



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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ARMS SUPPLIES TO LOYALIST PARAMILITARIES

Source of Supplies

Loyalist paramilitaries are known to obtain arms and explosives from three main sources:

- A. Importation from abroad
- B. Theft of weapons and ammunition from Security Force bases and other sources within Northern Ireland
- C. Home made weapons and explosives

A Reported importation by loyalist paramilitaries of arms and explosives from abroad.

The most significant importation in recent years occurred in early 1988 when the U. D. A., the U. V. F. and "Ulster Resistance" jointly imported a large amount of arms into Northern Ireland. Press reports quoting "usually reliable sources" indicated that the weapons were imported from the Lebanon, having been seized from the PLO by the Israelis who sold them on to South African arms dealers.

The shipment is believed to have contained :

- 200 rifles
- 90 pistols
- 30,000 rounds of assorted ammunition
- 450 grenades
- 12 Mark VII Rocket Powered Grenades

The shipment is understood to have been financed from the proceeds of a major bank robbery in Portadown, in July, 1987 when £326,313 was taken. Press reports also contained allegations that there were two further arms shipments to loyalists in the second half of 1988. More recently, there have been allegations in the press that Brian Nelson travelled to South Africa in 1985 in connection with arms smuggling for loyalist paramilitaries while he worked as an army intelligence agent.

While some of the 1988 consignment has been seized by the R. U. C., a considerable amount remains in loyalist hands and is undoubtedly a factor in the upsurge in loyalist violence since 1988. For example, on 3 December, 1991, the RUC found two rifles and other weapons linked to the 1988 consignment in a car being driven by four loyalists along the Falls road. The weapon and grenades used by Michael Stone during the funerals of the Gibraltar three, and the rockets used in two attacks on Sinn Fein headquarters in Belfast are also believed

to have come from this consignment.

Part of the U.D.A's share of the consignment was discovered on 8 January 1988 when three cars were stopped and searched at an RUC checkpoint in Portadown, this find included:

61	Automatic rifles
30	Browning pistols
150	Hand grenades
11,520	Rounds of assorted ammunition
124	Rifle magazines

Part of the U.V.F.'s share was recovered by the RUC in a search of a house on Flush Street, Ligoniel, North Belfast. This find included:

38	assault rifles
15	Browning pistols
26	Rocket propelled grenades and propulsion units
1	Rocket propelled grenade launcher
100	Hand Grenades and fuses
40,500	Rounds of assorted ammunition

Further finds were made by the RUC in November 1988 and February 1989:

- In November, 1988, 2 former members of the U.D.R. were found in possession of arms and ammunition (belonging to Ulster Resistance) at their homes near Markethill in Co. Armagh. Robert Johnston was found in possession of 5,500 rounds of ammunition, a rifle, a pistol, six hand grenades and detonators, as well as items relating to a Javelin missile aiming unit stolen from Shorts in 1985. Robert James Muldrew was found in possession of an RPG rocket launcher and 5 grenades, 3 assault rifles, 10 detonators and 4,900 assorted bullets.
- In February, 1989, two further caches which included some of the 1988 arms were found in Co. Down. The finds included two home-made sub-machine guns, 1 rifle, 5 pistols, 722 rounds of ammunition and 5 rocket propelled grenades. One of those charged was an officer in the Newtownards Territorial Army base.

Other Reported Importations and Attempted Importations :

- i In June 1979, nine Scottish U.V.F. members from Glasgow were convicted of involvement in supplying explosives to the U.V.F. .
- ii In July, 1979, Scottish police were reported to have foiled a U.D.A. plot to import arms from Scotland into Northern Ireland.

- iii In February 1981, an unidentified Scottish member of the U. D. A. claimed in a T. V. documentary that there were stockpiles of arms in Scotland and that arms and ammunition had been smuggled to Northern Ireland through Larne.
- iv In October, 1988, a U. V. F. plot to import arms from Toronto, Canada via Liverpool was foiled when police in Canada seized an arsenal of weapons including machine guns and silencers at the Ontario home of William Charles Taylor a U. V. F. member. (Note: press reports have alleged that Taylor met Ian Paisley and then Lord Mayor of Belfast, Sammy Wilson in 1986.)
- v In April 1989, three members of Ulster Resistance, Noel Little, (a part-time member of the UDR from 1980-1986.), James King (both leading members of Ulster Resistance) and Samuel Quinn a senior NCO and Missile Instructor in the Territorial Army, were arrested by the French authorities after they were found in possession of a "cut away" demonstration model of a Shorts Blowpipe ground to air missile which had been stolen from a Territorial Army base in Newtownards on 12 April 1989. An American arms dealer, a South African diplomat, and an official of the South African Arms Corporation (ARMSCOR) were also arrested. The incident gave rise to strong diplomatic protests and South African diplomats were expelled from Britain and France. Little, Quinn and King were initially charged with illegal dealing in weapons, but this charge was dropped and they were eventually convicted of relatively minor stolen property offences and released. According to press reports, they are still living in Paris.

(In November and December 1989, letters appeared in Northern Ireland newspapers, signed by Peter Robinson M. P. and William McCrea M. P., soliciting donations for a bail fund. Copy attached. Paisley initially planned to visit the three in jail in Paris, but he did not proceed with the visit. He is reported to have sent Bibles instead.)

[Initially the British told us that they had an interest in seeking the extradition of the three when the French legal proceedings had ended, but, so far, they do not appear to have followed up on this.]

In May 1989, Quinn and four other members of the Territorial Army were discharged. The others included Alan McGrath, who was arrested on 24 February, 1989 and charged with possession of firearms and explosives at his home near Newtownards, and James Shannon, a DUP Councillor, who "came to the adverse notice of the military authorities following the arrest of McGrath"

vi In March, 1992, two men (Robert Black and Alexander Ward) were charged with unlawful acquisition and possession of firearms and explosives for the UVF before a Court at Airdrie, in Scotland. Black who was linked during the trial to the Portestant Apprentice Boys, admitted to the charge of possession of 56lbs of high explosive at his home and received a sentence of four years.

B Theft of weapons and ammunition from Security Force bases and other sources in Northern Ireland.

Public concern about the UDR has been exacerbated by repeated thefts of UDR weapons and the use of UDR weapons in sectarian murders. According to a PQ reply given by the British Ministry of Defence, by the end of 1972, 193 UDR weapons had been stolen, 130 of them in raids on armouries and points of duty. Only 76 were recovered.

According to Irish Information Partnership figures, the number of legally held weapons stolen in Northern Ireland from 1969 to the end of 1986 were:

<u>Source</u>	<u>Totals</u>
RUC/RUCR/B Specials	237
UDR	593
British Army	132
Privately owned	2,419
Total	3,381

Major Reported Thefts.

- i In October, 1973, a UDR armoury in Armagh was raided, and in July, 1975, a sterling sub-machine gun and 759 rounds of ammunition taken in the raid were found at the home of a serving UDR soldier in Belfast.
- ii In November, 1974, a submachine gun which had been stolen from a UDR base in Larne, was used in an indiscriminate UVF attack on a bar in Larne in which one man (Kevin Regan) was killed and a woman was seriously injured. A UDR private, Ronald Dempsey, was later given a life sentence for his part in the attack.
- iii On 16 June, 1975, a 12 strong UDA gang, which included a number of UDR soldiers, stole 220 guns, including 148 self-loading rifles, 35 sterling sub-machine guns, 9,500 rounds of ammunition, 8 grenades and a rocket from Magherafelt U.D.R. armoury. The weapons were recovered shortly after they were stolen. In April, 1978, a UDR soldier, Ronald Nelson was sentenced to 10 years for his part in the robbery.

- iv In 1985 an aiming unit for the "Javelin" missile system was stolen from the Shorts missile research centre at Ballinahinch. This was recovered amongst a loyalist arms find at Markethill, Co. Armagh in November 1988.
- v In February, 1987, a UDR man going on duty at the U. D. R. base in Coleraine smuggled two UDA members into the base in the boot of his car. The three proceeded to overpower five other UDR soldiers and loaded 144 rifles, 2 machine guns 28 pistols, ammunition and other military equipment into a van. An RUC patrol stopped the van on its way to Belfast. Two members of the UDR were convicted for their part in the theft.
- vi In April 1988, 18 weapons were stolen from Palace Barracks, Hollywood, Three U. D. R. members at the barracks were later charged with theft of the weapons and with selling them to the U. D. A. (It was reported that one of these weapons was used in the murder of the Catholic solicitor Pat Finucane in February 1989.) One of the U. D. R. men charged, John Fletcher, was arrested in Dundalk and was extradited to Northern Ireland where he was sentenced to 5 years for the arms theft.
- vii On 31 October 1988, the U. D. A. stole plans and an aiming unit for the "Javelin" missile system from the Short's missile research department at Castlereagh.
- viii In January 1989 four pistols were stolen from the Malone Road UDR base.
- xi In February and April 1989 there were thefts from a Territorial Army base at Newtownards, Co. Down, including a demonstration "Blowpipe" type missile. This was later recovered in Paris in the possession of Little, Quinn and King who tried to sell it to the South Africans (see above).

C Home made weapons and explosives.

Loyalist paramilitaries do not appear to have matched the capability of the IRA in developing and manufacturing home made explosive devices. The finding of a considerable quantity of detonators and timers at the Ballinahinch weapons factory in September, 1988, (see below) would suggest that they remain interested in developing such a capability. They have also shown a determination to develop their own weapons, particularly home made machine guns:

(i) 1982

Police raids in the Shankhill area of Belfast uncovered a U. V. F. arsenal including home-made machine guns.

(ii) September, 1988.

Samuel McCoubrey (former B-Special and UDR member), William Purdy and Fergus McKeown, all from Ballinahinch Co. Down, were charged with the manufacturing of arms at premises in Ballinahinch. Police uncovered :

35	assembled home-made sub-machine guns
80	home-made sub-machine gun bodies for assembly
1,000	moving parts constructed from technical drawings of UZI sub-machine gun components (reported to be of very good quality)
12	standard machine guns
1	home-made machine pistol
1	machine pistol
3	standard pistols
5,173	assorted rounds of ammunition
203	detonators
4	electronic timers

Loyalist paramilitaries are alleged to have paid up to £18,000 for the manufacture of the arms. (It was reported that at one point McCoubrey had alleged that an UUP Councillor on Down District Council and two RUC constables had some involvement in the affair.) In January, 1991, McCoubrey was sentenced to 14 years imprisonment.

Philip Grant
Anglo-Irish Section
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