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K-9 Operations / Philosophy and Methodology

By Naftali TS Gordon

I want to preface this article with an explanation that this is based on philosophical and principal discussions of canine operations. Multiple viewpoints from a variety of experts have been brought into capturing the elements and understanding of canine teams, from both the Operator/Handler viewpoint, as well as the oversight and management of canine programs. In addition, although the primary insights of this article revolve around the Explosive Detection (EDD) canine teams; the methodologies are compatible with all canine units, as they are incorporated into federal, state and local agencies.

Let us begin with the breakdown of the multiple elements of a canine team and its operations:

Training – We will briefly discuss the training elements which provide success

Maintenance – The requirements for structured maintenance of a canine division

Safety – The safety constraints incorporated within an EDD unit

Measured Success – The ability to measure success from a handler and management standpoint.

Training

Training is a particularly complex tenet of the EDD unit. Trainers of EDD units range from military to local and federal agency trainers and organizations. In addition there are multiple private organizations which train units throughout the world. I recently had the opportunity to view the training methods of South African handlers within the Middle East. Most training regiments, especially military, have very rigid requirements for the initial training of canine and handler, as well as annual certification standards.

The annual certification maintains and reviews the proficiency of EDD units, and assesses deployment capabilities. (As stated in my preface, I will refrain from going into specific details of initial phase



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training and recertification and focus primarily on conceptual observations. Specific level information will be part of an ongoing series of articles.)

Each training branch provides valuable resources, tools and skill sets which are extremely valuable in the ability to provide a framework for proficiency within teams of explosives detection canines and handlers.

Every canine team is the best. All handlers will attest to their proficient abilities regardless of who provided their training and resources. However, it is critical that the strengths and weaknesses of each training branch be assessed and incorporated into an overall strategic approach to canine training and usage.

Within the United States and abroad the fragmented canine training branches present a misconception of abilities throughout varied programs. A unique set of standards would be beneficial for law enforcement and security agencies to communicate and coordinate with each other in a seamless effort. This is a primary principle of best practices from physical communication, first response procedures and communication standards.

The EOD and Canine world as we know it is very small. The integration of best practice procedures from various sources and inter-agency training is a vital tool for the successful deployment of canine units. While this is done on the handler level, all too often management does not understand the benefits of training with other organizations.

Maintenance

Cost and maintenance of any division is usually commensurate with the success rate, which we will talk about later in this article. However, the success of an EDD unit cannot accurately be measured with the care and maintenance of the team.

Whether you bring your canine home, or the canine is kenneled, the cost of upkeep, health care, and miscellaneous items are a tremendous expenditure. The misconception of management is that the organizational heads see only the salary of the employee and the job function. However, each handler maintains a separate "non-paid biological explosives detector" which requires continuous resources to maintain proficiency levels.

After many years I stopped correcting senior leadership, or non-trained individuals, when they said that I operate and train "bomb dogs." I never met a bomb dog. Canines are trained for scent detection. Canines do not detect bombs or drugs, they detect odor. In addition, their olfaction is quite unique. We are still developing an understanding of canine olfaction.

The maintenance issue leads us back to proficiency and canines. Training as we know, regardless of type, is the cornerstone of a proficient canine team. Without the necessary training on a regular basis, we are not only failing in our ability to detect, but we are putting lives in danger. This is a common misconception with the senior leadership of an organization. Questions often asked are: "Why do you need to train so much?" "Isn't your dog trained already?" or "Why are you utilizing so much time on training, and not keeping the team operational?"

As handlers, we know the answers. A canine is not a gun which can be cleaned and ready to go without issue. A canine requires a tremendous amount of maintenance through training in order to work proficiently.

This is also a difference between Explosive Detection canines and Narcotics canines. While I agree missing a few kilos of drugs is a bad thing for a dog, missing a few kilos of explosives for an EDD is a potential catastrophic event, which can bring a country to its knees.

Maintenance with a canine requires us to utilize explosives on a daily basis to maintain proficiency. However, this poses an issue with cost factors, as well as Federal guidelines on storage, transportation, etc.

Having gone into the corporate world of EOD and K-9 operations, I am now involved in reviews of non-detonatable explosive odor materials. As this technology and chemistry advances, I see its valuable potential for the maintenance of the EDD. These materials alleviate the Federal requirements and can support the maintenance of the canine in conjunction with actual explosives, which require a bunker and a set of strict protocols. This is not a new concept, although it is now a movement within the global canine world to increase proficiency. From an operator standpoint, I have utilized canines trained on high quantity explosives with the non-detonatable materials and have seen extremely positive results. However, I am open to discussing the detailed aspects of non-detonatable materials in another article or privately.

Safety

Safety is a key component when we discuss a canine team. Safety for the canine and the safe operation of explosives. This topic also covers cross contamination procedures, health and government regulations. This would be a 300 page report, at the least. For this article I will maintain a level of generality and focus on the safety aspects of the canine team from the perspective of senior leadership, while attempting to bridge the gap of understanding from the point of view of the handler.

As already discussed, the EOD and

K-9 world is quite small in comparison to other law enforcement groups. Information, no matter how quietly it is kept, will always be published throughout the community. Senior leadership knows this, and often times fears the repercussions of accidents with explosives, so they are hesitant to either provide for a canine unit or provide the necessary tools and resources for an existing canine unit. Leadership goes into self-preservation mode. This conclusion invariably leads to an existing canine unit's inability to function properly, and the failure of teams to complete recertification, or worse, the inability to detect the required substance. This breaches the success aspect of our article, whereby the fear of an issue due to self-preservation leads to the unsuccessful mission of a canine unit, which has the same effect on the leadership aspect.

To break it down to primary issues, leadership is the critical component for the safety of a canine team. As with terrorism, there is never going to be a 100 percent prevention rate. Same with crime. There will also be issues with the canine teams working with many components and multiple personnel in different venues. It is leadership's responsibility to provide structure and policy in order that personnel (which includes the canine) mitigate any potential hazards without taking away the primary needs of a successful canine operation.

To touch on a few tiers of the safety operations and leadership: it is necessary to discuss the ability to delegate authority; to understand the strengths and weaknesses of personnel to accomplish different tasks, without taking away from training and utilization. In addition, continued program oversight is critical to ensuring that all standards are continuously reviewed for their effectiveness, and that they are being adhered to through routine audits and "red team" assessments, as with other areas of security and law enforcement. Furthermore, there is the requirement for leadership to maintain consistency within their programs and provide an open framework for collaboration; which builds proficiency and resources within the unit. This is a very basic assessment of divisional leadership,

which can and must be expanded upon within your division.

With proper leadership and management we can accomplish the following:

- Minimize explosive hazard
- Minimize potential for loss of explosives
- Minimize injuries to canines and handlers
- Minimize cross contamination of explosives
- Minimize potential for damage of training aids
- Increase proficiency
- Increase utilization
- Increase standards and certification success
- Increase morale
- Increase the ability to save lives

Measured Success

In today's atmosphere of budgetary constraints, it becomes necessary to measure success through metric based programs. Visible success becomes a primary element to promoting various law enforcement programs, and the ability to point out key accomplishments of any program which requires the amount of funding as a canine division.

To all management, federal and state oversight committees — It is my fervent hope that none of your canine handlers find an actual explosive device. Let me digress. If the need arises, and the training has been implemented properly, they have provided the team with the necessary tools to detect the odor and properly accomplish the mission with multiple units to prevent the explosive device from causing harm. However, having lived overseas and been subject to multiple events, I think the potential for attacks within the United States and abroad are equalizing.

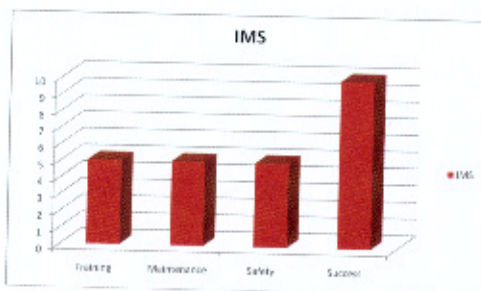
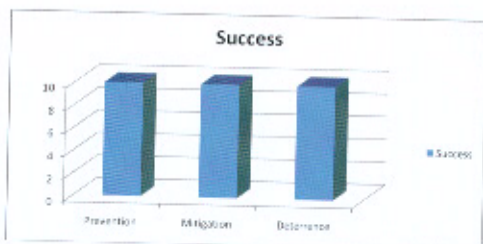
The need for effective explosives detection canine tools are at a premium. I consider myself very lucky to work with multiple companies and scientists which develop explosive detection tools for use in a wide variety of systems. Having said this, the current odor scenting technologies still do not come close to a properly trained and utilized canine team. Without presenting myself as an expert in all

disciplines, I have a strong aptitude in physics, biology, chemistry and geology. I present this in order to make the statement that a canine's ability and olfactory sensing device crosses all these disciplines.

Back to our original question: How do we measure success? Allocations are made, budgets are weighed and explosive detection canines are not finding "bombs." (They don't find bombs, they find odor!!!). This is a great debate. Where on the scale is an EDD?

This is critical to understanding how we want to utilize our teams. What is the greatest importance? Success with an EDD cannot be measured by "finds." Success must be measured by intelligence-based systems which determine where in the graph each canine team has performed. Mitigation and deterrence is critical, although a visible, measurable result cannot be shown as completely successful.

I will however issue a caveat to the



above graph of "Intelligent Matrix Success," or "IMS". This ability to measure success is commensurate with the following graph which depicts what we have discussed.

By meeting all the required levels of training, maintenance, and safety we are

able to exponentially raise the success level, and to show a greater level of metric success through the IMS system.

To reiterate what I mentioned earlier, there is a tremendous amount of knowledge and data which is not encompassed within this article. Specifics of each element require a much greater digression which cannot be accomplished here. It is my sincere desire that this article provides a framework and baseline approach from which to build success within teams and organizations.

Naftali TS Gordon is currently the CEO of an intelligence fusion center "Global Research & Response Intelligence Division, GRRID," in addition to being the Director for Security Operations of "X-TEST" Explosives Security Technologies. Naftali has a background with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as a Senior Inspector, security specialist and K-9 handler. Further accomplishments include being an elected official in New York, and integration of law enforcement and security industry agencies. He can be reached at Naftali.Gordon@GRRID.org.

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