

## Written evidence submitted by Lee Sheldon (private individual) (OWB159)

### Executive summary

- **Section 15**

The proposal to ban the delivery of bladed products to residential premises etc will disrupt a huge amount of legitimate trade in the implements with a sharp edge that are required for many routine domestic and business activities. It will also disrupt trade in military artefacts from WW1 and WW2. The isolated incidents that appear to be the driver for this legislation involve individuals failing in their legal duty to check the age of the recipient of a postal package. A more effective remedy might be to increase the penalty for failing to carry out such checks.
- **Section 20**

The Government has not identified the features of a flick knife or a gravity knife that make them substantially more dangerous than other edged weapons to the extent that their ownership should be prohibited completely. This proposal fails to recognise the value and historical importance of certain gravity knives in particular.
- **Section 22**

Concerning the prohibition on the possession of offensive weapons: it has to be acknowledged that the Government has introduced a defence for the possession of a weapon of “historical importance.” However, the meaning of this term is left undefined. To prevent the loss or destruction of special weapons used in WW2, the Bill should be amended so that the prohibitions of the Offensive Weapons Act do not apply to items manufactured before 1945. As of 2018, the definition of an antique permits the ownership of weapons used in the trenches of WW1. Weapons dating from WW2 should benefit from a similar exemption.
- **Section 28**

Concerning the proposed ban on centre fire rifles with a muzzle energy above a specified level: the Government has not substantiated the notion that a material risk to public safety arises from the following scenario. Terrorists identify the holder of a Firearm Certificate who possesses one of these rifles, steals it from the secure premises that are a condition of having a FAC, and then - having acquired the skills to use it - deploy the weapon at very long ranges. (For that is how they are used in target shooting).

### Profile of the author

I am a retired business planning manager who worked for over 30 years in the petrochemicals industry. My lifelong interest in firearms and military history was sparked by my father who served with the 8h Army in Africa and Italy in WW2. I have had a Firearm Certificate for almost 50 years and like to participate in target shooting competitions at Bisley. I collect military knives dating from WW1 and WW2 and have had articles about these knives and the men who carried them published in magazines in the US and UK.

## Supporting comments

### Section 15 - Delivery of bladed products to residential premises etc

The proposal to ban the delivery of knives to residential premises is totally disproportionate and would disrupt legitimate trade in kitchen knives, modelling knives etc etc

There is also significant trade in military artefacts which includes knives, bayonets and swords. This reflects the enormous public interest in Britain's involvement in the two world wars. Evidence of this fascination can be seen at two huge fairs (there are other smaller events):

The "War and Peace Revival" is the world's largest military vehicle show. It includes a large fair for collectors of militaria and living history re-enactments from the First World War to more recent conflicts. It is held annually over several days in July at the Hop Farm Country Park, Kent.

"Military Odyssey" is a massive multi-period re-enactment show held annually at the Kent Show Ground. It hosts over 4,000 re-enactors and living history enthusiasts as well as over 250 stalls and 200 vehicles. History buffs depict numerous periods of conflict including the Napoleonic, the American Civil War, the Wild West, World Wars I & II and Vietnam.

At both these events, enthusiasts and collectors exhibit and demonstrate the weapons, uniforms and equipment of their chosen period, with WW2 being particularly popular.

*Cost is a barrier to acquiring knives from the collectors' market:*

It should be noted that whereas a black handled kitchen knife is affordable to the disaffected youths who choose to carry them, collectors pay considerably more for edged weapons of the World Wars: a common, standard issue bayonet would be £50 to £100; early versions of the fighting knives made for the Commandos cost from £1000 to £2000.

*A potential solution - enforce existing legislation:*

There have been cases of knives being delivered to a residential address without the required check on the recipient's age. This is something that could potentially happen with purchases made in a shop. It might be more consistent and effective to increase the penalty for failing to do statutory checks on the age of persons buying any controlled products – not just knives but corrosive fluids and alcohol (etc).

*Are there any bladed products that cannot cause serious injury?*

The "overarching documents" web page for the Offensive Weapons Bill 2018 states that "the offence for bladed products is limited to those that can cause serious injury". But any bladed product, by definition, is made for cutting and any cut on some parts of the body has the potential to cause serious injury. This exemption for bladed articles that *cannot* cause serious injury is surely meaningless or at least of minimal consequence. It does not in any way ameliorate the consequences of the Bill described above.

## Section 20 - Prohibition on the possession of certain dangerous knives

The decision to apply exceptional restrictions to flick knives and gravity knives is not justified or explained. The blade of a gravity knife is typically no different to that of a folding clasp knife. By definition, deployment of the blade of a gravity knife is powered by nothing more than the blade's weight. The gravity knife shown below was made by the British firm Ibberson in WW2. It was a copy of the gravity knife issued to German paratroopers and is now extremely rare.



For comparison, shown below is a British WW2 period Royal Navy Seaman's Clasp Knife (not classified as an offensive weapon).



## Section 22 - Prohibition on the possession of offensive weapons

In the First World War, the army of the British Empire was the only major fighting force that did not issue its front line troops with a knife for the trench raids which by 1915 were a feature of the fighting. British troops fashioned trench knives from bayonets or purchased knives and daggers from cutlers at home. One such was a push dagger made by the firm of Robbins of Dudley (in the Midlands). These daggers, which occasionally become available to the collectors' market at prices of £600-£800, were produced in 1916 and are classified as antiques. Hence the prohibitions of the Offensive Weapons Act do not apply.

In WW2, special forces like the Commandos and agents of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) also made use of edged weapons which are currently prohibited by the Offensive Weapons Act. For example:

The hatpin dagger – so called because of what it looks like – is a type of push dagger. It has a black painted, shaped aluminium grip and a seven inch, blued steel blade made from a round section steel rod. There are believed to be four examples extant.



The workshops of the SOE produced a range of concealed and concealable weapons. An ordinary seven inch lead pencil was used to house a 4 ½ inch steel spike made from a one eighth inch diameter fluted, circular rod. This implement, which could be used as a weapon or as an aid to field survival, falls under the definition of a “disguised knife” in the Offensive Weapons Act (though not the example shown below which is a specially made “demonstrator” used by SOE instructors).



It should be possible to document and preserve surviving examples of rare and unusual WW2 weapons like the ones shown above. They are an indispensable part of the history of the SOE - Winston Churchill’s ‘Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare’.

*Recommendation for action by the Government*

To make it legitimate to study and collect important weapons of WW2, the prohibition of “specified weapons” in the Offensive Weapons Act should not apply to weapons made before 1945.

**Section 28 - Prohibition of certain firearms etc: England and Wales and Scotland**

The proposed ban on centre fire rifles with muzzle energy above an arbitrary level is disproportionate and unjustified in terms of a risk to the public.

Rifle shooters will have a concern that if one type of full bore rifle is banned because of an arbitrary limit on muzzle energy, it puts at risk the continued use of other full bore rifles like the venerable .303 Lee Enfield.

*August 2018*