

Ex-firearms manager takes force to tribunal

Jan 25 2008 by Gareth Hughes, Daily Post

THE former licensing manager of the North Wales Police firearms unit is claiming that he was unfairly sacked by the force. Neil Smith also alleges that the force was guilty of breach of contract in the way he was dealt with during disciplinary proceedings last year. Mr Smith, 54, **was dismissed from his civilian post** following a court appearance in January last year when he pleaded guilty to having ammunition he was not licensed to keep.

He was given a 12-month conditional discharge by Prestatyn magistrates and ordered to pay costs of £200. But his solicitor Gwyn Jones told the court that had he not been in a position of such responsibility he would probably have escaped with a caution from his employers. Mr Smith, of Church Street, Rhuddlan, had been a firearms registration manager for 20 years but the court heard that the offence had nothing to do with his work. Instead, it was linked to his membership of gun clubs in Ruthin and Chester.

In June, 2006, the force's professional standards unit searched Mr Smith's home **as part of a wider operation** and in a gun cabinet they found 40 rounds of .22-calibre "stinger" ammunition designed to expand on impact. He was not entitled to have it under the terms of his licence. The court heard that since 1997, under legislation introduced following the Dunblane tragedy, such ammunition could only be kept for killing vermin, managing estates, protecting other animals and for the humane killing of animals. The ammunition was difficult to distinguish from other forms and the fact that it was unlawful **was confirmed only by forensic investigation**.

Mr Smith was under suspension at the time of the court hearing and was later sacked. His claims for unfair dismissal and breach of contract **will be heard at an employment tribunal in Abergele next month**.

Shortly after this story appeared in the Daily Post a spokesperson for the Force stated "We would like to clarify that Neil Smith was the former civilian licensing manager for North Wales police's firearms unit, and not a police officer

The PPP comments Here we go again and we told you so!
The headline 12 months ago was ...

Firearms chief caught with unlicensed ammunition.

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And we commented then This case has many of the hallmarks of a NWPF internal vendetta!.

How did they know about 19 yr old ammunition in his cabinet?. Whom in the Police hierarchy has Smith upset? Wouldn't they NORMALLY protect their own if he had made a silly or genuine mistake??. Our information is that he was generally doing a good job but the section was under-resourced and customers were experiencing serious delays.

This is expected to develop into an expensive pay off a la Peter Bolton and lose another experienced specialist from the service....why??

Our comments now are ... the original story *clearly identified* Neil Smith as a civilian staff member of NWPF. So why did they ask the post to print..” *We would like to clarify that Neil Smith was the former civilian licensing manager for North Wales police’s firearms unit, and not a police officer”... . are staff members more expendable??*

Our information is that this ammo. Is easily identified *so why carry out forensic analysis ?.*

What was the ‘*wider operation*’ about and what was it’s outcome in June 2006.

This time we expect the employment tribunal and the press to make the real issues and responsibilities clear before dishing out more policing funds as compensation.