

Human Remains Detector Dogs

A Different Type of Investigator

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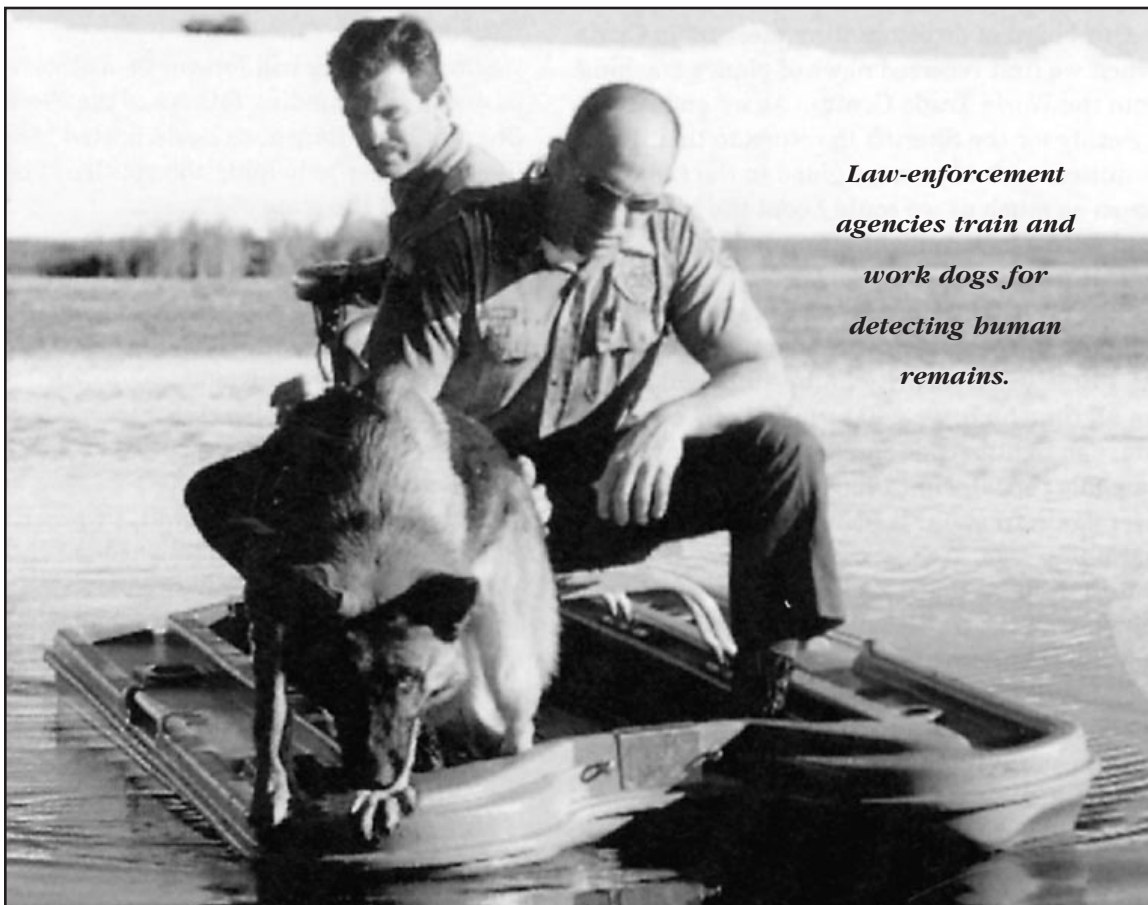
Florida is known as the state with great tasting orange juice, beautiful sandy beaches, and the country's largest national park—The Everglades (Which reveals the true meaning of the term God's Country).

But, Florida also has another side that tourism officials would just as soon you not know about – crime – and the unique situations people create when committing those crimes. Thankfully, though, our state has a secret weapon to address these situations: K-9 units. Miami-Dade Police Department (MDPD), which is a consolidated city/county law enforcement agency, is the largest police department in the southeastern United States and has one of the busiest K-9 units in the country.

For more than 25 years, the MDPD's K-9 teams have located explosives, illegal narcotics and—even—wanted persons. The teams have also assisted with the forfeiture of millions of dollars of currency and property. The number of requests received annually averages about 2,700.

Detecting human remains is a specialty. In 1995, MDPD became one of the first South Florida law-enforcement agencies to train and work dogs for detecting human remains. At the inception, one street patrol dog was cross-trained to include human remains and another was trained exclusively for this specialty.

During the first years, work was sporadic, as the dogs were mostly used for major crime scenes consisting of high-profile homicides, aviation accidents, cars that



Law-enforcement agencies train and work dogs for detecting human remains.

WANTED



RALPH TYRONE RICKS

Race: Black **Violation:**
Sex: Male Public
DOB: 9/4/53 Assistance
Ht.: 6' 1" Fraud-AFDC
Wt.: 194



LATISHA J. ROBINSON

Race: Black **Violation:**
Sex: Female VOP-Agg Dom
DOB: 6/29/72 Batt/deadly
Ht.: 5' 6" weapon
Wt.: 138



KHIANTI JOVAN ROSS

Race: Black **Violation:**
Sex: Male VOP-Battery/
DOB: 4/3/78 Domestic
Ht.: 5' 9" Violence
Wt.: 155



TAQUANA MASHAWN SIMMONS

Race: Black **Violation:**
Sex: Female WC-Obt
DOB: 12/6/81 Prop >\$150
Ht.: 5' 9"
Wt.: 137

crashed into waterways and missing person cases.

But, this law enforcement K-9 tool quickly became a proven asset, not only to the seasoned investigator but also to the uniformed officer on the street.

In the past, locating human remains was predominantly left up to the crime-scene and homicide investigators. Based on the information available, the search area would be defined.

Many tools, including shovels, rakes, metal detectors, pry tools, drills, investigative hunches and the visual senses, were put to use depending on the circumstances. The last tool that any human remains investigation should employ is heavy equipment – and it quite possibly should not be used at all. The reason is that it has the potential to create havoc and destroy a crime scene. Because of the large volume the equipment is able to move, it can also create situations where the remains and any other evidence could be damaged, or missed altogether by investigators.

The tool of balance is the Human Remains Detector Dog. It's no secret that a dog's sense of smell is many times stronger than that of humans. What makes this most valuable is the fact that something hidden can be detected strictly from its odor. When a particular odor is present, a competent dog will indicate it.

How it works

To illustrate, picture a wall outside of a house. What do you see? A wall. You might be able to imagine the wood or metal studs, plumbing or electrical pipes and insulation underneath. But you would

miss the fact that human remains are encased in that wall.

A K-9 sniffing along the wall, however, will most likely give an indication that human remains are within, and they can usually narrow the area where the odor is concentrated. This way, the wall can be dismantled with minimum destruction to the crime scene, and the remains recovered for further investigation.

In this very scenario, dogs have searched using minimal resources and minimal time. Without the dog, this search may take hours or days to complete and use lots of expensive resources.

Now, try to visualize that wall again and see the human remains – whether it be a body or pieces of it. Think about how the odor flows from it and settles in the seams and wall outlets.

Unless the wall and seams

are air tight, the odor will flow.

Certain conditions can enhance or retard the odor, though, which can make it difficult or even impossible for the dog to detect the remains.

Some of the factors that affect odor are:

- Time since death
- Method of death
- Items used to mask the odor
- Hot/cold temperatures
- Moist/dry environments
- Size/amount of remains

The human factor: Odor is what makes or breaks the success of a human remains detector dog. It's the handler's responsibility to give the dog every opportunity to search as many areas as possible for detection. They must determine the search area and decide what type of search should be

Dogs... Continued on page 13

NASSAU COUNTY

MISSING

Jessica
Ford



Age: 3
Height: 5' 6"
Weight: 220

Missing since:
NOVEMBER 13, 2001

You may remain anonymous.
Nassau County Sheriff's Office at

904-879-2009