

C O N F I D E N T I A L

1. Mr. [unclear] 7/9
2. Mr. [unclear] (1/10)
3. Mr. [unclear]
8/9 Per P/A..
JHO
2-9

PAE 352/WKL/RN

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FROM: W K LINDSAY
POLITICAL AFFAIRS DIVISION
DATE: 28 AUGUST 1992

Mr Steele - B

mm 10/9/92

cc Mr Watkins - B
Mr Maccabe

JMcC
25/9

How is Mr. [unclear] to be taken forward with the [unclear]?

MEETING WITH RESIDENTS FROM COALISLAND AREA

Mr Watkins, Mr Maccabe, you and I met a group of residents from the Coalisland area yesterday to hear their views on relations with the security forces. The meeting was arranged with the help of Mr Jim Canning, an Independent Republican Councillor and former Chairman of Dungannon District Council, who works closely with Father Faul and is an unrelenting opponent of violence for political ends.

He will be interested in this (accounts) note.

2. Also attending the meeting were Monsignor McEnteggart, the senior priest in the area and former Headmaster of St Patrick Boys Academy in Dungannon, an accountant, the owner of a taxi firm and his wife, one of the proprietors of the Venue Bar, where the incident with the Paras took place earlier this year, the father of one of the barmen at the Venue and the mother of another young man who is frequently stopped by the security forces. The meeting lasted for almost two hours and all appeared to give factual and truthful accounts of incidents involving themselves or their sons.

3. There was no consensus among the residents as to which section of the security forces engaged more in harassment, some thought the RUC, others the army. They were united however in their firm belief that making official complaints was a waste of time, as this usually increased the harassment towards the complainant, marked him out for the future as a trouble maker and they said inevitably ended inconclusively with police officers/soldiers closing ranks. They were also consistent in their view that instances of harassment occurred usually against young men

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from the age of around 15 from certain specified areas and took the form of constant stopping in the street, searching, removing jackets and sometimes shoes and name-calling. Much of it was petty but cumulatively diminished any respect there was for the security forces. As the frequency of harassment intensified so the propensity for young men to support or join PIRA also increased.

4. All the residents re-counted individual cases of misbehaviour by the security forces, often the police. One man told how his son, who had just got engaged was stopped at a roadblock and told in a threatening manner that he would never see his wedding day; another said his son suffered from a kidney complaint, was stopped by soldiers in front of the RUC station, made take his jacket off and stand in the rain. He ended up in hospital as a result of the incident. Others told of their sons being constantly stopped at VCPs and minute checks made of vehicles; on one occasion the only fault the police could find was no water in the windscreen washer. There were constant deliberate delays, threats, humiliation and unnecessary offensive remarks. The Monsignor mentioned a recent case of a clerical student who was stopped, searched, mocked and taken into custody to Dungannon for no apparent reason. He too refused to make an official complaint but a meeting with the local sub-divisional commander had been held to discuss the incident.

5. There was general agreement that the present army unit (Coldstream Guards) was fine and there had been little, if any, cause for complaint with them. Individual police and army officers too, particularly at middle and senior ranks were given credit for trying to improve the situation and for taking action on informal complaints. The Paras on the otherhand were "unmentionable" and the residents said should never have been in contact with the civilian population. Accompaniment of a patrol by a police officer was said to be virtually useless and was no guarantee of better behaviour. Asked about Clonoe and the killing of the four men there earlier in the year, it was claimed that local people were numbed by the incident but some of those present took it as evidence of a shoot to kill policy. Monsignor McEntegart mentioned the subsequent funerals and the unnecessary saturation of housing estates and the graveyard by police drafted in from outside who did not know the area or the sensitivities well enough.

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6. Canning concluded by suggesting that there was a change in attitude among the people. He mentioned as an example the funeral recently of a Coalisland man killed by PIRA as an informer which was well attended (by around 1000 people) and the coffin carried through the town for about a quarter of a mile. Release of prisoners, war weariness and economic regeneration also contributed to the change of attitude. He contended that the security forces should take note and act accordingly by reducing the number of checks and searches. In his view some young constables, whose heads were "full of (unionist) slogans" did not know their own history and did not have the understanding or sensitivity to deal with nationalist young people. If they continued to treat everyone in Coalisland with suspicion and contempt they would inevitably drive more young men into active or passive support for the paramilitaries. Mutual respect was lacking and clearly those present saw the police in particular as the main quarter from which attempts to build this respect had to come.

[Signed Ken Lindsay]

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