BROOKS BLANKET*

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SUMMARY. A new form of blanket is described for quick application to burning casualties in Northern Ireland caused by incendiary bomb attacks.

The petrol bomb is one of the most incapacitating weapons used by the Provisional Irish Republican Army in South Armagh and other border areas. It is home made and consists of a small charge fixed to a gallon container of petrol which causes a burning flowing effect. The object is to produce maximum flame effect and it adheres to whatever the fireball may strike, burning the casualty and setting his clothes alight. The major problems associated with burning clothes are the flames and smouldering. The quicker these effects can be neutralized the better chance any casualty has of survival.

The method previously employed was for each four man patrol to carry a 'wet blanket' for use in the event of fire bomb attack. The wet blanket had disadvantages:-

a. Weight — Approximately 11lb (five kg); on rural operations this is excessive when added to the rest of the soldier's kit. It is also damp against his clothing.

b. Texture — The woollen army blanket harbours dust and dirt; placed over a full thickness burn this could lead to problems. The 'hairy' texture of the blanket also sticks to the burn.

c. Bulk — It is a bulky object for a soldier to carry.

Something new was required: something light, flame resistant and simple to use. First thoughts were of a cotton sheet (clean, light and easy to use), but this was impractical as its flameproof quality was practically nil.

The idea of a wet sheet next to the patient however was sound.

Following discussion with the Quartermaster's Department of 2 Para we tried the 'Kip Sheet'. This is an individual protection sheet made of cotton synthetic material impregnated with an Anti Infra-red Spray. Fortunately it was noticed that this was the size of an ordinary cotton sheet, so the two were sewn together around the edges (a velcro attachment for the sheets is easier than having them sewn together). We now had a sheet 150 cm x 230 cm (large enough to cover a body) with a clean cotton inner surface in contact with the patient, and an air proof, flame resistant outer cover for putting out the fire. The two sheets can be separated, and as much water as possible, for example, three water bottles, poured between the sheets to neutralize the smouldering effect of the patient's clothing.

**Editor's Note: The eponymous title assigned to the blanket described by Capt Brooks was at the instigation of the Unit, 2 Para, not the author who would have preferred to remain anonymous.*

Trials were carried out with a one gallon petrol explosive device (Fig 1). A dummy made of polystyrene in combat kit was easily set alight. Time was allowed following the explosion for the remainder of the patrol (three men) to organise themselves and tackle the burning casualty. It was estimated that approximately 25% of the dummy was on fire (it must be borne in mind the casualty would be moving around when on fire whereas the dummy was not) (Figs 2 to 4).

Fig. 1 Home made petrol bomb

Fig. 2 Preparing to cover burning dummy with opened blanket

Fig. 3 Pouring water into space between 'inner and outer' sheets of dummy covered by blanket

Fig 4 Removing blanket after extinguishing flames. Note distribution of water on inner sheet

Fig. 5 Fitting blanket in cape carrier of webbing — as arrowed

Following quick use of the blanket, and the saturating effect of the water in-between the blanket layers, seven per cent full thickness burns were noted. Observations made as the result of the trials were:

- a. The casualty's face would have been quite severely burnt.
- b. Other injuries following the blast would probably have occurred.
- c. The one gallon petrol bomb used in the trials caused a flowing fire ball approximately 25 metres in length and 20 metres in height.

d. The Brook's blanket certainly extinguished the flames and the water application reduced the smouldering effect. The inner cotton sheet on the trials was not burnt as the water had diffused around the entire sheet.

e. The casualty, once controlled and saturated, could easily be treated for whatever other injuries he might have sustained.

f. The blanket weighs only 11 oz (312 g) and is easy to carry in the cape carrier of the webbing (Fig 5).

g. It can be folded in such a way that it opens out quickly with the cotton sheet facing the casualty.

In conclusion the woollen wet blanket was not satisfactory as a means of tackling the burning casualties, an increasing problem in Northern Ireland. Something lighter, cleaner, easier to carry and more efficient has been devised to meet these requirements. Preliminary trials suggest that it is effective.