

# K9 COP

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SPECIAL CONFERENCE ISSUE

# The Verbal Out, Out and Return, and Tactical Release

## A Three Part Series

# Part 1

One of the most important patrol skills for a police K-9 is the verbal out. Every certification requires a verbal out and every dog team should practice the out in virtually every training session. In my experience seeing hundreds of police dogs across the country every year in seminars, this is a skill that is very misunderstood and one that handlers and trainers struggle with. Maybe second only to the recall exercise, it is a skill that our industry as a whole needs to pay more attention to developing and maintaining correctly.

In my opinion, one of the main reasons that K-9 handlers struggle with the out on command is that it is rarely, if ever, rewarded properly when the dog executes the command. The dog is often punished for not outing and then almost never rewarded for executing the command. If we treated the dog's detection alert (also a trained behavior) in the same way – nobody would be surprised why the dog stopped alerting properly. Additionally,

because most police dog certifications require an out and return to heel in certification, and because this is one of the most difficult exercises to reward in a timely fashion, we have built into the police dog community a bias to slow outs that is institutionally sanctioned.

In my opinion, all police dog certifications (as our military has done) should allow either a verbal out and guard or a verbal out and return as allowable options for patrol dog certification. Police dogs in Holland out and guard (there is no out and return in KNPV's PH 1 certification, the prerequisite title of PH 1 is required for every police dog in Holland). In the end, the verbal out in certification is, for the most part, a way to show the handler has verbal control of the dog's biting behavior. On the street, virtually every officer is taught to remove the dog using a "Tactical Release" with hands on the dog's collar at the time of tactical release to absolutely ensure a clean release, and no further engagement. The handler positively controls the use of force.

In order to reward out and returns properly, either the decoy must come to heel position after the out to reward the dog for returning to heel position, or the handler must give the dog a toy reward or a reward bite (preferably on a second

decoy hidden behind the handler) for returning all the way to heel position. Many dogs will not take a toy in the presence of a decoy as they value the decoy more highly than the toy. In fact, the dog isn't going to willingly leave the decoy to come back to you if you do not give him something of equal value (or greater value) to come to you. Most handlers do not understand this and instead turn to punishing the dog for failing to out and return, which either makes the dog fight against the out or do it very, very, slowly at a minimum.

The out and return to heel is a complex behavior that relies on reward to speed it up and make it correct, and often it is never rewarded properly. Redirect bites are how we develop out and returns (see my book *Controlled Aggression*, available on [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) by searching "Controlled Aggression" for an extensive discussion of redirected bites to develop an out and return). Redirects and the out and return will be the subject of the next article. In this article, we will discuss the out and guard, which is an exercise that is easy to reward with an equal value reward (a re-bite). In my opinion, every police dog should be able to perform an out and guard **and** an out and return. The out and guard is used in training often to easily reward the dog for releasing, a skill that is



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critical to maintain at a high level. The out and return is developed through the redirected bites and is the one used in certification. The out and guard is the key to clean tactical release on command as well, which will be explored in the third article in this series.

## Key Temperament Issues

There are some key temperament issues that affect how easily the dog can be trained to out and these must be factored into the training program. The first issue is the dog's drive balance. The more intense the dog's defensive instinct, the harder it is for the dog to come off this defensive mood and settle into a prey mood where he can process information. The irony of the training process is that if we teach the dog to confidently come into defense, the dog should react to defensive confrontation with intense aggression and the more he is fought, the more he should fight back with power and intensity. As we bring in corrections to induce the out, the dog can take these corrections as simply an obstacle to fighting the man and in reaction to this, the dog may fight the out corrections harder. In order to avoid this

outcome, we must not teach the out by beginning in defense with such a dog. As you will see below, we shall begin all out training in prey and slowly condition the dog to complying with the out by bringing in defense slowly so as to systematically desensitize the dog. This is important to keep in mind, as the trainer will have to be patient in bringing the dog to higher levels of defense. Moving too fast will likely cause a conflict. We do not want to teach the dog to fight the out.

The prey dog will more easily return to a prey mood after being brought to defense, so this issue is less of a concern except in the case of the dog that is extremely intense in prey (the typical "prey monster" or non-classically aggressive dog). In this case, the dog is so possessive of his prey that the out can be construed as an attempt to deprive him of his possession and cause the dog to fight against the out.

The conclusion is that all out training should be done initially in a low to moderate intensity prey mood so as to have the dog in the proper frame of mind to avoid conflict. If this conflict

between obedience to the trainer and the dog's desire to fight or possess his prey is allowed to occur, the out can take a long time to train and the results may not be optimal. The dog can become conditioned to fight the out, rather than conditioned to accept it as obedience, patiently waiting for the reward that comes in exchange for this obedience.

Another key temperament issue we must consider in training the out is hardness. The harder the dog, the less likely the dog will respond to compulsion to effect a change in his behavior. In selection, we should weed out those dogs that are so hard they cannot be controlled with force. This may seem an odd thing to say, as many people seem to want to gravitate to hard dogs because they represent toughness of character. Just remember, the harder the dog, the more likely you will have to forgo compulsion to get desired results. In the case of training the out, this likely means having to first train redirected bites. You will teach the out by trading one grip opportunity for a higher intensity grip opportunity instead of a clear out on command as an obedience exercise as we will explain below.

In the opposite case, a dog that is too soft to the handler, the out corrections may cause the dog to shut down or go into avoidance. In such a case, you will have to train the out piecemeal, returning often to confidence building exercises which allow the dog to win the prey item rather than enforcing the out. Over-training the out will cause the dog to release early or worse - shut down and not want to engage. It is important

to remember that this softness may not impact the dog's desire to fight the man. A soft dog can be very tough, but when the social dimension of the handler giving the command and a correction following that command comes into play, the dog reacts with over-compliance. This can happen as well with the recall, causing the dog to hesitate or not go after the suspect and can be a very frustrating, life-long problem with which to contend. In both cases, with the overly hard dog or the overly soft dog, a motivational approach of trading bite for bite (as in a redirect) may be the best way to imprint the exercise and then moving to a compulsive out after the dog has a clear idea of giving up one grip opportunity for another. In a dog that is neither too hard nor too soft, the out can be trained as discussed below, with little complication and easy compliance.

## Training Set-Up

For the out training, we go to a back tie set-up. The dog is back tied on the pole, even though at this point, he has been doing a significant amount of field work because we want to control his behavior after the out. The two line system allows us to keep the dog clean after the out, as well as to guard against any other behaviors we do not want to see (spinning, dirty biting, leg biting, etc). Once we add in the guard after the out (which is the only prerequisite skill and can be as simple as a sit or a down obedience command) the two line system easily enforces the guarding behavior and keeps the dog clean.

The dog should be back tied in a flat agitation collar or on a harness and a prong collar with a long line attached. The prong collar should be positioned high on the neck with the rings at the bottom of his neck. With the prong set up this way, you have two ways to use the collar: **(1) Jerk-and-release style correction (positive punishment) or (2) steady pull to deprive the dog of air for a moment to bring about a release (negative reinforcement)**. Most dogs will come off with a good jerk-and-release correction, but some harder dogs may need a more compelling reason to release and if the long line is attached to the prong collar's outside ring, the chain with the inside ring will lie across his trachea and a steady pull on the prong collar will tighten the chain and quickly, when pulled tight, result in a release. I do not recommend using an actual choke collar unless you have a sensitive dog (I don't like choke collars at all for the most part because they can severely damage the dog's trachea over time). The prong collar offers more versatility and is safer and more effective in

communicating a correction.

The long line will be attached to the dog and the trainer giving the correction will stand behind the decoy. The reason for this set-up is to be able to correct the dog into the sleeve, not correct him from behind. Dogs possess two reflexes that are at work during out training. The **opposition reflex**, activated when you pull against the dog (say, as on a leash), makes the dog pull away from the pressure. This occurs when you pull on something in his mouth - he will try to pull against you. The **gag reflex** is activated when you push something into the dog's mouth - the dog will gag and open his mouth. American police dog trainers are famous for correcting the dog from behind on a choke collar to get the dog to release. There is a big problem with this approach. In Europe, leash tension from behind while the dog is biting is meant to induce opposition reflex, causing the dog to bite down harder on the sleeve or suit. Thus correcting the dog from behind actually will induce the dog into conflict between biting harder



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and letting go, leading to slow outs and ripping and tearing of the suit or sleeve cover during outs. Correcting the dog into the bite will induce more of a gag reflex and turn off the opposition reflex, allowing for easier and cleaner outs. If your dog came from Europe and had any bite work there at all, pulling from behind is an already trained cue to sink into the grip, so don't work against it.

### Correction & Reward Structure

Out training should be done initially on a sleeve, even if the dog is already biting the suit and doing hidden sleeve bites as well. The sleeve makes it easy to reward the dog. Once the dog is clear with the out on a sleeve, then the dog can be moved to the hidden sleeve and the suit (in all the various targeting areas), starting with the forearm, moving to the triceps, and then the frontal biceps area.

The basic correction and reward structure is this: The dog is allowed to bite and the handler commands "out." The dog does not out because he doesn't likely know what out means and so the dog is corrected for continuing to bite with a jerk-and-release correction into the sleeve. The dog lets go of the sleeve and is immediately rewarded for letting go with another bite. In the initial stages of training, we just want the dog to let go. Once out, the dog is immediately rewarded with another grip. After the dog gets the idea, we will make it mandatory for the dog to go into his trained guarding position (such as a sit or a down) after the out and prior to



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another reward bite. The following are the steps to the process:

#### Step 1: Alert the dog and deliver a prey bite with medium decoy intensity.

Don't forget that the dog's job is to alert to the decoy on command, so always begin with the alert command. Then, the decoy delivers a medium intensity prey bite. Prey is the drive of clear thinking and calmness and because the out is the dog's introduction to obedience during the excitement of biting, we want him in a clear thinking mood for out training, at least initially. Regardless if the dog is more defensive or prey oriented, we want to work the dog in this clear thinking drive. Later, we will include channeling exercises to bring the intensity of the dog's experience up prior to the out. Once the grip is given, work the dog a little to allow him to blow off some steam and reduce his level of frustration.

#### Step 2: The Decoy freezes up with the dog squarely in front of him.

The decoy must position the dog correctly so that the trainer can correct the dog effectively. Meaning, there should be a direct line from the prong collar to the trainer and there should be a little slack in the back tie line. The trainer and handler should give the dog a second or two to get in a last shake as the decoy freezes up, before the command is given and the dog is corrected. Put the dog on all four feet when freezing up.



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### Step 3: The handler commands “out” & the trainer instantly corrects the dog into the sleeve.

The handler must give a clear command. The handler should stay back from the dog 3-5 feet and not get right up in the dog’s face when giving the out command. The reason for this is two-fold. The handler’s presence right next to the dog can be perceived as competition for the sleeve and induce the dog to hang on tighter out of possessiveness. Further, the handler can get bit out of frustration if the dog comes off the bite on the correction and the dog is frustrated about letting the sleeve go, or reacts to the discomfort of the correction and redirects his aggression to the handler. This is especially true for new K-9 handlers, who may have only weeks before received their dog at the beginning of a class.

Commands should be firm and audible, but the dog has good hearing and screaming should not

be necessary. Leave your screams for emergency situations. The handler is not getting the dog to let go with his voice, the trainer is getting the dog to let go with the prong collar. You want to condition the dog to release on a soft command, so when you give a hard command in a real situation, the dog will take it to heart.

As soon as the out command is given, the trainer corrects the dog into the sleeve with a stout correction or two until the dog comes off. As soon as the dog lets go and has all four feet on the ground in front of the decoy, a reward bite must be given immediately and the dog slipped the sleeve. The decoy quickly brings the sleeve up and into the body to make the dog strike up. Do not shove the sleeve into the dog’s mouth. The command should not be repeated, the trainer should enforce the command with the correction line, using either positive punishment or negative reinforcement to induce the out behavior, as discussed above. Once

the dog is quickly re-engaging the bite after the correction, you can do multiple outs and re-bites before slipping the sleeve. The next step is to add in the guarding behavior.

### Step 4: Adding in the guard after the dog releases.

Now we can add in the guard and the training progression is as follows: The dog is alerted, the decoy gives a prey bite, works the dog, and the decoy freezes up. The command to out is given and enforced; the handler immediately gives the guarding command (sit or down) and the guarding behavior is enforced by the trainer with the correction line. At first, the reward bite is given once the dog obtains the guarding position. This means, as soon as the dog sits or lies down, the decoy gives another grip. Then the decoy will vary the time the dog stays in the guard, working up to a longer guard over a period of time. The dog must sometimes be quickly rewarded, and other times demand he stays clean in the guard for longer periods, but make it variable. The variability will make the behavior stronger. The trainer working the correction line must stay attentive so that the dog is not allowed to become dirty during the guard.

The trainer must watch for signs of stress in the dog, which will usually manifest as deterioration in the grip. The grip gets more frontal or less firm with the stress of the out. If this occurs, you can go back to prey work and build the grip back up without doing any outs for a couple of sessions and then return to the out work later. It is critical to understand that

the pressure of the out is stressful and that stress accumulates over time, so continuing to work the out when the grip is deteriorating will only make the grip worse and worse if you don't take a break from the out training for a few sessions to allow the dog's confidence to come back. Having said that, if the deterioration in the grip is only very minor, you can mix in bites and slips of the sleeve with the outs to bring the grip back up during the out session. It is only for major grip changes that you should take a break from the out training. The handler will have to accept some minor changes in the grip during the initial phases of out training, but as the dog gets clear on his requirements, you should see the grip bounce back to its pre-out quality.



## Step 5: Adding in drive channeling to the process.

Drive channeling is explained in detail in my book *Controlled Aggression* because it is of critical importance in training controlled aggression properly. So far, we have done a prey bite followed by the out. We have to proof the out with higher intensity work in both prey and defense, which will work against the out command. Once the out and guard is well established and clean, with the dog readily re-biting and doing multiple sets of bites and outs on the pole, we now include channeling exercises.

Recall that before you embarked on the out training, the dog completed his foundation work with channeling exercises and targeting exercises. So, as we bring higher intensity into the prey work and then include defense into the process, it should all be review for your dog. If your channeling work is incomplete, the out should not be attempted. Do not give into the temptation to rush to skills training before the foundation is complete, it will only make for

bigger problems that have to be fixed down the road.

The changes in the training progression that occur when the channeling is added all occur prior to the out command being given. The goal is to bring up the intensity in both prey and defense work prior to the out. The set-up and the procedure for giving the corrections and enforcing the out and guarding are all the same as described above. The process is as follows:

### Prey (variably increasing intensity) -> Out (and then multiples)

Our first goal is variably increasing the intensity of the prey sessions prior to the out command. Begin with a medium intensity prey bite, work the dog and out. Once in the guard, deliver a re-bite and make this next grip a little more intense for the dog, still keeping in prey, then demand another out. Once the dog is out, deliver a re-bite and out again, then end with a grip and a slip of the sleeve. Vary the intensity of these sessions. The dog should handle this fairly easily. If the outs and guards are clean, you may even see some anticipation of the out. This is nothing to worry about and it will likely disappear as we bring in defensive intensity in the next set of exercises.

### Prey -> Defense -> Prey -> Out (and multiples prior to the out)

Here we give a medium intensity prey bite to start the process out. The dog is then brought to defense (by driving the dog



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with a stick, clatter stick, or other distraction), returned to prey, and then commanded to out. Our goal here is to variably decrease the initial prey intensity, variably increase the defensive intensity, and variably decrease the recovery time (the prey work after the dog has been worked in defense). These exercises should be a repeat of the channeling work already completed. Perhaps now it is easier to see why the channeling work is so critical. Having the dog comfortably come off the defense into a prey mood quickly will more easily allow the dog to relax and out after a hard defensive confrontation. The dog must be taught he can “release the demons” of the fight and get into a mood where he can process the obedience command of the out. Notice the only thing we have added from the first progression

of Prey -> Out is what precedes it: Prey -> Defense. But the defense portion of the fight is critical.

Remember, we are variably increasing or decreasing the intensity of the prey or defense work referenced above. Nothing is changed in a linear fashion, but rather we want to see the work trending higher or lower in intensity over time. As this work goes to its completion, we are left with the following reduction:

#### **Defense -> Out**

What this means is that the dog can take a hard initial fight all in defense and then out quickly after the fight. The only signal for the dog that the fight is over is that the decoy freezes up. There is no long recovery in prey, just a freeze and out. If your dog can do this quickly and cleanly and

not fight the out, your dog is clear and comfortable with his job. The proof is in the behavior that he can come off of defense and into a prey mood where he can think and process information clearly. That information being obedience commands that the handler gives. (Our YouTube channel [www.YouTube.com/TarheelK-9](http://www.YouTube.com/TarheelK-9) has many videos showing drive channeling and outs.)

It is important to realize that if the foundation work was properly laid with the dog, you will very likely go quickly through these steps, as the dog will be going through drive channeling a second time - a procedure with which he will have had much experience.

#### **Step 6: Two Line Fieldwork**

Once the dog is clear with the work on the pole and has gone



through the channeling exercises, it is time to get the dog off the pole and out into the field or inside a building for the out work. Remember, this is a change of context for the dog, so we must be certain we do not allow the dog the freedom to make a mistake in this new context. Therefore, we want to preserve the two line situation where we can both enforce the out and the proper guarding behavior without the dog being able to make a mistake. To assume that the dog will behave as he did on the pole once he is given the freedom of fieldwork, is to set the dog up for failure. We must be in a position to enforce the obedience to the out and the guard.

The training set-up will then be as follows: The dog has one long line on the flat collar or agitation harness and one line on the training collar. Be sure to use lines of different color so you know which line is which. The procedure is the same as always: the dog is alerted and once the dog begins his aggression, the decoy agitates in response. The decoy can either deliver a grip (of medium intensity in either prey or defense) or the handler can send the dog on the

decoy. Once the dog is biting, the handler takes the flat collar line and a third person takes the correction line, as we did before on the pole. The handler becomes a “moving pole” during fieldwork. Once the decoy works the dog, he signals to the handler that he is freezing up. The handler becomes still and becomes the pole against which the correction can be delivered if necessary. The trainer takes a position behind the decoy in the same fashion as on the pole. The handler and decoy must be sure there is a little slack in the back line and the handler gives the out command. The trainer then keeps the dog in position once he outs and guards with the correction line. If the dog doesn’t out, the trainer enforces the out as we discussed above.

## Step 7: One Line Fieldwork

Finally, the training set-up will go to a single long line situation when the dog is outing cleanly in the two line situation. A long line is put on the pinch collar only. The dog is sent to the bite and the decoy works the dog. The handler picks up the correction line and puts himself in a position behind the decoy to enforce the out as before. The decoy freezes on the signal of the handler (use a non-verbal signal so the dog doesn’t anticipate the out on “freeze up” or some such command) and the out command is given. The handler is now in a position where he can correct the dog if necessary, enforcing the out and proper guard position. By now, the dog should be very clear on his guard after the out. If he is not, the trainer has

*Photo By: Tamara Haddad*



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moved forward too quickly and the dog should be on two lines to enforce proper guard position.

## Step 8: Generalization

The final step in the out training is to generalize the response. It is best to take the dog back to the two line fieldwork step so that there is an easily enforceable out. We must enforce the out and reward the out in varying but likely circumstances where the dog will have to out. For the police dog, outs inside buildings, on stairways, in dark rooms, and inside confined spaces are some of the variables to which we should generalize the out. Further variables include varying the bite equipment. As the dog is introduced to the hidden sleeve and the bite suit, the dog should be made to out on this equipment by being taken back to the two line situation.

Outs on the hidden sleeve are best done on the back tie to guard against leg and body re-bites or



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over a meter jump (for the same reason). The bite suit outs should be incorporated after the dog is comfortable biting and gripping the suit and should start with outs on the forearm, then go to the triceps area, and finally inside front bites. The reason for the transition is that the dog is likely to be in a more defensive mood the greater the level of confrontation and will be harder to out. During this progression, the dog can go away from the two line set-up back to the one line set-up as the out does not need to be corrected and the behavior is clear to the dog.

## Step 9: Incorporating the E-collar

For me personally, I find the E-collar to be an indispensable tool for training sport and police dogs. It allows for properly timed corrections independent of the handler's position relative to the dog. However, there should be a well thought out progression for teaching the dog to respond to the E-collar in every exercise in which it is likely to be used. For the most part, we will use the E-collar for obedience (heeling, recalls, distraction management) and in protection for outs,

returns, redirects and call-offs (all variations on the obedience recall exercise).

In the April/May 2009 issue of **K-9 Cop Magazine**, I wrote an article about how to incorporate the E-collar into training using the concept of pairing corrections. I think of the E-collar as the final step in out training. After the dog can out in a generalized fashion on sleeves, suits, hidden sleeves, and in varying environments, the E-collar can be introduced. I use it here as a proofing device after the behavior is clearly trained. Further, the dog should have a concept of the E-collar from obedience before putting it into the protection work. This gives the dog an advance understanding of pairing corrections (for heeling) which will be readily transferred to the out.

The trainer should select a setting on the E-collar that is enough to motivate the dog given his temperament. For harder dogs, we must remember that the adrenaline rush of biting will increase the dog's pain tolerance. However, we do not want to overcorrect the dog and shut him down with conflict or throw him into defense and have him fight the correction. We want

to make the E-collar correction meaningful but not counter-productive. Choose a level about 20% higher than you would use in obedience. You can always go up a little if it doesn't do the job of making an impression. Remember, the dog should already be outing cleanly without the E-collar and the E-collar will only be a proofing mechanism. In the first session, as we said, the collar should be set a little higher than you will use in maintenance training. This gives us the ability to back down on the level after the dog understands the e-correction. This is to guard against stepping up higher and higher as the dog learns to tolerate the correction at progressively higher levels. This can create, in some dogs, a tolerance to the e-correction and as a result, a very hard animal. Just as we did with the pinch collar, the initial correction should be meaningful to make a lasting impression that we need only remind the dog of later.

The training set-up goes back to the pole to simplify things. The dog is back tied on a flat collar and the dog has on an E-collar and a pinch collar with a line coming off the bottom of his neck, exactly as we had for the initial out training on the pole. The handler holds the remote and the correction line. The dog is worked in a soft prey style, given a grip and when the decoy freezes for the correction, the handler gives the correction as follows:

**Decoy Freezes -> Command "out"**  
**-> Nick on E-collar -> Pop on Pinch Collar**

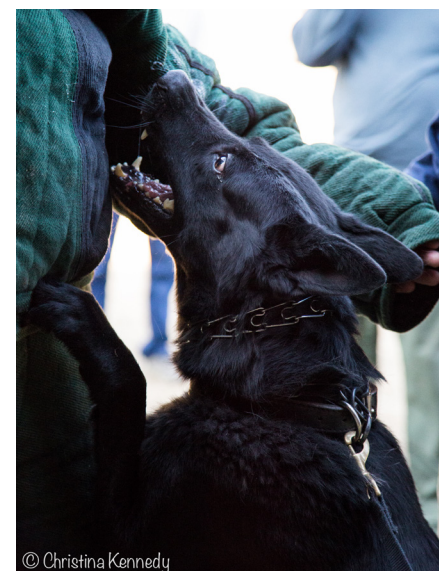
This formulation does a few things. First, it keeps the dog from

moving out of the guard because he is surprised by the E-collar correction in the new context. The back tie and 2nd line hold him in the guard position. Second, the new correction (e-correction) is followed by a familiar correction (pinch correction) in order to transition the dog to react to the new correction. This is simple classical conditioning. The signal that the dog understands this is that he is coming out quickly and clearly after the e-correction before you can even give the pinch collar correction with the line. As the dog understands the e-correction, we can phase out the physical correction of the pinch collar. Then the progression follows along what we have already discussed, going to two lines, one line, and finally no lines - just the E-collar.

The verbal out is a process that once created, must be used in everyday training to maintain it. I see too many handlers constantly lifting their dogs off of grips every time they are sending the dog for a bite in training. This makes for an extremely frustrated dog and makes recovering the out more difficult down the road as certification nears. Once the out is clear to the dog and the behavior is repeated often without need for correction, use the out in your training scenarios with reward bites given for correct responses on a variable reward basis to maintain it. You will, however, always be in a position to enforce the out with either an E-collar or a short tab line on the pinch collar to be in a position to correct if the dog refuses to out. Then you will reward for compliance. Being in a position to enforce

these commands is critical. One command must result in the desired action.

You can see the out and guard gives you the flexibility to quickly train and maintain the out. I recommend all K-9 teams possess both the out and guard and an out and return to give you flexibility both in training and in deployments. In the coming articles, we will discuss how to properly train and maintain out and return for certification and deployments where you might need to bring the dog back to you and how out and guard will ultimately make your tactical removals easy, seamless, and correct. **K9**



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