

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 1 -

FROM EGMG FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE

GIVEN BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND,

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW, SIR HUGH ANNESLEY AND LT GENERAL

SIR ROGER WHEELER

AT STORMONT

ON FRIDAY, 3 JUNE 1994

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

The format of this will be that I will make a statement first, that will be followed by a short statement by the Chief Constable and a short statement by the D.O.C., there will then be of course ample opportunity for questions.

This has been a dreadful and a tragic event, a terrible accident, which has left 29 people dead. I first wish to express my deepest condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives. The individuals concerned were very dedicated people, engaged in vital work in Northern Ireland. I also wish to express my gratitude for the very many messages of sympathy we have received.

Her Majesty The Queen has sent the following message:

"I was deeply shocked to hear of the tragedy in Scotland in which so many died. My heartfelt sympathy goes to the families and comrades of the victims, they will indeed be grievously missed."

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 2 -

The Prime Minister has sent me a personal message in the following terms:

"The loss of so many outstanding and dedicated people in the helicopter tragedy yesterday evening is dreadful news. I would like, through you and Malcolm Rifkind, to express my sorrow and deep sympathy to their families. Their grief will be shared through Northern Ireland and Great Britain and their loss will be heavily felt by all friends and colleagues.

These officers and officials from the RUC, the Army, the Royal Air Force, the Northern Ireland Office and other departments were all in their different ways carrying out work of vital importance in Northern Ireland. As I know from meetings during my visits to the province they made light of the risks in their daily lives, their skill and determination had helped to save many lives in Northern Ireland. They should be remembered with pride as people who were working to make the community safer.

There can be no better memorial than for others to follow their example and to carry on their fine work, as I know they will."

The passengers on board the helicopter comprised 10 senior members of the RUC and 9 army staff officers of various ranks engaged on counter-terrorism activities together with 6 civilian security specialists working in the Northern Ireland Office. The 4 Royal Air Force crew members also tragically died.

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 3 -

They were en route to a conference in Scotland concerned with the fight against terrorism throughout the United Kingdom. We shall not be releasing the names of all of those who died for reasons which I think will be obvious.

They were travelling on a Royal Air Force Chinook helicopter, an aircraft which has a long-established reputation as a safe and secure means of transport widely used in Northern Ireland. The aircraft had recently undergone refurbishment and modernisation by Boeing. There is no evidence of sabotage. This use of a single helicopter represented no departure from standard practice.

There will also be three separate enquiries which will be held into this accident. These will be undertaken by the Air Accident Investigations Branch of the DTI, the Strathclyde Police and the Royal Air Force on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. We shall of course be considering carefully whether there are lessons to be learnt from this tragic accident.

I have already referred to the grievous loss this accident has inflicted on the families, it has also been a severe blow to our efforts to combat terrorism. But the operational effects will certainly be overcome. The work of these fine people will continue, as they would have wished, and indeed is continuing even now.

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 4 -

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

I join with the Secretary of State and the General Officer Commanding in extending my very deepest sympathy to the families of all those who have died, they have suffered a devastating and appalling loss and, first and foremost, this morning our thoughts and condolences are with them at this terrible time.

You will understand that as Chief Constable I naturally wish to refer personally to those members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, my friends and colleagues who have so cruelly perished. I say this of them, they were no ordinary men, they were extraordinary men, individually and collectively they gave brave outstanding service to the Royal Ulster Constabulary, to this community of Northern Ireland, and by reason of their special jobs, to the nation as a whole.

Like all officers in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, they gave themselves far, far beyond the call of duty and it was in the course of performing that duty that they died so tragically. Together these officers have contributed more than 246 years service, in the course of that service they made an enormous contribution to saving life, protecting the whole community and serving the cause of peace. This community owes them a huge, huge debt of gratitude.

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994  
- 5 -

On behalf of the RUC I thank sincerely all of those people who have expressed their condolences to the families and to the RUC, we are much comforted by the fact that this tragedy has evoked such sympathy and such support.

LT GENERAL SIR ROGER WHEELER:

I join with the Secretary of State and the Chief Constable in extending my very deepest sympathy to the families of all those who have died. Those families have suffered a devastating loss and first and foremost our thoughts must be with them today.

Of course I wish to express my admiration for the ability, courage and the outstanding service that all those who have died have given to the community here in Northern Ireland. My own officers were their close colleagues and not only have themselves made an enormous and important contribution to countering terrorism, but have also served with great distinction in the army throughout their careers in various parts of the world.

They would all want us to be steadfast in our resolve to continue to support the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the protection of our community here in Northern Ireland, and that we will do.

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 6 -

QUESTION:

Chief Constable, the scale of the human tragedy is obvious from what has been said already, but could you define the potential impact that this crash will have on the counter-terrorist effort?

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

To be helpful I can say that we have lost one Assistant Chief Constable, two Detective Chief Superintendents, four Detective Superintendents, one Detective Chief Inspector and two Detective Inspectors. No-one can pretend that this is not a catastrophic loss, these men were outstanding professionals and had, as I have said, many years of experience between them. But, as the General has said, we have systems where nobody relies on one man or woman and whilst this will be a very very significant set-back, we shall push forward, as has always been the case, to fill that vacuum. But today our hearts and our thoughts of course are as you rightly say with their families.

QUESTION:

Without wishing to dance on anybody's grave at this present moment, was it excusable for so many members, the brightest brains, the most intelligent among the intelligence gathering community, to be aboard the same aircraft, did that make operational sense from your point of view?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 7 -

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

I would revert that and say, why not? This method of transport has been safe and secure, there was no departure from our standard policy in conveying these officers to various locations and, as the General may wish to confirm if you put it to him, the enormous safety record of the Chinook. This tragedy could have happened with a chartered aircraft, it could have happened on a scheduled aircraft, this is a tragedy and we should not sideline the issue about whether or not it was a Chinook. As the Secretary of State has said, obviously given the circumstances then we would wish to look at what might have been done.

QUESTION:

So by way of a supplementary could I put two points to you - that human error, pilot error, mechanical faults can occur on any helicopter, any aircraft. The other potential which is ever present is the potential of an attack on an aircraft like that from the IRA or whoever else, if you put all your people in the same helicopter aren't you really exposing some of your best brains to grave danger, was that a prudent decision?

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

We have not put all of our best brains, we have put very experienced, very able and committed officers, and we transport officers of that seniority and that level around the province on a daily and a weekly basis. We were not flying over hostile territory, we were going from one secure base to another with

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 8 -

personnel who were known, who had boarded the aircraft known to the flight crew and who had left from a secure base. In my view, whilst it is clear that we must look at all of the circumstances, I see no reason now to think that that was a departure from what was safe, secure and satisfactory.

QUESTION:

Sir Patrick, we have been given details about some of the police officers on board the helicopter, I gather you will not be releasing all the names of those who died, but have you any more details that you can give us either about the senior army officers or about those members of the civil service who may have been from your department or from the Security Service?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I have said so far as the officials are concerned, the civilians, that they were security specialists working in the Northern Ireland Office, I do not propose to say more about it than that and I believe that that will be readily understood. As for the military personnel, I would ask the General to deal with that.

QUESTION:

Security agents or security specialists?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

No, security specialists is the word that I have used in this statement and that is the word which I wish to use.

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 9 -

LT GENERAL SIR ROGER WHEELER:

My officers were staff officers both in my headquarters and in  
brigade headquarters, matching their RUC colleagues.

QUESTION:

Were there senior members of military intelligence on the  
helicopter when it crashed?

LT GENERAL SIR ROGER WHEELER:

They were members of my staff from my headquarters and from  
brigade headquarters.

QUESTION:

And you are not prepared to go any further?

LT GENERAL SIR ROGER WHEELER:

They worked in a number of things, of which security of course is  
one.

QUESTION:

You have said that you have lost men of vast experience in the  
fight against terrorism, how difficult is it going to be to  
replace that experience?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 10 -

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

It is difficult but it is not impossible and as I said in my statement, in the concluding passage, this is a heavy blow but it is a blow whose operational effects will be overcome, meanwhile the work is continuing, even now.

QUESTION:

Was that a routine meeting?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

This was a conference which takes place on a regular basis.

QUESTION:

The Prime Minister's statement refers to the victims being members of the Army, the NIO and the RUC and other departments, what other departments was the Prime Minister referring to?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I do not wish to go further than to say that those civilians, and there were six of them, were security specialists working in the Northern Ireland Office.

QUESTION:

When you say it was a regular meeting, that seems to be at variance with what some of your security chiefs have been advising us of this morning, was it or was it not a regular meeting.

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 11 -

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I understand it to be an annual meeting, that is regular. Is that right?

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

Absolutely right.

QUESTION:

Would people of that calibre have regularly gone in a single aircraft to such a meeting annually?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

I understand that is the case.

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

Yes that is the case and that is why I was making my earlier comments about the method of travel, this is a regular conference, there are other conferences we hold as and when, but this particular conference was a regular conference that had taken place for some years.

QUESTION:

And is that one of the lessons that you will learn that perhaps it is not wise to put all your top men on the one aircraft?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 12 -

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

It is better to decide what the lessons that are to be learnt may be after one has had the various enquiries.

QUESTION:

Can you tell us what part of the top sphere of Special Branch has been lost as a result of this crash?

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

I do not want to go into individual posts, we have lost tragically the Head of Special Branch, we have lost a number of people in headquarters and in the Belfast region, we have lost other operators in both the south and in the north regions.

QUESTION:

All Special Branch?

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

All Special Branch.

QUESTION:

How would you sum up the mood in the ranks today at headquarters?

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

It is like mine, heartbroken, and that is the only way one can describe it. But the RUC has a long history of the military and of other supporters in trying to carry on and I am sure that if

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW/SIR HUGH ANNESLEY/LT GEN SIR ROGER WHEELER -  
PRESS CONFERENCE - STORMONT - 3 JUNE 1994

- 13 -

... and our colleagues were able to talk to us now they would say that is what they want us to do. But we must grieve, first we must look after their families.

QUESTION:

I understand you said it was an annual meeting, I understand that in the past these meetings were taking place in Maclihanish (phon), ...

SIR HUGH ANNESLEY:

There are various locations for various conferences, the helicopter was not going to Maclihanish, there was no question of it landing there, it was on a direct flight to Inverness.

QUESTION:

What steps have been taken to restore confidence now?

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW:

The work continues and it is being undertaken by those who were the colleagues of those who have died.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)