

Background Quality Report

Improvised Explosive Device (IED) events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, 1 April 2009 to 30 November 2014

Overview

A one-off Official Statistic on Improvised Explosive Device (IED) events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Afghanistan, 1 April 2009 to 30 November 2014 (these dates correspond with the earliest date that comprehensive data is available and the end of Op HERRICK), was published on 25 August 2016.

This report focuses on Helmand Province as this was the main area of responsibility. It would be at disproportionate cost to collate numbers for the whole of Afghanistan.

1. Methodology and Production

Definitions:

Operation HERRICK: Operation HERRICK is the name for UK operations in Afghanistan which started in April 2006. UK Forces were deployed to Afghanistan in support of the UN authorised, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission. UK Forces were in Afghanistan for one overriding reason – to protect our national security by helping the Afghan's take control of their own. The UK were helping Afghanistan develop the ability to maintain its own security and prevent the return of international terrorists, such as al Qaeda.

Improvised Explosive Device (IED): The NATO Allied Joint Publication (AJP)-3.15(B) definition of an IED is 'A device placed or fabricated in an improvised manner incorporating destructive, lethal, noxious, pyrotechnic or incendiary chemicals and designed to destroy, incapacitate, harass or distract. It may incorporate military stores, but is normally devised from non-military components'. They can be initiated either by the victim or remotely by enemy forces. IEDs can also be delivered by suicide bombers where they are self-initiated or remotely initiated by an observer. In Afghanistan, low-technology victim operated pressure-plate IEDs, command-wire IEDs, radio-controlled IEDs and suicide IEDs collectively posed a significant threat.

IED Events

In this publication, the count of IED events amounts to all events involving UK personnel¹ in Afghanistan, in which the IEDs were emplaced. This includes:

- Finds: Devices which have been emplaced but are discovered by coalition forces before they are able to function.
- Explosions: Devices which successfully detonate – this includes those devices which detonate but fail to strike their intended target.
- IED Strikes: Devices which successfully detonate and cause damage or casualties.

¹ The data does not specify whether personnel are UK Armed Forces or UK Civilians, however the majority will be UK Armed Forces.

- Mine Strikes: Devices which successfully detonate and cause damage or casualties – note that the term ‘mine’ is often used when referring to a victim operated IED. This term also includes conventional, industrially produced mines used in an unconventional manner.

An event may include one or multiple IEDs.

The count of IED events does not include non-emplaced IEDs, namely:

- Caches: Complete devices or device components in a non-deployed scenario.
- Hoaxes: Devices which have been emplaced or left such that they will be discovered by and require effort on the part of coalition forces but are deliberately non-viable – i.e. are missing critical components such as explosive charge or connecting wires.
- Tip-offs/turn-ins: Devices which have been identified or recovered by the civilian population.

2. Background Notes

Land Operational Reporting Database (LORD)

The LORD is managed by Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) and commenced on 1 April 2009. The database is populated with data sourced from Weapon Intelligence Specialist Reports (WISREPs), Significant Incident Reports (SINCREFs) and a number of other sources. LORD provides good coverage of known emplaced IEDs involving UK personnel within Afghanistan.

Significant Actions Database (SIGACTs)

The UK Significant Actions (SIGACTs) database is the UK database produced by the Operational Analysis team within the UK Area of Operations (UKAO)². The database is populated with data sourced from 9-liners³ and the watch-keepers logs. SIGACTs data was collected from April 2006 and was the sole integrated source of IED data for the period April 2006 to 31 March 2009 when the LORD database was initiated.

Some SIGACTs data has been incorporated throughout the LORD (including Significant Incident Reports (SINCREFs), Weapon Intelligence Specialist Report (WISREPs), and Serious Equipment Failure Investigation Team Reports (SEFITs) reporting) but the only comprehensive integration of SIGACTs data into the LORD took place for events between 1 March 2012 and 31 August 2013. Removing SIGACTs data from the current LORD dataset would be very time consuming and not resource effective

3. Relevance

This report has been published to support the MOD's commitment to release information wherever possible. It was agreed to produce a single bulletin which will be published on the Gov.uk website.

² The UKAO comprises the command formerly known as Task Force Helmand (responsibility handed over to Regional Command South West from 1 April 2014) and Task Force Belleau Wood. The UKAO has changed over time and is the area over which the UK has responsibility for conducting/coordinating operations. It is an area that is constantly evolving, although since end of 2009, it has shrunk – it once included the Sangin Valley, Kajaki and Musa Qal'eh.

³ Military description of the radio message received for a MEDEVAC (Medical Evacuation).

The MOD are committed to making information on operations public but have to draw a line between how much information is provided regularly in the public domain and information which compromise operational security of UK Armed Forces personnel.

The release is used to answer parliamentary questions and Freedom of Information requests. The report is also useful for internal customers in PJHQ, the Ops Directorate and the single Services.

This report is currently limited in terms of the amount of information it can include, specifically in relation to the classification of IED events, as it can harm the operational security of Service personnel that are still deployed on operations.

4. Accuracy and Reliability

The statistics provided were straightforward counts in a table. The table has a number of footnotes clarifying what is included or excluded and provides appropriate caveats.

Due to the nature of operational reporting it is likely that a number of incidents were not reported, therefore the numbers presented in this report should be treated as the minimum.

The LORD has not been fully validated to ensure accuracy of the data held. There are known data inconsistencies over time and missing data. This source of data however is the most reliable held by the Department for reporting on IED events involving UK personnel.

5. Timeliness and Punctuality

This one-off report will be published on 25 August 2016. This report is being published now as combat operations in Afghanistan have ended.

6. Accessibility and Clarity

The report was published on the Gov.UK website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mod-national-and-official-statistics-by-topic>.

It can also be accessed via the UK National Statistics Publication Hub or through an internet search engine such as Google.

24 hour pre-release access to the report was available to a limited distribution list within the MOD. The full list can be found in the Pre-Release access list available on the Gov.UK website.

7. Coherence and Comparability

The Defence Statistics figures in the IED events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Helmand Province, Afghanistan are the definitive statistics in the MOD. There are no other publically available statistical publications on the number of IED events involving UK Service personnel with which to ensure coherence.

However there have been a number of parliamentary questions and Freedom of information requests answered by the MOD that provided statistics on the number of IED events. These numbers are not directly comparable for a number of reasons, including:

- Some of the responses were estimates that were derived from a number of sources that had not been validated. This could have led to duplicate counting of events that were present in more than one data set.
- In a number of these responses the data was caveated with the difficulties of ensuring a consistent approach to compiling the information in a complex fast moving multinational operational environment. They stated that the data would be modified over time as more information became available. The statistics presented in this publication are data validated by Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL).
- Different types of IED events were included in different responses and therefore the numbers provided in these responses are not directly comparable.

8. Trade-offs between Output and Quality Components

One trade-off is between the level of information presented in the output, without compromising operational security.

The MOD are committed to making information public on IED's but have to draw a line between how much information is provided in the public domain and information which compromise operational security of UK Armed Forces personnel.

Another trade-off is between ensuring the full integration of the UK Significant Actions (SIGACTs) database into LORD in order to provide a more complete dataset. For IED events in the period 1 March 2012 to 31 August 2013 there was a validation process carried out by Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) that integrated the SIGACTS database into the LORD. This increased the coverage of reported IED events involving UK personnel in Afghanistan for this time period.

The aspiration was to fully incorporate the SIGACTs data into the LORD but this task was very resource intensive as it required examination of individual event records and could not be completed within resource constraints. Therefore, some SIGACTs data was incorporated throughout the LORD but the only comprehensive integration of SIGACTs data into the LORD took place for events between 1 March 2012 and 31 August 2013. As a result the statistics presented should be treated as a minimum.

9. Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

Defence Statistics developed the IED events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Helmand Province, Afghanistan report to support the MOD's commitment to release information wherever possible.

Users are encouraged to provide feedback on the publication itself and Defence Statistics also welcome feedback from any other internal and external customers.

There is currently no process in place to assess the satisfaction of users for this report, though it is an objective of Defence Statistics (Health) to assess each part of the quality report for all of our Official and National Statistics. This will result in an assessment of user needs and may lead to a consultation process for internal and external users to assess their satisfaction with the report.

10. Confidentiality, Transparency and Security

Security

All Defence Statistics (Health) staff involved in the production of the statistics have signed a declaration that they have completed the Government wide Responsible for Information-General User training and they understand their responsibilities under the Data Protection Act and the Official Statistics Code of Practice. All MOD, Civil Service and data protection regulations are adhered to. The data is stored, accessed and analysed using the MOD's restricted network and IT systems. The databases supplied by our external customers are password protected.

Transparency

The IED events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Helmand Province, Afghanistan report is currently a basic statistic, which contains a table and identifies any issues or caveats to the data with limited commentary. This quality report provides further information on the method, production process and quality of the output.

The IED events involving UK personnel on Op HERRICK in Helmand Province, Afghanistan report is an Official Statistic and was produced in line with the UK Code of Practice for Official Statistics. The publication date was pre-announced on the UK National Statistics Publication Hub. 24 hour pre-release access was provided to an agreed list of people, with the list being available on the Gov.UK website (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defence-statistics-pre-release-access-list>). A ministerial submission accompanies the pre-release publication, which contains the key information about the publication and also lines to take for Defence media communications.

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We welcome feedback on this Background Quality Report or any of the statistics mentioned.