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Reference Code: 2001/43/1449

Title: Aer Lingus press release regarding importation of arms to Ireland

Creation Date(s): 18 May, 1970

Level of description: Item

Extent and medium: 2 pages

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Access Conditions: Open

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-Issued verbally at 7 p.m. on Monday, May 18th

The following statement relating to the current story on another alleged attempt to import arms to Ireland, was released today (May 18) by Aer Lingus, Dublin.

On Saturday night last (May 16) we were informed of reports in London and Belfast that Lufthansa Vienna had made telex contact early last week with Aer Lingus Frankfurt requesting space last week for a consignment of arms from Frankfurt to Dublin. Our Chief Press Officer checked with cargo management at our Dublin headquarters and established that no request or report had reached us here about any such consignment. In the knowledge of a management standing instruction that no arms should be transported anywhere and that any enquiries for transport of arms should be transmitted immediately to headquarters in Dublin, our spokesman then issued a denial to London and Belfast that any contact had been made with us last week.

The reports in London continued on yesterday (Sunday) and were supported by repeated statements from a Lufthansa public relations spokesman that a telex message had been sent by Lufthansa Vienna to the Aer Lingus office last week and that a telex reply had been sent from Aer Lingus Frankfurt refusing the consignment. We tried on Sunday to make contact with our Aer Lingus officials in Frankfurt and with the responsible Lufthansa officials in Germany or Vienna but we failed because this is the Whit Holiday weekend on the Continent. We did get a garbled message secondhand from an Aer Lingus Frankfurt official. It was contradictory in its terms but left room for doubt in our minds. In these circumstances we felt that we had not enough direct information to reiterate last night (Sunday) our earlier statement of Saturday night that there was no substance in the report or to contradict again the repeated Lufthansa statement that

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telexes had been exchanged last week between Lufthansa Vienna and Aer Lingus Frankfurt. We decided to accept the Lufthansa statement pending further enquiries.

It is noteworthy in all this that no question has arisen that Aer Lingus transported or was willing to transport arms at any time. The only fact that needed confirmation or otherwise was whether any communication was made last week between Lufthansa Vienna and Aer Lingus Frankfurt.

We have today (Monday) interviewed in Dublin our cargo representative at Frankfurt. He states unequivocally, "I did not receive any message and was not asked to accommodate any unusual bookings in the last week. I am certain had the telex come from Vienna as stated I would have been contacted for my decision".

In the light of this we are no longer prepared to accept the Lufthansa statement.

Tomorrow (Tuesday) when staff are available again at our office in Frankfurt we will make complete enquiries from all persons there. It seems to us an unusual coincidence that the same dates of the month, the 14th and 15th, should have been quoted in this flurry of reports as the dates on which a month earlier - 14th and 15th April - Lufthansa Vienna had sought to reserve space for arms on the Frankfurt/Dublin flight and had been refused by Aer Lingus.

end

NOTE: Following the release of the above statement, Lufthansa German Airlines admitted that they had made an error in transmitting copies of telex messages from Vienna to London. The relevant dates should, in fact, have read April 14 and 15, and not May 14 and 15. There was, therefore, no substance whatever in the stores alleging an attempt last week to import arms.

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18 May 1970