

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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## Meetings on Explosives

1. Four meetings at official level have taken place in this series commencing in April 1975. Meetings at expert level i.e. the Irish Inspectorate of Explosives and HM Inspectorate have also taken place. The genesis for these meetings is contained in correspondence between the Secretary of State and the Minister at the beginning of February 1975 dealing with finds of explosives of IIE origin in Northern Ireland in the previous year.

2. The British suggested an agenda for the first meeting which was slightly wider in scope than what has come to be the standard agenda viz.

- marking of detonators
- marking of explosives
- extraction of explosives substances from fertilisers
- storage, conveyance, use and accounting of explosives.

Varying degrees of progress on each of these items have been achieved, it being the general British position that stricter controls were necessary under each heading, and the general Irish position that, while the desirability of stricter controls was admitted, these proposals had to be examined in terms of safety, expense, practicality and general commercial considerations.

3. Marking of explosives. IIE has a monopoly on the supply of commercial gelignite to both the Republic and the North since the autumn of 1973. This explosive is already marked in so far as explosives intended for Northern Ireland are dyed pink and those for the Republic are undyed. Prompted by these meetings the Department of Justice and the Management of the Enfield factory have examined the practicality of a more detailed marking system which would convey to the experts examining illegal caches or the debris after an explosion information about the point of theft. The examination took two forms

- (i) external marking of containers (cartridges and/or heavy paper wrappers)
- (ii) internal marking

(i) Implementation of the former marking system is now at an



advanced stage. Machinery on order from Germany has been installed and tested. The final report of the Enfield technicians was received by the Department of Justice on 24 May 1976 and is currently under consideration by the Gardaí and the Inspector of Explosives. It is hoped to have the new marking system in operation by August. The British have asked to be closely involved in the detail of the more sophisticated accountancy system which must necessarily be introduced with the new machinery and a meeting to discuss this will take place at expert level shortly.

(ii) With regard to internal marking, tests are still continuing at IIE to see whether date coded plastic discs could be introduced into the explosive mix, but it now seems likely that any such system would be excessively awkward and expensive to administer.

4. Marking of detonators. Almost all detonators used in the Republic are of British manufacture and since August 1971 are marked in the British factory as being intended for use in the Republic. The British made available a detonator scratch marking machine (extensively used by them in Northern Ireland) which would permit closer consumer identification and this has been on test by the Irish Inspector of Explosives since August 1975. The former Inspector maintained that the machine was not safe to operate and while exploring (unsuccessfully) whether modifications could be introduced which would render it safer, pursued simultaneously the possibility of obtaining from any other country detonators marked at the time of manufacture, use of which would have the same result as the post-manufacture marking i.e. the closer identification of consumer and thereby of point of theft. This proved unsuccessful up to the present time and will probably now be abandoned as the present Inspector has come to a more favourable conclusion about the marking machine and has conveyed this to his British counterparts. They have furnished a complete description of the way in which their related accountancy system operates and this is presently being studied by the Gardaí. It is understood that the Minister for Justice - who when discussing this question with the Secretary of State in Dublin on 20 February did not favour the use of the scratch marker - has now instructed that all necessary action be taken to bring it into use in the Republic. It will be some time before this is done, however, as there is a very



large market here for detonators - up to 750,000 are used annually. Four Gardaí have been appointed to oversee whatever system may be devised to regulate and control the issue of detonators.

The marking of detonators is the crucial issue to control of all explosives. It is understood that Mr. Whitbread, HM Chief Inspector of Explosives, has indicated to Mr. Bates, the Irish Inspector, that British pressure regarding the marking of cartridge wrappers (see 3(1) above) would ease off if detonator marking were introduced, as they regard the latter as far more important. It is likely too that our suggestion that existing British factories be modified to enable the detonator markers to be marked on the factory floor, a project which could run to £25 million to £30 million and would take three to seven years to get under way, will now be abandoned.

As the new Irish attitude to the scratch marker and all the subsequent developments flowing from this have as yet been conveyed only at experts level - our attitude was quite rigid at the last meeting of officials - they may feel it necessary to press for an acknowledgement of new developments at Friday's meeting. The Minister for Justice may have views on how best this should be conveyed.

5. Extraction of explosives substances from fertilisers. Parallel research is being conducted here and in Britain in this field. British research is being conducted by ICI and at a meeting last October we were given some indication of lines of research being followed by them with regard to polysaccharide additives. Irish research is being conducted, under the supervision of the Explosives Inspector, by NET, Ceimicí Teoranta and the IIRS. No line of Irish research has so far proved really encouraging. The British side professed themselves impressed with Irish progress, however, and have suggested that a second bilateral expert group should be established to swap information. The British representatives in such a group would be Government officials, and it was stressed that any discussions on this topic would be strictly confidential. Some of our experts, however, would come from the commercial concerns mentioned above and might well be reluctant to engage in a frank exchange of information in such a forum. Apart from security implications, this question is one of great economic importance since the reduction of the detonable elements in ammonium



nitrate based fertilisers could lead to substantial savings in insurance, transportation and storage costs to producers. The Irish side promised, however, to look at the British suggestion in a constructive way. No answer on this matter has been conveyed to the British.

6. Accountancy procedures. The development of watertight accountancy procedures is a necessary corollary of any detailed marking system which may be devised, hence progress on this item is linked to progress on matters dealt with in paras. 3 and 4.

7. British reciprocal measures

(i) At the third meeting in October the British side announced that once detailed marking of IIE cartridge wrappers commenced they would introduce regulations forbidding the importation of any but marked explosives into Northern Ireland, hence their desire to be involved in the accountancy arrangements referred to above at 3(i).

(ii) The point was made with increasing emphasis to the British during this series of meetings that strict controls on this island were useless unless reciprocal measures were simultaneously introduced in Great Britain, as terrorist pressure to obtain explosives and detonators would simply be diverted there. There was also anxiety here about stocks of explosives in loyalist hands. The British side were not initially disposed to accept at all the force of these arguments. They maintained that the nature of the problem was completely different in Great Britain, that any caches of explosives discovered there were almost exclusively of IIE origin, that very few caches of exclusively British material had been found. Nevertheless they undertook, if any such cache or evidence from exploded debris could be traced to a British quarry or factory, to impose selective controls, involving a selective marking system, on materials consigned subsequently to that source with a view to verifying or otherwise the source's involvement in illegal use of explosives.

Though this represents an advance by the British, it does not represent a significant tightening up of controls, as a theft will have to have (a) taken place and (b) been successfully traced before any police



action will taken. If the theft is discovered as part of an explosives cache, at least no damage to life or property will have been done; if discovered through identification of debris after an explosion these lax controls will be indefensible. There is scope here for continuing to urge tighter controls on the British even if our own controls are not yet perfect.

8. Notwithstanding the above, the British posture throughout this series of meetings has, ostensibly at least, been a helpful one. They have expressed gratitude for all reports of progress, however slight; they have given on extended loan for testing here the detonator marking machine referred to above, and have also facilitated the inspection and testing by our Inspector of Explosives of the machine for marking the plastic discs referred to in paragraph 3(ii) above; they have made available to us - though after some delay - details requested by us of explosives finds in Great Britain in 1975 and have agreed to continue to do so on a regular basis; they have commenced to supply details of similar finds in Northern Ireland on a more comprehensive basis, at our suggestion. The Irish promised in their turn to supply details of finds in the Republic to the British and two such reports, covering the period Jan-March 1976, have been handed over.

9. The attached tables give details of finds of commercial explosives and detonators in the North and the Republic for the first quarter of 1976, as notified to each other by the British Embassy and the Department respectively. We have not received any report of finds in Great Britain for this period although regular reports were promised at the last security meeting. The matter has been raised in recent days with the Embassy. The Minister may also wish to refer to this.



# Security Reports - Quarterly Figures

January-March 1976

## 1. Finds of commercial explosives in Northern Ireland: 1/

(lbs)

	<u>January</u>	<u>February</u>	<u>March</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>as % of all finds</u>
IIE undyed <sup>2/</sup>	313.25 (17) <sup>3/</sup>	224.45 (26)	55.25 (6)	592.95 (49)	92.3%
IIE dyed	10 (2)	2.25 (1)	10 (1)	22.25 (4)	3.5%
Irish or British Manufacture, exact origin uncertain	-	-	10 (2)	10 (2)	1.6%
Manufactured outside G.B. or Ireland	9.50 (3)	5.0 (2)	3 (2)	17.5 (7)	2.7%
Uncertain origin	-	-	-	-	
<b>TOTAL all finds</b>	<b>332.75 (19)<sup>4/</sup></b>	<b>231.7 (28)</b>	<b>78.25 (11)</b>	<b>642.7 (58)</b>	<b>100%</b>

1/ Based on fortnightly reports supplied via the British Embassy.

2/ Intended for use within the Republic only and hence illegally imported into Northern Ireland.

3/ No. of finds in brackets.

4/ Some finds included two different types of explosives, hence discrepancy.

### Remarks

The total figures for finds of undyed IIE gelignite this year and the percentage which this represents of total finds show a considerable increase on the 1975 averages. (In 1975 1,282 lbs. of undyed IIE gelignite were found which represented 62% of total finds.) The figures are not strictly comparable, however, as more refined counting techniques have this year been introduced in Northern Ireland, which show not only immediately identifiable IIE undyed finds but also the results of further laboratory tests on forensic traces. Moreover, figures for the first quarter of 1975 were also high, showing a 79% incidence of IIE undyed. Allowing for the non-comparability just noted, therefore, the upward trend is not as significant as might at first appear.



2. Finds of detonators in Northern Ireland: 1/

	<u>January</u>	<u>February</u>	<u>March</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>As % of all finds</u>
Manufactured G.B. Marked for Republic	27 (14)	56 (35)	83 (21)	166 (70)	68.9%
Manufactured G.B. Marked for N.I.	-	1 (1)	-	1 (1)	0.4%
Manufactured USA Illegal in U.K.	1 (1)	4 (3)	1 (1)	6 (5)	2.5%
Manufactured Germany Illegal in U.K.	-	-	-	-	
Austrian	-	-	-	-	
Too damaged for identification	-	2 (2)	-	2 (2)	0.8%
Manufactured G.B. <u>2/</u> Unmarked	10 (5)	33 (13)	21 (9)	64 (27)	26.6%
Other	-	-	1 (1)	1 (1)	0.4%
Military	1 (1)	-	-	1 (1)	0.4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39 (18) <u>3/</u></b>	<b>96 (52)</b>	<b>106 (28)</b>	<b>241 (98)</b>	<b>100%</b>

1/ Based on weekly reports supplied via the British Embassy.

2/ Unmarked and manufactured in G.B. either before 1971 for use in the home or foreign market (including Republic and Northern Ireland) or since 1971 for use in G.B. or the rest of the world excluding Republic and Northern Ireland).

3/ Some finds included two different types of detonators hence discrepancy.  
Remarks

It is unlikely that all the unmarked British detonators being found (7th column down) were manufactured before marking commenced in 1971. It seems reasonable to assume that some of them are detonators stolen in Great Britain in the recent past.



3. "Terrorist incidents originating in the Republic of Ireland": 1/

13 reports were received for the period in question at irregular intervals from the British Embassy

7 weeks were without incident

4 instances were reported of vehicles being hi-jacked within the Republic for use as proxy bombs or booby traps

2 instances were reported of cross-border shooting

1 instance was reported of command wires from a booby trap leading back into the Republic.

4. Finds of explosives, etc. within Great Britain: 1/

No report received so far for January-March.

5. Finds of explosives within the Republic: 2/

2 reports for the period January-February have been handed to the British Embassy. Copies attached.

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1/ Based on weekly reports supplied via the British Embassy.

2/ Information supplied by the Department of Justice.



Explosives and Detonators seized by Garda Síochána

From 1st January 1976-29th February 1976

January

1. Border Areas

(Cos. Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth)

(i) Explosives; 42 sticks of gelignite  
2 tons 18 cwt 70 lbs<sup>1</sup>  
5 Land Mines  
1 Milk Churn Bomb =  
(1 cwt 88 lbs)<sup>1</sup>

(ii) Detonators; 60

2. Non Border Areas

(i) Explosives; Nil

(ii) Detonators; Nil

February

1. Border Areas

(i) Explosives; 1 ton 1 cwt 49 lbs<sup>1</sup>

(ii) Detonators; 2

2. Non Border Areas

(i) Explosives; Nil

(ii) Detonators; Nil

<sup>1</sup>Ammonium Nitrate based explosive material



Explosives and Detonators seized by Garda Síochána

March 1976

1. Border Areas

(Cos. Donegal, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth)

(1) Explosives; 1 cwt<sup>1</sup>  
1 pint Nitro Benzene  
4 pints Diesel Oil

(11) Detonators; 0

2. Non-Border Areas

(1) Explosives; 4 tons 16 cwt 7st 6 lbs.<sup>1</sup>

(11) Detonators; 57

<sup>1</sup>Ammonium Nitrate based explosive material