



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Report on today's press conference by senior RUC officers
responding to questions about the Marley funeral
(Radio Ulster, 5 p.m., 8 April 1987)

Presenter: This afternoon senior police officers of the RUC explained their actions to journalists. First, Assistant Chief Constable Stanley Steenson explained what arrangements had been made with the Marley family.

Steenson: There were actually three demands, or three requests, made to us on Monday. One was that we should leave the path clear from the front of the house right down to where the hearse would be. Secondly, there was a request that we would not flank the hearse. And the third request was that we would not flank the coffin. Now, we were given guarantees that there would be no question of any paramilitary trappings, that there would be three men at each side of the coffin and then we would take up position immediately behind that. Now, we acceded to those requests right at the beginning of the week so I would endorse fully what our Chief Constable has said. I see absolutely no reason from a police point of view, or indeed any other point of view, why that funeral could not have gone ahead on the Monday as planned.

Interviewer: What changed on Monday, what was different when you got to the funeral?

Steenson: What happened on Monday was this, that whenever the cortege was being brought out there was a lull, and then there was a rush made towards police lines. We had exactly the same thing on the Tuesday. I'm convinced, I'm satisfied from what I observed by being there that that was totally orchestrated to prevent the funeral from taking place. I'm convinced of that because everything was peaceful, everything was calm. We had already negotiated with the clergy who were there and we had given the undertakings and I had told the clergymen that I'd be right there with them, right at the front, to ensure if there was any fear on the part of the Marley family, to ensure that there would be no police interference and that was the position.

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Interviewer: Mr. Steenson, could I ask you though ..
(interruption)

Hermon: By the way the short answer was that PIRA and Sinn Fein took command of the situation.

Presenter: But how did the Chief Constable, Sir John Hermon, respond to comments made by the Catholic Bishop of Derry, Dr. Edward Daly, about the heavy police presence at the recent IRA funeral in his city?

Hermon: I respect what he said. I will say that it was after very careful consideration by the commanders on the ground with my full support that they had that deployment and strength. Because you have also seen on occasions, not least in West Belfast, where we endeavoured to take a distanced approach, hoping that those people would acknowledge the dignity of a funeral and they exploited it by a paramilitary show of strength, by the production of very sinister weapons, and the firing of volleys. Those weapons were seized. People were arrested and charged and we have found, sadly, that when we did adopt a tactic of standing back and giving those people the opportunity to conduct their funerals and bury their dead within the law, that they breached it, and it was with great regret that we had to change out stand.

Interviewer: What do you say to Fr. Denis Faul's assertion that your heavy police presence at such funerals is counter-productive and is guiding people into the ranks of the IRA?

Hermon: I think that there's that risk. We have a total community to police and the law to maintain. I would say this: that all the approaches towards resolving this problem by very responsible people were seemingly directed to the RUC and when I asked why they did not direct similar requests to Provisional IRA and PIRA the remark was "they are of the damned and they will give nothing".