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327/5

SP(B)60/192/03



- cc PS/Secretary of State (L) - M
- PS/Mr Scott (B&L) - M
- PS/PUS (B&L) - M
- PS/Sir Ewart Bell
- Mr Bourn
- Mr Brennan - M
- Mr Buxton
- Mr Doyne Ditmas
- Mr Palmer
- Mr Boys Smith - M
- Mr Jackson
- Mr Templeton
- Mr Wood - M
- Mr Maccabe

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PS/Secretary of State (B)

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BALLYGALLY POST OFFICE SHOOTING

I can now let you have a comprehensive response to Mr Cleasby's minute of 15 May.

2. According to the RUC, as a result of information received, police officers belonging to a Headquarters Mobile Support Unit were deployed at Ballygally Post Office on the morning of 14 May. Some, in plain clothes, were inside the building: others, in uniform, were outside nearby. At about 10.00 am, shortly after a sum of money had been delivered to the post office, three masked men entered the premises one of them, now known to be Seamus FITZSIMONS, was carrying a weapon, later found to be a replica revolver.

3. FITZSIMONS threatened the postmistress with a gun, and another of the masked men opened a door leading to a room where five police officers, dressed in boiler suits and running shoes were hiding. He saw the police and quickly closed the door and tried to keep it shut. The police managed to reopen it and three of the officers came into the post office through it, while the two others made their way via a side route to the main entrance.

4. The masked men ran from the office and were called on to stop by the pursuing officers. One of these officers saw FITZSIMONS turn towards him with the revolver in his hand, and believing he was about to be shot drew his own pistol and fired at FITZSIMONS. FITZSIMONS fell to the ground but continued to point his gun at the officer who, still fearful for his own safety, fired at him

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again. FITZSIMONS later died from his wounds.

5. At the same time, another officer gave chase to a second masked man who also refused to stop when challenged. This officer fired a warning shot into the air at which point the man stopped and was arrested. He was found to be Brendan CALLAGHAN.

6. The officer who had fired at FITZSIMONS went on to chase a third masked man and as he was doing so he heard a shot which made him think the man he was pursuing was also armed. The officer fired at the man whom he hit once and then captured. He was found to be Michael Patrick McGEOWN. It is thought that the shot this officer heard was the shot fired by the officer who arrested CALLAGHAN.

7. CALLAGHAN is currently detained at Castlereagh Holding Centre. McGEOWN is in Ward 18 of the Musgrave Park Hospital.

8. A fourth man, Robert McCANN who is suspected of having been the driver of the car used to convey the party to the post office, was arrested later the same day and is also in custody at Castlereagh.

9. Neither FITZSIMONS nor McCANN has a prison record, although the police believe the latter is a member of the UVF. CALLAGHAN (RC, and according to the police, UVF) and McGEOWN (RC and UVF) and another man, Thomas Patrick FRIEL (RC) were together in H6 B Wing of Maze Prison and all got home leave at the same time - on Tuesday 8 May 1984. It is perhaps worth noting that the RUC initially identified the dead man at Ballygally as FRIEL, although as far as we can establish he was not connected with this crime.

10. The RUC were consulted in the usual way about home leave for each of these three and did not object. As the police have not been forthcoming about the information which prompted them to set up an ambush at the post office we are left to speculate what

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this might have been. It is clear that the police knew in advance that a crime was planned and the evidence would suggest that they knew the identity of those likely to be involved. This raises the difficult questions of whether they had this information before these men were released from prison, and, if so, why they did not object to home leave. We have been unable to resolve these questions and the Secretary of State may wish to consider raising this directly with the Chief Constable at next week's SPM.



P COULSON
Law and Order Division

18 May 1984

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