

CANADIAN SHOOTING SPORTS ASSOCIATION / CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR LEGISLATIVE ACTION

TEAM CSSA E-NEWS - December 02, 2013

COMMENTARY: RCMP AND CBC STIR THE HIGH RIVER PROPAGANDA POT

The RCMP and CBC have conspired to dismiss systemic firearms theft by police officers in High River, Alberta.

The cops and the CBC say confiscating the firearms of flood victims is perfectly acceptable behaviour. They even gleefully pronounce the Harper government's inquiries into the heavy-handed RCMP raid as "political interference." They expect the federal government to ignore the thuggery when its national police force breaks into private residences to confiscate legal firearms. The officers left behind copious damning evidence when they targeted gun owners' homes using government firearms records. They even filmed themselves rooting through homes to swipe guns that were safely stored. O Canada, indeed.

The CBC story of November 28 claims: "An email from an unidentified RCMP special tactical operations (STO) member describes the operating procedures in place for those searches. 'We did not search for firearms and only firearms that were in the open/in plain sight were to be noted and secured. The purpose of the searches were for people and animals in distress.' The officer added that no STO members seized firearms from gun cabinets, whether they were locked or not."

So who's lying – the RCMP or 1,900 High River homeowners who claimed for damages? One can answer this question with another question. Given the excessive damage in so many homes, which of these two groups has the incentive to bend the truth?

The RCMP have concocted some fabulous fiction through it's willing media shill, the CBC. Had the Harper government not put the RCMP on notice early in this witch hunt, we can only shudder at the treatment High River residents might have been forced to endure. As it was, police busted down doors and dragged mud throughout many homes and severely damaged many homes. It is most unsettling that the RCMP and CBC insist that police took only "unsecured" firearms – the smash-and-grab tactics surely prove that most of the guns were secured.

Both the RCMP and CBC smugly note that a few High River residents volunteered to give police "109 firearms surrendered for safe-keeping." There may well have been some residents who were worried that their firearms could be under water or vulnerable. The news report, however, suggests that a few surrendered guns justifies confiscating 542 others from absentee residents. High River RCMP said they received 94 guns for destruction, too. We wonder if they remembered to hand out cheap cameras in return.

A few police officers and a few CBC broadcasters believe they should be allowed to make the rules as they go. They are determined to make guns go away because they believe it's the righteous road to public safety and national security.

How so many educated people can be so wrong is a puzzle for the ages.

WOW – CBC BLAMES CONSERVATIVE STAFFERS FOR HIGH RIVER CONCERN: Documents obtained by CBC News show just how much pressure Conservative staffers exerted on the Mounties to justify why they seized hundreds of firearms from evacuated homes at the height of the Alberta floods last spring.

The emails paint a picture of a police force trying to juggle political demands with the "basic police work" of ensuring the public's safety in an emergency situation.

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The correspondence, obtained under Access to Information, begins on June 20, 2013, when the RCMP asked for help from the Canadian Forces because there were roughly 150 people trapped in trees and on rooftops. Insp. Don McKenna explained the need for helicopters and boats with big engines to power through debris-filled water. By June 25, the Mounties reported having rescued 38 people, locating 327 people in evacuation zones after entering 4,688 buildings, 754 of them by force.

But what the RCMP found in some of those homes created another operational challenge. An email from an unidentified RCMP special tactical operations (STO) member describes the operating procedures in place for those searches.

"We did not search for firearms and only firearms that were in the open/in plain sight were to be noted and secured. The purpose of the searches were for people and animals in distress."

The officer added that no STO members seized firearms from gun cabinets, whether they were locked or not. In total, the documents show the Mounties seized 542 firearms, 93 of them coming from a single residence. When the people of High River found out, many were incensed.

On June 28, the Calgary Herald ran a story with the headline, "'Hell to Pay:' Residents angry as RCMP seize guns from High River homes." It only took a few hours for Mark Johnson, the director of issues management in the office of former Public Safety Minister Vic Toews, to send a link to that story to the RCMP and asked, "Is this taking members away from the work of disaster recovery?"

Subsequent emails indicate there were also some phone calls from the minister's office asking how many guns had been taken. The inquiries did not go over so well inside RCMP national headquarters.

Sgt. Julie Gagnon wrote to her colleagues, "They are getting involved in basic police work where we are only ensuring the safety/security of the population. Police do that kind of work when they go to residences that are unsecured. This is not taking them away from doing other things, they have to do it."

Her boss Daniel Lavoie asked why political staffers needed the numbers, as did Alberta's Deputy Commissioner Dale McGowan.

"I'm not sure we should be releasing the number as it is quite a statement with that many unsecured guns out there. A bit of a political issue I would think," wrote McGowan. That was an understatement.

The very next day, the Prime Minister's Office publicly rebuked the RCMP by saying the force "should focus on more important tasks such as protecting lives and private property." It added that all firearms should be returned to their owners as soon as possible.

Looking back on it, Staff Sgt. Abe Townsend says the statement was not appreciated. "They acted within the law and in the best interests of the community. The negative comments surrounding the manner in which the members were conducting their duties was discouraging," the RCMP staff relations representative said.

The Alberta government had also taken an interest in the High River gun situation. On June 27, Solicitor General Jonathan Denis wrote to McGowan to thank the Mounties for their dedication and commitment but also to get clarification on whether weapons taken from private dwellings were being stored or confiscated. He also asked if there was a plan to tell Albertans how to retrieve their lawful property.

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Back in High River documents show the two officers tasked with documenting each gun and making sure it wasn't stolen property were under a great deal of strain. On June 29, Staff Sgt. Ian Shardlow replied to a request to start returning firearms, "We are stuck at two resources to accomplish this. We have processed the guns from the first zone... we have a couple of concerns regarding the logistics of accomplishing this."

The next day Shardlow reported having returned several firearms, including \$25,000 worth of guns to someone who he said was happy with how the RCMP handled the seizures. There was one procedural hiccup though. Shardlow wrote that he had been unable to reach the Canadian Firearms Centre to obtain transport permits for restricted firearms in cases where evacuees were not returning to their flood-damaged homes.

By July 5, officers had returned 164 firearms but something else was happening. While several residents continued to slam the RCMP for kicking down their doors and taking their guns, others in High River started bringing their guns and large quantities of ammunition to the Mounties for safekeeping.

On July 10, people had surrendered so many firearms at the local detachment that lack of space was becoming an issue.

Cst. Matt Allen asked for permission to rent a small shipping container. "That would put two garage bays here at the detachment back in service. As of tonight's totals we have 109 guns in storage at the request of the owners. I anticipate this number will increase in the coming weeks."

One month later, the RCMP reported that 517 firearms had been returned, 94 had been turned in for destruction and 132 remained in storage along with 500,000 rounds of ammunition.

"The firearms in storage are made up of a small amount originally secured during the flood but the vast amount of them have been brought in after the flood by owners who have no place to safely store them for the time being," wrote Cst. John Rotheisler.