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Friday June 14 1968.

MORNING STAR Friday June 14 1968

## GOVT MADE THE BEST GUNPOWDER

From JOHN MOSS

FOR the first time in 400 years the Explosives Research and Development Establishment at Waltham Abbey (Essex) opened its doors yesterday to a big Press party. It is thought that gunpowder was made on the site at the time of the Spanish Armada.

Evocative names like Powdermill Lane, now a quiet, leafy road, reveal the potentially lethal experiments made there.

The Government bought John Walton's gunpowder factory on the site in 1787, after Gen. Sir William Congreve disputed the claim that private manufacturers made cheaper and better gunpowder than did the Government.

Congreve showed the superior-

ity of the nationalised product of what became the Royal Gunpowder Factory and saved £50,000 into the bargain.

Both sides were supplied in the American Civil War, when in 1862, the U.S. Ordnance Manual recorded that no one made better powder.

Today 20 per cent of the work is on explosives, 50 per cent on rocket and other propellants, and 30 per cent on research into new materials, especially the new fibre-reinforced materials, said the director, Dr. L. J. Bellamy.

### NEW MATERIALS

Among these new materials are mixtures of nylon and asbestos, with the asbestos fibres lined up in the same direction to give maximum strength.

Both materials are cheap, and the result is better than glass fibre products.

Silicon carbide "whiskers," which are made of the material in very pure form, turn out to be stronger, weight for weight, when used to reinforce aluminium alloys, than the best steel, titanium, or conventional aluminium alloys, and are expected to give lightweight strong, second generation aircraft materials in planes like Concorde.