

E. R.

25 FEB 1981

5

W. H. H.
In info of file
Mr
cc. PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - M
PS/PUS (B&L) - M
Mr Blelloch
Mr Burns
Mr Buxton - M
Mr Gilliland
Mr Cromey ✓

PA
PS/MR ALISON (B&L) - Mufax

MEETING BETWEEN MR ALISON, MR GOODHART, MR MOLYNEAUX
AND MR McCUSKER ABOUT THE EVENTS AT TYNAN ABBEY ON 21 JANUARY

I attach a brief for this meeting, which you told me was now likely to take place tomorrow. MOD officials are content with the line I have suggested Mr Alison should take.

2. I am separately submitting to the Secretary of State's office (copied to you) a draft reply to the letter of 17 February from Mr McCusker about the rumour that on the night of the Tynan murders uniformed soldiers were drinking in a pub in Middletown. The draft reply rebuts this rumour. I understand that the Secretary of State may in fact have already told Mr McCusker that there is no truth in it in the course of a conversation last weekend, but I am suggesting to the Secretary of State's office that it would in any case be helpful if Mr McCusker had a reply to his letter before he and Mr Molyneaux see Mr Alison and Mr Goodhart.

3. In his letter to Mr Goodhart seeking the meeting (copy attached) Mr Molyneaux says that "We would be guided by you in deciding what could usefully be said after our meeting". I suggest that Mr Molyneaux and Mr McCusker should be steered in the direction of expressing themselves satisfied that there is no truth in the allegations but should be dissuaded from making any more detailed public comment.

C. Davenport

C DAVENPORT

Law and Order Division
Stormont House

25 February 1981

LINE TO TAKE

We naturally made enquiries into the allegations by Dr Paisley and others of ineptitude or dereliction of duty by the security forces at Tynan Abbey on the night of 21 January. It is not for me to sit in judgement on the operational tactics adopted by the security forces in individual incidents; but I can say that there is absolutely no basis for the allegations. The Chief Constable has publicly stated that he is fully satisfied with the assistance given by the Army that night; and the Secretary of State is absolutely satisfied that nothing improper occurred.

/If necessary: Helicopter support was on the scene and carrying out useful operational tasks within minutes of being called for. Of course it had to refuel during the several hours of operations which were required. A helicopter only has a limited fuel supply. There was no question of mismanagement or incompetence. /

/If raised: We have also made enquiries about the suggestion that uniformed soldiers who were supposed to be on duty in the Tynan area that night were in fact drinking in a pub in Middletown. The Army categorically deny this. /

BACKGROUND

On the night of 21 January 1981, an armed gang of some 10 men crossed the border, hijacked two vehicles and went to Tynan Abbey. There they murdered Sir Norman Stronge (ex Speaker of the House of Commons (NI)) and his son James (a serving member of the RUC(R) and an ex-member of the Northern Ireland Assembly). They then bombed the Abbey and made off.

2. A two-vehicle RUC patrol having heard the explosion raced to the scene where their leading car was rammed by one of the terrorists' escape vehicles. A gun battle ensued and the terrorists made off on foot.

3. Intense interest was caused by this double murder. PIRA claimed responsibility, stating that it was a reprisal for attacks by Loyalists on Republicans. (Over the last 6 months, 4 well-known Republicans have been murdered and just a few days before the Tynan attack Mr and Mrs Michael McAliskey were attacked and wounded in their home near Coalisland - three Loyalists were arrested at the scene and have been charged with these attempted murders.)

4. On 12 February 1981 during Oral Question time Rev Dr Paisley MP asked the Secretary of State to confirm or deny that the Army patrol which was to observe Tynan Abbey on the night of 21 January was being wine and dined in a well-known Republican house in the area. He also asked the Secretary of State to confirm or deny that the helicopter which came to the assistance of the RUC ran out of fuel and had to return to base, the implication being that due to incompetence it had had to return to base earlier than might have been expected. He asked what action had been taken against the officer who was responsible for the patrol not being in position on the night in question. In response, the Secretary of State said that he never gave details in the House of security force operations.

5. The Minister will have seen the detailed report which CLF submitted to the Secretary of State about these allegations. It confirms that there is no basis for criticism of the Army in respect of the events. The report also discounts a further rumour, not

voiced by Dr Paisley, that there was a dispute between "an RUC man" and an Army officer on the night in question about the Army's deployment at the time of the incident at Tynan.

6. Since the Army report was written, Mr McCusker has written to the Secretary of State informing him that he believes that Paisley's "wining and dining" allegation might have been based on the "fact" that uniformed soldiers who were supposed to have been on duty in the Tynan area at the time had in fact been drinking in Hughes' Hotel, Middletown, (see attached copy letter). The Army have investigated this assertion and have flatly denied it. They say Hughes' Hotel is a Republican pub and is not used by soldiers. The Army does occasionally call in the hotel to check it out but even this has not happened since Christmas.

7. The Minister is already aware of the fact that no special security force guard was in operation in respect of Sir Norman or the Abbey. Sir Norman had specifically declined such a guard. There were troops in the area. They were engaged on specific tasks. All were at their posts.

8. Since the Tynan murders steps have been taken to review and where appropriate to enhance the security afforded to other prominent persons who might be considered at risk. It would, however, be unwise to be drawn into a detailed discussion of this with Messrs Molyneaux and McCusker.