

workingdog

Issue 5 | September/October 2017 | \$9.95



**Training
to Avoid
Liability**
Part One

2018
workingdog
CONFERENCE

SAINT LOUIS

**Tracking
and Drones**
New Technology
in K9 Training

Bite Work

ASPECTS OF TRAINING POLICE DOGS WITH A BITE SUIT

By Jerry Bradshaw

Using bite suits in training police K9s is to a certain extent taken for granted. However, the proper use of the bite suit is often in question, unless a K9 unit has had proper instruction on this piece of equipment. Let's not forget, just like hidden sleeves, visible grip building sleeves, and muzzles, a bite suit is still a piece of equipment that is meant to assist us in approximating the scenario of a real bite on a subject. Unlike virtually everything else in police K9 training, a real bite is something we can't actually practice, but only approximate. Just because you work a dog on a suit, doesn't mean the dog can't have problems engaging a suspect in a real deployment. In this article we will explore the uses and advantages of proper integration of this piece of equipment into your patrol training.

In my opinion, one of the biggest misconceptions of using a bite suit is that it allows the dog to bite "anywhere." Most of the dogs that bite anywhere usually bite, wherever it is, poorly. They often get bites around the chest and stomach area, between the jacket and pants, pulling at whatever loose suit material that they can grab. Then there is the opposite use of a bite suit where the decoy feeds forearm bites to the dog. My company has done decoy seminars around the country and the world for police K9s, and I have seen bite suits that look pristine except for the forearm area, which is worn down. Why buy a whole suit if you don't intend to use anything but the forearm?

One of the main advantages of using a bite suit is it allows us to teach the dog to target a finite but multiple number of targets safely in scenario training. This means we must teach the dogs to target these areas properly, such as the forearm (a given), triceps, high on the inside of the forearm, biceps, and on the shins, calves, and hamstrings. Notice I have left out chest bites, back bites, and high thigh bites. There is a reason for this.





Photos by Laura Fogarty
laurafogartyphotography.com

Allowing dogs to target anywhere in training is dangerous for the decoy as well as the dog. In back bites at a distance and frontal chest bites, the decoy cannot use techniques to soften the blow. The dog absorbs all the energy of the collision on its neck and spine, and the decoy must just take the hit. Deflections from missed chest and back bites are common toward the neck and head because there is no good place to grip on the chest and back. Further, since there is no bite platform, nowhere to really grip on a real encounter, the likelihood of a dog just grabbing clothing if he goes to the back or chest is high, and this introduces an officer safety issue. If there is no part of the human in the grip, only clothing, then no pain compliance is generated. Dogs that are taught to grip extremities have a good platform to engage a grip and further generate the needed pain compliance.

These targets of the bicep, triceps, shin, and hamstring allow the grip to be solid and maintained throughout a fight, and as well, they avoid putting the dog close to vital areas such as the head, neck, and groin area. Documenting the dog gripping non-vital areas in training is critical in the case of an accidental grip in a vital area based on circumstances. It becomes the definition of an accident of the deployment and suspect behavior. As a handler, unit trainer, and by SOP, you must require the dog be taught to grip in areas that generate the most pain compliance but allow for the least probability of a grip in a vital area.

In firearms training we teach targeting to center mass so it becomes muscle memory in the stress of an encounter. Our dogs need the same training so that they go where they are most effective (producing pain compliance) in the midst of a stressful encounter. The dog needs a small number of effective target areas. This means decoys must be trained to teach the dogs to target in these areas correctly through a proper class on working as a decoy and learning suit mechanics to become comfortable catching dogs in the arms and legs. If you require any more convincing, go on YouTube and look at KNPV-trained dogs from Holland. These dogs are taught to target in the very areas I mention, and KNPV PH 1 titles are prerequisites for the dogs to enter Dutch police K9 schools. They have been using target training for their police dogs for more than a century.

Decoys need to know the right techniques to train fended-off attacks where we keep dogs away from high targets and make sure they go to low (leg) targets, and vice versa. Suspects will fend off the dogs by blocking them, or even offering jackets or couch pillows, to see if the dog will engage something instead of them. This goes to the topic of human orientation in biting, something we spend a good deal of time on in our decoy schools, but is a bit of a tangent for this particular article. Suffice to say, if you block the upper body, a properly trained dog can go in the legs, and the other way around. The bite suit allows us to teach these concepts to the dogs safely and effectively once they are fluid in their targeting.





One of the concepts we teach in our decoy schools is the importance of predictability of decoy behavior in initial targeting training. It allows the dog to learn to go to the targets with speed and conviction and power, and thus to get full, pushing, calm grips upon impact. Over time, we can lessen the dramatic presentations of initial training and even move to tucking arms into the body on runaway bites or allowing arms to hang to the sides in frontal encounters. This aspect of training is called *successive approximation*. We begin with unrealistic presentations and morph them into more realistic suspect behavior while still requiring the dog to target the areas we desire.

Beware of using a technique from the ring sports of “esquiving” or dodging to make the dog miss a grip at the last second. This will, in time drive the dog to bite more and more in the center of the target, the groin and stomach, both areas we want to avoid. Think of a linebacker making a tackle who must look at center mass (belt buckle), not shoulders or legs, to time his contact. Suspects you are chasing with a dog are not professional French ring decoys who can make a dog miss until exhaustion by technique. If a dog misses a target once on a suspect in a real-life encounter, it’s only a matter of seconds before he recovers and makes contact in a target area on the suspect. If you are a completely unpredictable decoy, you will end up with a dog that targets poorly for what we need in terms of pain compliance and avoidance of vital areas, and as well grips poorly to avoid losing the grip.

In the companion article in this magazine, we discuss choosing a bite suit. You want a suit that is custom fitted to the decoy if possible and allows good movement and reasonable protection. Do not sacrifice low profile (competition weight or semi-competition weight) for protection of the decoy from feeling the grip. We want the dog to feel the human underneath and push and counter any shallow grips (see my article on bite mechanics in the July/August 2017 issue of *Working Dog Magazine*). Due to budgets, we often do not get fitted suits, but it is something you should consider. A properly fitted suit allows us to cover the suit with clothing, jogging suits, for example, to make hidden equipment that goes beyond the simple hidden sleeve. Now the dog can get comfortable biting not only a low-profile hidden sleeve on a forearm hidden by clothing, but can bite in the legs and upper body targets that are covered as well. Training more closely approximates a real encounter and creates the muscle memory of the targeting that will lead the dog to make contact swiftly and decisively.



Learning how to catch dogs safely and effectively in a bite suit is only the first step. Decoys working in the suit must also learn how to pressure dogs, using the “drive,” a technique where the decoy turns into the dog in a bicep grip and pushes the dog with distractions. Distractions in the hands introduce the dog to working in defense and not just in prey (runaway bites) when in the suit. Techniques such as ground fighting and wrapping dogs up when biting inside arms teach the dog to endure pressure and close decoy contact, and how to function comfortably on the ground where most real bites end up. Bite suits allow for a larger measure of safety when introducing and using these techniques. I can’t stress enough how important it is to receive good training in these techniques, as well as proper handling of the dog when using these techniques, as provided in a proven, professional decoy school.

When introducing the dog to the bite suit, we want the dog displaying extremely comfortable sending and gripping behavior on visible sleeves (run away and frontal presentations), pushing and countering fluidly. He should be comfortable and confident working in the forearm in a hidden sleeve, and have some experience on a Belgian sleeve in the triceps and, importantly, in the bicep target, as well as in the leg sleeve before we take the dog to the suit. All these prerequisites are discussed in my article on bite mechanics in the July/August 2017 issue of *Working Dog Magazine*.

I will usually place the dog on a back-tie or have the handler post the dog out for bite suit introduction. We begin by introducing the dog to the familiar forearm target on the suit and see if the dog’s bite mechanics transfer to working in the suit. If the dog is comfortable on the forearm, we can move to the triceps target next (prey target from behind the decoy). If all goes well there, we can go to the bicep target. Remember the bicep target on the suit is the most difficult area for the dog to bite from a defensive perspective. It allows the least separation from the decoy and is the most frontal. The dog is normally off his front feet in that bite area. These facts create an atmosphere for the dog to feel out of his comfort zone; therefore, it is crucial the handler and decoy read the dog’s reactions carefully so as to not create any discomfort or give the dog a bad experience biting in this area. Once a dog goes into the bicep fluidly, we can apply pressure in the drive and channel from defense to prey and back and forth. Your dog’s confidence will skyrocket. Moving through these target areas systematically happens over weeks, not in single sessions. Be patient. Introduce pressure — intensity and duration separately — in a systematic and slow progression in each target area when you see the dog confidently biting in each area.

You must decide if you are okay with slipping the suit to the dog or you want to lift the dog off the grips or have an out before you go to the suit. These steps must be planned before getting the dog on the bite suit. I cannot stress enough that you must have a system of training that you understand how to progress through. Comprehending the foundation goals of working a young dog and then moving the dog through the various equipment used to approximate real suspect encounters that have no equipment is critical. Having the dog not only understand the fundamentals of biting but also learn the skills of outing, redirects, out and return as well as recalls must be done in a proper progression. Adding suit work into your police dog’s training must be done properly and carefully. Bite suits have their place for the things we discussed in this



article, mimicking suspect behavior on deployments, but they are not the piece of equipment you want to use when the dog is too young or naïve. Suits are not the equipment to teach good gripping behavior to a young dog. Targeting should be taught on the bicep, triceps, and legs with sleeves made for that purpose first. Bite suits give the dog too many options initially and can be a distraction from learning proper targeting if the dog has too many choices. Every piece of good equipment is made for particular purposes. Learn and understand the roles of each piece of equipment and how to introduce it into your dog's training program at the right stage of his development. If you take the time to lay a good foundation before moving to the suit, your suit work will progress more quickly and confidently.

Jerry Bradshaw is the Canine Training Director of Tarheel Canine Training, Inc. in Sanford, NC. The Tarheel Canine Training School for Dog Trainers holds police K9 instructor courses for police K9 trainers and unit supervisors as well as qualified civilians. Tarheel Canine Training, Inc. holds seminars on Police K9 Decoy Training, Advanced Detection, and High Risk Deployments, and trains and sells police dogs worldwide.

Email: jbradshaw@tarheelcanine.com