

BILLY WRIGHT INQUIRY

Day 23: 21st January 2008

Statement by the Chairman:

- Gave details of the scheduling
- Made a point that there had been late applications for anonymity despite many reminders; 62 applications outstanding
- Reminder that the panel cannot make any decisions until all relevant documentation is received; until then the applicant is allowed to remain anonymous, ciphering and removing names makes for a lot of administrative work and this slows the inquiry process
- Reminder that applications need to be done within the following fourteen days
- Noted that quite strict requirements must be met for anonymity (he referred to the outcome of the judicial review on anonymity arising out of the Robert Hamill Inquiry); the requirement to give evidence must give rise to a real and immediate risk to life
- The panel have original security services and MOD documents; these sensitive documents have been turned into summaries for distribution. The chairman was satisfied that this met the requirements of the Inquiry. Pointed out that this information was only available thanks to section 19 of the Inquiries Act 2005
- Chairman said that a paper has been issued in relation to PSNI co-operation and to the smooth running of the Inquiry. This paper, he hoped, might prevent hold ups. A summary of this paper is available elsewhere on this website

Day 24: 28th January 2008

Witness DO1 was asked to focus his preparation on questions relating to the CLMC (Combined Loyalist Military Command) threat and emergence of the LVF. DO1 was a Desk Officer working for the security service (MI5) in Northern Ireland until August 1999. Role was to provide assessments of terrorist leadership decisions in particular relation to the loyalists.

- DO1's reports went to the Northern Ireland Office, ministers, heads of department from Whitehall, cabinet office members, police, RUC, security service and occasionally intelligence service members.
- Information about any specific person would not have come to DO1.
- Aware of Billy Wright's declaration of independence from Belfast Brigade Staff of the UVF. It was noted that he was considered potentially useful in the case of a restart of terrorist activity by loyalist leaders. Also notes that the UVF attempted to reduce his sphere of influence in an attempt to try to keep mid Ulster under their control.
- Claims that governments were fearful of attacks north and south of the border. (compare this with HAG details day 26) Governments (Members of the PEC Province Executive Committee: very high

ranking officials) were concerned by break away groups, and personalities like Kerr and Wright.

- Wright appealed to hard line loyalists who were not in support of decommissioning, which was “an anathema to them”.
- DO1 suggested that the UVF had three options regarding Billy Wright
 1. Kill him outright
 2. Negotiate cooperation
 3. Make a formal break and for him to form a new group.

DO1 believes that by July 1996 the UVF leaders had opted for option 1.

Billy Wright was one of several factors building tensions within the UVF and within the PIRA.

After the CLMC threat Wright gained support, this was the opposite effect of what was intended according to DO1. This led to the opinion that the threat against Billy Wright’s life was a tactical error. NIO police documents suggest that the threat was retracted.

Assessments made suggest that the UVF was angry at the grant of the wing for the LVF at Maghaberry, that the LVF were in possession of weaponry and that their support continued to rise.

No assessments were made on potential revenge killings were the UVF to murder Billy Wright.

Derek Bachelor QC, Counsel to the Inquiry, (questioning the witness) made a mistake as to what the witness had said. The chairman took time to make this error clear to those present.

DO1 could not give an answer to the question of whether in late August/September 1996 the most immediate threat to Billy Wright was from loyalist groups. The witness pointed out that he was not a risk assessor.

Day 25: 29th January 2008

Witness DO2, Desk Officer working for the Northern Ireland Office Security Service on the Republican Desk.

- List of threats against Wright listed, from March 1991 to June 1996
- PIRA were experiencing internal difficulties in 1996 and 1997, over ceasefires and approaches to provisional strategies (political aspirations). They were concerned by the actions of the INLA and did not want them to attract members from within the PIRA
- Police documents provided give almost exact opposite evidence to the reports compiled by DO2. These documents suggest that action was done to remove blame from Sinn Féin for the collapse of the peace process by inciting loyalists to act. DO2 notes that the information would have been vetted for its value, reliability and accuracy

- According to PS01-0222 a security intelligence report PIRA prisoners were key in setting up Wright at the Maze but they were content for INLA to take the credit for the murder
- Opposing document PS01-0225 also from the police, from their PRISM computer system suggests that no PIRA involvement in the INLA murder of Wright
- Mr Bachelor points out that PIRA had a rule that they would not commit murders in prisons. DO2 was unaware of this rule
- An army document suggested that the murder of Wright was imminent. An NIIR, Northern Ireland Intelligence Report, dated 1997 noted the possibility of a close quarter attack on Wright. DO2 points out that responding to threats was the sole responsibility of the RUC. There were formal mechanisms in place for communicating threats between agencies
- Much discussion of security levels on reports. B2 was a common level, DO2 thinks this was a high level, but admits that they had never seen a report with a different coding. (In fact, B2 denotes information which comes from the second highest level of reliability – B – and has the second highest value – 2 – as intelligence.)
- DO2 suggests that INLA lacked political sophistication and that members were often people who could not join the PIRA

Day 26: 30th January 2008

Witness HAG. Head of Assessment Group, for the Northern Ireland Security Service, for 3 years up to July 1999. Dealt with strategic intelligence for Northern Ireland Office and Whitehall, reports were tailored to the readership. Monthly reports were made for a wider audience and were less detailed.

- Reference is made to the Warner Report after a break in the ceasefire, and the impact on changes to the RUC's intelligence structure
- HAG suggests that during the political evolution between Feb 1996 and July 1997 the PIRA's priorities remained military
- Instability and the emergence of breakaway groups, lead by people like Wright, would have been a concern to the security services readership
- HAG believes that the UDA and UVF position was one of reactive response to what PIRA might or might not do. He believed there was grass roots pressure to return to violence and that it would not have helped the leadership of either the UVF or UDA to remove Wright
- UDA and UVF members, if not directly involved with the UVF, were co-operating with them
- HAG states that Wright's claims were big, that he would bomb Dublin and be a threat south of the border, but that Wright did not have the capability to carry out these threats. He did what he was capable of and that was sectarian killing
- HAG believes that the UVF relied on Wright as a leader and that had he not been murdered a terrorist campaign could have been launched.
- Reference was made to Operation DESMAID. HAG had no recollection of this. No recollection of a report examining Wright was a threat to the peace process. No recollection of a report following the death of

Wright. HAG believes that no report ought to have been written on these topics

- HAG pointed out that intelligence reports were often created under pressure because of the amount of sectarian murders that were occurring and the effect these had. Politicians needed to examine whether a party could stay in the peace talks, if they were acting as terrorists or affiliated to terrorist groups
- HAG pointed out that the ceasefires were able to withstand a level of paramilitary activity
- HAG also stated that Billy Wright and the LVF targeted vulnerable Catholics in close quarter assassinations. He did not target senior IRA members
- Instability after his murder affected the loyalists, who were under increasing pressure and further murders took place, the IRA on the other hand stuck firm and continued to follow their proposed path
- HAG says it would have been the responsibility of the RUC to inform the prison service of information crucial to them. He could not remember the specific mechanisms for the correct flow of this information

Day 27: 31st January 2008

Witness DE, Special Branch officer in RUC headquarters in Belfast. Working on Loyalist Desks in E3B.

- DE stated that the same Prison Liaison Officer for the RUC would have dealt with both Maghaberry and Maze Prisons
- Headquarters dealt with strategic intelligence in relation to higher level or more generalised national security matters. Most intelligence collection was in the regions and the regions were generally autonomous. Intelligence was divulged on a need to know basis to headquarters
- DE was unable to say if it was strange that few documents were written about the INLA, Billy Wright, or The Maze, its riots and murders.
- Embedded security officers dealt with assessments and warrantry (seemingly a specific term used by the RUC for arrest warrant and other warrant work) and later questioning revealed that they understood and respected each other's roles
- Examination was made of the teams' use of different computer systems, CAISTER/MACER and PRISM. The information on these systems was governed by security clearance. With DSL level 23 being very high, only certain Special Branch users being able to gain access to this. Information often came in from the regions at DSL level 19, and this information was often then 'sanitised' and put into a SIDD report which was reclassified as a DSL level 7 which would then be used by security service teams
- DE agreed that paper copies of extremely sensitive information were kept

- DE did not recollect a brief or assessment of Wright's murder being made. He mentioned that briefs were made for a specific meeting or senior person and then that brief was for them, it was not often filed or copied. After their use the briefs were often out of date and useless. Could not recall if a brief of this type was likely to have been made.
- By September 1996 documents suggest the threat to Wright had lessened. (PRISM and NIIR) DE points out that this is just an accurate representation of someone's opinion. The intelligence could be correct but the information wrong
- Later evidence points out that a paper file on Billy Wright was held by the Special Branch registry. E3B held no such file
- Providing assessments on threats to prisoners was a smaller volume of the work carried out by E3B, this would have been done by relevant regional Special Branch more often than not. Actual mechanisms were not detailed, or asked about

Discussion took place about the witness Mr Morrison. His statements gave information outside the remit of the inquiry. The chairman proposed to attempt to rein him in throughout the questioning. It was noted that he had refused to sign more recent statements.

General Observations:

The Chairman and other members of the inquiry are placing heavy emphasis on the procedures of anonymity. Each witness is carefully protected and procedures carried out and reported in full. All sensitive documents and lists are referred to by ciphers or in code.

The remit of the inquiry has been referred to and questioning has not been allowed to stray outside it.