

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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AMBASSADE D'IRLANDE
89/93, rue Froissart
B-1040 Bruxelles

AMBASSADE VAN IERLAND
Froissartstraat 89/93
B-1040 Brussel

Tel : 230.53.37 Fax : 230.53.12

13 November 1998.

Mr. Paul Murray
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs.

MESEN

In response to your E-mail of 11 November, I attach, as requested, a report prepared by Mr. Biggar. This sets out our understanding and record of the sequence of events concerning the Irish Army Band and the ceremonies at Ieper.

Eamonn Ryan
Ambassador

cc : Secretary-General

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Ambassador,

I. As requested, I set out below the chronological schedule in relation to the issuing of an invitation to the Army Number One Band to play at the Ceremonies in Ieper (Ypres) on Tuesday night, 10 November 1998 at 8 pm. As you know these ceremonies were organised jointly by Mr. Guy Cruwez, the Chairman of the Last Post Committee, and by the Co-ordinator of the In Flanders Field Museum.

II. I was first contacted about this matter by Mr. Paul Murray, Mr. Declan Kelly and yourself on 10 November 1998. Each of you rang me separately on my mobile phone. I was at the Peace Park in Messines at the time, arranging and rehearsing for the visit by the three Heads of State the following day, 11 November 1998. In response to your questions, I pointed out to all three that invitations had been extended to an Irish Army band to participate in a number of different musical events in relation to Armistice Day related ceremonies. I said that to the best of my knowledge, I had no recollection of seeing any invitation to participate in the specific event under discussion. However I pointed out (and this was accepted by all three) that the files containing the relevant papers were voluminous and were literally 100 miles away in the Embassy in Brussels and that I therefore could not be certain in relation to any of the matters raised.

III. At the end of the President's visit on 11 November 1998, I saw Secretary Gallagher's request for material for reply for a possible PQ in Dail Eireann. On 12 November 1998, I was at last re-united with my files. As you will see from the chronological schedule below and attachments, an invitation inviting the Irish Army Band to play at the Menin Gate on the evening of Tuesday 10 November 1998 was sent on 16 or 18 September 1998 (exact date is hard to read) by the Burgomeister of Ypres to Mr. Paddy Harte. Mr. Cruwez, the Chairman of the Last Post Committee in Ieper (Ypres) was one of the two organisers of this event. Mr. Harte forwarded the invitation to Lt. Colonel Johnston on 21 September 1998. On 23 September 1998, the Lt. Colonel forwarded the invitation to A/Sec Kirwan, D/Taoiseach who in turn faxed it to Mr. Paul Murray, Anglo-Irish Division on 28 September 1998.

Chronological schedule

- **Note:** The paragraphs in Roman type are those which directly concern the invitation to the Last Post Ceremony. The paragraphs in italic contain background information.

1. **16 September :** *E-Mail from Paul Murray to Maurice Biggar ; Wally Kirwan received a fresh request from the British about the possibility of the President being involved in the Menin Gate ceremony. Mr. Murray requested information re Menin Gate ceremony.(Note: this is a reference to the full British Commemoration Ceremony on 11 November 1998, not to the Last Post Ceremony on 10 November 1998).*

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2. ***17 September 1998 :*** *I sent Paul Murray a comprehensive note by E-Mail on Ieper (Ypres) and the Menin Gate (see attachment 5) Paragraph 12 of that Note states: "..... There the King and the Queen will meet people who have played a significant part in Anglo-Belgian relations. These will include the members of the "Last Post Committee, a committee which has ensured that on every day since 11 November 1918 (with the exception of the German occupation during the Second World War), the "Last Post" has been played in Ieper at sundown."*

3. **16 or 18 September (date is hard to read)** : Mr. Luc Dehaene, the Burgomeister of Ieper (Ypres) wrote to Mr. Paddy Harte inviting the Irish Army Number One Band to play at the ceremonies in Ieper (Ypres) on Tuesday night 10 November at 8pm. These ceremonies are organised jointly by Mr. Guy Cruwez, the Chairman of the Last Post Committee, and Mr. (name illegible), the Coordinator of the In Flanders Field Museum.

(Note: The text of this letter of invitation is attached. As the fax of the letter on file here is of very poor quality, I have re-typed it. This typed version is also attached.)

4. **21 September 1998** : Mr. Paddy Harte forwarded the above invitation to Lt. Colonel Des Johnston, Officer-in-charge of "A" Administration Division, Irish Defence Forces (Fax attached).

5. **23 September 1998** : Lt. Colonel Johnston copied the above invitation to A/Sec. Kirwan, D/Taoiseach (Fax attached).

6. **25 September 1998:** *Paul Murray informed me by Fax that: "He (Secretary Brian McCarthy) mentioned that he has shown the programme to the President and (that) she is happy with the outline (This means that the question of the President attending the Menin Gate is now off the agenda and the British Ambassador has been informed accordingly by the Aras.)"*

7. **28 September :** A/Sec Kirwan forwarded the above invitation to Mr. Paul Murray, Anglo-Irish Division (Fax attached). In so doing A/Sec Kirwan suggested to Mr. Murray that the Embassy, Brussels might seek more information about the Last Post Ceremonies which were the subject of the invitation.

8. **29 September:** Paul Murray faxed me the above invitation (Fax attached). In relation to the request for further information, I discussed the matter with Mr. Murray on the phone and referred him to my note of 17 September 1998 (see attachment 5) about Ieper (Ypres), the Menin Gate and the Last Post Committee. This note drew attention to the words "the armies of the British Empire" prominently engraved on the Menin Gate War Memorial. On foot of this discussion and after consideration in Dublin of my note of 17 September, Mr. Murray informed me that an Irish Army band would not be participating in any ceremonies in Ieper (Ypres) or at the Menin Gate.

9. **6 October :** At a meeting (which I attended) between the Irish Reconnaissance party and the Burgomeister and Town Clerk of Mesen, the view was expressed that the involvement of the Irish Army Band should be directed to events which had a

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specifically Irish dimension, that is to say to events relating to the Inauguration of the Island of Ireland Peace Park rather than ceremonies at Ieper and the Menin Gate. It is my understanding that this view emerged as the result of a preparatory meeting at the Department of the Taoiseach.

10. **22 October:** *At my request, Ms. Dympna Headen sent a Fax to the DCOP enclosing an invitation from Mr. Guy Cruwez for an Irish Army Band to perform on the Market Place in Ieper on 10 November. Mr. Cruwez said that the performance should happen just after the arrival of "St. Martin", who by an old local tradition brings toys to the children during the night of 10 to 11 November. Mr. Cruwez states: This event ends circa 19 hours, and there will still be a lot of people in the center, together with the very great number of people who will attend the Last Post Ceremony at 8 o'clock p.m."*

11. **27 October:** The DCOP sent an E-Mail to Paul Murray and me (and copied to the Chief of Protocol and Adrian Farrell). The second paragraph of this message reads as follows :

"As indicated by telephone in response to Dympna Headen's fax the army band is not accepting the invitation to play in Ieper on 10 November. I spoke to Paul Murray and Wally Kirwan on this point and both felt that the considerations which influenced the original decision not to play in Ieper are also relevant to this invitation. (Comdt.)Brian Reade has also pointed to the need for both rest and rehearsal on the eve of the Mesen event."

12. **29 October:** I wrote the following note by hand (which has been seen by the Ambassador) and placed it on the file. It reads :

"1. I rang Mr. Guy Cruyez, Chairman of Ypres Last Post Committee to say that the Irish Military Band would not participate in any musical military events in Ypres before 11/11/98.

2. They would be rehearsing.

MB. 29/10/98."

13. **30 October:** *Fax from DCOP to me (copied to Paul Murray, Farrell Adrian; Nason Brian). The fourth paragraph of this E-Mail reads as follows: "Army ceremonial has asked for advice on the invitation to Army number One Band to participate in a morning event at Messines Ridge. I have sought the views of P. Murray and W. Kirwan. There does not appear to be a specifically Irish dimension in what is essentially a British, New Zealand and Belgian event."*

14. **3 November 1998:** *E-Mail from DCOP to me (copied to Paul Murray, Farrel Adrian and Brian Nason). Paragraph 3 of E-Mail reads as follows : "We have consulted Paul Murray on question of invitation to a morning event at Messines Ridge - the invitation went directly to the Army - and agreed that Col. Johnson should refuse it courteously indicating that we are on this occasion concentrating on the event at the*

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Peace Park which has a specifically Irish Mesen focus. Col Johnson will also point to the need for careful rehearsal and preparation of that event given the attendance by the three HOS."

Maurice Biggar

Maurice Biggar
First Secretary
12 November 1998

Attachments:

1. Invitation, dated 16 or 18 September 1998, from the Mayor of Ypres to Mr. Paddy Harte inviting the Irish Army Number One Band to participate in the Last Post ceremonies in Ypres on 10 November 1998. (Faxed by Paddy Harte to Lt. Colonel Johnston on 21 September 1998).

2. Fax, dated 23 September 1998, from Lt. Colonel Johnston forwarding invitation to A/Sec. Wally Kirwan

3. Fax, dated 28 September 1998, from A/Sec Wally Kirwan forwarding the invitation to Mr. Paul Murray, Anglo-Irish Division.

4. Fax, dated 29 September 1998, from Mr. Paul Murray faxing the invitation to Mr. Maurice Biggar.

5. Maurice Biggar's Note, dated 17 September 1998, to Mr. Paul Murray concerning Ieper (Ypres), Menin Gate and Last Post.

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Attachment 1

Mr. Paul Murray, Anglo-Irish Division

1. I refer to my fax of earlier this afternoon (Thursday 12 November 1998) and set out below the text of the letter inviting the Army Number One Band to play at the Menin Gate on the evening of 10 November 1998 which was sent by Mr. Luc Dehaene to Mr. Paddy Harte and copied to Lt. Colonel Johnston (Irish Defence Forces), A/Sec. Kirwan (D/Taoiseach) and Mr. Paul Murray (Anglo-Irish Division):

2. The text of the letter is as follows:

"To. Mr. Paddy Harte,
Joint Executive Chairman,
A Journey of Reconciliation Trust'
(....illegible ...)

Re : Number One Army Band at Menin Gate Ceremonies

Ieper (Ypres), 16 or 18 September 1998,

Dear Mr. Harte,

I am delighted to hear that the President of the Irish Republic has accepted to unveil the Messines Peace Tower, jointly with Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and the King of the Belgians. It is an event of the greatest importance for all Europeans in their (strife) for a better and more peaceful world.

It seems most appropriate that the Number One Army Band of the Irish Defence Forces should be playing on that occasion.

Since the band will be arriving on Monday night, the 9th of November, I think as you suggest, it would be most fitting if they could also play at the Menin Gate ceremonies on the Tuesday night, the 10th of November at 8 pm. After all thousands of Irishmen from a great number of Irish regiments are also commemorated on the walls of the Memorial. I've spoken to Mr. G. Cruwez, chairman of the Last Post Committee, and Mr. (... illegible ....), co-ordinator of the In Flanders Field Museum, and they don't see any difficulties to include the Number One Band in the Ceremonies. There will also be an English band involved.

It would be best if the leader of the Number One Band could contact Mr. Gruwez (after 1 October) or (before that day) Mr. (...illegible.....) to discuss the details of the ceremony.

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On behalf of the city of Ieper, I thank you for all the efforts you make for the Island of Ireland Peace Park.

Sincerely,

Luc Dehaene,
Burgomeister."

Maurice Biggar
First Secretary
12 November 1998

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FAX: Paddy Harte
FROM: Amy Pages: 2
Des Johnston 836-7822.

STAD IEPER

To Mr. Paddy Harte
Joint Executive Chairman
a Journey of Reconciliation Trust
00353 1 706 04 26

Ref.: Number One Army Band of Irish Gun Corporals

Ieper, 18 September 1998.

Dear Mr. Harte,

I am delighted to hear that the President of the Irish Republic has accepted to unveil the Messines Peace Tower, jointly with her Majesty the Queen of Great-Britain and the King of the Belgians. It is an event of the greatest importance for all Europeans in their search for a better and more peaceful world.

It seems most appropriate that the Number One Army Band of the Irish Defence Forces should be playing at that occasion.

Since the band will be arriving in Flanders on Monday night, the 9th of November, I think, as you suggest, it would be most fitting if they could also play at the Menin Gate ceremonies on the Tuesday night, the 10th of November at 8 p.m. After all thousands of Irishmen from a great number of Irish regiments, are also commemorated on the walls of the Memorial.
I've spoken to Mr. G.Greaves, chairman of the Last Post Committee, and Mr. Piet Chielens, co-ordinator of the In Flanders Fields Museum, and they don't see any difficulties to include the Number One Band in the ceremonies. There will also an English band be involved.

It would be best if the leader of the Number One Band, could contact Mr.Greaves (after 1 October) or (before that date) Mr.Chielens, to discuss the details of the ceremony.

On behalf of the city of Ieper, I thank you for all the efforts you take for the island of Ireland Peace Park.

Sincerely,

LUC DEHAENE
Burgemeester

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