

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Reference Code:	2022/47/442
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Mr Gary Ansbro
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7 December 2000

Dear Gary,

Illegal activities of the British Army's Force Reaction Unit in NI

For the last three weeks, *The Sunday Herald* (Glasgow) has carried a series of investigative articles on the activities of Brigadier Gordon Kerr and the Force Reaction Unit (FRU) he led in Northern Ireland between 1987 and 1991. These articles have been written by Neil Mackay, a NI-born journalist, who is the paper's Home Affairs correspondent. They detail the FRU's collusion with loyalist paramilitaries in the murder of "at least 14 Catholics". The paper's FRU source says that there was an unbroken chain of command through the military in NI, to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and all the way up to the Prime Minister. I have spoken with Mr Mackay, and the paper's editor, Andrew Jaspan, about their investigation of the FRU.

Scottish-born Brigadier Kerr is currently Military Attache at the British Embassy in Beijing. The FRU is said to have passed information on to the UDA through Brian Nelson which helped the UDA carry out political assassinations of republicans. It seems that two of Nelson's army handlers were Scottish soldiers while one of his RUC handlers was also a Scot.

An FRU source boasted to *The Sunday Herald* that "we were able to take out leading Provos with the help of the UDA. It was a great military move". The paper claims that Kerr is to be interrogated by the Stevens' Inquiry over the next few months and that Stevens plans to arrest a number of FRU officers shortly. Kerr was in charge of day-to-day handling of loyalist informers. He is described as having a gung-ho, aggressive style.

The Sunday Herald reports on the arrest last month of a former FRU officer, Phillip Campbell-Smith, who wrote a Ministry of Defence-approved book on the FRU entitled *The Fishers of Men*. Campbell-Smith is alleged to have threatened a witness who was cooperating with the Stevens' Inquiry. The Ministry of Defence expressed its full confidence in Kerr's capacity to continue serving as military attache in Beijing. The FRU are suspected of carrying

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out an arson attack on the office of the Stevens' inquiry in an effort to destroy incriminating evidence.

The Sunday Herald quotes an anonymous former FRU member as admitting that his unit was guilty of conspiring in the murder of at least 14 Catholics. The paper maintains that at least four of the victims had no republican connections. One of these, Francisco Notarantonio, was deliberately targeted so as to spare a Republican codenamed Steak Knife who was a valuable British Army informer within the IRA. Mr Notarantonio's details were passed on to Brian Nelson by a female FRU officer named as Captain M, who is still in the intelligence corps although no longer in NI. *The Sunday Herald* was planning to name 'Captain M', but backed down in the face of a threatened injunction from the MoD which would have stopped their investigation in its tracks. Captain M also withheld information from police that could have prevented sectarian killings. The Stevens' Inquiry is said to be investigating her role in assisting the UDA carry out the murder of Pat Finucane. Neil Mackay writes that at least three senior FRU officers are to be arrested in the coming weeks in connection with the Finucane murder.

An FRU source is quoted as saying that "it is rubbish to suggest that we were mavericks. ... the establishment knew what was happening". A security source describes Kerr as the Stevens' Inquiry's biggest fish. Whether those charged by the Stevens' team will ever be prosecuted is "a matter for debate. These people are so high-ranking that the establishment will have to cover up for them. If they go down, the stink of what was happening will reach right to the top of Government".

The series maintains that Kerr was the first FRU officer to sanction "illegal reconnaissance missions in the Republic". It seems that more than 100 border crossings may have been carried out under Kerr's command. These involved the bugging of homes of republicans and pubs they frequented. A spokesman for the Taoiseach is quoted as being "horrified" by the allegations which, he said, gave rise to "feelings of outrage and betrayal". The Government would be asking the British Government to investigate these allegations immediately.

The Sunday Herald, which was founded in 1999, has taken a keen interest in NI stories. Last year, I was invited by its editor to join his Editorial Advisory Board, which meets every couple of months to discuss the paper's performance. I have been encouraging their constructive interest in NI and have contributed a number of articles on Irish issues. When I spoke to the editor this week, he told me that they had been 'sailing close to the wind' with the MoD which had already injuncted *The Sunday Times* and *The Sunday People* to prevent them from publishing stories about the FRU. The MoD had threatened them with an injunction unless they promised not to identify Captain M. After weighing up his options, he had decided to give this promise and the threat of an injunction was then lifted. His paper had accumulated a huge amount of detail about the activities of the FRU and was keen to get this into the public domain. *The Sunday Times* had not been allowed to publish half of what his paper had published.

When I spoke to Neil Mackay, he explained that he had written about security matters in NI for five years before moving to Glasgow in 1996. During the current investigation, he had drawn on contacts built up as a journalist in NI. They would, he said, be publishing additional revelations this weekend concerning collusion between the FRU and Republican paramilitaries. We agreed to meet in the coming weeks so that he can give me a fuller account of his investigation.

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Dan Mulhall
Consul General

Copied to: Ambassador Barrington, Mr D. Kelly (Press Counsellor).

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