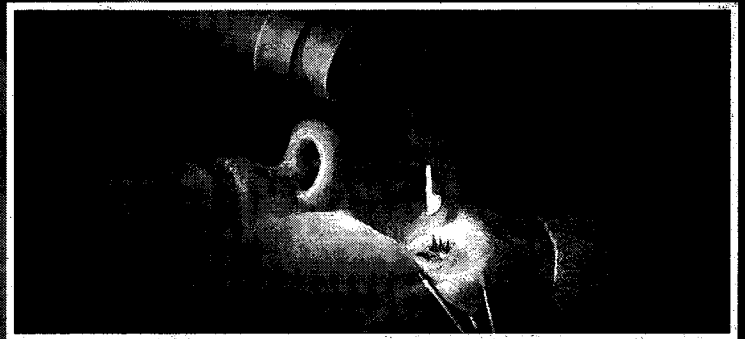




TONY BLAIR GUN POLICE GET LASER SURGERY TO FIX DODGY EYESIGHT



ELITE: Armed police guard Tony Blair



OP: Bosses hope laser surgery can improve sight of officers

By JON CLEMENTS
Crime Correspondent

THEY are the crack gun cops who guard Tony Blair, ready to respond in a split second with a precision shot to rub out anyone deemed a threat to his life.

Trouble is, some of them don't exactly have 20/20 vision...

Five of the elite armed squad that protect the PM with high-powered pistols and sub-machine guns have dodgy eyes and are being sent for laser surgery to improve their sight.

The members of the Diplomatic Protection Group who wear glasses or contact lenses will have the operations, which normally cost £4,200, at the London Vision Clinic.

But Met police chiefs insist the

EXCLUSIVE

procedures are being done so the talented officers can stay in their jobs longer and not because they can't see what they're shooting at.

A spokesman said: "The Met is taking part in a pilot scheme in which a London clinic is giving free laser eye surgery to a small number of officers."

"The officers chosen all work in critical posts where a high level of training is required.

"This will be of long-term benefit to the organisation and the individuals by enabling them to remain in these critical posts for a longer period."

And Labour MP Doctor Ian Gibson, who has campaigned for frontline staff such as firefighters to have laser

surgery to lengthen their working lives, supported the scheme.

He said: "There are some people who suffer from failing eyesight as they grow older and become less competent at carrying out their duties.

"But they have vital skills and experience and it makes economic sense to offer them treatment to allow them to carry on working.

"At the same time, the public needs to be assured that people working in life or death situations such as the emergency services have good eyesight."

The operations will be carried out under the supervision of Professor Dan Reinstein who approached the Met about the scheme.

An LVC source added: "The clinic believes it can show the value to the

public sector of laser surgery which can improve sight dramatically.

"Some workers will become more productive following the operation."

None of the five officers have failed eye tests. But they opted to have their vision permanently corrected.

After the ops, called LASIK treatment, they will need to have further tests to confirm their eyesight has improved with no complications.

Home Office rules state that police can wear contact lenses and specs but must meet specific sight standards. This also applies to armed officers.

Laser surgery has become popular among people who do not want to wear glasses or contacts. There was around 100,000 ops last year. Hope that reassures a jittery Mr Blair.