



A CORPS OF



While the political and diplomatic arenas of the world have undergone seismic shifts that are widely acknowledged, the threats that these developments have ignited also have a profound effect on those military personnel who must combat them. The proliferation of global terror and the history of terror on this island means that the Irish defence forces must be at a constant state of readiness to deal with such situations.

Fortunately the Ordnance Corps maintains a state of high training and equipment of such calibre that it enjoys a level of operational capability rarely seen in a neutral armed force. Ruairí Kavanagh speaks to Comdt Ray Lane.

# EXPERIENCE

“What makes the Ordnance Corps so special is that it has built up such a core of operational experience over the years, we have been operating in an active role almost constantly, on average receiving 180 callouts per year for our Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams. At all times we have six teams operational and on standby, these teams consist of two operators and a driver. They travel in custom-built vehicles which hold all the equipment required to analyse and deal with the incident,” explains Ray Lane. “The incidences of IEDD (Improvised Explosive Device Disposal) that were relatively common during the most violent phases of the Northern Ireland conflict form the basis of our accumulated operational experience over the years. From this experience we have developed our own EOD philosophy and principles which underpins the render-safe actions of the operator. The threat still exists and in some ways has become more sinister with the advent of global terrorism, that is why it is vital that we continually assess our training and expand our capability.”

“The Ordnance Corps is unique in many ways in that we have both an operational and logistical function. As with most Corps within the Defence Forces we have suffered the loss of key personnel with the restructuring of the Defence Forces. However the many tasks and functions of the Corps have certainly not reduced. Ordnance Corps personnel have a strong engineering and/or science background. The operational/logistical functionality of the Corps is one reason I was attracted to join,” Comdt Lane adds. The Corps offers great job satisfaction with many and varied tasks.



Comdt Ray Lane.



Comdt John Phelan.

The new Ordnance School in the Curragh is where ordnance personnel are trained. “Training for those who enrol in our Ordnance Corps can last for up to 18

months and is very intensive. We are very happy with the calibre of our personnel and there are many reasons for this. Primarily they are trained to a very high standard, the course is highly intensive. Each student on the course must learn the exact anatomy of every weapon and all munitions in the Irish Defence Forces, as procurement and repair of

weapons is one of our main functions. That means that everything from the main armament on our naval vessels to the smallest pistol needs to be studied intricately.



**The database has been developed by the Ordnance Corps with great attention to detail, and is designed to be accessible by EOD teams on-scene via laptop computers.**



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At the time that SIGNAL magazine visited the Ordnance Corps, an EOD training course was under way, with joint teams of Irish Ordnance personnel working with personnel from Sweden, Finland and Denmark. The purpose of the course was to learn the procedures that are necessary to successfully deal with Improvised Explosive Devices



Comdt Jim O'Neill returns to the EOD vehicle after a successful exercise.



Peter Jespersen from Denmark at controls of the HOB0 L3A15.

(IED). Dovetailing with the intensive training undergone by Ordnance Corps members, the equipment that the EOD units have at their disposal is highly impressive. "Our equipment is very good, because we need it to be, much of it is designed by ourselves," explains Ray Lane. The challenges and responsibilities faced by the Ordnance Corps are multiple. "EOD is the role which definitely has the highest public profile, but it only represents a fraction of our work here.

The Corps' largest role is the procurement, maintenance, repair and storage of ordnance equipment for the Defence Forces. This multi-dimensional role encompasses every-

also finds itself exposed to other threats. "The drugs business is one that we are becoming increasingly concerned with due to the increase in the use of weapons and explosives

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thing from anti-aircraft missiles and naval armaments to the uniforms worn by military personnel. Despite these many responsibilities, the existence of the Ordnance Corps as the only EOD service in the state means that their resources in this area cannot afford to be below their best. "We gained a lot of our operational experience during the darker days of the conflict in Northern Ireland, where we were dealing with an array of explosive ordnance, examples of which we have on display in the Ordnance School for teaching purposes. But although that threat has receded to an extent it still exists, and is expanding in other areas, it's a situation that we continue to monitor closely." But aside from the turmoil of Northern Ireland, the Ordnance Corps

in the narcotics trade." One of the exercises we viewed with the Ordnance Corps was the retrieval of a briefcase containing narcotics which had been booby-trapped.

There is also the fallout from global events that can have an impact on this country. "There are real and genuine threats in the world today, threats which we must train to deal with. Developing render-safe procedures in dealing with a suicide bomber is extremely problematic. One of our main projects within the Ordnance Corps at the moment is the preparation of a NBC IEDD capability. That translates as a Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Improvised Explosive Device Disposal." The Ordnance Corps have had some experience of such threats



*Scenario: suspect car with bomb reversed up to Dublin hotel. The HOBO robot is ideal for these situations.*

over the last year with a spate of anthrax related scares. The development of a NBCIEDD capability is an immediate priority for the Ordnance Corps. Their capability at present to deal with IED (improvised explosive devices) is impressive but the Ordnance Corps realise that they must continue to keep abreast of national and international security threats.

“Terrorism has evolved and advanced rapidly,” adds Ray Lane. “The development of explosive devices across the globe is wor-

equipment can now be seen on the global stage. So it is vital for the Ordnance Corps to be aware of the threats that exist and potential threats that may develop and to adapt their philosophy and equipment accordingly.”

### Equipment

While the skills of its personnel are the key to any successful operations, equipment such as the HOBO L3A15 is a vital aid. This Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV), built by



*Captain Matt Byrne and Johan Reis from Sweden.*

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rying, particularly the obvious sharing of information and technology within these groups.” The history of terrorism on this island is something that you can use as a reference. Our own stockpile of captured weaponry and improvised devices shows how quickly terrorist forces, such as the IRA, can advance. Variations of some of this

Kentree in Cork to Ordnance Corps specification, is one of the most technically advanced robots on the world stage, and is used in over 25 countries. The HOBO, which costs €75,000 each, is ideally equipped to deal with a wide variety of EOD/IEDD scenarios with mobility, agility and durability its key strengths. ‘It’s an excel-

lent piece of equipment,” confirms Ray Lane, “personally I have never come across a better robot, it is a vital aid to our work.” The HOBO is operated via a remote control panel and the robot itself is adept at working in closed or confined spaces, equipped with numerous weapon systems. “While the HOBO doesn’t come cheap it is replaceable, our personnel aren’t,” explains Commandant John Phelan on the scene of an EOD exercise using the HOBO to successfully neutralise a suspect package in the boot of a car.

Also key to IEDD operations is the EOD 78 protective suit, demonstrated here by Commandant Jim O'Neill. The suit itself can stop a 1/2-pound of explosives at point blank range. Comprising of Kevlar blast-plates, the suit also allows a certain degree of mobility, and it also features an air-cooling system as the interior of the suit is quite confined in addition to its considerable weight. The Ordnance Corps is also highly mobile, with custom-built vehicles designed to carry the EOD team.

The development of the EOD Database by Cpl John Keaney with the assistance of Pte Mark Clancy of the Ordnance Corps has given the EOD operator a significant asset. It catalogues previous incidents and devices and methods of operation. It gives the operator information as he formulates his render safe procedure. As all operators have access to this information, they can download all the latest taskings and information on the laptop computer.

### The Personnel

To use a very old adage, the equipment is only as good as those who use it. And in that respect the EOD Ordnance Corps are also blessed with a wealth of talented personnel. So what makes a suitable candidate for the Ordnance Corps? "What we're looking for is someone who can adapt quickly and think on their feet. This job requires a



*Capt Matt Byrne and Johan Reis from Sweden checking an x-ray photo of a weapon against the database of weapons.*

logical mind and an ability to cope with pressure. The sheer range of equipment which personnel must be familiar with is quite daunting. The result of our training is an Ordnance Corps of highly disciplined, highly motivated, highly trained professionals. Our mobility, our equipment and our training are the keys to our high level of operational readiness. That is something that we are constantly seeking to maintain

as there is an experience level here that many other armed forces wouldn't have," explains Ray Lane, who has been in the Ordnance Corps since 1979. The Ordnance Corps is highly operational on all levels, blending military training with technical and scientific expertise. The versatility and adaptability of the Ordnance Corps will be one of its greatest strengths as it faces the challenges of a new millennium.



*Comdt Ray Lane, right elbow leaning on a 'barrack buster' and a selection of homemade mortars.*