

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CABINET  
BY THE HON. PRIME MINISTER

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CLEARANCE OF EXPLOSIVES  
AFTER THE WITHDRAWAL OF BRITISH UNITS

As Ministers probably know, unexploded wartime missiles are still being found, mainly in the sea around Malta but particularly in the Grand Harbour, and occasionally on land.

2. Responsibility for the clearance of these missiles and their disposal rests with the British Services. The Royal Navy Clearance Diving Team looks after missiles found in or on the seabed, whilst a small team of Royal Engineers constitutes the Bomb Disposal Squad whose task is to dispose of or render harmless any explosive object brought to light as a result of building, road making, etc., anywhere in Malta and Gozo.

3. Both these units will eventually disappear in the course of the rundown. The R.N. Team is being retained in Malta until 1972 (and the utmost pressure is being put on the Naval authorities to ensure that the port, and particularly the waters adjoining service establishments due to be surrendered, is thoroughly swept), whilst the Bomb Disposal Squad will probably go in 1970, when the Royal Engineers (Malta) are due to be disbanded.

4. However the risk of unexploded missiles continuing to be discovered after 1972 cannot be excluded and the Government Committee on Ports has strongly recommended that consideration be given now to the possibility of training personnel from the Civil Defence Corps, the Police Force or the Royal Malta Artillery for this task, so that Government might have its own independent organization to provide this essential service, when the British units are no longer available. The Committee's recommendation is supported by the Ministry of Finance, Customs and Port.

5. Consideration has been given to the Committee's recommendation, to which may be added the further possibility of engaging the services of a contractor. Briefly, the conclusions are as follows:-

- (a) with regard to Civil Defence, the full-time personnel are not getting any younger and age alone would rule them out for what could be a tricky, arduous and dangerous job;

/(b).....

- (b) as to the Police, it is not usual for a Police Force to undertake this sort of task, and they already have enough to do as it is;
- (c) on the reasonable assumption that between now and the date the British unit leaves, the number of explosives still undetected will have been reduced considerably, it would hardly be economical to retain and pay for the services of a contractor to meet a progressively diminishing need;
- (d) the regular unit of the RMA which, by October, 1970, will be under Government control, would be somewhat under employed in peace time, and this is the sort of task which they can reasonably be expected to assume, as is done by the Army in other countries.

6. The Commander, MLF, has investigated the implications of (d), and his full report and recommendations are attached at appendix 'A'. As a result of discussion with the Commander, it appears that it would be possible for those personnel selected for the proposed squad to be given the necessary training without charge to the Malta Government. As to the equipment referred to in paragraph 8(e) of appendix 'A', it is not known at this stage what British intentions are, and it would probably be a matter for negotiation with the British authorities who could either be induced to leave the equipment here eventually, on the basis that we are having to assume a responsibility which would normally have remained their own, or else to hand over the equipment at a nominal figure. With regard to the proposed use of some personnel of the R.E. (Malta), it has been pointed out to the Commander that Government has no commitment towards this unit as such, and that we cannot, at this stage, contemplate taking on more men than the estimated number of RMA personnel whom we may have to retain after September 1970. Certainly it would be invidious to enter into a commitment with some R.E. personnel and disregard the majority. The Commander appreciates all this, and it would be sufficient for planning purposes for him to know whether the Government agrees in principle that (a) the clearance of explosives should eventually become a Malta Government responsibility on the withdrawal of the British units, and (b) if so, whether the task should be given to the regular RMA unit.

7. Ministers are kindly requested to consider the above and to record their views.

17th October, 1968.

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EXPLOSIVE ORDNANCE DISPOSALIntroduction

1. The Flag Officer Malta recently wrote to this Headquarters on the subject of Explosive Ordnance Disposal. His letter was prompted by the fact that while the Royal Navy Clearance Diving Team was due to be withdrawn from Malta in March 69, the Navy Department had now agreed to his recommendation that, as the work of the team would not be completed by then, a smaller team should remain in Malta until 1972. This would allow ample time for the successors to the team to be trained.

2. The work of the Royal Navy Clearance Diving Team, which is frequently featured in the news, is to clear all known underwater concentrations of wartime explosives, the destroyer "Jersey" being a case in point, and also to carry out sweeps of harbour and offshore waters for similar and uncharted explosives.

3. FOM also stated in his letter to us that the Port Committee are considering recommending that responsibility for this task should eventually pass to the Police, Civil Defence, or the Royal Malta Artillery, and that the transfer of responsibility should take place by not later than 1972.

4. As a result of FOM's letter, this HQ investigated the problem of e.o.d. on land prior to referring the matter to you. The problem is very much the same. A small team of Royal Engineers constitutes the Bomb Disposal Squad, whose task is to dispose of or render harmless any explosive object brought to light as a result of building, road making etc. anywhere on these islands. This team will undoubtedly be removed in the course of the Services Rundown.

Situation up to 1970/72

5. The situation may therefore be summarised as follows:-

- a. Offshore A small RN team will continue to clear charted concentrations of explosives and at the same time carry out a sweep to the 20 fathom line, charting all the areas cleared.
- b. On land The present Royal Engineers Disposal Squad (One UK officer and 12 LEP) will continue to operate until sometime in 1970, when, due to the run out of LEP, the squad will presumably disband.

Situation after 1970/72

6. During the period 1970-72 the offshore aspect of clearance will present no problem due to the continued presence of the RN team. However, the problem of land clearance during this period appears to be unresolved at this stage.

7. After 1972, with the withdrawal of the RN team, the problem of offshore and land disposal will pass to the Malta Government, if the proposed recommendation of the Port Committee is accepted.

Future organisation and training

8. Assuming that the Malta Government does take on the responsibility for explosives clearance, an organisation able to carry out this task on land and underwater will have to be set up. My recommendations for the setting up of this organisation are as follows:-

- a. Composition The organisation should consist of two identical teams, each composed of:-
  - 1 officer
  - 1 Senior NCO
  - 5 men
- b. Initial Training All personnel would require eight weeks training in skin diving, followed by a four to five weeks course at the Services Disposal School in the UK.
- c. Follow-up Training Initial training would be followed up by a period of attachment of about six months with the Royal Navy Clearance Team, and a shorter period with the Army Bomb Disposal Squad. This would be a most important phase of their training, during which they would be gaining confidence and familiarising themselves with the work, in the company of experienced personnel.
- d. Scope On the assumption that the Royal Navy team will have cleared all known underwater explosives by 1972, and that the Army team already operates "on call", it is envisaged that the two teams would operate only "on call", i.e. to dispose of reported explosives rather than to search for them.
- e. Equipment The amount of equipment required for the task is not great, and is to be found in Malta now. It is safe to assume that all of it could be acquired on taking over the task. The main items are:-

(1) Underwater disposal

- Skin diving equipment
- Air cylinder recharging plant
- Explosives
- Decompression chamber
- Boats.

(Note: It would in any case be prudent to assume responsibility for the decompression chamber, as underwater mishaps ("bends") are certain to occur with the ever increasing popularity of aqua-lung diving.

(2) Land Disposal

Metal detectors  
 Bomb locator  
 Explosive steaming plant  
 Non-ferrous tools and miscellaneous  
 equipment  
 One vehicle.

f. Manpower Sources Because this task calls for the younger man, the teams would in the main be recruited, on a voluntary basis, from the age bracket 25-35. There is however, a number of Maltese trained in bomb disposal and shallow water diving in the Royal Engineers, who would fit in this age bracket. I strongly recommend that their services should not be lost.

g. Time Scale Assuming that the Royal Engineers Bomb Disposal Squad will cease to exist as such after April 1970 and accepting the need for familiarisation attachments, the time scale for setting up the organisation would be:-

- |     |                        |   |                 |   |          |
|-----|------------------------|---|-----------------|---|----------|
| (1) | Attachment to RE BDG   | - | 1 Jan-31 Mar 70 | - | 13 weeks |
| (2) | Attachment to RN CT    | - | 1 Jul-31 Dec 69 | - | 26 weeks |
| (3) | Disposal Course UK     | - | May/June 69     | - | 5 weeks  |
| (4) | Skin diving training   | - | Mar/Apr 69      | - | 8 weeks  |
| (5) | Selection of personnel | - | Feb 69.         |   |          |

Recommendation

9. On the basis of the foregoing and if the principle is accepted that responsibility for clearance and disposal of explosive devices will pass to the Malta Government, I recommend that the task, which by tradition and usage, falls to one of the fighting services, should be given to the regular element of the Malta Land Force.

10. The manpower increment necessary to cover this task would be minimal because our draft establishments for the regular force already include an element of combat engineers, who are an obvious choice for the task and of the balance, a number would be drawn from regimental duty.

11. If the time scale recommended above is agreed, then it becomes apparent that an early decision is necessary, since additional time will be required to plan the organisation in detail, and furthermore, the approval of the Army Department would have to be sought to employ RMA and RE personnel on this task during the transitory period up to 30 September 1970.

12. May I please be informed at an early date whether
- a. The Government is prepared to assume responsibility for disposal of explosives on land and offshore, as appears inevitable.
  - b. My recommendation is agreed.
  - c. The approval of the Army Department should be sought for the training of R&A and RE in these tasks during the transitory period, with a view to assuming responsibility for clearance of explosive devices as follows:-
    - (1) On land - Apr or Oct 70.
    - (2) Offshore - 1972, on withdrawal of team from RN.

Commander  
Malta Land Force