

BILLY WRIGHT ENQUIRY

Day 51: Thursday 10th April 2008

Witness: Mr Brian Noel McCready (continued):

Mr Brian McCready was questioned about the issue of rooftop security. He acknowledged that steps were being taken to look at this issue. Further evidence confirmed that senior members of the Prison Service were looking at different options to improve rooftop security and were weighing up how effective each option would be. Mr McCready was not aware if any of these measures that were discussed were taken forward.

Mr Mogg stated his intention that searching as recommended in the Steele Report would recommence in January 1998. The evidence suggested that these searches did start in January 1998 and had become a weekly feature by March 1998. However, conflicting documentation suggested that these searches, in practice, appeared to have occurred on a monthly rather than weekly basis. The witness could not comment on this.

Mr McCready was aware that there was an issue around the Prison Officer's Association (POA) who had requested a copy of the Steele Report on numerous occasions, on the basis that many of the recommendations concerned issues with which staff and staffing issues were centrally involved. It was not his responsibility to disseminate this report. However, he recalled discussing certain matters in the report with representatives from the POA from time to time.

The witness was asked if political pressures affected what could be achieved in the prison. In his opinion, pressures on Maze staff were coming from the prisoners themselves and their political representatives outside the prison.

Witness FH, a police officer who worked for Special Branch between 1993 and 1997 at the E3B desk at RUC Headquarters. The E3B desk was responsible for dealing with loyalist matters.

Witness FH provided a statement to the Inquiry regarding some correspondence which passed between prison authorities and the E3B desk in relation to threats on certain loyalist paramilitaries who were then in prison.

Witness FH described the process followed when threats were received at E3B. Threats were received via phone call or more often in written form on an SB50 or later on, via a computerised system (called CAISTER). Witness FH acknowledged that during 1997 they were going through the transition from a paper based to a computerised system. Once a threat against a prisoner was received, the E3B desk would inform the Northern Ireland Office Prison Operations Centre by telephone and a written confirmation of the threat was kept for their records. If requested by the prison, a threat assessment was carried out which involved evaluating the intelligence and the information that was available to say if indeed a threat against the prisoner existed.

Witness FH was questioned about the Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) threat made against Billy Wright in August 1996. The CAISTER document was received before the threat against Billy Wright was publicly announced. The witness agreed that this seemed to have caused some misgivings among parts of the UVF. He acknowledged the evidence dated September 1996 that the CLMC seemed to have made a mistake in issuing the Wright/Kerr threat and that it appeared that overtures were being considered. A police PRISM document stated that the CLMC would not carry out its threat against Billy Wright following internal negotiations. Mr FH did not recall seeing this document, nor did he recognise the 210 security grading level on this document. However, evidence dated January/February 1997 showed that Billy Wright himself was concerned about his security and was making personal attempts to get the UVF death threat against him lifted. This suggested that Billy Wright may not have been privy to the intelligence above that the CLMC had decided not to take action against him.

The witness believed that, despite the documentation which seemed to suggest that the threat against Billy Wright had ebbed away slightly, a CLMC threat against him still existed in April 1997. Part of his reasoning for this belief stemmed from the fact that Billy Wright himself appeared to have thought that he remained under threat and had various meetings with the UVF to try to get this threat lifted.

The day ended with a discussion around timetabling and documents. The Inquiry was adjourned until Monday 14th April 2008 at 12 noon at the request of Mr Waite so that witnesses could consider documentation in advance of giving their evidence.