



Declassified Documents (/declassified-documents)

| Plastic bullets — plastic death. Decoding the Declassified documents (Part 1)

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1982



Plastic Bullets / Tasers / CS Gas (/plastic-bullets-tasers-cs-gas)

Last Thursday marked the 30th anniversary of the British Army killing of 11 year old Stephen Mc Conomy. Tomorrow, April 25th, is the 31st anniversary of the death of 15 year old Paul Whitters who died nine days after being shot in Gt James St. We should resist the temptation to say that they were 'killed by plastic bullets'. They were killed by a member of the RUC in one case and a member of the Royal Anglian Regiment in the other. They were children who were killed by adults firing plastic bullets.

Declassified documents that the PFC has uncovered at the Public Records Office in London paint an alarming picture of what was going on behind the scenes following Stephen's death.

In May 1982 there was an exchange of correspondence [see documents below] between the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down and officials within the Ministry of Defence. It was the responsibility of the scientists at Porton Down to test plastic bullets and it was then the statutory responsibility of an 'independent' Medical Committee to evaluate the results of these tests and advise Ministers accordingly. The key question that the Medical Committee had to answer was - how lethal were plastic bullets? In order to make this judgement Porton Down urgently needed data from the streets of Belfast and Derry on actual injuries caused, up to and including deaths. When we discovered newspaper clippings but little official data in this declassified file at Kew we began to wonder just how much information was being fed back to the Medical Committee. On May 10th 1982 a meeting of the Medical Committee expressed concern

'that so little information was being made available to them on the circumstances surrounding deaths or serious injuries from baton rounds'

This was within weeks of Stephen's death.

The author of this letter, the former Scientific Advisor to the GOC, pulled no punches,

'The Medical Committee has stated repeatedly that the advice they offer must be subject to revision in the light of usage in NI and they now feel that they are being 'thwarted' by the MoD.'

He goes on to speculate on why information on deaths and injuries was being withheld because of fears that the Committee,

'... could make a decision concerning the use of baton rounds.'

The implication is that this Committee might recommend the withdrawal of plastic bullets if they were provided with actual medical evidence from hospitals and inquests.

The issue surfaced again in July 1982 in further confidential correspondence when the following damning admission was made. The Medical Committee

'...have not been given any meaningful data on actual wounding but each time they meet they comment on the reports in the press and journals about injuries caused by baton rounds. Our excuse for not providing them with data ... is wearing thin.'





In the absence of actual medical data from the North scientists at Porton Down was carrying out tests by firing plastic bullets at pigs. Memos from the time express concern that this might leak and anger the animal rights lobby. The scientific evidence from Porton Down was alarming. According to an 1984 memo *'... in general anything over 50j (a measurement of kinetic energy) could be considered as potentially lethal.'* The plastic bullets being fired by the British Army had a kinetic energy of 216j - over four times that deemed potentially fatal by government scientists. The memo went on to outline that this represented the *'worst case scenario of strikes to the heads of children and elderly people.'* From the newspaper clippings in the file it is clear that they were aware that children were being struck in the head.

In another memo it is argued that *'further research'* aimed at making plastic bullets safer is *'unlikely to produce the desired result'* because stopping rioters was considered more important than avoiding potentially fatal head injuries to adults and children alike.

If scientists were reaching such damning conclusions in the absence of hard evidence from the streets of Derry and Belfast it seems reasonable to assume that the Medical Committee might well have recommended a full ban on plastic bullets had they been fully briefed on the horrific injuries being encountered in A&E Departments across the North. Lives might well have been saved. That this evidence was withheld is surely evidence of criminal wrongdoing by the MoD and others? A series of parliamentary questions to the British Defence Secretary from our local MP wouldn't go amiss.

Other declassified documents raise another alarming issue which relates directly to Stephen McConomy- the discussion around a possible replacement of the British Army L67 plastic bullet gun in the wake of his and other deaths.

Downloads

	CHEMICAL DEFENCE ESTABLISHMENT AT PORTON DOWN LETTER REGARDING BATON ROUNDS, 28 MAY '82 (HTTPS://WWW.PATFINUCANECENTRE.ORG/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/2016-11/419%20MAY%2082.PDF)	224.67 KB
	MINISTRY OF DEFENCE ANSWER, 2 JULY '82 (HTTPS://WWW.PATFINUCANECENTRE.ORG/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/2016-11/419%20JULY%2082.PDF)	127.34 KB
	CHEMICAL DEFENCE ESTABLISHMENT ANSWER, 8 JULY '82 (HTTPS://WWW.PATFINUCANECENTRE.ORG/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/2016-11/419%20JULY%2082_2.PDF)	143.65 KB
	PIGS VERSUS CHILDREN - LOOSE MINUTE 21 DEC '83 (HTTPS://WWW.PATFINUCANECENTRE.ORG/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/2016-11/PIGS%20V%20CHILDREN.PDF)	102.56 KB



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