

K9 COP

February/March 2015
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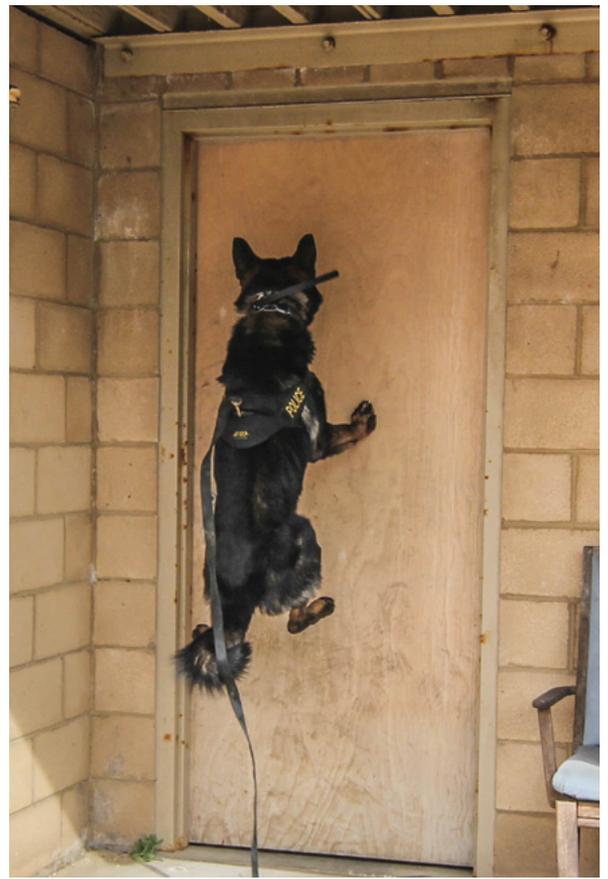
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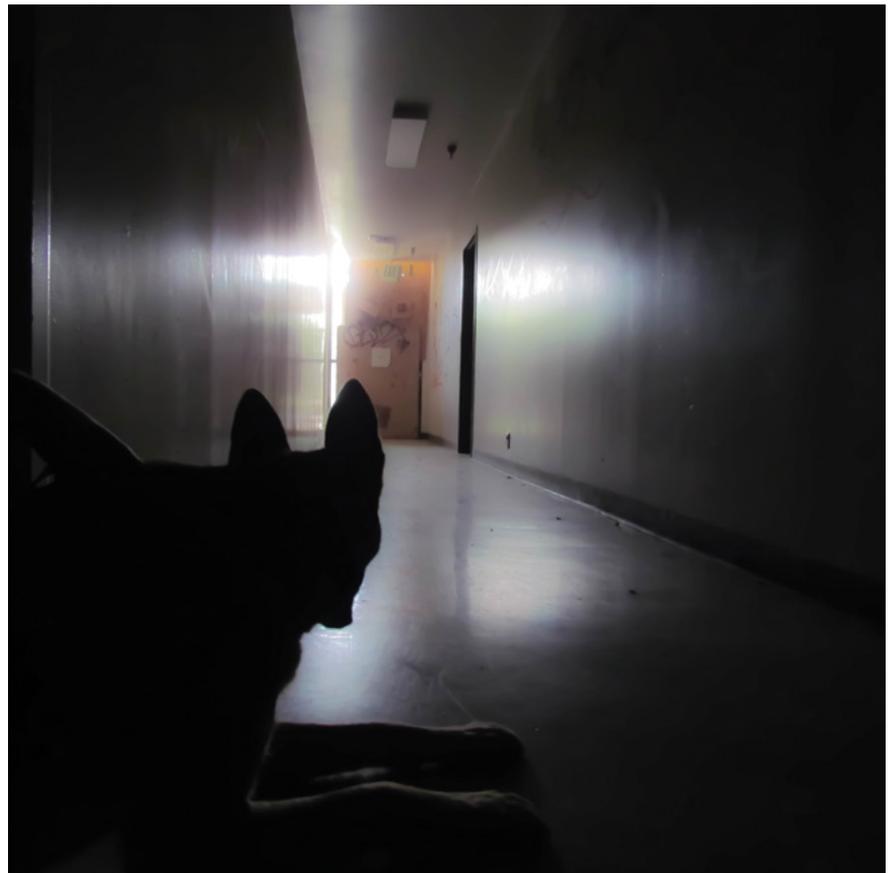
K9 tracking/trailing

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Training the Bark Alert

By Rodney Spicer



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Recently we held our annual K-9 patrol certification. The K-9 teams were prepared and ready. The obedience was excellent with enthusiasm and very responsive to the commands from their handlers. The handler protection was excellent with strong and fast pursuits of the fleeing agitator and just as responsive and fast on the cease of pursuit to return to the handler on the outs and call off. The building search was also excellent. The K-9s quickly located the odor of the role playing suspect and alerted by barking at the door they were hiding behind. Next up was the last phase of the certification - the area search.

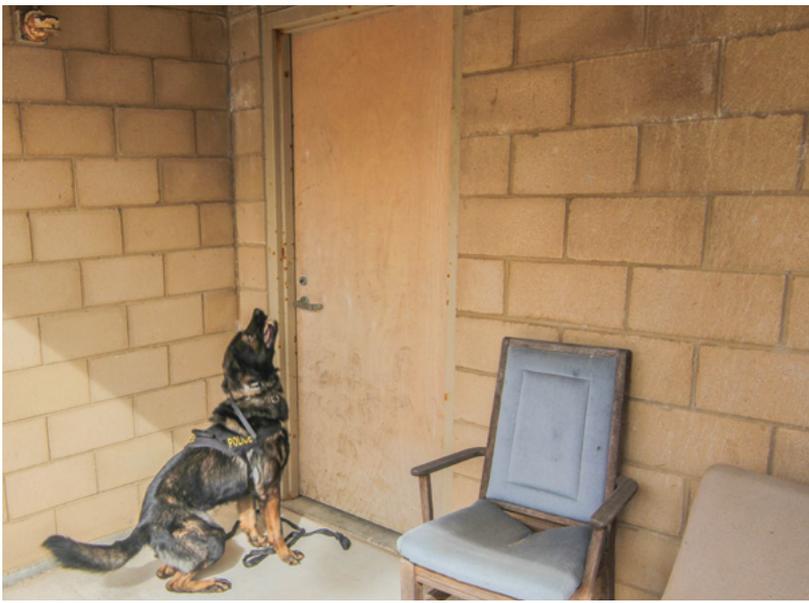
My thought at this time, after an hour and a half drive to get to the certification location and to now be in the final phase with the area search, was that I was very proud of all the K-9 teams consistent performance. Now we can finish the area search and head home with another year of patrol certifications completed.

We then head into the area search with a very large fenced in yard with many buildings and other obstacles and distractions. The first handler comes to the starting point, gives a K-9 warning announcement and sends the K-9 to conduct a search. Almost immediately, the K-9 catches odor, the handler recognizes the change in behavior as the K-9 then begins quartering back and forth with his head up following the odor in the area of thirty

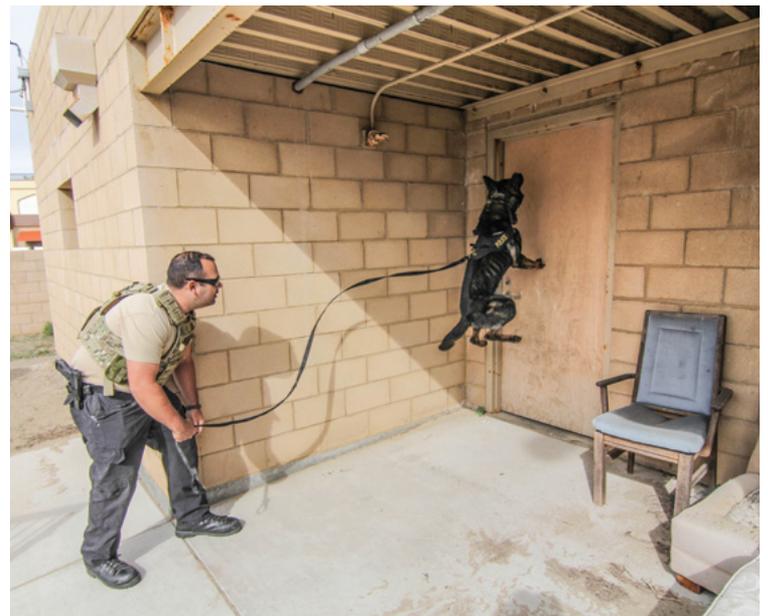
“Increasing Drive and Stimulation to Create a Trained Conditioned Response to Inaccessible Human Odor”



yards right to the source of a trash can where the role playing suspect was hiding inside. The K-9 stood on his rear feet, sniffed the lid of the trash can and then began to bark. The handler called the alert. As the handler was halfway to the trash can to retrieve the K-9, the dog turned and ran back to the handler at full speed as though he was coming to get his toy. I thought to myself, “Wow, where did that come from?” Okay, on to the next K-9 team. The next handler gives the K-9 warning announcement, sends the K-9 out to search and the performance was almost identical.



“Clear, consistent communication is necessary for successful training.”





Although the search itself was excellent, the fact the K-9s left the trash can prior to being called was unacceptable to me. It ruined the rest of my day and the coming days until we had our next K-9 training. As I was driving home, I was asking myself, "What just happened? Was it too much time dedicated to training for the certification? Was it rewarding the K-9 for returning to the handler for the toy? Was the training not balanced?" You may think that one area does not need attention because it is a strong point, but in the end, training needs to be balanced and prioritized to critical exercises and the expectations of them. I generally train in pictures and each exercise should be to the perfect picture that is in your mind of how it should look. If the K-9 is out of that perfect picture in your mind, you then need to take immediate action and remediate with corrective measures. If not, you will get what you accept.

The next training session, we addressed the bark alerts and staying at the source of odor through increasing drive and rewarding the correct behavior.

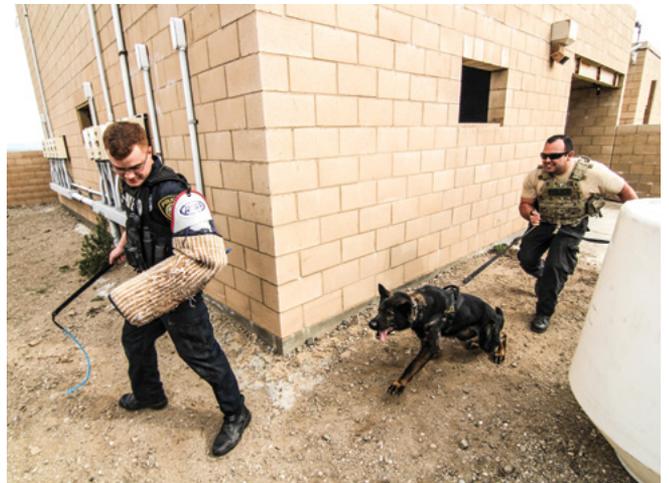
When I begin an exercise, I always begin with walking the handlers and agitators through the exercise prior to getting the PSD from the car. By rehearsing and choreographing the scenario, everyone involved will know and understand what the goal is, what the expectation of the exercise is and what you are going to do when the scenario does not go as planned.

Now that we have rehearsed the exercise, we then move on to inaccessible searches where the PSD will bark to alert the handler to where the agitator/suspect is hiding.

Briefly, start off with searches where the agitator is accessible to the PSD. Example: Day one of accessible building searches: Handler gives a K-9 warning announcement, agitator comes out from hiding and runs away from the PSD to another room with the door open, PSD is sent on search command, locates agitator and engages. After a short period, the agitator stops running out from the hiding place to stimulate the PSD. The PSD is now forming an association that when the handler sets up at a doorway and gives a warning announcement that the agitator is hiding and that they will be sent to locate due to this consistent pattern that has been formed. We then go to just slightly leaving the doors open so that the PSD is now losing the visual and beginning to use its nose. The agitator will now block the door from opening and only allow the door to open a few inches at most as the PSD is pushing on it. Out of our prior conditioning and the frustration once the PSD barks, the agitator will immediately open the door to let the PSD engage. We will then go to all doors closed so that the PSD must use

its nose to hunt and sniff the air around the doors to locate the fresh human odor. The PSD barks and the door opens to engage the agitator. The PSD has formed an association and learned a sequence of events... locate fresh human odor, bark, door opens by agitator or handler, PSD engages agitator. This method is a training technique, not real world deployments. The primary function of the PSD is a locating tool. Once the PSD has located fresh inaccessible human odor by barking, the deployment is over at that point.

Now to increase drive and reinforce the trained conditioned response by barking when locating the inaccessible agitator. The handler sets up in a position of cover, gives a loud and clear K-9 warning announcement. These are now cues to the PSD that someone is hiding and that the PSD will find them based on its prior search training. During this drive training session, the PSD will be wearing a harness with a 10' lead attached and dragging as it is searching. When the PSD locates the fresh odor of the agitator and begins to alert by barking, the handler will then go to the PSD, grab the lead and slowly back the PSD away from the door by a few feet while giving verbal praise and calling the agitator to come out from behind the door and show himself.





The agitator will come out and stimulate the PSD with equipment generally used during training and then quickly go back in the room and close the door as the handler then releases the PSD to continue barking. This stimulation is a quick burst. The agitator may be verbal as well during this time to stimulate the PSD. The handler will grab the lead again and back the PSD a few feet away from the door as he is calling the agitator to come out and show himself. The agitator will come out from behind the door, a quick burst of agitation and run away quickly to another hiding place and close the door. The handler will release the PSD to search after a few seconds once the agitator is hiding. At this point, the PSD should be highly stimulated. Once the PSD locates the inaccessible fresh odor, it will generally immediately begin barking with pronounced enthusiasm. We generally let the PSD bark for an extended period of time, up to one minute. During this time as the PSD is barking, the handler should remain silent. If the PSD stops barking, then the handler will give a bark command. The PSD must learn to work away from the handler and independent without constant reassurance and praise. If the handler is always giving verbal praise, then during a real world search, the PSD may not get the immediate reassurance and leave the suspect only to be found by another officer. The agitator will then pop open the door and the PSD will engage upon a simultaneous command from the handler. The handler will then go in the room, give verbal praise, release the PSD from the bite and the agitator will run away leaving the PSD excited. This exercise can be repeated several times during a training session. I generally have a theme for each training session. Set a goal and develop a plan of action to achieve the desired results. Do not just go through the motions - have a purpose.

Training a PSD is a big circle with many different exercises and components from arranging demos, obedience, agility, protection, building/area/article searches, detection and conditioning while always being aware of your surroundings for safety issues, loose dogs and pedestrians. Prioritize and balance critical exercises with a higher value and allow for dedicated time during training to address issues so that you do not have a failure during a real world scenario.

Considerations:

If the PSD is having a difficult time locating the agitator during a inaccessible search, do not have the agitator make noises to get the PSD's attention. A problem may develop where the PSD ranges out during a search and will stop, stand still, listen and not use its nose to locate odor. If this happens, the team may need to back up to foundation training.

K-9 warning announcements should be loud and clear while pausing in between commands just as you would during a real world deployment. The PSD will be loading and building drive, ready to explode and channel the drive into the search just as though you put a kettle on the stove - soon it will whistle due to the heat. The PSD should be quiet and contained. This will help in building focus and channeling drive.

Using the same door as an alert training door can train the PSD to go to a door and bark without locating odor. The PSD must first locate odor prior to any stimulation from the agitator.

Always rehearse the exercise with the handlers/ agitators prior to getting the PSD out of the car. Again, everyone involved needs to know what the goal is, what the expectation of the exercise is and what you are going to do when the exercise does not go as planned. Clear, consistent communication is necessary for successful training. ■



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