

ANIMAL BEHAVIOR SCIENCE AND THE INHERENTLY DANGEROUS NATURE OF ATTACK TRAINED POLICE K-9S

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Attack-trained police K-9s are commonly used by the police to apprehend criminal suspects



- » Belgian Malinois are breed most frequently used by the police for suspect apprehension.
- » Belgian Melinoises were used in the capture of Osama bin Laden.



- » Belgian Malinois are derived from lineages bred for heightened aggressive reactivity. Individuals are extremely athletic and easily trained.
- » The police K-9 is assigned to a handler and together they form a "team". When not on active duty the K-9 lives in the home of the handler.

Epidemiology

- » The use of attack-trained police K-9s to apprehend criminal suspects sent about 3600 people to emergency rooms each year from 2005 - 2013. Almost all were male and Black men were overrepresented.
- » 1.1% of all hospital emergency room visits are for dog bites inflicted by a police K-9. The vast majority of police K-9 bites happen away from the home of the victim and have a 3.7% hospital admission rate.

Attack-trained police K9 inflict severe dog bite injury on people

- » Attack-trained police K-9s bite with tremendous force. The force is unique because it is delivered by an animal and not a human capable of making split-second decisions. An attack-trained police K-9 cannot modulate the amount of force delivered to a victim so that it is commensurate with the circumstances present at the time of the incident.
- » A 51 y.o. handyman bled to death after being attacked by a Belgian Malinois in 2018 in Montgomery, Alabama.
- » A widely cited study examined police K-9 use in Los Angeles and concluded: "Used incorrectly a police dog can easily become a significant misuse of force that results in serious injury to a suspect or innocent bystander and significantly legal exposure."
- » Compared with the bite injuries inflicted by a similar size domestic dog, K-9 bite victims are bitten more often in the head, neck chest and flank. They are hospitalized more often, undergo more surgeries, and need more invasive diagnostic tests.
- » Police K-9 bites result in hospital visits 67.5% of the time, while other uses of force, like batons or tasers, result in hospital visits 22% of the time or less.

Attacks on innocent bystanders: Risks to public safety

Attack-trained police K-9s are are highly motivated to find a person to attack. Usually, the dog will find the correct suspect to apprehend. However, all too often innocent bystanders are attacked and severely bitten. These dogs when deployed in the field are on a mission and goal driven to find a person (suspect or not) to attack and bite. Unpublished research by this author found:



- * Innocent bystanders are usually attacked when the dog is off-leash in pursuit of a suspect.
- * 32% of attacks on innocent bystanders happen when the K-9 was not in service or in pursuit of a suspect.
- * 18% of attacks on innocent bystanders happen when the K-9 is on a leash held by the handler
- * In 77% of the incidences, the victim was male.

ANIMAL BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS: Factors which explain why attack-trained police K-9s are inherently dangerous animals

The animal behavior principles and mechanisms that govern the behavior and motivation of attack-trained police canines are no different from those which govern the behavior of all domestic dogs.



GENETICS

- » Individuals are selectively bred from lineages with heightened aggressive reactivity towards people and low attack thresholds. These dogs are derived from Europe, temperament tested for their suitability for police work, and then sold to training facilities in the United States for subsequent sale to police departments.
- » The Belgian Malinois has two polymorphisms in the dopamine transporter gene (SLC6A3). The SLC683 gene is associated with glazing over behaviors, episodic biting behaviors and general loss of clarity.



AROUSAL

Attack-trained K-9s are highly aroused when deployed in the field for suspect apprehension. High arousal interferes with performance (i.e. the ability of the K-9 ability to properly apprehend a suspect) according to the Yerkes-Dodson law. Highly aroused K-9s are prone to making behavioral errors. Behavioral errors include attacking the wrong person (e.g. innocent bystander), attacking in the absence of a command from the handler or attacking for excessively long durations.

LEARNING

- » Aggressive tendencies in the police K-9 are enhanced and developed through hundreds of hours of "agitation" training often using shock collars. Training is usually done by individuals with little understanding of animal behavior science.
- » Police K-9s are taught to apprehend suspects using the controversial training technique of "bite-and-hold". This technique teaches the K-9 to viciously attack a suspect by biting, vigorously shaking, forcibly latching onto the suspect, and then holding its bite until commanded to release by its handler.
- » Police K-9s are trained to bite forcefully. The estimated force of a bite is between 450 and 800 psi. Moreover, police K-9s are trained to inflict a "full mouth bite" by using all of their teeth to maximize their hold on a suspect.
- » The act of attacking is a highly rewarding experience for the attack-trained police K-9. The self-reinforcing nature of learnt aggression is well-documented in the animal behavior literature. Moreover, the handler may praise the K-9 during or after an attack which strengthens the dog's desire to attack with shorter latencies and with less inhibition.



IMPULSIVITY

Attack-trained police K-9s are impulsive. Impulsivity lowers the dog's attack threshold, it interferes with the dog's decision-making abilities, its ability to comply with vocal commands from the handler and its ability to differentiate suspects from non-suspects.

CONCLUSIONS

The hereditary makeup of attack-trained police K-9s combined with the specialized training these dogs receive and their impulsive nature creates a dog with a strong desire to attack. These dogs when deployed in the field for suspect apprehension are emotionally aroused and are prone to making behavioral errors. As such they need to be kept under control at all times by competent handlers. In the absence of such control, these dogs often inflict severe dog bite injury to the suspects they apprehend and to innocent bystanders.



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