

Police Officers who Died in the Fight against Terrorism between 1975 and 1983

By TONY MOORE

Following the tragic death of Police Constable Keith Palmer in the Westminster Bridge terrorist attack on 20 March 2017, Tony Moore looks back on those occasions between 1975 and 1983 when police officers and explosives officers were killed in terrorist-related incidents in London.

During a vicious campaign on the British mainland by Irish terrorist groups between 1975 and 1983, four police officers and two explosives officers employed by the Metropolitan Police were killed by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). Three of the police officers and the two explosives officers were killed by improvised explosive devices. The fourth police officer - in fact the first to die - was shot.

Police Constable Stephen Tibble had been in the Metropolitan Police for only six months when he was shot dead on 26 February 1975 by Liam Quinn, a United States citizen from an Irish Republican family in San Francisco who had become a PIRA volunteer. Quinn was part of what was originally a five-man PIRA Active Service Unit (ASU),¹ which had a base at 39 Fairholme Road, Hammersmith, West London.

There had been a number of

housebreakings in the area and, on that day, four police officers in plain clothes were keeping surveillance. Quinn was seen loitering in Fairholme Road before entering number 19. When he re-emerged, he was followed by a member of the surveillance team, who stopped him in nearby North End Road and found him to be in possession of a quantity of Irish bank notes.

Still thinking he may be a housebreaker, the officer asked Quinn to return to Fairholme Road with him, at which he fled, pursued by other members of the surveillance team. Police Constable Tibble, dressed in an anorak, jeans and wearing a white motorcycle helmet, was on his way from the home he shared with his wife of two years in West Kensington to his place of duty at Fulham, riding his Honda 125 motorcycle. He was flagged down by one of the surveillance team, who identified himself as a police officer and told Tibble what had occurred, without realising he was on off-duty police officer. Tibble promptly gave chase on his motorcycle, rode past the pursuing officers and Quinn and pulled to a stop at the junction of Charleville Road and Gledstone Road. He then leapt off his motor cycle

and confronted the now approaching Quinn.

As PC Tibble tried to catch hold of him, Quinn pulled out a Colt .38 and shot the officer twice in the chest. Rushed to hospital, he died two hours later with his wife at his side.

Quinn fled from the scene and back to the Irish Republic. Subsequently, the police discovered that the flat in Fairholme Road which Quinn had been seen leaving was a PIRA bomb factory.² After a lengthy battle over extradition, firstly from the Irish Republic and then from the United States, Quinn was eventually tried for the murder of Police Constable Tibble in 1988 and sentenced to life imprisonment, with a minimum tariff of thirty years minimum. Police Constable Tibble was posthumously awarded the Queen's Police Medal for bravery.³

The remaining members of the ASU, who would later become known as the Balcombe Street Four,⁴ relocated to Hackney and Crouch End in North London. After a temporary lull, they recommenced operations but realised that the former military explosive officers now employed by the Metropolitan Police⁵ had become adept at defusing the devices they were making. Joe O'Connell, bomb-

maker and commander of the ASU, decided to up the stakes. He gave each device 'two arming circuits, one false circuit, on the exterior of the bomb and one live circuit concealed inside the device in a section hollowed out in the explosives, making it extremely difficult for any bomb disposal [officer] working on the device to find, without moving the bomb to get a better look.'⁶

On 29 August 1975, following a telephone call to a national newspaper, two police officers found a suspicious package placed in the doorway of K shoe shop in Kensington Church Street. When one of the officers took a closer look, he saw a pocket watch fixed to the top of the contents with adhesive tape; it was almost certainly an improvised explosive device.

The area was cleared of pedestrians and residents were instructed to go to the rear of their premises and stay well away from windows.

When Roger Goad, formerly a captain in the British Army who had been awarded the British Empire Medal for gallantry in 1958 for repeated acts of courage in the disarming of bombs and booby traps set by terrorists in Cyprus and now an explosive officer with the Metropolitan Police arrived, he was briefed by a senior police officer as they walked towards K shoe shop.

The police officer stopped at a safe distance, leaving Goad to continue alone. He entered the doorway, was seen to bend over and was in the process of defusing the device when it exploded, killing him instantly. He left behind a wife and two children.⁷ He was awarded the George Cross posthumously.⁸

The device had been prepared by O'Connell, who had gone to Kensington High Street with another member of the ASU, Eddie Butler, to plant it.⁹

Goad's murder was one of twenty-

five faced by the Balcombe Street Four when they came up for trial in January 1977. O'Connell and Butler each received twelve life sentences, with the judge recommending a minimum tariff of thirty years.¹⁰



Memorial erected by the Police Dependents Trust to Stephen Tibble



*Kenneth Howorth
Courtesy Peter Howorth*

A new PIRA ASU had already launched two attacks on military targets in London in October 1981,¹¹ when it changed tactics to hit commercial targets.

On the 26th of the month an anonymous telephone warning was received that three bombs had been placed in a busy shopping street in

London which would explode in thirty minutes. Within twenty-five minutes, police found two suspicious packages in the basement toilets at the Wimpy Bar restaurant in Oxford Street.

The restaurant and surrounding area were quickly evacuated, by which time explosives officer Kenneth Howorth had arrived at the scene. Nearly an hour had elapsed between the original telephone call and Howorth's entry into the restaurant. From the brief description of the packages given by a police officer, Howorth thought it was almost certainly an improvised explosive device of some kind. He entered the confined toilet area but within three minutes the device exploded, killing him instantly.

Like his colleague Captain Goad, he left behind a wife and two children. He was awarded the George Medal posthumously.¹²

1. Moysey, Steven P (2008). *The Road to Balcombe Street: The IRA Reign of Terror in London*. New York: The Haworth Press, p.37
2. Ibid, p.80-86; see also Mark, Robert (1976). *Report of the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis for the year 1975* (Cmnd 6496). London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office (HMSO), p. 13.
3. www.policememorial.org.uk/index.php?page=metropolitan-police accessed on 21 June 2017.
4. The Balcombe Street Four were arrested in December 1975 after holding elderly occupants of a flat they had sought refuge in to escape the police. See Moysey, op. cit. 1 for the full story.
5. These officers were part of C7 Branch working with the Anti-Terrorism Branch, formerly known as the Bomb Squad,
6. Moysey, op. cit. 1, p.92.
7. Ibid, p.93; see also Mark, op. cit. 2, p.14.
8. *London Gazette*, dated 30 September 1976, supplement 47027, p 13305.
9. Moysey, op. cit. 1, p.93
10. Ibid, pp. 240-243.
11. A device had been placed outside Chelsea Barracks and an attempt had been made to assassinate the Commanding Officer of the Royal Marines, Sir Stuart Pringle,
12. *London Gazette*, 11 August 1983, supplement 49446, pp. 10721-22; see also McNee, David (1982). *Report of the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis for the year 1981*. London: HMSO, p. 13.

In 1985, Paul Kavanagh and Thomas Quigley, both members of PIRA, were convicted of his murder, along with other attacks, and sentenced to life imprisonment, with a minimum tariff of thirty-five years.

On 17 December 1983, at 12.44 p.m., a coded telephone call to the London branch of the Samaritans charity claimed there was a bomb in a motor vehicle, registration number KFP 252K, parked outside the prestigious Harrods store in Knightsbridge and another bomb had been placed inside the store; the caller also claimed bombs had been left in Oxford Street. No further information was given.

The call sent police officers hurrying to the scene, amongst them, in a police car, the Duty Officer from Chelsea Police Station, Inspector Stephen Dodd, with three other officers. Being mid-December, the streets were full of vehicles, parked bumper to bumper, and pedestrians, many doing their Christmas shopping in Harrods and the surrounding area.

Not knowing the make of car, and faced with a huge number of locations where it might be, the officers 'faced a task of Augean proportions'.

They had just spotted the car, a 1972 blue Austin 1300 GT saloon, when it

exploded; it was 37 minutes after the initial telephone warning.

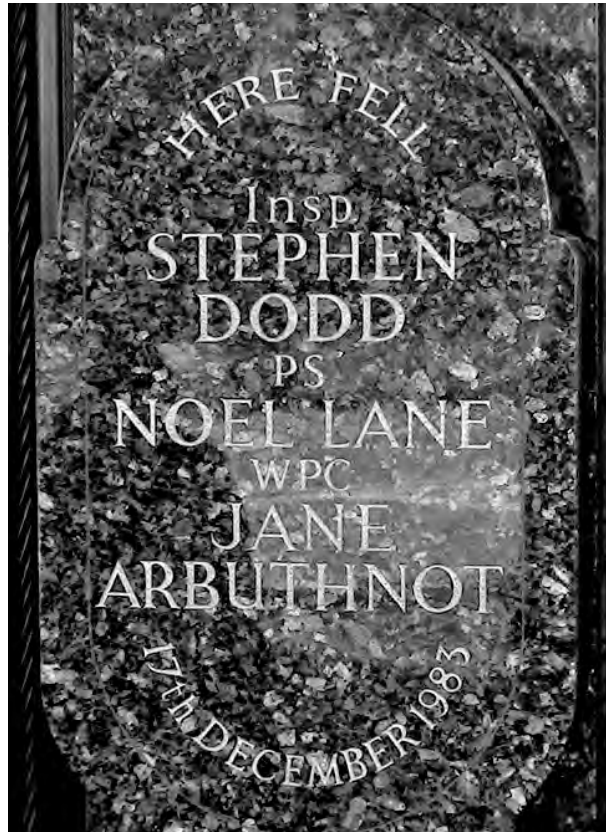
Much of the force of the blast, caused by the 14 kilograms of explosive packed into the Austin, was absorbed by the police car and undoubtedly this saved lives. Nevertheless, six

in the car, dog-handler Constable Jon Gordon, survived but lost both his legs and part of one hand in the blast; his dog, Queenie, was killed. Twenty-four cars were damaged by the explosion; only the two front wheels of the car in which the device had been placed were recognisable.

All the windows along one side of the Harrods building were shattered, and eight of the distinctive sage-green and gold canopies above the store's windows were in tatters.¹³

No-one was convicted of carrying out this attack.¹⁴

None of the PIRA members convicted of killing either police officers or explosives officers in London served their recommended terms. They were all released in 1998 as part of the Good Friday Agreement which brought an end to the thirty years of sectarian conflict.¹⁵



The memorial plaque dedicated to the officers who died as a result of the Harrods car bomb

people, including three of the four police officers in the patrol car died in the explosion. Sergeant Noel Lane and Constable Jane Arbuthnot died immediately. Inspector Stephen Dodd fought for his life for a week but eventually succumbed to his injuries on Christmas Eve. The fourth officer

13. *Guardian*, 19 December 1983, see also Newman, Kenneth (1984). *Report of the Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis for the year 1983* (Cmnd 9268). London: HMSO, p. 17.

14. Harley, Nicola (2015). 'IRA bombings and the Hunt for Justice'. *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 March 2015.

15. www.bbc.co.uk/history/events/good_friday_agreement accessed on 21 June 2017.



TONY MOORE, a member of the Police History Society, was a serving officer with the Metropolitan Police from 1958 to 1986.

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