

1946

Dangerous Incendiary Device, A

James R. Barrett

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

James R. Barrett, Dangerous Incendiary Device, A, 36 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 388 (1945-1946)

This Criminology is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

A DANGEROUS INCENDIARY DEVICE

James R. Barrett

(Here is an interesting account of one of the dangers brought from abroad: incendiary devices. Lt. Barrett in the following article describes one of these devices which came to the attention of the Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory of the Buffalo, New York, Police Department. He is director of the laboratory.—EDITOR.)

Of the many war souvenirs making their appearance in this country, one of the most recent to reach the Buffalo area is a small incendiary device which has dangerous criminal potentialities. Obscure in origin, consultants in the U. S. Army Chemical Warfare Service have been unable to fully identify this instrument but they do feel certain that it is of foreign manufacture.

Measuring only about six inches in length, one half inch in thickness and one and one half inches in width, this mechanism is small enough to be easily concealed on the person. (See illustration No. 1.) Its weight of slightly more than two ounces in no way detracts from its portability.

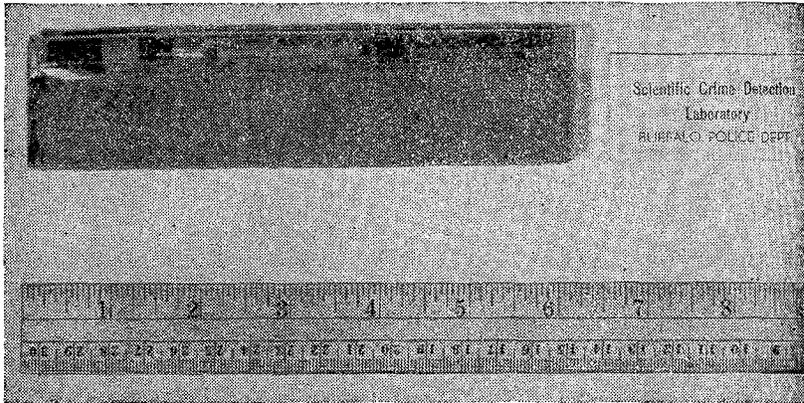


ILLUSTRATION NO. 1

If intact, this instrument can be recognized by its colorful red pasteboard wrapper which encloses a transparent plastic envelope. Printed on this wrapper (See Illustration No. 2) in eleven different European languages are the following words, "This is quite safe to handle. Tear the package off the card and hide it. Then read the instructions in the envelope, and make your plans."

The illustrated instructions referred to on the wrapper are printed on a piece of white paper which is taped under the outer cover. They read:

"This is a silent incendiary device with which you can injure the Nazis.

"Remove the tape. Under it is a metal strip.

"Squeeze the package between the red marks and crush the copper tube inside.

"Pull the metal strip right out.

"Place the package against wood shavings, straw, curtains or easily ignited material.

"After 30 minutes the package will burst quietly into flames."

The plastic container which smells like a phenol-formaldehyde condensation product is about four fifths filled with a viscous yellow liquid. The remaining fifth is occupied by the ignition mechanism. It is housed in three short pieces of tubing which are joined together to form a continuous cylinder of uniform diameter extending the full length of the envelope. The position of the copper tube, marked by two bands of red stain, is at one end of the unit. Adjoining it, in the center section, is a light colored metal sleeve through which is inserted the soft brass strip. The remaining piece consists of a short perforated section of coated metal tubing, a cardboard ring and a dark brown terminal rod of non-metallic material; all joined in the order named. (Note Illustration No. 3)

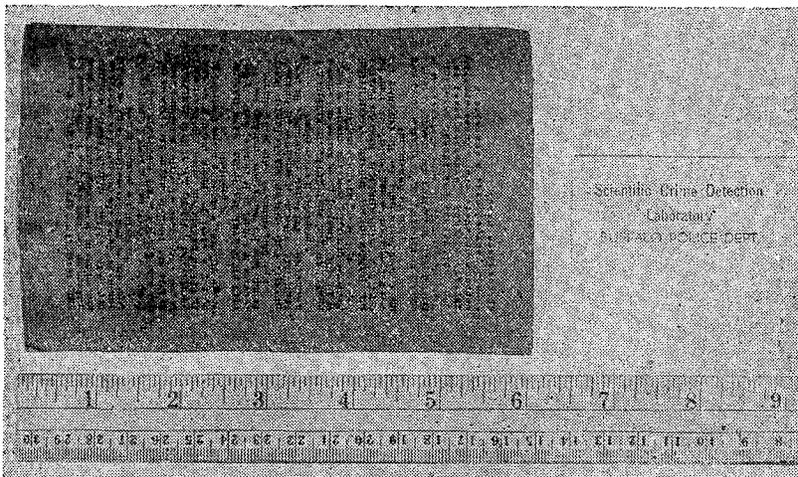
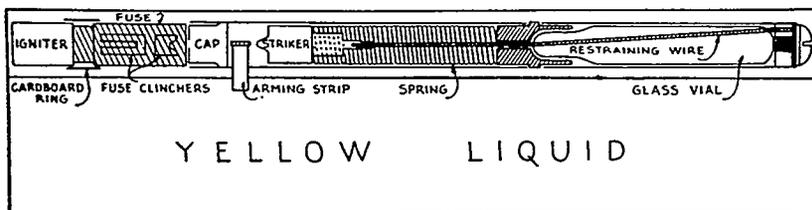


ILLUSTRATION NO. 2

To become fully acquainted with the action of these instruments, two were fired under test conditions. In each instance, the enclosed instructions were followed to the letter. One of the units, however, failed to ignite in the specified manner.

In accordance with directions, the copper tubes of both incendiaries were compressed at a point midway between the two

red marks. Considerable digital pressure was required to break the glass vials contained inside, but when sufficient force was exerted they broke with clearly audible cracking sounds. The soft brass strips were then withdrawn. After a delay of 13½ minutes the first device emitted a sharp report but failed to ignite the plastic holder and its contents. The second acted similarly with the exception that ignition of the combustible



INCENDIARY DEVICE

ILLUSTRATION NO. 3

material occurred after 14 minutes and it then burned for an additional seven minutes. The yellow liquid was consumed slowly as it produced a heavy black smoke which had an odor similar to that of burning kerosene. After the fire died out, the residue consisted of a small amount of charred organic material and the metallic ignition tube. The metal parts were carefully disassembled and examined to ascertain the internal action of this unit.

As shown in the accompanying diagram, removal of the brass arming strip permitted free forward movement of the striker. Crushing the copper tube broke the internal glass vial and liberated acid which was then free to act on the spring restraining wire. After a short period of time the pressure exerted by the compressed spring broke the weakened wire and drove the striker forward against the percussion cap with force sufficient to explode it. The spark resulting from this explosion ignited a short length of fuse. On burning through, it, in turn, fired the adjacent yellow liquid and plastic container.

After observing the action of these mechanisms and noting how readily combustible materials were ignited by them, it was evident that in the hands of arsonists, pyromaniacs, mental defectives or uninformed persons that these devices could cause widespread personal injury and property damage. Their hazard cannot be minimized and law enforcement officers everywhere would further the ends of public safety if they were to bring about the safe destruction of these instruments whenever and wherever they are found in the possession of civilians.