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Local & National

MoD's 'terrorist' apology

35 years on, Army chiefs say sorry to Derry family

Friday, August 31, 2007

By Brendan McDaid

The Ministry of Defence has apologised after labelling an innocent Londonderry youth shot dead during Operation Motorman as a "terrorist".

Army chiefs today issued "sincere apologies" for the "considerable distress" caused to the family of 15-year-old Daniel Hegarty.

Daniel, from Swilly Gardens, died after being shot in Creggan Heights in the early hours of July 31, 1972.

The teenager was branded a terrorist in a document analysing the British Army's operations in Northern Ireland between August 1969 and July this year.

The MoD claimed today that an error had occurred because the document had not been proof-read before being published on the internet in July.

The retraction comes after the Pat Finucane Centre in Derry wrote to Defence Minister Des Brown demanding that the document be withdrawn and the references to Daniel changed.

Paul O'Connor, project co-ordinator with the centre, said today: "Essentially what they have done is they have withdrawn the document dealing with Operation Banner to amend the section dealing with Daniel Hegarty.

"They have accepted that this was an innocent boy and have asked us to apologise to the family."

Mr O'Connor said the Hegarty family were today unable to speak directly about the MoD decision for family reasons.

He added, however: "Daniel's family have welcomed the fact that the MoD have put their hands up and accepted that what was written was wrong.

"They believe that they should not have continually had to fight to clear Daniel's name. They hope this puts rest to it.

"They have also pointed out that the other teenage boy killed [19-year-old Seamus Bradley] was also unarmed and was cleared of carrying arms at his inquest. That's the historical fact."

Staff at the Pat Finucane Centre said they were surprised by the swift response of the MoD in dealing with the issue.






An MoD spokesman said: "I would like to offer my sincere apologies to Daniel's family.

"The paragraph in question is inaccurate and this should have been picked up on during proof-reading, but unfortunately was not.

"I recognise the considerable distress this must have caused. I have instructed the report be removed from our website and an amended version produced."

He added: "The Secretary of State has previously written letters to the effect that Daniel is considered innocent and we continue to stand by those comments."

Operation Motorman was aimed at saturating working-class nationalist areas with troops, in particular the so-called 'no go' areas including Creggan, the Bogside and the Brandywell, which had collectively become known as 'Free Derry'.

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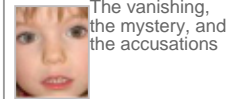
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