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& D. [unclear]  
7/1/75

26/1

Recd. from Mr. Hickman  
(British Embassy) to-day.

RW 6/1.

The incident at Aughrim, Co. Cavan, described in the Department of Foreign Affairs' Memorandum of 19 December has been fully investigated by the British authorities. Their report is as follows:

On 16 December a UDR patrol with regular Army representation was pinned down by fire from a position in the Irish Republic at 277213. During the subsequent engagement two terrorists were seen by the patrol.

On first contact assistance was requested from the Gardai at Ballyconnel who promptly sent a mixed Gardai and Irish Army patrol into the area. Unfortunately, due to the cumbersome system of communications between the two security forces and the incompatibility of map references used by the Gardai and the UK security forces, some confusion resulted. It appears that the UDR patrol was not aware that Gardai were in the area until after they had arrived. It also appears that the Gardai may have been under the impression that the contact was further north than was, in fact, the case.

It seems probable, therefore, that the approaching Gardai/Irish Army patrol were engaged by the UDR patrol under the mistaken impression that they were terrorists. The confusion was increased by the fact that the incident took place in poor light at dusk.

The British authorities deeply regret this incident and will take appropriate action to prevent a recurrence. They are greatly relieved that tragic consequences did not result. At the same time they would like to emphasise that good direct communications between the security forces and a compatible map reference system would go a long way to avoiding the risk of any recurrences in future. In addition the incident illustrates the need for tactical discussions between the Gardai and the RUC to agree standard procedures for use in such circumstances. It is hoped that speedy progress can be made in all these matters in the current talks.

BRITISH EMBASSY  
DUBLIN

6 January 1975

- talk w/ Mahon*
1. To note appropriately and
  2. P/A with a copy also on the transcript about the behaviour of the British Army etc.

*19/12*

*26/1*

Aughrim  
Ballyconnell  
Co. Cavan

*Note handed to talk Mahon  
today with strong direct  
representations that incidents  
such as these not only  
happened seriously and  
forces in their effort to  
cooperate on security but  
also possibly actively aided  
subversives. All was  
countered with the standard  
observation on direct radio  
links between the two  
but promised that domestic  
investigation would be  
initiated if necessary*

At 3.45 p.m. on 16th December 1974 a message was received by the Gardai at Ballyconnell from the RUC in Enniskillen that a unit of the British Army were under gunfire ~~from~~ from a position at Gortmullan, a townland on the Fermanagh/Cavan border and to the west of the main Ballyconnell/Derrylin/Enniskillen road. Security coverage from south of the border was requested and an assurance was given that this cover would be immediately provided.

A mixed force comprising five Gardai and four members of the Irish Army was immediately sent to Aughrim, a townland on the southern side of the border from Gortmullan, where they fanned out and started to approach the border, moving through the fields. At approximately 300 yards from the border a burst of machine-gun fire passed over the head and quite close to the Garda Superintendent in charge of the party (the remainder of whom were disposed to the left and right of the Superintendent). All but two of the party were in uniform. The group threw themselves to the ground and as they did so there was a second burst of machine-gun fire over their heads. A Garda who had remained in the patrol car in which they had travelled and which was parked at a distance of 150 yards from the group, radioed Ballyconnell station and requested that the British Army be informed through the RUC of the position.

At 4.55 p.m. the Garda and Army personnel withdrew under cover of darkness. While lying on the ground they heard further shooting but this exchange of shots was confined to Northern Ireland. The Gardai

are satisfied that they had been fired on by the Northern Ireland security forces who were themselves in position on the public road at Gortinedda, Co. Fermanagh. A British Army helicopter was observed landing close to the point from which the shooting had emanated.

At 8.30 p.m. on the evening of the 16th, Inspector Hamilton, RUC, Enniskillen, was contacted by phone and a complaint made concerning the conduct of the security forces. The Inspector said that the security forces comprised UDR and British Army personnel who had alleged that they were fired on from a position at G.R. 275212. This is, in fact, the position at Aughrim in which the Gardai/Army party were located when they were fired upon. The Inspector was informed of this and also informed that there was no shooting from this point. It will be remembered that the original RUC request for cover for the British security forces had mentioned that the shooting was coming from a position at Gortmullan, Co. Fermanagh.

This is a matter of grave concern to the Irish authorities, who are naturally anxious to ensure cooperation on security matters in the border area but whose efforts can only be thwarted when incidents such as those detailed above take place. If subversives were located on the southern side of the border their escape would have been facilitated by the turn of events.

The observations of the British authorities on this incident are urgently requested.

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

19 December 1974