

**BETWEEN APRIL 1972
AND AUGUST 1981,
13 PEOPLE, SIX OF THEM
CHILDREN, WERE KILLED
BY RUBBER AND
PLASTIC BULLETS**

50p

THEY SHOOT CHILDREN



**THE USE OF RUBBER AND PLASTIC
BULLETS IN THE NORTH OF IRELAND**

First published in 1982 by Information on Ireland, Box 189, 32
Ivor Place, London NW1 6DA, Tel 01-602 4195. Reprinted 1982,
1983.

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With thanks to Jonathan Rosenhead for help with technical
information

Design by Adrian Yeeles

Typeset by Range Left Photosetters (TU) 251 3959

Printed by The Russell Press Ltd., Gamble Street, Nottingham
NG7 4ET

ISBN 0 9507381 2 3

Cover photograph shows Carol Ann Kelly in her coffin



Photo: Jeremy Nicholl



**THE KILLERS:
ON THE LEFT A
RUBBER BULLET
IN ITS CASING,
RIGHT A
PLASTIC BULLET
& CASING.**

**BOTH ARE
SHOWN
ACTUAL SIZE**



1. LETHAL WEAPONS

Carol Ann Kelly, 12 years old, was just one of seven people killed by plastic bullets in the North of Ireland between April and August 1981.

She lived on the Twinbrook estate, just outside Belfast. Ten days before she was shot, Twinbrook had seen the funeral of Bobby Sands MP, whose family lives there.

On 19 May Carol Ann was returning from a local shop with a carton of milk for her mother. Outside the house of her next door neighbour, she was shot in the head by a plastic bullet fired by a soldier in a passing jeep. She died three days later.

Witnesses agreed that there was no rioting in the immediate area at the time. They said that when the army jeeps came into the area, the soldiers were very agitated. Five soldiers had been killed by the IRA in South Armagh, and the soldiers were shouting at the residents, 'We'll get you for our five mates today.'

By August 1981, ten people had been killed in the North of Ireland by plastic bullets, and three by the rubber bullets that preceded them. Many more had suffered horrific injuries, including blindness in one or both eyes, and brain damage.

Plastic bullets are lethal weapons. There have been many calls in the North of Ireland for them to be banned.

Yet the deaths and injuries they cause have gone almost unreported in the British media. There has been no outcry in parliament, nor any public enquiry into their use. Indeed in December 1981 Northern Ireland Secretary James Prior rejected the opposition's request for a review.

Not only do plastic bullets remain an officially approved, and widely used, weapon in the North of Ireland – they have now been made available to the police in Britain as well.



KILLED

Francis Rowntree
aged 11½, died 23
April 1972

Francis Rowntree, from Lower Clonard Street in West Belfast, was hit in the head by a rubber bullet near the Divis Flats in the afternoon of Thursday 20 April 1972. The bullet was fired by soldiers of the Royal Anglian regiment in a Saracen armoured vehicle.

Eyewitnesses said that the bullet had been doctored: it had been hacked in half, with a torch battery replacing the missing half.



Right: Carol Ann Kelly

PROTEST !!

TURF LODGE WOMEN WANT BRITISH TROOPS OUT

You killed Leo Norney

You tried to kill Sandy Lynch

You tried ~~to kill~~ ^{killed} Brian Stewart

You are destroying our children

**WE WANT LIFE PROTECTED
—NOT DESTROYED**

WE WANT TRUTH — NOT LIES

*Your actions destroy life.

Your words are lies.

Bring your Criminals to justice.

LEAVE THE DISTRICT

A poster produced by women in Turf Lodge after Brian Stewart was fatally hit by a plastic bullet

2. HONG KONG BATONS

The history of plastic bullets starts in another British colony, Hong Kong. Hong Kong has gross inequalities of wealth; wages, working conditions and housing are appalling. The system of government is undemocratic. There have been periodic uprisings, and 'law and order' is maintained by a large police force backed up by units of the British army.

In the 1960s the Hong Kong police developed a dramatically new form of truncheon to control riots. Called a 'baton round', it was a combination of a truncheon and a bullet. It was a teakwood cylinder, just over an inch long, which could be fired into crowds. The police were now able to strike demonstrators from a distance, with less risk to themselves. A heftier version, 7½ inches long and 1½ inches in diameter and weighted with a metal core, was also developed.

In 1966-67 there were widespread anti-colonial riots. Baton rounds were used. Despite the fact that they killed a girl, and that they caused serious injuries both from impact and from splintering, the authorities considered them a great success.

The wooden bullet was considered for use in the North of Ireland, but was rejected as being too dangerous (though clearly thought 'safe' enough for Asians).

After a nine month crash research programme at Porton, a new version, made of rubber, was produced. This rubber baton round was introduced in the North of Ireland in 1970. From 1973 it began to be replaced by yet another version — the harder and more accurate plastic bullet.

Rubber and plastic bullets were to prove as dangerous as their Hong Kong predecessors.



KILLED

**Tobias Molloy
aged 18, died 16 July
1972**

Tobias Molloy from Strabane was struck in the heart in the early hours of Sunday 16 July 1972 by a rubber bullet fired at point blank range by soldiers near a British army checkpoint on the border. A large group of youths, returning across the border from a dance in Lifford, were stoning soldiers, who were firing rubber bullets. Friends said Tobias was not involved in the rioting.

3. SUPPRESSING MASS RESISTANCE

Rubber and plastic bullets are part of an ever increasing range of riot control weapons. American Congressman James Scheuer once commented, 'We can tranquillise, impede, immobilise, harass, shock, upset, stupefy, nauseate, chill, temporarily blind, deafen or just plain scare the wits out of anyone the police have a proper need to control and restrain.'

In America, such weapons are often called 'less lethal weapons'. Some British scientists, finding this term too direct, have tried to popularise the inaccurate and self-contradictory term, 'harmless weapons'.

There are two main kinds of riot control weapons. Impact weapons, such as plastic bullets, cause pain by hitting the victim. Gases and sprays cause pain – such as vomiting, choking and skin disorders – by their irritant properties. Rubber and plastic bullets are the most dangerous riot control weapons in use with national security forces anywhere in the world.

Rubber bullets were developed to supplement and overcome the tactical disadvantages of CS gas and water cannon. CS gas could float back and engulf the soldiers who had fired it, and water cannon were unwieldy and quickly ran out of water. Rubber bullets quickly became the main riot control weapon in use in the North of Ireland.

Riot control weapons are designed to be used against crowds, not against guerilla armies. They are designed to disperse crowds by punishing demonstrators, and to intimidate people from taking part in protests.

Jonathan Rosenhead, of the British Society for Social Responsibility in Science, has described the usage of plastic and rubber bullets as being 'like a fever chart of the Northern Ireland body politic'. Every time large numbers of nationalist people have taken to the streets to protest against British govern-



KILLED

Thomas Friel
aged 21, died 22 May 1973.

Thomas Friel was hit on the head at around midnight on 17 May 1973 by a rubber bullet fired by British soldiers at about 25 to 30 yards range. Thomas was on his way to his home in Creggan Heights, Derry. His brother, who was with him, said the area was quiet at the time although there had been rioting earlier.

ment policies, there has been a dramatic surge in the numbers fired.

Sixteen thousand rubber bullets were fired in 1971, as thousands of people protested against internment without trial. In 1972, over 23,000 were fired. Nearly 4,000 were fired in February 1972 alone, following the Bloody Sunday massacre on 30 January.

Over succeeding years the number used gradually declined, only to escalate with the 1981 hunger strike. In April that year, as thousands took to the streets to support Bobby Sands, 1,959 plastic bullets were fired. The May total was a staggering 16,656.

4. FROM COLONY TO METROPOLIS

It was in the colonies during the fifties that Britain began using riot control weapons extensively. While baton rounds were developed in Hong Kong, CS gas and water cannon were first used in Cyprus.

CS gas in particular was soon being widely used both against anti-colonial resistance movements and against European and American demonstrators. It was used extensively by the British in Guyana. The Americans used huge quantities in Vietnam, and then used it against American blacks in Watts, Newark, Detroit and Chicago. The French used it against students in May 1968.

Britain has become a world 'brand leader' in riot control weapons, exporting them worldwide. Like CS gas, plastic bullets are made by Pains-Wessex Schermuly, of High Post, Salisbury, Wiltshire. Countries to which the bullets are exported include Spain (where one person was killed in San Sebastian and another in Barcelona), Portugal, South Africa, and Iran under the Shah. West Germany is believed to be considering buying them for use against anti-nuclear demonstrators.

There has been a steady transfer of riot control



KILLED

Stephen Geddis
aged 10, died 30 August 1975.

Stephen Geddis was near his home at Divis Flats, West Belfast, when he was hit on the side of the head by a plastic bullet fired by soldiers of the Royal Anglian regiment. A very quiet child, he had refused to go outside for three weeks since returning from a NSPCC-sponsored trip to America. That day, 28 August, his father persuaded him to go out. Near where he was playing, a patrol tried to remove two cushions which some boys had set fire to in the road. The boys stoned the soldiers. A soldier, pursuing the boys, fired a rubber bullet. Stephen fell to the ground with a head wound. He was about 40 yards away and, according to eyewitnesses, was not involved in the stoning. His case was described in detail by Sunday Times journalist Derek Humphry (see main text).



weaponry from the North of Ireland to Britain. Just as in America, its first domestic use in Britain has been to suppress dissent in the black population.

Thus riot shields, combined with 'snatch squads', were introduced at Lewisham in South London in 1977. 'Heli-tele' – a helicopter-borne camera controlled from the ground and able to focus on individual members of a crowd – appeared at the Ilford North by-election in February 1978, when confrontations between anti-fascists and the National Front were expected. A night-vision TV camera, also helicopter-borne, was used in the Brixton riots in April 1981.

Stocks of CS gas have been held by British police since at least 1968. On 6 July 1981 the gas was used against demonstrators in Britain for the first time, when police fired 26 canisters in Merseyside, seriously injuring a number of people. The police used a type of cartridge that is designed to penetrate barricades and is specifically labelled unsuitable for use against crowds.

In mid-July, the government responded to the black rebellion by announcing that plastic bullets, armoured personnel carriers and water cannon would be made available for use in British cities. Home Secretary William Whitelaw, who had earlier said – causing outrage in Ireland because of the double-think involved – that plastic bullets would not be introduced in Britain because they were too dangerous, now rescinded his pledge.

On 14 July six senior police officers from 'riot areas' in Britain flew to the North of Ireland for a crash course in riot control from the Royal Ulster Constabulary – a course with special emphasis, according to the press, on snatch squads and plastic bullets.



KILLED

**Brian Stewart
aged 13, died 10
October 1976.**

Brian Stewart was hit in the face by a plastic bullet fired by soldiers of the Kings Own Scottish Borderers soon after 6 p.m. on 4 October 1976. He had just left his home in Turf Lodge, West Belfast, and was standing on a corner. Several eyewitnesses said

there was no rioting in the area at the time. The British army made a number of contradictory statements, attempting to justify the shooting.



**Mrs Kathleen Stewart
with the plastic bullet
that killed her son**

5. PROPAGANDA

Rubber and plastic bullets do not replace live ammunition: they are additional weapons in the state's armoury. During the 1981 hunger strike, people were not only killed by plastic bullets – several were also killed by live rounds fired by the 'security forces'.

Essentially, rubber and plastic bullets are designed to be used in situations where the authorities want to use force, but where the use of live ammunition would be politically counter-productive, because it would provoke a storm of criticism from outsiders.

The image of crowd control weapons is crucial, especially when TV crews are likely to be on the scene. What matters to the authorities is not how dangerous the weapon actually is, but how dangerous people think it is.

For the authorities, the ideal situation is when the target population fully realises the danger of a weapon and is therefore intimidated by it, but everyone else imagines it is relatively harmless.

The authors of *The Technology of Political Control* noted, 'the principle is not really one of minimum force, but of minimum political reaction.' And US scientists involved with such weapons admitted, 'It is preferred that onlookers not get the impression that the police are using excessive force or that the weapon has an especially injurious effect on the target individuals. Here again, a flow of blood and similar dramatic effects are to be avoided.'

When the army introduced rubber bullets, they made a determined – and successful – effort to persuade the media that they were harmless.

Simon Winchester, a normally reliable *Guardian* reporter, has described how in July 1970, the 'charming press officer' of the King's Own Scottish Borderers 'showed the soft and squidgy things to reporters'. Winchester quotes an *Observer* reporter as saying, 'Soon they'll be lobbing grenades full of confetti ...



KILLED

Michael Donnelly
aged 21, died 10
August 1980.

Michael Donnelly was hit in the chest in the early hours of Sunday 10 August 1980, the weekend of the anniversary of internment. A dedicated social worker who worked with both Catholic and Protestant youth, he had just come off duty at the Ballymurphy Community Centre in West Belfast. He was walking home through the Lower Falls when he was hit by a plastic bullet fired by soldiers of the Royal Artillery at 15-20 yards range. An eyewitness said he saw a soldier fire at Michael Donnelly as he walked up Leeson Street, where troops had earlier been firing plastic bullets at youths.

You can't take this sort of thing seriously at all.'

Clearly the reporters were not invited to handle the rubber bullets themselves. For the missiles are anything but 'soft and squidgy'. They are harder than car tyres. They are cylinders, 5¾ inches long, 1½ inches in diameter, weighing a third of a pound. They leave the gun at 160 miles per hour.

The army deliberately substituted the term 'rubber bullet' for the official term 'baton round'. Major Clayton, Military Programmes Manager for the manufacturers, Schermuly, wrote in the *Defence Attaches' Quarterly* that the aim was to get a 'slightly humorous' image, and commented, 'looking back it does seem as if that aim was achieved.'

But the effects of rubber bullets were anything but humorous.

6. RUBBER BULLET DEATHS & INJURIES

Between 1970 and when they were withdrawn in 1975, rubber bullets caused three deaths and countless injuries.

From 1970 to 1972, four surgeons based at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast studied 90 patients who had needed hospital treatment after being hit by rubber bullets.

Their ages ranged from seven to 67, and a third were women. Forty-one were sufficiently severely injured to need inpatient treatment. One – 11-year-old Francis Rowntree – died. (The two other people who died from rubber bullet injuries, 18-year-old Tobias Molloy and 21-year-old Thomas Friel, were outside the scope of the surgeons' survey.)

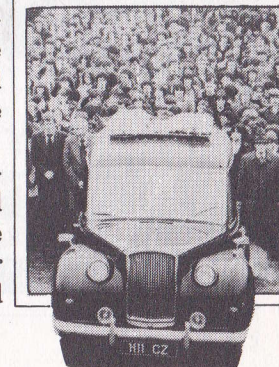
A very high proportion, 80 per cent, of the inpatients had head injuries. Two people were blinded in both eyes and seven were blinded in one eye. Five had severe loss of vision in one eye, and four had their faces severely disfigured. Twenty-one people had



KILLED

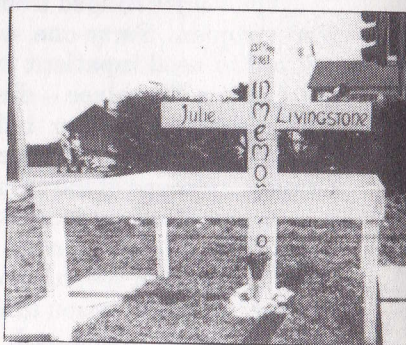
Paul Whitters
aged 15, died 25 April
1981

Paul Whitters was hit by a plastic bullet fired by a policeman in Derry at around 8.30 p.m. on Wednesday 15 April 1981. A group of boys had been stoning the RUC, who retreated into a bakery. The boys began stoning an electrical shop, and then, with the exception of Paul, moved away. Paul was alone when an RUC man emerged from the bakery and shot him in the head from about seven yards range. As with several of the plastic bullet victims, his funeral was enormous – it was attended by a thousand people.





Above, Julie Livingstone, far left, her mother, right, memorial on the spot where Julie was hit.



fractures of the face or skull bones. There were three severe cases of brain damage: one of these was the child who died.

Other injuries included seven cases of lung injury, and one case each of damage to the liver, spleen and intestine.

The surgeons noted, 'It is obvious that the tissues of the eyes, face and skull bones and brain are particularly susceptible to a blow from a missile of this size, weight and speed . . . Head injuries are particularly serious as brain damage may be fatal, and a very high percentage of injuries to the eye results in blindness.'

In the summer of 1972 the Belfast surgeons handed the report over to army surgeons. The army suppressed it, publishing it as a restricted document for internal use. It was not until *The Sunday Times* published a leaked account of it in May 1973, that the surgeons were finally told they could publish without risk of prosecution under the Official Secrets Act.

7. EVEN MORE DANGEROUS

Plastic bullets were issued in the North of Ireland in August 1972 and were first used in action on 7 February 1973.

At first they were used sparingly. Only 258 had been fired by the end of 1974, while 55,689 rubber bullets had been used by that date. But in 1975 over 3,500 plastic bullets were fired, and by the end of that year they had completely replaced the rubber bullet.

The attraction of plastic bullets for the army and police was their greater range and accuracy. Rubber bullets were designed to be fired at the ground, so that they would ricochet and strike demonstrators in the legs or the lower part of the body. They quickly became unstable in flight, so, although they were recommended for use against targets between 25 and



KILLED

**Julie Livingstone
aged 14, died 13 May
1981.**

Julie Livingstone was hit on the head by a plastic bullet as she walked towards her home in the Lenadoon area of West Belfast at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 12 May 1981. She was returning from an errand with a friend. A group of people, mainly women and children, were banging binlids in a protest following the death of hunger striker Francis Hughes. Two British army Saladin armoured vehicles came up the road. As the protesters ran for cover, plastic bullets were fired from the Saladins. Julie was found lying on the ground, fatally injured.

55 yards away, they were generally considered inaccurate at much above 20 yards.

In contrast, the plastic bullet is designed to be fired directly at the target, and at longer range (army rules recommend its use 'at a range of not less than 20 metres'). Thus in theory they should be less indiscriminate than rubber bullets and more likely to hit the selected target, so reducing the bad publicity that resulted from hitting bystanders.

The officially inspired *Jane's Infantry Weapons 1976* suggested that rubber bullets were withdrawn because the disability and serious injury rates 'were not considered acceptable' – although the fatality rate was thought very moderate. But the only explanation ever given in parliament for replacing them with plastic bullets was the plastic version's greater accuracy – no mention was made of its greater safety.

In fact, as Jonathan Rosenhead predicted in the *New Scientist* in 1976, plastic bullets proved more dangerous than rubber bullets. By the end of July 1981, there had been one death for every 4,000 rounds fired, compared with one for every 18,000 rubber ones.

Superficially, both types of bullet are similar. The plastic bullet, which is made of PVC, is shorter than the rubber one but of the same thickness. It is $3\frac{7}{8}$ inches long and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. It is harder than the rubber bullet but also a little lighter – plastic bullets weigh $4\frac{3}{4}$ ounces while rubber ones weigh $5\frac{1}{4}$ ounces. They differ in the shape of the nose: the plastic bullet is flat at both ends, while the rubber bullet has a bullet-shaped nose. The plastic bullet, with a muzzle velocity of well above 160 miles per hour, leaves the riot gun at an appreciably higher speed than the rubber bullet.

When fired directly at a target, both bullets have similar effects. In fact, the plastic bullet has a rather harder punch. Because, unlike rubber bullets, plastic bullets were meant to be fired direct, they were bound to cause more injuries.



KILLED

Carol Ann Kelly
aged 12, died 22 May 1981.

Carol Ann Kelly was hit on the side of the head by a plastic bullet fired by soldiers in a jeep at about 9.30 p.m. on Tuesday 19 May 1981. She was returning to her home in Twinbrook, on the outskirts of West Belfast, with a carton of milk for her mother. Witnesses were adamant that there was no rioting in the immediate area. Hundreds of school children lined the route at her funeral.

In May 1981, following Bobby Sands' death, a modernised version of the rubber bullet was used on the streets of Belfast by the RUC. Known as Rubber Baton Mk 2, it is similar in size and shape to the plastic bullet, though fractionally longer.

These weapons may be an interim design, stocks of which were made and held in reserve. At that time, unprecedented numbers of plastic bullets were being fired, and an RUC spokesman was quoted in *The Irish Times* as saying that the new rubber bullets were used 'because, at the time, sufficient stocks of plastic baton rounds were not available'.

8. PLASTIC BULLET DEATHS & INJURIES

The first person to be killed by a plastic bullet was 10-year-old Stephen Geddis, who was hit on the side of his head on 28 August 1975 and died three days later.

Sunday Times journalist Derek Humphry described his death. He wrote, 'By all accounts Stephen was not one of the city's wild youngsters. He was withdrawn and rarely went outdoors, spending most of his time playing with toys and learning the guitar and mouth organ.'

On 5 August Stephen returned from an NSPCC sponsored trip to America. He refused to go outside 'and pleaded with his parents to be allowed to go back to America. After three weeks without leaving his home, Stephen's father insisted that the boy go out to play.'

Nearby, a crowd of about 30 boys aged between seven and thirteen began stoning soldiers who were trying to remove some cushions the boys had set fire to in the road. Eye-witnesses said Stephen was not involved in the stoning.

Then a soldier, pursuing a group of boys, fired a plastic bullet. Stephen, who was about 40 yards away,



KILLED

Henry Duffy
aged 45, died 22 May 1981.

Henry Duffy, a widower with seven children, was hit by plastic bullets in the chest and on the left temple soon after midnight on Friday 22 May 1981. He was returning from a city centre pub to his home in the Creggan area of Derry, when he got caught up in rioting which was going on in the Bogside in the wake of hunger striker Patsy O'Hara's death.



dropped to the ground with a head wound.

Over the next five years two more people were killed by plastic bullets fired by soldiers. Thirteen-year-old Brian Stewart was killed in October 1976, and 21-year-old social worker Michael Donnelly was killed in August 1980.

The 1981 hunger strike saw a savage escalation in the death toll. Seven people were killed by plastic bullets in less than seven months. Three were children: 15-year-old Paul Whitters, 14-year-old Julie Livingstone and 12-year-old Carol Ann Kelly. One, Mrs Nora McCabe, was a 30-year-old housewife. Three were men in their forties: Henry Duffy, Peter Doherty and Peter Magennis.

There has been as yet no full compilation of the injuries caused by plastic bullets: at the time of writing, medical specialists in hospitals in the North of Ireland are compiling a detailed dossier. But the recorded cases make terrible reading.

After the first four deaths in 1981, Jonathan Rosenhead wrote, 'They are the most tragic victims in a grotesque cavalcade of injuries, only a fraction of which are ever reported in the media. Eviscerated eyes, smashed hands, triple fractures of the leg, head wounds requiring 40 stitches, injuries to the kidney, liver, groin and throat.'

In the three months from 5 May 1981, hospitals recorded 161 serious injuries. In answer to a parliamentary question, then Northern Ireland Secretary Humphrey Atkins revealed on 6 July that from 5 May 110 people had received hospital treatment for plastic bullet injuries. Of the 45 who were treated as inpatients, 31 had head injuries.

Of the seven people killed by plastic bullets in 1981, five died from head injuries, one from a chest injury and one had both head and chest injuries. Four of those injured that year lost an eye. Several had fractured skulls. One had epileptic fits after the incident and two are likely to remain partially paralysed.

Among the many children injured was 12-year-



KILLED

Nora McCabe
aged 30, died 9 July 1981.

Mrs Nora McCabe, who had two boys aged seven and two and a three-month-old baby girl, was hit on the head by a plastic bullet at about 7.45 a.m. on Wednesday 8 July 1981 in West Belfast. Youths were throwing stones following news of hunger striker Joe McDonnell's death. Mrs McCabe was walking towards the Falls Road with a friend to get cigarettes when an RUC jeep approached and a policeman fired at her from a range of about six feet.



KILLED

Peter Doherty
aged 40, died 31 July 1981.

Peter Doherty was hit on the head by a plastic bullet fired by soldiers of the Royal Marine Commandos at around 1 a.m. on Friday 24 July 1981. He was standing in the kitchen of his first floor flat in the Divis complex, West Belfast. The soldiers responsible were clearing barricades in the street below.

old Paul Corr. He was near his West Belfast home on 28 August when he was shot by soldiers of the Royal Marine Commandos from a passing landrover. There was no rioting in the area at the time. The plastic bullet tore off part of his nose, shattered and ripped out his palate, and forced his teeth down into his mouth. He needed extensive plastic surgery.

9. THE AUTHORITIES KNOW

The government continues to sanction the use of plastic bullets despite all the evidence, from scientific experiments as well as the record of deaths and injuries, that they are extremely dangerous.

It seems clear that when rubber bullets were first introduced, the authorities were not concerned about whether the missiles really were safe, so long as the public could be persuaded to believe that they were.

If safety had been an important consideration, the weapons would have been thoroughly tested before they were introduced. Yet in 1970, US government researchers, who have an information-sharing agreement with Britain, complained that 'very little quantitative data on blunt trauma to the body' was available.

The American government then undertook its own research. US military scientists intensively tested a variety of blunt impact weapons, firing them at the heads of baboons and the bodies of small pigs. They found that such weapons were in the 'severe damage' region if their impact energy exceeded 90 foot pounds (the energy which a 3lb weight would have if dropped from 30 feet). Weapons with this amount of punch caused serious skin lacerations, massive skull fractures, rupture and destruction of the kidney, fracture and fragmentation of the liver, haemorrhages, necrosis and rupture of the heart.

Rubber and plastic bullets even when used

BLINDED!



according to army instructions are in the 'severe damage' region. Parliamentary questions have revealed that both types of bullet have energy levels above 110 foot pounds at 50 yards, the extreme limit of their range, and that at five yards range the plastic bullet has an impact energy of 210 foot pounds.

US tests on rubber bullets found that impact energy levels above 120 foot pounds resulted either in death or in significant damage to the skin and organs of the thorax. They concluded that the rubber bullet has an 'extremely high' probability of undesirable effects in any scenario for its possible operational use.

The American tests were done between 1973 and 1975, and the results were available to the British government.

In August 1981 an international commission of enquiry, sponsored by the Association for Legal Justice, travelled to Belfast to investigate the use of plastic bullets. One of its members was senior British research scientist Dr Tim Shallice, who wrote in the *New Statesman*, 'The conclusion seemed inescapable to members of the commission: the Northern Ireland authorities were knowingly allowing widespread, indiscriminate and illegal use of a weapon whose lethal potential was well known.'

10. USE IS ABUSE

At 9 a.m. on 4 November 1971, paratroopers put every resident of Tullymore Gardens in Andersonstown, West Belfast, under house arrest. This angered Mrs Emma Groves, whose house had been raided earlier that morning. She told her daughter to play an Irish rebel record as a protest. Her daughter put on *Four Green Fields*, a song which tells how one of the four Irish provinces is held in bondage by Britain.

Within minutes a soldier fired a rubber bullet through her open window, at about eight yards range, striking Mrs Groves in the face. In hospital, she had both her eyes removed. Years later she received



KILLED

Peter Magennis
aged 41, died 9 August 1981.

Peter Magennis was struck in the chest by a plastic bullet soon after midnight on Sunday 9 August, the internment anniversary, in Bawnmore, a tiny nationalist area in North Belfast. He and his wife had come out of their house to protest to young rioters who had thrown a petrol bomb into their front garden. Two RUC landrovers appeared. The rioters disappeared, leaving Peter, his wife and a friend in the street. A landrover drew alongside them and Peter was shot at point blank range.

Left: Mrs Emma Groves

£35,000 compensation – a *de facto* admission of guilt by the army – but the soldier concerned was never charged.

As we have seen, even when rubber and plastic bullets are used at the range recommended by the army, they are very dangerous. But, as in Emma Groves' case, the army and RUC frequently fire them at very much shorter ranges. The Belfast surgeons found that more than half the injured in their survey of rubber bullet victims had been shot from less than 15 yards, and a third from less than five yards.

This gross disregard for human life is also reflected in the use of plastic bullets. Thirty-year-old Mrs Nora McCabe, who died on 9 July 1981, was shot by the RUC from just six feet away. Fifteen-year-old Paul Whitters, who died on 25 April 1981, was shot from seven yards' range, again by the RUC.

The injured and dead include many who, like Emma Groves and Nora McCabe, were not involved in rioting at the time they were shot. Part of the explanation for the high toll of uninvolved people may be that they are less alert than those involved in rioting, who watch the movements of soldiers and police and are readier to evade them.

Two press photographers were among the injured in 1981. Cyril Cain of the *Daily Mirror* was 30 to 35 yards away from troops when a plastic bullet fractured his leg in three places. Steve Benbow, a freelance, had 40 stitches in his head after being struck at a range of over 50 yards.

The soldiers and police often seem to fire with no motive other than blind retaliation against the nationalist community. Mrs McGuire, an elderly lady, was among a group of people saying the rosary the day before Bobby Sands died. RUC jeeps, she said, raced up the street with plastic bullet guns firing on both sides 'like fireworks': she was hit in the face and had to have 26 stitches. William Firth was shot three times at close range by soldiers while lying on the ground after being ordered out of a taxi: his skull was fractured and he lost part of his intestine.



BLINDED

Mrs Emma Groves

Mrs Emma Groves, 51 years old and mother of 11 children, was hit in the face by a rubber bullet on the morning of 4 November 1971. In hospital, both her eyes were removed. A British soldier fired the bullet at about eight yards range through the open window of Mrs Groves' home in Andersonstown, West Belfast.

There are also many cases of death or serious injury to children who are, as Jonathan Rosenhead has pointed out, 'too young to be a threat to the security forces'. In May 1981 the youngest victim was four-year-old David Madden: he had to have six stitches in a head wound after being struck by a plastic bullet while on his way home from school for lunch. On the same day, five-year-old Neil Lynagh was injured in the leg while sitting outside a shop.

Guardian journalist David Beresford, in the early hours of an August morning, witnessed a series of incidents in which soldiers and police blatantly flouted their instructions. These specify that plastic bullets should only be used where they represent 'minimum and reasonable force', that they should be aimed at a selected person and not used indiscriminately, that they should be aimed at the lower part of the body, and that they should be fired at a range of not less than 20 metres 'except when the safety of soldiers or others is seriously threatened'.

In the space of a couple of hours Beresford saw soldiers firing indiscriminately from moving Saracen armoured vehicles, soldiers firing from five yards' range at the backs of fleeing civilians, a soldier firing waist high 'at no apparent target' as he ran up a street, and police firing at close range at youths and women.

Dr Tim Shallice wrote of the international commission of enquiry, 'We were astonished by the widespread and indiscriminate use of plastic bullets and by the negligible official response... Saracens and jeeps had shot at people who were not rioting, from such close range that it could not be other than intentional... Incidents in which unprovoked and unjustifiable shots occurred at close range were frequently described.'

There have also been many allegations that soldiers and police deliberately increase the lethal potential of the bullets by doctoring them. Former British officer Michael Yardley wrote in the *New Statesman*, 'I have heard soldiers who have served in



BLINDED

Richard Moore

Richard Moore was 10 years old when, soon after 3.30 p.m. on Thursday 4 May 1972, he was hit in the face by a rubber bullet fired by a British soldier. He was blinded in both eyes and had 54 stitches in his face. He was returning from primary school to his home in Creggan, Derry, at the time, and there was no rioting in the area. (Richard appeared in two BBC documentaries, *Children in Crossfire*, first shown in 1974, and *A Bright Brand New Day...?*, shown in 1982.)



BELOW: DEVELOPING THE 'SLIGHTLY HUMOROUS' IMAGE OF THE RUBBER BULLET. RIGHT: THE GRIM REALITY, A 'DOCTORED' PLASTIC BULLET THAT WAS FIRED AT CHILDREN

This 'doctored' plastic bullet was fired by Royal Marine Commandos at children in West Belfast on 2 July 1981



The Lord Mayor of Birmingham taking an interest in the famous rubber bullet.



Northern Ireland boast that they put broken razor blades or nails into rubber bullets to make sure they hurt someone.'

The insertion of torch batteries into rubber bullets is said to have been particularly common. Eyewitnesses said that the rubber bullet that killed 11-year-old Francis Rowntree in 1972 had been doctored in this way.

There are allegations that plastic bullets have been doctored by sticking razor blades, jagged bottle tops and slivers of glass into the ends, or by sharpening them or glueing coins to the nose.

II. NO USE COMPLAINING

Dr Tim Shallice, commenting on unjustifiable close range shootings, wrote, 'Are such incidents the undisciplined response of individual soldiers and police in circumstances of increasing stress caused by the recent IRA campaign? Or are such incidents something the authorities tacitly accept? The authorities' response to civilians' complaints strongly supports the second interpretation.'

He quotes the case of a father who complained about his son being hit on the back by a plastic bullet in his back garden. 'The response was to fire at the father, too, hitting him on the arm.' Mrs Toner, who rang the RUC to say she was willing to testify about the death of Carol Ann Kelly, had her house shot up with plastic bullets that same evening.

The RUC appears to be totally negligent about following up incidents. Shallice writes that formal complaints to the police seemed to receive little attention. 'Frequently we asked witnesses whether they had been interviewed by the RUC. On every occasion the witness said that the RUC had not been to see them.'

David Beresford of *The Guardian* writes that



LOST AN EYE

Brendan Kelly

Brendan Kelly, 21 years old, of Dungiven, Co. Derry, was hit in the face by a plastic bullet fired at about 20 yards range by the RUC soon after 10 p.m. on Friday 24 April 1981. He lost his right eye and had 17 stitches in his head. Brendan was crossing a street in Maghera when, in his own words, he 'walked into crossfire' between the RUC and five or six youths who were throwing bottles. He says the RUC could easily have dispersed the youths without firing plastic bullets.

Left: picture and caption from a 1972 army publication

both Mrs McAree, who was present when Peter Doherty was shot through the window of a first floor flat in the Divis complex, and Mrs Toner 'insisted that police had not visited the scenes of death.' Mrs McAree showed him a bloodstained plastic bullet which she said had killed Peter Doherty.

A further hazard for complainants is that they may find themselves charged with riotous behaviour. Mrs Hanna, who had 12 stitches for a head wound from a plastic bullet, was told, when she went to the police station to complain, that she would be charged with rioting.

Neils Henrik Neilsen, a Danish social worker who had his pelvis shattered by a plastic bullet as he tried to help a Canadian press photographer escape some rioting, told *The Irish Times*:

'At the hospital, I tried to get an RUC officer to take a complaint but he seemed to be more interested in what country I was from and if I had credentials and permits to be in Northern Ireland than in doing anything about my complaint. My Canadian press photographer friend was treated as a "suspect" although he only wanted to tell what he saw in evidence for me.'

12. GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER

Throughout the whole history of the use of rubber and plastic bullets in the North of Ireland no soldier or policeman has been convicted for their misuse.

Not only does this make a mockery of justice and increase the alienation of the nationalist community: it also means that, in effect, the authorities are giving *carte blanche* to soldiers and police to kill and injure with impunity.

The army and police methodically evade the scrutiny of the courts. They regularly settle cases out of court by offering large sums in compensation –



LOST AN EYE

Patrick Callaghan

Patrick Callaghan, 21 years old, was struck in the face by a plastic bullet fired from a parked police landrover on the night of Sunday 10 May 1981. In hospital, his right eye was removed. He also had a broken nose, dislocated jaw and other facial injuries. He was returning to his home in Creggan, Derry, at the time, and there was no rioting in the area.

offers that impoverished victims and their families find hard to refuse. Offers of compensation are made on condition that no liability attaches to the army or police. By this means they avoid the embarrassing publicity of having their members dragged through the courts. The fact that soldiers and police go unpunished also reassures their colleagues that they can continue to fire plastic bullets without inhibition.

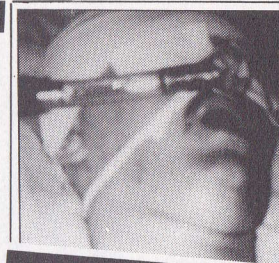
In 1980, when Patrick Deery was suing the Ministry of Defence over an incident in 1972 when he lost an eye after being hit at short range by a rubber bullet, the Army settled for £20,000 damages five minutes before the case was due to be heard. In the case of Richard Moore, blinded at the age of ten in 1972, the army agreed to pay £68,000 just three days before the scheduled court hearing in February 1977.

Mrs Kathleen Stewart, determined to prove the innocence of her son Brian, who was killed in 1976 at the age of 13, refused an offer of compensation because this would have entailed absolving the army from guilt. (Compensation for the deaths of children is anyway very low, because they are not wage-earners.) Instead she is suing the soldier who shot him and the officer who was in charge at the time. No-one has ever, apparently, won a case of this kind. The hearing has been repeatedly postponed. Mrs Stewart says that at one stage the army offered to give her a statement saying that Brian was an innocent victim. She was prepared to settle for this, but then the army withdrew the offer: perhaps because they didn't want to make a public admission of guilt at a time when, with the first 1981 deaths, plastic bullets were once again becoming controversial.

13. LIES & COVER-UPS

The army and police have repeatedly deflected public criticism of their use of plastic bullets by issuing lying press statements about incidents which resulted in serious injuries or deaths.

One of the most notorious cases of army lies came



SERIOUSLY INJURED

Sean Tumelty

Sean Tumelty, 26 years old, was hit in the head by a plastic bullet in the early morning of Sunday 31 May 1981, near his home in Divis Flats, West Belfast. The bullet was fired at close range by British soldiers. Sean underwent a five hour brain operation and was put on a life-support machine (see photo). He may remain partially paralysed.





after the death of Brian Stewart. Fionnula O'Connor of *The Irish Times* wrote,

The first army statement said two patrols had been attacked by stone-throwing youths, at first a few, then a crowd of about 400, and had fired 'a number of baton rounds' to extricate themselves. 'Unfortunately, one baton round hit a 13-year-old boy' said the spokesman.

Yesterday the unfortunate boy became a leading stone-thrower according to the officer commanding the regiment involved. Not an impressive change in story. In the meantime, local people maintained that there had been no crowd and no riot and that the boy had been standing at the corner with a few friends when the soldiers began firing. They admitted that people gathered angrily after that.

What the army and police do is retrospectively justify the incident by inventing circumstances which fit in with the standing instructions on when plastic bullets can be fired. They use the same technique for justifying incidents when innocent people have been killed by live ammunition.

In Carol Ann Kelly's case, residents said unanimously that there was no rioting when she was shot. Yet the RUC press office, which has taken over from the army as the chief source of comment on incidents, said that soldiers had been attacked by youths and had replied with baton rounds to disperse them.

In this case, the RUC took media manipulation a step further. Chief Constable Jack Hermon callously chose the night before her funeral to issue a statement defending the use of plastic bullets. So the next morning he grabbed the headlines (*The Times* led off with the risible 'Plastic bullets save lives, Ulster police chief says') while Carol Ann's funeral was relegated to the bottom of articles or, as in *The Times*, not reported at all.

When 37-year-old Peter Doherty was hit in Divis Flats, the RUC was reported in *The Irish Times* as



LOST AN EYE

Mrs Sarah Begley

Mrs Sarah Begley, 43 years old, was struck in the face by a plastic bullet fired by the RUC at about 12.30 a.m. on Saturday 13 June 1981. As she was returning to her home in Unity Flats, Belfast, RUC men in landrovers were pursuing a group of youths. Mrs Begley was talking to neighbours on a balcony 40 feet up when she was hit. Her left eye was removed in hospital.

Left: police and soldiers firing plastic bullets. Note the number of spent casings.

saying that 'as soldiers were removing makeshift barricades at Cullintree Road in the Divis area they came under attack from a crowd with petrol bombs, flaming cans of petrol and other missiles. The soldiers replied with a number of rounds of plastic bullets.'

Yet Peter Doherty was in a first floor flat when he was hit. Mrs Mary McAree, with whom he shared the flat, explained to David Beresford of *The Guardian* that she was at the open kitchen window with a friend watching soldiers clear a barricade. "Peter came into the kitchen and told us to move away in case they fired a shot at us," said Mrs McAree. A shot was heard and Mr Doherty fell. "I started screaming for an ambulance."

Peter Doherty was injured on 24 July 1981. He died on 31 July. This delay between injury and death is common in plastic bullet incidents and serves to lessen their impact on public opinion.

As Dr Tim Shallice writes, 'The authorities seem to be relying on the media image of the plastic bullet as a device which appears harmless other than in very exceptional circumstances. After all, deaths when they occur from plastic bullets tend to take place not under the noses of TV cameras, but a few days later in hospital, when interest has waned. If six unarmed civilians had been shot dead on the spot by rifles, the outcry would be immense.'

14. A POLITICAL SOLUTION

The use of rubber and plastic bullets in the years from 1970 has demonstrably failed to bring peace any closer in the North of Ireland. In fact, they have probably had the opposite effect.

In the words of Steve Wright of the Richardson Institute for Conflict and Peace Research at Lancaster University, the use of such riot control weapons 'exacerbated and helped to destabilise the Northern Irish conflict by reinforcing vicious conflict circuits.'



FRACTURED SKULL



Dermot Gallagher

Dermot Gallagher, 11 years old, was hit in the head by a plastic bullet fired by a British soldier on Friday 21 August 1981. His skull was fractured. He was returning from a local shop to his home in Twinbrook, West Belfast.

The fact that the British authorities can sanction such weapons, which have caused so many deaths and terrible injuries, has added to the deep grievances of the nationalist community and increased their alienation. Instead of discouraging violence, the use of these weapons helps to encourage violence. The fact that soldiers and police have a free hand to inflict death and injury indiscriminately on nationalists only serves to reinforce the belief that violence is a justifiable means of removing the regime that controls them.

Mass resistance, whether expressed through peaceful demonstrations or stone-throwing or petrol-bombing, can never, in the long term, be suppressed by bullets, whether lead or plastic.

Police harassment, combined with the social problems of being black in a racist society, has led to uprisings on the streets of Britain. In the North of Ireland, military and police repression have added to the bitterness of nationalists who already suffer discrimination in a partitioned Ireland: years of war have been the result.

Repression will never bring peace. In Belfast and Toxteth, in Brixton and the Bogside, the need is for political solutions that eliminate the fundamental problems.

In the meantime, as a matter of priority, plastic bullets must be banned. Otherwise more terrible deaths and injuries, more suffering and bitterness, will be inevitable.

'The penalty for rioting is, at most, six months, not death. The penalty for ten-year-olds throwing stones at heavily armoured vehicles should be a clip on the ear, not death. But we now have the situation that the penalty for being a Catholic (no plastic bullets have ever been fired in loyalist areas) and walking in your own street or even standing at your own window is now death.'

A resident of Divis Flats, West Belfast.



SERIOUSLY INJURED

Paul Corr

Paul Corr, 12 years old, was shot on Friday 28 August 1981 by Royal Marine Commandos firing from a passing landrover. The plastic bullet hit him on the side of his nose, tearing part of it off, and shattered his palate. He required extensive plastic surgery. He was returning from a local sweet shop to his home in Beechmount, West Belfast, and there was no rioting in the area.



EURO-MPs CALL FOR BAN

On 14 December 1981, 52 members of the European Parliament tabled a motion calling on governments of member states to ban the use of plastic bullets against civilians. Those tabling the motion included Irish MEPs Neil Blaney and Sile de Valera, Northern Irish MEP John Hume, and British MEPs Richard Balfe (London South Inner) and Ann Clwyd (Wales Mid and West). Other British MEPs who have expressed their opposition to the use of plastic bullets include Roland Boyes (Durham), WJ Griffiths (South Wales), Alf Lomas (London North East) and Dr Barry Seal (Yorkshire West).



This cartoon, from *The Irish Times* of 16 July 1981, comments on the visit of six senior police officers from 'riot areas' in Britain to the North of Ireland for a crash course in riot control from the Royal Ulster Constabulary.



INJURED

Neil Lynagh

Neil Lynagh, five years old, of Grosvenor Road, West Belfast, was sitting outside a shop at around 6.30 p.m. on Wednesday 13 May 1981 when the RUC opened fire. Neil was struck in the leg by a plastic bullet, which ripped off skin that had been grafted over burn wounds.

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Numbers of rubber and plastic bullets fired in the North of Ireland

Rubber bullets

1970	238
1971	16,752
1972	23,363
1973	12,724
1974	2,612
1975	145
Total	55,834

Plastic bullets

1973	42
1974	216
1975	3,556
1976	3,464
1977	1,490
1978	1,734
1979	1,271
1980	1,231
Total	13,004

1981 (by month, to 11 Nov.)

Jan.	68
Feb.	48
Mar.	320
Apr.	1,959
May	16,656
June	606
July	6,182
Aug.	3,755
Sep.	40
Oct.	24
Nov. (to 11)	7
Total	29,665

Total plastic bullets 42,669
Total rubber and plastic bullets 98,503

Note: The Royal Ulster Constabulary acquired plastic bullets in 1978, but the figures for 1978, 1979 and 1980 refer only to the number of plastic bullets fired by the army. The 1981 figures include plastic bullets fired by the RUC.



Toxteth, Liverpool, 6 July 1981. Members of the Special Police Tactical Unit with, from left, an image-intensifier telescope, a pump action shot gun and a riot gun (barrel on right, arrowed). In Toxteth both types of gun were used to fire CS gas. In the North of Ireland the riot gun is mainly used for firing plastic bullets. Photo: John Sturrock/Network.

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