

Reference: RN/AWRE/92A | S123

SPECIAL WEAPONS INCIDENT REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

Command and

(a) The following is a summary of the Commander control aspects of the "Incident" involving an RAF Special Weapons convoy in Helensburgh on Thursday 20 June 1985.

(b) The official RAF report has not been sighted but it is understood that a Load Carrier with two packaged Chevaline warheads on board ran into the back of an empty Load Carrier. The damage to the front vehicle was minimal but the vehicle with the weapons on board suffered shattered windscreens, damage to the front body work and the clutch and brake mountings were sheared off.

2. CHRONOLOGY (All times June 1985)

201317Z Accident occurred
201325Z [REDACTED] broadcast
201332Z Coulport informed that convoy had been re-directed to Faslane.
201338Z Convoy mobile.
201355Z Convoy arrived Faslane.
201611Z [REDACTED] signal sent by Comclyde.
201709Z [REDACTED] signal received in MOD.
201712Z [REDACTED] signal received in AFOR.
201718Z [REDACTED] received by MOD Police, AWRE.
201735Z Senior RAF Representative arrives AWRE.
201800Z By this time the Co-ordination Room at AWRE was manned by Dr [REDACTED] (DDP), Mr [REDACTED] (HWE) and the Duty Administrative Officer. It was agreed that the two weapons in their containers would be transferred to a serviceable Load Carrier.
201923Z Quarantine signal sent by AWRE. Never received by Coulport.
201932Z Convoy left Faslane.
201958Z Convoy arrived Coulport.
211437Z Signal from AWRE to Chief Engineer Coulport giving details of AWRE/ROF(B) staff being sent to witness on receipt inspection. Stores were verbally pronounced safe but not serviceable on Tuesday 25 June.
240800Z AWRE/ROF(B) representatives arrived Coulport to witness "on receipt" inspection.
241000Z [REDACTED] signal received by CINO after retransmission.
271042Z Signal report of the "on receipt" inspections carried out at RNAD.
271430Z Repeat of the lost 201923Z signal from AWRE.
281136Z Signal from Chev(Nuc)4 at AWRE confirming the stores are safe and specifying further inspection requirements for checking reliability.

3. COMMENT

Very little official information has been made available about this incident but the following comments would appear to be relevant:

(a) The MOD Police Duty Officer at AWRE did not receive the [REDACTED] message by telephone in accordance with Air Force Operations SOP 209 paragraph 3d (reference 1).

(b) SOP 209 does not require the RAF Duty Officer to inform any naval department in the event of an "Incident", even if a naval weapon is involved.

(c) The SIC IEL used in OLDHAM and [REDACTED] signals calls for a different distribution when used by each of the three services and the Central Staffs (reference 2). The only naval authority on the RAF SIC IEL is DNOT. The Duty Commander in DNOT is therefore the only person able to alert appropriate naval authorities such as DTS(WE)/CINO; indeed, this is the correct route. It is also noted that AFOR is not on the distribution of the naval SIC IEL.

(d) Some signals sent to RNAD Coulport were either never received or delayed because they were incorrectly addressed. A signal addressed to COMCLYDE with SIC IEL is not distributed to RNAD(C). Specifying "For Chief Engineer Coulport" in the first line of the text may make little difference as the communications staff work to the SIC and do not necessarily read the text.

(e) CLYSO 07 Part IV (reference 3) does not call for NOIO Coulport or any appropriate member of his staff to be called out as the weapons specialist in an "Accident/Incident" situation.

(f) A revised Naval Nuclear Accident Alerting List has been issued under cover of reference 4 and although this is an improvement on the outdated list issued by DS16 on 24 February 1984 there are still some improvements that can be made. The main points concern the order of call out and there is conflict here between the reactor and weapon requirements.

(g) The detailed action to be taken in the event of an "Incident" is difficult to define because the scope is so great. For example, an event in which a Load Carrier knocks down a pedestrian in Helensburgh, where the vehicles are well known for what they are, would undoubtedly attract the attention of the news media and the CND, but require minimal technical response from the MOD. Whereas another event in a remote part of the country may border on being an "Accident" and demand immediate technical advice and a subsequent visit by a small specialist team to confirm weapon safety.

(h) In any "Accident/Incident" there is an initial tendency to under-report the severity of the situation. This stems from a natural reluctance to initiate a large call-out before the seriousness of the situation is assessed and possibly also for security reasons. However an assessment may take time unless there has been a serious fire or explosion when the severity is obvious.

(i) In the Helensburgh "Incident" the question of transferring the stores from the damaged Load Carrier to a serviceable vehicle was discussed with AWRE and approval given. However, the Convoy Commander, who is the Incident Commander at this stage, is under no obligation to seek such advice and approval in the case of an "Incident". In the case of an "Accident" MOD (CERN) approval must be obtained before a store is moved from the accident site.

(j) The issue of Change 8 to BR 4022, Naval Nuclear Weapon Accident Procedures (reference 5), is imminent. It is therefore difficult to propose any amendments to this publication until the change is received.

4. CONCLUSIONS

(a) Although AWRE is an "information" addressee on the [REDACTED] signal the Air Force Operations Room should telephone the AWRE MOD Police Duty Officer as a backup.

(b) The Air Force Operations Room should inform DNOT if there is an "Accident/Incident" involving naval weapons or weapons destined for the naval service.

(c) DNOT must have clear instructions on whom to inform if there is an "Accident/Incident" involving naval weapons in RAF custody. This is unlikely to be such an extensive list as an "Accident/Incident" under naval command and control.

(d) The AFOR should be included in the distribution for the naval SIC IEL.

(e) Signals intended for RNAD(C) should be addressed to RNAD and not COMCLYDE if they are to arrive expeditiously. Inclusion of RNAD(C) on the COMCLYDE SIC IEL would reduce the scope for error.

(f) NOIO Coulport or a trained member of his staff should be called out to advise under these circumstances. This is particularly relevant when the stores concerned are being admitted to Naval Establishments.

(g) The Convoy Commander, acting as the Incident Commander, must take all necessary first aid action to ensure the safety and security of the weapons. He must also make the vital decision as to whether he has an "Accident" or an "Incident". It is very difficult to be specific as to how far he should be allowed to go on his own initiative.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS


(a) The Director of Weapon and Support Engineering (RAF) should be asked to include DNOT in the call out lists in paragraphs 3 and 4 of SOP 209 for "Incidents" involving naval weapons or stores destined for the naval service.

(b) The actions to be taken by DNOT should be reviewed to ensure that the appropriate naval departments are informed. Amendments and amplifications should be made to reference 4 so that DNOT has clear instructions to cover the following situations:

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- (i) An Accident involving naval weapons in naval custody.
 - (ii) An Incident involving naval weapons in naval custody.
 - (iii) Accident involving naval weapons in RAF custody.
 - (iv) An Incident involving naval weapons in RAF custody.
 - (v) Accident involving weapons in RAF custody in a situation in which the navy would have command and control eg the loss of RAF weapons in the sea.
- (c) The naval SIC IEL in the MOD should be amended to include the Air Force Operations Room.
- (d) RNAD(C) should be included on COMCLYDE's distribution for SIC IEL.
- (e) CLYSO 07 part IV (reference 3) should be amended to include the call out of NOIO Coulport or his representative for any "Accident/Incident" in which COMCLYDE's organisation is involved. A proposed amendment is currently circulating within CINO. *Do we have this?*
- (f) Guidelines should be prepared for any Incident Commander, either RN or RAF, to stabilise and secure the situation. A small meeting should be called to examine how far this action should extend eg transferring the weapons from one vehicle to another after an "Incident".


Commander RN(Retd)

Ext 5081

D29

6 November 1985

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REFERENCES

1. Air Force Operations SOP 209. (copy attached)
2. Subject Indicator Code (SIC) IEL - distribution list. (copy attached)
3. CLYSO 07 Part IV.
4. D/ACDA (Pol/Nuc)/211/1/10 dated 20 August 1985 - Naval Nuclear Accident Alerting List.
5. BR4022 - Naval Nuclear Weapon Accident Procedures.

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