

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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THE USE OF THE BORDER BY THE PROVISIONAL IRA

1. The border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland is a major factor in providing shelter and supplies for the total Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) effort in the North. This is much more important than its secondary role as a shield for short range raids along its length. Moreover the border also has its effect in the opposite direction since terrorists crossing from North to South often engage in criminal activities in the Republic. We have to deal therefore not with an isolated and autonomous organisation in Northern Ireland but with a terrorist body operating throughout the island. The level of operations at present maintained by PIRA in the North would not be possible without support from South of the border.

2. Overall control of the activities of the Provisional movement is firmly sited in the Republic. Both the governing bodies of the PIRA, the Provisional Army Council (PAC) and the General Headquarters Staff (GHQ), are based in Dublin. As a result of the recent re-organisation of the PIRA responsibility for the day to day running of the campaign in the North was given to the new Northern Command based in Belfast. However, the Northern Command which covers the counties of Monaghan, Donegal and Cavan as well as Northern Ireland remains subordinate to the GHQ staff and PAC and basic policy decisions are taken by these two bodies, who also retain overall control over training, finance, weapons and explosive supply, foreign relations and publicity. A recent illustration of this was the statement issued by the PIRA on 19 February 1978 admitting responsibility for the La Mon massacre, which appeared in the name of the "Irish Republican Publicity Bureau, Dublin".

Safe Haven

3. The Republic of Ireland provides a safe haven for active terrorists in three distinct ways:

Short-range Cross-border Penetration

a. Along the border on the Southern side are a series of PIRA Active Service Units (ASUs) which operate in the immediate border area, carrying out short sharp forays into the North and invariably returning directly across the border after one of their attacks. Examples of such units are those operating from Dundalk and Carrickmacross into South Armagh, from Clontarf into South West Armagh, from the Monaghan salient into South Tyrone and South Fermanagh and from Lifford/Ballybofey/Castlefin into West Tyrone. Recent examples of major incidents which originated in the Republic were:

- (i) the bombing on 20 December 1977 of a bar in Strabane in which one of the bombers was shot and injured and subsequently sought treatment at Lifford Hospital;
- (ii) the mortar attack on 23 January on a British Army base at Forkhill, South Armagh, where the lorry used was hi-jacked in the Republic;
- (iii) a command detonated land-mine device near Crossmaglen on 25 January 1978. This was detonated by command wires running back across the border. One soldier was very seriously injured.

Long-range Cross-border Penetration

b. Several PIRA ASU's operating in rural areas well inside Northern Ireland have used and continue to use the Republic as a safe haven to which they can retire when pressure from the Security Forces in the North gets too great. They use their stay to re-group, retrain and often to draw up new lists of targets in preparation for their return North.

Included in this group is, notably, the South Derry PIRA which, following a period of intense activity in March/April 1977 settled in Co. Donegal during the summer and again in the period November 1977 to February 1978. Among other crimes this unit was recently clearly responsible for the atrocious murder of Corporal Gordon and his daughter. Also included is the East Tyrone PIRA which operates largely in the Cookstown/Dungannon area but frequently retreats to Monaghan following intense periods of activity in the North. Unlike ASUs based permanently in the South, visiting ASUs are more prone to involving themselves in criminal activities in the Republic. The Sligo mail robbery and the Carrigans Garda Station incident, carried out by the South Derry PIRA while in Co. Donegal are good examples.

Safe Haven for Individuals

c. Terrorists being sought in relation to specific offences often successfully take refuge in the South, thereby avoiding capture and thus enabling them to carry out further acts of terrorism. Terrorists injured either in "action" or by accidental explosions or shootings, almost invariably seek medical treatment South of the border. This often avoids awkward explanations which may lead to their arrest. The case of [REDACTED] who was badly injured whilst assembling cassette incendiaries in Belfast in October 1977, is a relevant example. [REDACTED] received treatment at Monaghan Hospital whilst registered under a false name. The recent retreat of [REDACTED], the OC of the Belfast Brigade PIRA injured in an assassination attempt, to a hospital in Durdalk, is another illustration of this practice.

Weapons

4. The supply of weapons to the PIRA is maintained almost entirely by routes which pass through the Republic. There is virtually no evidence that the PIRA have at any time acquired / weapons

weapons by direct importation into Northern Ireland. Two well publicised examples of PIRA weapons smuggling are the recent Antwerp seizure and the interception of the MS Claudia off the coast of Ireland. Intelligence indicates that the M60 machine guns at present being distributed to PIRA units operating in Northern Ireland were imported into the Republic.

5. The PIRA apparently feel that there is less pressure on their activities South of the border and thus use the perceived opportunities in order to store weapons and arrange for distribution to individual units North of the border. As a result the Garda Siochana have made a number of significant arms discoveries particularly in the immediate border areas where weapons were probably directly available for use in the North, e.g. the discovery of two rifles and a rocket launcher at Drumade, Dundalk, on 23 November 1976, and the recent discovery of seven rifles at Dungooley, Co. Louth in January 1978.

6. Distribution of weapons stored in the South, not only occurs Northwards but also to Great Britain. The Manor Street find in Dublin was clearly destined for use in England and would have adequately equipped an ASU.

7. There is also strong evidence that the home-made mortars which the PIRA use in attacks on Army and Police establishments, the latest version of which proved so accurate in the attack on Forkhill RUC station on 23 January, are manufactured in the South. The discovery of the components for over 1,000 mortar bombs at Athy, Co Kildare on 13 January 1976 and on 10 December 1975 of an engineering factory in Ballyconnell, Co. Cavan which was being used to manufacture mortar tubes and rocket cases, are strong evidence in support of this assertion.

Training

8. Much of the PIRA's training programme is conducted in the Republic and use is frequently made of the remote areas of the border counties; particularly Co. Donegal.

Training camps are discovered regularly by the Garda Siochana; recent examples were the camps discovered in Co. Donegal, near Killygordon in July 1977, near Burtonport in August 1977 and in the Derryveagh mountains in October 1977.

9. Intelligence indicates that training is continuing in the Republic and the most recent reports have referred specifically to training on M60 Machine guns, mortars and on rifles and carbines. Co. Donegal remains the most frequently mentioned area.

10. Whilst some PIRA training occurs locally or in the more remote areas of Northern Ireland, there is no doubt that the hardened, experienced activists receive the majority of their training at camps established in the Republic.

Explosives

11. In addition to arms, important sources of explosive have been located in the South. However, in this area the Garda Siochana have had considerable success. They have effectively stopped all major sources of commercial explosive, much of which was being stolen from commercial mining operations, by tightening up the controls on usage. New controls on the Tynagh Arigna mines in 1977 closed the last significant sources for the PIRA and as a consequence they have been forced to use large quantities of home-made explosive (HME) instead.

12. The recent resurgence of bombing in the North has involved the use of HME, in particular Ammonium Nitrate Fuel Oil (ANFO), and the Garda recently seized 1½ cwt in Castlefin. This explosive was apparently destined for bomb attacks on the town of Strabane. As the Garda have discovered ammonium nitrate re-crystallisation plants in the Republic in the past and as large quantities of HME have been intercepted being delivered to the North e.g. 2 tons of HME found on a lorry in Newry on 17 January 1976 which had been loaded in Dundalk, it is reasonable to assume that HME manufacture is largely

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situated South of the border. There is also evidence that some of the bombs and incendiaries used in the North are assembled in the South. An example is the premature explosion of a car bomb in Castlederg on 17 July 1976 which had been driven from the Republic to the North by two residents of the Republic. More recently the seizure of cassette incendiaries in Dublin on 28 October 1977 and the subsequent arrest of two Belfast PIRA members provides evidence of at least some cassette incendiary manufacture in the South.

Finance

13. Very little hard evidence is available on the sources of PIRA finance. However we know that contributions from the USA are at a low level and may expect the PIRA to place greater emphasis on raising funds locally. Robberies have been a traditional source of PIRA finance and the recent Co-op siege in Dublin which involved 7 members of the Belfast PIRA indicates that the Republic is not immune from PIRA robberies.

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