

E. R.

DRAFT

PS/PUS (B&L)

Northern Ireland Office
Dundonald House

cc PS/Sir E Bell
Mr Bourn
Mr D McNeill*
(* without appendices)

I attach for your consideration a draft submission to the Secretary of State seeking his approval to the PUS recommending 5 prison officers for Gallantry Awards for their actions during the Maze escape on 25 September 1983.

2. The draft provides brief background material to the escape and the detailed actions of staff recommended for awards are contained in the Appendices (A - E).

3. If the PUS agrees that the recommendations should go forward and the Secretary of State approves, the procedure requires the PUS to submit the recommendations to the Ceremonial Officer, Cabinet Office (MPO), London. An appropriate draft will be provided for this purpose when the action proposed is approved.

4. There has been a delay in reaching this stage because the Department's inquiries were inhibited by the Hennessy Inquiry and the formal staff disciplinary inquiries. However, the Hennessy Team eventually provided some confidential information and statements from a number of individuals were brought to our attention during the disciplinary inquiries. It is on this information and, of course, the Hennessy Report itself that the recommendations have been based.

5. It is already more than one year since the escape and if Gallantry Award nominations are eventually accepted it could be a further 6 - 9 months before the recipients receive them. The Department has already been seen to move reasonably quickly on the disciplinary side following the escape, and we should now proceed with these nominations.

6. The Department has also investigated the conduct of 11 other officers whose actions deserve commendation. These

E. R.

officers acted commendably but did not meet one or both of the criteria necessary for a gallantry award - namely (i) deliberately and beyond the normal requirements of duty placing their lives at risk and (ii) whose actions were corroborated. I propose that they should receive individual letters from the Minister commending them for their actions. If this is acceptable to the Minister the Ministerial Commendation should issue at approximately the same time as the announcement of the Gallantry Awards so as not to inhibit consideration of the latter. I will arrange for the Prison Department to liaise closely with Ceremonial Branch on the timing of the Gallantry Award announcements.

7. A brief synopsis of the actions of these other officers is included (Appendix F). A separate submission to the Minister on these officers will be prepared in due course.

Recommendation

8. PUS is invited to endorse the recommendations contained in the attached submission, and to seek the Secretary of State's approval to him submitting recommendations to Ceremonial Branch, Cabinet Office (MPO).

B PALMER

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

DRAFT SUBMISSION FROM PUS TO SECRETARY OF STATE

MAZE ESCAPE - CONSIDERATION OF GALLANTRY AWARDS

HENNESSY REPORT - FOLLOW-UP

cc PS/Mr Scott (B&L)
PS/Sir E Bell*
Mr Bourn*
Mr Palmer*
Mr Jackson*
Mr Kerr*
Mr D McNeill*
Mr Ginn*
(without appendices)

Purpose

This submission proposes the recognition in various ways of those Prison Officers who distinguished themselves by their actions at the time of the escape from HM Prison, Maze Cellular, on 25 September 1983.

Background

The Hennessy Report provides a complete background to the escape but the following brief synopsis may be helpful in considering individual officer's actions.

On 25 September, at approximately 2.45 pm, a number of Republican prisoners produced guns in H Block 7 of the Maze Prison. They overpowered the prison officers in the block and shot the control room officer in the head. About an hour later the prisoners took over a meal delivery van on its arrival and the driver was forced at gunpoint to drive 38 of the prisoners to the main gate of the prison. At the main gate the prisoners disembarked and took control of the Tally Lodge, subsequently a fight with prison staff ensued during which a number of prison officers received serious injuries.

The prisoners opened the main gate but the exit was immediately blocked by a prison officer's car. The prisoners then forced their way past the car on foot and once outside the main gate made off in various directions chased by prison officers.

Of the 38 prisoners involved in the escape, 10 were quickly apprehended and returned to the establishment, and within the next few days a further 9 escapers were recaptured. Nineteen remain at large today.

Of the prison staff who had been on duty in the prison on 25 September, one officer, James Ferris, died. Four others were stabbed, 2 were shot, 13 were kicked about and beaten and a considerable number were subsequently off work due to nervous disorders.

On the day following the escape the Secretary of State invited Sir James Hennessy, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, to conduct an inquiry into the escape and to report to him as soon as possible.

General

The fact that Sir James Hennessy was asked to conduct an inquiry on the day following the escape meant that the Governor's investigation which had already begun could not proceed. As a result the subsequent examination of the individual actions of staff has had to depend on the confidential information provided to the Department by the Hennessy Team - included in the various Appendices - and individual statements made to the Governor by

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

staff in the immediate aftermath of the escape. Consideration of gallantry awards is a very sensitive area and the utmost discretion must be used not to convey any impression that an award is under consideration. In view of this no further investigation into the actions of staff has been possible.

It was anticipated that evidence given at the Coroner's Inquiry into the death of Officer Ferris would have provided additional background information. However the inquest is unlikely to take place for some time (enquiries have failed to establish any likely date) and in the circumstances it is considered that his nomination in respect of a posthumous award should go forward with the other officers involved.

Gallantry Awards Procedure

There are 4 gallantry awards which can be considered in such cases and they can all be given posthumously:-

- a. The George Cross for gallantry of the highest order;
- b. The George Medal for gallantry of an extremely high order;
- c. The Queen's Gallantry Medal
- d. The Queen's Commendation for Brave Conduct for risk to life which merits recognition.

Recipients of gallantry awards must generally have taken deliberate, determined, courageous and positive action which has involved putting themselves 'in the front line'. Awards are clearly not given lightly.