

## 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 on the find and bark behavior in this article but 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 is 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.

**Note:** For some canines and Departments the use of the out and guard command is used, much like some of the military working dog standards. If this is your wish it is easy to employ and usually allows the stronger willed canine an opportunity to de-escalate himself from the out and then you can follow-up with the recall. With patience you can train for either one – the out and guard and or the simple recall off the bite and back to your side. I want to stress though that for real world deployments you must be careful to train for the quick recall. Leaving your canine in a guard position after a contact (bite) is simply asking a lot out of your partner to stay and guard after a bite encounter – my point is train for the quick recall as well.

## **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 closer to the **TACTICAL K9**.