

K9 Officer Tactics (part 1), by Brian Woods.

Fellow K9 Officers:

It has been some time since we have had any articles about tactics. This past national workshop I was appointed to chair the tactical committee, with additional committee members Tyler Clark, Reno P.D., Reno, Nv. and Tom Dermody, Matteson P.D., Matteson, Il. assisting. Periodically we will be submitting articles covering Tactics and training ideas to get you and your dog to the level that you can perform on the street. This will NOT be SWAT type information, however some may apply, but it is intended to help street K9 officers to be able to truly be tactical on the street. Personally I hate the word, "Tactical", because it has become the buzzword for the 90's in law enforcement. I like to think of it more as, "Common Sense", with a lot of training added.

Those of you that know me know that I have a favorite saying. The cleaned up version goes like this, "Everyone has an opinion and some people have several." Please keep in mind that we do not profess to have all the answers and our intent is only to STIMULATE you to THINK. We will be discussing training tips for you and your dog. We will be keeping it simple to start and then progress to more complicated training techniques.

We will need your help to make this work. Please call or email (contact information is at the end of this article) with your thoughts and opinions whether good or bad. If you have any ideas or have something you would like covered in future articles please let me know. Again, we are going to keep this simple to start. Most of you will say, "I knew that" and you probably do, but start doing it!

To start with I would like to cover two principles of police K9 tactics. The first and most important principle is that any K9 handler is "A police officer FIRST and a K9 handler second!". The second is that your dog is NOT going to save your life. Allow me to elaborate exactly on what this means.

Why is it that when we were a patrol officer without a K9 we used good common sense in making stops and searching buildings, but as soon as someone handed us our first dog someone sucked all of our training out of our heads? Take for example building searches. When we were a patrol officer we were instructed to stay out of the fatal funnel (doorway) because the back light would make us a great target. We were taught to keep our heads out of the door way as well and to do a quick peek if we wanted to look inside the building or room. We were told when we made entry to the building or room to do it quickly so we did not again stand in the fatal funnel. We were taught to keep away from windows because we could be seen again by the back light. Etc. Etc. Etc.....

Now we get a K9 and what do we do? We stand in the middle of the doorway yelling with a K9 barking and bouncing all over the place. We then walk right in behind the K9 with our flash light shining all over the place so we can give the suspect another crack at us. Why? Maybe we just get lazy with our training and it carries over to the street. I am not making this up people, I have been there, seen this and even done it a few times.

In adhering to the statement, "police officer FIRST" principle, when faced with a question as to what you should do tactically when deploying your K9 in a given situation, you ask yourself the following question: "How would I do this if I did not have a K9?" Then train and deploy the K9 accordingly. Never sacrifice your own officer skills to handle a dog. If you find that you are, then change the K9's training, not yours.

I believe that when we got our initial training with our K9 we were mesmerized. Just truly amazed by what this K9 could do! As a result we trust this K9 with our life. We have to take a reality check here... The K9 is a tool, a very valuable tool, but just a tool none the less. This brings us to my second and equally important principle of police K9 tactics, "Your K9 is not going to save your life, they will only give you a couple of seconds to save your own life." It is not that the K9's loyalty, training or courage is questioned here, but the fact that they are only a K9. They can locate and fight a suspect for you but they can be killed or fail you. The best you can ask of your K9 is to distract a suspect long enough for you to take cover, return fire or retreat. It will be up to you to react and to take control of the situation if you are going to survive.

I heard a funny thing this past summer while at the nationals this past June. I was talking with some handlers about training tips and things, explaining to them, as with anything, you have to walk before your run. Someone

told me what was supposed to be a joke. He asked me if I knew Clint Eastwood was a K9 handler before he was an actor. I said "no". He said he could tell Clint was because of the saying he always used, "Son you got to know your limitations". This is so, so true! Not all calls are K9 calls and some may be but they are way over your and your K9's training abilities. With this in mind I will close for now. We will be discussing deployment and call off's in the next article following in 1 week. Again, help us help you! I am looking forward to hearing from you.

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