

San Diego police unleash K-9 dog on handcuffed man

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15 July 2017

Karond Cheatum lay face down, shirtless and handcuffed behind his back, last Sunday afternoon, as police officers let loose a K-9 police dog on him. Two videos captured the incident and were subsequently posted on social media, sparking outrage. The footage has been shared and viewed over 3 million times since it was first posted last weekend.

Cheatum was left with a large wound on his arm as the dog clamped down on him for over 30 seconds. The officer issued no command for the dog to release his arm while Cheatum struggled to get the dog off.

Officers with the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) were sent downtown after a number of reports were called in about an individual acting erratically, jumping on cars, pulling stop signs from the ground and challenging individuals nearby to fight. Reports also accused Cheatum of punching a taxi driver and attempting to steal a motorcycle.

In the first video, the police confront Cheatum, with the officer holding the canine by the leash. The police dog pounces on top of Cheatum. He can be heard saying, “Okay! Okay!” while the officer simply yells at him, “Give me your hand!” while the dog is on top of him.

In the second video, the police dog can be seen latching onto Cheatum’s arm for at least 30 seconds. One bystander asks the police officers, “Why can’t you call your dog off?” Cheatum, anguished in pain, screams and shouts “Uncomfortable!” Two more officers appear in the video holding down the man’s legs. Once the canine is finally pulled off, the officers pat down Cheatum. There is no indication from the video that the police officers ask if he is okay or offer medical attention. (Both videos are included above).

Cheatum’s aunt spoke to the local NBC affiliate about her nephew. She said: “He has a history of

mental health issues; he’s been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. So yeah, if you’re living out on the street, how do we expect one to act?” According to the Regional Task Force on the Homeless, San Diego County is home to 9,116 homeless people, an increase of 5 percent over last year.

An SDPD spokesman was quick to cover the officer’s tracks and justify the attack on Cheatum. “While these videos can be graphic in nature to view, keep in mind our canines are extremely effective at de-escalating situations and preventing elevated levels of force to take people into custody,” San Diego police Lt. Scott Wahl said.

Nothing can be further from the truth. Rob Berman, a forensic expert who works on litigating dog bites, said: “The K-9 in this video malfunctioned. Once the suspect is subdued and in handcuffs the handler is supposed to release the dog, which may have happened here but to no avail. It is clear that the dog is not responding to his handler, who is trying to get the dog to release.” In the video another bystander can be heard telling the officers, “You guys got three guys versus one. You can’t get the dog off?” The officers respond with, “Hey, shut up! Get back!”

K-9 units around the world are trained for a “find-and-bark” approach, according to the International Association of Chiefs of Police. However, police dogs in the US are trained for a “find-and-bite” approach because barking has been deemed too “unrealistic.” This can cause serious harm to bystanders. In one example alone, in Pierce County, Washington, a police dog attacked a 53-year-old woman as it was tracking a suspect.

There are an untold number of disturbing videos of police officers in the US, without care or remorse, using dogs to attack the individuals they are pursuing.

Just last year, a San Diego police body camera was released showing a cop ordering a police dog to attack an unarmed naked man. The K-9 officer ordered the canine to attack without giving any warnings to the unarmed naked man, noting in his report that “due to the immediate threat I did not have an opportunity to give K-9 warnings,” and that the man, with clearly no visible weapon, “posed an immediate threat to officers due to the fact he was clinching his fist and walking towards them.” The police dog bit the man’s leg for more than 44 seconds and the city ended up paying \$385,000 to the man that was mauled.

The ability of K-9 officers to indiscriminately unleash their attack dogs was vindicated in a recent 10-1 ruling by the 9th US Circuit of Appeals. The court upheld the right of police officers to use police dogs to protect themselves from a potential threat.

The case was brought forward by Sara Lowry, who was bitten by a police dog after she fell asleep in her office building after going out for drinks with her co-workers. Lowry accidentally tripped a security alarm when she went to use the restroom.

Police officers arrived at the scene believing they were dealing with an active burglary. The officers released the dog to find the “suspect,” pouncing on Lowry as she was asleep on the couch, with the dog biting her through the lip.

The decision overturned an opinion reached last year by a three-person panel that ruled that the unleashing of the police dog could be considered a severe use of force and a jury should decide the case. In the dissenting opinion in the Circuit Court of Appeals, Chief Judge Sidney Thomas wrote, “Because a reasonable jury could find that the City of San Diego’s use of a police dog was unreasonable under the circumstances presented here, I must respectfully dissent.”



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