

## **BILLY WRIGHT INQUIRY**

**Day 47: 12th March 2008**

**Witness: Mr. Alan Shannon, Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Prison Service at the time of the Billy Wright murder.**

Mr Bourne questioned Mr Shannon about the transfer of Billy Wright from HMP Maghaberry to the HMP Maze stating that it was obvious that he needed to be in a high security prison because he was under threats from both Loyalist and Republicans factions.

Mr Shannon said that in order to justify the transfer from HMP Maghaberry to HMP Maze because the former could not provide Billy Wright with segregation and that McWilliams and Kenneway were also in HMP Maghaberry. Mr Shannon spoke of the discussion about the most appropriate place for Billy Wright to be placed in the Maze and about the LVF not being placed with the UVF as this posed a major specified threat. In addition it was not appropriate to house him with PIRA either because of the general threat against him from Republican sources. Mr Shannon spoke of the debate about housing LVF with either UDA or INLA and that INLA was the most attractive housing option for LVF because it seemed that INLA posed the lesser threat out of all options.

When Mr Shannon had been previously asked about the possibility of LVF being housed on their own following a reshuffle of the block and using the spare capacity the Maze he had said that there was a policy of keeping a block free in case of other accommodation had been destroyed by prisoners and also that housing LVF on their own would require more staff. Mr Shannon elaborated on these points saying that housing LVF on their own would mean taking staff from elsewhere in the Maze and failing that from other prisons given their resources from government. Therefore Mr Shannon concluded that housing LVF in their own block would have meant sacrificing control and security in other areas of the Maze and this would have serious knock on consequences on the Maze.

Mr Shannon denied the allegation that Billy Wright's life was effectively traded for the sake of a refurbishment programme after stating that the prison were unable to house LVF in their own wing due to needing to install new cameras, better electronic control of the gates, improvement of roof protection, install electricity in the cells for TVs for the prisoners as a means of getting prisoners separated in to smaller groups of 2 or 3 as opposed to large groups in order to disrupt the cohesiveness of the group.

Mr Shannon stated that there were no risk-free options and although he realised that there were risks in bringing Billy Wright to The Maze, they were less so than keeping him in HMP Maghaberry. Mr Shannon spoke of the Governors' management of the Maze and his decision to cross-deploy staff to cater for the

supplementary visiting facilities that had been made available. Mr Shannon defended the management of the Maze, stating that there had been no escapes, no prisoner attacks or attacks on prison officers and no suicides between 1983 and 1998 and that the murder of Billy Wright was paradoxical. He maintained that there was control of the prisoners. Mr Shannon agreed that whilst there were some weaknesses, there was no alternative for housing Billy Wright.

The inquiry then moved on to the Maghaberry hostage-taking incident where guns had been taken into the prison and attempts had been made to fire them at prison officers and the subsequent transfer of McWilliams and Kenneway. Mr Shannon claimed that he did not think that the hostage-taking incident was not dealt with or investigated quickly or thoroughly enough and this consequently meant that the officers did not learn from the incident and were not able to investigate it properly in the future. Mr Shannon spoke of the officers going on sick leave straight after such an incident because this is what is recommended to them by the psychology service, so the prison officers have a period of respite. This consequently made it difficult for the officers to be interviewed about the incident.

Mr Shannon claimed that there was no way of knowing where the guns came from as there are no 100% reliable sources of information. Mr Shannon said that he would have been happy for McWilliams and Kenneway to remain in the Segregation Unit at Maghaberry for longer until the investigation was complete but he knew that eventually they would have had to be transferred to the Maze as they could not be put back on normal location and with the information available there was no reason to suspect that McWilliams and Kenneway would pose a direct threat to Wright.

Mr Batchelor questioned Mr Shannon on risk assessments within the Maze prison and if they were being taken out because Mr Batchelor believed there were none taken out in 1997. Mr Shannon said that there was a risk assessment procedure in place and has no reason to believe that it was not being complied with.

Mr Batchelor asked Mr Shannon about the Governor of Maghaberry, Mr McLaughlan, Mr Shannon claimed that Mr McLaughlan had some discrete and informal contacts, some of whom were paramilitaries or those close to paramilitaries and that he had contact with some INLA people outside. Mr Shannon claimed it was possible that Mr McLaughlan could have had a part to play in achieving acceptability at the Maze of McWilliams and Kenneway.

Mr Shannon again gave evidence about the decision to place Billy Wright in the Maze in H6, reiterating the fact that he could not be housed with PIRA because of the considerable general threat towards Wright and also the tunnel incident meaning that PIRA had been moved to H7 and H8. He also says that whilst there was also a considerable general threat from INLA, this was no more attractive an

option than being housed with PIRA, there was simply the space and enough staff with INLA as INLA were only occupying half of H block 6 and so there was half a wing remaining and as there was no known specific threat from INLA at this time, housing Billy Wright with INLA was the most amicable option. Although this was a very difficult situation, they were under great pressure not to go seeking additional resources because the prison system was already costing three times what the English and Scottish systems were costing and if anything they should be looking to reduce costs. By 5th May 1997, the prison service had information that reliably suggested that the guns had been bought in by McWilliams and Kenneway to shoot Billy Wright, Mr Shannon claimed that he has only just become aware of this information and that he would have expected it to be immediately processed which would have consequently affected decisions taken at the top of the organisation.

**Witness DCI (Director and Co-Coordinator of Intelligence), from summer of 1996 until August 1998) questioned by Mr Batchelor.**

Witness DCI was described as the personal adviser on intelligence matters to the Secretary of State and responsible for the co-ordination and policy direction of the activities of all intelligence agencies operating in Northern Ireland. Witness DCI co-ordinated the flow of intelligence, information relating to the activities of terrorist organisations and their counterparts, he made sure that customers both got what they wanted and were able to indicate what intelligence they needed to support their specific functions. We hear that DCI was the route the RUC would have to go through to obtain a warrant for things such as eavesdropping and intercept operations. It was the responsibility of witness DCI to ensure that there were processes in place for the appropriate sharing of intelligence and that it was distributed appropriately to those who needed to know amongst your customer base.

DCI was shown a piece of intelligence collected by the Security Service in respect of a threat from INLA to Billy Wright should the prison service move him into the Maze in April 1997, the relevant part of the intelligence was highlighted, and reads "The INLA intended to kill Billy Wright at the first opportunity if he were to be transferred to H block 6 at the Maze". DCI claims he had no involvement with the prison service. DCI accepts that this intelligence is definitely relevant to a decision as to where Billy Wright should be accommodated and that it should have reached someone at some point within the NIPS organisation and that under no circumstances should this information have been held back due to its sensitivity because any information relating to a threat should be passed on to who needed to hear about it. DCI did not appear to have been copied into any of the correspondence around the transfer of Wright, he claimed he would not have expected to see it. DCI claimed he would have had no interest in the transfer of Billy Wright to the Maze prison. DCI was asked if there could have been deliberate intention not to disseminate the information about the threat towards Wright by the Security Service or if something went badly wrong. DCI claims

however that this is definitely not the case and he would imagine that the desk officer of the Security Service who received the intelligence was satisfied that the steps he had taken were sufficient to believe the intelligence by the RUC to whoever needed it, and it had not been intentionally or deliberately withheld.