

**COPS, CANINES, AND COMMUNITY:  
The Oakland Police Canine Unit  
in a Changing Urban Community**

**by Gini Graham Scott**

**COPS, CANINES, AND COMMUNITY:**

## **The Oakland Police Canine Unit in a Changing Urban Community**

**by Gini Graham Scott**

### **Introduction**

The Oakland Police Canine Unit is part of the Special Operations Division in the Oakland Police Department, which currently consists of approximately 750 officers in a city of about 395,000 people, located 12 miles from San Francisco<sup>1</sup>. I chose to study the Canine Unit, since I have long been interested in community policing and have been active in the Oakland Citizens Police Academy's Alumni Association (CPAAA) after graduating from the Academy about 4 years ago. I am currently its VP and its PR/Community Liaison. Also, in the last two years, I have been working with a number of groups in the pets community, including the Oakland SPCA, as a result of working on a book project and Web site: [www.doyoulooklikeyourdog.com](http://www.doyoulooklikeyourdog.com).

Another reason for my interest is that both the police and the city of Oakland have been experiencing a number of changes in the last few years due to an increasingly diverse population, improving business economy, and high profile mayor, Jerry Brown, who has been attracting new business growth to the city. Thus, I thought it might be of special interest to do an ethnography of the Canine Unit, and my involvement with the CPAAA helped me gain the approvals and access to study this group. I conducted my study between March 14-April 15, 2001, and soon after completing the study, I took photographs of the unit, to be used in community presentations, articles, and other public relations purposes, soon after completing the study.

### **The Changing Oakland Community and the Police in Oakland**

The Oakland Canine Unit, like the rest of the Police Department, is very much shaped by the needs and interests of the larger Oakland community and by the changes that have taken place in the last few years.

The community has been very much affected by Oakland's relationship to San Francisco and the rest of the East Bay. Although Oakland is centrally located in the Bay Area -- the center of a triangle between three cities: San Francisco, San Jose, and Concord/Walnut Creek, and a transportation hub for shipping and airfreight -- Oakland has long been an economically underdeveloped city. It has suffered from being in the shadow of San Francisco across the Bay, and for a long time it had the reputation as a crime-ridden black inner-city ghetto with a high rate of crime. Oakland gained a high-profile as a dangerous place to be during the late 1960s, when it was the center of an organization of black radicals called the Black Panther Party, and its gun-toting party leaders, led by Huey Newton, gained front page news with their breakfasts for poor children and a one-day armed protest at the Sacramento State Capitol. The eventual

crack-down by the police led to shootings, trials, protests, and a growing distrust of many community members towards the police, popularly called “pigs” in those days of widespread political protest.

In the 1970s, 80s, and early 90s, Oakland continued to build its high crime, violence, and lower-income city reputation, when the crack epidemic spread to the inner city, particularly to East and West Oakland. The result was a growth of gangs, crack houses, drug-dealing, and an increasing rate of crimes, including for burglary, robbery, and homicide – much of this fueled by drugs. This environment helped to discourage business and economic development in the city, and the police department suffered from budget problems, which contributed to a serious decline in the department’s staffing in the early 90s. As a result, the unit was short about 70-80 officers – about 10% below its 800 authorized officers, which contributed to high overtime rates and problems in fully staffing community policing units. These various difficulties, in turn, contributed to a continuing problem of police-community mistrust, despite police efforts to improve community relations, such as starting a Citizens Police Academy in 1993 and expanding its community policing unit in the mid-1990s.

However, in the last few years, both Oakland and the police department have experienced major positive changes that have had an impact on the police Canine Unit, too. While the population itself has remained fairly stable since 1995, the big change has been a new economic growth sparked by a number of factors, including new businesses coming to the area, due to the expansion of high technology spilling over from the Silicon Valley and the combination of increasingly high rents and limited occupancy in San Francisco. At the same time, an explosion of immigration from Mexico, Central America, and Southeast Asia has led to an increasingly diverse population. The arrival of Jerry Brown as mayor in 1998 with his three-point plan to reduce crime 25%, improve the arts, and bring 10,000 new residents to downtown Oakland also contributed to this renaissance. So did a flurry of new construction and expansion downtown, resulting in a new city hall, city center complex, Jack London Square, and other new developments in the planning stage. The Oakland Chamber of Commerce has been growing rapidly, too, and becoming more politically powerful given these changes. As the officer of one company put it:

“Oakland is a great place to do business...These days, there is almost a palpable esprit de corps among those involved in Oakland’s business community. The city government has placed an emphasis on revitalization that is second only to the U.S. Government’s Manhattan Project of the 1930s and ‘40s. And as crime goes down, schools are improved and residents are enticed to the downtown area, the big winners will be the companies – large and small – who benefit from healthy neighborhoods and a thriving economy.”<sup>2</sup>

Concurrently, the police experienced its own revival, with the appointment of a new police chief, Richard Word, and the upping of its force of officers to close to full strength. And further efforts to improve police community relations have occurred, too, such as a City of Peace Initiative to reduce the interpersonal conflict that can lead to

homicide and stepped up efforts to eliminate drugs and prostitution in response to community pressure to take back the streets.

Still, despite such progress, the police department has recently suffered from two major setbacks that rocked the department and the community. One setback was the charge that four officers on the late-night “dogwatch” shift were involved in planting drugs and roughing up suspects in their zealous crackdown on crime, leading to criminal charges filed against them and a civil lawsuit against them and the city. The other incident was the shooting of a popular officer, William “Willie” Wilkins by two rookie officers. Though the police department’s investigation concluded that the officers were not at fault, the incident led to a civil suit filed in mid-April by a lawyer working for the firm of high profile lawyer Johnnie Cochran. Both stories have been widely featured in the news and have contributed to much discussion and assessment of training and supervision policies in the department.

It is in this context that I studied the Police Canine Unit. To a great extent, the Unit’s policies and procedures are affected by this climate, in which the police department has been trying to improve community relationships, as well as avoid liability problems in an increasingly litigious environment. While the Unit has its own policies and procedures that solely affect the unit, its officers are also affected by many of the police department’s general orders, particularly since the officers in the Canine Unit – generally called “handlers” to reflect their work with dogs – are also regular patrol officers when they aren’t called on to use the dogs.

## **Methodology**

The study was based using the following sources of information:

- Observation and interviews at two dog training sessions, which are at the core of the Canine Unit’s activities, to keep the dogs prepared for when they are called into action on patrol;
- Observation and interviews on a ride-along for several hours with one of the Canine Unit officers;
- A review of the police orders and procedures governing the Canine Unit;
- A review of national guidelines, case law, and articles about the practices of canine units nationally, primarily from the United States Police Canine Association.

To conduct the study, I began by getting the necessary approvals, which meant contacting the commanding officer in charge of the Special Operations Section, which included the Canine Unit – Lt. Eric Breshears. I called him in early March. After I explained the project was a field study based on doing observations and interviews in a community group, noted the results might be used for presentations with community groups, and described my background participating with the CPAAA and doing a previous volunteer project with the homicide section, Lt. Breshears said the project sounded like one he could approve. But first he asked me to send a written description

of what I hoped to do, which was similar to the approval procedure when I had previously done a volunteer study of the homicide division. In my letter, I indicated that I hoped to start the project in about two weeks, and about 10 days later, I got a call from Officer Pat Garrahan, the coordinator of the Canine Unit, inviting me to a training the following week – Wednesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>. Officer Garrahan also indicated that he didn't think there would be any problem arranging the two ride-alongs I proposed – one with the evening swing shift (from 3:30-11:30 pm.), the other with the day shift (from 9-5 p.m.) or of taking the photos that could be used for community presentations. I explained that I would be showing him copies of my report and field notes of my interviews and observations, so he could review these to make any corrections, additions, or suggest changes. So that's how the project began.

I went to the first training on March 14<sup>th</sup>, where I met most of the officers in the 13-member unit – 12 officers, plus Officer Pat Garrahan. It was held at a large carpet warehouse in the industrial section of East Oakland – a typical setting for these trainings. When I arrived at about 6 p.m., the officers were gathered inside the warehouse, a few standing in front of the group, and the rest sitting on long rolls of carpets by the front office. Garrahan introduced me to the group and I briefly explained the project and my previous involvement with the CPAAA, writing a homicide report, and going through the Administration of Justice Program at Merritt College. My account of these experiences helped to smooth the way, since I had developed previously supportive relationships with the police in a community where many people active in community and police meetings have antagonistic or distrustful relationships. Then, Garrahan assigned one of the officers to show me around, after which I was free to observe and talk to the officers who were training their dogs inside the warehouse or outside on the short dead-end street. While I was at the training for about 3 hours – from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., I took careful notes of what I observed and what the officers told me. As I could, I noted the names of the officers I spoke to, although I wasn't always able to do this, since I had met so many people at one time, and sometimes several officers were discussing something with me in a group. However, I planned to change the names of the officers anyway, and I figured that where relevant Garrahan could help make corrections and clarify who said what.

It was actually very fortunate that I did plan to send my field notes to Garrahan for review. After I faxed over my initial notes – about 21 single-spaced pages, about two weeks later, when I called Garrahan about some problems that developed in trying to arrange the ride-alongs, Garrahan said he wanted to tell me about a few minor corrections in my notes. He began by asking me to make a small change in who told me what and in describing a technique for training the dogs by slightly kicking at them, not kicking them, to get them used to the possibility of getting kicked by a suspect in the field. Then, after a brief pause to find the words to be diplomatic, Garrahan pointed out the other error. I had duly written the following in my field notes describing the different types of breeds used as search dogs:

“When I asked about the types of dogs that were most commonly used as search dogs, Travis indicated that there were six main breeds. Besides German Shepherds, the most common, the police also used

Dobermans, Rottweilers, Malinois, Pit Bulls, and Dutch Shepherds. However, there was unusual program in San Jose, which some officers in the unit had talked about where they used Chihuahuas. Chihuahuas, I asked, surprised, and Travis turned to a nearby officer, who confirmed that yes, they used Chihuahuas, and described how he heard they sent in 15 Chihuahuas at a time, since they could search more quickly, and then once one of the Chihuahuas found a hiding suspect, they would converge on him. Though they were small, the large numbers would be compelling in persuading him to give up.

Garrahan observed that he had to tell me about the account of the Chihuahuas. “Uhhhh...well...,” he said feeling around for just the right words to explain, “the guy who told you about the Chihuahuas is something of a comedian...”

“Oh, you mean that was a joke,” I said, suddenly realizing the ridiculousness of the story.

I hung up shortly after that, laughing hysterically, just thinking about this story, and thinking how I had subsequently told it to someone at a party, who had also taken the story quite seriously, remarking: “Well, it’s nice to see the police are trying to do something progressive to work with other kinds of dogs.”

The incident helped to highlight the importance of checking the facts in one’s field notes with the subjects in the field. Also, it pointed out the possibility of getting incorrect information, particularly when one first starts on a field study and doesn’t know the people or environment to be studied. It can be easy to take incorrect information to be valid, especially when one starts off with some initial misconceptions about the subject to be studied. For instance, when I started the project, I was mostly familiar with the images of police dogs being used for rescue work, for finding missing persons and objects, and at community events, such as at fairs and a Bay to Barkers celebration I intended. I didn’t realize that the primary purpose of the Canine Unit was to search for suspects or to make sure a suspect wasn’t still at a crime scene. I also didn’t realize the extent to which training is such a big part of the Canine Unit activities. And I didn’t know that the canine officers only occasionally use the dogs while on patrol, and most of the time, they act as regular patrol officers, who happen to have a dog in the back seat. Thus, it was quite easy for me to readily accept what the officers told me at this early stage of the project without questioning how accurate this information was, since I didn’t have an accurate context in which to place this information.

In any case, I quickly corrected that bit of misinformation, and a month later, when I went to a second training with three of the officers and brought up the Chihuahua story, it was clear that everyone in the department knew about it and enjoyed the big joke. One of the officers talked about how he had walked away when he heard the officer tell the story (“Because it was too painful”, he said), and he was glad I “had a good sense of humor about it.” At least the officers hadn’t passed the story on to the officers in San Jose, and after I told them how I had shared the story at a

party with a man who had readily believed it, I commented that I hoped the story “won’t become an urban legend.” After that the officers shared freely in my subsequent interviews with them, and I don’t think I ended up with any more “shaggy Chihuahua” stories – though the officers did joke about who actually told me the story, since I attributed it in my notes to the officer who had shown me around the first night, rather than one of the other officers, who really did share the story.

My initial methodology plans also had to be adapted early on due to the problems in going on a ride-along. Originally, I had planned to go on two representative ride-alongs – one during the day shift from 9-5 p.m., the other during the evening swing shift from 3:30-11:30 p.m. However, a problem in going on these ride-alongs soon developed, because of the handlers’ concerns about the dog’s reactions to another person in the car, the unpredictability of the dog’s behavior in a crime situation, and fears about liability for a dog attack. Initially, the Canine Unit coordinator, Officer Garrahan, thought there would be “no problem at all”, and he advised me to “just call the watch commander and let him know you have been doing a project with the Canine Unit,” he wrote me in one e-mail.

So I called the swing shift commander, set up the ride along, and appeared at the line-up as arranged, Saturday, March 30<sup>th</sup>. However, after I and the three other civilians scheduled for ride-alongs on that shift introduced ourselves, problems developed. As the other ride-alongs were paired up and left with the officers assigned to take them out, the lieutenant and his two assistants came over to explain the problem. The officer originally assigned to take me out wasn’t there, and the other two officers felt their dogs were too aggressive, so they couldn’t take a ride-along. Though the lieutenant made a few calls to see what other handlers were assigned the next day on Sunday or even later that day on the late night dog-watch shift, it was uncertain how these handlers would feel. Then, the dog-watch shift lieutenant, who came by as the swing-shift lieutenant was making calls, said he didn’t want any citizens on ride-alongs on his watch regardless. He said that citizens had never gone on ride-alongs with Canine Unit officers before, and he was concerned about the dog biting a citizen, noting that: “The dog can bite if the citizen gets in front of the handler, when the police set up a perimeter around the area. Or it can happen in the car, since the dog is riding right behind the citizen. Anything might set the dog off and it might bite.” He pointed out that he and some other police officers had even gotten bitten themselves, when they got in front of a handler after the police set up a perimeter at one crime scene. “So I don’t want to have any ride-alongs with dog handlers on my shift,” he concluded.

Thus, the swing-shift lieutenant suggested the best approach was for me to check back with the Canine Unit coordinator to find out which handlers would be open to having a ride-along. However, while Garrahan suggested another swing shift officer who might be a good match, that officer expressed some initial reservations, and after a discussion with Garrahan he called me back to explain very apologetically that he didn’t want to have a ride along because of his concerns about liability if anything went wrong because of having a citizen with a dog in what could be a very unpredictable situation. As he noted in his lengthy explanation and apology:

“The problem that I have from personal experience...is that it adds an unknown factor when you have someone that the dog does not know in your car... It adds an unwanted...burden of responsibility on the handler and exposure to liability...For me personally from previous experience, it's best not to have anyone in the car that the dog does not know or is familiar with handling a police canine, just because of the unpredicted accounts or incidents that can come along while riding along in the police car... It's just because of the nature of our business and the liability that is out there that makes it very difficult to justify – or for me – to justify having someone in the car. So for me personally...I will not be able to accommodate a ride-along.”

Thus, for awhile it looked like a ride-along wouldn't be possible, and making arrangements was further complicated since the Canine Unit coordinator was on vacation for a week, and many of the handlers were participating in various command and SWAT team trainings over the next weeks. But finally, Garrahan was able to find one officer, Travis<sup>1</sup>, who was willing to take me out for a few hours – though not for a full shift, since Travis felt uncomfortable with this. He also suggested that a ride-along on a full shift wouldn't be that useful after he asked my reason for wanting to go on two ride-alongs on different shifts. When I said I hoped to gain a representative view of what canine officers do, he pointed out that I might have a misconception about how often the officers use the dogs. “It's just like going on any ride along on patrol, unless we get a call for the dogs.” In fact, sometimes, he explained, there were no calls at all, though at other times there were.

Thus, rather than structuring the research primarily around going on these ride-alongs, I decided to primarily draw on my observations and interviews from the training, supplemented with a review of police policies and procedures, which were shaped by community input about appropriate police actions. Then, I would look at how these policies and procedures, along with community input, and other influences in Oakland guided how the canine unit officers acted on the job.

In turn, this experience in having to adapt the original research plan illustrates the need to be flexible in changing one's research methodology to suit the situation. Additionally, this experience helped provide some insights into the conditions that shape the role of the handlers in the community, such as the way concerns their about liability affect how they carry out their jobs – not only in this situation, but more generally, as I learned from subsequent interviews. The problems in setting up a ride-along helped to make me aware of these issues, so I knew to ask about them in the interviews at the second training I attended.

### **The Role of Policy, Procedures, Rules, Regulations, and Guidelines in Shaping the Canine Unit**

---

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the Canine Unit coordinator, I changed the names of the officers in the report, though I used their real names in my field notes.

Like the rest of the Oakland Police Department – or any police department – the Canine Unit is strongly affected by a series of policies, procedures, rules, regulations, and guidelines. Some of these are issued by the Police Department as official documents called Departmental General Orders, which describe in details “Department policy and procedures regarding the Canine Unit and the deployment of police dogs.” In addition, assorted directives and instructions are passed on to members of the Unit at trainings, briefings, and the regular daily line-ups at the beginning of each shift. Such directives, whether they are official orders, guidelines, or recommendations for preferred ways of acting as a canine officer play a major role in shaping what Unit members do. These directives are so important because the police department is set up like a command structure, patterned on a military model of organization with a strong hierarchy, and these directives set forth the organization’s official policy in fairly precise detail.

In addition, the role of the Canine Unit – and the directives issued in Oakland -- are influenced by guidelines been used in police departments in other U.S. cities and by the case law developed regarding the use of dogs in California and other states, such as described in various postings on the United States Police Canine Association Web site. This national association of police canine officers provides extensive detail about these policies and case law developments, along with articles on administrative and training techniques, such as how to create a canine unit and using different training approaches used, such as training dogs to “find and bark” rather than “find and bite”, in response to community input and the growing climate of litigation. In Oakland, as in other police departments, these policies and procedures are very much shaped in response to prevailing community attitudes towards the police, as reflected by input from community groups, individuals, and local political organizations, such as the Mayor and city council. Together, these various community forces have an influence on the police department management in shaping how the department should be run.

In response, the Oakland Canine Unit Officers were very aware of these various police department policies and procedures, which affected how they trained the dogs and used them on patrol. For example, one officer, Gary, noted how these guidelines established the types of circumstances where officers could use the dogs on a search, commenting that:

“The crimes need to be felonies or dangerous or violent misdemeanors, such as murder, rape, or robbery. They need to be crimes where you have a reason to use force.”

Another officer, Alex explained:

“We follow general orders. We follow these guidelines on when we can use the dogs and when we can’t. For instance, we can’t use the dogs for a misdemeanor, except under certain conditions.”

Likewise, Ted referred to these orders, noting that: “We’re bound by the general orders,” though he pointed out that sometimes the officers needed to adapt these order in light

of their street experience. But mostly, they sought to comply with these orders, such as when new patrol officers made inappropriate requests, such as asking for a canine officer to use the dog to search in a misdemeanor case or search for a missing child. Then, the canine officers would point out when their requests were out of line with these official guidelines.

What are these major guidelines? In Oakland, the two major Departmental General Orders affecting the unit are the quite appropriately labeled “K-9” order, which describes the department’s canine program, and the “K-3” order, which deals with the use of force. This use of force order applies, since the police canine bite is listed as one of the more severe options on a continuum of force, and the police have policies on what types of force can be used in different situations.

According to the K-9 order, a properly trained police dog is considered a “valuable law enforcement tool,” which can increase the department’s ability to capture criminals and locate items of evidence, while improving the safety of officers and citizens. The dogs are also used to reduce the time needed by officers to perform certain tasks, because the dogs are more efficient, such as locating suspects and evidence items by scent. While the dogs covered by this order includes patrol, narcotics detection dogs, and bloodhounds, most of the canine unit dogs were exclusively patrol dogs, plus one cross-trained dog, which was being trained for narcotics detection as well as patrol.

The order also spelled out the requirements for regular and continual training, so the dogs would be prepared when needed, noting that:

“All personnel assigned to the canine unit shall engage in training and readiness exercises on a regular basis to ensure that the canine teams have the opportunity to practice their special skills and develop their abilities to function effectively.”

Additionally, the order specified the particular times when the patrol dogs once fully trained – meaning certified after a period of training -- might be called upon to assist officers. Specifically, a dog might be appropriately used to assist at these seven times:

- 1) Searching for and arresting criminal suspects.
- 2) Searching for lost or missing persons (although this was only rarely done).
- 3) Pursuing and apprehending criminal suspects who are attempting to evade arrest.
- 4) Providing protection to canine handlers if attacked by a suspect.
- 5) Searching for and locating controlled substances (although this was only done by the dogs which were certified for narcotics detection)
- 6) Searching for and locating items of evidence.
- 7) Making public relations appearances for department.

Although the officers could use a dog if it didn't bite without use of force considerations, the question of biting was of major concern, because of potential liability. This possibility was a big issue, because whether the officer intentionally sent in the dog to bite or whether the dog just bit someone in response to the situation, the officer and department could be subjected to community anger or litigation. This was a major reason that the department in the past few years had switched to the "find and bark" rather than "find and bite" training approach, so now the dogs were trained to wait for a "bite" command except under a few conditions, such as when the handler was being threatened or the suspect was attacking the dog. However, as several officers noted, it was much harder to train the dogs this way, since the dogs were not good at making such distinctions. As Gary explained:

"It makes training harder, because you can't reason with a dog. You can't explain things to them. A dog's natural instinct is to attack. So you have to teach it to run to the ball, smell it and run away. It's more natural for the dog to get the ball, bite it, and bring it to you. It's the same with suspects. The dog's natural instinct would be to get the bad guy, bite, and bring him back to you. It's not as rewarding for the dog to just bark.

Also, it's hard to tell the dog to just bark this time and then another time it's okay to bite. The difficult part is for the dog to distinguish the commands. That's why we train them so much. However, even with all the training, the dogs can make mistakes. They are just dogs, and humans make mistakes, too."

But even with these training difficulties, the officers were expected to train the dogs so that ideally they could fully control their dogs and decide, based on the situation, whether it was appropriate to order the dogs to bite. In language a lawyer might love, the guidelines invited the handlers to decide for themselves what to do based on: the seriousness of the crime, the age of the suspect, the immediate or potential threat a suspect might pose by his behavior in trying to evade arrest by resisting, attempting to escape, or seeking to hide, and whether the suspect "is, or reasonably appears to be, attempting to evade arrest by active resistance, flight, or concealment." Then, taking all of facts and totality of the circumstances under consideration, the handler was directed to only have their dogs use as much force as appeared "reasonably necessary...to effectively bring an incident under control."

In other words, as the officers interpreted these guidelines on the street, in the event a suspect was involved in a felony or serious misdemeanor involving force or violence, then, there generally was no liability, whether the officer ordered the dog to bite or not. As Ted noted:

Sometimes...the commanders and patrol officers...don't know the policies that restrict the use of dogs. They think we can search for missing people, find juveniles, or find someone who has committed a misdemeanor. They think, for example, if we can find a missing kid, the dog will just bark. Or they think that if we send in the dog in a petty theft case, it will just bark, too. However, there is also the danger it

might bite. It might not just bark...That's why the handlers are not supposed to use the dogs in these non-crime or non-violent misdemeanor crime cases. As long as the suspect is involved in a felony or violent misdemeanor case, there isn't any liability if the dog did bite, but that wouldn't be the case if it were a non-crime or non-violent misdemeanor situation."

Additionally, to further protect the officers from liability and negative community fall-out from using the dogs, the officers were required to give a warning announcement before beginning any search -- and later as reasonably necessary during the search -- to advise the suspect the officer was about to release the dog if the suspect didn't give up and submit to an arrest within a short time. Generally, the officers were supposed to give the initial announcement in English and Spanish, or if the officers thought the suspect might speak another language, they should, if they could, give this warning in that language. The one major exception to giving this warning was if the announcement would jeopardize the safety of the officers or citizens at the scene. In addition, to provide further control of the situation and further legal cover, a handler should, if possible, ask a supervisor or commanding officer to come to the scene before sending out a dog to search for a suspect, though this wasn't necessary, if waiting for these officers would unnecessarily delay sending in the dog.

Then, according to these official guidelines, the handlers were supposed to give the suspect a reasonable amount of time to give up before sending in the dog -- generally about 1 minute on the street after the first announcement and another minute after a second warning -- although the officers only waited about 5-10 seconds during the training itself. Afterwards, once they sent in the dog, the handlers were supposed to closely monitor its activities and immediately call it off, once the dog made contact with the suspect and he submitted to arrest or was no longer an immediate danger to the officers or citizens on the scene. In other words, as Gary explained it, the ideal was to use as little force as possible.

"The procedure is to limit the use of force and to ensure officer safety...You give the suspect a chance to give up. If he doesn't come out, it's considered resisting. It's like the situation where a suspect keeps his hands in his pocket after you tell him to take them out. Whatever the situation, you try to use the minimum force as possible."

How much force? Here the officers were subjected to another general order on the use of lethal and non-lethal force, based on using the least amount of physical force reasonably necessary in light of current circumstances -- although here, too, all these terms were often subject to legal interpretation after the fact, should individual citizens, citizen groups, or their lawyers object. (For example, what is reasonable? What is reasonably necessary? What is unnecessary force? When does a misdemeanor become a felony? When does a felony become considered violent? When does a person have the apparent ability to carry out the use or threatened use of lethal force? When is there substantial risk of death or serious bodily injury?) In the field, the Canine Unit officers, like all officers, have to take into consideration such factors on the spur of

the moment in what might be a life or death situation, as well as factor in how and when to use of the dog, whether to command it to bite, and the possibility the dog might bite even if not commanded to do so.

To help decide what to do, the handlers are trained to go by the continuum of force options policy which starts with verbal persuasion, such as when a canine handler invites a suspect to surrender before sending in the dog, usually to bark and then wait for a bite command. The canine bite is listed as sixth on the options list, and between that and verbal persuasion comes using physical strength, (except for carotid holds), such as grabbing a suspect by the arm or pinning him to the ground, followed by pepper spray (technically called “oleoresin capsicum” or OC spray), carotid holds (a special choke hold to restrict blood flow to the brain), and the taser or “stun” gun. Then, comes the canine bite, which is to be used before using any kind of baton or other object to hit a suspect, and lastly the most deadly force is firearms. As for using the dog before it bites, say when it just barks and snarls – that’s considered on a par with using verbal persuasion, which is one reason the department shifted to a “find and bark” rather than a “find and bite” training policy.

Should the dog be commanded to bite or choose to bite on its own, then the less than lethal force guidelines apply, so the canine officers have to take these into account when they send the dog in to search for a subject. In this case, the guidelines for using less than lethal force allow it to be used under three main scenarios:

1. To effect an arrest or detain for investigation a person whom the member reasonably believes or suspects has committed a criminal offense or is involved in criminal activity;
2. To overcome the use or threatened use of physical force directed against the member or another person; or
3. To prevent the escape from custody of a person whom the member reasonably believes or suspects has committed a criminal offense.<sup>3</sup>

What these use of force orders mean for the canine unit officers is that they can only use dogs to do searches for felony suspects or for misdemeanor suspects, who appear from their actions or for other reasons to present an “imminent danger of serious bodily injury” to the handler, other officers, or other parties on the scene, unless the suspect is immediately taken into custody.

Then, once they send in the dog, the handlers have to carefully monitor its activities and immediately call it off once the dog finds the suspect and he submits to their authority or is no longer an immediate danger. Should the dog bite, the police are required to take the person immediately to a hospital for observation and treatment, and the police are supposed to have photos taken of the injury as soon as possible.

Such guidelines, in turn, contributed to the canine officers’ intensive focus on their dog’s actions during a search, so they could stay fully aware of and in control of what their dog was doing. This also meant the canine officers usually worked in teams of two officers when called to a crime scene, so that one handler could back up the first

handler, who was focused on the dog. As Ted, who I interviewed in the second training session I attended, explained:

“If a handler is in a search situation, they are focused on the dog. They don’t focus around them....That’s why it’s safer when another handler is there, so he can pay attention to the officer who is focused on what his dog is doing and is concentrating on directing the dog.... Otherwise there could be a danger to the handler from the suspect, and a regular cover officer may not be aware of this.”

In the event that a dog did bite a suspect or any other person, the officer had to immediately file a report about this under another departmental order dealing with the use of less than local force: “Departmental Order K-4: Reporting and Investigating the Use of Force”. In this case, the supervisor of the unit, the unit coordinator, would have to investigate the circumstances surrounding the use of force by conducting interviews with the handler sending in the dog, plus any witnesses, including other officers, if possible the suspect, and any medical personnel treating the victim. Plus the coordinator had to review any police reports about the incident and arrange for photos to be taken of any injuries suffered by the suspect and any police officers. Finally, the supervisor had to submit a Use of Force Report through the command structure to Chief of Police within 24 hours, and attach any police reports and other documents, including a printout of the radio tape related to the incident.

Afterwards, should a use of force report be filed, it was up to the Chief of Police or any designees to follow-up in various ways, including bringing together a Major Incident Board of Review to review the incident or referring the matter to a Use of Force Committee to identify any needs for further training or equipment to better prepare the police for future incidents. In some cases, the chief or his designee might refer the matter to further investigation, policy review, or otherwise notify commanders and supervisors about what happened. Additionally, these reports would become part of a quarterly Use of Force Reports – that would be used by the Department’s Internal Affairs Division to conduct an annual Use of Force Report to look for patterns to suggest needs for further training, equipment upgrades, or policy changes.

In summary, the Canine Unit officers’ actions on the street were very much guided by these general regulations that informed everything they did. Although much was left to their discretion in what to do in a particular situation, these departmental orders spelled out clear overall guidelines on how and when to use the dogs. In turn, these orders were shaped by the police department’s relationship with the larger Oakland community and the department’s input from individual citizens, citizen groups, and city government. Of special concern was the department and city’s fear about possible liability if the dogs were used inappropriately to cause injury, when such force might be considered excessive and therefore unjustified.

The canine handlers had to keep such guidelines in mind in their day-to-day actions on the street, and their extensive and ongoing training with their dogs was designed to put these guidelines into practice. Not only did they have to know how to

respond in the heat of high-pressure crime situations where they were asked to use the dogs or thought it appropriate to do so, but they had to carefully train their dogs, so the dogs knew how to respond under differing circumstances and the handler could ideally be in full control their dogs' actions.

In turn, these and other guidelines about the qualifications and procedures for becoming a handler influenced the officers in their decision to become a handler. They had to meet stiff conditions for becoming handlers, among them showing they had the good judgment to know how and when to use the dogs in various scenarios, as well as having a deep love of dogs.

The following sections discuss these key themes: becoming a handler, the nature and role of training, and putting these policies, procedures, and training techniques into practice on patrol and in the community.

### **Becoming a Handler**

Becoming a handler is a very selective process, since handlers have to be very good not only in working with dogs, but show a high level of performance in other policing activities. Among other things, they have to have a minimum of 3 years on patrol, be able to work independently with minimal supervision, stay calm under stress, communicate professionally with members of the public, and testify effectively in court. Additionally, they have to be able to house a police dog, since the dogs go home with the officers and live with them and their families, although in some departments, police dogs are put in kennels, so these housing conditions don't matter.

When I asked the handlers why they or others in the unit chose to become handlers, they all expressed similar reasons – they loved dogs and enjoyed being with them. They all specifically sought to work in the unit and considered being part of it a privilege – like gaining acceptance to an elite officer group within the police department. Though the working conditions in the unit were especially demanding because of all the extra training required to perform effectively with their dogs, they were willing to do so. In fact, they participated in additional training with their dogs off the job, such as when they drove around with their dogs or had them at home. And the officers often volunteered for off-hours public relations activities with their dogs, such as bringing them to their children's schools to do demos.

Some of the officers described their reasons for choosing to join the unit thus:

“I wanted to do this (join a canine unit) in the military. I love dogs. I have always had them. I wanted to understand how to properly train them. I like having an animal as a partner. They're easier to get along with than with humans.” (Gary).

“I have always loved dogs and the family had them as pets....I worked in narcotics, and when the opportunity came up to work with a

dog, I chose to do this. Then, once my narcotics tour of duty ends, I will seek to be a patrol handler with canines.” (Alex).

Others emphasized the popularity of the unit, such as Travis and Mack, who helped introduce me to the unit the first night I came to a training. As they each noted, when I asked how they happened to join the unit:

“It’s the most popular unit in the police. When there are openings in the unit, everyone in the department gets a notice and can apply. So I did.” (Travis)

“It’s the best job. You do something different every night. And you get to work with animals; the only other cops that do are the ones on the horses. Plus, you get to take your dog home with you. In fact, handlers spend more time with their dogs than their family. You spend time together at work and on the way back and forth from home. When you play with your kids, your dog will be there, too...Plus the work is always changing, and whatever it is, you are at the center of something exciting.” (Mack).

Once an officer decided he wanted to join the unit, he or she had to go through a lengthy evaluation process. As Travis explained the department’s review process:

“They look at the length of service, a low number of sick days, good annual evaluations, and no sustained internal affairs complaints for 3 years. They combine all of the information together in a work matrix evaluation, where you get points for the length of time in the department, how long in patrol, and your sick days. Each has a number value.”

In addition, the officers had to take a physical fitness test, which included a series of exercises, judged on a pass-fail basis. Next, the officers went through an evaluation interview, where they were tested on material they had been given to read about police procedures, general orders, and knowledge of canines and search procedures. Also, they had to explain why they wanted to be handlers. After all this testing, the officers were ranked in order, depending on the number of openings, and a letter was sent to the Chief to approve the transfer. Once he did so, the officers were assigned to the Canine Unit and matched up with a dog.

Then, once in the unit, each officer went through a one-month basic training. It was a comprehensive program designed to fully prepare the officer to work with the dog in accordance with the department’s guidelines. Among other requirements, the officer had to be able to fully control the dog during searches and when otherwise out in the community. As Travis explained.

“In the training, the officer learns everything from feeding to care and basic obedience. After that, the dog is started on some basic search and bite techniques. When the handler and dog are ready, the handler will put the dog through his paces, and if the dog passes, he is

certified on the POST test for being street ready. Basically, what that means is the dog will obey his handler on and off the leash and can do a building search where he finds the person in a reasonable length of time for that building. Also, the dog will be tested in an area outdoors, such as an open field or backyard. The test is of both the officer and dog as a team, since they have to work together on the street.”

### **The Nature and Role of Training**

This initial training is only a first step, however. As the officers I spoke with emphasized, the training process is continuous, since they have to keep the dogs up to speed. Otherwise, the dog’s ability to follow commands and respond appropriate could soon begin to deteriorate, and the officers would find it increasingly difficult to control them.

Thus, the officers engaged in a formal training with their dogs on a regular basis – generally once a week, and they carried on their own informal training when they were going to and from work with their dogs or at home. As Travis explained:

“The handlers and dogs need this repetitive training, so the dogs know what to do and they’re both on ‘the same page.’ That’s why the regular trainings are weekly, although the training process is continuous, when the officer is with the dog during the day, going to and from work, and at home.”

Mitch further commented:

“You are continually testing the dogs and seeing how they will react, so you know you can count on them...It’s a training process that goes on constantly, so I’m repeatedly rewarding my dog for good behavior and using punishments or the threat of them when he doesn’t respond....I’m training him constantly, even when he jumps in or out of the truck. Though we don’t use food rewards during the regular training, since that’s more serious, sometimes I’ll give him a food treat, because it’s a fun thing. Sometimes the dog’s motivation is to get praise, or I’ll use physical play with him, so he’ll know it’s fun and he’ll get used to being touched.”

All of this training, in turn, is designed to conform with the overall guidelines for how and when the officers should use the dogs, such as when to release the dogs to pursue a suspect and how to control them to bark, bite, release a bite, and return to the handler on command.

I observed an example of this intensive training process when I watched the unit train at a carpet company warehouse in an industrial section of East Oakland. It was located a few blocks West of the Oakland Coliseum at the end of a short block that

dead-ended near the railroad tracks. Inside the main warehouse, about the size of a super-large supermarket, two long aisles of carpets stretched out beyond the front door. Towards the front, there were large bolts of carpets on the floor, and in the rear, more bolts of carpets were pushed into rows of shelves along the walls.

The training began with an initial briefing, after which the coordinator of the unit split the unit into two groups – one to go outside and work on car control and bite work, the other to work inside on different search techniques. Then, the groups would switch locations.

As I observed throughout the evening, the various techniques were designed to reinforce for both the dogs and handlers the department's emphasis on using the "find and bark" approach and using the minimum force possible by giving warnings before releasing a dog and controlling the dog's natural tendency to attack and bite. Though I wasn't aware of the policy guidelines at the time, the following account based on my field notes reflects this emphasis.

- Observing Training Inside the Carpet Company: 6:15-7:30 p.m.

As I watched the officers get their dogs out of their trucks and cars, Travis gave me a quick run down on what to expect.

"Doing a search for a suspect is the basic bread and butter work of the Canine Unit. We come in when the police are looking for a suspect and the dogs are used to search. For the 'search and find', someone hides and then the dog goes to find them. We want the dog to bark when he does. For the 'find and bite', a person hides with a sleeve, and then we expect the dog to bite the sleeve."

Travis also emphasized the importance of the dog following commands.

"If a dog doesn't bark and just bites, that's wrong. He should know he can't bite until the handler gives him that command. Once the dog finishes the search, the handler will call him back."

Back inside the warehouse, as we sat on the carpet rolls while several of the officers participated in the training, I saw the officers use various techniques to motivate the dogs to search and only bark, not bite, and submit to the handler's commands in response to praise. To begin the process, Travis asked one of the officers, Mel, who was dressed in a grungy brown jacket, if he would "be the agitator", whose role was to get the dog "jazzed up". As Mel went to the end of the aisle holding a small rubber toy, Travis explained its purpose.

"The agitator's using the toy to train the dog, since the dog's relatively new to the Canine Unit, so the dog will want to search for the person. The dog gets motivated, since after he finds the agitator, he'll get the toy and praise from the agitator. Then, once he's trained to enjoy the search, he'll be trained to do it for the praise alone."

Additionally, as Travis pointed out, the dog had to learn to not bite after finding the person.

“He has to learn not to engage, so the handler wants his dog to go up to the sleeve without biting it. Then, after the dog learns to do that, he will be trained to bite on command. Also, once he finds the person in hiding, he has to bark to alert the officer, and he is not supposed to bite unless he is given the command to do so.”

The dogs were also taught to wait for the command to start searching, since the officers prefaced each search with an initial warning to come out and surrender before the officer released the dog – another example of how the training reflected the department’s conservative, go slow, and use minimal force approach. For example, I observed this wait and see approach when a series of officers who were putting their dogs through the “search and find” training stepped up in front of the warehouse with their dogs, while other officers observed. In turn each officer stood with his dog directly in front of him facing towards the shelves of carpeting in the rear of the warehouse. First up was Fred, a Samoan officer dressed in ordinary casual dress. He began with the common phrase used in a search: “This is the Oakland Police Canine Unit. Give yourself up. The dog will find you. The dog may bite you.” Then, after waiting a few seconds, although an officer in a real situation would wait about one minute, then give another warning, and wait about a minute more, he gave the dog the verbal command to go forward.

Seconds later, the dog bounded up to the agitator with the toy and sleeve, and for a moment the dog looked back and forth between the toy and sleeve, then began to bark. Once he did, the agitator gave him the toy as his reward, and Fred called out “Good boy”, as the dog rushed back with the ball. Then, Fred and the “agitator” sent out the dog to search a few more times. They were especially concerned that the dog didn’t bite, so they rewarded the dog each time with the toy for not biting. As Travis explained: “The dog has to learn how to find and not bite first, so that’s the only time he will get the reward.” Later, at subsequent trainings, they planned to introduce other refinements to the training to increase the dog’s ability to wait patiently without biting. As Travis noted: “Right now the dog needs to see the toy to bark. But he has to learn to bark at the man, not the toy, and then he will be rewarded for doing that.”

I also soon discovered that it didn’t matter what language the dog was trained in, the approach was the same. Each handler gave the same instructions, though in a different language. Some of the dogs had even learned several languages. Typically, since the dog became the officer’s dog and was like a family member, the officers trained the dogs in the language in which they were the most comfortable. Sometimes, though, if a dog was already trained in a language, the officer might use that or teach the dog to respond to either language – the one he preferred and the dog’s original language. This way, on the street, in the heat of an actual chase, the officer could use the language with which he felt more comfortable.

For example, as Travis explained, the Samoan officer used Samoan, but some of the officers used German since the dogs had been trained in this, while one officer trained his initially French-trained dog in German, since he didn't want to be in a tight situation and not be able to think of the French words quickly enough. In another case, an officer used Czech since his dog was trained in the Czech Republic. Still another officer with a Malinois used German, though the dog had been trained in Dutch. However, whether they sometimes used another language or not, most of the officers regularly used German, since this way another handler could step in, if necessary, where the two officers were working together. As Paul, the unit coordinator told me:

“It doesn't matter which language a dog is trained in. You can teach him in any language. The key is to training him to gain control.”

In fact, the handlers often used body language to achieve this effect, which their dogs became sensitive to over time. As Paul explained:

“Dogs know their owner's body English, and a handler can give hand commands. Plus even if a dog can't see, he can smell me and gain cues from that. For instance, if I'm driving and I get an emergency call, I'll be breathing more heavily, my pulse will speed up, and the dog can sense that. Say I see a guy pull a gun. My heart rate will go up, and my dog could be asleep, but he would know something has changed, wake up, and respond to help.”

This first phase of the training went on for about an hour, as different trainers put their dogs through their paces, using the warning and then sending their dogs in to search and bark. Then, at about 7:30 p.m., the two training groups switched positions, and I followed Travis outside to observe the training on the street, where we were soon joined by Paul, the unit coordinator, and Mitch, another officer.

- Observing Training on the Street: 7:30 p.m.-9:00 p.m.

Now several officers got ready to practice two other techniques. One was car control -- getting the dog to respond on command to jump in and out of the car. The other was a form of bite control, in which an officer stood wearing one or two sleeves, which the dog was supposed to wait to attack or bite and release on command. Here, too, the training's emphasized staying in control to use the minimum force possible, in keeping with department guidelines, as Paul emphasized.

“The handler to be fully in control, so that the dog knows to wait for the handler's command to attack or bite and doesn't act on its own. One reason we use this approach is to protect the public. So we train for wait and command. This way the handler decides if he needs the dog to attack. For example, a person who is talking to the officer could be drunk and no threat to the officer when he starts flailing around. It may look like a threat from a distance, but it isn't. So we don't want the dog to think for itself and maybe attack.”

Then, as I observed one officer guide his dog to jump in and out of the car and sometimes head towards an officer wearing a sleeve, Travis described how the dogs were trained to become familiar with different types of situations they might encounter on the street. If they were uncomfortable with a particular situation, they would be trained to overcome this discomfort or fear. For example, earlier that evening during the initial briefing, I had observed one officer with a golf club, and now I saw him across the street with his dog, raising and lowering the club. When I asked Travis what he was doing, Travis explained:

“He noticed that his dog flinched at the sight of a long stick, so he’s trying to get his dog to overcome his fear of any kind of long stick swung at him. He just happened to have a golf club handy, so he is using that. Though no one in the unit knows what might have happened to make him afraid, this is a type of “desensitization” training, so the dog will become familiar with being around a big stick.”

Likewise the dogs were trained to become familiar with other situations they might encounter on the streets, so they would be more comfortable should they occur and not respond out of fear. For instance, given the possibility of shooting, the dogs were trained to be comfortable with guns, and if not, a dog couldn’t be used. As Travis explained:

“We train them to see if they are gun-shy. If they are, they can’t do the job. The way we train the dog to be around guns is to take them to the range, when people are shooting there and gradually accustom the dog to the noise. Beyond that, the dog has no fear of what the gun might do, because the dog has no concept of the gun.”

The frequent and ongoing training was also designed to help establish a deeper bond of trust with the trainer, through continued repetition, reinforcement, and praise, and this meant that in the real life street situation, the handler had to act in ways that continued to inspire trust. As Mitch commented:

“The dog has to learn to trust its handler, even in situations where it can’t see, such as being told to go into a dark place or shallow hole in the ground. But the handler has to be worthy of that trust, or the dog will cease to trust him. For instance, if I come to a hatch over a dark hole, and I know it’s 2 feet down and tell the dog to jump in, he could balk, because he just sees the hole. He has to learn to realize it’s okay to jump in. So I’ll condition him to do that, so that even if he may not see what’s inside, he knows it’s okay. I’ve got to make him see that it’s okay. But it’s my obligation to make sure it really is okay. If it isn’t and there’s a problem, he won’t trust me after that.”

Mitch also spoke about the need to condition the dog, so it would stay calm and not attack under circumstances where it the officer might appear to be having problems with another person, but was actually in control of the situation. Otherwise, the dog was trained to attack anyone perceived as a threat to its handler. As Mitch explained:

“You have to expose the dog to different situations, so it knows something isn’t a threat and learns to wait for its owners command. For instance, you don’t want the dog to be afraid of a person yelling or of getting a kick from someone, say if a drunk is yelling at the officer or flailing around. The dog needs to be conditioned not to attack, because generally it will react aggressively automatically due to a lack of experience. For instance, you might have someone kick at your dog in a training to show it is okay and won’t hurt him. You also have to train the dog not to suddenly attack if someone comes up to the officer on the street, say to ask for directions. The dog has to learn to recognize that this person isn’t a threat.”

Such fine points of carefully attuning to human behavior under sometimes but not always potentially dangerous conditions is a reason the police dogs have to be so carefully trained, compared to general or “civilian” dog training, which can be less rigorous, as Mitch pointed out.

“That’s one reason police training sometimes involves physical correction, such as pulling on a dog strap, or giving it a slight kick, so it will realize that the action won’t hurt it and it won’t overreact, if someone kicks it in a real life situation. We have to train them so carefully, since the police are using the dogs under potentially dangerous conditions, and our lives might depend on a dog following a command, unlike with civilians.

Some civilian trainers say never physically correct a dog, just use words and be nice. That may be fine for civilian training, but their life doesn’t dependent on their dog. So we use physical corrections. For instance, if I ask my dog to sit and he doesn’t, I’ll pull his leash. I have to show him who’s in charge and what will happen if he disregards a command....For us, training the dog is very serious, since we’re trusting our lives to an animal...But when we correct them, we won’t mistreat them. After all, they’re our dogs. Sometimes a voice command or a look is enough. They learn what they have to do, since once they’re trained, they realize what they will get if they don’t respond. So they’ll do what you want.”

Importantly, much of the training was designed to get the dog to wait, even if he was motivated to act, in keeping with the department’s “as little force as possible” guidelines. As Mitch pointed out:

“A dog can smell fear in a person. But that doesn’t mean he should or will attack. Say the dog sees the sleeve. He needs to learn to wait until he is given the command to attack.”

Over the next hour, I observed repeated examples of how the dogs were trained to wait for commands, change their attention from one suspect to another, stop biting a sleeve, and let go of one sleeve and bite another – this last scenario to simulate a fleeing suspect who dropped a jacket while running away. As in the search training

inside the carpet factory, this outside car training was also done entirely with verbal commands, since the dogs were supposed to respond to such commands in the field. The officers were never supposed to touch their dogs.

In the first car control scenario, the dog sat by the open window of a patrol car parked in the center of the road in front of the carpet warehouse. Meanwhile, an officer outside the car wearing a large padded gray sleeve on his left arm acted as the “agitator” by jumping up and down and waving his arms or a stick around to excite or “jazz” up the dog, as the officers called it. But the dog was supposed to remain in the car impassively until his handler, standing about 20 feet away, commanded him to jump out, run to him, and then go back into the car through the window. As Mitch commented:

“This is training the dog to stay in the car until he is told to come out. That’s because on the street, the officer often drives around with the back window down, since he wants to be able to call out the dog when he needs to. The dog has to learn to stay inside and sit quietly until called.”

Then, after the dog was called to jump out, depending on the command, he was supposed to bite or not bite, or bite and stop. In some cases, the agitator, as instructed, lightly hit the dog on its head, as might happen in the course of a street struggle with a suspect. But even so, the dog was not supposed to bite to show him he could be hit without being hurt. At the same time, if the dog obeyed as instructed, this would demonstrate the handler’s control of the dog. After the dog followed a series of such commands, the officer would tell him to jump back in the car, and usually the dog did exactly that.

Meanwhile, as I watched, since I didn’t understand the commands, Mitch offered a running commentary on what was happening, as the officers varied their commands to train the dog to adjust to a number of situations in the field. Then, if the dog performed correctly, the officer responded with words of praise or sometimes went over and hugged the dog. Or if the dog made a mistake, he might offer a few stern words of rebuke, frown to show displeasure, or perhaps tug on the dog’s leash. As Mitch commented over the next few minutes:

“Okay, now what’s happening is the handler’s trying to reinforce when the dog’s supposed to bark rather than bite...Now at the handler’s signal, the dog started biting the large sleeve...Now the handler’s given the signal for the dog to return to the car...And now that the dog hopped in, he’s giving the dog some words of praise to show the dog did just what he wanted him to do.”

A few times, however, a dog jumped out of the car or began biting before being commanded to do so, and each time, the handler corrected him, such as by pulling his leash. As Mitch explained.

“You have to correct an error right way, because it’s a potential problem if the dog doesn’t wait to obey, such as getting out of the car

before he should. So part of the training is getting the dog to fail, so he experiences these corrective behaviors. The bite control is very important, because you don't want the dog to bite a person who isn't really a threat to the officer, such as a drunk who is yelling and waving his arms around. Thus, you want to expose the dog to different situations."

This training was especially applicable to the criminal search or confrontation situation, enabling the officer to use less force, while making the situation safe for the officer. As Mitch explained:

"Even if you want the dog to come out to protect you, you want the dog to wait until you give the signal. Just the presence of the dog in the car or standing in front of you might be enough to get a person who is a potential threat to back down.

Or say you confront a dark unknown place. Rather than an officer going in, we'll send in the dog, and his instinct is to bite. But we want to give the suspect a chance to give up, so the dog is trained to wait to see if the suspect will do that and first bark to alert the officer. And mostly the suspects do give up."

When I noticed that the officer agitating the dog with a stick was wearing two sleeves and asked why, Mitch explained that this procedure was designed to prepare the dog for what might happen while chasing a suspect.

"They're doing sleeve work now. A lot of the time when the dog is chasing a guy, he's wearing a coat, and then he takes it off when the dog grabs him. The dog will naturally stay with the coat he is already biting. So this training is to get the dog to give up the sleeve when he drops it and go after the other sleeve and bite that....He shouldn't get hung up on the sleeve. He should learn to let it go."

That's exactly what happened as I watched different sets of dogs and their handlers go through their paces again and again, much like athletes practice the same maneuver over and over until they get it right. Eventually, after a series of dogs correctly bit one sleeve, dropped it on command, and raced on another command to the other officer, the officers were ready for the next phase of training, which would involve doing some search work indoors.

As we headed inside, Travis answers to my next questions highlighted the close relationship between the training and the officer's work on the street. When I wondered why some officers were in uniform while others weren't, Travis explained that those in uniform were still on active duty, so "if there's a call for a dog they'll be the ones to go", though that night, no one was called away. Then, when I wondered why each dog was trained individually by its handler, while other dogs and officers observed rather than training the dogs together, Travis pointed out the reason:

"We do the training separately, since the dogs usually go on a search individually, and the other dogs and handlers are around, since

we want the dogs to be social with the other handlers. Also, it will prevent any confusion during a crime scene on who the dog is searching for, if he already knows who the other handlers are.”

Later, Travis gave still another reason for keeping the dogs separate in the training as on the street:

“It’s important to have the dogs search each area separately, since they’re territorial. So you wouldn’t have two dogs search the same yard together, for example, though you might have them search two yards side by side.”

Yet, though the individual handlers generally trained their own dogs, it was crucial for a dog to learn to take commands from another handler, so he would be prepared for a situation in which his handler wasn’t able to give commands -- a reason many handlers used German as a common language, even though they used another language most of the time. This way, by training the dog to respond to another handler’s commands, if one handler had to leave the scene briefly for a time or ran into trouble, the other handler would be prepared to take control of his dog. As Travis commented:

“Your dog will take commands if he senses that authority in the other person and knows it’s okay with you. For example, the dog might know this if the other handler was standing nearby and then I transferred my authority to him, before going away for a brief period. It’s possible to do this transfer, since the dogs become accustomed to the other handlers during the training – and this ability might be very important in a real life situation, where another handler has to exercise control. That’s why the handlers learn to work with other dogs and handlers, since the handlers and different dogs will work together on the street.”

Then, too, Travis pointed up the continually evolving nature of training in response to continually changing situations. As Travis noted:

“There’s always more to learn. For example, sometimes a dog might have to do a search in an attic, under the foundations of a house, or in a crawl space. He might have to get around in the dark with no lights. In some cases, tear gas might be used, and that would affect the dog.

Also, the handler has to learn to read what the dog is signaling. For example, one time one handler’s dog was barking loudly and jumping up and down, and the suspect turned out to be high up in a tree. Another time the dog began barking intently in front of a dryer, and the officer was dubious, but when he opened the door, he found the suspect hiding inside. When he told me, I asked: ‘Did you turn it on?’ But of course he knew, Travis said smiling, that question was a joke”.

- Observing Search and Bite Training: 9-10 p.m.

The last phase of training was about to begin – training the dogs to use the kind of search, find, and bark techniques they might use in looking for a suspect in an indoor location. While some officers gathered in a small kitchen with the doors closed, so the dogs wouldn't get confused by their smells and think the person he was supposed to find was among them, several officers who would take turn training their dogs sat on the long rolls of carpet towards the front of the warehouse.

This time, the officer acting as the suspect headed towards long shelves of carpeting in the back of the warehouse. He took with him a towel to wave around to attract and excite the dog, as well as get the dog to stop looking for the ball as a reward for finding the suspect. As Travis explained:

“This way he's trained more towards what he would experience on the street – just finding the suspect and being rewarded for that. And the towel is closer to the fabric or clothing that a suspect will be wearing, too.”

Then, in keeping with the police department's “bark first” policy, after the officer playing the suspect hid deep in the warehouse, the dog was supposed to find him, yet just bark. As Travis pointed out, the carpet warehouse was a good place to stage this scenario, because it modeled a possible difficult situation a dog might confront in trying to find someone a real search. As Travis commented:

“The warehouse is a great place for a search, because the scent will float around like in a regular house, making it harder to find the target. But usually the officers can learn to tell where the suspect might be, after the dog picks up the scent, based on how the roof was shaped. You learn from experience to understand where the scent might go.”

Now the dog was supposed to find and alert the handler by barking once he found the suspect concealed in the search area. Then, the officer would call out for him to surrender. Or if didn't, he would send in the dog to bite. As Travis explained:

“The training's designed to reflect a situation in the field where a suspect has a knife or a gun. It's not safe to send in an officer, so the dog is trained to go in to search instead. If the dog barks and the man surrenders and throws down any weapons, the officer or a team of officers can go in and make the arrest without the dog biting. But if the man doesn't respond, the handler will direct the dog to start biting until the suspect is subdued. Once he is, the officer will call him off and go in to make the arrest. The police use this approach, since it's not safe to send in an officer.”

What about the risk to the dog? Unfortunately, it was a risk the Oakland police like other police departments and the military have chosen to make, on the presumption that it is “better to lose a dog than a human life.” Still, the police did what they could to reduce the risk to the dog. One choice was not sending the dogs into an unknown area and setting up a perimeter to encircle the area; then waiting or using tear gas to draw out a suspect. Another possibility used in some police departments is putting the dogs in vests to make it safer for them, though Oakland didn’t use these. Why not? Travis explained:

“One reason we don’t use the vests is the high cost -- \$500-700 per vest for 13 dogs. Also, the police would have to train the dogs to work in a vest, which is a distraction for the dogs and makes them less effective. Yet, even without using the vests, so far, Oakland has not lost any dogs in field.”

Then, I watched as the officers took turns sending their dog to search for a suspect, while Travis and a few other officers acted as suspects. At first, the dogs did a “cold search,” where the suspect was already hiding and the dog was supposed to find him. Fred started off with his dog, Loki<sup>2</sup>, standing just behind him and giving his commands in German: “Steh” for stay, followed by “Vorauss” (go out) and “Such” (track). On command, Loki bounded forward, and after wandering through several aisles, he successfully found the suspect and barked several times, after which Fred rewarded him with verbal praise and rubbing his head and neck in appreciation. After Fred repeated the process of command, search, and reward a successful find and bark a few more times with Loki, several other officers similarly put their own dogs through the paces to do a search.

In a few cases, the dog seemed to wander around the warehouse and come towards the front, like he didn’t have the slightest idea where to go, but that wasn’t the case. As Travis explained,

“He’s still searching, trying to pick up a scent, and so the handler will praise him for doing a good job, before he motions for him to continue the search. Dogs need this repeated praise and reinforcement, so that’s an essential part of training. It helps to keep them motivated, which they have to be when they do a real search.”

Then, the training shifted to a “sight and flight” or “run and hide” scenario, where the officer acting as the suspect would stand in an aisle between the carpets for a few moments, until the dog saw him. Then, the suspect would run off to hide, while the officer waited for a few moments, then signaled the dog to start the search. From time to time, if the dog took too long to find the suspect, the officer acting as the suspect would reappear and wave his arms to help the dog to find him.

Finally, after one officer called out the suggestion: “Now let’s have an agitator come out in the middle of the search to distract the dog,” a third officer joined the training as the agitator and stood towards the side of the warehouse between the dog

---

<sup>2</sup> I have used invented names for the dogs, too.

and the rear area with shelves of carpets where the suspect was hiding. There the agitator variously waved his arms, jumped up and down, or yelled to draw the dog's attention from the suspect. When that happened, the trainer would typically repeat the command: "Voraus" (go out) or "Such" (track), to get the dog refocused on doing the search, and typically the dog would look away from the agitator and head back towards the shelves to search again for the suspect. Or at other times, when the agitator distracted the dog and it seemed to lose interest in the search, the suspect would pop out again and wave his arms to attract the dog's attention and renew his interest. The purpose of using the agitator in these ways was to simulate real conditions, where a number of people could be milling about at a crime scene distracting the dog from finding a suspect.

Again and again, different officers repeated the process, to reinforce what they wanted the dogs to do, praising them when they got it right or applying a mild corrective, like a look of annoyance or firmer tone in repeating the command, when they got it wrong. Meanwhile, as various handlers sent their dogs in to search, the officers who were sitting or standing around observing made occasional suggestions to the handler, suspect, or agitator on what to do next. "Send him out. If he seems distracted, that's your cue to step out."..."Hold up right there. Let him work it out"..."Good, there's the bark. Now praise him."..."Use the towel as a toy to set him up. Then, do the sight and flight in the middle of the search if his interest starts waning."

At around 10 p.m., the training finally ended and the officers began taking their dogs to their cars and heading home.

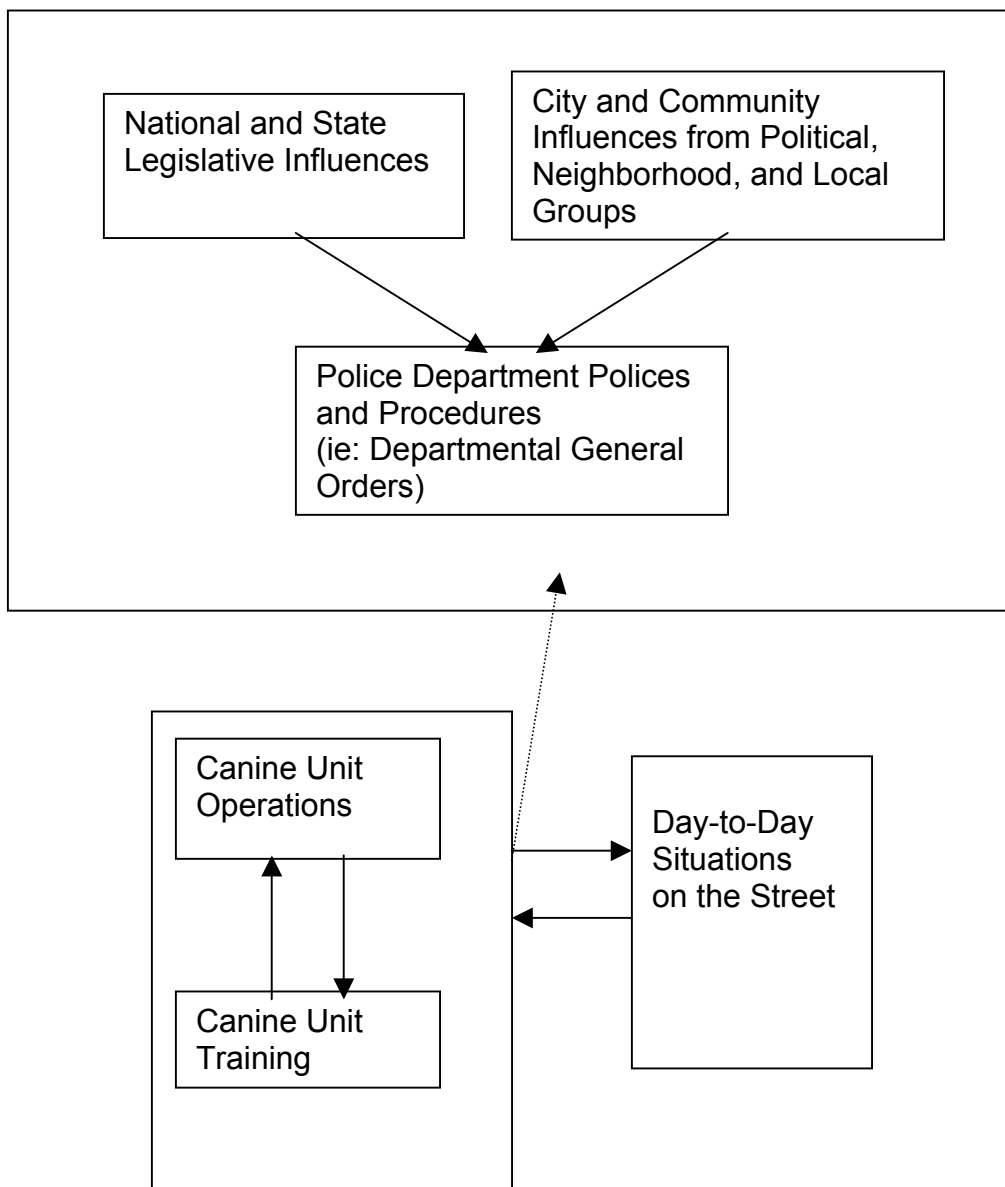
It had been a fairly typical session, covering the major types of behavior of the dogs expected in the field, combined with some special training exercises to go over particular situations that had occurred. Again and again, I observed examples or heard the officers explain how the training was designed to not only model the kinds of actions expected in the field but to take into consideration the police department's overall policy and procedures that shaped the role of the officers in the Canine Unit. And these policies and procedures were themselves established in response to extensive input on how Canine Unit officers and police officers generally should act. This input came from not only the external community of private citizens, business owners, community organizations, city officials, including the city attorney, and members of county and state government, but case law and the police department's culture.

Expressed in terms of a model, this relationship between the external community, police department, Canine Unit, officer-dog teams in it, and the training process might look something like this – with these various influences coming together to shape how the officers trained in response to departmental policies. Given the command structure of the police department and the way the department is subjected to outside laws and pressures, most of these influences go downward to guide both Canine Unit operations and training, although there is some upward input when police commanders get feedback and study operations to consider making changes in department policy and procedures. Mostly, though, the officers have learned to respond to commands and

follow current policies and procedures, while adapting them to particular situations in the field and modifying the training accordingly.

The arrows in the diagram on the following page reflect this situation with the unbroken lines reflecting the stronger influences; the broken lines reflecting the weaker ones.

## The Relationship Between the Canine Unit, Police Department and the Community



## **Putting It All Together: Putting Police Policies, Procedures, and Training Techniques into Practice on Patrol in the Community**

How are policies, procedures and training techniques reflected on a day-to-day basis in the community? To find out, I interviewed several officers about what a typical shift was like and went on a ride-along with one officer for a few hours.

- **Using the Dogs on Patrol**

As the officers told me and as I observed, for most or all of their shift on patrol, they acted like any other patrol officer. Though they were each assigned to a district – either East or West Oakland – rather than to one of 57 beats in Oakland, like other patrol officers, they drove around in their area looking for any violations or problems they might observe and responding to any radio calls -- generally on the regular channel they listened to for their district -- 1 for West Oakland, 2 for Central Oakland, or 3 for East Oakland. Sometimes the dispatchers would ask the officers to respond to a specific call, or the officers would hear a call on the air and go to that location to assist another officer. Should a situation arise where the dog could be used to search an area, usually for a fleeing or hiding suspect, they would call on their dog. Typically, two Canine Unit officers worked each shift – one in East Oakland, the other in West Oakland, though occasionally one officer patrolled alone, generally due to the other officer being on vacation, in training, or out due to illness.

Generally, the officers indicated that over a week, the dogs averaged about a search a night. Ted's account was typical: "Last week, we had two nights without any searches. Then, the following night, I had three searches." While an officer might normally be called first to assist in his own area, if he was the only canine officer on that shift, he would work citywide.

Commonly, the searches involved general area searches, such as a yard or building, and usually the officers found it easier to work with the dogs in an inside area, such as a burglary. Though it might be harder to locate a suspect indoors due to the scent wafting around in a building, outside it was harder to control the dogs, because, as Ted explained: "A yard is more difficult to control. The dog runs all over the place." In one case, when he started a search in a building, the dog ran out into the yard, and briefly Ted lost track of where the dog was.

Yet, even while the dogs might be out of sight and not immediately under the handler's control, the techniques used in training helped them to keep focused on the search. A key factor that contributed to this focus was making the search fun and rewarding for the dog, so in a real situation it would want to search, because the search was like play. As Ted noted:

"For most dogs, doing these searches is like a game. All they go by is the smell. The dog wants to find the guy to get the toy, as he learns in training. The dogs don't know anything about guns. It's all a game to them. If they find the guy and bark, they will get a ball. If I

send my dog in to bite, he sees a sleeve and goes to bite it. He doesn't know why."

However, if a dog was too aggressive and prone to bite, it could not be used as a patrol dog, since it would be too dangerous on the street.. And so, in the training, the dogs learned to control their aggressiveness – or they would be dropped from being a patrol dog, as occurred when Ted had a difficult dog. As he described what happened:

"My previous dog was very aggressive. The problem is he liked to bite and was mean spirited. He seemed like a psycho, and I had to get rid of him. He had a great drive, but he enjoyed biting so much, he was out of control and everyone else in the unit, except for Pat (the unit coordinator) was afraid of him.

Then, things came to a head when I had a fight with him. He was doing bite work during a training, and I called him off. But he didn't come off. One handler hit him on the head, and he turned on me and attacked me. I couldn't get him off. Several other handlers had to step in to pull him away and get him under control. Afterwards, I went to the hospital and got morphine for my wounds. The attack left scars on my hands, fingers, and thumbs, and after that I had to let him go. But my new dog takes orders just fine, so he learned in training how to behave and take orders on the street."

The training also helped to sensitive the officers to the various flaws and quirks their dogs might have, so they could compensate for them on the street during a search situation. For instance, in explaining the different types of flaws their dogs had, Ted noted:

"One has a problem with high places. Mine has a problem with slick floors. In general, 90% of the time the dog will be good in finding someone, but sometimes those little flaws will get in the way."

In response, when the officers used their dogs on the street, they took into account not only the police department's general orders governing the use of dogs, but what they learned about their dogs in training and from their experience on the street. And sometimes they had to let the other patrol officers know when and how they could use the dogs, particularly when these officers were fairly new to the department and had only a couple of years on the street. As Ted noted:

"The average street experience for the Oakland cops is now only about two years. As a result, the patrol officers sometimes ask you to do something that's inappropriate or they think the dogs may be able to do more than they can. For instance, they think the dog will go find the guy, bark, and capture him. But the dog has flaws, and you have to learn never fully trust the dog, though maybe 90% of the time you can. So if the dog finds the guy, you should think 'Great!' and reward the dog for that. But otherwise that's just the way it goes. The dog's aren't robots, after all."

- A Typical Shift

Several officers emphasized how much their shifts were like those of regular patrol officers. For example, Gary, who worked a swing shift, described how he would start a typical shift by dropping off his dog in one of the eight kennels in the police parking lot, after cleaning it out, while he left his dog in his car. After the line-up, he would get his dog, put it in his car, and drive to a secured grassy area to let the dog run and relieve itself, so it was ready for duty. When it was ready, he would call dispatch and go into service. Then, he would respond like any patrol officer, with a few exceptions, as Gary explained:

“I keep my ears open for in progress calls where they might need a canine. I try not to go to major paper calls, like a rape or kidnap, and let the normal patrol guys handle that. If I have to go to the hospital, I would be tied up there, and if they need the dog, I can’t leave, since it’s already traumatic for the victim. The victim would need the rapport we’ve already built up, so it wouldn’t be right to just say ‘I’ve got a call and I’ve got to go now,’ and let another officer take over then.”

Yet, while the canine officers needed to be as free as possible to respond when a dog was needed, the number of calls for a dog varied widely, averaging about once a night. “Some nights I’m not called at all,” Gary told me. “But one Saturday night, I got 5 calls.”

The nature of these calls was, in turn, shaped by department policies restricting the use of dogs to cases involving felonies or serious misdemeanors with at least the potential for violence. Given these restrictions, most typically these calls for dogs to search were for residential burglaries or forced entries. Another common scenario was a report of a suspect seen in an area with a gun. A major goal of these searches, apart from finding a suspect, was to clear the house or area to make sure the suspect was no longer there. Gary described a recent situation.

“One time the dogs were called since a man with a handgun threatened another man, and when the officers arrived, he ran into the house. The officers surrounded the house, and they called everyone to come out of the house one by one. We didn’t know if the man with the gun had come out or not, so we went in to clear the house and found the gun. He had left it on the couch and he came out with the others. He might have thought we might think he was just one of the residents. But we already had a description of the suspect, so once he was out, we soon located him and took him to jail.”

Ted’s account of his work on the midnight/dog watch shift in West Oakland was similar. He typically began his shift with a line-up at 9 p.m., joined another officer with the same shift in East Oakland at the fire station for a few hours of training doing bite and search work, after which he drove around answering calls like a regular patrol officer. But if a situation requiring a search with the dog occurred, he headed to the scene.

Ted described a typical call which involved searching two yards.

“Last night we got a call for a search when an informant called to report a guy with a gun, and we went to the house where he was holed up. The man wouldn’t open the door, so we parked up the street and waited. Thirty minutes later he came running out, and there was a car chase. He bailed out on Seminary, and we joined with the other officers to assist them in trying to follow him.

In such a situation, you want to get a perimeter surrounding the area set up fast. He headed onto the roof of a two-story building, then jumped, and took off running. While the other officers set up the perimeter, my partner and I did a search of the two yards in the back. It looked like the suspect ran through one of them, ran into the other one, and crossed back. But no one was in the yard. We brought in both of the dogs and searched for about 1½ hours. Generally, one dog will search at a time. Then, when he gets tired, it’s good to have another dog who can take over.”

The techniques they had practiced in training helped them know what to do in this situation. As he explained:

“You learn to notice when a dog is tired, so you can send in another. Dogs don’t just stop, but they go through the motions. They wander around and slow down. Then, it’s good to stop them and bring in another dog and start there. That’s what we did that night.”

Ted pointed out how it was best to work a crime scene with another handler, since a regular patrol officer might not be able to handle the dog should something happen to its handler. As Ted noted:

“Since my partner and I work together, we get to know each other’s dogs very well. It’s good to know I have another canine officer watching me, when I’m working the dog. The patrol guys don’t work the dogs, so they may not know how to handle them. If something happens to me, another canine unit guy can control them.”

Another advantage of having two handlers train and work together is that on the street, the handler who sent in his dog to search could focus on the dog, while the other handler provided back up to protect the first handler. The regular patrol officers often didn’t know how to do this. As Ted explained:

“If a handler is in a search situation, he is focused on the dog, not on what’s going on around him. So there could be a danger to him from the suspect, and a regular cover officer may not be aware of this. Thus, it’s safer when there is another handler, who can pay attention to the officer who is focused on what his dog is doing and is concentrating on directing the dog.”

Then, too, having two handlers with dogs at a crime scene increased the chance of finding a suspect, since the handlers could work their dogs in adjacent areas, thereby broadening the search, though they couldn't use the dogs simultaneously in the same area, due to the potential for conflicts over dominance. As Ted noted:

"Generally, you only send one dog into a particular area, although two handlers might work their dogs in adjacent yards. One value of using a team this way is to keep the suspect from doubling back. For example, a suspect might jump a fence and double back, and after the officers have done an initial search, they might think the area is already clear. But if it isn't, the dog will probably signal this by heading back to the area that he has already searched. So if that happens, it's best to go back and search again rather than thinking you have already searched the area and it's clear."

Though only one canine officer might be on a shift when one was on vacation or out for training or illness, most of the time both officers were there for a search, and they gained this awareness of each other's dogs through training together.

"The other handler will train with your dog, so he can read your dog. He will know the nuances of behavior. A patrol officer wouldn't be able to understand that. For example, someone who understands these nuances will notice slight physical cues, such as how the dog behaves when he comes to a doorway. Last night, for example, Alex's dog hit on a garage by turning slightly, and Alex told the patrol guys his dog was alerting on something though his movements were very slight. Another handler who trained with him would learn to notice that slight signal, too. But probably the patrol guys wouldn't have noticed this signal if Alex didn't tell them."

The only officer who didn't have the typical patrol responsibilities of a regular patrol officer was Alex, who was in the narcotics unit, though he hoped eventually to become a regular patrol handler. At the time I interviewed him, he was assigned to the airport to do interdiction, which meant stopping and interviewing individuals who fit a drug courier profile, and training his already certified patrol dog to do narcotics work by learning how to correctly sniff out drugs hidden in a passenger's luggage.

Thus, rather than answering patrol calls from dispatch, Alex spent a typical day working to make dope arrests. Then, on request, he would take his dog to a search location to assist the patrol officers find suspects, though eventually, once his dog was narcotics certified, he would take his dog to search a house or other area for dope if there was a search warrant. As Alex described a typical shift:

"My job at the airport is to contact people and interview them. Then, once my dog is certified as a narcotics dog, I can use him to search luggage to see if there is drug traffic, though now he is still being trained.

"A typical day might go like this. I go to the airport, and then I observe people. If I see someone who might be a messenger, I stop

them. I look for the characteristics of a drug courier. If I see them, I contact the person and introduce myself. I ask to see if they have any drugs or large sums of money and ask for their consent to search. I'll say: 'Do you have any have drugs or large sums or money on you?' Most say no, and then I'll ask if I can search their bags. A lot of people will give their permission. They say 'Search if you want.' Generally, they say yes, because they think if they agree, the officer won't search. However, if they say, 'No, you can't check,' the officer can still check if the dog hits on the luggage. While I can't use my dog to do this now, because he isn't certified, I can ask another narc dog handler to bring in his dog. Then, if his dog indicates a hit on the luggage, I can do the search."

In turn, the training to motivate the dogs to search for drugs was much like the motivation approach used in the patrol dog training to search for suspects – making the search like a game using a toy to make it fun. As Alex commented:

"They look for drugs like a hidden toy they have to find, and they're trained accordingly. In the training, I hide the narcotics, and then see if my dog can find it. It's like any other toy. I hide it and he tries to find it."

- Going on a Typical Ride-Along

When I went on a ride along with one of the officers, Travis, who I had spoken to at length my first night at a training, I had a chance to see for myself what a typical patrol shift with a dog is like. The ride along was actually quite difficult to arrange, since no officer in the Canine Unit had ever had a ride-along before, and as described in the methodology section, many officers in the unit had new dogs who were too aggressive or had concerns about liability, even though the unit coordinator said nothing in the official guidelines prohibited a ride-along. The watch commanders were unsure or reluctant themselves.

Finally, though, Travis volunteered to take a chance and invited me to join him for a few hours, though he didn't feel comfortable having me along for the whole 10-hour shift – from 3:30 p.m.-2:30 a.m., including an extra hour for dinner or lunch. I felt delighted, if not honored, that someone would take the risk, and we arranged the ride-along for April 16<sup>th</sup> -- Easter Sunday. Though I wondered how representative the day would be, Travis thought it would be as typical as any other day, even if it were a big holiday. "You just can't tell. Sometimes the day might be quiet because it's a holiday; or sometimes it might be more active as a result. You just never know."

In any event, given the difficulty of even setting up a single ride-along, I was delighted to go on any day, and arranged to meet Travis at the patrol desk on 3:15 p.m. Easter Sunday. Yet, even then, the ride-along wasn't 100% certain, since it depended on how his German Shepherd Cisco would react, which was uncertain. Travis wanted

to feel comfortable I wouldn't overly excite his dog and that he could control the situation.

Thus, after we headed across the street from police headquarters to the car lot, and Travis picked up the keys to his car from the patrol lot clerk, he said we needed to make sure "this is going to work" before we go out. As a result, as we approached his patrol car parked next to his large white van, he asked me to stop and wait quietly about 20 feet away from the van. Then, as I waited, he walked to the kennel, filled up a bowl of water with a hose, and returned to his van, where he had left Cisco. Although he could have used the kennels, as did Gary and many other canine officers, he preferred to leave his dog in his van, because, as he told me later: "The kennels are right on the street, and anyone coming by could throw something in the kennel to tease your dog. Or they could try to feed it or even poison it. So, I feel my dog is safer in the van."

Once Travis opened the van door, Cisco jumped out, briefly glanced at me, and made a few wandering circles near the police car. Travis let him exercise for a few minutes, put the bowl down so Cisco could have a drink, and directed Cisco to go to the open passenger door of the police car and jump in. Then, Travis asked me to continue waiting while he got in the car, until he gave me the signal to come forward. So now, as I waited, Travis took some time to pet and reassure his dog, because, as Travis later explained:

"He thinks of this car as his home and he's trained to protect his handler, so he has to feel comfortable about someone else coming into the car. He has to feel it's safe and okay me."

After about a minute, Travis motioned from the front window for me to come forward. I did so slowly, as Travis held and brushed Cisco's head. As I approached the front passenger door, Travis called out: "Now wait there." Again, Travis took a few moments to pet and reassure Cisco and finally said: "Okay, you can open the door now." As I did, Cisco watched me quietly. "Now you can sit down." I eased in quietly, and after another moment Travis told me: "Okay, now you can close the door." Meanwhile, Cisco remained quiet and calm.

I felt like I had passed the test and Travis seemed satisfied. "Okay, we can go now."

Then, Travis headed out of the lot onto the street, as I settled back and opened my notebook and began taking notes. Travis said we would stop to get gas and then go to East Oakland, where he would start his shift. He also explained what had just happened, noting that: "I had to take this time, so Cisco could adjust to you and I could be sure he did, since having someone else in the car with him is so unusual." Then, as Travis pulled onto the freeway, he wanted to explain why he might not be able to talk to me freely once we got to East Oakland. He emphasized how he had to pay careful attention to both the radio and his dog once on patrol, explaining:

“My attention has to be focused on the radio and the dog. The job of a policeman is a difficult one. So I don’t want you to feel I’m being rude. But this can’t be a social hour.”

Accordingly, over the next three hours, I mostly observed and kept my questions to a minimum, and Travis answered questions as he could.

As Travis and other officers had told me, the shift was much like any other shift on patrol without the dog, since Travis went to call to call, and as is common, no call came in for the dog while I was on the shift. The main exception to being just like any other patrol shift is that Travis wasn’t the first officer to go to the scene when more serious calls came in, since one of the beat officers went to cover them first, such as when a pistol whipping armed robbery incident was reported. Instead of getting these calls, Travis usually called in to dispatch to see if he could help, or if we were close, he would drive by the scene. But in each case, the incident was already under control because two officers were already on the scene.

Thus, mostly, we went to the more routine cases, like an accident where one party was claiming the other party was an uninsured driver or a report of rowdy teenagers partying in their cars and blocking the street. In a few cases, Travis went to take reports from complaining citizens, such as about burglaries, vandalism, and stolen cars. These incidents were generally low-priority cases, and by the time we got there, the suspect was already gone (GOA – gone on arrival), the complainant had already left (as had one discount auto dealer reporting a stolen car), the address given was wrong (as when a phone hang-up turned out to be at a vacant lot, probably due to incorrect phone company records), or the complaint was unfounded (as when a woman reported a stolen car, but her boyfriend had borrowed it and hadn’t brought it back). Thus, generally, the shift was quite routine – and perhaps even more so compared to a regular ride-along, since Travis wasn’t involved in the few more serious calls that did occur during the few hours I was on the ride along.

The main difference was having the dog in the car. As Travis told had told me, he not only had to focus on the radio but on the dog, and again and again, he did have to pay attention Cisco. While Cisco was free to move around in the back seat of the car and often did move from side to side, from time to time, Travis would say something to make a connection with Cisco. Often Travis would say something like “Good boy” or reach back to briefly touch or pet him. At other times, if Cisco seemed to be getting more alert or aroused or was poking his head forward, Travis would tell him “Platz” (down), and Cisco would calm down or back off. However, when Cisco barked excitedly when we passed people on the street, Travis let him bark, telling me: “I want him to bark at people out there, and that’s what he’s trained to do. He’s trained to protect his handler.” In fact, after a period of barking at people outside, Travis would often reinforce Cisco’s behavior by petting him or saying: “Good boy.”

My own presence in the car seemed to have little effect. Once Travis had gone through the initial process of reassuring Cisco that I wasn’t a threat to him, Cisco mostly

paid little attention to my being there. A couple of time he appeared to regard my furry black hat like an interesting toy and began licking it with its tongue. But Travis was quickly aware of this, tapped Cisco, told him: "Platz", and Cisco backed down. Even when Travis went out of the car a few times to briefly talk to a citizen, such as when he went to talk to three people standing by their car who had reported an accident, Cisco focused outside of the car on Travis. If other people were nearby, he barked excitedly as he watched out of the car; or if no one was there, he simply looked after Travis intently.

Even when Travis was gone from the car for about 10 minutes to take a report, Cisco paid little attention to me. As Travis walked down a narrow path toward the house to meet the caller, Cisco watched out of the car for about a minute. After Travis disappeared from view, Cisco stopped watching and settled down in the back of the car. Only when Travis started back down the path to the car did Cisco get up and look out, after which Travis petted him, told him "Platz", and we drove off again.

Thus, overall, my few hours on the ride-along reflected a relatively routine, typical afternoon and evening on patrol. The following account from my field notes reflects these themes. I've included these notes to illustrate what a typical patrol shift with a dog is like.

#### Initial Meeting: 3:15-4:00 p.m.

I went to meet Travis at the patrol desk at 3:15 p.m. He first got the computer printouts of the General Orders K3, K4, and K9 for me and then took me out to the police lot. I didn't go to the line-up as usual, since my going on the ride-along would depend on whether his dog Cisco would be comfortable having me in the car.

Once we got to the lot, Travis got the keys for his patrol car from the clerk at the key desk and pulled his car out of the parking space. He got some water for Cisco, then let Cisco out of his van, and let him circle around for a few minutes, while I waited about 20 feet away. Then, Travis ordered Cisco to get in the car while I waited for a few minutes. Next, he asked me to stand by door, while he got Cisco prepared, and finally he asked me to open the door and get in. Since Cisco seemed to accept my presence, he invited me to close the door and we headed off. I quietly took opened my notebook and began to take notes. I noticed that there was a large grill on the window on Travis's side of the car, while the rear window on the passenger side had no grill, but was only open a slight crack.

#### Initial Preparation for Shift: 4:00-4:30 p.m.

Travis explained the reason for having to prepare his dog before I got into the car. "He has to adjust to you."

Then, as Travis headed out of the lot, he explained why he wouldn't be able to talk too much as in a regular conversation. "My attention is focused on the radio and the dog. The job of a policeman is different. It's not like a civilian job. So I don't want you to feel I'm being rude. This can't be a social hour."

Travis said he had to first stop and get gas. On the way, I asked about the commands he used to control his dog, and Travis explained: "The dog

understands about a dozen commands. He understands more by my tone of voice, expression, and body posture. That's the way it is in a dog pack. In the dog world, dogs get signs of dominance from the body posture, such as from the most aggressive dog or alpha male."

Once we got to East Oakland, Travis explained, his job would be to "basically answer calls, unless there's a call for the dog. My job is no more different than that of the regular patrol officer. Except it's like I have two jobs – the other is to use the dog."

However, the dispatchers limited the calls they sent the handlers on. "Usually, the dispatchers don't send us to paper calls. They don't want to tie the dogs up on an incident where we will be tied up with paper work, such as a rape or kidnap." Also, Travis said he might go on a call on his own. "If a call sounds like I can assist, I'll start in that direction."

As we pulled into the gas station on Piedmont, Travis noted that none of the officers had ever had a rider before in the four years he had been in the unit. He expressed some concern about how the dog might behave, since "dogs aren't robots". However, some of the officers have had other handlers in the car with them.

The handlers' big concern about having another person in the car was whether the dog would perceive that person as a threat to the handler. The handler had to make sure the dog wouldn't think that, because as Travis explained: "One of his jobs is to protect me."

After Travis filled up the tank at the automated pump, using a credit card, we went through the automated car wash tunnel. As we rolled through, jets of water pounded on the car and large rubber wipers flapped across the windowpane. I noticed Cisco crouched down low in the back, and I wondered how Cisco might react to this experience that might seem unusual. I thought it might seem strange and Travis agreed, noting that: "The washer is scary for him. Cisco's like a big scardy cat."

But after we got through the tunnel and Travis drove along Piedmont, a teenage boy of about 14-15 in a windbreaker passed in front of the car, and Cisco began barking loudly. "That's because his job is to protect me," Travis explained. "He's trained to see anyone outside the car as a potential threat." The boy looked nervously at the car, as Cisco continued to bark. However, since the grill was on the window and the other window was only slightly opened, there was no chance for Cisco to jump out.

#### 4:45 pm

After we got off the Freeway at High Street, Travis called in to indicate he was on duty – "3K51 – 909". Then, he began driving around listening to the radio. He drove around randomly, mostly staying on the main streets, though sometimes he cut through some of the smaller streets.

As he drove, the dispatcher on the radio reported various incidents in the neighborhood, listing the type of offense or problem by its police code number first, its location, and some details about it, followed by an incident number. One call came in for a fight, another for two homeless people on Park Blvd. who were

starting a fire. Then, a guy was chasing his girlfriend on Fruitvale. Since we weren't in the area and other officers were taking these calls, Travis didn't respond.

When we passed several people on the sidewalks of the narrow neighborhood streets, Cisco began barking again, and Travis explained why. "He perceives a person outside the car as a threat. I don't discipline him for barking, because I want him to do that." According to Travis, Cisco would bark at anyone. "He responds to anyone outside the car. It could be another police officer. Anyone. He will also react to a handler he is already familiar with this way. Until I let him know it's okay, he'll respond to anyone by barking at them each time."

Then, as Travis drove down Seminary past Mills College near MacArthur, the dispatcher asked him to do a security check on 66<sup>th</sup> near MacArthur. Moments later, Travis drove by the address she gave him, and called in a Code 4, since he was taking the call and no other officer was needed. When we passed by, with no apparent activity at the location, he called in to say "You can clear the call."

Next came a security check on 69<sup>th</sup> that a woman had called in earlier. But again, no one was there, and Travis reported in GOA – meaning gone on arrival.

As we drove, I noticed that Cisco moved around in the back, though now he was seated just behind Travis. "He's all over the back of the car," Travis explained.

#### 5:00 p.m.

As Travis continued driving, other calls came over the radio, though generally, they didn't require any response. From time to time, when I didn't understand what a radio code meant, I asked Travis, and he gave me a quick explanation. Some of the calls now were the following:

- a 594 (vandalism) on MacArthur near 6<sup>th</sup>.
- A 911 hang-up (which meant someone dialed 911 and hung up; the police were required to check for any problems).
- A 211 armed robbery on 81<sup>st</sup> and Ney, but the caller's son, who had been pistol whipped by the robber, refused to get on the phone. The dispatcher said she'd be sending out the fire and medical units, and Travis picked up the radio to say: "I'll go by."

When we arrived at the 81<sup>st</sup> and Ney intersection, Travis called to say we were there, and he drove slowly along the block. Two police cars were already parked in front of the house, where a woman in a housedress had opened the door, and Travis waved to the officers as we drove by, while Cisco began barking excitedly. Travis explained why didn't stop. "There's no need to get out. Two officers are already there." Travis also explained Cisco's barking. "It's typical for him to bark when we approach a call. Whenever he sees anyone out there, even if it's just officers, his excitement level goes way up." As we drove off, Travis explained what the officers were doing from what he observed and heard on the radio. "They're talking to the victim now. They didn't see any injuries."

Just then we passed the medical van with paramedics on its way to the scene, and as Cisco barked again loudly, Travis rolled down his window to talk to the driver. Then, Travis called the dispatcher to ask if there was any more

information. "Is there any suspect description?" "No. The victim's not cooperating," the dispatcher said. "Are there any other details?" Travis asked. The dispatcher continued: "It happened at Eastmont. The suspect stabbed the victim, and the victim knows the suspect."

Then, the dispatcher told Travis she had a call about a disturbance that was fairly near our current location -- in front of a small church on the 7700 block of McArthur. Travis said he would check it out, but as we drove by, all was quiet, so Travis called it in as Code 4 -- don't need another officer.

When a few calls came in for stolen cars, such as one 85 Cadillac taken from the 5000 block of 98<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Travis wrote down the license number, so he would be on the look-out for it.

#### 5:15 p.m.

Since things were quiet again, Travis called in to say that he could check out an earlier 415C (individual disturbing the peace call) on the 1600 block of 69<sup>th</sup> Avenue, where the suspect was supposed to be GOA (gone on arrival). He asked what time the call had come in, learned it was 16:27 -- about 4:30 p.m., a half-hour earlier, and drove by. As we passed by the location of the 415C -- a small frame house on a narrow block, Travis drove by slowly, while Cisco looked out of the car intently. When Travis got out of the car to do a quick check, leaving the front driver seat window open, Cisco watched closely, as if prepared to jump out if necessary to protect Travis. A few moments later, Travis returned, pulled out a narrow field contact card, and wrote up a brief report of his check -- required whenever he stopped to investigate anything.

#### 5:30 pm.

Soon after, a call came in about a 901 -- a non-injury vehicle collision, where one party had remained at the scene, while the other party had no license and insurance. When we got there, as Cisco again barked furiously, Travis got out of the car to talk to the three people who were standing on the street around their damaged and undrivable car. Moments later, Travis was back explaining: "The problem's all settled. They got the information they needed on the other party in the accident."

So we drove on. Then, a call came in about a drunk driver who was just getting off of 580 onto Edwards. Since we were in the area on MacArthur and 73<sup>rd</sup>, Travis picked up the radio to say he would see if he could locate the driver. He spun around on MacArthur and headed up 73<sup>rd</sup> to Edwards. Meanwhile, another radio call came in about a male black beating a female black, though the dispatcher didn't know if medical was needed. After a few minutes, we were at the top of Edwards by 580 with no sign of a drunk driver, and Travis called in with a 909 to say he was back in service.

This time the dispatcher asked him to check out a 911 hang-up on Park, which was supposed to be a pay phone. "Copy. Code 4," Travis said, indicating that he was on the way and didn't need any help. But when we got there, there was nothing to check out -- just a vacant lot. "Probably a bad address," Travis explained, noting that this was most likely due to a phone company error.

Now, after a few minute of driving, the dispatcher came on the radio with Travis's number asking him to meet a State Parole Officer in a Blue Ford at the police substation at the Eastmont Mall. "They need to pick up a parolee and would like a unit to cover them, and they need a person to transport the parolee to jail." "But I can't do that," Travis said, explaining that he couldn't transport any prisoners because of his dog in the back seat. Even so, Travis drove by the Eastmont Mall substation, observed that two other police cars were now there with the State Patrol Officer in the Blue Ford, and drove on.

#### 6:00 p.m.

Now a call came in for a 950 – to take a report of a stolen car at a discount auto store. A 91 Toyota had been taken, the dispatcher explained. Travis asked when the call came in and the dispatcher advised him it had been 14:42, and then the supplemental came in at 15:29 -- in other words, at 2:42 p.m. and 3:29 p.m. Since taking reports were low priority, the dispatcher was only now advising him to take the report. Travis asked for the incident number and said he would take the call.

Meanwhile, during this exchange, we were on a narrow side street, stopped at a light, and a black man in a trench coat holding a radio to his ear began dancing on the street corner on my side of the car. At once, Cisco moved over, put his nose against the window, and began barking. The man with the radio looked up, smiled with amusement, opened his mouth widely, showing his gold teeth, and shook the radio at the dog, as if to tease him. In response, Cisco barked even more loudly, though Travis seemed unconcerned. "It's perfectly normal," he said. "He's just more excited as his stress level goes up." When the light changed and Travis drove off, passing the man with the radio, Cisco's barking gradually calmed down.

A few minutes later, we arrived at the discount auto center at the intersection of International Blvd. and a small side street. As Travis turned on the side street, U-turned, drove on International alongside the discount center, and stopped, Cisco stood up, again poised to jump out if necessary. But once it was clear no one was at the discount center, Travis called in that information and filed out another field report. As he did, another radio announcement advised that a woman on parole for drugs, wearing a pink top and pink shoes, was doing heroin at an East Oakland address.

When Travis finished filing out the card, he called in that he would be 908B for a few minutes – in other words, taking a brief break.

#### 6:15 p.m.

As we drove to the Denny's near the airport, where Travis was stopping for a few minutes, we talked about Cisco's behavior in the car. Was all the barking normal I asked, and Travis assured me that it was. "The dogs are very protective of the handler, and some dogs are more so than others....Cisco's on the high range of being possessive. But that's their job – to protect the car and the handler."

When I mentioned how hard it had been to set up a ride-along, because many of the other handlers were afraid how their dog might react with another person in the car, Travis commented: "The handler should be able to control the dog, even with someone else in the car." And so far, he had.

6:20 p.m.

Travis called to report he was back in service, and the dispatcher advised him that there was a sideshow at 76<sup>th</sup> and Bancroft. Reportedly, 20 vehicles and 32 juveniles were at the scene. After Travis told the dispatcher: "I'll go by there," she continued. "Several people are on top of the vehicles dancing, and they're preventing vehicles from passing." "When did the call come in?" Travis asked. "18:18," replied the dispatcher, indicating it was only 2 minutes ago.

However, once we arrived at the location, no one was there. To check if the cars and juveniles might have moved to a nearby location, Travis drove up and down a few other streets in the area, reporting on what he observed: "77<sup>th</sup> and Bancroft clear...I'll check 77<sup>th</sup> and Garfield...77<sup>th</sup> and Garfield clear." Meanwhile, as we drove through the narrow streets, passing several groups of people on the sidewalks, Cisco began barking loudly again. "He doesn't like them. He doesn't like anyone near the car," Travis noted. "In fact, if you get out of the car, he won't recognize you. He'll just think you're another stranger."

6:30 p.m.

We drove around for awhile, and Travis checked on a car that was supposed to be deserted on 64<sup>th</sup> Avenue near MacArthur but wasn't there. After he issued another Code 4 (officer not needed), he asked about an earlier stolen car report from the beginning of the ride-along on 65<sup>th</sup> near MacArthur. The dispatcher advised him that the woman reporting the incident was still at that address, so we headed there.

On the way, there was a radio alert to look out for a lime green Ford that had been in a robbery, and minutes later, Travis heard an officer report that he was stopping a green car heading west on Foothill near Brookdale. "We'll stop there on the way to see if he needs any help," Travis said. As we came to the intersection, two officers were pulled up just in front of and behind a lime-green sports car.

As before, Travis briefly acknowledged the two other officers, while Cisco barked furiously and the guy in the car looked very scared. Then, Travis drove on, explaining two officers were already on the scene, so his help wasn't needed. But they didn't know if the man they stopped was the robbery suspect. "There's no way of knowing now, but they'll investigate to see if he might be." For instance, they would check his license and ask him some questions about where he had been to see if anything he said suggested his involvement. If not, they would let him go, and several minutes later they did. An announcement from the dispatcher advised that the officers had sent the man on his way, so everyone should continue looking for another lime green car that might have been in the robbery.

6:50 p.m.

Travis turned on 65<sup>th</sup> to take the 950 stolen car report. The address was located in one of a number of small connecting houses in a project complex. After we passed several units, Travis pulled into a private driveway, and after searching for the number on several houses, he found the address at the end of a narrow courtyard. Then, grabbing his notebook, he stepped out of the car, told me to stay there, and walked down a narrow path to the house, while Cisco watched. After about a minute, I started to feel nervous about being in the car alone with Cisco for so long without Travis, and I wasn't sure whether to try to get out of the car, since earlier, Travis and I had discussed my doing just that if he had to get out of the car. But Travis had asked me to stay in the car, and for now, Cisco seemed calm and quiet. So I just stayed there quietly, not wanting to do anything that might attract Cisco's attention. Meanwhile, Cisco stopped watching out of the front car window and settled back in the backseat to wait.

#### 7:05 p.m.

After a few more minutes, a boy came out of one of the houses with a scooter and began to ride back and forth. I was concerned that Cisco might suddenly get excited again by someone outside the car as he had before. But since Travis was out of the car and Cisco didn't have to protect him, he remained calm and quiet.

Finally, after another 10 minutes, Travis came back down the path to the car and Cisco's ears perked up. As Travis got back in the car, he patted Cisco's head to reassure him he was back, told him to sit down again in the back, and started the car. I was relieved to see Travis back, too, since I had been unsure how Cisco would act while I was gone. But fortunately, as I told Travis, "He was just fine. Very quiet and well-behaved."

Then, Travis briefly described what happened when he took the report. "The woman's boyfriend took the car, so it's not stolen. If you loan someone a car, even if you don't bring it back in time, it's not a theft. It's a civil matter. So I explained that to her and referred her complaint to auto theft. Then, they can handle it, if there are any other facts that make it a theft. But otherwise, there isn't anything that the police can do. It's a private matter."

#### 7:15 p.m.

After another few minutes of driving around, Travis glanced at his watch, told me he would take me back, and called dispatch to say he was "returning to PAB" – short for the Police Administration Building.

On the way, I asked him about the different shifts and if today's shift had been typical. He explained it was hard to say, since each shift was different, although the swing shift was usually the busiest. When I asked how he happened to be on this shift, he explained how the shifts were assigned. "You pick shifts based on seniority. Some officer's like working during the day. Some like the graveyard shift. Some like working swing. Every year you select your shift based on seniority. I like this one because it's usually the busiest, though I like graveyard, too."

Today, though, the shift had been fairly quiet, though Travis noted that in minutes it could suddenly and dramatically change. "You just never know." In

any case, I felt the shift had given me a good sense of what it was like to ride with a dog on patrol, and the four hours were quite typical, since calls for a search are relatively rare. Besides if there had been a search, I wouldn't have been able to observe it, since it would have been too dangerous for me to be there. I would have to stay in the car. So the four hours I had ridden around had given me a fairly good look at the patrol experience with a dog, and for the most part, the rest of the shift would likely be similar, in that Travis would continue responding to mostly routine calls (and later I learned there had been no calls for a search that night). Besides it was starting to get dark, and it would be harder to observe at night.

- Using the Dogs to Promote Community Relations

While the primary purpose of using the dogs is for searches, primarily for criminal suspects, the other way the handlers occasionally used the dogs was for public relations in the community. One type of PR was using the dogs in community demonstrations; the other was making arrangements with local businesses and non-profits to use their facilities to train the dogs.

#### Doing Community Demonstrations

While the handlers sometimes participated in official events for the police department, such as attending fairs where the department had a booth, mostly the canine unit officers arranged community demonstrations on their own time. For instance, they went to local community meetings or schools with their dogs and enthusiastically showed off what the dogs could do. Other settings included block parties, safety fairs, or special events, such as a demonstration held at a Federal Express opening which featured a Business and Jobs Fair. In some cases, the canine unit officers were joined by officers from the horse patrol unit, who brought their horses.

The canine officers loved showing off their dogs and talking about them, and they found that most community members responded well to their dogs, except for a few who had a fear of dogs, usually due to an early incident from childhood that inspired this fear.

The handlers I spoke to described a variety of community events they participated in and how much the participants enjoyed these demos. For example, Mitch described his own and other's experiences with taking dogs into the community thus:

“We go in spurts of taking the dogs into the community, such as when there was a ‘Bring Your Daughter to Work Day.’ On that occasion we did a brief demonstration to show what the dogs would do and answered questions about the unit. There's also a program at Piedmont Elementary School in Oakland where we bring in our dogs. Plus some officers take the dogs to their own kids' schools. And Fred, who has a kid in high school, goes to all the public high schools. I have a cousin in one of Oakland's elementary schools, and I did a

demonstration there with a traffic officer, who talked about traffic. Another time I went to a high school to speak at a police science class.

Mitch pointed out that these community programs were very popular, because “Everyone loves dogs,” aside from a few people with anxieties about them. He also saw the presentations as a chance to overcome a misperception that some people had about police dogs, thinking them very aggressive and threatening. But that wasn’t true, he emphasized, explaining:

“They’re like a big baby when they’re not working. My youngest daughter is 2, and I couldn’t have my dog at home if he was a threat to her. But when the dogs are off duty, they’re pets, and at work, they’re working. They’re big babies at home, and when they’re at work, they love the job.”

In fact, Mitch saw these demonstrations as a way to overcome individual fears of dogs due to psychological factors or due to images of dogs being used for crowd and riot control, which was still being done in some areas of the country or was done historically – though not in Oakland. As Mitch noted:

“Though most people love dogs, a small segment of people are wary and some are very scared. Sometimes that fear could be because of something that happened when they were a kid, like a dog attacked them. And there are societal fears, too. For instance, at one of the Citizen Police Academy classes, some of the black residents spoke about how the police dogs attacked people in Alabama. So you have to address these issues to reassure people that the dogs won’t hurt them.

For instance, the police could take the dogs to a school or community meeting to show how the dogs can be quite gentle and well-behaved. Dogs are just like a gun or mace. A dog can be very protective or dangerous. It depends on how you use it. Dogs are not inherently mean and aggressive. So I explain to people how they are like pets, but when they are at work, they just have a job to do. And I assure people who are scared that I won’t let the dog harm them. While some people may not believe this and stay scared, others learn to overcome their fears.”

Similarly, Gary described how people in the community generally supported the Canine Unit and enjoyed the demos. As he noted:

“Most people enjoy the canine demos, and they’re amazed about the ability of the dogs. When we do these demos, they show the dog’s ability to find the suspect. They show the dog’s bite work and the handler’s ability to call off the dogs before they contact the decoy. They show your control and the dog’s obedience. Basically you do the demos to show what the dogs are capable of. They don’t just bite people. These demos are a way to educate people about the dogs”

Gary was especially pleased when he described how a well-trained dog would respond. Not only did he like showing off his ability to control the dog, but people liked to see that control, too. As Gary explained:

“When you have a well trained dog, he will stop, lay down. You can have a great time with a dog when he listens to you. When you have a dog that runs off and doesn’t listen, no one enjoys a dog like that. People like watching a well-trained dog.”

Gary also noted that many officers participated in these community events on their own and made all the arrangements. As he explained:

“A lot of officers do these demos for their own kids. One time when one of my kid’s school had a narcotics day, she brought in my dog. My daughter was able to say ‘My dad has a narcotics dog,’ and it made a great display. The dogs are quite friendly at these events, too, since most dogs are socialized and well behaved around other people.”

Like Mitch, Gary found most people very much liked the dogs at these events. As he commented:

“Some individuals do have fears of dogs, but that’s usually due to their own experience. Mostly, people like them. I even experienced this, while I was waiting at a stop light before coming to one of the trainings. A man came over to the window with his son and asked me to roll down the window, because, he said: “My son wants to see your dog.” The boy was very excited, and I rolled down the window to show off my dog.”

Thus, whether they engaged in official police department events or arranged their own public relations for the department, the Canine Unit officers actively participated in numerous types of activities to improve community relations with their dogs. In turn, not only the community members but the officers enjoyed these events, and to some extent, these activities help build support for the unit’s main role in doing searches for criminal suspects. As Ted commented:

“The way people react to us is related to their perception of officers generally. Many people don’t like us... Maybe 30% of the people in Oakland don’t like us; 70% do. Those who like us, like the dogs, while the 30% who hate us, hate the dogs, too.

“But a lot of the negative attitude is because there has been a crack-down on crime in Oakland, which is putting more pressure on the police to make arrests. The police management, from lieutenant up, has pushed the officers to be more proactive, which means making more stops. A lot of crooks and bad people don’t like this. They see a stop as harassment, though when a police officer comes up to you to ask a question, people are free to leave. But some people don’t realize that. They feel anything the police do is bad.

On the other hand, most people are very supportive. Most people in the neighborhood like the police cleaning up the neighborhood. They

like it that crime is down. And so they also like it when we have to bring in the dogs to help find a suspect. They know we're doing this as part of the push to reduce crime in Oakland."

### Gaining Community Support for Trainings

Finally, another way that the canine unit worked with the community to gain community support was through alliances with businesses and non-profits with locations that were suitable for trainings. In turn, the companies and non-profits that provided these locations used these as a form of public relations for their organizations. Besides the carpet company and St. Vincent de Pat Society, where I went for two trainings, there were dozens of other companies and non-profits in Oakland that contributed. Even Fairyland, the amusement park for children, donated its facilities for a training.

As Mitch explained the first night of the project, the Canine Unit officers looked for organizations with big buildings, such as schools, factories, or warehouses; with large open areas, such as an abandoned Navy Station housing complex in Alameda; or with fenced in fields or backyards. Commonly, they looked for locations in industrial areas, which worked well "because there's a lot of barking during these trainings, and that makes it hard for other businesses in the area because of all the noise. Also, we don't want a place with a lot of traffic or people stopping to watch, which could cause an accident."

Then, with these criteria in mind, various officers in the Canine Unit found volunteers to provide these locations. Often these were people that members of the police department knew, such as the owner of the carpet company where I first attended a training, who was the brother-in-law of one of the officers. In another case, a retired police officer owned a factory. And sometimes building owners observed a training and offered their building, such as when one manager saw the police training across the street from his factory and invited the police to use his building. In other cases, the police have met owners of buildings when they have done a search. As Mitch explained:

"We have met a lot of people when their building was broken into and we did a search for them. When the owner shows up to secure it, often they will offer the place. The people who provide these spaces for the trainings do so as volunteers. It's a way to do something for the Police Department."

### Conclusion

In summary, the police Canine Unit in Oakland has been set up to carry out searches, primarily for suspects in crime situations, in response to community needs, translated into pressure from public officials, to authorize such a unit. The way the unit carries out its activities, as set forth in the department's policies and procedures as general orders, is guided by community input, too. For example, the unit primarily searches for suspects, sometimes looks for items of evidence and controlled

substances, and on occasion tries to find lost and missing persons, but it does not use the dogs for crowd or riot control, because the community wouldn't support this type of use of the dogs. The other major activity – protecting the canine handler if attacked by a suspect – flows naturally from the unit's primary focus on searching, while the dogs are used occasionally in a more informal way to promote better community relations by using them at public demonstrations or by setting up training locations with local businesses and non-profits.

In turn, the nature of training is directly influenced by a number of formal rules and procedures, since the officers have to follow these guidelines in working with their dogs on the street, and their training is designed to put these policies into practice. In some cases, the experience on the street may offer input for changing the policies and procedures in the future, since the command offices in the police department, including the chief, review operations on a regular basis quarterly and annually, and may make some changes in general orders as a result. But mostly, until these changes occur, the guidelines on how to act translate into how the handlers train the dogs and work with them on the street. The process starts with some community and government influence into what the department should do. Then these guidelines, developed by the police department officials, cascade down the police command structure and are expressed in the field both in the training and in how the police act on a day-to-day basis on the street.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hank Masler, ed. Oakland 2000-2001 Relocation Guide, Oakland Chamber of Commerce, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon R. Smith, "Oakland's Renaissance Means Good News for Business," in Hank Masler, ed., Oakland 2000-2001 Relocation Guide, Oakland Chamber of Commerce, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Oakland Police Department: "Departmental General Order: K-3, IV. A," p. 4.