

**EXPERT REPORT OF PROFESSOR HEATHER HAMILL
TO THE OMAGH BOMBING INQUIRY**

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The Omagh Bombing: Summary of Events

On 15 August 1998, a car bomb detonated on Market Street in Omagh, County Tyrone, resulting in the deaths of 29 people and two unborn children. The attack was carried out by the Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA), a dissident paramilitary group opposed to both the Provisional IRA ceasefire declared on 20th July 1997 and the Good Friday Agreement, 1998.

The Omagh bombing remains the deadliest single incident of the Northern Ireland Troubles.

The vehicle used in the attack—a stolen maroon 1991 Vauxhall Cavalier—was loaded with approximately 500 pounds (230 kilograms) of fertiliser-based explosives. In its warning calls, the Real IRA identified Omagh Courthouse and Main Street as the intended target. But the vehicle was ultimately parked outside S.D. Kells’ clothing shop on Market Street, approximately 365 yards (334 metres) from the courthouse.

The explosion occurred at 15:04, causing extensive destruction throughout the town’s central commercial district.

Between 14.29 and 14.31, three telephone warnings were made from public phone boxes. The first and third warning calls were made from a phone box in Forkhill, County Armagh and the second warning call was made from a phone box in Newtownhamilton, County Armagh. Each used the codeword “Martha Pope,” previously associated with a Real IRA bombing in Banbridge two weeks earlier, and identified the Courthouse and Main Street, Omagh, as the intended target.

Based on the belief that the courthouse was the target, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) evacuated civilians away from that location—moving many toward Market Street and into the vicinity of the parked car bomb.

1. Introduction

This report has been prepared at the request of the Solicitor to the Omagh Bombing Inquiry, on behalf of the Chairman, the Rt. Hon. Lord Turnbull, pursuant to the letter of instruction dated 9 July 2025. My instructions are to provide expert evidence on the subject of coded warnings in the Northern Ireland conflict, with specific reference to their origins, purposes, and usage, and to consider their application in the period leading up to the Omagh bombing of 15 August 1998. I am also asked to address the role of dissident republican organisations and to provide information on the specific coded warning “Martha Pope.”

1.1 Academic qualifications and experience

I am Professor of Sociology at the University of Oxford and have worked for over two decades on the sociology of violence, paramilitarism, informal systems of justice, extra-legal governance, and trust. My work combines ethnographic field research, historical analysis, and interviews with paramilitary members, community activists, journalists, and security personnel. My research has focused, in part, on how armed groups seek to build legitimacy, how they communicate with both their own communities and wider publics, and how state and non-state actors interpret their actions.

a) Research into the conflict in Northern Ireland

My research has examined the role of paramilitary groups in policing and informal justice during the Northern Ireland conflict. This work is set out in my monograph *The Hoods: Crime and Punishment in West Belfast*,¹ which draws on game theory models and is grounded in original fieldwork and interviews. The book explores how paramilitary groups informally police young people known as “hoods,” whose antisocial behaviour—joyriding, vandalism, petty crime—provoked harsh punishments such as beatings, shootings, or exile. The book argues that these punishments functioned both as community control and as status markers: enduring violence enhanced a hood’s reputation, reinforcing defiance and undermining deterrence. The book highlights the tension between state justice and extra-legal enforcement, illustrating how non-state actors sustain order where state legitimacy is weak.

b) Research into the use of codewords by paramilitary organisations during the conflict in Northern Ireland

I have researched and written about the use of codewords by armed groups in Northern Ireland. This work was published as “*The Code Word Conundrum in the Northern Ireland Conflict*.”² This chapter explores the use of mimicry as a tactic by both Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries during the conflict in Northern Ireland. A notable aspect of these practices was

¹ Hamill, H. (2011). *The Hoods: Crime and Punishment in Belfast*. Princeton University Press.

² Hamill, H. (2024). *The code word conundrum in the Northern Ireland conflict*. In D. Gambetta & T. Hegghammer (Eds.), *Fight, flight, mimic: Identity mimicry in conflict* (online ed.). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191802454.003.0004>

the deployment of codewords, which operated, in part, as signals of organisational identity and authenticity. This original research is based on content analysis of 332 incidents involving codewords between 1973 and 2011, as well as interviews with former members of the IRA and UDA, police officers, intelligence officials, and journalists. **These interviews provided general contextual information about paramilitary group operations rather than incident-specific evidence.**

2. In the context of the conflict in Northern Ireland, please provide an overview of your research into what a coded warning is, the origin of coded warnings and their intended purpose(s)

During the conflict (1968–1998) in Northern Ireland, also known as “The Troubles”, there were at least 10,000 bomb attacks in Northern Ireland alone (CAIN, 2025). Coded warnings emerged as a distinctive feature of this conflict, particularly in relation to bomb attacks. They were communications, typically delivered by telephone, in which the caller, purporting to represent a paramilitary group, included a codeword associated with a paramilitary organisation in the message to authenticate a warning about an attack or to claim responsibility for an action. While, in principle, such warnings might serve to limit casualties and demonstrate a group’s restraint, in practice, their meaning and effect were more complex. Across the period of “The Troubles” coded warnings had four primary functions:

- *Prevention*: of civilian death. When the target was an economic one, adequate warnings could allow evacuation and demonstrate that civilian deaths were not the group’s aim.
- *Legitimising*: the calls enabled groups to assert responsibility for their actions and project their power to both supporters and opponents.
- *Deceptive*: rival or enemy armed groups, or unaffiliated members of the public, sometimes used codewords to mimic paramilitary organisations.
- *Disruptive*: codewords were used by armed groups to heighten the threat of hoax warnings, which caused enormous economic costs, evacuations, and resource drain on security services.

The open-source records do not indicate what proportion of attacks were preceded by warnings, nor how many of those warnings included codewords.

2.1. Methodology and Data

The findings presented in this report are based on the methodology and data used in *The Code Word Conundrum in the Northern Ireland Conflict*. This study combined multiple sources to analyse the origins, use, and evolution of coded warnings:

Archival Content Analysis – A systematic review of the *Nexis UK* newspaper archive identified 332 incidents where codewords were used between 1973 and 2011. Each case was coded for the armed group responsible, message content, event type, recipient of the warning, contested claims, and codeword used.

Primary Documentary Evidence – The Birmingham Mail’s internal telephone logbook (1971–1992), containing 401 recorded threatening calls, was analysed. Each entry was coded for caller accent, gender, source of call (call box or private phone), message content, codeword used, and links to incidents.

Interviews – The author conducted interviews with a cross-section of individuals, including former members of the IRA and UDA, serving and retired police officers from the PSNI and Metropolitan Police, former members of Military Intelligence and Special Branch, and journalists with firsthand experience of receiving coded warnings. These interviews provided general contextual information and did not provide incident-specific evidence.

Comparative Analysis – These sources were cross-referenced to identify recurring patterns in how coded warnings were created, transmitted, and verified, as well as how they evolved from genuine warnings to mimicry and hoaxes.

Limitations – The evidence regarding the use of codewords is primarily derived from open-source material. This evidence is partial and, at times, inconsistent, reflecting the secretive nature of paramilitary communications, the reporting practices of the period, and the broader security and policing context in which these events occurred. The author has not reviewed any internal RUC/PSNI policies or detailed operational documents relating to the use of codewords.

2.2 Paramilitary Organisations and Codeword Use

- i. The identities of Northern Ireland terrorist groups that used coded warnings and whether this included terrorist groups that termed themselves as "republican" and/or "loyalist"?

Both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups used coded warnings.

- Republican armed groups: Provisional IRA, Real IRA, Continuity IRA (CIRA), and Óglaigh na hÉireann.
 - Loyalist armed groups: Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Ulster Defence Association (UDA, sometimes under the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF)), and Red Hand Defenders (RHD).
- ii. The reason(s) that coded warnings were first used by terrorist groups, when that was, by which organisation and how the use of such warnings developed over time? You may wish to cover the period beginning 1966, when it is understood a coded warning was first used in Northern Ireland, until at least 15 August 1998

There is evidence, predating 1966, of the IRA using a codeword to refer to their actions. In particular, the guerrilla campaign between 1956 and 1962 was codenamed *Operation Harvest* (also known popularly as the Border Campaign).³ Even well-known Republicans, like former Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams, used pen names. In the mid-1970s, while interned in prison, he and other inmates smuggled out a series of articles published in Republican News/An

³ Moloney, E. (2003). *A secret history of the IRA*. Penguin. INQ035814

Phoblacht depicting life inside under the collective name ‘Brownie.’⁴⁵ The IRA also used a *nom de guerre* – signing its statements ‘JJ McGarrity, Dublin.’⁴⁶ From 1971 onwards the Provisional IRA used the signature ‘P. O’Neill.’⁴⁷

The first recorded use of a codeword during the Troubles occurred in 1966, when the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) used the name “Captain William Johnston.” The Belfast Telegraph received a phone call from someone identifying himself as Captain William Johnston, Adjutant of the 1st Belfast Battalion of the UVF. During the call, he stated, “From this day, we declare war against the IRA and its splinter groups. Known IRA men will be executed mercilessly and without hesitation.”⁴⁸

At first, such codewords acted simply as markers of identity, a way to demonstrate authorship of violent acts. Their utility was quickly recognized, and other groups—including the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and its cover group, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF), as well as the IRA and later splinter groups such as the Real IRA—adopted codewords of their own.

By the 1970s and 1980s, codewords had become an established part of paramilitary communication. Based on data obtained from the Nexis newspaper archive, there were 332 recorded incidents involving the use of codewords between 1973 and 2011. The frequency of such incidents peaked between 1992 and 2003. The data indicate that Republican armed groups employed codewords more frequently than Loyalist armed groups. Of all incidents where codewords were used, 35 per cent were attributed to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and 15 per cent to the Real IRA. Among Loyalist groups, the Red Hand Defenders were most frequently associated with the use of codewords, accounting for 12 per cent of all incidents. This organisation was linked to the Ulster Defence Association (UDA).⁴⁹

All armed groups used codewords to warn of impending bomb attacks, to claim or deny responsibility for violent incidents, and to publicize internal strategic decisions. During this period, codewords were used as an anti-mimicry tool, intended in part to distinguish authentic messages from rival or enemy groups’ false claims or deliberate attempts at discrediting.

Over time, however, the credibility of codewords was eroded. Increasingly, they were deployed in hoax calls that blurred the line between real threats and fabrications. The IRA made extensive, deliberate, and strategic use of coded hoax warnings to disrupt transportation systems in England, inflict economic damage, divert the attention of security forces, and test the response of the security forces to a potential attack. In 1992, for example, British Transport Police received 1,600 hoax calls over a 12-month period.⁵⁰ Such calls often surged following

⁴ Adams, G. (1996). *Before the Dawn: an autobiography*. Heinemann in association with Brandon Book. INQ035780

⁵ Traynor, V. (2025, May 8). Adams says he was not author of article stating he was an IRA volunteer. *RTE*

News. <https://www.rte.ie/news/courts/2025/0508/1511749-gerry-adams/> INQ035778

⁶ National Archives of Ireland. (1969, August). *Irish Republican Army statement in relation to the situation in Northern Ireland*, by Cathal Goulding, Chief of Staff of the IRA (Reference Code: 2000/6/658). Department of the Taoiseach. <https://www.nationalarchives.ie/> CAIN: IRA: Statements by the Irish Republican Army (IRA). INQ035816

⁷ Irish Republican Army. (1971, September 6). *Irish Republican Army (IRA) statement concerning a prisoner in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin*. Irish Republican Publicity Bureau. INQ035820

⁸ Boyd, A. (1969). *Holy war in Belfast* (3rd ed). INQ035787

⁹ Hamill, 2024:106

¹⁰ Clutterbuck, R. (1997, April 23). Ban the bomb chaos; Should we be held up for hours by police acting on a coded telephone warning? Richard Clutterbuck thinks it may be time for us to be allowed to take our chances. *The Guardian* INQ035798

actual incidents. For example, in the week after an IRA bomb killed one person at Victoria Station in February 1991, British Rail and the London Underground received 85 bomb threats. Notably, the warning for the Victoria Station bomb came amid a series of hoax calls triggered by an earlier explosion at Paddington Station just three hours prior.¹¹ These examples underscore the challenge of distinguishing, in real-time, genuine threats from false alarms, which complicates decision-making, stretches resources, and increases the risk of both under- and over-response.

Of the IRA's reported use of codewords, 58 percent were issued as warnings for real bombs or explosions, while 14 percent were later identified as hoaxes.¹²

Overall, the available evidence shows that the IRA made the greatest use of codewords. Their use spanned both genuine and hoax warnings, with most incidents involving pre-attack warnings relating to explosive devices. This pattern is consistent with the IRA's position as the principal armed group responsible for bombings during the Troubles.

As the peace process advanced in the mid to late 1990s, dissident republican organisations such as the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA adopted the practice of using codewords. They employed these codewords in the same manner as the Provisional IRA had previously done—to issue warnings of potential bomb threats in areas where civilians might be at risk and to claim responsibility for attacks.

The credibility of codewords was undermined by their association with hoaxes and mimicry. The available evidence suggests that security forces regarded codewords as one factor when assessing threats, weighing them alongside details such as the caller's accent, gender, and the consistency of the message with known paramilitary patterns.¹³

Following the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the broader decline in paramilitary violence was mirrored in the fading importance and use of codewords. They continued to be used by dissident Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups.

Some individuals with former links to the Provisional Irish Republican Army (IRA), as well as criminals with no genuine paramilitary ties, began to imitate the behaviour of paramilitaries. Exploiting the enduring aura of fear surrounding groups like the IRA, they adopted or emphasised their Irish accents, used threatening language and known code-words to extort money or intimidate victims—many of whom were unfamiliar with the complexities and distinctions within Northern Ireland's paramilitary landscape.

In England, for example, press coverage described how two former IRA prisoners were accused of attempting to extort £120,000 from businessmen by sending menacing letters and invoking the IRA's name to demand the money.¹⁴ In Northern Ireland, local media documented that dissident republicans—or criminals merely claiming that identity—targeted construction firms for “protection” money; when the demands were refused, heavy machinery was burned in

¹¹ Israelson, D. (1991, February 22). U.K. bomb threats cause transit chaos. *Toronto Star* INQ035801

¹² Hamill, 2024.

¹³ Hamill, 2024: 111

¹⁴ Cheston, P. (2012, April 13). Blackmail plot used IRA's name to demand £120,000. *The Standard*. ['Blackmail plot used IRA's name to demand £120,000' | London Evening Standard | The Standard](#) INQ041336

retaliation.¹⁵ And in Dublin, Sean Doherty told a robbery victim, “*I’m in the IRA*,” during a violent incident for which he was later sentenced in 2022.¹⁶

These incidents reflect a wider pattern identified in official inquiries and policing assessments. The *Independent Reporting Commission* has noted that both genuine and impersonated paramilitary groups have remained active in Northern Ireland in extortion and intimidation of businesses.¹⁷ Similarly, the Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) and have recorded ongoing cases in which individuals “claiming to be” republican paramilitaries engage in racketeering and coercive control.¹⁸

The evolution of codeword usage is summarised in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Evolution of Codewords Usage by Armed Groups in the Northern Ireland Conflict 1960-2000.

Period	Characteristics
Origins: 1960s-early 1970s	Initial use of codewords as identity markers by armed groups.
Expansion: 1970s-1980s	Codewords were widely adopted by Republican and Loyalist groups. They were used in warnings, responsibility claims, or denials, and public statements. Codewords also began to serve as partial anti-mimicry mechanisms.
Peak and Hoaxes: 1990s	Increase in usage, especially by the IRA in both Northern Ireland and England. Codewords were employed for both genuine and hoax warnings. Dissident Republican groups also began adopting them.
Decline & Criminal Imitation: post 1998	Following the Good Friday Agreement, the use of codewords declined alongside violent attacks. Criminal groups also began to imitate their use.

¹⁵ Allen, T. (2016, March 16). Builders targeted by dissident thieves who burnt out diggers after failed extortion bid. *Belfast Telegraph* [INQ035786]

¹⁶ Henry, C. (2022, December 8). Criminal who claimed to be IRA member jailed for four robberies. *The Journal*. <https://www.thejournal.ie> [INQ035791]

¹⁷ Independent Reporting Commission. (2022). *Fifth report: Presented to Parliament pursuant to Regulation 3(1) of the Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016 (Independent Reporting Commission) Regulations 2016*. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed on 7 December 2022. The Stationery Office. [IRC Fifth Report | Independent Reporting Commission](#) [INQ035817]

¹⁸ Department of Justice (DOJ). (2021). *ORGANISED CRIME STRATEGY Northern Ireland 2021-2024*. [INQ035818]

- iii. How coded warnings were made (for example, from public telephone boxes, by fax, by letter etc.), who made them (for example, the typical profile of the individual, their gender etc.), the detail(s) provided in codes warnings and to whom the warning was given (for example to The Samaritans, media organisations, the police etc.)? Please also explain, if it is the case, why a particular profile of individual was used and a particular recipient selected.

Between 1966 and 1998, coded warnings were often delivered by telephone. However, since this was before mobile phones were common, callers had to find a public phone box to make the call. This caused potential delays because:

- Finding a phone box could take time, especially in remote or busy areas.
- Some phone boxes might be broken or out of order, forcing the caller to look for another.
- Other people might be using the phone, so the caller had to wait until it was free.
- Travel time between locations and the chosen phone box also added to the delay.

So, the warning might be delayed simply because the person sending it couldn't immediately access a working, private, or available telephone.

Paramilitaries did not systematically contact the same organisation or individuals when issuing warnings. Calls were directed to a wide variety of recipients rather than a single, preferred outlet. Analysis of 332 incidents from the Nexis database identified fourteen categories of recipients. These included: media organisations (radio, television, and newspapers), charities, and named individuals. The distribution of calls was as follows:

- Newspapers: 29%
- Television stations: 14%
- Radio stations: 10%
- Samaritans: 3%

Each outlet had receptionists or telephonists continuously available to receive such communications. There is no open-source evidence suggesting that any single outlet was used exclusively or predominantly by a specific paramilitary group.¹⁹

Those making the calls were usually male members of, or associated with, paramilitary groups who had perhaps not yet come to the attention of the security services, making them less likely to attract notice. The individual making the call often did not know about the attack beyond the wording of the message they were required to relay. The content of the messages, therefore, varied: some were precise, providing accurate information on the location and timing of a bomb, while others were vague or even misleading. For example, the warning call that was made in advance of the bombs planted in Warrington on 20th March 1993 stated that there was a device outside a Boots chemist shop in Liverpool, 16 miles from Warrington.²⁰ The information available in open-source material is insufficient to determine whether there is a

¹⁹ Hamill, 2024.

²⁰ Dean, L. (2023, March 20). What happened on the day of the Warrington bombings? *Warrington Guardian*. [What happened on the day of the Warrington bombings? | Warrington Guardian](#) INQ035802

consistent pattern indicating whether calls from a particular paramilitary group to a specific outlet are more or less likely to contain accurate information.

The variation in the detail and accuracy of the content of calls may have arisen from deliberate attempts to mislead, miscommunication, or the caller's limited knowledge of the precise location of the planted devices.

Individual journalists, such as Henry McDonald from *The Guardian* and Brian Rowan from the *Belfast Telegraph*, claimed to have a special relationship with paramilitaries that was facilitated by codewords,²¹²² but almost all staff working for outlets, such as newsrooms or the Samaritans, that received these calls did not have this type of relationship.

- iv. Whether there were officially recognised coded warnings by the police or other government agencies that were attributed to particular terrorist groups, or types of incident? If possible, please provide a list of known codewords, to which terrorist groups they were attributed and summarise details about their usage.

To my knowledge, no officially sanctioned system of coded warnings existed between the police, government agencies, the British military, and paramilitary organisations, nor were such codes ever the subject of formal agreement. Nevertheless, police and government agencies became familiar with the codewords used by paramilitary groups through their consistent, repeated use over time. Some of these codewords were also reported in the press.

Throughout the Troubles, the IRA used the long-standing *nom de guerre* "P. O'Neill" as a codeword. They also used "Double X" to warn of the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974, "Michael Collins", "Easter Rising", "Kerrygold"²³ and "Óglaigh na hÉireann." The UFF have used 'Captain Black' since the beginning of the Troubles.²⁴ The UDA used 'The Ulster Troubles,' 'Crucible,' and 'Titanic' as code words,²⁵ and the Real IRA used "Martha Pope, "Óglaigh na hÉireann," "Mardi Gras,"²⁶ and "Francie."²⁷

²¹ McDonald, H. (2011, September 23). Police must accept journalists' confidential sources are sacrosanct. *The Guardian*. [INQ035796]

²² Rowan, B. (2011, August 27). Reporters cannot become state evidence-gatherers. *Belfast Telegraph*. [INQ035799]

²³ Harnden (2024) states that the IRA began using Kerrygold as a codeword in 1989 after a supermarket owner in Kent removed Kerrygold butter and other Irish products from sale in protest against the bombing of the Royal Marines School of Music in Deal, Kent on 22 September 1989. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/22/newsid_2528000/2528223.stm [INQ035779]

²⁴ Taylor, P. (2000). *Loyalists*. London: Bloomsbury

²⁵ Rowan, B. (2010, January 11). Growing up with the UDA. *Belfast Telegraph*. [INQ035794]

²⁶ [INQ001018]

²⁷ [INQ001005]

Table 2: Attribution and Use of Codewords During the Northern Ireland Conflict

Armed Group	Codeword or Pseudonym	Context and notes
IRA (1920s onwards)	<i>JJ McGarrity, Dublin</i>	All IRA statements were signed in this way until the formation of the Provisional IRA in 1969
Provisional IRA (1969 onwards)	<i>P. O'Neill</i>	Nom de guerre adopted by the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland.
UVF (1966)	<i>Captain William Johnson</i>	First recorded use of a codeword in the Northern Ireland Troubles.
UFF (early Troubles)	<i>Captain Black</i>	Long-standing Loyalist codeword used in public statements.
UDA	<i>The Ulster Troubles; Crucible; Titanic</i>	Multiple codewords are used across different operations.
IRA (1974 & later)	<i>Double X (1974, Birmingham pub bombings); Michael Collins; Easter Rising; P. O'Neill; Óglaigh na hÉireann; Kerrygold (London Docklands bomb)</i>	A variety of symbolic or historically loaded codewords are used in both genuine and hoax attacks.
Real IRA	<i>Martha Pope; Óglaigh na hÉireann; Mardi Gras; Francie</i>	Adopted following the split from the Provisional IRA, the continued use of codewords to assert continuity in the armed campaign.

Recipients of the calls did not have access to any official “master list” of codewords.

Verification of a codeword and its association with a paramilitary group by the police and other state security agencies relied on whether the codeword had been linked to previous authentic incidents, whether the caller’s voice was recognised, and whether the details aligned with other intelligence information and assessments. The terms ‘officially recognised codewords’ and ‘recognised codewords’ appear in media reporting. It is unclear whether any meaningful distinction exists between these terms.

- v. Whether, as you understand it, non-state organisations that might receive coded warnings were provided by state organisations (or otherwise informed themselves) with lists or with any information, advice or instructions as to how to respond to coded warnings.

There is no evidence that non-state organisations that received such calls were provided with an authoritative list of codewords, nor was there systematic communication from state agencies regarding the adoption or modification of codewords. Staff, such as telephonists and receptionists, who answered the phone did not consistently receive systematic training on how to respond.²⁸ Upon receiving the call, they phoned the police and relayed the message they had received as best they could. This system risked recipients mishearing, misinterpreting, or omitting details of the message under stressful conditions.

The available evidence suggests that those who routinely answered the telephone in media outlets, such as telephonists and receptionists, had some awareness of the use and significance of codewords in such communications. However, this should not be taken as indicative of a consistent or detailed level of knowledge across organisations or individuals, nor as evidence of systematic training. Rather, it is more likely to reflect variable awareness in certain contexts. I have not reviewed the policies or practices of relevant organisations during the 1990s.

- vi. Whether coded warnings were used for specific types of attack? For example, a bombing of an economic target or of a target where members of the public may be present? Did the nature of coded warnings (including when they were made, to whom, how often and their details etc.) differ depending on the intended target or motivation of the attack?

Initially, paramilitaries used codewords to authenticate the authorship of attacks and to counter mimicry by other paramilitary groups. Later, they were used by paramilitaries to forewarn of bombs, especially against economic targets with the potential for civilian casualties, to claim or deny responsibility for actions, and to sign policy statements.

The most notable trend in the data is that the majority of codewords were used in telephone warnings about bomb attacks, whether genuine or hoax, and that the IRA remained the principal perpetrators of such bombings throughout the Troubles.

The data show no consistent or discernible relationship between the type of coded warning and the attacker's chosen target or motive.

- vii. Whether there were types of attack where a coded warning was not used? For example, an attack against security forces personnel or members of other terrorist groups. If so, what was the reason for that?

It is important to note that coded warnings did not precede all attacks on economic targets, even when civilian casualties were likely. Numerous such bombings during the Troubles resulted in fatalities or civilians being severely injured. There is no evidence of coded warnings preceding attacks on political or security targets, including politicians, members of the judiciary, British Army personnel, members of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), or police officers, or against

²⁸ Telephone interview with *Belfast Telegraph* journalist, Oxford, 10 September 2012.

members of rival or enemy paramilitary groups. In these cases, where the objective was targeted assassination, surprise was crucial to success, and paramilitaries had no incentive to provide a warning. For example, on 23rd October 1993, a bomb planted by the IRA exploded in Frizzells' fish shop on the Shankill Road in Belfast. According to available evidence, the IRA intended to assassinate senior members of the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), who were believed to be holding a meeting above the shop. The plan involved placing a five-pound time bomb inside the premises, forcing customers to leave, and allowing the device to detonate upward into the meeting room. While the IRA later claimed that customers would have been warned before the explosion, no such warning was in fact communicated, and the device detonated almost immediately after being brought into the shop. Ten people were killed (including one of the bombers) and 57 people were injured.²⁹³⁰

- viii. Whether coded warnings were used as form of mimicry and, if so, why that was done? For example, to deceive who had carried out an attack, the target of the attack, or the date / time of the attack?

Dissident Republican groups adopted the same operational tactics as the IRA, including the use of codewords in warnings of bomb attacks. Although these groups did not formally claim to be the IRA, their tactics, objectives, and communication style were often so closely aligned that they appeared operationally indistinct from it. In the public mind, they were effectively seen as the same organisation—a perception that blurred organisational boundaries, created uncertainty about responsibility for violent acts, and undermined the IRA's credibility during its involvement in the peace process.

- ix. Whether coded warnings were used as a hoax where no attack was intended on the stated target? If so, please provide examples of that and explain the reason for it and how state organisations were able to identify a real coded warning from a hoax?

There is substantial evidence that paramilitary groups, particularly the IRA, issued false warnings of imminent attacks or fabricated claims about events, often employing codewords in the process. The overwhelming majority of reported hoaxes occurred in England. The intention of many of these hoaxes was to cause significant disruption and economic loss: for example, three IRA bomb scares in England in April 1997, including the postponement of the Grand National horse race, were estimated to cost £250 million.³¹

The IRA frequently employed this tactic to maximize disruption without loss of life. Hoax threats also enabled the monitoring of security responses, providing intelligence on police routes, response times, personnel deployment, vehicle use, cordon sizes, and the involvement of the Army. This information could then inform future operations. In some cases, hoaxes were used to divert attention from larger, more significant actions. For example, there was an aborted IRA escape attempt from Crumlin Road Prison, Belfast, in which a digger carrying a bomb was

²⁹ McDonald, H., & Cusack, J. (2004). *UDA: Inside the heart of loyalist terror* (pp. 247–249). Dublin: Penguin Ireland.

³⁰ Dillon, M. (2011). *The trigger men: Assassins and terror bosses in the Ireland conflict*. London: Random House.

³¹ Ellin, T. (1997, April 19). Travel chaos as IRA gang strike again; The IRA tried to bring Britain to a standstill yesterday with two small bombs and a string of hoax calls. *Daily Record*. INQ035800

to breach the prison wall, facilitated by a coordinated series of hoax and real bomb threats across Belfast designed to overstretch security forces.³²

Between 1991 and 1992, the British Transport Police received nearly 4,000 IRA bomb warnings, yet fewer than 2 percent involved actual devices.³³ Interviewed security personnel reported that the presence or absence of a codeword was assessed in conjunction with other factors, including the caller's accent and gender, whether the call originated from a public phone (in the pre-mobile era), the content of the message, its consistency with previous warnings, and available intelligence on paramilitary activity. They emphasized that all warnings of imminent attacks were treated with equal seriousness, as the potential consequences of dismissing a genuine threat were too severe. The use of a codeword tended to heighten the perceived urgency of a warning, but it is evidence of authorship only in conjunction with other identifying information.

- x. Please explain whether you have examples of any coded warning calls that were made in a particular way (e.g. to a known journalist by a known member of a terrorist group) to illustrate that a warning call was genuine and the urgency of the need for it to be acted upon by UK State organisations? How, if at all, could such calls be identified?

Individual journalists, such as Henry McDonald from *The Guardian* and Brian Rowan from the *Belfast Telegraph*, claimed to have a special relationship with paramilitaries that was facilitated by codewords.^{34 35}

The London Docklands Bombing, also referred to as the Canary Wharf bombing on 9th February 1996, represents the clearest example of a coded warning delivered in a manner designed to ensure it was taken seriously and acted upon with urgency. Ninety minutes before the explosion, at 5.28 pm on the 9th of February 1996, a male phoned John Murray, a reporter with RTÉ, the Irish Republic's state broadcasting corporation. He dictated the following statement from the IRA's Army Council:

"It is with great reluctance that the leadership announces that the complete cessation of military operations will end at six o'clock on February 9th. The cessation presented a historic challenge for everyone and Óglaigh na hÉireann [the IRA] commends the leadership of nationalist Ireland at home and abroad. They rose to the challenge. The British Prime Minister did not. Instead of embracing the peace process, the British government acted in bad faith, with Mr Major and the Unionist leaders squandering this unprecedented opportunity to resolve the conflict."

The statement was signed 'P. O'Neill,' the IRA's *nom de guerre*.³⁶ Some reports also suggest that John Murray recognised the voice of the caller and knew him to be a member of the IRA.

³² McEvoy, K. (2001). *Paramilitary imprisonment in Northern Ireland: Resistance, management, and release*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 56-57.

³³ Clutterbuck, R. (1997, April 23). Ban the bomb chaos; Should we be held up for hours by police acting on a coded telephone warning? Richard Clutterbuck thinks it may be time for us to be allowed to take our chances. *The Guardian* INQ035798

³⁴ McDonald, H. (2011, September 23). Police must accept journalists' confidential sources are sacrosanct. *The Guardian*. INQ035796

³⁵ Rowan, B. (2011, August 27). Reporters cannot become state evidence-gatherers. *Belfast Telegraph* INQ035799

³⁶ Hamden, T. (2024). *Bandit Country: The IRA and South Armagh* (First edition.). Biteback Publishing Ltd.

At 5.54 pm, a male called the *Irish News* newspaper in Belfast and delivered a message to the switchboard operator: “There's a massive bomb beside South Quay station, Marsh Wall, Isle of Dogs, London. Evacuate immediately. Codeword Kerrygold.”³⁷ It has been reported that a total of six calls were made to warn of this bomb, but I have not been able to verify this in open-source material.

This attack had immense political significance as it marked the end of the IRA's seventeen-month ceasefire, and they wanted to ensure there was no doubt as to who was responsible. At the same time, they sought to limit civilian casualties while inflicting maximum economic damage. The combination of the IRA statement signed P O'Neill, the personal recognition of the caller, and the use of a codeword previously employed in earlier IRA bomb warnings all signalled the IRA's authorship. Together, these elements made the warning both credible and urgent.

3. Dissident Republican Terrorists

***The following analysis includes the Omagh bombing.**

With respect to the activities of dissident republican terrorists from July 1997 to 15 August 1998, please provide an overview of the following:

- a) Whether there are any differences between terrorist groups or other organisations to whom coded warnings are attributable and the approaches of dissident republican terrorists?

From 1994, two main dissident Republican groups were active. The Continuity IRA (CIRA) became active in 1994, and the Real IRA was formed in 1997. Both organisations contained disaffected members of the Provisional IRA and were opposed to the peace negotiations between the IRA and the British government that resulted in the Good Friday Agreement, 1998.

In 1997, five incidents involving explosive devices were attributed to the CIRA. In three of these cases, warnings were issued.³⁸ These were:

- 31 July 1997, Carrybridge Hotel, County Fermanagh
- 16 September 1997, Markethill
- 20 November 1997, Belfast City Hall

A further four incidents initially believed to involve explosive devices were later found to be hoaxes. There is no evidence of a warning being given in these cases.³⁹

³⁷ Harnden, T. (1999). “*Bandit country*.” Hodder & Stoughton.

³⁸ <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/violence/chrondissidents.htm#chron>

INQ041337

³⁹ Wikipedia contributors. (2026, March 7). Timeline of Continuity IRA actions. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*.

from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Timeline_of_Continuity_IRA_actions&oldid=1342257511

In 1998, when the Real IRA became active, many incidents were attributed to both the CIRA and the Real IRA.

In 1998, thirteen incidents in which an explosive device was planted were attributed to CIRA/RIRA. Of these thirteen incidents, ten were preceded by a telephone warning. These were:

- 6 January 1998, Banbridge
- 24 January 1998, River Club, Enniskillen (attributed to the Irish National Republican Army (INRA) believed to be an alternative appellation for the CIRA)⁴⁰
- 20 February 1998, Moira
- 23 February 1998, Portadown
- 30 April 1998, Lisburn
- 16 May 1998, Armagh
- 24 June 1998, Newtownhamilton
- 13 July 1998, Newry
- 1 August 1998, Banbridge
- 15 August 1998, Omagh

Overall, the available open-source evidence indicates that dissident republican attacks—particularly large vehicle-borne explosive devices directed at urban or commercial targets—were often preceded by warnings. Gun and mortar attacks were typically carried out without warning.

- b) An analysis as far as it is possible to do so, of the warnings, whether or not coded that were known to be issued in respect of completed, intended or hoax attacks.

Thirteen incidents attributed to the CIRA and Real IRA between January 1997 were preceded by a warning. Table 3 shows the outcome of those attacks.

Table 3: Incident Outcomes and Use of Warnings Attributed to Dissident Republican Armed Groups, including the Continuity IRA and Real IRA, January 1997 – August 1998 (n=13)

Outcome	Incidents with Warning (n=13)
Exploded ¹	8
Defused/controlled explosion	5

¹ Refers to incidents in which a device exploded as intended.

⁴⁰ INQ001001

This data shows warnings accompanied intended bomb attacks. The open-source evidence does not explicitly state whether telephone warnings accompanied hoaxes.

- i. The types of targets they were used for, e.g. economic, security or general public.

Of the thirteen incidents that included warnings, seven were directed at security-related targets (such as RUC bases and courthouses), while six were aimed at economic or general public targets. It is important to note, however, that civilians could easily have been killed or injured in any of the attacks on security targets.

- ii. How many warning calls were made in advance of a particular incident?

Reports on the number of warning phone calls can be inconsistent, and the data presented in Table 4 are derived from multiple sources, including newspapers, court proceedings, and documents supplied by the Inquiry Team. As shown in Table 4, the number of warnings ranged from 1 to 15.

Table 4: Reported Number of Warning Calls per Incident by Dissident Republican Armed Groups, including the Continuity IRA and Real IRA (January 1997 – August 1998)

Date and Location	Number of warning calls
31 July 1997: Carrybridge Hotel, Co. Fermanagh	2 ⁴¹
16 Sept 1997: Markethill	1 ⁴²
20 Nov 1997: Belfast City Hall	1 ⁴³
6 Jan 1998: Banbridge	2 ⁴⁴

⁴¹ Fletcher, M. (1997, August 2). *Breakaway group blamed for bomb*. *The Times*

INQ041282

⁴² Belfast Telegraph staff reporters. (1997, September 16). Bomb rocks police base: Massive device rips through Markethill. *Belfast Telegraph*. [Bomb rocks police base | BelfastTelegraph.co.uk](http://BelfastTelegraph.co.uk)

INQ035783

⁴³ BBC News. (1997, November 18). *Army bomb experts blow up device in Belfast*.

INQ041278

⁴⁴ United Kingdom Parliament. (1998, January 19). *Banbridge bomb incident* [Written answer, Prime Minister, House of Commons Hansard, vol. 304, col. 397]. *Hansard*. <https://hansard.parliament.uk>

INQ035781

24 Jan 1998: Enniskillen, River Club	Unspecified (multiple) ⁴⁵
20 Feb 1998: Moira	Unspecified ⁴⁶
23 Feb 1998: Portadown	4 ⁴⁷
30 Apr 1998: Lisburn	15 ⁴⁸
16 May 1998: Armagh	2 ⁴⁹ 50
24 Jun 1998: Newtownhamilton	2 ⁵¹
13 Jul 1998: Newry Courthouse	4 ⁵²
1 Aug 1998: Banbridge	3 ⁵³ 54 + 4 attempted calls ⁵⁵
15 August 1998: Omagh	3 ⁵⁶ 57 58 59

iii. Is the expert aware of the existence of any evidence of more than three call warnings in total made by those responsible for the Omagh bombing?

INQ001039⁶⁰ refers to “several coded warnings”, and INQ001040⁶¹ states that “there were at least 4 coded warnings to various agencies.” However, all other sources I have consulted, including inter alia the breakdown of calls specified in INQ016899⁶² identify only three warnings.

iv. The amount of time given between the warning and the intended attack and whether that was always the same amount of time? If it changed, when and did it result in more or less time being given?

⁴⁵ Breen, S. (1998, January 26). Continuity IRA blamed for bombing. *The Irish Times*. [INQ035790]

⁴⁶ Moriarty, G. (1998, February 21). 11 injured in bomb blast in Co Down. *The Irish Times*. [INQ035777]

⁴⁷ INQ013685

⁴⁸ INQ013685

⁴⁹ Crown Court of Northern Ireland. (2007). *The Queen v. Sean Hoey* [2007] NICC 49 [INQ000261]

⁵⁰ INQ013785.pdf

⁵¹ McGahan, C. (1998, June 25). Bombed village counts the cost: Blast affects wide area. *Belfast Telegraph*. [INQ035785]

⁵² Crown Court of Northern Ireland. (2007). *The Queen v. Sean Hoey* [2007] NICC 49

⁵³ Crown Court of Northern Ireland. (2007). *The Queen v. Sean Hoey* [2007] NICC 49

⁵⁴ INQ013784.pdf

⁵⁵ INQ013685

⁵⁶ Crown Court of Northern Ireland. (2007). *The Queen v. Sean Hoey* [2007] NICC 49

⁵⁷ INQ013786.pdf

⁵⁸ INQ013787.pdf

⁵⁹ INQ013788.pdf

⁶⁰ INQ001039.pdf

⁶¹ INQ001040.pdf

⁶² INQ016899.pdf

The timing of telephoned bomb warnings varied widely and was not consistent across incidents. As shown in Table 5, some attacks—such as Moira (February 1998) and Banbridge (August 1998)—were preceded by very short warnings of only 10–20 minutes, resulting in casualties. Others, including Portadown (February 1998), Newtownhamilton (June 1998), and Enniskillen (January 1998), provided longer notice periods of approximately 40, 49, and 120 minutes, respectively. Several incidents, including Lisburn, Armagh, and Newry, had multiple calls but no explosion, making the exact interval unknown. Overall, the data suggest there was no consistent warning duration, with shorter advance notices tending to result in greater casualties despite evacuation efforts.

Table 5: Time Elapsed Between (First) Warning Call and Detonation or Disposal (Jan 1997 – Aug 1998)

Date and Location	Time between warning and detonation/device defused
31 July 1997: Carrybridge Hotel, Co. Fermanagh	Unspecified
16 Sept 1997: Markethill	45 minutes ⁶³
20 Nov 1997: Belfast City Hall	Unspecified
6 Jan 1998: Banbridge	20 minutes ⁶⁴
24 Jan 1998: River Club, Enniskillen	Approximately 120 minutes ⁶⁵
20 Feb 1998: Moira	10 minutes ⁶⁶
23 Feb 1998: Portadown	40 minutes ⁶⁷
30 Apr 1998: Lisburn	40 minutes ⁶⁸
16 May 1998: Armagh	Bomb was discovered 20 minutes before the warning ⁶⁹
24 Jun 1998: Newtownhamilton	49 minutes ⁷⁰
13 Jul 1998: Newry Courthouse	30 minutes ⁷¹
1 Aug 1998: Banbridge	Approximately 20 minutes ⁷²
15 August 1998: Omagh	35 minutes ⁷³

⁶³ Belfast Telegraph staff reporters. (1997, September 16). Bomb rocks police base: Massive device rips through Markethill. *Belfast Telegraph*. [Bomb rocks police base | BelfastTelegraph.co.uk](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/ireland/bomb-rocks-police-base-1997-09-16/) INQ035783

⁶⁴ United Kingdom Parliament. (1998, January 19). *Banbridge bomb incident* [Written answer, Prime Minister, House of Commons Hansard, vol. 304, col. 397]. *Hansard*. <https://hansard.parliament.uk> INQ035781

⁶⁵ Breen, S. (1998, January 26). Continuity IRA blamed for bombing. *The Irish Times* INQ035790

⁶⁶ Moriarty, G. (1998, February 21). 11 injured in bomb blast in Co Down. *The Irish Times* INQ035777

⁶⁷ Belfast Telegraph reporters. (1998, February 23). Bomb rocks Portadown: Shops destroyed in town centre blast. *Belfast Telegraph*. INQ035782

⁶⁸ INQ013783.pdf

⁶⁹ INQ013785.pdf

⁷⁰ McGahan, C. (1998, June 25). Bombed village counts the cost: Blast affects wide area. *Belfast Telegraph*. INQ035785

⁷¹ Pogatchnik, S. (2010, February 23). IRA car bomb damages N. Ireland courthouse. *The Associated Press*. INQ035792

⁷² INQ013784.pdf

⁷³ INQ013786.pdf

- v. The details given about the intended target of the attack and whether that information was correct?

Table 6 presents the details and accuracy of the warning calls, along with the resulting outcomes of each incident. Court records and Inquiry documents provide precise details of the warnings given for the attacks in Lisburn (April 30, 1998), Banbridge (August 1, 1998), Armagh (June 16, 1998), and Omagh (August 15, 1998). This evidence shows warnings in these cases specified street location, nearby landmarks or premises, and, in some cases, even the make and colour of the vehicle involved. These details were generally accurate, although in Lisburn, a follow-up corrective call was made.

For the Enniskillen River Club bombing (January 24, 1998), press reports confirm that the warning explicitly mentioned the River Club, which proved correct. In the Portadown (February 23, 1998) and Newtownhamilton (June 24, 1998) incidents, sources confirm that warnings were given, but do not reproduce their wording. In these cases, accuracy is inferred from police evacuations and the locations of the explosions.

Table 6: Content and Accuracy of Warnings by Incident (Jan 1997 – Aug 1998)

Date and Location	Outcome	Details Provided in Warning	Accuracy of Warning
31 July 1997: Carrybridge Hotel, Co. Fermanagh	Device Defused	Unknown but “this is the real thing” repeated.	Correct
16 Sept 1997: Markethill	Device Exploded	Bomb in blue Transit van parked outside Markethill RUC station	Correct
20 Nov 1997: Belfast City Hall	Device Defused	Unknown	Unknown
6 Jan 1998: Banbridge	Device Defused	Bomb left in red Sierra car in town centre	Correct
24 Jan 1998: River Club, Enniskillen	Device Exploded	Bomb at the River Club	Correct
20 Feb 1998: Moira	Device Exploded	Bomb at RUC station	Correct
23 Feb 1998: Portadown	Device Exploded	Bomb at RUC station	Correct (inferred) ¹
30 Apr 1998: Lisburn	Device Defused	Initial warning: Bank of Ireland/blue Toyota; later corrected to butcher’s shop	Initially incorrect but corrected after follow-up call ²
16 May 1998: Armagh	Device Defused	Bomb near RUC station	Correct (inferred) ¹
24 Jun 1998: Newtownhamilton	Device Exploded	Bomb in town centre	Correct (general area) ³
13 Jul 1998: Newry Courthouse	Device Defused	Bomb outside courthouse	Correct
1 Aug 1998: Banbridge	Device Exploded	Bomb in red Cavalier outside ‘the Ranch’, Newry Street	Correct
15 August 1998: Omagh	Device Exploded	Courthouse, Main Street, Omagh	Incorrect

1 Accuracy inferred based on proximity to the target rather than explicit identification

2 A correction was issued in a follow-up call specifying the accurate location.

3 Warning identified a general area rather than a specific target.

The available evidence reveals a clear pattern: except for the Omagh warnings, all calls for which warning details are known generally provided accurate information about the bomb locations. In some instances, such as Banbridge and Newtownhamilton, the warnings were issued too close to detonation to allow a safe evacuation, but the details were nonetheless accurate.

vi. Whether the warning resulted in an attack being thwarted?

Out of 11 incidents with warnings, four were thwarted, i.e., the devices were defused safely, and seven exploded.

vii. The identity or characteristics, as far as they are known, of the person(s) making the warnings and the means by which they made them.

There is very little over-source information regarding the identity or characteristics of the individual(s) who made the warning calls between September 1997 and August 1998. It is reported, however, that the call warning of the Markethill bomb (September 16, 1997) was made by a male.⁷⁴

Audio recordings of the calls made to police by individuals who received the Omagh bombing (August 15, 1998) warnings reveal that the original caller was male, spoke with a “country accent,” and claimed to represent an “Irish IRA,” an organisation unfamiliar to the person who received the call.^{75 76}

viii. To whom the warnings were made and how they were subsequently communicated or disseminated to relevant bodies and authorities.

Table 7 summarises the means and recipients of the warnings and dissemination of that information to the authorities. In some cases, the recipients of the warnings are clearly recorded. In other cases, such as the incidents at the Enniskillen River Club in January 1998 and Newtownhamilton in June 1998, warnings are reported, but the specific recipients are not named in open-source material.

⁷⁴ Belfast Telegraph staff reporters. (1997, September 16). Bomb rocks police base: Massive device rips through Markethill. *Belfast Telegraph*. [Bomb rocks police base | BelfastTelegraph.co.uk](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/Bomb-rocks-police-base-1.1000000) INQ035783

⁷⁵ INQ034438.MP4

⁷⁶ INQ034440.MP4

Table 7: Warning Delivery Method, Recipient, and Dissemination to Authorities (Sept 1997 – Aug 1998)

Date and Location	Warning Method	Warning recipient/s	Dissemination to Authorities
16 Sept 1997:	Telephone call from	BBC Belfast	Police notified ⁷⁷
6 Jan 1998: Banbridge	Telephone call from phone box	Radio station (Drogheda); Samaritans (Newry)	Police were notified ⁷⁸
24 Jan 1998: River Club, Enniskillen	Telephone call from phone box	Catholic Priest	Unspecified ⁷⁹
20 Feb 1998: Moira	Telephone call from phone box	Unspecified	Unspecified
23 Feb 1998: Portadown	Telephone call from phone box	Newsroom Belfast ¹ (possibly Belfast Telegraph)	Unspecified ⁸⁰
30 Apr 1998: Lisburn	Telephone call from phone box	Irish News, Belfast City Hospital, Belfast UTV, Belfast Bank of Ireland, Lisburn	Police are notified directly by the recipients of the warnings. ⁸¹
16 May 1998: Armagh	Telephone call from	Samaritans, Bangor;	Police are notified
24 Jun 1998: Newtownhamilton	Telephone call from phone box	Unspecified	Unspecified
13 Jul 1998: Newry Courthouse	Telephone call from phone box	Unspecified	Unspecified
1 Aug 1998: Banbridge	Telephone call from phone box	999 Communications: Newry Police Switchboard, Banbridge Police Station	Police are recipients of the warning call. ⁸³
15 Aug 1998: Omagh	Telephone call from phone box	UTV, Belfast. The Samaritans, Coleraine	Police are notified directly by the recipients of the warnings. ^{84 85 86}

¹ Believed to be the Belfast Telegraph newsroom but not definitively confirmed.

⁷⁷ Belfast Telegraph staff reporters. (1997, September 16). Bomb rocks police base: Massive device rips through Markethill. *Belfast Telegraph*. [Bomb rocks police base | BelfastTelegraph.co.uk](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk) INQ035783

⁷⁸ United Kingdom Parliament. (1998, January 19). *Banbridge bomb incident* [Written answer, Prime Minister, House of Commons Hansard, vol. 304, col. 397]. *Hansard*. <https://hansard.parliament.uk> INQ035781

⁷⁹ Breen, S. (1998, January 26). Continuity IRA blamed for bombing. *The Irish Times*. INQ035790

⁸⁰ Belfast Telegraph reporters. (1998, February 23). Bomb rocks Portadown: Shops destroyed in town centre blast. *Belfast Telegraph*. INQ035782

⁸¹ INQ013783.pdf

⁸² INQ013785.pdf

⁸³ INQ013784.pdf

⁸⁴ INQ013786.pdf

⁸⁵ INQ013787.pdf

⁸⁶ INQ013788.pdf

xi. If applicable, the wording of the coded warnings that were used.

I have reviewed the calls made in advance of the Lisburn bomb⁸⁷ (April 30, 1998), Armagh bomb (May 16, 1998),⁸⁸ Banbridge bomb (August 1, 1998),⁸⁹ and the Omagh Bomb (August 15, 1998), as these documents record the wording of the coded warnings that were given.

Lisburn

Ten warning calls were made in advance of the Lisburn bomb; their wording is presented below.

Call 1: "... there is a car bomb parked in the middle of Lisburn, it's in a grey Toyota Corolla import and it is going to go off in an hour or 45 minutes". "Outside the Bank of Ireland and St Johns Shop....codeword is Marta Pope....we have planted car bomb in the past, you will know it."

Call 2: "... a grey Toyota Corolla import with Northern plates parked with OS explosives outside the Bank of Ireland, Lisburn, (St Johns Shop mentioned). He said it was not a hoax and it's the same people who done Portadown and Lurgan and its going off in forty-five minutes, Martha Pope."

Call 3: "There is a bomb planted outside the Bank of Ireland and St Johns Shop, Lisburn. The codeword is Marta Pope"

Call 4: "Write this down carefully. This is not a hoax. There is a car bomb in Lisburn Main car park in a grey Toyota Corolla import outside Bank of Ireland, St Johns Shop. Codename Marti Pope". Stated the bomb was OS and would go off in 45 minutes. Stated it was the same boys as Moira and Portadown. This is not a hoax."

Call 5: "A grey Toyota Corolla import in St John Street, Lisburn.... did you get that". Marta Pope."

Call 6: "There is a car bomb outside, in a dark grey Toyota Corolla in the boot, there is OS in the boot, its due to go off in 45 minutes, so get out", Marta Pope." (During conversation bomber also said recipient could go outside and look and see the car).

Call 7: "There is a bomb planted in the middle of Lisburn in a grey Toyota Corolla import, the codeword is Marta Pope, you have 40 minutes."

Call 8: "Bomb in centre of Lisburn outside Bank of Ireland to go off in forty minutes" – Marta Pope."

Call 9: "The codeword is Marta Pope. There is a bomb outside the Bank of Ireland in St Johns Street, Lisburn."

⁸⁷ INQ013783.pdf

⁸⁸ INQ013785.pdf

⁸⁹ INQ013784.pdf

Call 10: “There is a bomb planted in the middle of Lisburn in a grey Toyota Corolla import in John Street, Lisburn Marta Pope. You have forty minutes to clear it.”

The calls were made within 31 minutes. Across all ten calls, there was consistency in the core details:

- *Vehicle:* Grey or dark-grey Toyota Corolla import.
- *Location:* “Outside the Bank of Ireland” / “St John’s Shop” / “Lisburn Main Car Park” / “John Street” / “centre of Lisburn.”
- *Explosives:* Repeated reference to **OS** of explosive in the boot.
- *Timing:* Detonation predicted in 45 minutes, later shortened to 40 minutes.
- *Codeword:* “Marta/Marti/Martha Pope.”
- *Authenticity claim:* Assertion that “this is not a hoax,” sometimes linked to previous incidents at Portadown, Lurgan, and Moira.

The directive in Call 6—to “go outside and look and see the car”—was clearly intended to create a sense of urgency and prompt immediate action.

Armagh

Two warning calls were made within three minutes in advance of the Armagh bomb; their wording is presented below.

Call 1: “There is a bomb outside the Police Station on Newry Road Armagh. Matha Pope.”

Call 2: “I want you to take a message. There’s a bomb outside the Police Station in Armagh.

Fire Control – We already have been notified that there’s a suspect bomb at Armagh.

Bomber – Oh, Goodbye.

Fire Control – And who are you.

Bomber – Oglagh-Na-Leireann”

In this instance, the calls contain fewer details and show less overlap in their content.

- *Location:* both calls refer to the police station in Armagh
- *Codeword:* Matha Pope given in the first call, and the caller uses the organisation’s name in the second call.
- *Authenticity:* The second call’s use of “Oglagh na hÉireann” serves as an explicit authenticity claim.

Both calls corroborate the same threat; the second adds the IRA-style claim, strengthening the credibility of the warning.

Banbridge

Call 1: Bomber – Ok this Is eh Marjorie Pope here I would just like to say there is a bomb in Banbridge OK.

BT – OK then

Bomber – Did you Get that clear?

BT – Sorry what Did you say there?

Bomber – There is A bomb in Banbridge. This Is Marjorie Pope IRA

BT – Marjorie

Bomber – Pope

BT – Pope. Whereabouts in Banbridge?

Bomber – Main Street Banbridge, Twenty minutes, Yeah.

Call 2: Aye, yous got a phone call about Banbridge. Red Cavalier outside The Ranch House. You’ve got 20 Minutes.

Call 3: This is the IRA, there is a bomb to go off in twenty minutes in a red Cavalier. Marjorie Pope.

In this case, there is a progression of detail with each call adding more specificity: the first call is a general bomb warning, the second call adds timing and location plus an IRA reference, and the third call adds the vehicle and the precise location – outside The Ranch House.

- *Vehicle*: Red Cavalier
- *Location*: Banbridge/ outside The Ranch House
- *Explosives*: Reference only to a bomb
- *Timing*: 20 minutes.
- *Codeword*: “Marjorie Pope.”
- *Authenticity claim*: Caller explicitly states, “This is the IRA,” and repeats, “Marjorie Pope.”

The final call contains the most actionable details—vehicle, location, timing, and group attribution—making it the most operationally credible of the three warnings.

Omagh

Three warning calls were made in advance of the Omagh bomb; their wording is presented below.

Call 1: Hello Newsroom, bomb courthouse Omagh, Main Street. 500lbs explosion, 30 minutes. Martha Pope IRA Oglanahan [Oglaigh na hÉireann].

Call 2: Martha Pope 15 minutes, bomb Omagh Town.

Call 3: Am I through to Omagh? This is a bomb warning. It is going to go off in the centre of Omagh in thirty minutes. (codeword given and spelt on third attempt) codeword was “Marta Pope”. When asked to clarify where, he stated “Main Street about 200 yards up from the Courthouse.

There is less detail in the Omagh calls compared with those made in advance of Lisburn, Armagh, and Banbridge.

- *Location*: Omagh Main Street/Courthouse area, and in Call 3 – “200 yards up from the Courthouse” is pinpointed.
- *Explosives*: Call 1 explicitly states the bomb is 500lbs.
- *Timing*: Calls 1 and 3 report 30 minutes to detonation while call 2 reports 15 minutes.

- *Codeword*: “Martha Pope.”
- *Authenticity claim*: Caller 1 explicitly identifies as IRA/Oglaigh na hÉireann, and the codeword “Martha Pope” is used in all three calls.

The content of the calls is consistent in identifying the bomb’s location and in using the codeword “Martha Pope.” IRA/Oglaigh na hÉireann responsibility is claimed explicitly only in Call 3.

Comparative Analysis: Across the Lisburn, Armagh, Banbridge, and Omagh incidents, the warning calls show recurring elements—use of codewords (variations on “Martha Pope”), references to the IRA/Oglaigh na hÉireann, and broadly accurate locations—but they vary significantly in detail, tone, and structure. Lisburn featured the highest volume of calls and the most consistent content, while Armagh’s were brief and minimal. Banbridge showed a progression in specificity across its three calls, and Omagh’s warnings, though consistent in codeword and location, were limited in actionable detail. Collectively, the warnings demonstrate no standardised format but do reflect attempts—varying in credibility and clarity—to convey threat information in advance of detonation.

- xii. If applicable, to which organisation the coded warnings were attributed.

Table 8 identifies the organisations to which incidents involving warnings with codewords are attributed.

There is no reliable open-source evidence identifying the specific codewords used by the Continuity IRA (CIRA) when issuing warnings or claiming responsibility. Open-source material states that codewords were used, but the actual words themselves are not publicly disclosed.

Table 8: Attribution of Attacks Accompanied by Coded Warnings (Sept 1997 – Aug 1998)

Date and Location	Attributed Paramilitary Group	Source
6 Jan 1998: Banbridge	CIRA	CAIN Web Service. (1998). <i>A chronology of the conflict – 1998</i> . Ulster University. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ ; Belfast Telegraph, 1998 ⁹⁰
23 Feb 1998: Portadown	CIRA	CAIN Web Service. (1998). <i>A chronology of the conflict – 1998</i> . Ulster University. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ ; Belfast Telegraph, 1998 ⁹¹
30 Apr 1998: Lisburn	Thought to be a dissident Republican armed group, but unattributed	CAIN Web Service. (1998). <i>A chronology of the conflict – 1998</i> . Ulster University. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ ; Crown Court of Northern Ireland, 2007 ⁹²
16 May 1998: Armagh	Thought to be a dissident Republican armed group, but unattributed	CAIN Web Service. (1998). <i>A chronology of the conflict – 1998</i> . Ulster University. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ ; Crown Court of Northern Ireland, 2007 ⁹³
24 Jun 1998: Newtownhamilton	INLA and Real IRA	CAIN Web Service. (1998). <i>A chronology of the conflict – 1998</i> . Ulster University. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ ; Crown Court of Northern Ireland, 2007 ⁹⁴
13 Jul 1998: Newry Courthouse	Real IRA	Nally, P. (2003, March). <i>The Nally report: Review of the factual findings of the report of the tribunal of inquiry into the Omagh bombing of 15 August 1998</i> . Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Retrieved from https://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/omagh/docs/nally0603.pd
1 Aug 1998: Banbridge	Real IRA	CAIN Web Service. (1998). <i>A chronology of the conflict – 1998</i> . Ulster University. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ ; Crown Court of Northern Ireland, 2007 ⁹⁵
15 Aug 1998: Omagh	Real IRA	CAIN Web Service. (1998). <i>A chronology of the conflict – 1998</i> . Ulster University. https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/ ; Crown Court of Northern Ireland, 2007 ⁹⁶

xiii. Use of codewords by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) (1994-1998)

Between January 1994 and the INLA's ceasefire declaration in August 1998, the public record identifies sixty-one incidents attributable to or linked to the INLA.⁹⁷ Of those, five involved warnings relating to bombs or incendiary devices. These incidents were:

⁹⁰ Paul Connolly, Security Correspondent. (1998, January 7). Riddle of Banbridge car bomb. *Belfast Telegraph*

INQ041285

⁹¹ Belfast Telegraph reporters. (1998, February 23). Bomb rocks Portadown: Shops destroyed in town centre blast. *Belfast Telegraph*.

INQ035782

⁹² Crown Court of Northern Ireland. (2007). *The Queen v. Sean Hoey* [2007] NICC 49

INQ000261

⁹³ Crown Court of Northern Ireland. (2007). *The Queen v. Sean Hoey* [2007] NICC 49

⁹⁴ Crown Court of Northern Ireland. (2007). *The Queen v. Sean Hoey* [2007] NICC 49

⁹⁵ Crown Court of Northern Ireland. (2007). *The Queen v. Sean Hoey* [2007] NICC 49

⁹⁶ Crown Court of Northern Ireland. (2007). *The Queen v. Sean Hoey* [2007] NICC 49

⁹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Timeline_of_Irish_National_Liberation_Armey_actions&oldid=1344336234.

- 19 July 1996: Several bomb warnings in Lisburn.⁹⁸
- 27 July 1996: A warning of devices left in the Woodburn and Oldpark areas of Belfast.⁹⁹
- 12 May 1998: Claim of responsibility for an abandoned landmine on Whiterock Road, Belfast.¹⁰⁰
- 24 June 1998: A warning about a car bomb in Newtownhamilton. This attack is also attributed to the CIRA.¹⁰¹
- 13 July 1998: Warning of devices left at Ballynafeigh Orange Hall, Belfast.¹⁰²

The open-source material records that a recognised INLA codeword was used in two of these incidents – 19 July 1996, Lisburn and 13 July 1998, Ballynafeigh Orange Hall, Belfast – but the actual codeword is not disclosed in the reporting in either case.

4. In respect of the use of the "Martha Pope" coded warning, please provide, as far as it is possible to do so, any available information about:

a. The origin of the codeword and whether that was intended to provide a statement by dissident republican terrorists on the peace process in Northern Ireland that culminated in the Belfast Good Friday Agreement?

The codeword “Martha Pope” refers to Martha Pope, an American political aide and diplomat who was closely involved in the Northern Ireland peace process. She served as Senior Advisor for the Northern Ireland Peace Negotiations between January 4, 1995, and July 1998, working with U.S. Senator George Mitchell, who chaired the multi-party talks that led to the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Her presence in Northern Ireland was closely linked to the USA's role in promoting compromise and moving towards peace.

Dissident republicans—those who rejected the ceasefires declared by the Provisional IRA and the constitutional settlement offered by the Good Friday Agreement, 1998—chose the phrase “Martha Pope” as a deliberate codeword. By invoking the name of someone so closely linked to the peace talks, the groups were signalling their opposition to the Agreement and to the direction mainstream republicanism (via Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA leadership) was taking.

In effect, using her name as a bomb warning code was a way of making a political statement: that they rejected the peace process and saw the involvement of figures like Ms Pope (and the wider USA/international mediation effort) as emblematic of what they opposed.

b. Any information about the terrorist group to which the warning has been attributed?

The Real Irish Republican Army (Real IRA) is a dissident republican paramilitary group committed to achieving a united Ireland. It emerged in 1997 after a faction broke away from

⁹⁸ Ulster police reopen town after bomb search. (1996, July 19). *Agence France-Presse*. [INQ041340]

⁹⁹ Belfast bomb hoaxes. (1996, July 27). *Belfast Telegraph*. [INQ041280]

¹⁰⁰ Security alert in West Belfast. (1998, May 12). *The Irish Times*. [INQ041287]

¹⁰¹ Car bomb explodes in N Ireland. (1998, June 24). *BBC News*. [INQ041279]

¹⁰² Thorpe, N. (1998, July 14). Silent scorn greets walk along the Ormeau Rd. *The Scotsman*. [INQ041286]

the Provisional IRA, rejecting that group's ceasefire. Like its predecessor, the Real IRA claimed to be the legitimate continuation of the original Irish Republican Army, referring to itself simply as "the Irish Republican Army" or *Óglaigh na hÉireann* in Irish. The armed group was officially proscribed as a terrorist group in the United Kingdom in 2004.¹⁰³

c. Other than the Omagh Bombing on 15 August 1998 whether it was used in any other attacks by a dissident republican terrorist organisation and, if so, which organisation?

The codeword Martha Pope was used in telephone warnings preceding the following incidents:

- A car bomb placed at Market Square, Lisburn on 30 April 1998¹⁰⁴
- A car bomb placed near Armagh RUC Station on 16 May 1998¹⁰⁵
- A car bomb placed at Newry Street, Banbridge on 1 August 1998¹⁰⁶

The attacks in Lisburn and Armagh have been attributed to armed dissident republican elements, though not to any specific organisation, whereas the Banbridge attack has been directly attributed to the Real IRA.¹⁰⁷

d. Leaving aside the incident at Red Bridge, Newry at the beginning of April 1998, is there any evidence of the codeword Martha Pope (or similar) ever being used as part of a hoax?

I have not been able to find any evidence in the public domain that the codeword "Martha Pope" was used in a hoax warning.

e. Is there any evidence on when the codeword Martha Pope first became public knowledge (i.e. the specific codeword was made public after the Omagh bombing but is there anything to suggest that it would have been within public knowledge prior to the Omagh bombing)?

The codeword Martha Pope first appeared in public reporting on 16th August 1998. I have not been able to find any mention of the codeword Martha Pope in the public domain prior to the Omagh bombing.

¹⁰³ *R v Z* [2004] NICA (Court of Appeal in Northern Ireland, June 30, 2004). *Establishing the proscription of the Real Irish Republican Army under the Terrorism Act 2000*. INQ039382

¹⁰⁴ INQ013783.pdf

¹⁰⁵ INQ013785.pdf

¹⁰⁶ INQ013784.pdf

¹⁰⁷ CAIN Web Service. (1998). *A chronology of the conflict – 1998*. Ulster University. <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/> INQ035789

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- INQ034440.MP4 - Audio recording of the third warning call to police conveying the Omagh bomb alert, made by the UTV Newsroom to police.
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