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Army sought non-lethal weapons after massacre

By Liz Trainor

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HORROR: The aftermath of the Bloody Sunday shootings in which 13 people died

SCIENTISTS at a secret government research centre were asked by the British military to develop non-lethal weapons as a matter of urgency in the wake of Bloody Sunday, it has been revealed.

Files just released at the National Archives show how in 1972 the military were desperate for new tools to deal with civilian unrest after 13 people were killed by the Parachute Regiment on the streets of Derry during a civil rights march on January 30 that year.

The military at the time were using water canons, tear gas and baton guns firing rubber bullets.

Porton Down, near Salisbury in Wiltshire, was asked by army top brass to suggest other methods of crowd control.

The scientists managed to come up with a list of unusual ideas – many of which would not be out of place in a superhero comic book.

One suggestion included instant banana skin – a substance that would be sprayed on the streets and roads to make them too slippery to use.

Another idea was to develop a strong glue to act as human fly-paper and suggestions were even put forward for an instant clothes stiffener.


Other suggestions included a modified version of a vets' tranquilliser dart to knock out targets or induce vomiting.

The files show that the military did, however, order up prototypes of a grenade which would explode in the air releasing coils of wire coated with fast-setting glue to entangle rioters.

But it appears that the ideas in the early 1970s came to nothing.

Professor Steve Wright of Leeds University said that despite the bizarre nature of the suggestions, Americans were already using some of them – including the exploding grenade dubbed the “stick ‘em and slick ‘em”.

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