

E.R.

CONFIDENTIAL

45/9

PC/84/9/372/ES



PS/Secretary of State (L) - Mufax

cc: PS/Secretary of State (B)

PS/Mr Scott (L&B) - M

PS/PUS (L&B) - M

PS/Sir Ewart Bell ✓

Mr Brennan - M

Mr Bourn

Mr Buxton

Mr Burns - M

Mr Merifield

Mr Gilliland

Mr Lyon - M

Mr Bickham - M

WJ
6/9

2 SEC 11

BORDER ROAD CLOSURES: M8

The Secretary of State may recall that on 18 May I advised him that the RUC wished to close two border crossings between Tyrone and Monaghan. These are designated M4, which is in the Favour Royal, and M8 which is a few miles to the South. I recommended that the Secretary of State should accept the re-closure of M4 but not M8, because we were far from satisfied that it was a practical proposition to re-close this crossing.

2. M4 was subsequently re-closed and this closure remains effective. However, we asked the RUC to provide further information on the practicability of re-closing M8.

3. The Secretary of State may recall that M8 was originally closed in the mid-1970s by a series of craters caused by explosives. The local farmers living inside the Republic built a track by-passing these craters. In 1981 it was decided, because of the heightened security threat, to re-close the road once more. The Secretary of State signed the necessary order for its closure on 24 September 1981, in accordance with Section 19 of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978. The track was subsequently closed by the Army using a braithwaite tank.

4. It would appear that the same farmer then constructed a sophisticated track across one of the craters in order to by-pass the braithwaite tank. Construction of this track involved the

CONFIDENTIAL

use of heavy plant and machinery, and demonstrated considerable ingenuity and will on the part of this farmer.

5. The RUC have now said that M8 can be effectively closed by making some deep excavations some yards away from its junction with the Northern Ireland road from which it branches, and that, between these excavations and the road there should be a pattern of 3 zig-zag braithwaite tanks. The excavations, using heavy plant, would, at this time of the year create a morass which would be impassable to traffic without a great deal of in-filling. Even if this was done, experience has shown that the zig-zag braithwaite tanks would be very difficult to shift or by-pass. Nevertheless, the RUC has said that they will monitor this crossing in order to prevent any further attempts by local people to circumvent or interfere with these measures. They consider, therefore, that these measures will protect the closure during the Autumn and Winter and that by springtime the closure of this track will have become an accepted fact.

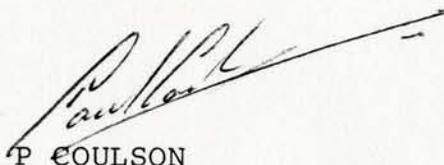
6. The RUC have advanced strong security reasons for carrying out this work. M8 is very close to the spot where Sergeant Hillen, a part-time member of 6UDR, was shot dead by two gunmen on 12 May 1984. In addition, an off-duty part-time soldier from 8UDR, Private Murray was attacked nearby on 26 August 1984. You will recall that he sustained gunshot wounds to the head and was very seriously injured. Intelligence reports of increased PIRA activity coupled with reports of greater increased use of the M8 crossing by the public has given rise to considerable concern about the safety of other local members of the security forces. Hence, the RUC and the Army firmly believe that the re-closure of this crossing is essential for security reasons.

7. The RUC considers that this work will be practical, effective and more likely to be enduring than some of their recent efforts to re-close border roads. However, no absolute guarantee can be given that such measures will not be interfered with. On the other

E.R.

hand if this crossing remains open and any further security incidents happen in the area both the security forces and the Secretary of State will be heavily criticised for having failed to attempt to prevent further incursions by terrorists across the border at M8.

8. I believe that the RUC have made, at our request, a careful and realistic study of the problems associated with the closure of M8, and that the way they wish to put this into effect has a good chance of being effective. The RUC have informed the Garda of their intentions, and if the Secretary of State is content with these arrangements we will inform the RUC that they may arrange for this work to be done. We will also arrange for the Department of Foreign Affairs to be informed that the closure work is being carried out at M8 for security reasons, just in case the Garda should have omitted to inform them.



P COULSON
Law and Order Division

5 September 1984