



LESSONS NATIONAL DEFENCE LEARNED DURING HIGH RIVER FLOOD

Soldiers in High River failed to follow orders signed by the Minister and the Chief of Defence Staff

By Dennis R. Young – February 23, 2018

On October 16, 2016, the Department of National Defence sent me a response to an *Access to Information Act* request claiming they were 'unable to locate records' of any meetings being held with respect to the six-day deployment of 330 soldiers and equipment in High River, Alberta following the 2013 flood. [I filed a complaint with the Office of Information Commissioner showing how ridiculous this response was because of written orders soldiers were given NOT to Assist in Law Enforcement Activities' \(ALEA\).](#)

On February 24, 2017, I filed a follow-up *Access to Information Act* request with the Department of National Defence asking for a complete dump of 'all documentation making mention of the actions taken by Canadian Armed Forces personnel deployed in the door-to-door searches of High River residences'. [On February 14, 2018 \(almost a year later\) I received a 126-page reply](#) which included admissions that **the soldiers deployed in High River failed to follow orders and DID 'assist in law enforcement activities'** and documents describing the 'lessons learned' to make sure it didn't happen again. See orders given to the Canadian Armed Forces personnel deployed in response to flooding in southern Alberta in letters signed by the Minister of Defence Peter MacKay (PDF pages 8 and 9) and Chief of Defence Staff General J.T. Lawson (PDF pages 16 and 17).

NATIONAL DEFENCE ADMITS SOLDIERS FAILED TO FOLLOW ORDERS IN HIGH RIVER

EXCERPT FROM PDF (Page 2) *During the period of CAF assistance to the Province of Alberta, the CAF provided transportation support for an RCMP effort to locate trapped or injured persons in the flood zone. It was during this transportation support activity that the RCMP made two additional, informal, support requests directly to junior CAF members who were providing the transportation support. The first request was to assist the RCMP in the search activity, including opening locked doors to search for trapped or injured persons. In a number of the residences that the RCMP entered, they found firearms that the RCMP determined needed to be secured. The RCMP then requested that the CAF members accompanying them assist the RCMP in removing those firearms (the second request). **The CAF members assisted the RCMP in the removal of the firearms; however, this action was outside the restraints of the Operation Order.** As soon as the military chain-of-command became aware of the activity, they took the appropriate actions to cause it to cease and to ensure that it would not reoccur*

NATIONAL DEFENCE: LESSONS LEARNED & RECOMMENDATIONS

8. KEY LESSONS OBSERVED - EXCERPT PDF Page 32:

b. Assistance to Law Enforcement/Agencies (ALEA) Requests. *In light of the RCMP precautionary measure of securing firearms from evacuated homes in High River, and CAF personnel being asked to establish and maintain roadblocks, it has been noted that the complexities of what does and does not constitute ALEA are not well understood down to the platoon level. JTFW has taken this, observation under review and determined that increased training is required. CJOC considers this to be applicable to all regions and will provide clear direction to assist all regions for this training requirement.*

OPR: CJOC HQ J6 - RFA/POS/ALEA REQUESTS - EXCERPT PDF Page 51:

66. This highlights the importance to note that in order to quickly produce and move a CDS Task through the Strategic level, the simpler it is, the better. It is important to note email (or verbal) authorities are being used in

the early stages and that the CAF must ensure to stay within the lanes of what has been agreed to, which may often be vague. Items such as HHS or ALEA tasks, if not specifically authorized before the TaskO process starts, are time intensive to staff, particularly when key personnel are not in Ottawa. It is therefore imperative that provincial/territorial authorities be consulted as early as possible as to what types of capabilities they may need and make sure that they are included in the original email or verbal request.

OPR: CJOC HQ JS - EXCERPT PDF Page 52 & 53:

70. ALEA Training. In light of the RCMP precautionary measure of securing firearms from evacuated homes in High River and CAF personnel being asked to establish and maintain roadblocks, it was noted that the complexities of what does and does not constitute ALEA are not well understood down to the platoon level. The professional 'cando' attitude of CAF participants can inadvertently have CAF personnel encroaching into ALEA tasks. JTFW has contributed this observation and determined that increased training is required for personnel in their region who may be assigned ALEA tasks.

71. Recommendation. This observation is applicable to all regions and RJTF commanders need to consider exercising or educating their personnel on what is, and what is not, considered ALEA to ensure a broader understanding of ALEA missions at tactical levels of command. CJOC HQ LEGAD to develop a standard template for ALEA training to be used by all RJTFs.

NATIONAL DEFENCE STILL WITHHOLDING IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

I will be filing yet another complaint to the Information Commissioner with regard to missing National Defence responses to important e-mail requests from the Office of the Minister of Defence (see e-mails below) concerning events happening during the two days when doors to hundreds and hundreds of High River homes were being kicked in ([resulting in \\$2.3 million in damages to 2,210 homes](#)), unwarranted searches were occurring and firearms were being seized.

National Defence E-MAIL: Thu June 27, 2013 (10:22 pm)

Sir, PMO is saying that gun organizations are saying this.

MM Tompkins, Captain, PPCLI, Military Assistant to the MND. [ATIP page 4]

National Defence E-MAIL: Thu June 27, 2013 (22:28 pm)

As well sir: The reporter, _____ is filing on this tonight. He's had gun organizations tell him the **military entered homes as well.** MNDO has asked to confirm ASAP if this occurred.

MM Tompkins, Captain, PPCLI, Military Assistant to the MND. [ATIP page 3]

National Defence E-MAIL - Fri June 28, 2013 (00:20 am)

Alcon, I have spoken to BGen Juneau who has spoken with Comd 1 CMBG on this issue. **Comd LFWA states that at no time did our soldiers touch any Comd LFWA also states that he is satisfied with the response from the CoC and does not intend to pursue this matter further.**

T.P. Gosselin, LCol, A/COS, LFWA HQ 1985 [ATIP page 2]

National Defence E-MAIL - Friday, June 28, 2013 (00:28 am)

Sir, I understand from our COS that this issue has been closed "on high" but have sent you this for your own essay. LFWA-JTFW DSO@LFWA-JTFW HQ@Edmonton [ATIP page 11]

MY COMMENT: Odd that the officers 'on high' chose to close this investigation down after just 8 minutes, without conducting a proper investigation and without answering all the questions posed by the Minister's office.

National Defence E-MAIL - Friday June 28, 2013 (00:32)

Matt: **Comd JTFC/LFWA confirms base on his engagement of his chain of command that: "at no time did our soldiers touch any weapons."** Conrad Mialkowski, Col, SJS/J33 Current Ops [ATIP page 1]

E-MAIL - June 28, 2013 (1:01 am)

BGen Thomas; Sir, RFI close. Thank you. I don't expect that it will surface again unless some type of evidence to the contrary is presented.

MY COMMENT: 'Unless some type of evidence to the contrary is presented'?

(1) Like the RCMP photograph showing soldiers being handed seized firearms by an RCMP officer, and
(2) Detailed records (obtained by Access to Information request) from Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC) with the results of their investigation into Canadian Armed Forces involvement in the search of High River homes and firearm seizures (see below).

NOTE #1: Access to the full DND response to my Access to Information Act request including the quotes above are included in this link:

<https://dennisryoung.ca/2017/09/01/dnd-high-river-response-no-time-solders-touch-weapons-oops/>



(SOURCE: RCMP)