

K-9 TACTICS (Area and Building Searches)

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The purpose of this article is to offer the reader a basic philosophy of K-9 Tactics utilized during searches (building and area). It should be noted that this article is only a brief outline of tactics utilized and is offered as a guideline for future reference.

Mind-Set

Before one can begin to talk about tactics of any kind the subject of mind-set must come into play. It has been stated a thousand times before and I will state it again; your primary adversary in police work is **complacency**. How many times have we searched a building or an area and discovered the suspect to gone on arrival (GOA). How many times have we located a suspect and taken them into custody without incident. Even a high find ratio of 50% means that half the time that suspects are discovered to be GOA during K-9 searches. Additionally, when located most suspects are taken into custody with little to no resistance.

How do we combat complacency? There are several things we can do to reduce and or eliminate complacency. One of the most important things we can do is **train**. Remember we train to condition and **proof** ourselves in situations we are rarely presented with. Training provides us with a foundation to fall back on during a high stress incident. Training develops our foundation and gives us confidence. It has been proven time and again that training diminishes use of force incidents, officer involved shootings and injuries to officers. Training creates and maintains a mind-set that readies us for serious tactical situations. Remember proper mind-set is more than just a will to live. Proper mind-set does not begin during a tactical situation but should manifest itself in our everyday attitude and **tactical development**. The subject of mind-set is the foundation for everything we do in police work and is paramount during tactical K-9 searches. The subject of mind-set cannot be overstated.

K-9 Search Team Cell Concept

The K-9 search Team cell concept is one that is often practiced in law enforcement organizations, and has been developed over many years of practice. The cell concept consists of either three or four member search teams.

Note: During unusual high-risk incidents (multiple suspects, heavily armored and or superior weaponry, the number of search team members can be increased.)

The cell concept affords the handler with optimum cover while allowing needed movement during a K-9 search. It is understood that a K-9 search is a **dynamic one** and will change constantly with the environment offered. The K-9 search team shall consist of one canine and handler. His search team shall consist of a number two man that will work closely with him, keeping a visual responsibility in front of the handler. The number three and four team members shall be responsible for the left and right areas of the search and provide cover as rear guards. When deploying a shotgun or long rifle it is imperative that this team member work directly next to the handler, and in some environments work directly in front of him. It is vitally important that the shotgun man not fall behind the handler causing an officer safety issue. Some canines need to be exposed to this tactic (team member working in front of the handler). It is advisable that the shotgun man be provided with a sling, preferably a one or three-point type. This allows the shotgun or long rifle to easily be slung to the search team member's side, making an easy transition to his pistol if needed. When deploying through open doorways or fenced gates, the shotgun man shall enter first, directly following the canine scanning and covering known and unknown territory.

Note: The threshold area of a door or gate or any similar type opening is considered a potential **kill zone**. The tactic of having the shotgun man following the canine instead of the handler, gives more cover and protection to the handler once he has passed through the threshold area. This tactic is often referred to as "**guns up front.**" The handler immediately follows the shotgun man who then provides cover and protection while he conducts his search. This tactic keeps the threshold or **kill zone** area clear for additional members to make entry. A situation may arise where an assigned patrol officer is utilized to deploy a shotgun. Because of tactical considerations, personnel with some advance training in this search technique should normally be utilized.

It is imperative that the handler has tactical control over the search team and its movement. This control shall be explained prior to beginning the search. It is the handler's job to assign areas of responsibility to each search team member. Search team members shall maintain visual responsibility of the areas of assignment and not that of the canine. When a handler has read a possible alert by his canine he shall inform his search team verbally or by hand signal. This will allow search team members time to locate tactical positions of advantage and move toward them, while maintaining cover for the handler. There will be times when a positive alert by the canine has located an inaccessible suspect who refuses to surrender. In this case it may become practical to remove the canine from the problem to safely access the concealed suspect. A decision must be made at this point whether or not the assigned canine has done all it can do in a given situation. The question at this point has the canine done all it can and should it be taken out of the problem. When making this decision one must know the abilities and limitations of the involved canine (be honest).

When a suspect is located, one designated search team member (usually the number three man) shall administer orders to the suspect. The handler shall have control (by leash or tab) over his canine and maintain his control while the suspect is being taken into custody. During an altercation between the canine and the suspect the handler shall recall the canine at the appropriate time. Search team members shall be instructed prior to beginning the search not to interfere during this type of situation unless directed by the handler. Search team members shall not approach the suspect until the handler has directed them to do so.

Note: It is imperative that the assigned K9 Handler have off-leash control over his canine partner. This cannot be stressed enough. Having to leave a position of tactical advantage to complete a “choke off” or some other method of release, places the handler and search team members at unnecessary risk.

Perimeter Considerations

Most canine searches are initiated by patrol officers preceded by successful containment of the suspect, either in an open area or a building. The success of a canine search obviously begins at this point. With this in mind, the subject of perimeter tactics should be discussed. Supervisors should have ongoing discussions and training involving **perimeter tactics**.

Discuss Perimeter Tactics before you need them

- Planning and training are essential for the apprehension of suspects fleeing on foot.
- Officers should discuss perimeters with their partners during their watch, along with other tactics.
- Officers should know their area such as alleys, gang location and other common “bail out areas.”
- Think **perimeter** and **containment** whenever possible. The earlier you request a perimeter, the better the chance of a successful apprehension. Long foot pursuits, which are followed by a perimeter, are usually unsuccessful.
- When available always request an Air Ship to assist in situations that are likely to end in a foot pursuit.

Communications

- When suspect(s) start running, give short vital information to responding units.
- Direction of travel and location are imperative pieces of information.
- What is the suspect description and the type of crime (armed or unarmed).
- When the Air Ship arrives, they need to communicate with the primary unit only. With your light, show the Air Ship where you are and where the suspect was last seen. The Air Ship at this point shall assist you in setting up containment.
- How large do you want the perimeter? This decision should be made quickly. One should consider the crime and how close responding units are.
- It is better to make a perimeter bigger than smaller, you can always downsize at a later time. If time has passed, increasing the size of a perimeter is usually futile.
- The primary unit should set up the short side of the block; this allows two officers to initially cover three sides of a block. It is essential that officers keep each other in sight at all times.

Responding Units Responsibilities

- During a vehicle following, attempt to parallel the primary unit, especially if they enter an alley. Alleys are one of the most common “bail out” locations during vehicle pursuits.
- Think common sense as to where to respond. If you are not close, consider going two-blocks away from the primary unit. If not instructed otherwise circle the area and “find a spot.”
- When you arrive at a corner, activate your light bar to make your presence known, especially if no Air Ship is present. This will create stress for a fleeing suspect and force him to “**put down**” in the perimeter. The same applies to buildings and large warehouses.
- Officers on the perimeter should be standing **outside** of their vehicles using both eyes and ears. Suspects attempt to run and even walk out of perimeters on a regular basis. If an armed suspect “pops out” of the perimeter in front of you, what tactical position would you want to be in?

- When the perimeter is set, request a tactical frequency and a K-9 unit.
- Keep radio traffic to a minimum, allowing only emergency communications after the K-9 search begins. All administrative communications shall be completed on another frequency.
- If an emergency occurs during the search inside the perimeter, (shots fired or suspect running) hold your position and maintain **perimeter integrity** unless directed by a K-9 Officer or Field Incident Commander.

Incident De-Brief

One of the most neglected practices after a tactical incident is the debrief. It is the responsibility of Field Supervisors to constantly evaluate and de-brief tactical situations that have occurred. Incidents shall be evaluated in good spirit involving good points as well as bad ones. Hard issues that may develop during these incidents should be discussed and not sidestepped. It is important to remember that de-briefing will enhance future operations and can be utilized as a training tool to benefit all. The stated considerations in this handout can and should be used as a guideline when de-briefing.

Summary

The use of a canine should always be considered when attempting to locate a secreted suspect. Utilizing a canine is tactically safer and faster. More importantly suspects can be located in locations where they would never be conventionally found.

Canines were developed for these reasons. Additionally, considerations of liability should be one of concern when the decision not to utilize a canine is made. If a question arises as to the use or policy involved during a particular incident, contact your K9 Unit for discussion. Upon notification a decision will be made if the use of a canine is warranted.

This article is offered as a guideline for consideration. Every situation is unique. These guidelines should be utilized and tailored to your Department resources and the particular incident.

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