

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Secretary Gallagher,

Mr Myers
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ARMY BAND/IEPER

1. Please see across the report from the Embassy, Brussels, on the invitation to the Army Band to play in Ieper (Ypres) in Belgium on 10 November 1998, the evening before the President inaugurated the Island of Ireland Peace Park at Mesen (Messines). Also, attached is an E-mail from Clare O'Flaherty setting out her perspective on the sequence of events.

2. The issue gave rise to a negative article in the *Cork Examiner* on 11 November 1998 and negative references in Kevin Myers' column in *The Irish Times* on 18 November 1998.

3. There was some confusion following the publication of the *Cork Examiner* story on 11 November 1998 as the Army Press Office denied that there had been such an invitation. I was certain that there had been an invitation to the Army Band to play at Ieper but could not recall whether the ceremony included the Last Post (the focus of the criticism). Owing to its involvement in Messines on the 10 November 1998 in the preparations for the visit by the three Heads of State and on the 11 November 1998 in the visit itself, the Embassy, Brussels was not in a position to clarify this question on 10 November 1998. At the first available opportunity, on 12 and 13 November 1998, the Embassy, Brussels prepared a full report clarifying the position in relation to the invitation to the Last Post Ceremony.

4. The factors which influenced our decision not to recommend acceptance of the invitation are outlined in Ms O'Flaherty's E-mail of 16 November 1998. There was also the fact that by 28 September we had a clear policy line, accepted both by the President and the Taoiseach, that the President herself would not participate in the Menin Gate commemoration ceremonies (see my separate submission on this issue). For the Army to participate in such ceremonies while the President did not would have been incongruous and might have placed the President in the invidious position.

5. Also, from both a political and practical point of view it made sense to concentrate our limited resources on the Mesen ceremony, an event of major significance. In considering the Ieper invitation, Comdt Brian

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Reade of the Irish Army had "pointed to the need for rest and rehearsal on the eve of the Mesen event". The British Army had two bands in the area for these ceremonies. One band, that of the RIR, confined itself, as did our band, to rehearsals on the afternoon of 10 November and the morning of 11 November before performing at the inauguration of the Peace Park on the afternoon of 11 November. A second British Army band undertook the Menin Gate commemorations.

Paul Murray
19 November 1998

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Secretary Gallagher,

I participated in the advance visit to Flanders last week in connection with the visit of the President to Mesen (Messines) to inaugurate, together with the King and Queen of the Belgians and Queen Elizabeth II, the Island of Ireland Peace Park as a memorial to the Irish war dead in World War 1 on 11 November 1998.

On this occasion, the British mentioned that they envisaged two of their Ministers participating, probably at Minister of State level, most likely from the Ministry of Defence (the Minister for the Armed Forces) and the Northern Ireland Office.

In the circumstances, I would recommend that positive consideration be given to Irish Ministerial attendance. Given the fact that this is a major reconciliation event in the Irish context and is likely to attract significant publicity, the Minister may wish to consider attendance. On the other hand, in view of the fact that British attendance is at MOS level, it might be more appropriate to approach the Minister of State.

We might also need to consult the Department of Defence to see if they would wish to be represented at Ministerial/MOS level, given that the British MOD will be represented and that the Irish Army will be involved in the ceremony.

A copy of the most recent draft programme prepared by the Protocol Section is across.

Paul Murray
13 October 1998

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