

Incident in relation to Unexploded Ordnance at the Luqa Runway Extension in Malta 1974.

A transcription of documents held at the RE Museum Archives.

Document 1.

The Commander British Forces Malta
BFPO 51

Reference CBFM/1000/2. Dated 15 July 1974 date stamped HQ 33 Engr Regt (EOD) 23 July 1974.

Unexploded Ordnance at the Luqa Runway Extension.

References:

- A. BHC Valletta Telegram to FCO No 185 of 2 July 1974.
 - B. MALSEC 13 DIG KYP of 031400Z Jul 74
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- 1. Arising from the request of the Malta Government reported in Reference A for assistance with the location and clearance of unexploded ordnance at the Luqa runway extension, a British Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team, consisting of a Warrant Officer, one Corporal and two Sappers carried out a reconnaissance of the site between 7 and 12 July 1974. The team worked in conjunction with the Armed Forces of Malta and in consultation with Mr Farrugia, Technical Secretary to the Minister of Public Buildings and Works, Mr Bucci, Officer in Charge of Project, and Mr Scicluna, the site Foreman.
 - 2. The following main points arise from the report which has been submitted to CBFM by the EOD team leader, WOII Kibble of 33 Engineer Regiment (EOD):
 - a. The total area involved amounts to about 300 acres which fall into two main categories:
 - 1. Category A. About 75 acres consisting of either virgin soil or recently disturbed ground. Of this about one acre is covered by a pile of topsoil destined for future dispersal and about 10 acres by an asphalt plant.
 - 2. Category B. About 225 acres of either bedrock or ground which has been excavated to bedrock then back-filled with quarried rock and rubble from other parts of the site.
 - b. The present resource available for the search of the area are limited to one Forster Bomb Locator owned by the Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) and operated by AFM personnel. A further three Forster Bomb Locators have been promised by the Italian Army, but it is not known when these will arrive. In anticipation of their arrival, more operators are being trained.
 - c. The Warrant Officer in charge of the British EOD team is of the opinion that it is improbable that any bomb could penetrate rock beyond its own length without leaving a visible trace. He therefore considers that the area referred to as Category B in paragraph 2A need not be searched other than visually. It can also be assumed that bedrock which has been back-filled is free from unexploded ordnance since they would have been discovered during the process of back-filling.
 - d. The estimated search capacity of one Forster Bomb Locator, taking into account the state of training of the new operators and the difficulty of the terrain, is about ½ acre per day: with experience this should reach about ¾ acre a day. When the promised Italian bomb locators are in operation, and sufficient operators have been trained, the total estimated daily coverage could be between 2 and 3 acres. However, if bombs are located and have to be dealt with, or other snags are met (e.g. unserviceability of equipment), these figures could be greatly reduced.
 - e. The Forster Bomb Locators will inevitably require expert maintenance, facilities for which are known to exist in the United Kingdom and Germany (and, presumably, Italy). To minimise delays caused through unserviceability, arrangements should be made for unserviceable equipment's to be backlogged for quick repair or replacement.
 - f. There would appear to be two main options open to the Malta Government:

To confine the search to the area referred to as Category A.

- 1. To confine the search to the area referred to as Category A.

2. To Search the whole 300-acre area, i.e. Categories A and B.

- g. Based on the estimates in sub paragraph d, the minimum time needed to complete the task from the time all four locators are in full operation would be:
 1. Category A area – 40 working days, plus any extra time needed to remove the pile of topsoil referred to in paragraph 2a (1) to enable the ground underneath to be searched. Clearance of the ground occupied by the asphalt plant cannot be undertaken until the plant ceases operation and closes down (presumably when the requirement for asphaltting the runway has been completed).
 2. The whole area (Categories A and B) -150 working days, to which must be added the time to remove the back filling in the Category B area in order to enable the rock underneath to be searched: it is impossible to estimate the extra time and cost involved, but both are bound to be considerable. For a complete search of the whole area, some site administration buildings have to be removed. In addition, the existence of the two runway underpass tunnels (since they are constructed of reinforced concrete) will affect the readings of the search instruments.

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Main Building
Whitehall.
London
SW1A 2 HB

Hidden copy to 33 Engineer Regiment (EOD)

Document 2.

Luqa Runway Extension -Malta.

Task.

1. To search, locate and dispose of any bombs in an area of approx. 55 acres on the Luqa Runway Extension.

Method.

2. Bedrock is at a depth of not more than 8 ft from the surface therefore there is no requirement to search below this depth. The search can be carried out by a surface sweep using Forester 5015 locators.
3. An are search requires more manpower than the disposal of the bomb which once located requires to be exposed and demolished in situ. Disposal of any bombs is not considered further.

Requirements.

4. Manpower. To enable the work to be completed as soon as possible with the minimum disruption to normal operational tasks of 33 Engr Regt (EOD), it is suggested that six weeks work should be considered as the ideal length of the task. To complete the task in this time two shifts must be worked requiring the following manpower.

OIC Task 1
SNCO IC shift (1 per shift) 2
Cpl IC search team (2 per shift) 4
Sapper Instrument operator (4 per shift) 8
Admin NCO 1
Total British military requirements 1 + 15.

5. Additional outside assistance is required as below;
EOD trained instrument operator (Maltese?) 8
Non-EOD -Trained personnel as tape men (local labour) 8

The additional instrument operators are requested to duplicate the Spr operators as it is impossible to work a locator continually for a full shift.

Instruments.

6. All instruments used should be from 33 Engr Regt (EOD) AND THE Maltese instruments considered as a reserve.
7. The requirement indicated in para 4 above is for 4 x 4015s. Since these instruments will be working 14-16 hours a per day a 50% back up is required.
Total number of instruments required 6.

8. Repair facilities do not exist on Malta and agreement should be obtained to fly U/S instruments to the UK for replacement.

Conclusion.

9. Requirements are for 1 Officer and 15 Ors who are EOD trained, 6 x Forester 4015 locators plus locally employed EOD and non-EOD trained personnel for a minimum period of six weeks.

Document 3.

CBFM/1000/2

EOD Assistance to the Malta Government.

Grid Malta East/537676 -555660.

Background.

1. The Malta Government are extending the Luqa airport runway that runs NW-SE so that it will take the larger type of commercial aircraft in current use.
2. In the process of the earthworks a number of bombs have come to light. These have been dealt with by the EOD section of the Malta Armed Forces. The method used for disposal in all cases was demolition in situ.
3. The bombs that have given rise to anxiety were found more or less in a straight line at MR 548665 generally running North to South. These were:
 - a. 1 x 250k.
 - b. 1 x 500 kg SC
 - c. 1 X 500 KG SD

4. Italian technical experts who are assisting in the construction of the runway said they would not work on that area till it had been cleared of UXO.

Manpower.

5. The Malta Armed Forces has a small EOD Section consisting of seven men, two of which are Commissioned Officers. They have to date trained, on a two-day course, ten men of one of the Malta Pioneer Battalions in the use of the 4015-bomb locator. More of these men are to be trained in the near future.

Equipment

6. At present the EOD section possess the following:
 - a. 4 x 4c mine-detectors.
 - b. 1 x 4015 bomb locator.

Another three 4015 locators have been promised to them by the Italian Government. This will be the total search capability of the unit.

7. The bulk of the EOD stores that the section hold is hopelessly inadequate for the task of bomb disposal on this island. Much of it dates back to WW11 and is now either broken completely, erratic in use, worn out or just plain obsolete.

Equipment Repair.

8. The EOD section sends its instruments to the logistics unit for repair as and when needed. I ascertained from Captain Cauchi Inglott who commands the section that there are no repair facilities on the island for the 4015s. This will certainly affect the speed of clearance of the task.

Requirements.

9. Two tasks to be carried out:

- a. To recce the site, giving recommendations on:

1. How to tackle the task and advise on how to get the best production rate using equipment available.

2. What additional men and equipment may be necessary.
- b. To conduct a survey of the EOD equipment on charge to the section, comment on its serviceability and recommend replacement equipment where needed.
10. The recce report on the site at Annex A (*not in the file*) whilst the survey results are at Annex B., (*also not with the report*). Recommendations on the best practical use of the equipment will be given verbally on site as the situation demands.

Points raised through the Recce.

11. Captain Gauchi Inglott requested some identification manuals of older type of LSO that he may come across from time to time. I pointed out to him that these were very hard to come by and I stood no chance of getting any for them.
12. Mr Farrugia, who is Technical Secretary for the Minister of Public Buildings and Works, asked what sort of assistance would be forthcoming from the UK in the way of instruments, equipment or manpower. I told him that such decisions were taken at a far higher level than myself and I could not even guess the answer. I did however tell him that EOD in the UK was fully stretched in trying to clear the backlog of work we have there.

Signed by WO11 RE WH Kimble
July 1974.