

E-COLLAR TRAINING FIND & BARK / DIRECTION and CONTROL

Why the Find & bark

In my last article we dealt with the release from the bite behavior. I did not go over the find & bark as it is a subject in and of itself. I separated this into its own section because it can be very involved and it usually conjures up some discussion among dog trainers and handlers. Before we get into training the behavior lets discuss the philosophy of the find & bark, bark and hold, circle and bark, or detainment training. At the Los Angeles Police Department this is what we employ. I would like to discuss a brief history.

During the early 1990's the Los Angeles Police K-9 Platoon did not have a find & bark or bark & hold policy as it currently does. The policy then was handler control. This policy in a nutshell allowed the working canine to locate the secreted suspect and absent a command the canine would engage the suspect resulting in a canine bite. During this same period of time the Los Angeles Police Department as well as the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department was involved in an onslaught of litigation involving civil attorneys representing individuals that had been bitten and injured during K-9 search apprehensions. It was at this time that the K-9 Platoon looked into changing the policy from handler control to find & bark.

At the time many of the same requirements involving training and certifications and the use of the e-collars were in effect. The fundamental difference was the locating and apprehension policy. In an effort to reduce canine contacts and injuries to suspects the area of suspect apprehension was examined. At the time we were utilizing the e-collar to assist us in canine searches. As I have continually stated the e-collar was and always should be used as a conditioning tool rather than a punishment tool. It was not mandated at the time but was offered to teams as an insurance policy during times of high agitation while conducting canine searches. As I have stated it allowed us the ability to recall a canine during such times to avoid unnecessary canine contacts. It also offered us a tool that could drastically diminish accidental bites during K9 deployments. Paralleling the stated onslaught of litigation was the Christopher Commission Study into our Departments use of force policies. This investigation caused our K-9 Platoon to re-examine the handler control and handler discretion policy of locating suspects.

The Training Cadre at the time was headed by Sergeant Donn Yarnall who then implemented the now find & bark policy of suspect apprehension. It was found that this method of canine search work offered the handler time to quickly access each incident when the canine located a secreted suspect and allowed for a recall before a canine contact occurred. Prior to this a handler had to be working much closer with his canine

and sometimes anticipate an unnecessary canine contact with the suspect. The reality of a canine search is that there are sometimes moments, no matter how brief that a working canine is out of the handler's site and control. If a suspect is secreted in such a location the opportunity to surrender is not an option and a canine contact would occur. Handler control also placed more stress on the handler to work closer and sometimes unsafely close to his canine to avoid such situations.

The major flaw in the find & bark policy was the handler's ability or inability to correct a canine during real field encounters. The e-collar became the answer to this problem. A working canine could now locate a suspect and if it appeared he was going to be "dirty" and not complete a clean find & bark the handler could now make an e-collar correction from a tactically safe position. Upon changing our policy from handler control to find & bark the e-collar became an essential piece of equipment. This was also in agreement with Christopher Commission mandates. After this mandate was in place the K-9 Platoon was given a six month period of time to re-train all working K-9 teams to locate and apprehend suspects utilizing the find & bark method. This has been our policy since. This policy along with strict maintenance training has dramatically dropped our contact ratio from 45/55 % to 12/22 % respectively. The policy now allows a canine to make contact during specific incidences. Many searches involve the locating of aggressive suspects. One must realize that the K-9 Platoon is the last effort and tool an officer has to locate a secreted suspect. A suspect that has been given the opportunity to surrender and refused, sometimes aggressively, often maintains that motivation when he is secreted and then located during a canine search. The find & bark gives not only the suspect an additional opportunity to surrender but also the handler time to evaluate the situation and recall the canine before a contact is made.

Many agencies still do not adhere to or agree with the find & bark method. The argument is that it leaves the decision to bite with the canine or a canine learns to bump the suspect in order to make him move to allow him a bite. We have found that this is not the case with the proper use of the e-collar. Additionally, once a canine completes a bark alert it is up to the handler, as soon as practicable to recall the canine back to his side. Proper tactics are then utilized to allow the suspect to surrender. The canine is still available for deployment if necessary. The simple fact is that when a canine performs a bark and hold on a real suspect, it affords the handler the ability to quickly asses the real time event. Any trainer or seasoned handler will attest that the longer you leave a canine in the find and bark behavior the chance of a bite may increase because of suspect movement and or aggression and assault to the canine. If the situation (environment and tactical advantage) allows for it the handler should recall the canine as soon as practicable. Other changes were implemented to maintain this policy. It was found that lack of training and reinforcement of said training would diminish quickly with the find & bark policy. Therefore, the enhancement of the Training

Cadre was completed in order to maintain the find and bark guidelines of suspect apprehension. The development and design of current e-collar have advanced in such a way that the level of correction on the collars can be dialed in to a very minor correction to a more aggressive correction depending on the level of disobedience when channeling a desired behavior for any given situation.

A final area to be mentioned is canine control during an aggressive encounter with a suspect. The e-collar offers the handler the option and ability to recall his canine during such times. The first question is why would one need to recall a canine during such times? The answers and situations are numerous to be sure. Many encounters with suspects during canine contacts place suspects in a fight or flight mindset. Once in this state a suspect may be defending himself. A canine in an aggressive state certainly cannot differentiate between self-defense and aggression toward him. It is then up to the handler to recall the canine and allow the suspect a chance to surrender to avoid substantial injury. Additionally, a suspect may be armed with a weapon, such as a pipe, knife or hard blunt object that could indeed cause serious injury or death to the canine. Only the handler has the ability to ascertain the identified danger and recall the canine.

Many canines in a high state of fight and self-defense will not call off in field situations. Once again the handler can tactically recall his canine back to his side during such encounters. In closing one should understand that canine intelligence is based on proper conditioning and the ability to correct. A canine soon learns the difference between training exercises and real field encounters. If a canine is not corrected during field encounters and only during staged training exercises then an association to misbehave in field encounters will quickly be made and ingrained in the canine. Conversely if field situations are treated as training exercises in the canines mind, then conditioning is constant and true. The e-collar allows proper reinforcement to be completed in any tactical situation. It is this ability to have an invisible leash that allows us such precise and consistent training. In closing I would like to say one thing and that is whether you employ find & bark, handler discretion or find and bite it always comes down to handler control. You are responsible for your dog, his training and his performance. If a real field encounter demands that your dog bite than he should bite, if it does not than he should not and you should have the control to allow it or not allow it. It is really as simple as that.

Find & bark Training

Before we can start find & bark training we must first make sure we have the right dog. You say that goes without saying but not so fast. The fact of the matter is that a true find & bark dog is usually one that has a little more of everything we want in a PSD. The find & bark dog requires more fight drive, as well as enhanced hunt drive. The reason for this is that he must be willing to accept holding his prey at bay in a stable and

balanced attitude. Training the behavior sometimes is not as hard as maintaining the behavior. The behavior becomes harder to maintain after the canine has had field encounters where the suspect has hit, struck and attacked the find & bark dog. If your dog is worth his muster he will certainly want to go in strong and hard on his next encounter after this occurs. We must constantly reinforce the behavior to maintain balance and reliability.

If you have a new dog that is titled in KNVP, Ring Sport, or Schutzhund then part of your work is done. What I want to stress here is that even if your dog understands the behavior I still go back to basics and make sure the dog is locked in. We accomplish this once again by controlling his environment, by incorporating a long line in the exercise. With the 30 foot long line attached to his pinch collar (placed behind the e-collar) and the dog at the handlers side we can begin. Remember the check list for the e-collar before we start. Make sure the e-collar is in front of the pinch collar so when the correction on the pinch is made it will not interfere with the e-collars position. One more caveat here is to make sure you are using a good decoy. Now he does not have to be Ring Sport Certified but he must be able to read a dogs behavior and have some semblance of skill and ability to manipulate behavior in a working dog. He should not be weak in nature or conversely to strong and bull headed. Your decoy needs to be strong when necessary and submissive when applicable, coupled with the ability to finesse a dog into proper behavior. I know this is asking a lot but it will save you countless hours in training, trust me. I believe the right decoy can truly make or break a dog.

With your dog at your side and long line attached send him in to your decoy. As he approaches into the hold position, give him a quick snap with the pinch collar and simultaneously nick him with the e-collar correction. Use a level at least as strong as what was used in your obedience work. If he is in very high drive then dial up the correction a bit. Remember that right now we are only marrying the leash pinch correction with the e-collar correction. The e-collar correction is only offered as a communication device so keep the level of stimulation moderate just to get his attention. The pinch correction is what is really stopping him at this point. The decoy should be squaring off at the dog with his hands tucked around to his side. I personally do most of my training with decoys in bite suits. I want to make sure the dog bites anywhere and whatever is offered to him from the decoy (leg, back or arm). There are times when I go to the single sleeve and will discuss that later. I also have decoys hold a soft stick or padded stick and make sure they use it when necessary. As the dog comes in and is nicked by the e-collar make sure he does not get to bite the decoy. He must be made clean in the behavior and it is important that communication between the handler / trainer and decoy is solid. A point here is that many sport dogs will go in and perform a nice hold exercise but have trouble on the recall. Let us discuss this. First of all I train

all our dogs to recall from the decoy. Tactically and in the field this is a must. I do not want handlers to have to go anywhere near the dog from a tactically safe position to recall their canine partners or worse yet do the infamous “choke off”. There may be times they approach closer and I will get into those times later but this is not the norm. A titled dog is not (normally) trained to recall. Remember they have been trained to be escorted from the decoy and this behavior has been imprinted in them over and over again. We must allow for this and extinguish such behavior fairly and over time. Once again this is why we use the long line.

So the dog goes to the decoy and sits and barks, the decoy settles the dog and then gives him a bite. The handler or helper has the long line in his hand and then when ready the handler recalls his canine back to his side. Use one command and one command only, the heel command. Simultaneously the dog is stimulated with the e-collar while he is corrected with the pinch and long line. The long line correction should be completed as a snap and not a tug. The e-collar can be used in different ways at this point. What seems to work better is a nick off the bite and then let off, as the dog turns toward the handler because of the long line, hit him again with the e-collar. You can also stimulate him off the bite and keep the e-collar activated all the way back to your side. This is old school method and I find it is usually not as productive as the first method. I have found over the years that nicking him off the bite makes the dog react in a surprise fashion, almost like a quick leash snap. It also allows the dog to refocus and hopefully submit to your verbal command. Once he is off the bite then hit him again with the e-collar until he has made a positive return back to the handler’s side. I have found that too much juice from the e-collar, especially in the beginning may send the dog into “fight”. Many dogs once in fight will bite harder on the decoy and try to fight through the e-collar. Some very hard dogs will fight through the e-collar requiring other forms of compulsion; this is certainly something to be avoided. A good rule of thumb is to watch your dog with a careful eye and when he displays positive and desired behavior then let off the e-collar. An important point here is to allow creativity and tailoring to your specific dog. No trainer in the world will ever be able to mimic each and every problem that may come up with a particular team. A good trainer will offer you a large bag of tricks and tools to pull from to condition appropriate and desired behavior.

A couple of things to cover here that many handlers encounter during find and bark training and that is what is a good position for the dog to be in during find and bark behavior. Well the simple answer is the sit or the bounce sit position. For the majority of dogs this is not a problem, however, some dogs just have a hard time maintaining it. Here is my answer. As with many other behaviors your particular dog may have, sometimes you have to ask yourself how far do I want to go to get what I want and how much compulsion will it take to get there. For example if your dog goes in and is stable

in a half sit and stand position, and is reliable than this might be acceptable. If this position makes him edgy and unstable, then demand the more stable position. Every once in a while I come across a dog that will not consistently stay in the sit position and is dirty (biting the passive decoy). I have on occasion taught these dogs to go into a down position. The down position is not something I am very fond of; there are several reasons for this. In the real environment it may be hard for the canine to go into this position because of the environment. Additionally the down position sometimes takes the canine too far out of drive and if the suspect suddenly bolts or decides to assault the canine then he is at somewhat of a disadvantage. I believe the sit offers the canine more tactical options for the canine in these kinds of incidences.

Before we move on it is only fair that I cover issues that will surely come up with some of you during find and bark training. In some of my prior writings I covered the importance of realizing that the e-collar is not the save all to correcting or more importantly conditioning new behaviors. There are many times that the handler leash correction with his or her canine is vital to creating the correct pack relationship between the two, which often cannot be attained with just the e-collar. Remember when your canine was young and disobedient with his mama. Mama dog certainly did not grab an e-collar to correct unwanted behavior; she simply grabbed her youngster by the neck and gave him a harsh neck correction. This first learned behavior is something that will always be with your canine, make no mistake. My point is never under estimate the proper use of the leash and correction collar that first got you there.

This leads me to my topic of decoy corrections during find and bark behavior. If you are lucky and you use the e-collar, long line and pinch collar to instill the find and bark and it works, consider yourself lucky and you can move on. However, many dogs need more than just the e-collar. They need to learn to respect the decoy. If you have any time as a handler you have certainly seen what a strong dog will do with a weak decoy. Simply put he will rule his world if allowed. I have seen hard push button dogs over time loose all their good work after being worked by weak decoys. You will not want all your hard work to go down the drain because of this. Remember if your training session is going high and right because of a poor decoy, stop the madness. You will only lock in more disobedient behavior and have a bigger problem later, requiring heavy compulsion to fix.

Going Off-Leash

Making the call to drop the long line and go off-leash during find & bark training is once again going to depend on many factors. A rule of thumb here is to be conservative and make sure the behavior is locked in. Additionally if the find & bark behavior is locked in then the use of negative reinforcement is justified and warranted and more importantly understood by the canine. Remember that negative reinforcement should never

precede conditioning and learning, be fair. Some dogs will take to the behavior very quickly and after a day or two they understand it. The dog goes in and performs the find & bark, is given the bite and is recalled nicely back to the handlers side. Keep the long line on him until he is consistent in his release and recall. Also make sure he is solid on the recall where no bite is given. The dog should not be given a bite each time, in fact some dogs will become to frantic with too many bites during detainment training. Remember reward systems are used often when you are teaching a new behavior but should dissipate once it is learned (they should be variable and intermittent). You will have to read your particular canine. A good rule of thumb is to mix it up, if it appears he is demanding a bite do not give it to him and conversely when it is locked in let him have his bite. If this is your dog consider yourself fortunate and you can move on to field and search work. I will get into this later.

The Strong Willed Dog

The strong willed dog will obviously take more work. An examination of his drive level and his tolerance to compulsion will also have to be determined. Often times the strong willed dog will require a good decoy or agitator. I mention this because many trainers make the mistake of thinking that the e-collar can solve all problems, this is not so. It is only one of your tools and many times has to be utilized and coordinated with other methods. The use of a padded stick may be required to correct the dog into the find & bark. If this method is needed it will allow you to marry up the decoy correction with the e-collar and long line correction. It may sound like much to do but it really is not. The bottom line is at some point you will have to drop the long line on the strong willed canine. It may require good stick work to punish the canine off the bite. These types of dogs need to respect the decoy and learn that he is a force to be reckoned with. He needs to perform the find & bark behavior and that is all there is to it. This is the mindset of the team (handler, decoy and or helper). The area of good decoy work is of course a subject in itself. There are many techniques that involve good decoy work but make no mistake if you have a strong willed canine these methods will probably have to be employed.

My experience in the dog training community has always been that these types of techniques are not written about and only discussed. I am not sure why but every dog trainer knows that some very high pain tolerant canines require more compulsion. Like us there are individuals that are not the norm and you must adapt your methods. If you do not you may never have controllable canine, whether he is find and bite or find and bark. There are some canines that are worked with two receivers on their e-collar. For these dogs anything less is worth the pain to satisfy a drive. It should be noted that if you had these same dogs when they were young and malleable then proper channeling and conditioning could have been done to avoid these behaviors. The simple fact is this; many dogs that are being sold are being brought along way to fast. The trainers

and breeders are enhancing prey and fight drives with no control whatsoever. This is producing canines that are hard and look good as potential Police Service Dogs (PSD's) but are very hard and pain tolerant indeed. There is a light at the end of the tunnel though. Many of these strong willed dogs have simply learned to fight through conventional compulsion. If you condition these dogs properly and over time they usually can be channeled correctly. Additionally many of them simply have to know that you have the ability to go to a high level of compulsion. Once this is established you will find that most only need to be reminded of this fact very seldom.

The message here is that if you need it, you have it for the time your dog decides to roll the dice. There are other methods to employ but require special skills and trainers and sometimes it is well worth it to seek out these trainers. Very often they can employ skills that will allow you to salvage your canine who has possibly become a liability issue because you have no control over him, be it the find & bark or simply outing from the man. Some of you may be thinking well I will never go to that level of compulsion. These same trainers are the ones that are quite frankly beating their dogs off the bite. Dogs are coming back from a training session with broken ribs and or permanent neck injuries from constant choke offs and double lining. The use of the e-collar is much less drastic than some of these methods. The important fact here is that it can be used anytime and anywhere with your dog. You will never have to leave cover or concealment in a tactical situation to choke or punish your dog off a bite.

The Find & Bark in Search Work

Once you have developed this behavior on the field then it is paramount that you solidify it in the search environment. You must now reinforce the find & bark during search work. You can also start this like any other new behavior, baby steps. You might be saying well this should be no big deal as he is solid on the field. Remember this is very static and controlling environment and the dog is not in hunt drive. We must now show and teach the dog to be compliant in the find & bark behavior during search work. You can start this on the familiar field as you have the decoy start moving from various positions, behind structures and or barricades. Over time you will start to mimic more the natural environment he will be working in while he is searching for a decoy / suspect.

If you want to incur the expense of a second transmitter, this will assist you in reinforcing behaviors during any search work (be it find & bark or find & bite). Let me explain. I am not sure about other brands but Tri Tronics allow you to marry up additional transmitters to one collar receiver. As you progress it is important to add different body postures for the canine. The decoy should slowly start to place himself in unique hiding locations. The decoy should be able to squat and hide in a seated position. Some canines have no problems with this but many have to be conditioned to

this new twist. Some canines will come in to a seated decoy and recognize this as something different and will not detain but bite. So we once again have to take baby steps to instill learning.

If your decoy is in a tight space secreted and equipped with a transmitter, it will allow him to observe and use good timing to correct your dog should he need it. The decoy can use the transmitter to reinforce the find & bark and or the recall from bite. As I have mentioned in the previous articles this ability offers you the handler to reinforce behaviors anytime and anywhere. Your canine quickly realizes this fact and will not try and gamble because of this ability to provide consistent reinforcement. Once your dog is performing the find & bark from various positions on the training field then it is time to move into search environments. I usually try and keep it simple at first by providing pretty cut and dry hiding locations for the team. Additionally you must make sure that you communicate to your helpers what is expected from them and what you are trying to accomplish during that specific exercise. If it is a find & bark with a bite then all parties should know this or what happens if the dog is dirty and fails to perform the find & bark. What will be the method of correction and what will be done afterwards to correct and instill the proper behavior? These simple instructions should all be counseled beforehand. There is much more to do as it pertains to search work and control, which now places us in the area of advanced training as it pertains to off-leash searching.

Why Direction and Control (Off Leash)

By now I am sure you are getting the fact that I am very demanding in the area of off leash control. How handlers are still working their canines attached to long lines is completely beyond me and it is my desire for all of you to move beyond these restrictions. Before we get into methods, I will like to once again get into the reasons why off leash control is so vitally important. Besides the obvious reasons, like liability and simple control of your canine there are so many others. In the search arena you are the pack leader and your dog is submissive in this relationship. His desire and ability to satisfy drives must always go through you. This relationship is vital and must be thoroughly understood by your dog.

For your partner to develop into a search dog he must be allowed to hunt in as much of a natural state as possible. Your canine is genetically predisposed to hundreds of years of hunting traits that are imbedded in his gene pool. If your dog has the right stuff all that is needed is to awaken these traits and let them work for you. Your control should be valued by your partner and not looked at as an obstacle. Once this is understood searching is a beautiful dance between you and your dog. You both become problem solvers. Yes I said problem solvers. An experienced canine who has been worked off leash for a time in a target rich environment becomes very good at his job. He will enter

a large warehouse and run the walls and then with your help you will direct him in a systematic fashion to clear the interior of the location. A tactical search means that your dog must accept being called off scent in order to clear areas leading up to the scent source. You say why not let him go. Well first of all scent source often times does not mean suspect location. Additionally you may have multiple suspects in which your dog may pass while working a stronger scent source for the other suspect. Allowing a dog to run the show during a search will eventually get you hurt or killed. You must be in charge of the search and complete the search systematically. Will there be times when you let him clear an area on his own for a low risk felon, I am sure there will be. This will be your choice and you will allow this to happen and not be at his uncontrolled mercy.

Another fact that experienced handlers will immediately relate to is that some buildings and environments are complicated in their layout. If you do not complete them systematically you will miss areas and miss suspects. Believe me there is nothing worse than missing a suspect once a K9 team has "cleared" the location. Hundreds of successful searches will be forgotten by your patrol officers if you miss a suspect. They may never trust you again. When a K9 team says a building is cleared, well it should be cleared. If there are areas that you could not search then you must be very clear on that point and advise your search team and the Incident Commander of that fact.

There are so many other reasons for off leash searching and here is one more. Many handlers throughout the country are limited to the availability of search team members. Of course working with the Los Angeles Police Department we usually have the required resources for our searches. We always take a minimum of two to three search team members with each team. Instructing throughout the country I soon realized that this would be considered a luxury for many Departments. This is all the more reason for off-leash control. When you are searching for an armed suspect who will do most anything to avoid going back to jail you surely want your hands free. In fact each member of any K9 search team that is looking for felony suspect should have his weapon in his hand period. The last thing a handler should worry about is his dog chasing a varmint or an engagement on a non-suspect with no ability to recall his dog back to his side. With limited resources and fewer back up search team members, the availability and more importantly the ability to use your weapon properly is imperative during a high risk search. You may have the toughest dog alive that will take care of business and locate anyone, anytime, anywhere. He will do you no good if you cannot control him. You see we use dogs to make are jobs safer as well as finding suspects who might not otherwise be found. Your dog should not drag you into an unsafe environment or situation because you have no control over him, this is simply unacceptable. You would not want a weapon that fires on its own nor should you want a search dog that you cannot control. My next article will introduce methods for

developing off-leash direction and control during search work. You are one step closer to developing the Tactical K9.

Off-Leash Direction and Control (Getting Started)

Developing direction and control with your PSD can actually be fun for many teams. If your dog is very high drive we may have to adjust his behavior a bit, for his own good of course. There are many ways to develop direction and control and I will go over a few. Hopefully you have been working toward more advance learning. If your dog has become habituated in glancing at you for direction through hand signals then he will continue this behavior as we move forward. One way of starting direction and control is utilizing blinds or any other natural barrier or obstructions that a decoy can use to hide behind while performing bite and control work. Once again you should learn to be creative in your training and pare this training toward your particular working environment. I will go over several ways and techniques that I have used to develop off-leash controlled canines. Before we start I will assume that all is going well and your partner is doing call offs from the bite and releases off the bite as well as being E-collar trained. It is important that these behaviors are locked in so we are not trying to remedy control issues as we go further into advanced training.

Note: A few assumptions should be understood. During the explanation of your commands it is assumed that you are using one of many foreign commands that have already been imprinted in your canine. My use of “heel” or “here” commands for example, are used to explain my instruction and not the language that you have chosen to use for your specific K9 team.

One of the most popular ways of employing off-leash work is to utilize the old fashioned blinds that are used in Schutzhund work. They are easy to set up and can be moved and added for your particular exercise. If you decide to start with blind work you can soon move to other environments and this behavior will progress quickly as the concepts are the same. Start off with two blinds set at a good distance apart (say about 40 to 50 yards). You should start with two decoys and place each one behind your blinds. At this point place the blinds in a position so when the decoy is in the blind the dog cannot see him. Your dog will eventually figure it out but not initially, he will know they are there soon enough. The blinds should be spaced out apart with you the handler and your dog in between the two (the center). With you and your dog in the center between the blinds and decoys, you will face one of them. With the e-collar attached and fitted properly and your dog on a down or sit, point and send your dog toward one of the decoys. As your dog approaches, the blind should be facing away with the decoy out of view of the dog. If your dog needs a vantage point before sending, simply have the decoy quickly display himself for your dog and then send him. This simple exercise will accomplish many things depending somewhat on your

Department Policies. If you employ find & bark then as the dog goes into the blind he should perform a find & bark hold on the decoy. The decoy can now discipline the dog with a decoy correction and or you can use the E-collar to reinforce the bark & hold. The decoy will then give the dog a bite and you will perform your recall. If needed use your E-collar for the call off from the bite and return to your side. As stated before if your dog is making a positive return to your side then let off the E-collar. All the same principles will apply with the use of the E-collar in this exercise.

At this point it is crucial for your other decoy opposite you, to be watchful of your dog. Once your dog has returned to your side and your facing the other decoy, this new decoy will then agitate the dog toward his direction. At this point send your dog and reinforce the same behavior. A point here is that if your dog is so stimulated on the original decoy, that he is having trouble focusing on the new decoy then this decoy may have to stimulate him more initially. Eventually the dog will start to get the routine and refocus more easily as you progress. He will suddenly realize that there is a positive reason to refocus and listen to the handler that is providing and allowing him to satisfy his drive. If your dog is a find & bite dog then this will go faster as you will not have to worry about reinforcing the bark & hold behavior. You will have to gauge your particular canine and see how fast he picks it up. Complete several more exercises going back and forth. You can improvise depending on the progress of your dog. For example if he starts to anticipate and gets too drivey on one or the other decoy then you can resend him on the same decoy twice (the one he does not want to go to). Usually this will be the stronger of the two. This will start to lock in the discipline and your desired control for off-leash work. You can mix things up and sometimes send him right from one decoy to another or you can stop him at your side each time. The point is for your dog to listen to your commands. Here is another point that is very important. I like to use the here command for coming toward me and not the heel command. The heel command is for heeling at my side, the here command is to come toward my direction and voice. If you command "here" then once he is coming toward you give him a pronounced hand signal pointing toward the other blind. He will learn to follow your hand signals which are paramount for this exercise. So the process is "here" and point to the desired location or blind. If you decide to mix it up and want him back at your side then make sure you give the heel command, whether it be fuss, platz or whatever language he is taught in. One thing you will find is that once your dog gets the hang of this exercise he will enjoy it and your e-collar use will probably diminish drastically as you will not need it. The reason compulsion is usually lowered is that the canine is active and positively stimulated allowing him to learn. He is given positive reasons to come off the bite of one decoy for the chance of the fight with another.

One thing I will incorporate quickly is the use of the flashlight. I believe the use of the flashlight in low light or no light environments is imperative during direction and control

work. To condition you canine to follow the light is very easy indeed. You can start it during simple ball work as described in previous articles. Simply do you sessions at night with very low light. Utilize a strong flash light with a narrow cone of light that affords you the ability to pinpoint a specific area of concern. Throw the ball and but hold your canine back form retrieving it. Walk him about and suddenly point with an extended arm while holding the flashlight pointing to the ball. Give him the get it command as you assist him finding it with the light. This activity is picked up very quickly by most canines as you can become very creative in its use.

These same methods can be employed during the blind work described in this article. In a low light environment point to the decoy or area where you want your canine to go using the same light source and your canine will learn this behavior quickly. He will learn to follow the light to an area, which leads to the hidden decoy. This will set into motion the direction and control behavior we are teaching the canine. I am not a big fan of laser training during search work. I believe it certainly has its uses during a directed deployment, giving the canine a small area of concern to focus on that a light does not afford. The problem in search work is that you want the canine to go to an area and not focus on one spot. Additionally in a low light environment the laser will not offer you much in the way of light needed to observe not only your canine but areas of concern that your canine may need to get to as a possible scent source.

I will usually spend a day on this but if he is doing well and is coming off the bite easily and following your directions, we can then move on. Now the fun starts as we move on by placing four blinds in the field. They should be spaced out like a square and not a box. Two blinds should be about 20 yards apart and the other two about 40 yards away in the same fashion. Still using two decoys except we are going to add something to the exercise. Start off in the same way as before except when we call the dog off the decoy and upon his return to the handler this same decoy will now move to the other blind. The second blind should be positioned so the dog cannot easily see him from the handler's vantage point. The decoy should be inside the blind, which will make the dog go to the blind to discover him and not see him from a distance. As the dog goes to the second decoy and completes the exercise, recall and send the dog to the original blind where the other decoy was just at. He will circle and see no decoy; you will then send him toward the blind where the decoy has moved. While this is going on the decoy across the field shall move to his other blind. He will negotiate this move and try hard not to be seen doing it. I think you are starting to get the picture of what we are trying to accomplish. As this exercise gets locked in we will then add two more blinds and move each decoy in a variety of positions. The handler will use the e-collar when needed as he completes the exercise.

It is important that I explain what we are now accomplishing. Simply put we are locking in several behaviors all in a very short amount of time and utilizing motivations and a

great reward system to accomplish it. We are not only locking in the find & bark (if used) and the recall off the bite, but more importantly your dog is learning to trust and listen to you. You see eventually as you progress he will start to know where the decoy is, either by assumptions or by misshapes where the decoy lets himself be seen moving from one blind to another. You see at this point it will not matter because this is not a search exercise at all, it is an obedience exercise. Your dog is learning to trust you and listen to your hand signals and voice inflections'. The end result of your commands and directions is with a bite (or at least the chance of a bite). This is the message we are sending to the dog. You are now working as a team and he begins to trust you. You are now one step closer to the **Tactical K9**.

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