



1. Mr. H. Scott
2. Mr. P. Simpson

To take action as regards the
proposed meeting.


J. H. Copeland
23/10

DUNDONALD HOUSE
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Minister

SHOOTING INCIDENT IN BELFAST CITY HOSPITAL

As requested by you, I attach for your information a short note on this incident. Full details are not yet available about some aspects of the incident but no doubt we will get a complete picture at the proposed meeting with representatives of the Board, Police, NIO etc. I intend to hold the meeting as soon as possible and will keep you informed of the discussions and any developments.


J H COPELAND

23 October 1979

cc: Secretary
CMO
Mr E H Elliott

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SHOOTING INCIDENT IN BELFAST CITY HOSPITAL

On 22 October 1979 I spoke at length to Mr P Kinder (Chief Administrative Officer) and obtained the following account of the shooting incident in the Belfast City Hospital.

Mr G Stilges of the Markets district of Belfast was shot by several men in his home on Friday, 19 October 1979 but was not seriously wounded and was admitted to the accident ward (3) of the City Hospital for treatment. These facts were known to the RUC but no attempt was made to provide a guard as apparently the policy is not to do so in respect of civilian casualties unless there are special reasons. The patient's presence in the hospital and his condition were made known to the public by radio and television later on the same day.

At about 1 am on Saturday 20 October 1979 two men knocked on the door of ward 3. In the temporary absence of the staff nurse, a nurse (SEN) in charge of the ward at the time opened the door and the men, giving names, asked to see the patient on the grounds that he had been taken from home to hospital without having the opportunity to make any personal arrangements and that they wished to assist him in any way possible. Obviously they were both apologetic and persuasive because the nurse, having pointed out the lateness of the visit and other patients being asleep, asked them to wait while she checked with Mr Stilges as to whether or not he wished to see them. She closed the door and went to his bed towards the end of the ward. On hearing the names given by the visitors he readily agreed to see them but at that moment they pushed past the nurse and started shooting at him. In an attempt to avoid the shots he threw himself out of the bed but was very badly injured by at least one bullet being deflected from a hip bone into the kidneys and heart.

In the few minutes of this incident other patients in the dim light of the ward were thrown into total confusion, some jumping or rolling out of bed to avoid any possible shooting in their direction. A policeman patient was naturally very concerned for his safety. Apparently there was also a Maze prisoner under treatment in the ward and he was under the supervision of a warder but it is not known where this guard was at the time of the incident or whether or not he was armed. Altogether the effect upon patients and staff was traumatic.

The gunmen made their escape with little difficulty from the hospital, but as the alarm seems to have been given without delay, two men were later arrested by

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the Police in the Ballymurphy district. It is understood that they may be soon charged with the crime.

Later on Saturday the Board's Chairman Sir Thomas Brown and Mr Kinder, visited the ward and spoke to the patients and staff. Naturally both patients and staff were very shocked and the general demand was for greater security. Mr Stilges was at that time very seriously ill in the intensive care unit of the hospital and under Police protection.

Further Action

During the brief discussion with Mr Kinder about this incident it was clear to both of us that further consideration should be given as soon as possible to a number of points:-

- (a) Police policy as regards protection of civilians who might be the subject of further attack.
- (b) The issue of Press statements by Police etc as regards the place of treatment and condition of a casualty - a source of information for terrorists. Admittedly a series of phone calls to hospitals by alleged relatives could probably elicit the required information, but there appears to be no reason to assist them by Press releases.
- (c) Any guard for a patient to be situated outside the ward, not inside the ward, and thus avoid any possibility of a "shoot-out" in the ward.
- (d) Any possible strengthening of security at City Hospital - mainly by ensuring that staff are more security conscious.

I agreed to arrange a meeting as soon as possible on these points between the Board, Police etc and NIO.

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