narrow cone of light that affords you the ability to pinpoint a specific area of concern. Throw the ball and but hold your canine back form retrieving it. Walk him about and suddenly point with an extended arm while holding the flashlight pointing to the ball. Give him the get it command as you assist him finding it with the light. This activity is picked up very quickly by most canines as you can become very creative in its use.

These same methods can be employed during the blind work described in this article. In a low light environment point to the decoy or area where you want your canine to go using the same light source and your canine will learn this behavior quickly. He will learn to follow the light to an area, which leads to the hidden decoy. This will set into motion the direction and control behavior we are teaching the canine. I am not a big fan of laser training during search work. I believe it certainly has its uses during a directed deployment, giving the canine a small area of concern to focus on that a light does not afford. The problem in search work is that you want the canine to go to an area and not focus on one spot. Additionally in a low light environment the laser will not offer you much in the way of light needed to observe not only your canine but areas of concern that your canine may need to get to as a possible scent source.

I will usually spend a day on this but if he is doing well and is coming off the bite easily and following your directions, we can then move on. Now the fun starts as we move on by placing four blinds in the field. They should be spaced out like a square and not a box. Two blinds should be about 20 yards apart and the other two about 40 yards away in the same fashion. Still using two decoys except we are going to add something to the exercise. Start off in the same way as before except when we call the dog off the decoy and upon his return to the handler this same decoy will now move to the other blind. The second blind should be positioned so the dog cannot easily see him from the handler's vantage point. The decoy should be inside the blind, which will make the dog go to the blind to discover him and not see him from a distance. As the dog goes to the second decoy and completes the exercise, recall and send the dog to the original blind where the other decoy was just at. He will circle and see no decoy; you will then send him toward the blind where the decoy has moved. While this is going on the decoy across the field shall move to his other blind. He will negotiate this move and try hard not to be seen doing it. I think you are starting to get the picture of what we are trying to accomplish. As this exercise gets locked in we will then add two more blinds and move each decoy in a variety of positions. The handler will use the e-collar when needed as he completes the exercise.

It is important that I explain what we are now accomplishing. Simply put we are locking in several behaviors all in a very short amount of time and utilizing motivations and a great reward system to accomplish it. We are not only locking in the find & bark (if used) and the recall off the bite, but more importantly your dog is learning to trust and listen to you. You see eventually as you progress he will start to know where the decoy is, either by assumptions or by misshapes where the decoy lets himself be seen moving from one blind to another. You see at this point it will not matter because this is not a search exercise at all, it is an obedience exercise. Your dog is learning to trust you and listen to your hand signals and voice inflections'. The end result of your commands and directions is with a bite (or at least the chance of a bite). This is the message we are sending to the dog. You are now working as a team and he begins to trust you. You are now one step closer to the **Tactical K9**.

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