Bite and Hold Review Report

Bark and Hold vs Bite and Hold

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For decades, a key debate among police dog trainers and other stakeholders has centered around the two main methods of criminal apprehension; bark and hold vs. bite and hold; and which one has the lowest bite ratio. In this report, I will call upon my 17 years of experience as a police dog handler and head trainer with the Vancouver Police Department to compare and contrast both methods and their respective bite ratios.

The bark and hold method of criminal apprehension became well known in Europe at a time when dogs were recruited to help protect the lives of German border guards. Fugitives illegally crossing the border were well aware that the border patrol dogs were trained to apprehend and hold on until called off by their master. To defeat these dogs, border jumpers would wrap heavy layers of clothing around their arms to protect themselves from the bite of the dog. Once the dog made the apprehension and took hold of the fugitive’s protected arm, the dog would often be stabbed to death. As the handler was usually out of sight when the confrontation occurred, the fugitive was free to make his escape.

In response to the tactics of the fugitives, an alternate method of training was developed that did not require dogs to engage suspects, but rather, circle and bark, alerting guards to their location. By not engaging suspects, the dogs were no longer put in harms way.

Today, the bark and hold method of criminal apprehension is defined in the sport of Schutzhund. Schutzhund is the civil sport of dog training that is quite exact and precise. Police canine trainers who employ the bark and hold apprehension method use the Schutzhund training methodology when training police service dogs to this style of apprehension. There are three distinct phases in the sport of Schutzhund: protection, tracking and obedience. The find and bark in Schutzhund is found within the protection phase of the Schutzhund profile.

Schutzhund Training

Schutzhund Protection Phase:

Search for the Helper - 5 Points

The helper is hidden in a position 40 paces away so that the dog must make searching passes to the right and left, or vice versa. The handler and dog must be out of sight when the helper moves into the hiding place. At the request of the judge, the handler releases the dog and gives the command to search towards
the empty hiding place, then towards the helper. The command "here" and the dog's name may be used.

Hold and Bark - 10 Points

When the dog reaches the helper, who is to remain motionless, it should immediately and continuously bark. The dog should not bother the helper by gripping the protective sleeve or bump the helper. Only after the helper moves his arm is the dog to engage without command. When the dog has taken a firm grip, the helper will press the dog briefly without applying the stick, then cease resistance. The dog must release, either independently, or after receiving the command to "out". After the dog has let go, the handler will remain standing without influencing the dog. The handler is to remain at a distance of approximately 25 paces. When the judge indicates, the handler will out his dog and hold it securely so that the helper can leave the hiding place.

Attack - 35 Points

A helper is directed to proceed to another hiding place at least 50 paces away. Upon directions from the judge, the handler will proceed with a free heeling dog towards the hiding place. The handler is now attacked from the front by the helper, who suddenly comes out of the hiding place. No contact is permitted between the handler and helper. The dog must immediately attack and demonstrate a firm grip. The dog will be struck with a flexible, padded stick -- two blows will be given on the flanks, thighs, or withers. Encouragement may be given via vocal command. When requested by the judge, the helper stops the aggression. The dog must independently release, or release his grip upon receiving the command to "out". After receiving the command from the judge, the handler will hold the dog by the collar.

Pursuit and Hold - 50 Points

The helper makes threatening gestures and runs away. After he has gone about 50 paces, the handler sends the dog toward the helper and remains standing still. The judge will instruct the helper to turn around and run toward the dog when the dog is about 30 paces away. Using aggressive and threatening motions, the helper will run toward the dog. When the dog has taken a firm grip, the helper will press the dog briefly without applying the stick, then cease resistance. The dog must release, either independently, or after receiving the command to "out". After the dog has let go, the handler will remain standing without influencing the dog. Upon a signal from the judge, the handler will approach the dog and helper at a normal pace. The handler will order the helper to step back from the dog, and order the dog to lie down. The helper will be
searched and disarmed before transport to the judge. The dog will be on leash during transport. The handler will leave the area with the dog on leash.  

In the sport of Schutzhund very few commands are given by the handler to the dog. Through extensive operant conditioning the dog is trained to react only when certain set of circumstances are presented. During the search, the dog is conditioned to search a series of blinds that are spaced throughout the training field. As the dog and his helper approach the blind, the dog finds a human wearing a protective sleeve standing absolutely motionless. Through his conditioning, the dog has learned that he must bark and not engage the sleeve until he perceives movement. When the helper moves the sleeve in an upward motion, approximately 6 inches, the dog will engage in a bite without command from the handler. The decision to bite and release is left entirely up to the dog.

During trials and training, the hidden man is a trained helper wearing protective clothing. This man is highly skilled and is not afraid of the dog. He knows how and when to move, make eye contact, and emit sounds that will either causes the dog to succeed or fail. Experienced helpers can trick almost any dog into an attack with near imperceptible motion, eye contact or sound. When demonstrated with a cooperative helper, this exercise can be made to look quite impressive.

In real world applications, suspects are rarely cooperative. During the stress of a confrontation with a police dog and his handler, suspects react in many different ways; some yell, others panic and become very animated, and many attempt to flee. All of these behaviors produce enough movement to evoke an attack from a bark and hold trained dog. The universal “I surrender” gesture of hands being raised in the air is enough movement to illicit a bite from the dog.

Based on my experience as a dog trainer and handler with the Vancouver Police Department, I believe this reaction in a bark and hold dog raises questions about the merit of this type of criminal apprehension. It also potentially opens the door to increased liability when a dog trained to bark and hold, then engages a suspect upon apprehension because of an unanticipated movement, or, when the suspect raises his arms to surrender. In Rosario v. Canada (RCMP) the Judge found for the plaintiff because the dog did not respond as trained. That begs the question: “If we train a dog not to bite and because of an innocent movement from a suspect it bites, are we now not liable for that dog’s action? It is possible that a police department could face increased liability if a bark and hold dog searches, locates a hidden suspect, barks and is then met by yelling or overt movements that influence him to bite the suspect.

A bark and hold dog is trained to attack on the slightest movement and only many hours of training with a professional decoy can keep the dog ‘clean’. I have acted as a decoy on many occasions for police service dogs trained in the bark and hold method of apprehension. I have actually witnessed a bark and hold dog locate the decoy, alert by

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1 United Schutzhund Club of America
barking, and then actually bump the decoy’s leg or torso with his snout in order to illicit a response from the decoy so he could engage with a bite. The slightest overt response by the decoy can result in a bite. There is very little tolerance level in a bark and hold dog. If he locates a suspect and the suspect stumbles or moves accidentally, there is a high likelihood of an unwarranted bite.²

Another component to bark and hold training is the “self out”. If a bark and hold dog engages a suspect because that suspect moved the dog is then required to disengage once the suspect stops moving. Disengaging is at the discretion of the dog not the handler. If that same suspect moves again after the dog has released him the dog will re-engage and make contact. The handler is then left to defend why his dog contacted (bit) the suspect twice.

As head trainer at the VPD Dog Squad for 9 of 17 years in the Unit, I had the opportunity to travel throughout North America and Germany and train with a variety of agencies that utilize the find and bark method of criminal apprehension. During this time, I participated as a decoy for dogs trained in this method and on every occasion, I was able to demonstrate the inherent faults.

I researched the limitations of this method of criminal apprehension with the head trainers of the agencies I visited and all agreed that the bark and hold method has a high degree of failure. When asked why they continue with it knowing the significant limitations of the method, they outlined that their canine training programs were originally established on the bark and hold method and their administrators believe it reduces liability. The research I will discuss further on does not support that belief.

The use of bark and hold dog method has resulted in the death of many police dogs. When the decision to engage or not engage a suspect is left to a dog to make, the risk factor for injury to the suspect, the dog, or the handler increases.

Vancouver Police Department service dogs are trained in the bite and hold method of apprehension, and a number of other profiles including tracking, area search, building search and direct apprehension. In all but tracking, the dog is off leash searching a specific area for a suspect who is either hiding from police to avoid apprehension, or fleeing from police on foot. While tracking, the dog is usually 25-30 ft out front of his handler on a tracking line and harness using his scenting ability to follow the suspect’s route. When the suspect is located the dog, in most instances, is the first to engage.

In the same scenario, a bark and hold dog in all of these applications will not engage if the suspect remains motionless. The dog will bark to alert its handler to the location where the suspect is found. If the suspect makes any type of movement prior to the arrival of the handler, however, the dog will engage (bite). This can happen even when the suspect simply stands up from a crouched position and puts his hands up.

² Hander Control vs Bark and Hold Apprehension Techniques – R. Eden
If a police dog is required to conduct a high risk track or search where the suspect is armed with a gun or knife, the risk factor to the dog increases dramatically. If a suspect is lying in wait and the dog finds him, the bark and hold dog will begin to bark while the bite and hold dog will engage the suspect. If that suspect is armed he is now given the opportunity to shoot the bark and hold dog, and in turn shoot the arriving handler. If a handler control dog (bite and hold) was deployed in that same scenario, he would immediately engage the suspect which would give not only the dog an advantage to win the fight, but also give the handler the upper hand in taking control of the armed suspect.

It is almost impossible to predict suspect behaviour: who will remain motionless, who will lay waiting in ambush, or who will run. A suspect in hiding may change his tactics once he realizes that he can ambush the police officer or police dog from a place of concealment. If the dog hesitates upon apprehension or circles and barks, the suspects’ opportunity to injure the handler or dog increases. It does not take much movement to shoot a gun or swing a knife or club.

The canine handler has a unique job in that he most typically responds to incidents in which a suspect has chosen to run and hide. These events are inherently high risk and the canine handler is always the point man. As a matter of survival, he must maintain any tactical advantage that he has. The suspect usually has all the advantages because he chooses the ground, the time, and the route of escape. The handler has little advantage; only his canine partner’s nose and teeth. A dog that doesn’t bark can often make contact before the suspect can react. The severity of the resulting injuries is usually determined by the suspect’s choice to fight or surrender. As soon as the handler can determine the suspect is free of weapons, the dog can be instructed to release.

In R. vs Robinow the suspect had secreted himself under a vehicle in a garage. When the dog tracked him to that location, Robinow had two options; he could have yelled out his surrender or he could continue to remain motionless hoping that the dog would pass by. He chose the latter and as a result the dog found him through scent and engaged him. Had a bark and hold dog been used in that scenario the dog would not have gone under the car to engage but rather, would have circled around the car and barked. If the suspect under the car was lying in wait and had a weapon, both the dog and handler could have sustained potentially fatal injuries. 3

The VPD Dog Squad training methods came under scrutiny during this trial. As the VPD head dog trainer, I was required to give testimony in regards to the handler control (bite and hold) method of training that the VPD utilizes. This training was found to be reasonable by the Supreme Court.

To illustrate the benefit of the bite and hold method of criminal apprehension, I will relate a relevant story from August of 1991. At that time I was personally handling police service dog ‘Prince’. I responded to a break and enter in progress with my dog and as I approached the rear of the residence I heard the sound of someone being beaten. As I made my way onto the back porch and looked through a broken window, I saw a man

3 Robinow v. Vancouver City BC Supreme Court n0. SO03585
wearing a balaclava. He was kneeling over another man who was lying on the kitchen floor in a pool of blood. His hands and feet were bound with duct tape, and the suspect was stabbing him in the abdomen with a broken shard of glass.

After several attempts I managed to kick open the back door and entered the house with my police service dog. I pursued the suspect as he ran towards the front door of the house and managed to take him into custody before he could get out the front door. As I was handcuffing the suspect, my police service dog circled around behind me and without command apprehended a second suspect who was hiding directly behind me motionless in a dark alcove by the front door. This man had been armed with a large hunting knife which he had in his hand only feet away from me. My police service dog without hesitation or barking engaged the suspect and took him to the ground causing the knife to fall to the floor. The dog controlled the man until my cover units arrived and assisted with the arrest. I was unaware of a second suspect and without my dogs quick decision to engage the outcome could have been quite different.

My police service dog responded as trained and immediately engaged the motionless armed suspect. If my dog had been trained in the bark and hold method of apprehension he would have began barking at the suspect until he made a move. While this would have alerted me to a second suspect, in all likelihood it would have been too late as I was already at a severe disadvantage struggling to control the first suspect.

This next scenario clarifies the limitations of the bark and hold method further. When a bark and hold dog is sent on a direct apprehension deployment (dog is sent in pursuit of a fleeing suspect) the dog reacts with his instinctive prey drive and pursues the fleeing suspect. While in flight, if the suspect stops and turns towards the dog and handler with a firearm in his hand, the bark and hold dog, through conditioning, has been trained to stop and begin barking at the suspect. The dog does not have the ability to recognize the threat of the firearm and is only reacting to the lack of movement from the suspect. This now gives the suspect the opportunity to use the firearm against the dog and the handler. This poses a serious risk to officer safety.

In this same scenario a handler control dog (bite and hold) would not react to the suspect stopping but instead, would still engage unless called off by the handler. If the suspect was stopping to turn and shoot the dog or handler, his ability to do so would be greatly diminished as he would be engaged by the dog immediately and taken to the ground.

A well trained police service dog can be recalled at any point after being deployed by the handler. Control of the dog through voice commands permits the handler to call off the dog prior to, or after, the apprehension. Once the dog is called off, he is positioned where he can safely watch the suspect while the officer approaches and secures him. In essence, he is acting as a contact/cover officer. Total control of the dog is with the handler so if the suspect becomes combative during the arrest the dog is close enough to immediately assist his handler. Additionally, the dog is conditioned to tolerate movement and the
actions of the suspect without the officer having to be concerned that the dog is going to bite at the slightest movement.

In Rosario v. Canada (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) Feb 4th 2000 Paragraph 78 & 80 the Judge ruled:

78 “Considerable documentary and oral evidence was led with respect to the training of police dogs generally, and Kaiser in particular. Both Kaiser and Constable Gladney had completed all levels of training at the time of this incident. Both the dogs and their handlers undergo extensive training in a number of areas, including obedience, criminal apprehension, and controlled aggression. The training manual and records make it clear that maintenance of control over the dog by the handler at all times is central to this training. In particular, in learning apprehension and aggression, the dogs are taught the "bite and hold" method. With this method, the handler, rather than the dog, makes the decision about how to approach a suspect, and the dog will only grab the suspect with its mouth on the command "hag". The dog does not attack on its own volition. I find this evidence sufficient to establish the standard of care expected of RCMP dogs and their handlers, and find that standard includes control of the dogs at all times. The dogs are to attack only on the command of their handlers.”

80 “I find that this action by Kaiser was essentially the “find and bark” method of apprehension, in which the dog rather than the handler decides whether to bite a suspect. This method is specifically not taught by the RCMP. It is contrary to Kaiser’s training. In this instance, the effect of his lunge was compounded by the fact that it caused Constable Gadney to lose his footing, and he was unable to regain control of Kaiser quickly, prolonging the attack.”

In this specific case the dog acted on his own when he engaged a suspect. These actions took the handler by surprise and caused him to lose his footing when the dog engaged; this compounded the injuries to the suspect. 4

A dog has the mental capacity of an infant so the obvious question is why would we ask it to make a decision on when to apply force and how much force? That is what we are asking police dogs trained in the bark and hold method to do; which, in my opinion, increases the chance of a bite and the associated liability.

Trainers who profess that the bark and hold method of criminal apprehension is a superior to the bite and hold method of apprehension have used the fear of liability as the reason to convince administrators and police agencies to move away from the handler control method of training that is currently in place by most North American law enforcement agencies. Unfortunately this assumption is not based in fact. Although this is one of the most hotly debated topics in police canine circles, statistics have shown that there is liability in both deployment methods.

4 Rosario v. Canada (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) BC Supreme Court New Westminster No. S044043
A very extensive study was conducted by Charles Mesloh of the University of Florida with the following conclusions:

AN EXAMINATION OF POLICE CANINE USE OF FORCE

IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA by Charles Mesloh

Conclusion

Using the data from Florida canine handlers, *bite and hold* dogs had lower mean bite ratios (15.7) than bark and hold trained canines (22.4) and there was a statistically significant difference between the two apprehension methods. Consequently, any mandated changes in apprehension training are not a feasible solution to combat canine use of force issues. This may seem odd; dogs trained in what was perceived as a reduced level of force actually generating higher levels of force.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that mandating a massive paradigm shift for training police service dogs is both unwarranted and potentially damaging. If one were to simply compare the bite ratios for canines trained in both apprehension methods, it is clear that bark and hold does not produce the panacea as it has been advertised. In theory, a dog trained to contain the suspect without causing injury is a noble proposition and seemingly the answer to many problems. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The decision to use force is a complex and dynamic issue, best suited to the handler and not the dog. While police dogs can be trained to do amazing things, it is unrealistic to expect them to decide which actions warrant force and which ones do not. Regardless of training methodology, the handler alone is responsible for the force delivered by his four-legged partner.⁵

Police canine handlers find themselves on the front line pursuing individuals who have chosen to flee from the police and who in many cases have the propensity for violence when apprehended. The tool they have to locate these suspects is the scenting ability of their canine partners. When the suspect is located that canine must now respond as a back up officer for their handler should the need arise. That response should solely be based on training and commands from the handler, not what the canine perceives.

Like all other tools on an officer’s duty belt, the police canine is a tool for law enforcement. The K9 officer must be certified under the British Columbia Police Service Dog Standards in the use of that tool and be responsible for any force that results from its application. Under these standards the handler must show complete control of his canine in all disciplines. When we give a canine the licence to apply force if and when they deem it appropriate, we take that control and decision making ability away from the handler. Ultimately, the handler will

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⁵ An examination of police canine use of force in the state of Florida by Charles Mesloh
find himself defending a use of force complaint that is based not on his actions, but on the actions of a canine that has been trained to bite based on a predetermined action.

When taking into consideration all factors including officer safety, safety of the suspect, safety of the canine, the handler control (bite and hold) method of criminal apprehension ensures that the decision to use force and the accompanying liability remain the responsibility of the handler.