Disaster Search Dog Training Manual

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By Robert Milner, LtCol, USAFR (Retired)
Search Team Mgr – TN TF – 1
# A Training Manual For Urban Search and Rescue Dogs

By Robert Milner

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I write this search dog training manual at the culmination of two careers, one as a US Air Force Reserve Disaster Response Officer and one as a dog trainer. In 1968 as a 2nd lieutenant I attended the USAF Disaster Response Officer training school. Some years later I also attended the DOD Nuclear Emergency Team Operations Course in New Mexico. As a 1st lieutenant, I built the disaster response program at small radar site. After leaving active duty in 1972 I remained in the USAF Reserve and served as a disaster response officer and later as an Emergency Operations Officer and as a Hazmat Officer. I built disaster response programs at a major pilot training base and at a Defense Logistics Agency Depot. Along the way, I managed the response at several actual disasters and ran many disaster exercises.

In the dog arena, upon my release from my initial active duty tour in the Air Force in 1972, I started a retriever training kennel, Wildrose Kennels. I owned and operated that kennel until 1996, when I sold it. Along the way I trained somewhere between 1500 and 2000 Labrador retrievers. Most of the training was for field trial and hunting dogs, but included also drug detection dogs, bomb detection dogs, and a few tracking dogs. I have had two books published: Retriever Training for the Duck Hunter, 1984; and Retriever Training – A Back to Basics Approach, 2000.

I tell you all this to answer the question, “Why does this guy’s training advice have any value?” That is a question that all trainers new and old should ask. There is always something else you can learn about animal training and you should keep learning. However, you should be a little careful about who you learn from. Nearly everyone that owns a dog has opinion on dog training. Many of the opinions are wrong.

The wrong opinion advice applies to recognized dog trainers as well. Anyone can hang out a shingle as a dog trainer. There are many dog trainers whose dogs get trained in spite of the trainer instead of because of the trainer. I know because that was me in my early years. The moral is to examine critically all the training advice you get.

I write this manual from an operations officer perspective. My goal is to give the FEMA USAR Dog program a tool to help raise the level of dog and handler performance, and to help integrate more fully the dogs and handlers into the USAR task force operational system. To meet the challenges that will emerge in the upcoming era of increasing terrorist threat to our homeland, we must raise the bar on our dog and handler performance as integrated members of the USAR Task Force.

Robert Milner, LtCol, USAFR(Retired)
Search Team Mgr – TN TF-1
Memphis TN
July 2002
Chapter 1 - Excellence is Essential

When a FEMA certified dog and handler are deployed to a disaster, the On-Scene-Commander is going to assume that they are the best of the best, and he is going to utilize them under that assumption. It is the inherent responsibility of the FEMA task force leaders and search team leaders and dog program leaders to maintain the highest standards of search dog work.

When a structural collapse occurs and traps victims, there is a high degree of likelihood that those victims will die within the first 24 hours. Additionally, a disaster response force will probably not arrive for 12 hours. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the typical search and rescue team will be working in an environment where victims lives lost will be measured in minutes of search time expended. There is no place for a mediocre dog in this environment. The disaster environment is a place for excellence in quality of search dog work. Anything less costs lives of victims.

Urban Search and Rescue dogs should be trained only on searching for live victims. Inherent dangers lie in cross training a live search dog for cadaver work. First is the fact that a very small number of dog candidates have the inherent talent and behavioral tendencies to perform both live and cadaver search with excellence.

Second is the fact that an even smaller number of search dog handler/trainers have the dog training and communications skills to train a dog to perform both live search and cadaver search with excellence.

Consider this scenario:

A disaster occurs. The USAR team arrives at the disaster 12 hours later. The search begins. A cross-trained dog alerts. A second cross-trained dog confirms the alert. A confirmed live victim is declared. Resources are committed. 2 hours later, a severed leg is extracted. Meanwhile during those 2 hours, four unfound victims die. With dogs that are cross trained on live and cadaver search there is a much increased probability of mistaking a cadaver alert for a live alert.

The danger of a cross trained dog lies in the greatly increased probability of misallocation resources in the face of the implacable enemy, time. The USAR dog handler has an inherent responsibility to victims to provide only the best of search work. By far, the highest probability for achieving excellence lies with the single-function, specialized live-search dog. Those handlers who feel the need to have a cadaver search dog should train a separate dog for that function.

Search and Rescue dog trainers handlers must hold themselves to a much higher standard of performance that any other area of animal training. Victims lives hang in the balance. Search and Rescue dog training is a place where the trainer must put his ego in his pocket. The search dog trainer is not betting his life on his dog’s performance. He is betting other people’s lives on his dog’s performance.
The search dog trainer has a deep and profound moral obligation to select the best possible candidate for training, and to pursue the training program with the highest standards of excellence.

Search dog training is not the place for trainers to try to train a substandard dog because they love him.

Search dog training is not the place for trainers to try to train a substandard dog to demonstrate training skill.

Search dog training is not the place for trainers to try to train a substandard dog to demonstrate that a particular breed can be a search dog.

Search dog training is not a project to undertake as a social occasion.

I say again: The search dog trainer has a deep and profound moral obligation to select the best possible candidate for training, and to pursue the training program with the highest standards of excellence. He is betting other people’s lives on his dog’s performance.

The Excellent Search Dog

To train the excellent search dog one obviously must know the behaviors that characterize an excellent search dog. They are:

1. The first and vastly important behavioral trait of an excellent search dog is the drive and energy to willingly and diligently and energetically search for an extended period of time with focused purpose to find buried humans in a harsh, hostile environment. The excellent search dog will search willingly and eagerly with high energy for an hour or more at a time in a hostile environment in the presence of heat, fire, smoke, and foul odors.
2. When he encounters live human scent the excellent search dog will seek and pinpoint the strongest source and alert upon it with sustained barking until his handler arrives.
3. The excellent search dog will always be under control and eager to follow the directions and commands of his handler. He will diligently attempt to go wherever his handler bids him to go.
4. The excellent search dog will not demonstrate any aggression toward people or other dogs.
Chapter 2 – Selecting a Search Dog Candidate.

There are three important behaviors for a search dog. They are:

1. Searching
2. Searching
3. Searching

A major weakness in the current USAR search dog program is that one sees in the training program too many dogs that should never have started the program. Most dogs do not have the innate drive and talent to become a good search dog. Search drive and energy level are determined by genetics, and cannot be put in with training.

Therefore, when entering into the process of developing a search and rescue dog a major effort should be made during the selection process. It does no good to short cut the selection process and pick a low drive with the intention of trying to counteract a lack of drive with more training later. It will not work. Search drive potential is a quality the dog is born with. You cannot train in the search drive. You can only develop and channel the drive that the dog inherited from his ancestors.

Saving Lives or Training Dogs

The aspiring USAR Canine handler/trainer should decide whether he/she wants to be in the life saving business or the dog training business. If you want to be in the dog training business go get a dog of marginal talent. You will spend 2 or 3 years training it and end up with a marginal search dog.

If you want to be in the life saving business, do the research. Go find a dog of exceptional talent, and that fits your level of dog training skills. Then, starting with a 12 to 18 month-old good search dog candidate, you should be able to train the dog in 6 to 9 months, and be operational and mission ready.

Search Drive

The major traits that characterize a promising search dog candidate in order of importance are:

1. High prey drive
2. Boldness in new and strange environments
3. High tractability

Diligent and energetic searching is by far the most important behavior for a search dog. This search drive is closely connected to the degree of prey drive possessed by a dog, and this prey drive is directly proportional to retrieving drive. Thus the first and most important test for evaluating a search dog is the retrieving test. It is most reliable for dogs over 6 months of age. Take the dog away from his backyard and into a new environment, preferably with some bushes and trees. Throw him a couple of retrieves which land in the open. If he shows plenty of zip and energy, progress to a retrieve thrown in heavy brush or cover or briar patch. Then you will be able to get some measure of his persistence at searching. The longer he persists at trying to get
the retrieving dummy out of the bushes, then the greater will be his potential as a search dog. A good search dog candidate will persist for at least 30 seconds in trying to get to the retrieving dummy that he can smell but not reach.

A dog lacking in retrieving drive and persistence should not be selected; he will not make a good search dog. Prey drive and retrieving drive are genetically driven traits. Training cannot put search drive into a dog that is born with too little. The primary criteria here is the dogs behavior up to the point of grabbing the retrieving dummy. If he does not bring it back to you, it is probably indicative of a low level of tractability, but that can be remedied with a more stringent training program. The dog that doesn’t readily return with the dummy should be evaluated while trailing a 30 or 40 foot check cord so that you can control his return.

**Boldness in new Environments**

Second in the hierarchy of necessary traits is boldness in new environments. Even the highest drive dog is worthless if he comes apart in new and strange environments. It is best to discover this weakness early, because usually it cannot be reversed. Shyness in new environments is typically due to a lack of socialization and lack of exposure to new environments in puppies during the critical period from around 6 weeks of age to around 16 weeks of age. If they miss the socialization and exposure during that period the probabilities are slim of overcoming the resultant shyness.

The test for boldness is to take the dog to a couple of new environments, including a noisy environment and observe his reactions. If he acts shy and spooky in new environments, then do not select him. Some good places to try would be the WalMart Parking lot, a construction site, etc.

**Tractability**

High tractability generally means easier to train. You can train a dog that is low in tractability, it just requires higher degree of training skills and generally more negative reinforcement than with the tractable dog.

Tractability is one of the tougher traits to judge with a brief observation. It is best gauged by spending a little time observing the dogs parents. If they are well behaved and calm and of good demeanor, then they are probably tractable and so will their puppies probably be tractable. If they are wild and hyperactive then they may be lacking in tractability or their owner may be an ineffective dog person or both.

**Training Skills of Handler/Trainer**

A discussion on tractability leads directly to the subject of the prospective trainer’s proficiency level. As a general rule, dog training skills consist greatly of the ability to communicate with the dog. Also included in dog training skills is a certain level of ability to predict a dog’s likely reaction to various environments and situations. This ability to predict a dog enables the trainer to set up scenarios to produce the desired behaviors in a dog so that those behaviors may be rewarded and thus through repetition developed into firm habits. Generally these communication skills and predictive talents are developed through training a number of dogs.
Unfortunately, most USAR dog handler/trainers are fairly low in dog training skills. The typical USAR dog handler/trainer has trained only 2 or 3 or 5 dogs. He has not trained the 30 or 40 or 100 dogs that develop a high level of dog training skill in a dog trainer.

The prospective USAR handler/trainer should be conscious of his training weaknesses and select a breed and an individual dog that is more tolerant of low skill levels in the trainer.

**Adaptability to New Handler**

In the WMD environment that today’s USAR Task Force is likely to encounter, the handler is going to be the weak link. The dog is much more resistant than a person to bacterial agents, mild radiation, and chemical agents. For flea and tick control we have been dipping dogs for years in Organophosphate insecticides which are the same cholinesterase inhibitors as the nerve agents found in chemical warfare arsenals.

The bottom line is that in today’s USAR Task Force operational scenario, the handler is much more likely to become incapacitated than is the dog. In that event, then for the task force to remain operational, the dogs will have to accept and work for substitute handlers. Some breeds and some individual dogs are more adaptable to new handlers than other breeds and individual dogs. That is a factor that should be considered in the selection process.

**Breeding Selection and Search Dogs**

Most of the breeding selection in this country is driven by the bench shows and breeds dogs for better looks and appearance. There are a few pools of performance driven breeding selection and that is where one should look for a search dog candidate. Specifically one should look for offspring of dogs that excel in performing behaviors that require a heavy foundation of prey drive. The three major performance driven competitions that produce dogs heavy in search drive are Retriever Field Trials, Schutzhund, and Stock Herding.

1. **Retriever Field Trials** - AKC licensed Retriever Field Trials involve tests that challenge to the utmost a dog’s abilities both natural and trained. A typical test might include a marked retrieve where 4 birds in succession are thrown at distances of up to 200 yards from the dog who is sitting and watching and marking the falls. Upon release he must remember exactly where all 4 birds are and retrieve them gently to hand. The other category of test is the blind retrieve where a dog is sent for as many as 2 or 3 birds unseen by the dog, that have been placed as far as 300 yards away. The dog must be directed to these blind retrieves by lining and by stopping on whistle to take a directional casts.
Test For Search Dog Candidate

Search Drive = Prey Drive= Retrieving Drive

This demanding test of a dog requires behaviors that are heavily dependant on prey drive. Additionally the dogs that excel and win several field trials are awarded titles that appear on AKC pedigrees. The titles are:

- FC – Field Champion
- AFC-Amateur Field Champion

In addition there are AKC Hunt Tests which are essentially watered down field trials. The tests are much less demanding and hence do not require a dog with the degree of drive that the field trials do. In AKC Hunt Tests the highest level title is MH – Master Hunter.

When prospecting for a search and rescue candidate, one should place far the more weight on a dog’s pedigree when it has lots of FC’s and AFC’s. The highest probability for high search drive will lie with a dog that has at least one FC or AFC parent.

2. **Schutzhund**– Schutzhund competitions are open to all breeds but the most predominant breed is the German Shepard, followed by the Belgian Malinois. The degrees of Schutzhund are SchH I, SchH II, and SchH III, with SchH III being the highest. The three areas of a dog’s behavior that are tested by Schutzhund competition are tracking, obedience and protection. The tracking and protection training both require a basis of high prey drive. A Schutzhund III track might be ¾ to one mile in length, and it takes a dog with high search drive to accomplish such a tracking feat. Additionally in the protection exercise, the dog must locate an intruder in a hide and bark at and guard the intruder. These behaviors are very similar to those required for a disaster search dog. Thus an dog with one or more Sch III titles in his first two generations of ancestors would be a good search dog prospect.
German Shepard  
Usually needs a strong handler

The Schutzen titles do not appear on AKC pedigrees, so if you want to find dogs with good track records in Schutzhund, you must do some research. A good place to start is the local Schutzhund club. Obviously the more SchH II and SchH III titles there are in a dog’s ancestry, the better will be the probability of him having high prey drive and consequently making a good search dog.

3. **Stock Herding** – The herding dogs also require a more research and homework in the selection process as their winning of competition is not recorded on pedigrees. Herding dogs are run in competitions in which they are required to go out as far as 300 or 400 yards and gather a flock of sheep and herd them back to the handler. They are also required to herd the sheep in various directions at the bidding of the handler and to pen the sheep. Because of the high degree of prey drive required to produce these behaviors the winners of these competitions have in there genetic makeup lots of prey drive.

Since the winners are not awarded titles that go on pedigrees, a lot of research is required to find puppies or young dogs that have a great deal of potential as stock trials dogs and hence a great deal of potential as search dogs. Basically one must contact a sheep dog expert to start the search. A good starting point is the US Border Collie Handler Club which can be found at [www.usbcha.com](http://www.usbcha.com). Start there and be willing to spend a good bit of time on the telephone to search out a high potential search dog candidate.

The various breeds that comprise the best candidates for search dogs are of course comprised of many dogs of various talents and characteristics. However several broad generalizations can be attempted. At risk of oversimplification, I would rank (where 1 is the highest) the breeds according to several search dog criteria:
Prey Drive
1. Labrador Retriever
2. Border Collie
3. German Shepard or Belgian Malinois

Tolerant of poor training skills
1. Labrador Retriever
2. German Shepard and Malinois
3. Border Collie

Adaptable to new handler
1. Labrador
2. German Shepard and Malinois
3. Border Collie

Thus Labrador would be the dog best suited to a handler/trainer who is low in training skills, and whose task force plans to train backup handlers.

Age of search dog candidate

The choice of puppy vs young adult is greatly one of personal preference and allowable timetable. If you get a 7-week old puppy, there will be a long wait before you start his training, as it should not be started until he is 6 to 12 months old depending upon his individual makeup and maturity level. Additionally it will be very difficult to get a measure of his prey drive until he is 6 to 12 months old.

A surer thing and a much faster process is to find a young dog in the 12 to 18 month age range. Then you can see exactly what you are getting. You can check his prey drive level. You can check his responses to new and strange environments. You can start training him right now. If you do good job in the selection process, you can have an operational dog in 3 to 6 months.
Chapter 3 – Basic Search Dog Training Principles

1. Search and Find

2. Reward
1. Search and Find

2. Alert
3. Reward

The Overview

The most important part of planning to train your dog is to have a plan, and write it down. The only way a dog can predict what is going to happen today, is by what happened yesterday and the day before, etc. Therefore the consistent trainer is the one who has an emotionally stable, eager canine pupil. The trainer who tries a new training trick each week is a trainer who probably has a confused, plodding, unenthusiastic canine pupil.

Identify and Prioritize Behaviors

The behaviors you are concerned with are

1. **Searching** – searching is by far the most important behavior and that which you want to be the basic and primary behavior. Start on it early and emphasize its development.

2. **Confidence and agility in new environments** – The search dog must be confident in new environments and agile as well. Mother nature has been teaching confidence and agility in new environments to dogs and their ancestors for thousands of years. She is quite good at it. All you as a trainer need to do is take your dog and preferably a couple of others on hikes in the woods and fields and hills and valleys. Go to places remote from automobiles and let the dogs run loose together. The dogs will teach themselves agility as they explore new environments.
3. **Obedience** – Obedience is necessary in a search dog and is quite achievable in any dog. Obedience is a way of life, not a daily 15-minute training drill. Obedience should be consistently required from day one.

4. **Bark Alert** – The bark alert is very easy to produce and reinforce and can be added on after the searching behavior is well established.

5. **Directional Control** – Directional control is easy to train in any dog with high prey drive. Like the bark alert, this behavior should be added on after the searching is well established.

A step-by-step written training plan is provided in chapter 15 along with a checklist which maps out the first 34 search training sessions. If this plan doesn’t fit you or your dog then develop your own and write it down so that you maintain consistency. Then you will have stacked the deck in your favor for success.

Do not try to teach basic search skills on a rubble pile where the dog will be subjected to the stress and discomfort and occasional pain of negotiating rubble. Start training the basic searching skills in a comfortable, low stress environment, such as the barrel field. After the basic search enthusiasm and skills are well developed, then you move to the rubble pile. A reasonable comparison might be the task of training a student pilot to fly at night in bad weather. You don’t start training basic flying skills at night in bad weather. You train the basic flying skills in daylight and good weather, in a low stress comfortable environment. Then, after the basic flying skills are well developed, you move the training over to night and then to night in bad weather. Do your dog a favor and confine his training to a comfortable low stress environment until the enthusiasm and basic skills are well developed.

**The Plan**

A model plan for a one-year old Labrador retriever would start with obedience, searching, and agility training. The search behavior would be produced and shaped (made more persistent) in a barrel field as will be described shortly. The agility training would be confined strictly to walks in the woods and fields as is discussed later in chapter 12. I term the dog’s agility gained by walks in woods and fields and strange new places, field agility. Searching would be the behavior receiving the most emphasis at the beginning of the training program. If you can’t get the dog searching energetically in the first few weeks, then you need to retire him as a house pet and get another dog. If you can’t get him searching energetically in the first few weeks then all the other training is irrelevant.
Here is what a 20 week time-phased training plan overview would look like.

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Note that you would not start the formal agility of ladders planks and tunnels until the last portion of this 20 week program. That is so that you have the obedience and control tools developed by the obedience and directional training. Taking a dog thru a formal agility course is about 80% having him under control and being able to get him to go where you tell him to.

Similarly note that rubble searches don’t start until the last 3 weeks of this 20 week program. Every time you put a dog on rubble he will experience some discomfort and negative reinforcement simply from being there. If you take off your boots and take a short walk on a rubble pile, you will gain an appreciation of the dog’s perspective.

Since the discomfort is going to make the dog not want to be there, you want his search/hunt drive built up to a very high level to counteract it. That is why you wait so long to put him on rubble. Additionally, you frequently bring him back to the barrel field to keep his drive levels high.

If you keep it simple and keep the dog always successful, then you can expect a gradually increasing length of time that he will hunt diligently and energetically. A typical reasonable model is shown below. A cautionary note is in order here. Don’t test the dog once a week, to measure his persistence. Testing instead of training is a sure way to never build the hunting persistence that the search dog needs.
Increasing Search Time or Persistence

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<th>wk 1</th>
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<th>wk 4</th>
<th>wk 5</th>
<th>wk 6</th>
<th>wk 7</th>
<th>wk 8</th>
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<td>search time</td>
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</table>

Training Program in Weeks at 2 Training Sessions per Week

Basic Rules

There are two basic principles that govern dog training:

1. The behavior that precedes a reward will have a high probability of being repeated.
2. The behavior that precedes a punishment will have a high probability of not being repeated.

A good dog trainer does most of his work by shaping behavior with reward. The better he is at #1 then the less he must resort to #2, using punishment to extinct undesirable behavior.

The Key Element

The key principle in animal training is to understand that it is the trainer’s job to produce the behavior and the trainer’s job to make the reward happen immediately after that behavior occurs. You do not make the behavior happen by saying a word. You make the behavior happen by structuring the dog’s environment so that he does what you want. You keep your mouth shut until the dog is reliably performing the behavior. Then you add on the cue or command. When the behavior has become habit and is consistently occurring at the cue or command, then you start shaping the behavior.
Here are some examples:

To train a young puppy to sit you do the following:

1. **Produce the behavior of sitting on the cue, “sit”**
   With a young puppy, you can start with food. Feed him in the same place every meal. Let’s say you feed him in the kitchen by the pantry. Put some food in his bowl and hold it up high enough that he can’t reach it. Keep your mouth shut. The puppy will dance and turn and rear up on his hind legs trying to get to the food. After a few minutes he will quit dancing and stand there and look up at the food. Standing and looking up is somewhat uncomfortable as it strains the neck muscles a little. In a few more moments, pup will sit down to make his neck more comfortable. As soon as he sits, put down the food. After 3 or 4 days of this sequence, pup will be sitting quite quickly at supper time when he sees the bowl being held up in the air. Then start adding the cue, “Sit” as he sits. Immediately follow the response of sitting with reward of the food going down to floor level.

   **Shape the “sit” into “staying”**
   After 5 or 6 days of pup sitting on the sight of the food bowl in the air and the cue, “sit”, you can begin shaping the sit behavior into staying. Start by holding the bowl up and saying “sit” to produce sit. Then gently hold a hand on pup’s chest to restrain him as you lower the bowl. Let it sit on the floor for a second or two or however long it takes for pup to relax and not push against your hand. As soon as he relaxes, release him to go to the food. After 3 or 4 days you should be able to put down the food while pup is sitting and your hand is just in front of his chest but not touching. Then over a period of days gradually move the hand and the food bowl further from pup and gradually lengthen the time period of his sit. Every time you release him to eat use the same verbal cue like “ok”, or “go on”. After a week or so you should be able to say, “sit”, hold out your blocking hand and move 6 feet away, put down the food, wait 3 or 4 seconds, and then verbally release pup to go to the food.

2. **Produce the behavior of sitting on the cue “sit”**
   To train a year-old dog, put a slip lead, preferably rope not chain, on his neck. Hold up on the lead with very light pressure, just enough that he is uncomfortable and fidgets a little. Hold up the lead with 2 fingers only. That will be enough pressure. Wait. Say nothing. If it takes 5 minutes, then take five minutes. There is no time limit. He will eventually do something to relieve the discomfort to his neck. The way he will relieve it is to raise his neck upward. To do that he must sit, which he will do. When he sits, pet and praise him. After a few repetitions, he will be sitting as soon as he feels a little pressure starting. Then you add the cue, “sit”. After a few repetitions, the dog will begin sitting on the cue, “sit”. Throughout this exercise you should say nothing but the cue “sit” when indicated. The reward should be gentle stroking on his shoulders and gentle words of praise, with the objective of rewarding him, while keeping him calm.

   **Shape the “sit” into “staying”**
   When pup is sitting on the cue, “sit”, you can begin shaping it into staying by moving progressively away from pup while holding up a hand in the “traffic cop” gesture. Take one step away, wait 2 seconds then step back and gently reward with a couple of “good
dogs” and a couple of gentle strokes on the shoulders. Next repeat the sequence but step away 2 steps and wait 2 seconds before stepping back and rewarding gently, so that he stays in place. Gradually extend the number of steps you move away and the time pup stays. After 3 days (three 5-minute lessons) he should be sitting while you move away 30 feet and require him to stay a couple of minutes. A key point is to consistently move away from pup while he stays and move back to him to reward him in the place he has been staying.

3. **Produce the behavior of searching for people.**

To produce searching behavior in a dog the trainer should use geography. When a dog successfully finds “stuff” in a particular geographic location such as a specific field or a specific section of woods, then he expects to find “stuff” in that field or that piece of woods and his hunting behavior is triggered.

Set up a field of 10 to 15 barrels that are large enough for a person to get in. Place the barrels, preferably in a wooded area of about an acre. When you start the barrels should be randomly spaced about 10 to 15 feet apart. You will need the full acre later as you add barrels to the field.

You start by letting the dog watch some other dogs as a victim runs away into the barrel field, gets in a barrel and then is found by a dog, who is rewarded with a couple of retrieves. A group of dogs waiting to work in this manner generates a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and excitement which our beginner dog will join in on.

The next step is for the beginner dog to get a few retrieves in the barrel field. The dog is held outside the barrel field. A person (victim) stands in the barrel field and yells and throws a retrieving dummy. The dog is released and he gets a couple of retrieves thrown by the victim. Two sessions of this exercise begins to establish the behavior of searching in a barrel field for a dummy.

During the next session we change the sequence. The victim stands in the barrel field and yells. The dog is released before the victim throws a dummy. When the dog is ½ way to the victim the dummy is thrown by the victim. After the dog gets that dummy, the victim throws him a couple of more retrieves.

After two sessions of this we progress to a runaway. The dog is held outside the barrel field and the victim runs away (yelling) from the dog into the barrel field. The victim stops and crouches behind a barrel. The dog is quickly released to find the victim. When the dog finds the victim, the victim gives him two retrieves.

Two or three sessions of the dog finding the runaway victim will begin to establish the behavior of searching for people. The next step is to shape that search or hunt behavior so that it persists for a longer and longer time period.

**Shaping the search behavior**

3. After the dog is reliably hunting and finding the victim crouching behind the barrel, then we progress to the victim hiding inside the open barrel. As we do it we gradually increase the amount of time the dog searches prior to finding the victim. We increase the search time by making the search more complex by adding barrels. We also increase the
persistence by holding the dog for a gradually increasing period of time after the victim has run into field.

Training Frequency and Duration

Training sessions should be short (ie find 2 victims) and should be no more frequent than every other day. TN TF-1 trains young dogs 2 times per week and we find that to be an excellent frequency of training.

Punishment

In dog training you build specific behaviors with reward and you extinguish specific behaviors by withholding reward or with punishment. The better the dog trainer, then the less he must resort to punishment. In an ideal world the dog trainer is good enough that he recognizes precursors to undesirable behaviors quickly and manipulates the environment so that the undesirable behavior is not rewarded and thus quickly dies out.

A major problem occurring with the use of punishment in dog training is the issue of timing. To be effective and valid, punishment must occur within a few seconds of the undesirable behavior. To many times one sees a “trainer” administer punishment many seconds or minutes after the behavior with the justification that the dog “knew better”. Dogs do not deal in abstract moral concepts, and they associate punishment with the behavior that immediately preceded the punishment.

When a trainer does use punishment, it generally comes with a price. Not only does the punishment decrease the probability of the immediately preceding behavior, the punishment also will likely be associated with whatever the dog happens to be smelling or hearing or feeling at the particular time of the punishment. The trainer has no control over that association.

Suppose you are walking your dog across a rubble pile. He starts to leave you. You tell him, “Heel”. He keeps going. You pick up a small rock, throw it and hit him in the rump. He comes back to heel.

You think you have delivered an effective heeling lesson. However, suppose he was leaving you in the first place because he got a whiff of live human scent from a person upwind and out of your sight. In that case, as in nearly all instances, you cannot tell what the dog is smelling. You have in reality delivered a lesson lessening the dog’s desire to find live humans on rubble piles. You intended for it to be a heeling lesson, but intentions have nothing to do with the reality of dog training.

Almost universally, dogs react with a geographic element to punishment. When they get hurt, they avoid the specific piece of geography where the hurt occurred. Furthermore they will often generalize to some degree. If a dog gets hurt in the water, he will tend to avoid all water. Similarly one would expect a dog that gets hurt on rubble to tend to avoid all rubble.

A fairly frequently seen training practice that defies logic is that of punishing a dog for not staying by punishing him on the spot where you expect him to stay. The punishment communicates in dog language that you want him to be away from that spot. That some dogs manage to get trained in spite of such practices is a monument to canine adaptability.
Training dogs on rubble is another inadvertent invocation of punishment principles. When a dog walks on rubble, he experiences discomfort. If he experiences more discomfort than pleasure over a time period, then he will not like rubble. I have seen several dogs that would not even look at a rubble pile, the negative association was so great.

To get a dog to like rubble, you either need a dog with a very high pain threshold, or you need to structure the training program carefully so that pleasure greatly outweighs the discomfort for all the dog’s experiences on rubble. Thus you build up the dog’s “hunt excitement” to maximum levels before you ever put him on rubble. Further, you structure all his rubble hunts so that he will find the victim and be rewarded while he is still in the high-gear-hunt emotional state. Then positive reinforcement will outweigh the negative and the dog will become conditioned to love hunting on rubble.

### Rewards and Intervals

The major reward for search dogs is typically the retrieve, and the time interval to precede the reward is initially from 2 to 6 seconds. Thus the search trainer must set up the early training exercises so that the dog searches diligently for 4 to 6 seconds and finds the victim while still searching diligently. This causes the desired behavior of diligent searching to be rewarded and thus learned.

Whatever the dog happens to be doing just prior to getting a reward is the behavior that he learns. If the dog the dog acts playful, and then gets a retrieve, you are training him to act playful. If you set up the exercise so that

If you give the dog several retrieves to “energize him” for a search, you are training whatever behavior was occurring just before the retrieves. If he gets 50 retrieves a week for “doing nothing” and 10 retrieves a week for searching, then he is learning to “do nothing”. Furthermore, if he gets 50 retrieves a week from the handler and only 10 from victims, then you are training him to focus on the handler, when you need to be training him to focus on the victim.

Suppose you set up a training exercise for the dog. He hunts vigorously for 2 or 3 minutes and then starts wandering aimlessly and sniffing bushes. Then you go over near the victim location and call the dog and verbally encourage him to guide him to the victim, which he stumbles upon, alerts and is rewarded. The dog is rewarded when his immediately prior behavior is wandering aimlessly, and that is the behavior that is trained by the reward. Whatever he was doing for the 6 seconds prior to reward is what is being trained.

The trainer must determine what behavior he wants. Then he must divide it into pieces and cause the behaviors to occur and be followed by a reward. The segments are generally trained in reverse order, training the last piece first and adding the segments in reverse order. For search dogs the desired behavior is to search and find people.

Breaking it into components, in reverse order, you train first the finding and add the searching later. As a separate piece you train the bark alert and add it later.

Additionally the reward should always come from the victim. Then the dog associates the reward with the victim, and his search drive is enhanced.
The training and development program that I am describing here applies to a 12 to 18 month old dog who has been raised in the house, well socialized, trained in basic obedience and given lots of exposure to new and different environments. Also he should have been taken on lots of hikes while allowed to run free on various terrains.

The training and development phase should be 3 to 6 months in duration. During that time the objective is to channel all the dog’s prey drive into finding victims. To this end, the dog’s play, and especially retrieves should be strictly rationed during this development period. The only time the dog should get play or retrieves is when he is on a search exercise and finds a victim.

**Training the Emotional State**

An excellent search dog must search for long periods of time in an unpleasant, uncomfortable environment. To do that, he must be very high in search drive. Thus when you train that search dog, you must train not only the search behavior but also the excited intense emotional state. As with search behavior the key is to produce that emotional state and make sure it persists to the retrieve reward. The training exercises must be structured so that you know the dog will succeed while the drive is still high. The keys to high drive are:

1. Start with a dog that has a high prey drive and/or retrieve drive. You cannot train in drive if it is not there genetically.
2. Work in groups. When you have 4 or 5 dogs lined up, straining at their handlers leads, they generate and communicate amongst themselves an incredible amount of excitement.
3. Develop the “high gear” search in small increments. You want to gradually extend the search time in 5 to 30 second intervals. Set up each training exercise so that it takes the dog a little longer each time to find the victim and be rewarded. This will be a matter of weeks not days to produce a major change. You will start with a dog that searches in high gear on flat ground for 5 to 10 seconds. After a period of 4 months of gradually extending that search time that occurs before each reward, the dog will get to the point of searching in high gear in tough conditions for 15 to 20 minutes or more.
4. Keep the early searches in the same geographic area, the same field or same woods, so that the dog expects to find something in that field or that piece of woods. When he found several victims in that field the last training session, then his expectation and search drive will be high.
5. During the early months of search training, totally restrict other outlets for play and retrieving.
What you are striving to produce is a dog that will literally try to go thru a brick wall to get to victim and his retrieves. Additionally you are striving for a dog that will maintain that high drive focused behavior for extended periods of time.

Starting each dog in high gear is half the training problem. The other half is insuring that the dog makes his finds and gets his rewards while he is still in high gear. The tendency of human nature is to keep setting it harder to see how well the dog can do. The logical conclusion of this trap is that the dog fails. In a failure, by the time the dog makes the find he is tired, bored, and out of gas.

A reward at that point reinforces the immediately preceding emotionally down state. A failure is expensive. A failure costs you about 4 or 5 successes in your training program.

You can never give the reward too quickly. However, a reward given too late is worse than no reward at all. The moral is to be absolutely sure that you err to the side of simplicity when structuring a training test.

Invariably there will be times that you structure the training exercise such that the dog fails and runs out of gas on searching, and begins wandering without purpose or sniffing around without dedication or energy. When that happens do not try to help him so that you can reward him. A find and reward at that point simply rewards and trains purposeless wandering. A reward at that point will cost you 4 or 5 successful exercises. The appropriate action for failure to demonstrate drive is to leash the dog and remove him from the exercise. Work another dog and come back in few minutes and set a much simpler exercise for the dog that failed.

**The Barrel Training Field**
The barrel field allows the trainer to produce search behavior of energetic searching and to shape it by gradually increasing the time which energetic searching persists. The barrel field provides a
controlled environment in which to establish the search behavior which is the basic and essential behavior of a disaster search dog.

One of the best training set ups is a field of plastic bark barrels. These barrels are simply two 55-gal plastic barrels with top and bottom cut out and bolted end-to-end, so that a person can fit in them. A plywood cover is attached to the open end. The cover has a number of 1” holes drilled in it to allow plenty of scent out, and is attached with two heavy wire loops for hinges. The scent holes also allow the victim within to see out and thus be able to cue a dog when required. Another wire is looped through the scent holes to allow the victim to hold the door closed against a persistent dog.

These plastic barrels are routinely used to ship and the flavor syrup that goes into soft drinks. They are readily and cheaply available from the local Coca Cola or Pepsi Cola bottling plant.

Forty to fifty of these bark barrels are constructed and placed randomly in an area about 100’ by 100’. This barrel field accomplishes several goals:

1. The barrel field becomes a place that the dog expects to find victims and the accompanying reward. Thus the dog will hunt with enthusiasm and diligence.
2. After the first few sessions, the handler and the dog will be held where they can see the victim run toward the barrel field, but they cannot see which barrel he goes to. Thus, the handler is robbed of the ability to help the dog by giving off the subconscious signals that all handlers give off when they know the victim’s location.
3. The dog will learn to find victims independent of the handler. Furthermore, the dog will form the habit of searching energetically and thoroughly, because there are always victims and rewards to be had in the barrel field.
The Building Blocks

To train a search dog the building blocks of behavior and the order in which you train them are (1) find people (2) search for people (3) bark alert

Find Victim

The first behavior block is find people. The trainer must structure the exercise so that the behavior “find victim” is immediately followed by the reward of two retrieves. Since we want the reward always associated with the victim, and never with the handler, the retrieves should come from the victim while the handler is well removed from the picture. The victim should always give the dog 2 retrieves with the dog returning to the victim with each retrieve. To insure this sequence you may have to throw a dummy with an attached 10 ft line, the other end of which is held by the victim.
1. **Get the dog to hunt in the barrel field.** The handler holds the dog and a helper, the victim, walks out 30 feet into the barrel field, stops and throws a dummy. The handler releases the dog who runs out and grabs the dummy. The victim calls the dog to him, and tosses another retrieve, followed calling the dog back to the victim. Then the handler walks out and gets the dog. The rewards establish the geographic setting for our next step, which is changing the sequence of the retrieve. This is done for 2 or 3 training sessions, with the throws being to all areas of the barrel field so that the dog builds and expectation of finding a reward in all the barrel field.
2. **Change the sequence** - The 4th session, the victim again goes out 30 or 40 feet into the barrel field. This time the handler sends the dog before the dummy is thrown. When the dog has moved 10 feet toward the victim, the victim throws a retrieve. Note we are changing the sequence. The dog moving toward the victim produces a retrieve. Over 2 or three training sessions we stretch the distance until the dog is running all the way out to a victim placed 30 yards away. Each time the dog arrives at the victim, the dog gets the two retrieves.

3. **From sight to smell** - Next we cause the dog to go from a visual cue to an olfactory cue. We have the helper run off into the barrel field and crouch down behind a barrel so that the dog cannot see him, but must use his nose to find the victim. The first attempt is very short and cross wind so that the dog is insured of quickly finding the victim. When the dog finds the victim, the dog gets two retrieves from the victim. Several sessions should be conducted with victim crouching behind barrel.
4. **Victim in open barrel.** The next phase consists of gradually extending the time interval between the dog’s starting the search and his finding the victim. Thus the search time is gradually extended while keeping the drive level high. The dogs are held where they can see the victim initially run toward the barrel field, but cannot see specifically what part of the field the victim runs to. The barrels are all open in one end. The victim gets in a barrel. Then the dog is sent to search. When he locates by smell the barrel with the victim and sticks his head in, the victim gives him 2 retrieves.
There is always another victim to find. From the beginning of his training you want to program the dog to always expect to find another victim. As soon as the dog completes several exercises of finding one victim in an open barrel, an additional victim should be added. The dog is working in the same barrel field so his expectation is high of finding victims. Start him very early on the behavior of starting another search immediately after finding a victim. Specifically, you let the group of dogs watch 2 or 3 victims run off in a bunch into the barrel field. There they scatter and hide in open barrels.

A dog is sent to search. When the dog finds a victim and sticks his head in the barrel, the dog gets two retrieves. Then the handler comes up, grasps the dog by the collar and moves him a few paces from the found victim. Next the handler sends the dog on to find the next victim and the sequence is repeated. If you are doing 3 victims make sure you use 3 different people. Using the same person 3 times merely tends to create a tendency for a search dog to return to a victim that he has already found.

After the dog has successfully completed 10 or 12 sessions of searching energetically for multiple victims in the barrel field, you can go on to the next step of adding the bark alert and closing the barrels. The bark alert is covered in chapter 6.

Searching energetically for multiple victims is the essential behavior to a search dog. When you have it well established, then you can worry about the other behaviors such as bark alert, directional, obedience, etc. If you cannot establish the high drive searching behavior in a particular dog, then there is no point in continuing with that dog. Get another one. You owe it to future potential victims.
Chapter 4 – Scent

20 years of dog training have taught me the most important principle of scent. That principle is that the dog knows a thousand times more about scent than I do. The most the trainer can do is program the dog to have maximum drive and desire to find a particular scent. For disaster search dogs that scent is of course live human scent. Then the best thing the trainer can do is get out of the way and let the dog find the strongest source.

The trainer should of course use the wind to help set up training exercises of appropriate difficulty for a particular dog. If he is working in a barrel field, the trainer can use the wind direction to keep the dog upwind of any victims for whatever time period of “high drive” search he is aiming for. If the dog searched for 2 minutes last session, then the trainer might with directional control keep the dog searching for 2 minutes and 10 seconds before allowing the dog to get downwind of the victims.

The dog’s job is to recognize the live human scent when he encounters it and stick with it and trace it to the strongest source. The handler’s job is to give order to the dog’s search pattern, so that the dog does not repeat needlessly and so that the dog doesn’t miss major areas.

There will be occasions when the dog will be required to search enclosed structures and confined spaces. There the scent rules change a little. In an enclosed space the handler should open some windows and doors if possible to get some air moving.

In a relatively enclosed space, the scent tends to pile up along perimeter walls and in the corners. Additionally, if air currents are low, the dog may have to be fairly close to the victim to pinpoint him. The way to search an enclosed space is systematically. You have the dog search first the perimeter walls and corners. If a victim is in the space the dog will often show his first indications of interest on walls or a corner. Often he will be unable to pinpoint the source. Then you must fall back on a systematic search of all the space and by directing the dog to progressively search and eliminate areas you will help the dog find the victim whose scent he first picked up in a far corner. It is valuable to start early in a dogs training to develop a specific search pattern. My personal preference is to have the dog search clockwise beginning with the perimeter of the area to be searched.
Chapter 5 – Rewards and Reinforcement

For searching the reward that is most effective in eliciting search drive is the retrieve or its relative, tug-o-war. Whichever of these your dog likes better is what you should use. The other key factors are the previously discussed timing and the reward schedule. If the dog won’t work for a retrieve or tug-o-war then he won’t make a search dog.

**Reward Schedule**

Suppose you reward a slot machine gambler for several days with a payoff for every pull of the handle. He will get very good and very enthusiastic about pulling the handle. Further suppose that you suddenly stop giving payoffs. Then he will fairly quickly stop pulling the handle.

The best way to create a slot machine addict is to let them win every pull at first. Then you gradually change the wins to every other pull, then to an occasional pull on an unpredictable pattern. When the reward pattern is unpredictable then the slot machine gambler is far more likely to keep on pulling the handle for a long time, hoping for a payoff.

Dog training works the same way. If you train a behavior by giving a reward for every repetition, when the reward goes away, then the behavior will cease fairly quickly. Conversely, if you start with a reward for every repetition, and then change to a reward for every other repetition, and then to an unpredictable pattern of reward, the behavior becomes much more persistent when the reward is removed.

In animal behavior lingo you would call it starting out with a fixed schedule of reinforcement and changing it to a variable schedule of reinforcement. The variable schedule of reinforcement causes a behavior to be much more resistant to extinction.

If you want an excellent search dog you should apply that variable schedule of reinforcement after your dog is well started and reliable on searching. Your end goal for your dog is that he search for a long time in a real disaster where he will not be getting rewards. To make his search behavior the most resistant to extinction in that non reward environment, you should transition him to a variable schedule of reward for searching. In other words, after his searching is well established and solid, he should not get a reward for every find. He should get a retrieve only some of the times that he finds a victim, and the pattern of reward should be irregular so that it is unpredictable. Then you will have trained his search behavior for maximum persistence in a non reward environment. You should not start a variable reinforcement schedule until after your dog is certified at level II and after he is working very solidly.
## Training Plan for Variable Schedule of Reward

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Random number of barks to produce the reward (dummy). Set up reward schedule from 0 to 50 barks to produce the reward.
On 0 barks, he gets the reward before he has a chance to bark.
Make it variable so that dog doesn’t know whether he will get reward or not. He will also not know how many barks it takes to produce the reward.
Clicker Training and Food Rewards

Food rewards have no place in search training, but they are valuable in directional training and agility training. In order to get maximum benefit from food rewards, they should be used with a secondary reinforcer, in this case a clicker. The clicker gives you total control of the timing of the reward, which makes it much easier to shape behavior. Let me use an example of training a dog to climb a ladder.

1. “Sit” 2. “Click” 3. Treat

1. Give the dog a few sequences of “sit”-click- treat in which you command “sit”, and as soon as the dog sits, you “click” and follow it with a treat for the dog. A few repetitions of this sequence establishes a very positive value for the click sound.
2. Lead the dog up to the ladder. Hold your hand up against the ladder and above his head and give him some verbal encouragement and maybe a finger snap to get his attention focused on the hand. As soon as he picks a foot up and puts in on the bottom rung of the ladder, “click”. Follow with a treat.
3. Continue encouragement. If he takes his foot off don’t worry. As soon as he puts it back, “click” followed by treat.
4. When he puts a second foot up on the bottom rung, “click” followed by treat.
5. You teach him to climb the ladder one foot and one rung at a time, with a “click” followed by treat rewarding each small increment of behavior that is part of climbing the ladder.

The value of the clicker lies in the complete control it gives you of timing. To the dog click means treat even though there is a time delay in delivering the treat. Thus you can reward at the instant of occurrence each small segment of the desired behavior.

One of the best treatments of clicker training is Karen Pryor’s Don’t Shoot the Dog, a well written clicker training book and an excellent review of basic animal training principles.
Chapter 6 – Bark Alert

The bark alert is another piece of behavior that must be added into the chain of:

1. Search
2. find victim
3. Alert
4. Get reward

Bark Alert
• The Bark Box

Bark Alert
Another Bark Box
The most effective way to produce the bark alert is with a group of 3 or 4 or 5 dogs lined up, held back straining and lunging at their collars by their handlers. 15 feet away in front of them is a bark box with a guillotine door. Inside the bark box is a “victim”. The victim has the door open and is vocally razzing up the dogs who are barking and lunging to get at the dummy waving victim. If the dogs are not barking then plant an older barking dog in with the pack to act as a catalyst.

An important point on this topic is how you release the dog. The handler should be holding the dog by leash or by the collar and the dog should be pulling to get at the box. When his turn comes, the handler should let the dog succeed in pulling out of his hand to get at the box. This magnifies fourfold the dog’s response to try and penetrate the box.

The key elements are:

a. Use in the bark box a noisy boisterous person who provides retrieves. Conduct all sessions in the same place with bark box in same location. Dogs to a great degree cue on their surroundings and location. So keep these the same.

b. Work dogs in group on leash (let the dog drag the leash with him when released). You need 3 or 4 or more dogs in the group. Handler/dog pairs stand about 3 ft apart with handlers holding dogs on leash. Do not try to enforce obedience here, just hold the dog. The objective is to get the dog excited, bucking and pulling on lead and barking. When a particular dog is designated to be released to rush at the box, the handler should wait a little if necessary so that he releases the dog when he is bucking and pulling on leash attempting to get to the victim in the box. When you get the timing right on this you magnify the attempt to penetrate the box by a factor of four or five. (Plant an experienced Barker in the group if you need a catalyst to get the barking going)
Bark Training Sessions

**First session** – box remains open – give retrieve into box – then put box man in box and he calls dog into box – pets and praises – box man tosses retrieve out of box for dog. The purpose is to get dog comfortable with the box, and teach the dog that the box man gives retrieves. Then handler goes to box and grabs leash, leads dog back to group. Each dog gets 3 turns. All should be barking excitedly halfway thru the first session.

**Session 2** – box is closed until dog arrives - The dogs are grouped 15 feet from box – Boxman sits in box, and vocally razzes up dogs – Boxman’s razzing is continuous whether door is open or closed. - The doorman stands in dog group and operates rope to open and close box. - With box open, boxman in box razzes up dogs
  - Doorman closes door (boxman continues razzing behind door)
  - First dog released
  - When dogs arrives at box wait for first sign of whine, bark or scratch. When dog gives first sign of whine or bark or scratch, quickly open door. Do not, do not, do not, wait for 2nd bark or scratch. After door open, boxman gives dog 2 retrieves. All during this, the boxman is continuously vocally razzing up the dogs. Give each dog 3 turns to rush the box.
  - An important point: 4 or 5 dogs is good size for the group. The dogs should be lunging and straining against their leashes. When a dog’s turn comes to rush the box he should be released as he is tugging and straining. Let the dog succeed at pulling out of your hand holding the collar. The right timing here will give a 4 fold stronger response toward trying to penetrate the box. That is what we want. This is not the place for obedience, or for the dog to be sitting waiting to be sent. This is the place for them to be wild, boisterous, and bold.

**Session 3** – Same as session 2 except box man is not continuously vocal. The boxman vocally razzes only when door is open. When door is closed, he is quiet, otherwise conduct session same as session 2. Open door on first sign of whine, bark, or scratch. Don’t wait for the second one.
  - Give each dog 3 turns at rushing the box.

**Session 4** – Same as session 3

**Session 5** – Same as session 4

**Session 6** – All dogs should be now be barking or scratching or both to get the box to open. Any of those is acceptable and sufficient at this point in time. Now we switch to a barrel. Lay a barrel with hinged plywood end within a few feet of the bark box. Put the boxman in the barrel. He should vocally razz up the dogs continually during this session. Have him close the end (while continuously razzing up); then start releasing dogs sequentially to rush the barrel. At the first scratch or bark or whine, the boxman opens the barrel and gives to retrieves. Give each dog 3 turns at rushing the barrel.
Session 7 – Same as session 6 except boxman (barrelman) is quiet when barrel is closed. He razzes when barrel opens in response to bark or scratch. Give each dog 2 turns.

Session 8 – Same as session 7

Session 9 – Here is where you combine the search and alert behaviors. Now you take the alert behavior to the barrel field. Put 2 helpers in barrels in the barrel field with closed doors. Instruct helpers to become vocal when dog comes up to barrel. The object is to elicit bark or scratch before opening barrel and giving dog retrieve.

Sessions 10, 11 – Same as session 9

Session 12 – same as session 11 except dogs should not need any vocal cues to elicit scratch or bark. If you have one that does still need a vocal cue then keep furnishing the vocal cue to get the scratch or bark, but you should wean him off of the audible cue as quickly as feasible. Remember that all cues and rewards should come from the victim; not from the handler.

More Bark Alert Techniques
Chapter 7 – The handler

The handler’s function in the search process is to give to the dog’s searching a logical pattern, and to keep track of which areas have been searched and which have not.

In the training of the search function the handler should be removed from the find and reward process. The reward should come entirely from the victim. Any cues or reinforcement from the handler simply shifts some of the dog’s focus from victim to handler. Since one of the training objectives is to maximize the dog’s focus on the victim, the handler needs to keep himself out of the process. He should be at least 20 or 30 feet away when dog finds victim and during the reward process when victim gives two retrieves or plays tug-o-war. The handler’s only function is to come up and get the dog after the reward process, and then send the dog on to find the next victim.

The handler should occasionally sit the dog during a search and should occasionally change his direction with a hand signal and by changing direction. The handlers job is to give order to the dog’s search pattern. The directional control is also used to gradually extend the search time by controlling to some degree how long a time the dog spends searching before finding a victim.

The training scenario should be set up so that the dog is at least 20 to 30 feet away from the handler when the dog finds the victim. After the dog finds the victim the dog should get two short retrieves from the victim, with the dog returning the retrieves to the victim. Only after the dog has gotten his two retrieves does the handler move in and take control of the dog to have him resume the search for the next victim.

When the handler knows the victim’s location he will invariably telegraph that information to the dog. When the handler knows the victim’s location the handler will make small unconscious behavioral changes that will tell the dog when he is getting close. Dogs are masters of the art of reading people.

Trained dogs are used to detect the onset of a seizure in epileptic patients. The dog is usually able to sense the onset of an impending seizure 10 to 20 minutes before the seizure arrives. He warns the patient who takes medication which prevents the seizure. The point is that the dog reads small behavioral and body changes that even the epileptic patient is unaware of. If dogs can do that, then it is very easy for a dog to read the smallest behavioral change of a handler who knows the victim location.

There are 3 ways to deal with this:

1. As frequently as you can, and within the parameters of keeping the exercise simple, run the exercise without the handler knowing the location of the victim. You accomplish two things with this practice. You rob the dog of handler cues on victim location, and you help build the handler’s confidence in the dog.
2. Change handlers. Every time you change handlers, you change the imperceptible handler cues. Thus you rob the dog of some of capability of reading the handler.
3. The handler should stay as much as possible out of the dog’s area of perception. The handler should try to stay at least 40 or 50 feet away from the dog during the search and alert process. The handler should only approach the dog after the alert and reward have occurred.

I have found that having the dogs handled by strange handlers greatly improves their performance and search drive. I think that the cause is probably the inadvertent cues that the dog’s regular handler gives off. Dogs are masters of reading the slightest change in behavior, mannerism, attitude and posture. Frequently giving them a strange handler robs them of these cues and injects some challenge back into the search game for the dog.
Chapter 8 – Practices That Interfere with Search Dog Training

There are several frequently encountered human behaviors that interfere with dog training. Some of the major ones are:

1. **Testing instead of training** – Human nature seems to drive us to see how much our dogs can do. We keep making the test harder until the dog fails. Then we reward the failure in our attempt to salvage the situation. In dog training terms we are training whatever behavior immediately precedes the reward. If the dog searches diligently for 5 minutes, and then runs out of gas and is wandering around aimlessly when he stumbles onto the victim, then he has failed. A reward then rewards the behavior of wandering around aimlessly. Giving the reward in this circumstance will cost you 4 or 5 correct training exercises to compensate for the “learning to Not Search” behavior. In other words this practice of testing in reality trains the dog to fail.

2. **When the dog fails, make the reward bigger** – Human nature again works in opposition to reality when the dog fails and we not only give the dog the reward, we make it bigger in order to try and compensate. In reality the bigger reward changes nothing. Dog training is strictly a function of timing. When the dog is failing the exercise should be terminated rather than rewarding the wrong behavior. The size of the reward will not compensate for failure. The trainer must always structure the training exercise so that he is positive that the dog will succeed and get the reward while the dog is still in high-drive mode. You can never reward too quickly, but it is very easy to reward too late. The late reward is irretrievable and will cost you 4 or 5 correct training sessions.

3. **Dissipation of Prey Drive** – When you are taking a search dog candidate through his initial training, you are trying to channel all of his prey drive, energy, and play drive into the behavior of searching for victims. That means he should have no other outlets. He should not get retrieves in the back yard for no good reason. He should not get frisbee games. He should not get unlimited play with the kids. Retrieves reinforce the behavior that comes immediately before the retrieve. If you give pup 50 retrieves a week for “looking cute”, and 12 retrieves a week for searching for and finding victims, then “looking cute” is the behavior that will tend to predominate.

   For the 3 to 6 month period of his basic training, all activity should be geared toward building search drive. Every retrieve that the dog gets should be from a victim, and should be preceded by high-drive search behavior.

4. **Putting the handler in search reward/process.** – Human nature causes us as handlers to want to be part of the reward process. However the lessons will be much better defined and the dog will learn much more rapidly if the handler is totally removed from the picture. If the handler remains outside of the dog’s “perceptual picture” during the search-find-reward process then the dog does not start cueing on imperceptible signals from the handler. You can be sure that the handler who does get in the picture will subconsciously telegraph to the dog a lot of information. The classic example of dogs reading cues that humans are unaware of is the epileptic prediction dog. Dogs have been used successfully to detect impending epileptic seizures and to signal their owner to take his medication to prevent the impending seizure. Search dogs are quite capable of doing the same degree of reading of a handler who persists in staying in the search process.
picture. Problems arise when the dog becomes dependant upon these cues and is unable to search independently. Problems also arise when these cues begin driving false alerts. I have found that having the dogs handled by strange handlers frequently can make a dramatic improvement on their performance and search drive. I think that the cause is probably the inadvertent cues that the dog’s regular handler gives off. Dogs are masters of reading the slightest change in behavior, mannerism, attitude and posture. Giving them a strange handler robs them of these cues and injects some challenge back into the game for the dog.

5. **Overwork** – Human nature gets in the way again with some people who think that if a little work is good, a whole lot must be much better. That is an erroneous concept. When you are trying to build up search drive, less work is better. During the 3 to 6 month initial training period, two search training sessions per week is plenty. During each session the dog should find two or three victims. That is plenty of search work for the average dog. In addition to the search work you might have 2 or 3 obedience sessions and 2 or 3 directional sessions per week.

6. **Assuming that Rubble Will Train the Search Dog** – Rubble does not train the dog. Sound training principles applied over a consistent planned training program are what train the dog. The basic search skills and search enthusiasm should be developed and cemented into habit in a comfortable, controlled environment. You don’t train a pilot to fly at night in bad weather by starting his training of basic flying skills at night in bad weather. You train his basic flying skills in good weather and daylight, a low stress environment. After the basic flying skills are well developed habits you transfer his training to night and then to bad weather. The same principles apply to training your dog. After the search enthusiasm and skills are well developed habits, then you move the training into the high stress and hostile environment of a rubble pile. Train him first in a low stress environment like the barrel field, then after he is an enthusiastic and skillful, and successful searcher, graduate to the rubble piles.

7. **The Magic Training Trip of the Week** – One sees far to many novice search dog trainers who change their program almost on a weekly basis as they hear of some new training trick. That practice is an excellent way to produce a confused, inhibited, plodding dog who expects to fail. The key to a successful dog is a consistent training plan that gradually and progressively takes the dog from novice to accomplished, enthusiastic search dog. Due to the failings of human nature, the best way to achieve this is to (1) formulate the plan, (2) write it down and (3) follow the plan.

8. **Reward the Dog Before the Behavior** – One sometimes sees search dog handlers using the reward (toy, retrieve, or tug) before the search in order to try and make the dog more enthusiastic. In reality you are rewarding whatever behavior the dog happens to be engaged in just prior to the reward. If you reward prior to the search to try and “rev up” the dog, then you are in reality training the dog to “not search”. If you want to train an enthusiastic, skillful search dog, the reward must come only after the desired behavior of enthusiastically, skillfully and successfully searching.

9. **The Pause** – One frequently sees disaster search dogs that seem to lose interest as soon as they find a victim. They find the victim, don’t bark, and wander off to do other things.
This behavior probably starts with requiring too many barks from a beginning dog. If the trainer requires a steadily increasing number of barks from an alerting dog, the trainer literally trains the dog to lose interest. To the dog the steadily increasing number of barks is simply a steadily increasing time period before he gets the reward. When the dog has been “trained to expect to wait 30 or 40 seconds before the reward appears, then he is easily distracted and tends to engage in other activities such as peeing on rocks, sniffing for critters, etc. This behavior often progresses from a pause to leaving the victim and going off to find something more entertaining to do.

The solution to the pause is to nip it in the bud as soon as it starts, while it is only a second or so in duration. Produce the reward on an unpredictable schedule, sometimes on zero barks, sometimes on 2 or 3, sometimes on 15 barks. Then the dog never knows what combination is going to “open” the barrel and produce the reward.

The “pause” is also effectively counteracted by going back to running the dog in the barrel field with the barrels open (Zero barks to open the barrel when the dog finds the victim.)
Chapter 9 - The Nature of the Beast - Pup Is a Pack Animal

The dying fire cast dancing shadows on the dark granite outlining the cave entrance. A hairy hulking humanoid figure squatted near the fire gnawing at a huge elk quarter. He grew tired and satiated. He tossed the meat to the side and shuffled off into the cave. A few minutes later a wolf cautiously picked his way toward the discarded prize. The wolf stopped frequently to listen and raise his nose to test the air currents for threatening scents. He snatched the hind quarter with powerful jaws and quickly dragged it off a half mile into the forest where he was joined by the other members of his pack.

Many generations ago the ancestors of this pack had learned that food could be had in proximity to man. The pack had passed that learned behavior down. Now the wolves tended to hang around the vicinity of the bands of men, especially in times of climatic extremes and difficult hunting.

During this evolving social process, man had been learning as well. An ice age was glacially approaching. The large easily killed game was disappearing. Man was having to work much harder to kill enough to survive. However man was also gradually recognizing that the wolves with their superior sense of smell, could occasionally lead him to the few remaining elusive large animals.

Thus in prehistory may have arisen the social bond between ancestral men and wolves. Note that the relationship was not one sided with man saving the wolves. The wolves probably had a very beneficial effect on our evolution, allowing the present branch of our family to survive rather than all the other branches that died out. We could have been vastly different creatures with hulking bodies, knuckles dragging the ground, and a propensity for swinging through the trees. Perhaps we owe a great debt to wolf ancestors of dogs; Perhaps not.

Today we can look to the wolf behavior for explanation of what makes our dogs tick. That dogs are descended from wolves is no longer mere speculation. Recent DNA analysis has demonstrated that all today’s dogs are descended from a single common ancestor, the Eurasian gray wolf. Thus pup’s behavior and communication has its roots in his wolf ancestors. We need to look to wolf behavior to understand our dogs.

**Dominance and Subordinance**

The wolf is a pack animal and the pack gives the wolf his primary underlying behavioral traits, dominance and subordinance. All the behavior and communication and order within a wolf pack derive from the powerful instinctive behaviors of dominance and subordinance.

There is always a pack leader and a defined hierarchy of subordination. The pack leader enforces and defends his position in a relatively bloodless manner with several ritual behaviors that act on the instinctive level. The behaviors in order of increasing severity are:

1. **A direct threatening stare** – A dominant canine gives a steady direct threatening stare at an underling to put him in his place. You can see this mechanism in effect by going to the zoo and staring steadily into the eyes of one of the lions. He will become very irritated. Similarly, if you are in need of excitement, you can stir up a good bit of trouble by trying on an adult male human in a bar on Saturday night.

2. **Looming over** - The dominant wolf stretches up on his toes, raises his hackles and makes himself larger to intimidate a subordinate.
(3) **Shoulder touching** – The dominant wolf puts his muzzle on top of the shoulders of a subordinate. If the desired subordination effect isn’t achieved the dominant wolf will rear up and put his paws on the subordinate’s shoulders. This behavior has some very direct relevance to the common problem of dogs jumping up on his owner. If the owner is dominant in the social hierarchy, then the dog is psychologically incapable of jumping up and putting his paws on the owner.

(4) **Shaking by the throat** – When all else fails the dominant wolf will run at the subordinate, hit him in the shoulder, knock him down, roll him over, grab him by the throat and shake him roughly while growling fiercely. This is very extreme behavior and not exhibited with great frequency unless there are two wolves in the pack who are very similar in dominance drives. It is also the only dominance demonstration accompanied by a large amount of noise.

Wolves within the pack rarely fight to the point of injury. Usually when two are similar in dominance drive, they will continue to conflict until one leaves the pack. Dominance is determined by the individual genetic makeup, and enforced by the instinctive ritual behaviors.

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**Reading nuances of behavior of pack members**

The dominant canine carries himself boldly erect with ears up and exhibits a confident manner. He carries his tail high, well above horizontal. The subordinate exhibits a posture less bold. Reading behavior, posture, and body language of fellow pack members is a highly developed trait and skill in dogs. In a wild pack where the members are not skillful at reading dominance levels and emotional states of fellow pack members, chaos and fighting would predominate, and the pack would not have time to hunt enough game to feed themselves. Therefore natural selection has made wolves and dogs masters of the skill of reading emotions and posture and
body language. Thousands of years of evolution have developed pup into a creature that can read
you like a book. You must be a skillful actor to fool him.

Impact of pack structure on Pup’s Emotional State

Your dog’s mental health to large degree depends on leadership and consistency. Pup is a
product of thousands of years of evolution as a pack animal. He needs a pack leader. If he
doesn’t get one he is quite likely to be neurotic. Additionally he needs a fairly stable position in
the pack. You as the pack leader have a responsibility to conduct yourself like the pack leader so
that pup can feel confident of his position. When his master gives mixed signals and alternates
between leading and following the dog becomes neurotic.

Impact of pack dynamics on Training – How to use it.

Now that you have a basic understanding of the powerful pack behavioral mechanisms that affect
pup, how do you use them in training?

1. Raise pup in the house so that he imprints with the right pack. Raising him in the house
insures that he associates you as a pack member as opposed to say, the neighbor’s beagle.
Additionally, raising pup in the house will help develop a bond that becomes a desire to
please on the part of pup. Most important, if you and pup live in the house together, you will
develop some communication skills. You will both learn much better to communicate with
each other.

2. Be quiet. Conduct your training sessions with a minimum of verbage from the trainer.
Remember that the dominance mechanisms involve little in the way of sound. They are mostly
visual. Remember also that dogs communicate very little to each other with audible signals. Most
of dogs’ communication with each other is in terms of visual signals provided by motion,
posture, attitude, and other aspects of body language.

2. Be the pack leader. This means acting with authority when you expect pup to obey. It means
conducting yourself with authority in training sessions. Your behavior is the only way pup
can tell whether it is work time or play time. Have a signal for play time. When it is work
time don’t sent play signals with your voice or mannerisms. Be consistent and don’t give
mixed signals. Don’t change your tone of voice or mannerisms just because pup happens to
be 300 yards away, or just because he’s not wearing that checkcord. Always act like the pack
leader when you want a response from pup, because he reads you like a book.

Start the obedience properly. Train pup to heel and to watch you. When you do the quick
turns and direction changes impart enough momentum to pup that you shift his front feet off
the ground. This is of major importance in the initial formation of dominance.

Give a lot of your reward petting as slow stroking on top of pup shoulders to reinforce your
dominance in a positive manner. Pay attention to pup’s attitude. When his tail is up high and
his ears are up, he’s a lot less likely to be responsive to you. He should show a tail at or
below horizontal and his ears back slightly. Then pup is properly submissive and will
respond consistently.
3. When you must punish use canine mechanisms. For minor infractions, and as a first effort use a direct threatening stare. For a more serious rebellion grab pup by the nape of the neck and give him a shake with sufficient vigor to pick up his front feet. If he is really bad, and if you are strong enough, pick him up by the nape of his neck and the loose skin above his rear quarters and give him a shake such that all four feet are off the ground.
Chapter 10 - Obedience Is a Way of Life; Not a Daily 15-Minute Drill

Obedience for the Older Dog

Obedience consists of three simple behaviors, heeling, sitting, and coming. Pup is heeling when he is walking along at your side with his nose within a foot or so of your knee. Heeling is typically done on the left side for the right handed shooter to keep the dog out of the way of the gun. If you are left handed, reverse it, or if you like make pup ambidextrous and have him heel on either side.

Coming is obviously coming when called.

Sitting is a two-for-one command. Pup should sit upon command and he should also stay where he’s sitting until told to do something else. Thus sit also means stay.

These basic behaviors of obedience can be taught in about three to five training sessions of 20 minutes each. The challenge is then to ingrain the habits strongly enough that pup will consistently respond when he’s further away and also consistently respond in the face of extreme distraction and temptation. This behavior comes with repetition in the face of gradually increasing distance from the handler, and with repetition in the face of increasing distraction and temptation. All this is overlayed with the trainer consistently maintaining his position as pack leader.

Myth of Refresher Training

When I was running Wildrose Kennels and training up to 30 dogs a day, I used to love to see dogs coming back for refresher training. The owner brought the dog back because his responsiveness had gradually deteriorated over the intervening year. These dogs were absolute gravy. The simple expenditure of a couple of obedience training sessions would snap that dog back into his former responsiveness and he became a real pleasure to work for the next month or two. All his training was still in there, he just needed a pack leader to bring it out. Reestablishing the handler’s dominance with a few obedience drills would snap that pup right back into his good habits.

The secret is in knowing the trigger for responsiveness. Dogs don’t “forget” behaviors that have been trained. They may become unresponsive, but they don’t forget. All you have to do to reestablish your position as the pack leader and responsiveness will return. The simplest, most gentle way to do this is through obedience training and obedience drills.

Obedience is the foundation of all the subsequent trained behaviors and it is the foundation for responsiveness. Train pup well in obedience, and keep requiring responsiveness, and you can get him to do anything. Even better, you can get him to do anything without any heavy use of force.

The Wrong Way

To explain how to start training in obedience, let me first tell the wrong way to train. Unfortunately, this wrong method is all too prevalent in the dog training community at large. It involves a choke collar and a lot of dragging and nagging of pup, while the handler shouts commands that have absolutely no meaning to pup. Here is the way it goes:
Put a choke collar on pup and start dragging him along, holding him at your left knee, all the while you are barking “heel!, heel!” at pup. Do this daily for two weeks and pup will learn to heel in spite of the training program. After you’ve got pup well programmed to heel and keep himself right beside you, then start trying to get pup to stay while you move away from him.

Let me tell you what is really happening here. When you put that choke collar on pup and start dragging him along, you are triggering an opposing response in pup that makes him pull harder against the choke collar. He’s being choked and his neck feels very uncomfortable in the very location that you are trying to teach him to seek. When he’s by your left knee, his neck hurts. The hurting neck makes him want to leave that space by your left knee. While all these reactions are going on, the trainer is barking “Heel!, Heel!, Heel!”

In these circumstances, guess what “Heel” means to pup. From pup’s perspective, it is “Heel means my neck is hurting and I want to leave this space by this guy’s left knee.” The most amazing facet of this training method is that dogs are adaptive enough and flexible enough to eventually get trained in spite of such methods.

**The Right Way – Lesson Number One**

The trainer’s demeanor and attitude is all important. Pup’s primary means of communication is body language and attitude. You better believe that he is a master at reading you. Your attitude should be positive, businesslike, and authoritative. Conduct yourself in a manner that conveys that you expect compliance. Conduct yourself in the manner that a CEO or supervisor conducts himself or herself.

This discussion of obedience is appropriate for a dog of 6 or 7 month old and up. It is the most important training session of pup’s career, because this session is going to greatly influence how pup views training in general. Make sure pup is successful. Make sure that you engineer the session so that the desired behavior occurs. Then you can reward it and pup will not only learn, but also find out that training is pleasant. We are going to teach pup to heel, sit, stay, and come in this first lesson.

Heeling is the most important part of initial obedience training because, done properly, it also teaches pup that you are the pack leader. Heeling also trains pup to watch you, the handler. These are two major facets of dog training. The dominance of the pack leader elicits response from pup. Pup can be perfectly trained in responses, but it takes a pack leader to consistently elicit the responses.

Watching the handler is vital to communicating, since most of pup’s communication is visual. It is very difficult for pup to respond to an audible command in the absence of some visual signal, so to make training easy, we need at the beginning to teach pup to watch the handler.

First step is make sure he has learned to give to neck. If he’s ever been tied to an immovable object then he’s probably learned to give to his neck. If he’s been drug around on a leash he’s also probably learned. The test is to tie him to a tree, and walk away. Use a non-slip collar. If he doesn’t fight the restraint, then he has obviously already learned to give to his neck. If he does fight the restraint, then keep some distance from him and let him keep fighting the restraint till he gives in to it. You would rather pup have this particular argument with a tree and not with the trainer. It will make learning to heel much more simple. Be careful in very hot weather that he doesn’t over heat. If he gets frantic about it, calm him with reassuring vocalizations. When he quits fighting the restraint then he’s learned to give to his neck and you are ready to continue to the next phase, heeling.
First put a choke collar on pup. I much prefer one of regular rope over the chain ones. The chain collar doesn’t release as quickly and smoothly as rope. Next, attach a 6 foot leash to the collar, and start walking. Keep your eyes on pup. When he’s in the heel zone with his nose within a foot or so of your knee, the leash should be slack, and you should be saying “good dog, good dog”. When he gets ahead of you, extend your arm to give him additional slack while turning quickly and quietly 180 degrees and keep walking briskly. Suddenly pup gets a healthy tug on the neck that turns him around and starts moving him the other direction. Simultaneously, he looks up and finds that he’s 6 feet behind you and way outside the heel zone. The discomfort occurs outside the heel zone. He hurries to catch up. When he is in the heel zone you say, “Good Dog! Good Dog!”.

Five important things are happening here:

(1) Pup feels discomfort of tug on the neck when he’s outside the heel zone, but comfort of slack leash when he’s inside the heel zone.

(2) That forceful tug at the end of the leash imparts your opposite momentum to pup and jerks him around toward you, lifting his front feet off of the ground. This forceful shift of his weight, taking his front feet off the ground is very important. It triggers a response in pup that creates dominance for you the handler. It is a fractional piece of the instinctive behavior that occurs when the pack leader of a wolf pack establishes dominance over a rebelling subordinate. The pack leader lunges into the shoulder of the subordinate, rolls him over and grabs him by the throat for a vigorous shaking. This automatically reestablishes dominance. The key portion of this behavior is the rolling pup over, thus taking him off of his feet. During heeling, you’re your directional turns extreme and crisp and forceful enough to lift pup’s front feet off of the ground. Shifting pup’s front feet off the ground triggers pack leader status for the handler.

(3) Pup is getting reward in the form of verbal praise when he’s inside the heel zone

(4) Pup is learning that it’s his responsibility to watch you and keep himself at heel. When he’s not paying attention, he suddenly finds himself out at the end of the leash with you going rapidly the other way.

(5) Pup is not associating any commands with any of these fragments of behavior, because you are not giving any commands. You will save that for after the behavior is formed. After pup is heeling properly, you start using the command “heel.” Then pup will associate the command “heel” with the appropriate behavior.
Heel

So continue this first session in silence except for the praise when pup is in the “heel zone.” It is very important to keep your eyes and attention on pup. Whenever he gets out front, or focuses his attention elsewhere, you should, quickly, quietly, and forcefully turn while giving pup maximum slack in the leash. Suddenly he finds himself 6 feet away at the end of the leash with you going the other way. Simultaneously your momentum is imparted to him through the leash and suddenly his front feet leave the ground as he’s jerked around to follow you. Whenever his eyes stray from you this should happen. After four or five “to-the-rear-marches” with accompanying hefty tugs for inattention, pup will be looking at you and keeping himself at heel. Then you may start saying, “heel.”

Two other behaviors will occur in some dogs: lagging behind you and hugging your leg. Lagging is overcompensation on pup’s part as he modifies his charging-ahead behavior. Pup finds out that in front is not the place to be, and thus tries lagging behind you. The solution is for the trainer to walk faster and give a good tug on pup as he falls further behind. As you get him back in the heel zone praise more. He will very quickly correct himself.

Hugging your leg during heeling is attempt by pup to avoid the mental effort of watching you with his eyes to keep himself at heel. Pup will move in close so that he is touching your leg. Then he can tell by sense of touch when you are turning. Then he doesn’t have to focus much attention on you.

Pup should be quickly discouraged from this behavior by the simple tactic of turning right into him. Every time he moves into physical contact with your leg, turn rapidly and forcefully ninety degrees to the left and walk briskly right into him. Keep walking briskly into him until he moves away from your leg. One or two repetitions are usually enough to modify pup’s behavior. Then he will use his eyes to keep himself in the proper position and you will be reinforcing the very important communication habit, “watch the trainer”.

I can preach quite well on how easy this is as I’ve had several thousand dogs worth of practice. In fact, looking back over ten years of teaching obedience classes I can say that a large number of people don’t have the motor skills and timing ability to be terribly effective with a normal choke collar. There is a fairly simple solution.
An Effective Training Collar

Some degree of hand-eye coordination and motor skills are needed to perform the initial obedience drills. Also, required is a degree of timing. I have noticed over 10 years of teaching obedience classes that a lot of people have difficulty managing the timing issue with a standard choke collar. Additionally, small people with large dogs sometimes don’t have the strength needed to properly modify pup’s behavior during the initial obedience lessons.

There is a simple solution in the JASA training collar, also known as a pinch collar. This is a very stiff leather slip collar with brass tacks protruding to the inside. The tacks are a little too sharp on a new collar and should have points dulled slightly with a file.

The pinch collar looks mean but it is very effective. In fact, the pinch collar is much kinder to pup that a handler with poor timing jerking pup around inappropriately and thus vastly prolonging his discomforts. The pinch collar eliminates timing and coordination problems and makes the lessons crisp, effective, and brief.

To begin heeling you simply put the collar on with the roller to the outside, away from you. Then you grasp the leash about 18 inches up from the collar, keep your hand extended down and locked at your left side and start walking. When pup forges ahead he makes the collar constrict and pinch is neck. He will automatically slow to release it. The same occurs when he lags behind. Pup is in control of the collar when you keep your hand immobilized, and he quickly teaches himself to remain in the “heel zone”. Dogs will not abuse themselves when they are controlling the pinch of this collar.

On the quick turns, much less muscle power is required from the handler due to the leverage given by the pinch collar. A few rapid reverses of direction during heeling drills will have pup watching you closely and keeping himself in the heel zone.

Sitting and Staying

Sitting and staying should be taught in the first obedience lesson. This is in keeping with a basic tenant of dog training: “Don’t train in a behavior that you have to train out later”. Heeling trains pup to stay right beside you. Training pup to stay involves you moving away from pup. Before you get pup thoroughly programmed to stick right beside your left knee, it would be wise to start teaching him that it is also ok to be away from you.

During this first obedience lesson, after pup has started heeling a little, teach him to sit. As you are walking along with pup at heel, stop and hold a mild tension upward on the leash. You want just enough pressure that pup is uncomfortable and needs to do something to relieve the discomfort. If you are holding light tension straight up, then the natural thing for pup to do is raise his head up by sitting. If you hold a steady pressure as pup fidgets, he will decide to sit. As his rear hits the ground give the command “sit.” Then stroke pup gently on the shoulder and say, “good dog, good dog.” Pup will associate the command with the appropriate response. Do not say “sit” prior to the action of sitting, otherwise pup forms the wrong association. You don’t want the command, “sit,” associated with fidgeting behavior. You want the command, “sit,” associated with sitting behavior.

Repeat this sitting sequence a few times and pup will be sitting automatically as you stop walking. Now add on the “stay” behavior. After pup sits raise your hand in a traffic cop’s “stop” gesture; command “sit!”; take one step away from pup while watching him closely. If he starts to move command “sit!” again to keep him there. Let pup sit a couple of seconds and then step back next to him. Stroke him gently on the shoulder and say, “Good Dog!, Good Dog!” Keep
your voice tone gentle and calm. You do not want to overdo the praise and excite pup. That emotional state is not conducive to obedient behavior.

Repeat this sequence but take two steps away, being careful to keep pup in place with your raised arm traffic cop gesture, and direct stare. Again step back to him and calmly praise him while gently stroking him 3 or 4 times on the shoulder. Repeat this sequence three or 4 times as you extend the distance you move away each time. By the 4th or 5th repetition you should be out near the end of the leash and 3 or 4 steps from pup.

Training pup to Come

We are still in lesson number one and have so far taught pup to heel, sit, and stay. We want to end the lesson with coming. For training pup to come to you, the best command to use is “here”. “Here” can be vocally projected with authority to a distant pup. Thus it is the command of choice.

Begin with pup sitting, give the traffic cop gesture, step out to the end of the leash and pause to let pup sit a few seconds. Then give a tug on the leash, and as pup is coming to you give the command “Here!” in a calm, authoritative tone of voice. Repeat this sequence a couple of times. Then finish your lesson by having pup stay while you move out to the end of the leash, and then step back to him and stroke him gently on the shoulders a couple of times.

There is a reason for mixing up the pattern on calling pup to you versus you walking away and then returning to pup. Whatever you do consistently, pup will get in the habit of. If you consistently sit pup; then walk 6 ft away, turn, wait 5 seconds and then call him to you, then that’s the habit he will form. Do it enough and he will become unable to sit longer than the 5 second wait that he been programmed to.

Lesson Number 2- Repeat What You’ve Started

Lesson number 2 is very easy. You simply repeat what you’ve started in lesson 1. Do a little heeling, sitting, staying and coming. Make the stay’s a little longer in duration of time. Keep the lesson short and try to conduct it in a manner that pup is successful at every command. Ten minutes is plenty.

Lesson Number 3 – Repeat Again

Change equipment here. Trade your 6 foot leash for a 20 foot check cord fastened to pup’s collar. Move further away from pup on the stays. Make sure you always have a hand on the checkcord to insure pup’s compliance. Keep the lesson brief. The more time you spend the greater the probability that pup will screw up and you’ll have to correct him. We want these initial sessions to be short, sweet, and successful.

Lesson Number 4 – The Non-Retrieve

The non-retrieve is the backbone and foundation of a steady calm hunting companion. Incorporate this training principle into your dog’s life and you will produce a gundog that will be vastly superior in behavior and manners.

To begin, put on pup’s 20-ft checkcord and go through a couple of repetitions of heel, sit, stay drills. Then tell pup to sit. Walk about 6 feet away from him. With hand raised in traffic cop gesture and your eyes glued on pup, and with an authoritative “sit,” give a tiny, very low, very slow, 3-ft toss of a dummy away from you. The toss should be away so that you are between pup
and the dummy. It is very difficult for him to run straight past you. You are giving a very weak, slow, low, short toss because that makes it much less tempting to pup. You are engineering the situation so that pup will be successful and you can reward him.

If pup has remained sitting you’ve got it made. Tell him “sit” again, and slowly step out and pick up the dummy yourself. Then walk back to pup and stroke him gently several times on the shoulders: the reward for the correct behavior sequence.

Go through this same sequence twice more, with you picking up the dummy.

The fourth time let pup retrieve the dummy. Send pup with a snappy hand signal and the command “back”. When gets back to you with the dummy, simply grasp the dummy while leaving it in pup’s mouth. Pet him generously while the dummy is in his mouth. Then take it from him with the command “leave it”.

Don’t move toward pup as he brings you the dummy. This will tend to cause him to either drop it or move away from you. If he shows any reluctance about bringing the dummy to you, simply back away from him.

Don’t worry if he drops the dummy. The objective here is for him to retrieve the dummy and come back to you. If he drops the dummy on the way back don’t worry about it. Encourage him to come, and pet him when he gets to you. After the behavior becomes more solidly established, he will forget to drop the dummy.

Finish the training session with one more non-retrieve with you picking up the dummy. This is a fairly good ratio to maintain during all pup’s training sessions. Pup should retrieve about one out of four dummies that he sees fall. Then he doesn’t expect to retrieve every fall and it will be much easier in the future for him to remain calm and steady while guns are shooting and birds are falling.

**Lessons 5 through 10**

The next five sessions should be a continuation of the first four. You should repeat the same heel, sit, stay, and come drills. He should be trailing a 20 or 30 foot check cord, so that you can get a hand or foot on it if necessary. The distance you move away when pup is staying should increase gradually to 50 or 60 feet. Remember to walk all the way back to him occasionally, so that he doesn’t get in the habit of always coming to you after staying.

The non-retrieve should lengthen in distance in 3 to 10 foot increments, so that by lesson number 10 the dummy falls 50 to 60 feet away from you. Keep yourself in the habit of standing a few feet in front of pup so that he would have to run right past you to break on a retrieve. With you in front of him, it is much easier for him to keep himself sitting there while the oh-so-tempting dummy is falling out front.

When you and pup have reached this point, you have taught him everything he needs to know to be a good gun dog. In these first 10 lessons we have trained pup to heel, sit, stay, and come on command. He is steady and doesn’t retrieve until sent. We have even started him on hand signals. We’ve been sending him from several feet away with a hand signal. The non-retrieves have also planted the seed of calmness which will make it easier to get him to stop on a whistle and take a hand signal in the future.

All that is required now is repeating these behavior patterns in the face of steadily increasing distraction and temptation. Also we will steadily increase the distances involved.

**Obedience is a way of life; not a daily 15-minute drill**

The good news is that an obedient dog is a real pleasure to live with. The bad news is that obedience takes some degree of commitment on the part of you, pup’s pack leader. For pup
obedience is a way of life. It is not something that 15 minutes a day of training is magically going to implant.

A major facet in continuing pup’s progress is for the handler to maintain his position as pack leader. This is done through requiring obedience all the time, not just during training sessions. You can spend 2 hours a day doing obedience training sessions, but if you let pup disobey during the other 22 hours, disobedience will predominate. So require him to obey all the time and he will be very responsive to you.

Obedience training is easy. You can train pup to heel, sit, and stay in five or 6 lessons. The tough part is requiring him to respond the rest of the time. Just because you’ve taught pup to heel, sit, and stay doesn’t mean he is going to automatically do it from now on. Quite the contrary will occur. Pup is going to regularly challenge the limits on his behavior. The frequency of the challenges will be directly proportional to your consistency. If you are very consistent pup will very infrequently disobey. If you are inconsistent he will disobey frequently.

If the handler is consistent in his demand for a high level of responsiveness from pup, then pup’s life is much more pleasant. If you squelch the small rebellions, then the big ones never occur. Pup understands what the program is and he is happy. Additionally you never have to severely punish pup, and he doesn’t have to be totally confused about why he was severely punished for something that your inconsistency telegraphed was OK. Obedience can be taught in 3 or 4 days. Maintaining obedience takes a lifetime.

Obedience is not for everyone

Just because pup obeys you doesn’t mean he’s going to obey anyone else. He will obey consistently the person he perceives to be dominant in the pack hierarchy. He can obey you perfectly, but he will not obey your wife unless she maintains her dominance by requiring consistent response from pup.

A good measure of pup’s relative dominance is whether he can pup his paws up on you. The nature of a pack animal makes him unable to put his paws up on a dominant pack member. One of the behaviors that the pack leader uses to reinforce dominance is to rear up and put his front paws on the shoulders of a subordinate. The subordinate is psychologically incapable of putting his front paws up on a dominant pack member.

I used to regularly demonstrate this mechanism at the first session of obedience courses. I would take a dog from one of the students and entice him to put his front paws up on me. It invariably was very easy to get him to jump up on me.

After putting him through a short obedience lesson, I would try again to get him to jump up on me. Invariably, the dog would be unable to put his paws up on me because the obedience would have established my dominance. Frequently, prolonged enticement from me would get the pup razzed up enough that he just had to jump up on someone. Though I was the one enticing him to jump on me, he would run over and jump up on his owner, ten feet away. This was a great illustration of the power of obedience in reinforcing dominance, and of the mechanism of rearing up on a subordinate.

The most valuable behavior for you and for pup is certainly obedience.
Directional control trained in the traditional manner of retrieving dogs is the best approach I have found for search dogs. It leads to a dog that can be directionally controlled in a wide variety of environments, and is extremely valuable in allowing the handler to inject a systematic order to the dog’s natural search pattern.

When dogs are allowed to search independently they will cover a lot of areas two or three times, thus expending a lot of energy and search time in needless repetition. Part of the handler’s function is to impart to a dog’s search pattern some order, so that all areas are covered and repetition and search time for a particular area are minimized.

Directional casts are most easily taught using retrieve as reward and trained initially on a fixed pattern with the behaviors being later transferred to varied environments as the dog increases in proficiency.

Transition to jumping up on an elevation at end of cast is done after the dog is proficient on the handling pattern. That transition is accomplished with clicker and treats.

**Control Distance**

Just as in obedience, a dog doing directional work has a control distance. That control distance is the distance at which he will stop and take a cast from the handler. Early in pup’s training it will be only a few feet. The purpose of much of the subsequent training is to gradually move this control distance out to 150 or 200 yards or more.

**When?**

The initial casting drills should be started as soon as pup is fairly steady and obedient. That would be around lesson 10 or 11 of his obedience training. At that point start tossing in a couple of casting drills per week into pup’s training schedule. You should also start giving pup at this time a sight blind exercise once a week. Casting drills and handling patterns are very repetitive and can get to be decidedly boring to pup. You should gauge the frequency of lessons to your dog’s activity level. If your dog has a high energy and high activity level then three handling pattern lessons per week should be about right. For a lower activity level pup, one or two sessions per week are plenty. Use a little judgment and discretion. If your dog starts to slow down in speed and enthusiasm on the handling pattern, give him a short vacation from it and decrease the frequency of lessons. Ideally you should intersperse these hand signal lessons with pup’s obedience lessons. Then there is less tendency for pup to get bored with either.

**The Handling Pattern**

The foundation for directional work is the handling pattern, which should be set up in a convenient place for you to work pup regularly over a period of several weeks. The initial training on the handling pattern should be done in the same field with the stations located in the same place for every training session. The lessons should be take about 10 to 15 minutes, and you should be careful not to overdo it, especially in warm weather. Pup will be doing a lot of running on these handling lessons, so give him a few minutes between retrieves to catch his
breath and cool off. Though not necessary, it is very helpful to take a lawn mower and mow the
paths defining the handling pattern.

You can visualize the handling pattern in terms of a baseball diamond as diagrammed
below. You will be sending pup from home plate toward second base. You will be stopping him
with a whistle blast at the pitchers mound to cast him either left to third base, right to first base,
or back to second base.

Back
2nd base

30 yds

Right
3rd base

Stop
pitcher’s mound

30 yds

Left
1st base

30 yds

Home

Overview

Training pup on the handling pattern uses simple Pavlovian conditioning. The behaviors you will
be training and the suggested commands are:

1. “Back” - going out away from you when sent
2. “Single whistle blast” or the verbal command “sit” - stopping and sitting
3. “Back” – to continue out away from you
4. “Right”-casting to the right
5. “Left” -casting to the left
6. “Back” - casting back from you

The Visual hand signals

If you want to tell a dog where to go, he must be looking at you, and you must give him a visual signal with plenty of motion in it. Additionally, the different directional signals should be very separate and distinct from each other to minimize confusion to the dog that is trying to read the signals.

The three hand signals are:

1. “Back” – Extend your hand and arm straight up, palm out just like the traffic cop’s “stop” gesture. This command sends the dog straight out away from you.
2. “Right” – Extend your right arm fully to the right side. Take a step or two in the same direction simultaneously, as that will give pup more motion to see and he is more likely to take the proper cast.
3. “Left” – Extend your left arm fully to the left side. Take a step or two to the left simultaneously, again to give pup more motion to see and thus make it easier for pup to do what you want.

There are a couple of points that will make hand signals easier for you and pup. Think about what pup is seeing when you are giving that hand signal. If he is 50 yards away, and you are giving a lackadaisical hand signal with little motion and little differentiation between “right” and “back”, it can sometimes be difficult for pup to deduce what you are telling him to do. If you are wearing camouflage and standing where you blend in with the background, then it can become very difficult for pup to read your signals. Therefore, make your signals separate and distinct. Take couple of steps right or left with those casts, to give pup more to see. On “back” commands, stretch your arm fully up to the vertical position so that pup has the best opportunity to see it.

A Word About Whistles

You will be using a single whistle blast to signal pup to stop and look to you for a directional hand signal. There are two kinds of whistles: those with peas and those without. The whistle with a pea sounds very loud to your ear, and it is loud to your ear. If you blow it energetically enough and frequently enough, it will damage your hearing.

Dogs hear a much higher frequency range than people. The whistles without peas, like the Acme model 210-1/2 are much softer on human ears while carrying as far as any other whistle. In addition to preserving you and your hunting companions’ hearing, the lower noise level of the pealess whistle makes hunting much more enjoyable.

You really don’t need to make a lot of noise with a whistle in order for pup to hear it. You would be amazed at how far out pup can hear a simple verbal hiss. I frequently simply make a hissing sound, “SSSSS” to tell my dogs to stop sit and look at me. They can hear it quite well out to thirty yards or more.

One factor to be aware of in judging how well pup should hear a whistle is the factor of how much noise he is making. If he is charging through shallow water with quite a bit of splashing, then it will be harder for him to hear you. Similarly, if pup is charging through a field of dry cornstalks, he will be creating so much noise that it will be difficult for him to hear you.
Casting Drills

The first few lessons will teach pup is the component parts of the handling pattern, then the pieces will be combined into complete handling pattern. In order to make it easier for pup, you should fix the location of this handling pattern and keep the dummies, stopping point etc. in the same places.

Lesson 1:

(a) Take pup to your fixed handling pattern and sit him at the pitcher’s mound.

(b) Walk over toward first base and throw two dummies to first base.

(c) Leaving pup sitting at the pitcher’s mound, walk back to home plate.

(d) Blow a single whistle blast

(e) When pup looks at you, give the verbal command “right” accompanied with an emphatic hand signal to the right as you take a couple of steps to the right.

(f) After pup brings you the dummy, put him back on the pitcher’s mound and repeat the sequence for another “right” over cast.

(g) Next go through the same sequence for two “left” casts, where you send pup from the pitchers mound to third base

(h) Next go through the same sequence for two “back” casts, where you stand at home plate and cast pup back to second base.

(i) Finally, leave pup sitting at home plate while you walk out and toss two dummies on second base. Then walk back and send him to retrieve them. You may send him from the heel position or take a step or two away and send him with a casting motion. The critical matter here is to sit pup so that his spine is aligned toward second base. That will cause him to head toward second base as opposed to first or third. Dogs nearly always take off in the direction that their back bone is aligned.

In Pavlovian terms here is what the casting drill teaches pup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signal 1</th>
<th>Response 1</th>
<th>Signal 2</th>
<th>Response 2</th>
<th>Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whistle blast</td>
<td>Pup looks at Handler</td>
<td>Visual cast with verbal signal</td>
<td>Retrieve in direction indicated</td>
<td>The retrieve (the dummy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here we are linking two responses together and then rewarding them. The first 5 lessons will consist of teaching pup the component parts of the handling pattern. Then we will put the pieces together.

**Lesson 2:**

(a) Sit pup at home plate and walk back and toss two dummies on second base  
(b) Go back to home plate and send pup twice to successively pick up the two dummies  
(c) Then repeat lesson 1

**Lesson 3**

Repeat lesson 2  

**Lesson 4**

Repeat lesson 2  

**Lesson 5**

Repeat lesson 2  

**Sit on the whistle drills**

While you are doing these casting drills at your handling pattern location, you should throw in a few sit drills in the back yard. These should be semi play sessions.

Walk around in the yard with pup. When pup gets out away from you several feet, give a whistle blast, and command, “sit”. Immediately after pup sits, praise him, “Good Dog!!!! Good Dog!!!! Then quickly throw a dummy for him to retrieve and let him break to retrieve it. Do this exercise in the yard several times a week while moving the sit distance out further from you.

**The Handling Pattern-Putting the Pieces Together**

After the first five lessons of casting drills, pup should be ready to put the pieces together. As pup starts on the handling pattern, you will be requiring him to go out, stop on command, and take a cast. In order to insure that pup is under control, attach a 50 foot check cord to his collar and let him drag it. Polypropylene ¼ inch water ski type rope works great for this purpose as it is light in weight and low in friction as it drags. It also floats for water work.

A very important but subtle point is to give pup some positive reinforcement for stopping on the whistle. Every time you stop him and “sit” him, give him some verbal praise, “Good Dog!!! Good Dog!!!. Then give him the directional cast.

In lessons 6 through 15 you will be sending pup toward second base, stopping him at the pitcher’s mound and casting him right, left, or back. Initially you will be sending pup from a point partway between the homeplate and the pitcher’s mound. You need to initially stop pup within the length of his checkcord, this insures that the desired behavior sequence occurs. Actually, it would be wise to initially stop pup with 6 to 10 feet of you as that will probably be his control distance. As he gets better at stopping on the pitcher’s mound you can gradually start backing up in 10 ft increments until you are sending him from home plate, stopping him for a
cast on the pitcher’s mound. Keeping pup within his control distance and engineering the situation for success helps insure that the training is successful.

**Lesson 6**

(1) Sit pup three quarters of the way from home base to the pitcher’s mound.
(2) Walk around and toss two dummies on 1st, and two dummies on 3rd. Last toss six dummies on 2nd base. Walk part way toward 2nd base and throw 4 dummies on 2nd base.
(3) Walk back to pup. Making sure his back bone is aligned toward 2nd base, send him toward 2nd base.
(4) When pup is six to ten feet away from you, stop him with either a “sit” command, a whistle blast, or a loud “hiss”. Then give him a back cast to continue on to 2nd base to retrieve a dummy.
(5) Next repeat this sequence, stopping pup a little further away, and giving him another back cast to second base.
(6) Send pup, stop him on the pitcher’s mound and send him right to 1st base.
(7) Send pup, stop him on the pitcher’s mound and send him left to 3rd base.
(8) Send pup, stop him on the pitcher’s mound and send him back to 2nd base.
(9) Send pup, stop him on the pitcher’s mound and send him right to 1st base.
(10) Send pup, stop him on the pitcher’s mound and send him left to 2nd base.
(11) Send pup, stop him on the pitcher’s mound and send him back to 2nd base.
(12) End the lesson by sending pup up the middle from home plate two second base twice without stopping him.

**Lesson 7**

Repeat lesson 6. Pup’s control distance should be getting longer so run pup from a point ½ way between the home plate and the pitcher’s mound. If pup is not stopping well then shorten up the distance and put your foot on that check cord occasionally.

**Lesson 8**

Repeat lesson 7. Pup should be stopping well enough that you can run him from home plate.

**Lessons 9 through 15**

Repeat lesson 7, running pup from home plate.

**Transition to Jumping up on an object**

Casting as trained on the baseball system with dummies seems to translate quite well to a rubble pile, but there may be instances where you want the dog to jump up on a particular obstacle. Also he must jump up on an elevation at the end of a directional cast to pass the FEMA Type II performance test. This behavior you can add on with some clicker training after he is working well on the handling pattern.

Build 3 or 4 tables or boxes that are 24” x 36” in size and 10” to 20” high. They should be stable so that they don’t wobble when the dog jumps up on them. Place these tables or boxes at the 3 bases and pitchers mound of your casting drill location.
Directionals

- Jump-on-box training

1. “Hup”  2. “Click”

3. “Click”  4. “Sit”  5. “Click”  6. Treat

First condition pup to the clicker. Do some drills in which you command pup to sit. As soon as he sits give a “click” and follow it with a treat. Repeat this sequence 5 or 6 times. Then take pup to 3rd base. Hold a treat up over the box so that he has to put his paws up on the box to reach the treat. Click when he puts front paws up on the box. Then give him the treat.

1. Next hold the treat higher so that he has to jump completely up on the box to get the treat. When he has all four feet on the box, click and then treat.

2. Repeat 2 but command “sit” as soon as he is up on the box. Click and treat immediately upon his sitting.
3. This time say “hup” and give a hand signal toward the box (you and pup are still within 3 feet of the box) When he jumps up, command sit and reward response with a click and treat. Repeat several times

4. Now tie a dummy down in the middle of the box so that pup cannot pick it up. Walk pup 10 feet away and sit pup. Step 10 feet away and give him an “over” toward the box. As he approaches the box command “hup” so that he will jump up on it. As soon as he is on it command “sit”. Reward compliance with a click, then walk over and give him a treat as he sits on the box. Gradually extend the distance over several repetitions until you are sending him from the box on the pitchers mound to the box on 3rd base. Gradually reduce the number of times that you give a treat and revert to a variable schedule. Keep giving the click for each sit on a box.

5. Repeat the same sequence for a right “over” from pitchers mound to 1st base and the “back” command from pitchers mound to 2nd base.

6. Then run the full handling pattern, sending pup from your side from Home base to pitchers mound where he jumps on box, sits at least 3 seconds and then casts to 3rd base or 2nd base or 1st base. Also cast in the reverse direction from 3rd base to pitchers mound, from 2nd base to pitchers mound, etc.

Two or three sessions spread over 2 or three days should see pup transition to proficiently running the pattern with the jumping up on obstacles included.
Agility

Take pup to the places where his agility can be developed by Mother Nature.

The disaster search dog will by definition be required to operate in many varied and hostile, and downright dangerous environments. In a real disaster scenario most dogs will shut down to some degree. A particular dog encountering a scenario like the World Trade Center is likely to shut down 10% or 30% or even 100%. Before the fact it is very difficult to predict how an individual dog will respond to a real disaster. However there are a few things the trainer can do to increase the dog’s adaptability, and thus minimize the shut down factor. Obviously the better the dog can emotionally and physically adapt to these hostile environments, the better the dog will be at his job of finding victims buried in collapsed structures.
Agility Training

You cannot train a dog on every environment that he might encounter in his career, but you can influence his psychological adaptability and his physical skills to help him meet future challenges.

During his youth and development stage exposure to new environments is a valuable activity that will enhance the dog’s adaptability and his physical agility. Spend time taking your dog to strange places. Take him to marinas, to shopping centers, to parks, factories, to noisy construction sites, etc. The trainer’s objective of these visits is not to train any specific behaviors, but to be supportive and let pup learn that new environments will not hurt him. At the same time he will be teaching himself the physical dexterity to negotiate difficult and strange terrain and objects. Some exposure to hostile environments during his youth will help him in the future with adapting to disaster environments.
Taking your dog on long unleashed hikes in the countryside will also help your dog. If you take your dog on unfettered walks in woods, hills, and fields, where he can traverse ditches, hillsides, rock structures, brush piles, creeks etc. he will naturally develop agility. Then it will take tenfold less effort on his and your part for him to master a simple agility course. Of greater importance is the value of the hikes in bolstering his learning to be comfortable in new environments.

Ideally a puppy destined for search and rescue work is raised with lots of exposure to new environments, and lots of miles of walks in woods and fields and hills and valleys. The unfettered hikes will help him develop muscle and stamina. The unfettered hikes will also help develop his balance and motor skills for climbing and negotiating difficult footing and terrain.
Last but not least, the hikes will help bring out his hunting instincts and reinforce his prey drive, leading to a better search dog in the future.

Agility Training

His recreational exposure should also include time spent around a few marinas. Marinas are great places for dogs to get used to unstable shifting surfaces and climbing in and out of boats and climbing up and down ladders and stairs.

A dog will learn a great deal more generally applicable agility by spending 10 hours around several different marinas and equipment yards and construction sites than he will learn by spending 10 hours on a specific agility course in the training area. Conversely, the marina and equipment yard time will enable the dog to learn a specific fixed agility course much more rapidly when you do begin to train that specific agility course.

The Agility Course

The agility course required for FEMA Type II Dog certification will contain 6 of the following obstacles. The dog must complete 5 out of a course of 6.

* 8 ft Ladder flat or round rungs

* Elevated plank –12” x 12 ft long plank at least 6 ft and no more than 8 ft above ground

* 3 ft high Unsteady/wobbly surface
*dark narrow tunnel containing at least one right angle turn. Dog should be able to fit into Tunnel without crawling

seesaw – 16’ long by 12” wide plank on 55 gal drum

slick slippery unpleasant surface

moving plank supported on two barrels 12’ x 12”

object that requires dog to crawl on its belly.

* = mandatory

**Agility Training**

Agility training on the above specific obstacles should begin after the dog is searching with high drive. The dog should also be obedient and doing directionals before starting the agility course. Both the obedience and directional work will give the handler more control with which to guide the dog thru training on the agility course.

Training with the clicker and treats works great on agility. A retrieve reward is frequently counterproductive for agility, as it tends to make the dog try to go faster, which makes traversing agility obstacles more difficult for the dog.

The clicker gives the trainer complete control of the timing so that each small movement toward the desired goal can be “clicked” and thus rewarded.

Training the dog on climbing the 8 foot ladder might go like this:
First “close” the underside of the ladder by nailing plywood sheet to it. This will keep the dog’s feet from going through and slipping off the steps. This will make it much easier for him to learn and perform with confidence. After he has made 15 or 20 trips up the ladder over a period of several days, then you can take off the plywood and accustom pup to the regular ladder.

1. If the dog has not previously been conditioned to the clicker, do that first by giving him a few sequences of “sit”, followed by a click immediately after the sit response, followed by a treat. 8 or 10 repetitions of “sit”- “click”- treat will establish the value of the click as a reinforcer. Then you can use the click to immediately reward small increments of behavior that are headed toward your goal. The treat should be very small. An 1/8” x 1/8” bit of bacon is about right. “Beggin Strips” are excellent as treats. It is not messy and it is easy to break into 1/8” pieces.

2. Hold a treat up high enough that the dog needs to put a foot on the first ladder rung to reach it. When his foot is on the rung, “click”
3. When his other foot is on the rung, “click” then treat.
4. Hold the treat up higher with verbal encouragement to get his feet up on the next rung. As soon as a foot touches the next rung, “click”. When the other foot is on the rung, “click”, then treat.
5. Continue one rung at a time in the same manner until he gets to the top.

The key points to consider when training the dog to climb the ladder are:

1. Keep your voice calm and soothing. Razzing pup up will merely make him try to go faster which is counterproductive when trying to climb a ladder. You want him to go slowly.
2. Do nothing when he takes his feet off or jumps off the ladder. Simply and gently, encourage him to try again, and only click successes.
3. Make sure he has a place to go when he gets to the top of the ladder. Have a plank in place or a platform for him to go onto. When he gets to the top give him a whole handful of treats.

The other climbing and “up” obstacles are equally easily taught with clicker and treats.

The tunnel and the crawling obstacles are the two “down” obstacles. They are more easily taught initially with a retrieve. The best cue is to have the dog begin both of these from the “down” position.

For the crawling obstacle take the dog up to the opening and put him in the down position.

1. Toss a retrieving dummy about 3 feet into the tunnel. Send the dog for it with “get in” or some other specific signal. Always send the dog from the down position.
2. Toss it 6 feet into the tunnel. Send the dog for it
3. Put another person at the end of the tunnel. Fake a toss into the tunnel, and send the dog. When he is halfway through the tunnel, have the person at the other end call and wave a dummy. When he gets to the other end, that person gives him a retrieve.

1. Toss a retrieving dummy about 3 feet into the tunnel. Send the dog for it with “get in” or some other specific signal. Always send the dog from the down position.
2. Toss it 6 feet into the tunnel. Send the dog for it

3. Continue to lengthen the tosses by 3 feet at a time until he has traversed the length of the tunnel.
4. On the toss that takes him out the other end, have him sit as he emerges from the tunnel. Then say “good dog” and throw him a dummy.
5. Give 6 or 8 retrieves in which he traverses the length of the crawl tunnel and emerges and sits at the other end and sits and waits for a dummy. After that you should be able to eliminate the retrieving dummy and send him on the verbal signal. For completion give him a dummy only occasionally (a variable schedule of reinforcement).

The right angle tunnel should be trained similarly, except do it one leg at a time with the tunnel dismantled at the joint. Then put them back together and train it as the whole with both legs joined together at the right angle.

Agility is easily trained if the trainer can remember that there is not a time limit. If he lets the dog take his time progressing from one small step to the next, then the dog will fairly quickly train himself to negotiate the obstacles. When the trainer tries to make the dog go faster, or excites the dog with his voice, or does much physical manipulation of the dog, then the trainer is making it more difficult for the dog to learn the required behavior.
Pup doesn’t speak English, he speaks wolf and dog, languages that you will find that you recognize. Wolf and dog is mostly sign language. It is read with the eyes, not heard with the ears. If you watch a pack of dogs or a pack of wolves, you will hear very little in the way of sound. Most of the social interaction is visual. Communication consists of reading body language, attitude, posture, and mood. Thus the dog’s most important organ for communication is the eye, not the ear or the voice.

Wolves and dogs live in a world dominated by sight for communication with each other. They live in a world of dominance and subordinance mechanisms that work mainly on visual cues. A major principle of natural selection says that behaviors that minimize conflict and disharmony in the pack are going promote survival of the pack and thus have been selectively promoted over the centuries. These hierarchical behaviors are primarily of posture and manner and attitude. Dogs have evolved to a very advanced state in using these behaviors and in reading them. These behaviors involve little to no sound.

The major impact on dog training is that dogs respond primarily to visual signal, not to sound. Therefore the silent trainer is generally much more effective.

One of the greatest obstacles to successful dog training is the human voice. We humans have a great deal of trouble keeping our mouths shut. All that sound means mainly excitement or aggression to a dog. If you look again at the wolf pack, in general sound signals are infrequent. When they do occur the sound signals in the pack communicate excitement, alarm, aggression, and geographic spacing of groups or packs. Wolves growl to put subordinates in their place. The extremes of dominance demonstration involve shaking the subordinate by the throat while growling fiercely. Other sound signals are mainly alarm barking to alert the pack to danger, and group howling which seems to convey geographic spacing information between packs. Within the pack most of their social communication is in the form of body language, posture, and attitude. Dogs take in much more communication through their eyes than through their ears. It follows that more training should be done more with visual signals than with vocal signals. Often the human noises added to training sessions signify to a dog either threat and aggression or excitement. Either emotional state makes it more difficult for the dog to perform the behavior you are trying to establish.

Silence is Golden

One of the most important things a novice trainer with a novice dog can do is keep his mouth shut. Dogs communicate with vision, not with sounds and hearing. They read posture, attitude, expression and body language.

In the beginning of training, commands mean nothing to a dog. The command acquires meaning only after being paired with a response for a number of repetitions. Nearly universally you will see people doing it backwards and giving the command while the dog is doing everything else but the desired behavior. They think the command is going to cause the behavior, and they are wrong. The command will cause the behavior only after it has been paired with the appropriate behavior for a number of times and the sequence has been rewarded.

Some years ago I learned by necessity that dogs learn more readily when the trainer keeps his mouth shut. I had throat cancer. Several rounds of surgery and some radiation rendered me unable to speak above a whisper for a period of about 6 months. Obviously, I had to train dogs without my voice. To my surprise I learned that dogs respond much more readily to visual signals with no verbal cues. The human vocalizations simply add to the opportunities for
confusion. I learned by experience that dogs learn much more readily when the trainer uses his
voice very sparingly, and mainly for the reward. Desired behavior is learned much more rapidly
when initially paired with a visual signal, such as a raised hand to stay, a step back with a
dropping of the shoulder to come, etc. The verbal command is added later, as a substitute for the
visual signal.

When you analyze a typical training session it becomes obvious that not only does the
dog respond to the visual signal, but also that the trainer instinctively knows the signal to give.
Take the command sit. If you require the trainer to be silent, most will automatically, to get a
new dog to sit, move their hand back over and above the dog’s head so that he has to look up to
follow the hand. This in conjunction with light upward pressure from the choke collar will
usually cause him to sit.

Similarly, when you want him to stay and can’t give a verbal command, most people will
raise their hand in a traffic cop’s “stop” gesture, as they step away from pup.

The amazing thing here is that most people will automatically pick these signals. That
says that they know on an instinctive level, how to communicate with pup. The moral here is that
if you keep your mouth shut during initial training, your instincts already know the signals to
give to pup.

When you are training pup on obedience, try some silent drills. You will be pleasantly
surprised at how well you communicate without your voice. You will find that pup usually learns
quicker with a visual silent signal than he does with noise.

**Typical sins of the voice**

Typically, a person training a dog uses his voice entirely too much and tends to communicate
alarm, aggression, or excitement to the trainee. None of these emotional states is conducive to
successful behavior modification. Here are the most common sins of the voice:

1. **Wrong association:**

   The trainer pairs the voice command with other than the desired behavior. This is commonly
seen with heeling, when the trainer is saying “Heel! Heel! Heel!” while the dog is every place
but in the heel position. This practice just makes it more difficult for pup to learn the meaning of
heel. If you only say the command “Heel” when pup is in the heel position, walking alertly at
your left or right knee, then pup will very quickly learn the meaning of the command. Dogs learn
a command by association of that command with a particular behavior. The command does not
cause the behavior until the conditioning process is complete.

2. **Repeating Commands**

   When pup does not respond to a command, it is usually not because he didn’t hear it.
Repeating the command simply trains pup to respond to the 3rd, 4th, or 5th command. A lack of
response is a common phenomena when your dominance is flagging. Pup is programmed to
periodically check you out on dominance. When you are sending the wrong signals and not
maintaining your position as pack leader, pup is going to become much less responsive. The
solution is not to repeat commands. The solution is to reinforce your dominance with the
appropriate mechanism, such as putting the lead on and doing a heeling drill, or such as a direct
threatening stare, or shaking pup by the neck.

2. **Shouting**
Shouting is frequently seen at dog training sessions. Shouting is totally counterproductive for dog training. Shouting generally just scares pup or makes him excited. Neither emotional state is conducive to making pup more responsive to whatever command he is failing to execute.

3. Praise Everything

Some people praise everything that pup does. When you praise all behaviors, then you deprive yourself of praise as a primary training tool. Use praise sparingly and use it to reward the behaviors that you value. Also remember that pup perceives praise by tone and inflection, not by deciphering the words. When pup is doing something you want him to, such as sitting quietly in the face of temptation, praise him. When he is doing something undesirable, such as pulling you down the street on the leash, don’t sing “heel, heel, heel, to him in a friendly voice. Let him know by your firm authoritative tone of voice that he is not doing the right thing.

4. Praise Too Profusely – Jazz Up Pup Excessively

Praising pup too enthusiastically and too much will tend to excite pup and elevate his emotional state. It tends to make him hyper. That is not the emotional state that you want in a gundog, therefore keep it moderate.

Praising pup too much and too enthusiastically will also send signals to pup saying that he is the pack leader. In a pack structure, the subordinates usually tease to initiate play with the pack leader. Over indulgence in praise will frequently send signals to pup that you are subordinate. Those signals make it difficult for pup to maintain a high level of responsiveness to your commands.

Generally, praise should consist of two or three repetitions of “Good Dog!” which may be accompanied be two or three gently downward strokes on the top of pup’s shoulders.

The World is A Stage

Communication works both ways. While you are reading pup, Pup is reading you. Remember that thousands of years of breeding selection have developed pup into a consummate reader of attitude, emotion, body language, mood, etc. That’s how wolf packs survive and keep from degenerating into continuous brawls. Thus pup is well aware of how your day went when you come home in the afternoon. He is also probably well aware of whether you are going to be strict or lax in a particular training session. If you want consistent predictable responses from pup, you had better give him consistent signals on the behavior standards you expect. This means you must be consistently authoritative, and it means that you must be consistent in the standards of response you require.

You will give pup a great deal of emotional security by consistently maintaining your position as pack leader, and by giving pup the signals he expects from a pack leader. Generally, when pup is exhibiting what humans interpret as misbehavior and rebellion, that is frequently not the case. Often disobedience and rebellion are the result of the trainer giving the wrong signals or the trainer giving mixed signals. The best way to explain this is to give examples of common transgressions of the principle:

1. When pup is beyond your reach you change your tone of voice from authoritative to questioning. This usually happens at 75 feet when pup is wearing a 50 foot check cord, or
when he is on the other side of a pond, or with collar dogs, when you have the dummy on him or are not running him on the collar. When a dog goes out of control under these circumstances it is not because pup knows the length of the checkcord or because he knows that the electric collar is not on. Pup goes out of control, because the trainer changes his voice tone from authoritative to questioning. That tone change sends a signal to pup that the trainer is no longer dominant. Pup reacts accordingly and quits being responsive. Trainer behavior is real reason that electric collar dogs get less responsive when they are not wearing the collar. It is not that they are aware that they are not wearing the collar, it is because they are reading changes in the attitude and mannerisms of the trainer.

2. When you are by yourself with pup you are consistently authoritative. When you are in the company of others, you get self conscious, and get more tentative in tone of voice and mannerism. Pup tends to read that as submissive signals and he becomes less responsive.

3. When you are training you are consistently authoritative and do quiet well with pup. When hunting season arrives you take pup out and promptly forget most of the rules. You get excited, communicate that to pup, and don’t require the degree of obedience that you do in training. He starts out with a few minor transgressions of obedience which you ignore. He progressively gets less responsive, until he surpasses your limit of tolerance. You lose your temper and punish him. This sequence can be avoided with your maintaining the same standard for responsiveness for both hunting and training.

**How dogs learn**

Pup doesn’t sit because you say “sit”. He sits because he’s been put through a repetitive regimen of behavioral conditioning. Pup learns behaviors the same way people learn physical skills like bicycle riding or tennis or golf. He learns, typically in spite of the trainer, that the word “sit” followed by his response of sitting produces a reward. The behavior gets learned because of the sequence of events, not because you said “sit”.

**Shaping Behavior with Reward**

To train pup effectively one needs a basic understanding of animal behavior modification principles. These are fairly simple and are fairly familiar since we humans react along the same lines as animals. The two fundamental principles that apply to canine behavior modification are:

1. Behaviors are formed and shaped by reward
2. Behaviors are extinguished by lack of reward and by punishment

The foundation of any good training program should be based on building and shaping desireable behavior by reward training. If you read your old college psychology book you’ll fine reward training labeled as operant conditioning, Skinnerian conditioning and various other terms. They are based on the principle that behavior that is followed by a reward tends to be repeated. They are based on Pavlovian conditioning. Pavlov was a Russian physiologist in the early 1900’s who discovered that dogs could be trained to salivate at the sound of a ringing bell.

Pavlov set up a trial in which he regularly rang a bell before feeding the dogs. After a number of repetitions the dogs would salivate merely upon the ringing of the bell without needing the presence of food to stimulate the salivation. The bell had become the stimulus or signal, while the salivation was the conditioned response. The key was the sequence:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>response</th>
<th>Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bell</td>
<td>salivate</td>
<td>food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After a number of repetitions to establish the signal or stimulus, the food can be removed from the sequence and just the bell will produce salivation, as diagrammed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bell</td>
<td>Salivate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Training a Young Puppy to Sit**

Pup learns the same way Pavlov’s dogs did. Look at training pup to sit. The signal or stimulus is the command “sit”. The response is sitting, and the reward can be praise or food. The key is to teach it backwards to what traditional dog training preaches. You must first produce the response, then reward it, so that the response will occur more frequently. When the response is occurring predictably then add the signal prior to the response. After a number of repetitions over a time period, the signal by itself will by conditioning become effective enough to produce the response.

The response of sitting is preceded by the signal “sit” and followed by a reward for a number of repetitions, then the signal sit will start producing the response without the reward following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>response</th>
<th>reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“sit”</td>
<td>sitting</td>
<td>praise and petting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sitting is a little more difficult to produce than the salivation of Pavlov’s demonstration. Salivating is automatically caused by food. The trainer must take a little more active role to produce the sit response so that it can be followed with a reward. So the first part of this training sequence is to produce the response of sitting.

You can usually get a young puppy to sit with food. Puppies tend to be ravenously hungry all the time, so food is a good reward, and can be used to shape responses. Every time you feed pup, go through this sequence:

1. Put his food in a bowl
2. Put the food under his nose so he gets a good sniff and knows what it is.
3. Raise the bowl up above his head
4. Wait till he sits
5. After he sits, immediately put down the bowl for him to eat
6. While he’s eating, praise him, “Good Dog! Good Dog!”

This is what our Pavlovian diagram will look like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sees food bowl</td>
<td>Sitting</td>
<td>food and praise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above his head</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
You see that the reward is eating. The praise is paired with the act of eating the food so that praise becomes a reward in itself, for future use. Praise is a lot easier to carry than food and you always have it with you.

Note that this process should be carried out in silence, except for the praise. Note that we have not introduced the signal “sit”. Right now we are building the back part of the sequence: response followed by reward. We want food to produce sitting just like in Pavlov’s sequence food produces salivation.

The key here is waiting until the desired response occurs before giving the reward of putting down the food bowl. Pup may dance around. He may yap in frustration. He likely will rear up on your leg and scratch. Don’t reward any of those behaviors. Do not pair the signal “sit” with any of these behaviors. If you wait long enough, it is inevitable that pup will sit and look up. Keep your mouth shut and wait. When he does sit, give him the food and verbal praise, “Good Dog! Good Dog!”.

After several days the sight of the food bowl above his head at meal time will causes pup to sit, then you add the verbal signal “sit” prior to the response of sitting. Then the sequence becomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signal</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sit</td>
<td>sitting</td>
<td>food and praise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After a few of repetitions pup will sit merely on the signal “sit”.

After a few days you will probably notice that when it is close to meal time and you are in the area of the house where pup eats, he will probably sit to see if it produces food even when you don’t have the food bowl handy.

Thou Shalt Not

Note the things you don’t do:

(1) Don’t leave a bowl of food always present. If pup always has food available and is seldom hungry, then food has little reward value, and you have robbed yourself and pup of an effective reward training tool. Keep that in mind when you start feeling guilty about pup being a little hungry.

A six-week old puppy should be fed three times a day. In fact they do admirably on twice a day. I personally feed puppies twice a day on a regular schedule. This makes them easier to house train since their defecation schedule becomes predictable. Making food available only twice a day for a short time period also allows them to be trained with food reward. If they are not hungry, food is not a reward.

Don’t let guilt overcome common sense on the feeding schedule. Pup is geared through evolution to eat at well spaced intervals. In the wolf pack from which he evolved, the mother did not hunt and feed her pups three times a day. A puppy in a wolf pack is probably lucky to eat once a day.

(2) You don’t cave in while pup is reared up scratching your calves, looking pitifully up at you with those big blue eyes. If you give him the food at that moment then you are not only training him to jump up on you, you are also training him to manipulate you. Wait until he sits to give him the food. It may take five minutes, but it will happen.
Training a Young Puppy to Stay

After pup is consistently sitting on command before getting his food you can by successive approximation, gradually shape that behavior into staying until released to eat.

1. Have pup sit while keeping the bowl of food up above his reach
2. Put your had on his chest to physically restrain pup as you slowly lower the bowl to the floor.
3. Say “sit” one time.
4. After he relaxes and accepts the restraint of your hand, wait a couple of seconds with your hand remaining on his chest restraining him.
5. Then release him to eat. Use a slight hand motion and a verbal signal such as “ok” to release him.
6. After several repetitions of this try it without the physical restraint. If pup attempts to charge ahead for the food, simply raise the bowl above his reach. Put him back in place and try it again. Keep repeating until he will sit without restraint until released with a verbal and visual signal.
7. Gradually increase the distance you move away with food bowl and gradually increase the period of time pup sits.
8. If your communication skills are not up to the job and you can’t get pup to stay with the restraining hand, then resort to a checkcord. Tie a 20 foot check cord to pup’s collar. Run one end though an anchored object such as chair leg behind pup. Tell pup to sit and hold some tension on the cord as you proceed a step or two away and put down the food bowl. Let pup sit a couple of minutes and then release him with a verbal “ok” and a hand signal. Gradually stretch out the drill in both time and distance. After a number of repetitions, the behavior will become established and you can eliminate the checkcord.

Going through this drill with a young puppy is one of the most valuable activities you can engage in. It teaches pup how to learn through reward, and establishes the foundation for sitting and staying that will make pup a calmer steadier hunting companion in the future.
Chapter 14 – Working on Rubble Pile

Urban SAR are going to be tasked to search on real disasters. The conditions will be harsh, unpleasant, and uncomfortable. They cannot be duplicated for training purposes. The closest the trainer can come is to work the dog on rubble piles.

Beware the rubble pile. It can be hazardous to the health of your search dog training program. Beautiful, large, jagged, jumbled rubble piles have a strong magnetism that frequently seduces the dog trainer into testing instead of training. It is very difficult for the trainer to restrain himself and resist seeing how difficult a test his dog can do. The inherent danger with training on rubble is that human nature will cause many trainers to slide into testing instead of training.

One should always keep in mind that it is not the rubble pile that successfully trains the dog. Sound basic training principles are what successfully train the dog. Structure the training exercise so that the dog is successful and finds the victim and gets the reward while the dog still in “high gear search mode.”

Dog should be trained on flat till drive is very high. Then worked on rubble enough to be agile and comfortable. Physical condition plays more important part on rubble. Dog needs to be in good shape as rubble requires much more work to move around on.

Before searching on rubble piles, the dog should be comfortable on it. A background of long hikes in difficult terrain is great preparation for beginning to search on rubble. Also the long hikes will put the dog in the good physical condition required for sustained work on rubble.

From a training standpoint your rubble candidates should be working well in the barrel field. They should be finding two or three victims in succession in the barrel field and be maintaining a “high gear” searching behavior for 5 to 7 minutes. When you start the rubble work, stick with the same basic techniques that work well in the barrel field training. Work in groups with the dogs lined up on leash, each awaiting his turn. This gets the dogs’ emotional states in high gear. Use barrels to hide victims the first few times on rubble to give the dog a smooth and confident transition.

Set the initial exercise up so that the dog will be quickly successful. Find a natural pathway into and thru the rubble that the dog is likely to take. Pick a pathway that the wind is crosswind to. Pick a hiding place that is up wind of the dog’s probable path so that it is certain that he will run into the scent being blown from the victim. As with the barrel field work, there should always be more than one victim to be found, so pick a second hiding place as well.

The victims should hide in a manner that the dog can’t get to them, but they can still give the dog a reward. A retrieving dummy tied to a 10 foot piece of rope works well. After the find and alert, the victim tosses the dummy a couple of feet so the dog can grab it. Then most dogs will tug on the dummy, which constitutes a reward.

The dogs are lined up on leash with their handlers. They are positioned so that they can see the victims run off into the rubble pile, but where they cannot see where the victims hide. Preceding each dog’s turn to search, that dog gets to watch a victim run off into the rubble pile. Over a period of weeks you make the rubble searches take a little longer each week, by starting the dog further away from the hiding places, and by having the dog search upwind for a bit.
before putting him where he is likely to smell the victim. The object is to develop a high drive search mode that persists for longer periods of time.

Sometimes you will misjudge and make the exercise too difficult and the dog will lose interest and simply be wandering around. When that happens, terminate the exercise so that the dog doesn’t accidentally blunder upon the victim and get rewarded for aimless wandering.

Then bring the failing dog back later and run a simplified exercise.

In my mind the ideal rubble pile for training is 100 yards long by 100 yards wide and 10 feet high and it has 40 to 50 pop-up holes in it. A pop-up hole is a hole about 3 feet deep with a 2 foot parapet of stones piled around it like a foxhole. The victim gets in and is out of sight, yet the parapet of piled stones allows lots of scent to escape so that it is easy for the dog to succeed at finding the victim. A plywood cover can be used to keep the dogs from penetrating if necessary.

The dogs are worked in groups, each held on leash by his handler. The dogs are placed where they can see the victims disappear into the rubble pile, but where they can’t see exactly where they go. For each dog 2 or 3 victims run of to hide in the rubble and hide in a pop-up hole. Each training session the victims pick different holes. After a few weeks and 10 or 12 sessions, those dogs will be searching that whole rubble pile with great gusto and enthusiasm to find which holes the victims are in.

The basic principles to remember on search work and rubble work are:

1. Work in groups to keep drive maximum
2. Make sure dog is successful while drive level is still high.
3. Do lots of runaways
4. Always have multiple victims
5. As the dog gets better, start transitioning to variable schedule of reinforcement. Don’t give him a reward for every find.
Chapter 15 – A Step-by-Step Search Dog Training Program

The attached training schedule and checklist should be used in conjunction with this chapter.

General Training Principles

1. For the disaster search dog, searching is the imperative and essential behavior. Most dogs do not have the inherent, genetically produced prey drive to make a search dog. These dogs should be filtered out on the front end. You can only shape the basic inherited drive that the dog was born with. You cannot train searching into a dog that lacks the basic drive. Energetic intense searching appears to correlate to a strong prey drive or predatory instinct in the individual dog. A good search dog candidate is one that shows a very strong response to retrieve a thrown object. A further indicator is that the dog be persistent when he can’t get to a thrown object. If you throw the toy in a briar patch where he can’t get to it, a good search dog candidate will keep trying to get to the toy for at least 30 seconds.

If you cannot produce diligent, focused, energetic searching behavior then you need to get another dog. A reasonable expectation would be to produce focused energetic searching behavior in 4 to 6 weeks.

2. The basic training principle is: **A dog tends to repeat or learn the behavior that immediately precedes a reward.** The trainer’s job is to set up the scenario or exercise so that intense searching is the behavior that precedes the reward. The retrieve or tug from the victim is the reward. The trainer must always keep the exercise simple enough that the dog finds the victim while the dog is still in high gear.

A key point is that you are training not only the search behavior, but also the emotional state of high motivation and drive. You cause the dog to start out in that state by working in groups of several dogs on leash, each awaiting his turn to work. When 4 to 6 dogs are lined up tugging at their handlers’ leashes, straining to go to work, they will generate and communicate an incredible amount of excitement to each other.

The victim running off to hide also generates excitement. Thus the dog who is released to search, starts in an excited emotional state. The key is to make sure that he is still in that excited state when he finds the victim and gets the reward. The key to making that happen is to gradually increase the length of search, or even better keep the searching training on the same piece of ground. When you do the search training on the same acre of ground for a number of times, and the dog has a number of simple successful searches, then his expectation of finding a reward on that acre is very high. Hence he will search with high motivation level. That is why the barrel field is such an effective training scenario. That is why the barrel field should be established in one place and kept there.

3. When the dog fails, back up 4 or 5 training sessions on the checklist. Failure occurs when the dog runs out of gas and starts merely wandering and sniffing bushes aimlessly. This is generally a factor of trying to go too fast, by either making the search to difficult or by running too many searches per week, or both.

The solution is to simplify by backing up on the training schedule.
When the dog runs out of gas before succeeding on a search exercise, terminate the exercise, and put the dog on leash and take him back to the holding area. Vastly simplify the exercise and start over. Do not show him where the victim is and then reward him, and try to fix it by making the reward bigger. If the reward comes after the dog fails in searching then you are rewarding lethargic, aimless, wandering. Do not reward failure. Changing the size of the reward will not fix the situation. After the failure it is too late, you cannot fix it.

Cardinal Training Rules

1. You cannot make a dog search. You can only develop and channel the search drive he was born with.
2. You cannot train a dog by testing him.
3. Reward the smallest increment of the desired behavior.
4. You can nearly never reward too quickly. Nearly all training problems are created by waiting too long to reward; by trying to get too big a piece of the desired behavior; by testing instead of training.
5. Training is cumulative. Every time you allow the dog to fail, and every time you reward failure, you are adding a nail to the coffin of the dog’s search potential. When you get a certain number of nails in that coffin, the dog becomes unsalvageable.

Training equipment:

**Bark Barrels**: 40 to 50 plastic double-length barrels (made from two 55-gal plastic barrels with top and bottom removed and bolted together end-to-end). The open end is closed with a plywood cover hinged by attaching with two wire loops. 8 holes of one-inch diameter are drilled in the plywood cover so that scent escapes easily and readily, and so that the victim has ventilation and can see out. An additional wire loop threaded thru two of the ventilation holes serves as a handle for the victim to hold the door closed against a persistent dog.

The barrels should be strewn haphazardly around a fixed training site of about an acre or so. For those living in the south the barrel field should be in the woods where the dogs will be working in the shade and where temperatures in summer will be cooler.

**The bark box** – A plywood box with guillotine type door with frame and pulley arrangement allowing the door to be pulled up or released to fall by means of a rope which is controlled by a person outside the box. The box should be large enough that a person can sit comfortably in it.

Ground rules:

Maximum of 1 session per day. No more than 3 sessions per week of search training with a day off between sessions. Less is better in early the early stages. During the 34 sessions of basic search training don’t do agility and directional training other than long walks in woods and fields and visits to strange places. You are trying to channel all the dog’s energy into search drive so don’t give any other avenues to for him to get retrieving or tugging rewards. Don’t give play or rewards except at successful completion of a search exercise.
Attached is a training schedule and checklist. The search training period is divided into 34 trainings sessions. The exercises to be trained are indicated by x in the box for that training session. The trainer should carry out that exercise and circle the x and put initials and date in the box. After completing this 34 session program, all the dog should need is 6 to 8 search sessions with runaways on rubble and he should be ready for the search portion of the FEMA certification test.

Search behavior and bark alert behavior are trained separately and parallel. They are added together at session 27.

After session 7, the neither the handler nor the dog is allowed to see which barrel the victims go to. This develops the dog’s hunting/searching behavior, and more importantly it trains the handler to trust the dog. Additionally it prevents the handler from subconsciously giving off signals that tell the dog when he is getting close to victim. Thus any tendency on the part of the handler to drive the dog into alerts and false alerts is circumvented.

**Search Training Stages**

The dogs are worked in a group held on leash by their handlers who are lined up 6 to 8 feet apart and 40 to 50 feet back from the barrel field with the barrel field in clear view of dogs and handlers. The search behavior is trained in 4 basic stages in the barrel field:

1. **Search (1) - In sessions 1 thru 3** – A person stands in the barrel field at left or right edge. He yells “Hey! Hey! Hey!” And throws a dummy out about 30 feet into barrel field. The throw should have plenty of height so the dog gets a good view of it. The first handler sends his dog for the retrieve. When the dog gets it, the thrower (victim) should try to get the dog to bring it to the thrower. If he does bring it to the thrower then the thrower should toss the dog another short retrieve and praise him. Then the handler comes and gets the dog and takes him back to the holding area. This sequence is repeated twice more for that dog with the thrower (victim) moving to different segments of the barrel field. The throws should fall different areas of barrel field to start the hunting behavior.
   We want the dog to find dummies in different areas of the field so he starts to expect to find dummies in all parts of the barrel field.
   The thrower tries to get the dog to bring the dummy to him and then reward him for it with another retrieve because we want the dog to stay with the victim and this is the beginning of that behavior.

2. **Search (2) - In sessions 4 thru 6** – We change to a runaway victim. The victim stands in front of the group of dogs and yells “Hey! Hey! Hey!” and jumps around and waves dummy. Then he runs off into the barrel field and hides behind a barrel. The dog is released as soon as the victim is out of sight. When the dog gets to the victim he gets two retrieves and great verbal praise from the victim. If the dog is still trying to take the dummy back to his handler, simply tie a 20 foot line to the dummy. Then after the victim throws it, he can insure that dummy and dog return to the victim. This stage of the training starts the transition from sight to smell for the dog to find the victim. It also changes the reward sequence. The dog finds the victim behind a barrel and then gets the retrieve. Each dog should get 3 runaways to different areas of the barrel field.
3. **Search (3) - Sessions 7 thru 14** – Dogs are still worked in group, but now they and the handlers are screened from the barrel field. The barrels are left open. The dogs and handlers should be able to see the runaway victims as they start for the barrel field, but they should not be able to see which barrel the victim hides in. With dogs in group, 2 victims jump around and tease dogs with waving dummies and “Hey! Hey! Hey!”. Then the victims run off and hide in barrels in separate parts of barrel field. The barrels are left open. A dog is released. When the dog finds a victim and sticks his head in barrel, the victim gives him two retrieves and lots of verbal encouragement. Then the handler comes up and takes the dog a few feet away from the first victim. The remaining victim is signaled and he gives a vigorous “Hey! Hey! Hey!” while staying in his barrel. Handler releases dog. If dog needs it the handler signals for more verbal cueing from remaining victim. When the dog finds 2nd victim, and sticks his head in barrel, the victim gives him two retrieves and vigorous verbal encouragement. Then handler collects the dog and returns to holding area.

This phase of the search training develops dogs search drive toward finding encapsulated people by having to use his nose. We use 2 victims to start training the dog to always expect to find another victim.

4. **Search (4) - Sessions 15 thru 26** – Same as the preceding section, search (3) except the verbal cue from 2nd victim is eliminated. After dog finds first and is rewarded, the handler takes him a few feet away and releases him to find the second. This time there is not verbal cue from the remaining victim.

5. **Search (5) – Sessions 27 thru 34** – Same as search (4) except barrels are closed. By session 27 the bark alert should be well developed and we now move it to the barrel field. The first few sessions may require some verbal cueing from victim to produce the bark, but you should be able to quickly remove the cueing. We have the 2 runaways run out and hide in barrel field. Then the dog is released when he finds the first victim he should bark. The victim should open the barrel on the first or second bark. Then the victim give the dog two retrieves or a vigorous game of tug with great verbal encouragement. Then the handler comes up and takes dog. Then he releases him to find second victim.

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**Bark Alert - 5 stages**

Conduct 8 sessions of search behavior before starting the “alert” training. After 8th search session, each training session will consist of a search exercise and a bark alert exercise. For each bark exercise the dogs are stationed in a group on leash held by their handlers. The dogs should be 4 or 5 feet from each other and around 20 feet from the bark box or bark barrel. The first couple of sessions it is helpful to plant a veteran barker in the group to stir things up. An energetic boisterous victim is very helpful for these drills. Handlers should keep their eyes on their dogs as the dogs are straining and lunging to be released. They are likely to bark and that bark should be rewarded by the handler quickly giving a dummy to the dog and playing a little tug. The dogs should soon be pulling and straining against their collars and leads to get at the box. When a dog’s turn comes to rush the box, the handler should let him succeed at pulling from the handler’s grasp. This action will significantly magnify the dog’s tendency to penetrate the box.

1. **Bark Alert (1) – Sessions 9 and 10** – Bark box is used. Bark box is left open. Victim in box gives energetic verbal cues. Dog is released to go to box. Victim entices him in, pets
and praises and gives him 2 retrieves or a vigorous game of tug. Each dog gets 2 or 3 turns by random selection or by sending the dog that appears most excited at that instant.

2. **Bark Alert (2) – Sessions 11 and 12** – Bark box is used. Victim gets in and box is closed. Victim gives lots of verbal cues to entice dogs to come to box. Dog is released to go to box. When dog is half way to the box the door is opened. When dog gets to box he is given two retrieves or vigorous game of tug. Each dog gets 2 or 3 turns.

3. **Bark Alert (3) – Sessions 13 and 14** – Bark box is used. Box is closed. For each dog’s turn, door is opened, victim gives verbal cue, then box is closed, then dog is released to rush the box. When dog gets to closed door the victim continues giving verbal cues to excite the dog. At the first active movement from the dog, the first whine, the first scratch, or the first bite at the box, the door should immediately open and the dog get the reward. Each dog gets 2 or 3 turns. The handlers waiting their turn should remain vigilant at watching their dogs and quickly reward a bark by sticking a dummy in dog’s mouth and giving brief game of tug.

4. **Bark Alert (4) – Sessions 15 Thru 20** – Bark Box is used. Box is closed. Same drill as Bark Alert (3) except verbal cues are eliminated. Dog are sequentially released to rush the box. When they get there, wait until they bark or scratch, then open box and victim give 2 retrieves and much verbal praise. Each dog gets 2 or 3 turns. After session 17 wait for one or two barks before opening box and giving reward.

5. **Bark Alert (5) – Sessions 20 thru 26** – Use Bark barrel instead of bark box. For session 20 and 21 have victim give continuous verbal cues with door closed. When dog scratches or barks, door opens and dog gets 2 retrieves and much profuse verbal praise. From session 22 onward the victim should remain quiet except in the case of a dog that is slower in making the transition to no verbal cue.

**Combining Search and Bark Alert Behaviors**

Beginning with session 27 you will add the bark alert to the search behavior in the barrel field. Beginning with session 27 all the barrels doors will be closed. Your two runaway victims will run off making vigorous noise into the field and hide in barrels and close the doors. The first dog will be released to search. When the dog makes the first find, the victim should give a light verbal cue to insure a bark. When he gets the bark he should immediately open the door and energetically reward the dog. Then the handler comes up and takes dog a few feet away and sits him. Then the dog is released to find the second victim and when the dog finds the victim, the victim should give a light verbal cue to insure a bark. Upon the bark he opens door and energetically rewards dog. After session 27 the dog should need no more verbal cues from the victim to elicit a bark. If you do have a dog that has trouble making the transition then keep giving the cue, but wean him off of it as soon as possible.

**Transition to Rubble Pile**

After you have completed session 34 the dog is ready for the rubble pile. Move to a rubble pile. Continue the same pattern of at least two runaways for each exercise, so that the dog continues to be trained to always expect to find another victim. Do not have him find the same victim twice.

Do use the same rubble pile for the first few rubble sessions so that the dog builds an expectation of finding victims at that particular piece of geography.

The first few exercises should be set up for success. The victims should be a very short distance into the rubble and they should be placed upwind of a natural pathway that the dogs are likely to follow. After the first 3 or 4 rubble sessions if the dog is searching vigorously, you can
place the victims further into the rubble and thus make the search longer. Gradually make the search more difficult and thus longer in time duration, but always structure the exercise so that the dog is still in high gear when he finds the victim and gets the reward. Structure the rubble exercises like the barrel field searches by screening dogs and handlers so that they can see the victims run off toward the rubble but they cannot see where they hide. If the handler doesn’t know the victim’s location then he will learn to trust the dog, and the dog won’t learn to look to the handler for the minute cues that a handler gives off that telegraph the victim’s location.

After 6 to 8 rubble sessions your dog should be ready for the search portion of the FEMA certification test.