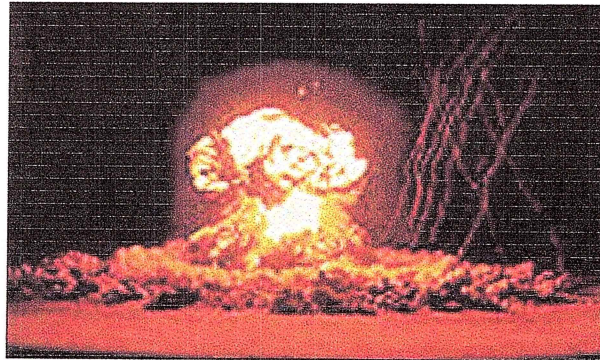


You are in: UK: **Scotland**  
Monday, 1 January, 2001, 00:07 GMT

Front Page  
World  
UK  
Northern Ireland  
Scotland  
Wales  
UK Politics  
Business  
Sci/Tech  
Health  
Education  
Entertainment  
Talking Point  
In Depth  
AudioVideo

**BBC** SPORT >>

## Scotland's holocaust fears



The Cold War was at its height in the Swinging Sixties  
Sixties Scotland may have been swinging to a heady brew of sex, drugs and rock and roll, but the country's civic leaders were grappling with weightier matters.

The somewhat apocalyptic question of how to bury all the dead after a nuclear holocaust, and who would be responsible was at the centre of a flurry of memos and meetings.

But officials in town halls and the then Scottish Office never reached a firm conclusion, mainly because no-one knew how many people would be killed.

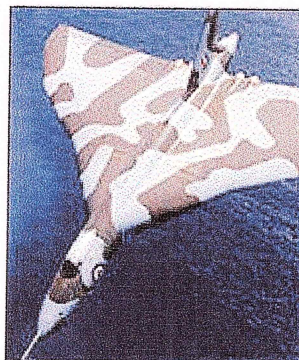
One study speculated that 952,000 Scots could be the victims of a nuclear attack, with 2,000 deaths a day in Midlothian alone.

So earnestly was the question addressed that Scottish Office files include blueprints of makeshift mortuary body racks and photographs of emergency coffins.

Cremation would use too much fuel and sinking the bodies at sea in the hulks of ships would involve too much handling, officials said.

One solution appeared to be mass burial pits, dug with the aid of "the unemployed".

The macabre files are included in Scottish



The Vulcan bomber was a potent symbol of the times

>

Search BBC News Online

Advanced search options

**Launch console for latest audio/video**

**BBC ONE TV NEWS**

**WORLD NEWS SUMMARY**

**BBC NEWS 24 BULLETIN**

**PROGRAMMES GUIDE**

**UK Confidential**

**Revealing the secrets: 1 January**

**Public Records Office**

**View national archives online**

### See also:

01 Jan 00 | Scotland  
Files reveal radioactive dump secrets  
22 May 00 | UK  
How we learned to stop worrying and forget the bomb  
02 May 00 | World  
The world's nuclear arsenal

### Internet links:

How to survive a nuclear holocaust  
National Archives of Scotland

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites

### Top Scotland stories now:

Sex attacker hunt switches cities  
Measles outbreak fears played down  
Jack and Chloe top baby names league  
Single-use scalpels to combat CJD  
Robbery victim loses baby  
Water all-clear as supplies return  
Top diplomat takes up Britons' case  
Services getting back on track

Office documents made public on New Year's Day at the National Archives of Scotland after 30 years.

LINK

**Links to more Scotland stories are at the foot of the page.**

The keeping of official records on the subject began when civil servants researched an answer to a parliamentary question in 1961 from an MP who wanted to know about the "designated burial officer" for the West of Scotland.

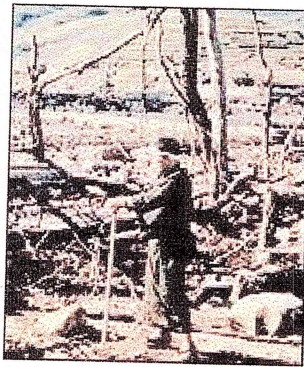
### 'Seemliness'

Records covering matters such as death registration stemmed from wartime experience, but a "secret" Ministry of Health memo in 1950 admitted: "It is not considered likely that the bodies of persons killed in mass destruction attacks, whether with atomic bombs or HE (high explosive) could be dealt with by ordinary methods."

Documents from 1948 on the likely requirements for emergency mortuary work specified 950 trucks, 75 of which would be for use in Scotland.

A Ministry of Health document in 1950 also detailed how civil defence burial regulations should be implemented at local level.

This should include mortuaries capable of holding 100 bodies at a time, with supplies to include labels, hurricane lamps, five pairs of strong rubber gloves per attendant, carbolic of lime and shrouds.



Officials worried about nuclear devastation like that in Nagasaki

Another Ministry of Health document that year admitted no casualty figures could be given because this was "highly speculative".

And a 1957 document records "disquiet" amongst officials in London at the lack of instructions to local authorities on the identification and disposal of the dead.

The first estimated casualty figures appear in a "restricted" Scottish home and health department note of 1964, which bore the civil service health warning: "This by no means represents departmental policy, but contains some interesting material."

### 'Disposal in pitshafts or hulks'

This recalled that post-war procedures for burying the dead laid emphasis on identification and "seemliness", but the nuclear age had changed that.

There was a suggestion that as many as 2,000 people could die in a large county like Midlothian.

Also in 1964, officials attended an event organised by public health and hygiene experts which included a talk by Dr Neil Reid.

They took notes as he suggested that in the areas of heaviest damage, the dead would either have been incinerated or buried in rubble, and these zones would be merely closed off.



The era was in the shadow of the mushroom cloud

Dead in the areas of lighter damage would be collected to remove the risk of disease, and tracked vehicles and special squads would be needed.

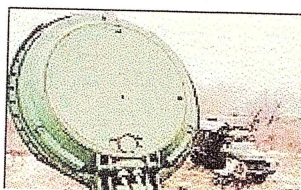
"It has been suggested that bodies should be disposed of in pitshafts or loaded in hulks which would be towed out to sea and sunk", said the notes of Dr Reid's talk.

The disadvantage of both those methods was that they would involve a great deal of handling of bodies.

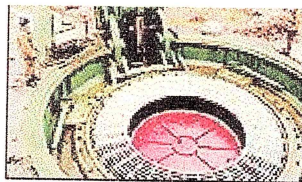
"Mass cremation had also been suggested, but this would require the use of great quantities of fuel which would be needed for other purposes.

"Probably the best method of disposal would be by mass burial in pits dug by earth-moving equipment.

"This might be undertaken by the rescue section of the civil defence corps with the assistance of the unemployed."



In 1970, the matter came up again when John Gorman, Dundee's chief defence officer, wrote to Edinburgh for guidance after Dundee's parks director had raised the question.



Many nuclear bombs are still deployed

An official noted to colleagues that several meetings had been held where "this difficult subject" had been mooted.

"I don't believe we ever got beyond the sort of useful but inconclusive thinking expressed in (the 1964 document estimating casualties)," the official noted.

Officials agreed to tell Mr Gorman no official guidance had ever been issued but that "common sense principles that he will have heard discussed from time to time" still applied.

A note in the 1970 file, apparently from army Brigadier Buchanan-Dunlop, informed officials: "There are no Branch Two data for Dundee, but they advise that the worst and most extravagant bomb on Dundee might result in 90,000 casualties (dead and dying, excluding wounded)."

---

### Links to more Scotland stories

In This Section

---

[Back to top](#)

[News Front Page](#) | [World](#) | [UK](#) | [UK Politics](#) | [Business](#) | [Sci/Tech](#) | [Health](#) | [Education](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [In-Depth](#) | [Talking Point](#) | [Audio/Video](#)

[>To BBC Sport](#)



Christmas shopping?  
 DVD'S AND VIDEOS [GET BEST PRICE](#)



- news
- sport
- features
- columnists
- money

Search T

Monday, January 01, 2001

- back to home page
- email
- chat
- pick of the box
- business finder
- features
- voice of scotland
- read instead
- Daily Record
- What's On
- Shopping Online
- Lifestyle
- Books & Music
- Eating & Drinking
- Maps & Directions

news

### WHAT WILL I DO WITH 952,000 DEAD IN SCOTLAND?

Grisly headache in planning for aftermath of nuclear holocaust

FEARS of nuclear Armageddon left planners struggling with the grim question of how to cope with a predicted death toll of up to one million Scots.

Experts calculated that as many as 2000 people a day would die in Midlothian alone if Scotland was hit by an all-out nuclear strike, secret Government papers reveal today.

But while officials had no problem assessing the scale of the holocaust, they could not decide on the best way to dispose of all the bodies.

Scottish Office files, made public today for the first time in 30 years, include blueprints of makeshift mortuary body racks and photographs of emergency coffins .

And a Ministry of Health memo in 1950 admitted: "It is not considered likely that the bodies of persons killed in mass destruction attacks, whether with atomic bombs or HE (high explosive) could be dealt with by ordinary methods."

Officials concluded that cremation would use too much fuel, and sinking the bodies at sea in the hulks of ships would involve too much handling.

But one solution appeared to be mass burial pits dug with the aid of the unemployed.

The keeping of official records on the subject was prompted when civil servants researched an answer to a parliamentary question in 1961, when John Maclay was the Scottish Secretary. An MP inquired who was the "designated burial officer" for the West of Scotland.

The interest in the nuclear question reflected fears in the 1960s of the Cold War with the Soviet Union turning into a nuclear inferno.

The world edged to the abyss of nuclear destruction in 1962 as the US squared up to the Soviet Union over its plans to install nuclear missiles on Cuban soil.

American President Kennedy blockaded Cuba and demanded that the USSR remove its deadly arsenal.

The world breathed a huge sigh of relief when USSR President Krushchev backed down.

On

BACK HOME

ALSO SEC

DOUBT HOLE SHOP when a error le money

THE E THE m experie waited and du

BANNE STUFF sparke bannin wearin; the gyr upset l; ladies..

AWW SCOTL by bliz horren; weathe the bel

HOLE CASHF celebra New Y; started money

or cli more



Listen to your local station



It was against this background that the Scottish Office asked local councils to consider how they could cope.

Scotland, with vital communication centres, the nuclear submarine base of the Clyde, a naval base at Rosyth, strategic radar sites and RAF airfields was sure to be high on the Warsaw Pact target list for nuclear hits.

A 1964 study concluded: "The number of deaths resulting from a heavy nuclear attack with with ground burst bombs, mainly in the central belt of Scotland, would be so great that normal interment would not be a practical proposition."

In the worst-hit areas, the dead would either be incinerated or buried under rubble.

In the west of the country it was estimated there would be 522,000 casualties in such areas, 60,000 in the east and 63,000 in the north.

There would be no attempt to recover corpses from nearest the centre of the blast point because the bodies would most likely have been completely destroyed and the area heavily irradiated. Re-populating the area could only be considered in the very long term.

Another 286,000 were expected to be killed by radiation in the 15 days after the attack, with a further 21,000 deaths in the following weeks.

Conventional bombing was expected to kill thousands more. A 1000-ton bombing raid on an area like Clydeside could kill another 11,000.

A conference in Dundee identified three problem areas in coping with such a huge death toll.

There was the identification and recording of corpses, the removal and decontamination of radioactivity and the disposal of thousands of corpses by burial or cremation.

They were asked to identify sites which could be used as makeshift mortuaries.

Civil servants suggested disused railways stations, bus stations, barns and open fields.

They also examined disposal sites such as disused quarries, disused mines, mass graves in open grounds and burial at sea.

Sea burial was a last resort because of the distance and problems of finding areas with suitable depth and a satisfactory way of sinking the bodies.

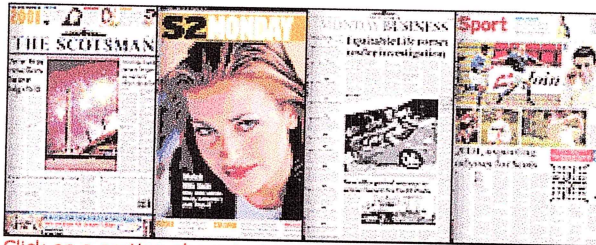
Ayrshire Council was one authority that considered buying 10,000 labels to tag corpses and 10,000 sack coffins. Mass graves dug by bulldozers were reckoned the best way of disposing of bodies.

The earth on top would be soaked with engine oil to cut the risk of contaminated dust blowing around.

Other papers released show Scots airline passengers could now be jetting in and out of Slamannan International airport if a scheme dreamt up 30 years ago had gone ahead.

Search today's online edi

FRONT PAGE



Click on a section above to jump to that page

NEWS

Scotland

UK

Parliament & Politics

World

Business

Sport

Edinburgh

Glasgow

COMMENT

Editorial

Columnists

Letters

Diary

Cartoon

GAZETTE

Obituaries

Court Circular

Gaelic

Crosswords

S2

Cover Story

FAQs

Health

Living

Style

Families

Interiors

Travel

Arts

Food & Drink

Outdoors

Gardening

Media

RELATED ARTICLES

Hain targeted over apartheid protest

PETER Hain, the Foreign Office minister, was targeted for prosecution by the Labour government of the 1970s because of his anti-apartheid activities.

Labour plan for crackdown on apartheid protester

THE Labour government of 1970 was prepared to have anti-apartheid campaigner Peter Hain arrested to ensure a South African cricket tour went ahead.

Prince Charles warned Wilson about threat to Scottish salmon

PRINCE Charles waged a war of words with Prime Minister Harold Wilson to protect salmon fishing on Scottish rivers, it was revealed.

Diplomat's war of words over hostage deadlock

BRITAIN'S most senior diplomat resorted to swearing in a war of words with his American counterpart as they attempted to resolve the deadlock with prevented the release of Western hostages by Palestinian guerillas seeking the return of comrades imprisoned in foreign jails.

Warnings on dumping of nuclear waste were ignored

BRITAIN dumped up to 60 tonnes of highly radioactive waste into the Atlantic Ocean despite warnings that the containers would burst open because of the pressure at the bottom of the sea.

How the Declaration of Arbroath meant a big dilemma for Labour

IT IS a stirring statement of Scotland's historic right to independence, and a stinging

Markets: principal closing prices



Send this story to a friend >

Printer friendly version >

Plan for mass nuclear grav

Joe Quinn

THOUSANDS of bodies were to be buried in ma by the unemployed in the event of a nuclear at documents predicted could immediately wipe o a million Scots.

Officials pondered over the fate of the dead in s made public for the first time today, which reve extent of government fears about a nuclear hol

One study speculated that 952,000 Scots could of a nuclear attack, with 2,000 deaths a day in alone.

So earnestly was the question taken that Scotti include blueprints of makeshift mortuary body photographs of emergency coffins.

Cremation would use too much fuel, and sinkin sea in the hulks of ships would involve too muc officials mused.

One solution appeared to be mass burial pits, d aid of "the unemployed".

The macabre files are included in Scottish Offic made public today at the National Archives of S gap of 30 years.

The keeping of official records on the subject w when civil servants researched an answer to a question in 1961 from an MP who inquired who "designated burial officer" for the West of Scotl

A "secret" Ministry of Health memo in 1950 sai considered likely that the bodies of persons kill

TV & Radio

scotsman.com

Home

Sport

Arts & Entertainment

Leisure & Lifestyle

Travel

Heritage

Money

Careers & Education

Property

Motors

Business

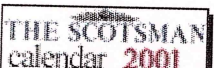
SERVICES

Subscriptions

Advertise Online

Advertise in Paper

Calendar



rebutal to English nobles who thought they could assume mastery of their neighbours.

Heath's plan to axe shipyards

THE cabinet meeting which sealed the fate of the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, threatening 8,000 jobs, took place three days before Christmas 1970, newly-released government documents reveal.

Thatcher's secret plan to charge for library books

IN ONE of her first acts as a Cabinet minister, Margaret Thatcher drew up secret plans to impose borrowing charges on library books.

Public 'hostile' to Britain going into the EEC

PRIME Minister Edward Heath was warned by officials of the need to massage public opinion on Europe if he was to succeed in taking Britain into the Common Market, according to the files released to the Public Record Office.

Diplomats came close to subverting Colombian justice system in Moore case

WHEN England's football captain Bobby Moore was arrested in Colombia just before the 1970 World Cup finals for alleged shoplifting, British diplomats spared no efforts to secure his release.

TOP STORIES

New Year revellers brave the big chill

THOUSANDS of Hogmanay revellers defied Arctic weather conditions last night, to take part in street parties across the country.

Middle East peace hopes in tatters after deaths

A ROUND of retaliatory violence that could damage Middle East peacemaking efforts seemed inevitable last night, after an Israeli right-wing extremist leader was killed in an ambush by Palestinians and Israeli forces shot dead a leader of Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction.

OTHER NEWS

2001, a sporting odyssey for Scots »

SFA set to throw book at Combe »

Cold comfort for Clark and Levein as points slip away »

BILL JAMIESON »

destruction attacks, whether with atomic bomb explosive), could be dealt with by ordinary met

A Ministry of Health document in 1950 detailed defence burial regulations should be implemented. This should include mortuaries capable of holding bodies, with supplies to include five pairs of stoups, gloves per attendant, carbolic of lime and shrouds.

The first estimated casualty figures appear in a Scottish home and health department note of 1950.

In Scotland's "western zone", direct casualties were estimated at 522,000 in the "A" and "B" rings, "C" ring, with a further 200,000 radiation casualties in hospital care over a 100-day period, and 11,000 deaths in medical care after a 100-day period.

"Eastern zone" figures were 60,000, 28,000 and 4,000 for the "northern zone" 63,000, 58,000, and 4,000.

Send this story to a friend >

Printer friendly version >

TO TOP >

MORE NEWS STORIES >

T