



THE STORY OF “K9 KIRA” THE DUAL PURPOSE MALINOIS

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In this story, the name of the dog has been changed to protect the innocent. One of the things I see when I do seminars for police and military units is that training often falls into a rut where what's easy to do becomes the norm. In-service training often turns into run-throughs of certification exercises. False starts and runaway bites on visible sleeves do not generally challenge the dogs sufficiently. Running through certification exercises over and over again will simply lead the dog to anticipate certain behaviors that may not work for you in a real deployment encounter. Many of the dogs become bored doing the same thing, and are just not challenged.




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This article is a story about a dog that I saw at a recent seminar. The handler of the dog described her as a good detection dog, but not a strong biting dog. Everyone in the unit was resigned to the idea that this dog was weak on apprehensions. On the first day of the seminar, I had the handler and unit decoy demonstrate a normal training session for them. The dog was sent to chase the fleeing decoy, who was using a very hard bite bar sleeve which consisted of very hard plastic sleeve covered by a jute cover. The dog chased strongly, came into the grip, moved a lot on the grip, and the decoy reported that the dog had a weak grip in addition to a “typewriting” grip, one that is not full, firm, and hard.

On the second send down field, the same thing happened, good pursuit, poor gripping and movement in the grip. On an adjacent field to where we were training, there was a softball game going on. All of a sudden I see the dog hauling it toward the softball players (there was a fence in between our field and theirs). My mind did not register what was happening all I could see was the dog running away from a decoy in full sprint, and then it dawned on me that the dog was heading to the big yellow balls flying around the field as they practiced. To the dog, the biting was equivalent to playing ball, or in fact less important to

be precise, than playing ball, as the dog left the decoy and sleeve for the ball.

Now I know there are some trainers that work police dogs in prey primarily and use balls or a Kong to lure dogs off of the grip to the ball as a method to teach the out and return. In fact I had a trainer come to my facility in North Carolina many years ago and during the testing, while a green dog was on a sleeve being worked, the trainer came over and dangled a Kong over the dog’s nose while on the bite. The dog stayed on the grip despite the temptation. This was repeated with a few dogs, all of whom stayed on the grips despite being tempted with the Kong. The trainer got through the list of dogs we were showing and asked if we had any more dogs to show, and I said no. I asked him why the dogs he had seen were not good enough for him to select. Back then I thought he was using the Kong to see if the dog would ignore a distraction in favor of biting and fighting the man. I was wrong. He informed me that none of the dogs would release to the Kong and that is how he was going to train the out, so they were not suitable. I told him that he is going to have to go to another vendor to find the patrol dog he wants, because at Tarheel Canine, a dog that would come off a bite to play ball was called a “single purpose detection dog.”



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When the evaluation of Kira was finished I explained to the handlers and decoys present that Kira saw biting as a less desirable activity than playing ball. There was no urgency in her man work, and no violence behind her biting. She had good prey drive, but the intensity of her prey drive was not enough to make her a solid patrol dog. What she needed was some balance in her training. The training all these dogs were experiencing was certification based bite training. It was all fairly low intensity prey work, there was no threat and thus the dog was not being challenged in defense. On the bite there was no pressure, no fight, nothing to bring up the level of intensity and violence in her work on the man. The equipment used made the biting somewhat uncomfortable because the sleeve was not conducive to building grips, it was for a finished dog with extreme grip power that comes from working on a progression of equipment. That progression was skipped and the dog expected to work on a piece of equipment that most dogs would struggle on, let alone a dog with underdeveloped gripping.

In my book **Controlled Aggression** (Lulu Press) I spend a lot of time discussing proper foundation training. That includes prey drive development where we work on gripping, pursuit speed, pushing, and other goals that are achieved by prey training. I also discuss in depth how to bring defense training into patrol work, where the dog learns how to respond to threat with aggression, and thus how to fight a man. Dogs must be taught to cycle back and forth from prey to defense and back into prey, as well as defense to prey and back to defense and ending in prey. Prey drive is the drive of confidence, where the dog feels most in control, it is triggered by movement (the wolf chasing the rabbit). Threat is the trigger for defense. A dog working in prey is in ultimate control, they prey isn't scary. But a dog working in defense must bring power and violence and fighting to bear in order to defeat the threat. Proper training in defense is essential for a dog to learn how to fight a man for real otherwise police K9 patrol work is simply a game of fetching equipment. These dogs need to understand the gravity of fighting a man, how to fight that man when in a position of disadvantage (under threat), and most importantly that if they keep fighting against the pressure of the adversary they will win the encounter and turn the threat into a prey item.

We began with Kira the next day doing civil aggression exercises. This began with a stalking exercise with the hidden sleeve bladed behind the decoy so it was not visible. The decoy threatened the dog by invading its space, making eye contact, presenting a puffed up body posture, and making a slow advance directly toward the dog. All of these body language cues show threat to the dog. Kira reacted with defensive aggression. We saw a more classical defensive bark, guttural and staccato, a short-mouth snarl, the showing of some teeth, and hard pull into the leash. The decoy was instructed to react to the dog by submitting with diversion of eye contact, slight turns away from the dog, retreating for a few seconds, and then resuming the press toward the dog. The slow advance of the pressure, allowed the dog to build confidence as good bursts of aggression made the decoy submit. As the decoy came forward and we got ever closer to the dog and the dog gave a real powerful demonstration of aggression, the decoy would turn and flee and gave the dog a prey target to come to by hanging the hidden sleeve out a little from the

body. The dog came fast and hard, the new equipment allowed the dog to grip full, the defensive pressure built up a great deal of aggression and frustration that, once on the grip, the dog now took out on the decoy in the form of harder biting, and more violent “kill shakes” as she thrashed on the sleeve. This is the essence of a technique we call drive channeling as we take the violence generated by threatening the dog and channel it into increased intensity in the biting behavior.

After these exercises we placed the decoy in a hidden sleeve but put the decoy in the corner of a tight space. Crouched on the ground. The dog was brought around the structure to face the passive threat, and the alert command given. The unfamiliar position of the decoy gave rise to a good aggressive alert as the dog barked defensively, but stayed out at the end of the line, confronting the decoy. As the dog aggressed in defense, the decoy made eye contact further increasing the tension and threat on the dog, then started slowly rising out of the crouch and advancing to the dog being posted by the handler. The dogs was allowed to pull towards the threat but held back by the agitation collar and the line. As the decoy advanced and the dog gave solid aggression to the decoy, the decoy would falter, glance away in submission, and this made the dog feel stronger. Her aggression was manipulating the decoy. Her aggression controlled him. The more aggressive and forward she was the more he submitted. Then on a particularly strong show of aggression as the decoy got closer, the decoy fled, and the dog was sent to bite. The dog was more focused, hit harder, stability returned to the grip, power came into the grip because the energy we generated in defense was being let out on the decoy in prey. The dog was allowed to bite and push, and the decoy went to the ground so the dog could feel superior. The handler kept line tension and worked with the decoy to create proper pushing and countering into the grip.

Then we added the next ingredient to the mix, with the dog on the grip, the decoy went from being beat up in prey, to attacking the dog through a decoy technique called the “drive” where the decoy turns into the dog, pushes into the dog and brings pressure with a stick or other distraction over the dog’s head. This threat stimulated the dog’s defensive reaction and got Kira fighting again against the threat. As the dog tolerated the pressure and fights willingly, the decoy relents the pressure and begins moving in prey again, backing up and moving away from the dog. The dog has once again used its power to subdue a

threat. The decoy folds to the ground and we simulate an arrest. The handler lifts the dog off the grip in order to frustrate the dog from losing its possession (the decoy). This lift off will over time increase the possessiveness of the dog over the apprehended decoy. Possessiveness increases desire and builds drive intensity.

Over the course of the next few days, we made the bite work more personal with similar scenarios but having the dog grip in the bicep area on a sleeve, and then on a suit, the most personal of all pieces of equipment. We continued to work the dog in defense with civil agitation and a defensive, threatening encounter presaging the prey bite. The dog was worked in multiple levels of drive channeling. On about the end of the 3rd day of the seminar, we looked to see how her out was. Before, the dog released with ease, now the dog was fighting to stay in the grip and didn’t want to out. I considered that a major victory. Fighting the decoy in this new style over 3 days of training became an imperative. The grip got fuller and harder and intensity during biting went very high. The dog became harder to tactically remove.

We easily got the dog outing again with a little more pressure and proper out technique, increasing and varying rewards, and now the dog who was only days before, basically written off as a weak patrol dog became one of the strongest in the class. The dogs that were already strong became even stronger. Everyone was able to see the changes in their dogs by making the training more scenario-based, more real, and teaching the dogs how to properly deal with threat by using the dog’s defense drive and not only prey, and channel their drives. These were all certified dogs, but now they became more street worthy. We then were able to roll into the tactical part of the course with stronger dogs, with stronger drives, and better more fluid drive channeling. The foundation became stronger, and so the platform we want to build upon became sturdier, so that real encounters would become more like training and vice versa.

Decoy training classes like the ones we put on at Tarheel Canine at agencies all over the world are meant to not just teach handlers how to work in a sleeve or a suit, but how to make real changes in the dogs that they are working with. Decoy work isn’t about just the mechanics of working a dog, it is about the psychology and mindset of the dogs when they are working. Needless to say if Kira continues to be worked in this manner, the choice between a ball and man-work will be an easy one for her.



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Tarheel Canine Training Inc. is a nationally renowned training facility for police service dogs, and has placed trained police dogs at federal, state and local law enforcement agencies nationally and internationally since 1993. Jerry is often a featured speaker at national police K9 conferences, and travels extensively giving seminars to police departments, the US Military, and sport trainers across the United States. Jerry has written a book, *Controlled Aggression*, which is rapidly becoming the standard text for understanding the fundamentals of canine aggression training for police service, personal protection, and competitive dog sports. Jerry also maintains a free blog at www.tarheelcanine.com.

Many of the training concepts mentioned in this article are covered in depth in published articles available on the Tarheel Canine website at www.tarheelcanine.com/media-area/training-articles/

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