

K9 Officer Tactics (part 2), by Brian Woods

I hope you found the article in last month's article informative. We will take up where we left off.

The first thing we need to discuss is our positioning. Again a little matter but one that could be the difference between life-death, an apprehension or frustration. Most of the time while training we stand next to or over our dog as we send him. Think about this! Why not take cover while deploying the dog or at least go to a knee to make yourself a smaller target. Not only does this make good tactical sense but we can also see the suspect in the same view as the dog. Meaning if we are on a knee and he is standing or sitting then our line of sight is the same. In this way you will know without a doubt that your dog has the same target as you in his/her sight. I could see over them fine but the dog could not. As a result when I sent the dog he ran toward the parked vehicles and started searching around them as I watched the suspect run out of sight. Not a good day for Brian.

While making yourself as small of a target as we can, the next thing is to give a warning. Why do we give a warning? For two reasons, the safety of the suspect or third parties and LIABILITY. I don't think I need to go on about this one, however there may be a time when I would not give a warning at all. This would not happen very often but if I am going to try to blind side an armed suspect for example I would not let him know the dog was coming. Personally I would give warnings but only loud enough for the dog to hear. This will excite the dog and cue it in on what is about to happen before you release the dog.

What is in a warning? Three things. First we identify ourselves as law enforcement. Police or Sheriff is plenty. We do not have to tell anyone who we work for (example: Horton city Police Department Canine Unit) but only that we are the police, sheriff, etc. The second thing we do is to advise the suspect what we want him/her to do, such as: "STOP"... Keep it very short and right to the point. We do not need to add any descriptive adjectives, just "STOP". The third thing we need to do is to tell the suspect what will happen if he/she doesn't, example: "or I'll send the

dog". So from behind cover if possible we have given a short precise warning to the suspect as to who we are, what we want him/her to do and what will happen if they don't.

Other things to consider is the speed in which you give your commands. Slow down so you can be understood. If your warning is short you should have the time. What is the sense in giving a warning if it is so fast your own mother would not understand you?

"How many warnings should I give?" This depends a lot on your surroundings. I try to get out three but working in the city environment seldom does it happen. There is nothing wrong with deploying the dog on the first warning and then giving a second, maybe even a third before the dog engages the suspect so long as you can stop the engagement if the suspect surrenders prior to the dog reaching him/her, it's the best of all worlds. You will look a lot better in court when you tell the jury that you kept telling the suspect to stop but the suspect would not.

What is the dog doing while the warnings are being given? In an ideal world the dog is alert, quiet and under control at your side but in Brian's world most of us are pumping the dog up, pounding on his side and the dog is reacting by pulling away from us, jumping up and down while barking. This is not good for several reasons. It is distracting to the dog and to us because we are now watching the dog and not the suspect area. It is noisy (no one can hear the warnings that you have been working so hard on) and the dog is pulling you off balance or from behind the cover you were lucky enough to find. I understand in the beginning that we pump the dog up before doing bite work because we want to build the dog up. **THIS IS NOT IN THE BEGINNING** and we are not on the training field! This is life or death! The dog should know what to do and be able to do it without you holding the dog's hand. **SLOWLY** wean the dog off the pounding and all the hoop la in training. The dog really doesn't need it but will become dependent on it at some point if you don't stop.

Some of you have dogs that are quiet or will be if told to be but some of you may need some help with this. "OK, so how do I shut the dog up?" This should be started as soon as the dog's drives in bite work are high enough to take the correction, not before. When the dog is biting and

fighting hard then you can add "Quiet 101". Start off with the dog in a down, get a baseball stance with the leash hooked to the live ring of the dogs collar. For those who use a flat collar, you will need to use a chain collar for this exercise. Fold the leash up in your hand so that it is short. Give a warning with a calm, slow, quiet voice with no decoy or stimulus present. If the dog stays quiet, praise the dog and heel the dog away. If the dog is not quiet tell the dog to be quiet with whatever command you use for that, once. If the dog is quiet, then praise the dog and heel away. If he is not quiet, then in a circular motion, step back with your right foot (if the dog is heeled on your left side) correcting the dog with a leash correction across your body just above the knees giving the heel command. You should get two to three good corrections in before you complete 360 degrees around. Then put the dog back in a down position. Give the warning again until the dog is quiet (use the correction again if needed). Are you with me? If not, NEVER try something you don't understand.

Now we have to talk about you and your dog as well as what a decoy should do. As with any patrol work exercise the decoy will make or break you and this is no exception. The decoy has to pay very close attention to the dog at this point. His job is to try to out guess the dog. What I mean by this is that he has to add just the right amount of stimulation but keep the dog quiet. If the handler has to correct the dog the decoy added a little too much too fast and has to back off some. At the end of this training, the decoy should be able to jump up and down yelling or whatever and the dog should stay put in the position it was originally put in and be quiet. Note: then and only then can you start TRUE Tactical Obedience. To start off with the decoy should be at a great distance away from the canine team. Usually start about 60 yards or so away. All the decoy should do is stand there, nothing more. If this works then the decoy can slowly move his upper body, then slowly walk, then talk and so on. See where we are going with this? You have to get out of 1st grade to get to 2nd, 3rd, etc. Slow as you go! Take the time to do this right so you don't set yourself back.

If at any time the dog barks, do the circle correction described above. If you get a couple of warnings out and he is good, send the dog to reward

him for good behavior. He will soon learn to be a little more patient. Now you can change your tone of voice while you give your warnings, from a whisper to a yell. You can start moving around while giving your warnings. The dog should learn that he/she does not move nor make a peep without being allowed to.

One more quick point. You notice I said allowed to and not commanded to. That's because we don't need to use a gruff command Tone of Voice to tell the dog to go. All we need is to use a tone that is calm and allow him to leave. Once the dog starts to pick this up and understand, put the dog in whatever position you want as a finished product (sit, down, stand). You may have to back up a step or two but no more.