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AN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BÉAL FEIRSTE

BELFAST

Confidential

17 October 1996

Mr. Sean O hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

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Security Section

PI-PA CB SEC 3

Dear Second Secretary

Conversation with the GOC

I was invited to a dinner at the British Army headquarters in Lisburn last night by the GOC, General Sir Rupert Smith.

In the course of this dinner, which was an essentially social occasion, the General and some of his senior colleagues made a number of points about the recent bomb attack on the base which may be of interest.

There was a rueful acknowledgment all round that security at HQNI, as the Lisburn complex is called, has been lax for several years back, i.e., since well before the August 1994 ceasefire. "There were many things we should have been doing but were not doing".

The relaxed regime since August 1994 was not appreciably tightened up following the ending of the IRA's ceasefire earlier this year, as nobody believed that Lisburn would be a target at any stage.

The base is home to a large number of service families and there is constant traffic in and out on domestic business. There has always been, accordingly, a deep-seated resistance to the

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kind of stringent security measures which are in force at Army bases in more sensitive parts of Northern Ireland. The GOC and his colleagues dismissed media portayals of HQNI as the most heavily protected base in Northern Ireland.

An investigation into the security breach which led to the bombings last Monday week is underway under the GOC's personal supervision but nobody expects it to produce a clearcut, or early, outcome. The base is, of course, rife with theories and rumours about what happened. The civilian workers take the view that the Army authorities are responsible for all security lapses and relations between the military and civilian elements have, as a result, come under serious strain.

The GOC noted, as an example of the security shortcomings, that the cameras which are mounted at the entrance to the base scan the access road but do not focus on the drivers of the cars (merely on the number-plates). From my own experience, little attention is paid by the soldiers on duty to the matching of ID cards against car occupants. One of the guests, however, categorically denied the rumour that there had been no film in the cameras on the day in question.

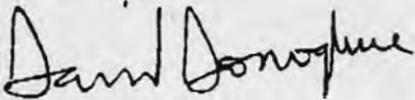
The GOC and his colleagues spoke of a widespread determination on the base to put this episode behind them as quickly as possible. The reaction to the death of Warrant Officer Bradwell was the fatalistic one with which Army personnel tend to respond to most casualties. Of the twenty or so people who were injured, three are still in hospital, one in a serious condition.

Leaving aside the human cost, the general view is that the attack was not particularly significant in military terms. Although the Army undoubtedly suffered an enormous loss of prestige from the attack, the bombs exploded in relatively insignificant parts of the base and caused no damage to essential functions. (As against this, the explosions occurred ~~within~~ a couple of hundred yards of the GOC's own residence - though he and his wife were holidaying in Scotland at the time).

The GOC suggested that one view might be that the IRA had deliberately selected a target which could be represented as "an extension of Britain" and did not constitute, therefore, an attack on the people of Northern Ireland. On another analysis, however, this was nonsense, as the base was known to employ many civilian workers of Loyalist background and these would inevitably have been caught up in any attack. He wondered, indeed, whether the

IRA's real purpose might not have been (especially given the timing, coinciding with the PUP visit to the Maze prisoners) to provoke a collapse of the Loyalist ceasefire in order to equip themselves with a pretext for a full-scale return to violence in Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Joint Secretary