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# IRA 'gave its consent' to murder of Billy Wright

## INLA asked for approval before it killed loyalist leader, public inquiry told

**Henry McDonald**, Ireland editor  
[The Observer](#), Sunday October 12 2008

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Loyalist Billy Wright's 1997 assassination had to be approved by a notorious IRA commander, according to newly released British army intelligence documents.

The INLA, which killed Wright inside the Maze prison, sought the consent of the IRA in Belfast before the murder, military intelligence officers have claimed. The group held meetings with the IRA commander, from Ardoyne, north Belfast, who also ordered the 1993 Shankill bomb attack, they said.

Undercover army surveillance units had key members of the INLA leadership who were central to the murder plot under round-the-clock observation in the days leading up to Wright's assassination, the documents confirm.

The classified material was released last week to the ongoing public inquiry into the killing of the Loyalist Volunteer Force leader in the maximum-security prison.

Wright's family have alleged that the prison authorities and the security forces 'turned a blind eye' to the dangers the LVF founder faced while sharing a block with INLA inmates. They also claim the security forces could have prevented the murder because they had intelligence warnings that he was being targeted.

A military intelligence officer known as Captain AA told the inquiry that the meetings, under constant surveillance, could have related to Wright's murder. He said that he was a battalion intelligence officer with responsibility for north and west Belfast from September 1997 to May 1998.

Under questioning last week by the Rev John Oliver, the former Anglican Bishop of Hereford who is one of three inquiry panel members, Captain AA said that the INLA had to seek the approval of the IRA to kill Wright. Captain AA said: 'It would have been foolhardy of them [INLA] to carry out an operation without at least the tacit consent of PIRA.'

A further British military assessment disclosed to the tribunal states: 'It is assessed the INLA meetings held at Belfast address 1 on the 16th and 19th of December were in connection with the murder of Billy Wright.'

Wright's murder almost destroyed the fragile political negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement a few months later. Wright's killing caused a wave of loyalist retaliatory gun attacks in Belfast and mid-Ulster.



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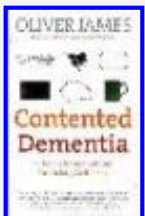
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