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Exchange programme for experts in the
field of civil protection and environmental
emergencies

FIRE BRIGADE OPERATIONS DURING CIVIL DISTRESS

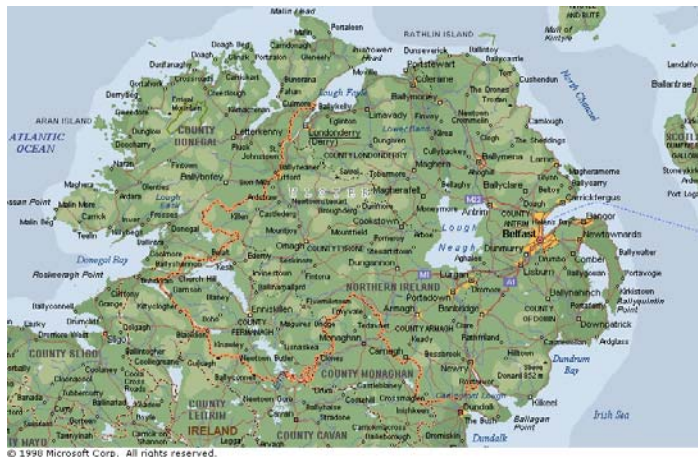
Introduction

The purpose of the visit was to study fire brigade operations during civil distress. Emphasising on tactics on the fire ground and safety for the personal during these operations. My previous experience in this field is a visit to Los Angeles Fire Department –94 after the riots following the verdict in the Rodney King trial. LAFD faced a four days ordeal with numerous fires and a serious safety risk for their staff during operations. One fire fighter, Scott Miller, was seriously injured by gunshots and several apparatus shot at.

Northern Ireland Fire Brigade, NIFB, faces a different type of incidents due to the political situation in Northern Ireland. The peace agreement, still in affect, is having a calming effect on the situation. The visit therefore came to concentrate more on to Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), '77' situations. The number of bomb incidents confronted by NIFB must be more than any other single fire brigade in Europe giving them a unique experience.

Despite the number of incidents during the 30 years of disturbance no standing order was issued until early 1990s. The approach was developed through experience gained in live incidents and common sense during this period. The Officer in charge made his own decision on the tactic to be used in each incident. The Standing Operations Procedure, SOP, later written was based on the experience from previous incidents and therefore well known and easily adapted in the field.

Northern Ireland, background of the conflict



Northern Ireland is also known as Ulster, because it comprises six of the nine counties that constituted the former Irish province of Ulster. The total land area of Northern Ireland is 13,483 sq km

(5,206-sq mi). Belfast is the capital of Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has a population (mid-1994 official estimate) of about 1,641,700, almost equally divided between urban and rural dwellers. The average population density is about 121 people per sq km (315 per sq mi), but the actual distribution of the population is very uneven; about 50 per cent of people in Northern Ireland are settled on the eastern coastal region, the centre of which is Belfast.

Principal Cities

The port of Belfast (population, 1995 estimate, 296,700) is Northern Ireland's largest city and cultural, commercial, and industrial centre, as well as its capital. The only other major city is Londonderry (also known as Derry; 72,334), located at the head of Lough Foyle near the northwestern border with Donegal.

Religion

Religion, or rather religious affiliation, has been the key determinant in Northern Ireland's history, politics, and social life since the 17th century. At various times it has determined access to the franchise and jobs, standards of living, and education. In modern times it has come to symbolise the differing political aspirations of the descendants of the original Irish inhabitants and those of the settler community, differences which in the 1970s escalated into sectarian violence and terrorism.

The descendants of the Scottish and English settlers are predominantly Protestant; those of the original Irish inhabitants are overwhelmingly Roman Catholic. In the late 1990s around 58 per cent of the population regarded themselves as Protestant, and around 42 per cent as Roman

Catholics. Roman Catholicism is the largest single denomination. The largest Protestant denominations are Presbyterian (21 per cent), the Church of Ireland (almost 17 per cent), and Methodist (4 per cent). Unlike England and Scotland, Northern Ireland has no established, or state, Church. The Church of Ireland, at one time a branch of the Church of England, was disassociated from it in 1871.

Partition of Ireland

In 1920, when Ireland was granted home rule, six of the nine counties of the province of Ulster, northernmost of the four Irish provinces, were given the opportunity to separate politically from the rest of Ireland and remain part of the United Kingdom. Under the Government of Ireland Act of 1920, which affected the partition of Ireland, the six counties became a separate political division of the United Kingdom, known as the province of Northern Ireland, with its own constitution, parliament, and administration for local affairs. The Irish Free State (later Éire, and now the Republic of Ireland) did not accept the separation as permanent, and the reunification of the island remained an element of the constitution until the referendum of May 1998.

The Protestant majority in Northern Ireland has consistently refused to consider a reunion. The boundary between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was fixed in 1925. Most people in Northern Ireland saw partition from the Roman Catholic south and union with the United Kingdom as the safeguard of their Protestant religion and dominant political, economic, and social position. For many Irish Catholics, the creation of Northern Ireland was simply the latest of a very long line of British injustices inflicted upon the people of Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement

In October 13, 1997, the Sinn Fein leaders met the new British prime minister, Tony Blair, for the first time at Stormont Castle, and on December 9 at Downing Street—the first Republican encounters with a British premier since Michael Collins negotiated the partition of Ireland in 1921. In January 1998 Sinn Fein formally rejected the British and Irish governments' new proposals for a settlement and the next phase of the talks was marred by wrangling and by a series of Republican and Loyalist killings. These were succeeded by various Republican bomb attacks in the North during March and April, some of which were attributed to a breakaway faction, Continuity IRA, comprising dissidents who are believed to have left the IRA in October 1997.

After Sinn Fein's brief suspension because of the attacks, it rejoined the now round-the-clock talks in late March and all parties were presented with a deadline of April 9 for completion. Several days of frantic activity

between the Irish and British governments and all parties finally led to the agreement, signed by the Irish and the British prime ministers, on Good Friday, April 10, 1998.

Irish Referendums

The Irish government was bound by the Stormont Agreement to hold a referendum to amend Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution, which laid territorial claim to the North, and to allow the proposed new North-South bodies to exercise powers on the island of Ireland. This referendum was held in the Republic on May 22, the same day as the referendum in the North; the result in the Irish Republic was an overwhelming 94.39 per cent vote in favour of the agreement.

In Northern Ireland's referendum, over 71 per cent of voters endorsed the agreement; a clear majority of Unionists taking part in the referendum voted "Yes", despite the efforts of the "No" campaign's leaders, most notably Ian Paisley. The Unionist vote was 54 per cent to 46 per cent in favour. There was a turnout of almost 81 per cent, higher than at any election and surpassing all expectations.

Northern Ireland Fire Brigade

The visit was going to emphasise on fire brigade operations during civil disturbance. During the four-day visit I came to be introduced to all departments of Northern Ireland fire brigade. This was beneficial to me for the overall understanding of the routines used in fire brigade operations during these circumstances.

Northern Ireland has a population (mid-1994 official estimate) of about 1,641,700. NIFB operates 67 stations, 8 whole time, 6 whole time/retained, and 52 retained and one volunteer station (Rathlin Island). With an on duty staff (wholetime) of 120 manning 20 pumps 6 turntable ladders, and 980 retained fire fighters divided into four watches. Head quarters are in Lisburn, Belfast with the control room for Northern Ireland. The budget for the fire brigade 1999/2000 is £48,500,000 per annum £25 per person. Northern Ireland fire brigade responded to, in 1998, 30'968 calls

The city of Stockholm has a population of 736,000 with a budget for the fire brigade of £14,000,000 per annum and £19 per person. Stockholm fire brigade operates 9 stations with an on duty staff of 74 manning 14 pumps/rescue tenders 7 turntable ladders and 7 special apparatus for the SCUBA-team, Haz-mat, water tanker and a container system for Breathing apparatus, large scale incidents etc. Stockholm fire brigade responded to 8'500 calls.

Fire Brigade operations

Northern Ireland fire brigade has developed a strategy on how to respond to Improvised Explosive Devices, IEDs, '77' situations and Civil Disturbance '88' situations. The strategy is formed by the experience gathered since the beginning of the disturbance in the early 70s. No SOP was written until the early 90s. Up to then where each incident handled by the Officer in charge. The tactics used was depending on his personal experience. The number of IEDs in Northern Ireland, responded to by the ammunition technical officer, ATO, has decreased from approximately 1500 incidents per annum to approximately 500 incidents a year during current peacetime. The fire brigade responded to the following numbers of IEDs, in -96 to 267 incidents, in -97 to 4 incidents and in -98 11 incidents, where bomb detonated. This is a significant decline in incidents during the peacetime. The number of civil disturbance calls responded to dropped in 1997 and returned back up again in 1998, in -96 1'983 incidents, in -97 798 incidents and in -98 1'55 incidents. The author can not verify if this increase is in any way connected to the referendum held in 1998.

The Fire Brigade does NOT respond to all '77' incidents, there might not be any exposures, threats to lives or fire threats. The fire brigade only respond to incidents where they can carry out specific tasks e.g. fire fighting, rescue, preventing escalation of the incident.

The Fire Brigade is not always on standby in a '77' or '88' incident, by not standing by at incidents where they will not be needed also helps the brigade to remain neutral in the conflict. Will also refrain them to be too much associated with Police and considered a legitimate target. This also includes not staging together at incidents for the same reasons and to enable the Fire Brigade to assist in case the Police or Army is attacked.

The ATO Ammunition Technical Officer with his team always responds to IEDs to defuse or deactivate eventual device. A pattern of secondary devices where later implemented to maim the Police and Army. The practise also affected the Fire service injuring firemen at the scene. To calm the bystanders who where often affected by the incident, they where actively used in the rescue operation cleaning out the debris in search for victims. The instant removal of victims from the scene to calm the viewers and not create more aggravation, a manner even the police has agreed upon. These are praxis that would be considered unconventional for Sweden.

There is no personal protection, flak jackets, given to the staff prior responding to a 77 or 88 incident like in LA -92 where all were issued

body armour. In incidents where the Fire Brigade doesn't feel the Police are in full control they adapt a defensive mood. Sending an officer's car to make an assessment and evaluate the threat and the likelihood of fire extension. This can even include negotiating with the crowd to gain access to the area for the Fire Brigade to enable them to carry out their duties. There are incidents where the Fire Brigade can respond with no lights and horns and are able to perform their duties, where the Police cannot go. Certain areas might only have one entrance/ exit which creates a security problem, they can get attacked on their way in and after extinguishing the fire also being attacked on their way out. The feeling today is however that the Fire Brigade are not deliberately attacked it is more to be considered as kid mischief. There has been only one Fireman (subspecialty) deliberately attacked and killed during the conflict, two other firemen were killed in 1971 when a building collapsed after a fire. One Fireman where killed by the injuries he received in a bomb incident with a secondary device in 1979. There has been incident where the Fire Brigade has been asked to leave the scene either by force or threats from bystanders. Even at one occasion has the machinery and the firemen been abducted and the apparatus burnt out.

Northern Ireland Fire Brigade reflect the society as a whole with staff from all groups of the population, this have however not been to any disadvantage for the fire service on the ground. The people accept them as professionals when in uniform and performing their duty. To care for themselves the team avoids using the real names of crewmembers when in the "wrong" area. Some names can identify that person as being a member of a particular community.

Contingency plans for the marching season, July and August have been developed to meet the increased number of incidents. The marching season commences with a number of bon fires throughout the city in empty parking lots.

Conclusion

Through the live experience and the developed praxis that came in to use during the height of the disturbance. A SOP was developed and later written and put in practice; the SOP is well known and accepted due to the fact it originates from the field. The common sense and uncomplicated approach of the SOP makes it more likely to be implemented in the field. The unconventional approach of writing the SOP after the practise is well in use could provide an enhanced SOP that are adhered better to by the crews, but must be considered a unconventional approach from a Swedish standpoint. NIFB have only been suffering a few losses despite the number of incidents, depending on their professional approach and the

always-present good luck some close calls are inevitable in the line of duty.

The program presented to me did not only cover the problems with incidents during civil disturbance but also an overall view of Northern Ireland fire brigade. The exchange very well met my expectations with experienced and professional colleagues chairing their knowledge. It is vital to do some research and having, at least, a basic knowledge prior to the visit. I myself have been following the Northern Ireland development through media for some time giving me an enhanced profit from the stay. This enabled me to better understand why NIFB operated, in above situations, the way they do. The length of the stay was in this case sufficient but could be improved by choosing a better time for the visit, i.e. when the marching season is in progress throughout Northern Ireland.

The procedures adhered to by NIFB could easily be implemented to other fire brigades to enhance safer procedures for the staff. An exchange between fire brigades in Europe, and other parts of the world, should be a regular occurrence to allow an exchange of experience and to implement similar safety procedures if possible. This when we are all part of EU and a globalisation of the world where news travels easily around the world affecting all of us. One example is the capture of the PKK leader in Nairobi this year.

Sven Johnson

Stockholm Fire Brigade

Appendix

Map Northern Ireland Fire Brigade

SOP '88` situations

SOP '77` situations

Interlocutors**Northern Ireland Fire Brigade****NIFB**www.IFE.ORG.UKsyssupp@bt.internet.com

NIFB HQ

Assistant Divisional Officer	Nobby Clark	NIFB
	host, Brigade HQ	
Fire Control Officer	Tom Nelson	
	Brigade HQ Control room	
Leading Fire Control Operator	Alan Crawford	
	Brigade HQ System Support	
Assistant Divisional Officer	William Clark	
	Brigade HQ	
Sub Officer	Robbie Bryson	
	Brigade HQ (police, A-div)	
Divisional Officer	Issac King	A-Div
Sub Officer	Barney Bannon	A-Div
	(tour of Belfast)	
Divisional Officer	Alan Lyle	A-Div
	Head of training Div	
Assistant Divisional Officer	Kenneth Leatham	
	Brigade training Centre	
Divisional Officer	Don MacKay	E-Div

Military 321 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Squadron, Royal Logistics Corps

Major

Chris Snaith

Senior Ammunition Technical Officer

Royal Ulster Constabulary (Police department)**RUC**

Sergeant

Ronnie Matthews

Operational planning Chief Inspector

Chief Inspector

Jimmy Ó Brien

Conflict Management