

BILLY WRIGHT INQUIRY

Day 86: 10th September 2008

Witness: Arthur Gallagher (continued)

Mr Gallagher agreed that, although he had not been given specific instructions about keeping the LVF and INLA inmates apart, he and his colleagues had employed safeguards such as keeping the circle secure, and using separate visits vans and sheets. Prior to Billy Wright's death, he had not heard any prison officers expressing concerns about Billy Wright's safety, nor suspicions that a firearm had been smuggled into H Block 6. He felt he had kept his ear to the ground and would have heard such concerns if prison officers were expressing them.

He could not explain why the Security Office had made a request, at 09:15 am on 27th December 1997, for both A/B and C/D watch tower officers to be stood down to man the visits area. The Security Office had earlier given permission for the C/D watch tower officer to stand down in order to assist in the wing. He was certain that C/D watch tower had not been stood down without the Security Office being informed. He recalled Officer Hill protesting at his removal from the A/B watchtower.

It was possible that prior to the 27th December 1997, he had stood down C/D watch tower following an order from the Security Office, but he had never before stood down A/B watchtower.

Witness: Joseph Flanigan, who had worked in H Block 6 in HMP Maze and was on duty in the Block Control Room (BCR) on 27th December 1997

The electronic turnstiles regulating access to the yards were controlled by the BCR. A green light indicated the yard was open, and a red light indicated it was closed. As far as he could recall, the only thing that prevented the prisoners entering the yard was a locked turnstile, he could not remember an outside grille being locked. In the evening, the prisoners would inform the Circle Officer when there were no more prisoners in the yards, at which time the Circle Officer would inform the BCR to lock the turnstiles. He accepted that the turnstiles had sometimes been breached by the inmates. He said that opening the turnstiles had been a quick and simple task requiring only the press of a button in the BCR, whereas opening the bacon slicer [an alternative type of gate] had required an officer to enter the wing to operate it.

He had not opened the LVF turnstiles on the morning of the 27th December 1997, the LVF prisoners had not requested it. He had unlocked the turnstiles on the INLA side around 09:00 am that day.

He thought the order to stand down the watch towers at around 09:30 am on the 27th December 1997 had come from the Principal Officer. He did not recall that the order was only to stand down C/D tower. He remembered that

he was asked to send the prison officers to the block rather than visits. He had not been surprised at the order, it was Christmas time and there were obvious staff shortages. He was aware that C/D tower had been stood down on previous occasions as another watchtower overlooked C/D yards. A/B tower being stood down surprised him more.

Only the BCR could communicate directly with the watch towers, via an intercom. The watch tower officer would only have carried a radio if the intercom was not working. If an alarm was sounded in the watchtower, it went through to the Emergency Control Room (ECR) and the BCR. The ECR would have automatically locked all the block grilles and then contacted the BCR to ascertain why the alarm had sounded.

He said he had not heard rumours amongst the prison officers, prior to Billy Wright's shooting, of Billy Wright being threatened by particular inmates, nor that a gun had been smuggled into HMP Maze specifically to kill Billy Wright.

Witness: Brian Patrick Molloy, a prison officer

He joined the Northern Ireland Prison Service in 1975 and worked at HMP Maze as a Senior Officer. He was Senior Relief Officer in H Block 6 on the morning of the 27th December 1997.

To his recollection, on the morning of the 27th December 1997, he had not been told that the A/B watch tower had been stood down. He only became aware that it had been stood down when Officer Hill came into the office to complain. Mr Molloy said that the decision to stand down a watch tower had not been made locally at 08:50 am, without the security office being told.

In Mr Molloy's opinion, even if the watch towers had been manned when Billy Wright was being taken to his visit, it would not have made a difference to the outcome.