

Sir Gwanto
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PS/Secretary of State (B & L)



PO/PP 30/84/1

PRISONS

PIRA ESCAPE PLAN, MAZE CELLULAR - INVOLVEMENT OF OFFICER BARR

1. The purpose of this minute is to advise the Secretary of State: that a major PIRA escape plan at Maze Cellular prison has been uncovered: that a prison officer, John B BARR, has been dismissed from the Service after admitting his complicity in the affair and: that measures have been taken, so far as possible, to close the gaps in physical defences and prison procedures revealed.

OFFICER BARR

2. As a result of some good RUC detective work, Barr was observed in company with Republican activists in the Lurgan area (North Armagh). Events - described at Annex A - then led quickly to his arrest and confession on 12 August. The following day he was charged with collecting and recording information of use to terrorists contrary to section 22(1)(b) of the Emergency Provisions Act. Though remanded in custody from Lurgan Magistrates' Court on 15 August he was granted bail the following day and remains at liberty. The RUC have now completed most of their questioning of Barr and expect to send the papers to the DPP before long. On present estimates his trial is unlikely to take place until well into 1985. Officer Barr was dismissed from the Prison Service on 5 September 1984.

THE ESCAPE PLAN

- 3.1 A source outside the prison had indicated that PIRA were again considering an escape attempt, but no details emerged until Barr's confession to the police. The full plans are set out in the attached Annex B, together with a detailed assessment of their viability and importance; a map is also appended. Having seen the value of a major escape, PIRA had clearly resolved to try again and the new plans took account of changes made following the 1983 escape. The 1984 version was to start late at night when the prison, as any other, was at its weakest. Having taken over the block - believed to be H3 where Barr was the class officer - with the help of another suborned member of staff and firearms, the prisoners would then have commandeered the prison central key, control and communication rooms. This would have given them control of the establishment which would have been used to unlock up to 100 of the most important prisoners from all the blocks. The final break would have been made using prison transport when movement began again at 0.600 hours.

SECRET

SECRET

2

- 3.2 This escape plan was well formulated and, although as related by Officer Barr it had some inconsistencies, was clearly well advanced. It could well have got under way and stood some small chance - with luck - of succeeding. Its prospects would measurably have improved if, as Barr alleged, there was continued staff malpractice at the institution.
- 3.3 Details of how and why Barr took part in the escape plan, of the information he has divulged, of his interviews with the police and myself and his allegations of malpractice are attached at Annex C.

THE CONSEQUENCES

4. The Secretary of State will wish to know that appropriate action has been, or is being, taken as a result of Barr's actions and revelations.
- (i) No major physical changes beyond those already in train following the previous escape are necessary.
 - (ii) Some more substantial changes have been required to night guard procedures at the prison. These and the minor physical changes necessary are described in Annex D. Almost all have now been implemented.
 - (iii) The existence of a "fifth column" is deeply disturbing and admits of no speedy solution. If Barr knows the identity of the other suborned officer "Sam", he refuses to divulge it. Otherwise the only prospect for detection lies in observation by and co-operation from staff inside, as well as continued RUC enquiries. The RUC have also been asked to look again into the question of staff collusion in the 1983 escape, now given important corroboration. The Governor has asked his staff for their urgent co-operation in defeating this threat from within.
 - (iv) Clearly allied to the problem of 'bent' staff is the evident lack of difficulty with which PIRA expected to obtain firearms again. Weapons are essential to any conceivable mass escape plan from Maze Cellular. Frequent searches of the prison, constant vigilance by staff and the deterrent use of staff searches remain the only means of prevention and detection. Protection is given through physical defence measures. The enhanced internal security measures already introduced or in train provide substantial mitigation of the threat, if they do not neutralise it. No new measures are considered necessary or proposed.

SECRET

SECRET

ANNEX A

OFFICER BARR - CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS ARREST

1. On Thursday 8 August in Lurgan, Co Armagh, Officer Barr was observed by a policeman to be in the company of two known Republican activists; all three people were in the officer's car and were clearly engaged in conversation. The police then visited Barr at work and he was questioned about these activities. As a result of these serious suspicions aroused, the police contacted the Prison Department and on 10 August Barr was suspended from duty. On Sunday 12 August, the officer, who was not under arrest at the time, called the police by telephone and later made a full statement about his actions.
2. The reason for Barr's confession seems to lie in his fear of disappointing his PIRA contacts at the next meeting scheduled to take place on the same evening (12 August). He would, he claims, have failed to give them the promised plasticine impression of the block "circle" key. [The "circle" in jail parlance is the central bar of the "H" in the H block, housing the administrative and security core.] Barr's suspension from duty two days before must also have thrown him into considerable mental confusion. He probably believed that we knew much more than we did (which at that stage only amounted to his having been seen in unsavoury subversive company). In this light his confession appears to have been an attempt to cut his losses.

SECRET

ANNEX B

THE PIRA ESCAPE PLAN

Take-over of Block

1. The escape plan was to be activated at 0100 hours when Officer Barr would have been in the H3 Block Communications Room and an accomplice in the circle. This man was to be given a cell key by an inmate so that a number of prisoners could be released at the appropriate moment. This could have been achieved when the two remaining officers, who should have been on patrol, were sleeping in a classroom. Assuming they were on duty, however, both would have been taken over, one after having been relieved for a break, the other following a ruse from a mixed wing prisoner claiming to be sick. Firearms would be used at this and later stages, though Barr claimed that, despite being asked to, he would not have brought them in.

Phase*take-over and transport

2. Barr would have used the same decoy of a sick prisoner to summon, via the Central Prison Control Room (ECR), the phase Senior Officer and a van to take the prisoner to the hospital. By the time they would have arrived, sufficient prisoners would have been out of their cells to have taken over the block completely and commandeer the van. The ECR would then have been advised that the van was not needed after all, a move which would clear its journey back to the Administration area.

Prison take-over

3. The night guard Principal Officer in the Administration block, expecting the return of the van, would be taken over by prisoners dressed as officers. The Key Room to the prison would then have been taken over when the officer there went to the toilet (with his own keys contrary to instructions) or perhaps he would be asked for a cup of tea by a bogus officer. The key for the emergency entrance to the rear of the ECR would then have been taken and used by the armed escapers to gain entrance to the ECR. Once it had been secured, the prisoners would have been in effective control of the prison. The officer in the Tally Lodge would have been called out of his location by the ECR only to be taken over; the main gate would then have been controlled by the prisoners. [At night the Secure Control Point at the Main Gate, which controls all the hydraulics and remote locking mechanisms, is not manned. Should emergency access, either by pedestrians or vehicles be required, the gates can be operated from the ECR which has a full over-ride facility.]

*Maze Cellular Prison is sub-divided into 3 "phases", 2 of 3 H Blocks and one of 2 H Blocks.

SECRET

2

Escape

4. Prisoners - presumably the most important - would then have been unlocked from different Blocks and assembled in the Administration area. Meanwhile the single officer in the Gate Lodge at the Extern (main road) gate would also have been taken over and have been replaced by a prisoner in uniform. Having thus secured everything on the inside of the prison and on the outside up to the Extern gate, a kitchen lorry would have left at 0600 hours when the main gate normally opened to admit catering staff. The bogus officer would have cleared the van with the army on the Extern gate and 50 - 100 prisoners would have driven out of the prison.

Assessment of the viability of the plan

5. This plan - and it may not be the only PIRA model under consideration - was a daring one and well formulated. The fact that there were considerable inconsistencies and loose ends in it should not be taken as conclusive evidence of weakness: these could simply reflect Barr's incomplete knowledge (whether deliberate or otherwise), or the fact that the escape was being finalised and a number of permutations were being examined. It showed a number of things beyond PIRA's obviously undiminished determination. In particular they had learned quickly. With the improvements made after Sir James Hennessy's Report escape from the Block was more difficult and from the prison more difficult still. Take-over of the ECR was therefore a bold step but a logical one and the only way in which a second mass escape was likely to have any chance of success. The plan should not have succeeded, but experience last September, the treachery by Barr and others, and the suspicion of continued staff malpractice could have combined to give it at least a good chance of getting under way. Among the main points and conclusions to be drawn are:-

- (1) PIRA inmates remain highly dangerous, very well organised and retain the capability to smuggle arms as well as other items including money.
- (2) The organisation recognises the enormous boost given by a major escape. It is widely seen as a Colditz-type victory by the Catholic community; it also provides important manpower; it aids morale and so on. There are also major dividends in terms of de-stabilisation to be reaped from the outrage and embarrassment caused. The political implications of a second major escape (or even a near escape) would have been devastating for the Prison Service, the Department and Ministers.

SECRET

SECRET

3

5. (3) The prison staff dimension is again critical. Firstly, the existence of a fifth column has been confirmed; this has a major bearing on the crucial introduction of firearms (and possibly also keys or even explosives). Secondly, some staff, including supervisors, have, despite the events of September 1983, continued to flout the Governor's instructions. Such indiscipline makes it easy for the paramilitaries to outflank the safeguards in our system. This escape attempt again relied to some extent on officers not carrying out their duties.
- (4) PIRA had a disturbingly good, accurate and up-to-date inside knowledge of the lay-out of the administration area, the ECR and the Tally Lodge (on a plan of which Barr obligingly drew in the post-Hennessy turnstiles). They also may have at least one cell key.
- (5) They will try again using information from Barr and the others whoever they may be.
- (6) Finally it is disturbing to note again that no intelligence had come to light from the inside.
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SECRET

SECRET

ANNEX C

OFFICER BARR - HIS INVOLVEMENT AND CONFESSION

Barr's Entrapment

1. There is still some uncertainty as to the reasons for Barr's succumbing to PIRA pressure. No direct physical threat seems to have been made although the inducement of being left off a draft 'hit list' was offered in May 1984. Barr seems to have been very fond of his daughter and this may have given a lever. Although he was not known by the prison to have "problems", from his interview with the RUC it would appear that he did have money difficulties, probably arising from gambling and drink. His desire to hide this might explain the discrepancy between the RUC interview and that with the Director of Prison Operations. At the former he claimed to have asked for the money (£10,000) whilst at the latter he insisted that PIRA had offered largish sums in which he was not particularly interested.
- 2.1 The entrapment process began, so far as we can tell, in May this year. Two PIRA leaders, MARLEY and BATESON, then in H3 carried out the operation to ensnare him and clearly found an easy target.
- 2.2 Almost incredibly, Barr copied out and signed a document given to him by one of the prisoners. This was to the effect that it was Barr who was seeking information from the prisoners about a possible escape attempt and was probably intended to clear the prisoners if they were overheard discussing details with him. Barr may also with amazing naiveté have regarded it as a protection for himself imagining that he could claim to have been seeking information in the line of duty. He also gave the prisoners his home telephone number and a small photograph which would be used in making contact with him outside.
- 2.3 The prisoners provided - inside the wing- plans of the Administration Block, Emergency Control Room and the Tally Lodge. Barr commented on these plans - which were disturbingly accurate. Indeed the re-located Security Department within the Admin Block was correctly shown in its new location of which Barr himself was allegedly unaware. He also provided details of the ^{Central} Key Room which appear to have been built into the escape plan.
- 2.4 Having, he claimed to the Director of Operations, initially refused the direct cash offer by a prisoner, he finally accepted £250 (2 x £100 notes and 1 x £50) on 1 or 2 June inside the wing. The prisoners were supposed to have told him that he would receive 2 instalments of £500 and one of £4,000 (figures confirmed from the RUC interview).

SECRET

SECRET

2

- 2.5 When he returned from leave in the middle of June the two prisoners had been transferred to another block and he told the Director of Operations that he thought the matter was finished. He told the RUC that he made enquiries about the prisoners. At any rate he was contacted again after 12 July by telephone. He met an outside contact, codenamed "Alice" who gave him another £250.
- 2.6 A week later he met her again and was handed a 6 page escape plan and map with a 2 page questionnaire seeking his comments on the feasibility of various aspects of the plan.
- 2.7 On or about 9 August he returned the questionnaire and claims to have offered no comments in most cases and only vague remarks in others. At this meeting he was asked by a man who joined "Alice" and him in the car to obtain an impression of the key giving access to the circle of the block. He was given a piece of plasticine for the purpose which he claims to have given to his child. He claimed to the RUC that he did not know how to take a key impression. This was patently untrue as officers' training includes demonstrations of how prisoners can take key impressions.
- 2.8 Although guns were part of the escape plan Barr claims he refused repeatedly to bring them in.

Interview with Director of Operations

- 3.1 On 22 August 1984 Barr was interviewed by the Director of Prison Operations in an attempt to ascertain how far he had compromised the security of the prison and its staff. This revealed in general only minor discrepancies from the version of events given to the RUC. Nevertheless, both the RUC investigating officers and the Director suspected that Barr had not yet told the whole truth concerning the extent of his involvement, the length of it, nor the number and identity of his confederates.
- 3.2 One of the main reasons for this further interview was to probe further the particularly disturbing allegations that other officers had been suborned. Thus the escape plan presumed a second corrupt officer code-named "Sam" - Barr's code name was "John" - whose identity Barr claimed to be unaware of and which has not yet been established. Equally disturbing he claimed that the prisoners had told him that they had "people still working for them from the last escape". He either could not or would not say whether the

SECRET

- 3.2 assistance on 25 September 1983 came directly from officers in H7 (c'd) or indirectly from those officers or others in preparing the escape plan. Barr denied any involvement himself. There is no evidence to suggest that he did play a part in that escape and checks have shown that he himself had not been detailed to work in H7 during the months leading up to the escape on 25 September. In view of these allegations, the Director has asked the RUC to re-open their investigations into the officers in H7.
- 3.3 Barr also gave examples of malpractice, of officers neglecting their duty and contravening Governors' orders. These included officers sleeping on night guard, warnings of the arrival of supervisory staff so that things appeared normal, circle grilles being left open, the key room officer leaving himself vulnerable to attack, and failure by supervisory staff to adhere to the new security procedures laid down in conjunction with the Hennessy-inspired changes to the Block entrances. He was less than complimentary about the capability of the Quick Reaction Force in its role as a search team. Some of this might well have been "sour grapes" but it confirmed disquiet felt by the Governor and Prison Headquarters that some staff had not learnt the lessons of September 1983, or did not wish to do so.
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SECRET

REF: PO.PP.30/84/1

ANNEX D

PIRA ESCAPE PLAN - REMEDIAL ACTION TAKEN BY THE PRISON AUTHORITIES

1. Remedial action by the Prison Governor has been taken in both physical and procedural areas and is now almost complete.

Physical modifications

- 2.1 Security at the entrance to the Central Key Room has been upgraded by the installation of grilles on corridors and windows leading into this area. The officer on duty there can visit the toilet without danger of being taken over. The key to the ECR is no longer held there (see para 3.2 below).
- 2.2 A mirror has been installed to enable the Key Room officer to observe persons approaching the Key Room. The door itself is now sheeted with steel with a macrolon viewing slit and the Key Room window is also protected with macrolon. The heavy Home Office lock has been replaced. Lastly, an extractor fan has been installed to improve ventilation.
- 2.3 The camera at the main entrance to the Emergency Control Room (ECR) has been re-located to give a better view.
- 2.4 At the emergency rear entrance to the ECR, the grille at the top of the stairwell has been sheeted with macrolon and the Home Office lock replaced.
- 2.5 Arrangements are under way to have all the cell door locks in H Block 3 replaced. No other blocks are compromised by the possible existence of a PIRA-held H3 key.
- 2.6 Consideration is being given to the possibility of providing each H Block with an alarm which will be linked directly to the Army Operations Room and/or the Duty Governor's "sleep-in" room.

Procedural improvements

- 3.1 Half-hourly check calls between the ECR and the Army Operations Room have been instituted; a system of code-words is currently being discussed.
- 3.2 The key for the ECR emergency entrance is now held within the ECR itself. There is a small safety risk arising from this arrangement but it is considered to be justified by the benefits to security.

SECRET

SECRET

2

- 3.3 The ECR will monitor closely the location of all supervisory staff at night to ensure that none go "missing".
 - 3.4 Governors' Orders now require the Principal Officer or Senior Officer unlocking or visiting a Block to leave his radio with the officer on duty at the Block Gate Lock. He also takes the precaution of leaving an officer outside the "Hennessy" new grille who will retain the keys of that grille.
 - 3.5 The Central Key Room records have been extended to show who has been on duty there and during what periods.
 - 3.6 Governors' Orders now require the Night Guard Principal Officer to remain in the Administration Block. He no longer visits the Main Gate or Hospital but keeps in contact with them at frequent but irregular intervals. Should he be required to unlock Segment Gate 5 (leading from the Administration Area to the prison proper) the Night Guard PO will ensure that a Principal Officer or Senior Officer from one of the phases is in attendance to establish the identity of staff wishing to gain access.
 - 3.7 The system of detailing night guards has been modified so that staff have no prior warning of the nature of their duty.
 - 3.8 Governors' Orders now require any officer not detailed to duty in a block to report to the Principal Officer on entering the block. Orders also require the PO to individually check each cell door following final lock-up.
 - 3.9 The Governor is pursuing the question of ensuring closer liaison between the officers on duty at the Extern Gate and the Army personnel on duty there.
 - 3.10 The introduction of closed circuit TV into the blocks and the establishment of monitoring facilities in the ECR planned as part of the post-Hennessy improvements will provide a further major protection against this type of escape.
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SECRET