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BELFAST

PROCUREMENT OF SEMTEX H EXPLOSIVES FOR SPECIALIST SEARCH - DOG TRAINING

1. Following upon the arrival on the terrorist scene of Semtex H plastic explosive, steps were taken to train our Specialist Search Dogs in detection of the substance. The "qualities" of Semtex H ie pliable, safe to handle, and with very little smell, make it attractive to terrorist organisations and a headache to security forces. It is however possible to train dogs to detect the substance (some better than others) and to this end, the RUC are including Semtex in all initial and Refresher explosive courses carried out on our behalf.
2. With any explosive, (or drug) once the initial course is completed, handlers are issued with a small sample of the substances to enable them to keep their dog familiar with the smells involved. The secret of success in this field is regular (almost daily) training exercises, allowing the animal regular successes and rewards to maintain its motivation. Handlers are licenced accordingly.
3. Despite explaining our case carefully to the RUC, I have been unable to obtain the supply of Semtex H explosive to enable our handlers to maintain the standard achieved on Initial and Refresher Training (at 6 monthly intervals) courses. I have appended the relevant correspondence for your information.
4. The inability of the RUC to provide us with the substance is not due to any lapse on their part. As the correspondence shows, they do not have enough for their own, never mind for other agencies use. Quite simply, because Semtex is an illegal substance, there is no legal source for them to approach to obtain it.

5. The puzzling aspect of this situation is that the Army can and do obtain Semtex following incidents and finds both here and on the mainland. Why the RUC cannot obtain supplies from the Army, when they are in the front line facing devices made from Semtex is something of a mystery to me. What is quite clear however is that we cannot approach the Army direct, as present legislation demands that all movement of explosives within Northern Ireland must be controlled by and through the RUC explosives section.
6. Prompted by me, Principal Officer (Dog Handler) from HM Prison Maze has raised the matter through the local security committee and, obtained the support of the establishment for the procurement of Semtex H. As the PO points out, (report attached) circumstances dictate that, if explosives are to enter the prison, then Semtex is the natural choice. The unfortunate truth is that some 2-3 weeks after training, our dogs are no longer able to identify Semtex as they receive no practice whatsoever in its detection.
- Our flank is completely exposed from this point of view, and is set to remain so unless steps are taken to iron out whatever barriers there are to the release of quantities of Semtex to interested agencies. If the RUC position is as related by C.I. Rudovich, then it may be necessary for ministerial involvement to resolve the current state of affairs, and allow the RUC access to sufficient supply of the substance, or permit us direct access to Army sources. Until this happens, we have no effective defence against the entry of Semtex to our prisons.
7. As a step in the right direction, I would ask that Prison Security and Operations Divisions raise the matter at an early S.P.G. Meeting so that appropriate action can be taken.