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NEWS

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Dog had attacked handler before

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A West Lafayette police officer attacked by his own canine Friday had been attacked by the dog before.

Tippecanoe County Sheriff Smokey Anderson shot and killed Fonske while the dog attacked Officer Jeff Dunscomb for no apparent reason during a bank robbery investigation in Battle Ground on Friday. Dunscomb yelled for Anderson to shoot the dog after it would not release him.

"For whatever reason that day, he had major aggression problems," Dunscomb said Monday night. "It's extremely, extremely rare for that to happen."

But according to city records, Fonske attacked Dunscomb on at least two other occasions -- one time in 2005, the other in April. One bite happened in training, while the other happened when Dunscomb was playing fetch with the dog, Dunscomb said.

In the April incident, Dunscomb suffered a broken arm.

Dunscomb said he was attempting to put flea drops on the dog during the April attack.

"We just kind of chalked it up to a self-defense mechanism for the dog," Dunscomb said. "It was just a real quick thing. It only lasted maybe 20 seconds or so and he came right off of me and came back over and tried to make friends."

The injuries from Friday's attack were less serious, Dunscomb said. He has several deep cuts and puncture wounds to both hands, but no broken bones or tendon damage.

Dunscomb said he plans to return to work Wednesday, and one of his first orders of business will be looking into replacing Fonske.

"We're checking with the insurance company now to see what kind of coverage we had on the dog," Dunscomb said.

It likely will cost about \$12,000 to buy and train a new dog, plus five to six weeks of Dunscomb's time training with the new canine.

Fonske underwent a necropsy -- an animal's form of an autopsy -- at Purdue University's Animal Diagnostic and Disease Center. It could take up to two weeks to get results, according to Capt. Mike Francis of WLPD.

A 4 1/2-year-old Belgian malinois, Fonske was born and initially trained in Holland, where he learned obedience,



(Journal and Courier file photo) West Lafayette K-9 officer Jeffrey Dunscomb and dog Fonske, Lafayette Police Officer Mark Roberts and Tippecanoe County Sheriff's Deputy Mick Gillen (right) search for a robbery suspect in 2004. Fonske was shot dead Friday after he turned on his handler, biting his hand.

Six other police dogs at work locally

Canine units in Tippecanoe County: West Lafayette Officer Jeff Dunscomb and his former dog Fonske are part of the Tippecanoe County Metro K9 Unit, which includes dogs and handlers from the Tippecanoe County Sheriff's Department, Lafayette Police Department and West Lafayette Police Department.

According to the unit's Web site, members work together at crime scenes around the county when they are needed.

Not including Dunscomb and Fonske, there are seven canine units in the county. Lafayette and the sheriff's department have three apiece. There's also one in Otterbein.

About the breed: According to dogbreedinfo.com, the Belgian malinois is smart, obedient, watchful, protective and territorial. It has a lot of energy and needs to be active. But some are known to be overly shy or overly aggressive.

For more online: For more information about the Tippecanoe County Metro K9 Unit, go online to www.city.west-lafayette.in.us/wjpd/police.html and click on the "Metro K-9" link on the left side of the page.

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tracking and bite work, the police department's Web site said.

Kennels of Denver, Ind., where he learned to detect drugs. He had been Dunscomb's partner for 2 1/2 years.

During that time, Dunscomb said, Fonske had been responsible for numerous drug seizures and had apprehended about 25 criminal suspects.

The executive director for the United States Police Canine Association was surprised at what happened.

"I've never heard of an incident where a dog had to be shot to get it off its handler," Russ Hess said.

Hess thinks something may have been wrong with Fonske, noting dogs can have mental issues and medical issues that might affect how they behave. Dunscomb has the same suspicion.

He said he's relieved the dog focused its aggression on its handler rather than one of the 20 to 25 civilians milling around the area of the robbery investigation.

"The fortunate thing is that I'm the one that got bit -- not another police officer or anyone else standing out there," Dunscomb said.

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