



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Meeting with Mr. Jim Dougal, RTE Correspondent,  
Northern Ireland

1. I met Mr. Jim Dougal, Northern Ireland Correspondent of RTE, in the course of a visit to Belfast on 20 April. Dougal said that there was still a great deal of disquiet about the events which had led to the killing of the two British soldiers on the Andersonstown Road. While not wanting to explain away the events, he said that he found the behaviour of the two soldiers very difficult to understand. He said that his understanding was that the soldiers car had approached the funeral cortege as it travelled up the Andersonstown Road at very high speed and that when it came within yards of the funeral, the driver switched on the headlights and put his hand on the horn, at which point he swerved into the inner road-way to avoid driving into the funeral. He then reversed the car and it was stopped by one of the black taxis. However, Dougal found it very difficult to understand why a soldier, even with a minimum of training, would have so behaved and, indeed, he had heard from some contacts in the British Army at Lisburn that the soldier driving the car had been a "gung-ho" type and would have certainly brought his colleague, who had just arrived in the North, down the Andersonstown Road to see the funeral. What is very difficult to understand is why the driver on approaching the funeral did not simply turn the car around and drive back up the Andersonstown Road which he knew was perfectly clear.
2. Dougal went on to describe in some detail his contacts with the RUC after they had requested the tapes of the RTE film of the events. Dougal said that eventually he had been relieved that RTE's lawyers had taken the view that he should hand over the film since, if RTE had not done so, his crew would have been the only one of those present at the funeral not to have handed over the tape. He

mentioned that there had been a particularly nasty incident at a Loyalist demonstration some days following Andersonstown when a Unionist crowd had attacked a BBC camera crew prior to the BBC's decision to hand over the tapes to the RUC. However, Dougal is very concerned about a tripod which one member of his crew had with them at the funeral. The tripod was taken by one of the crowd who used it to smash one of the windows in the vehicle. When the RTE man subsequently found the tripod it was covered with blood. The RUC asked him for the tripod at the scene at Andersonstown and he handed it over. He also made a brief statement to the RUC. Dougal is concerned that the cameraman could be called as a witness at the trial and he is worried that this could have implications for RTE crews in Belfast.

3. Dougal said that there were a number of very strange stories circulating in Belfast about the Gibraltar killings. One story he had heard from a reliable media source was that a message of congratulations had been sent from Downing Street to the SAS team minutes after the shootings. There was little doubt in his mind that the decision to kill the members of the active service unit had been taken at political level. He also had heard that there had been strong criticism within Sinn Fein about the timing of their statement admitting the presence of an active service unit on the Rock.
4. Dougal said that he was very pleased with his visit to the United States over the St. Patrick's Day period. He expressed gratitude to Ambassador MacKernan as well as to Martin Burke and Declan Kelleher for the broad range of contacts which they arranged for him on Capitol Hill. In the event, he had had interviews with a large number of the Irish American political leadership including Brian Donnelly, Chris Dodd, Tom Foley and Joe Kennedy. He said that he had been particularly impressed by the Embassy's success in the "greening" of Speaker Jim Wright. Both he and Shane Kenny, who was also in Washington during the St.

Patrick's Day period, were very positively surprised at the new Speaker's awareness of the details of Anglo-Irish issues. Dougal said that he was very appreciative of the efforts made by the Government Press Secretary and by the Department in ensuring the showing of the interview with Minister Flynn at the White House and the coverage of the White House ceremony itself. He said that he had been shocked by Patrick Kinsella's decision not to televise his report of the White House ceremony on St. Patrick's evening on RTE television, despite the fact that it had been shown across the United States in a number of Western European countries as well as in New Zealand and Australia. The coverage was credited to RTE as exclusive filmage of the White House on that day. In fact, the Embassy in Washington had to make considerable efforts to get Dougal and the RTE team into the Oval Office on the day because the White House had excluded all media because they wanted to avoid any questioning of the President's decision to send US troops to Honduras.

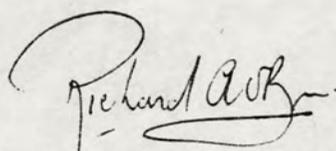
5. Dougal said that he had also been irritated to learn of the difficult exchange between Nick Coffee of "Today Tonight" and Vice President Bush in Chicago. I confirmed to Dougal on a confidential basis that the incident had caused some embarrassment to the Consul General in Chicago who had contacted one of Bush's friends in Chicago to facilitate Coffee's interview with the Vice President during the Illinois primary. When Bush made himself available to RTE on the expectations that he would be asked about Ireland, Coffee in fact asked him about the American economy and his alleged involvement in the Irangate affair. Bush became angry and ended the interview abruptly.
6. Dougal said that the visit of Congressman Joe Kennedy to Northern Ireland had been a particular boost to the nationalist community. It had provided a very significant morale boost to the people of West Belfast who felt that an important person from outside Northern Ireland was

taking a serious interest in their circumstances. Overall, the visit had been very important for the SDLP. Dougal felt that the NIO had handled the entire visit very badly and he felt that the responsibility for this rested on the shoulders of John McConnell of the political section of the NIO who failed to make the necessary effort to ensure that the visit went smoothly. He also had heard that the visit by Unionist MP, Ken Maginnis, to the United States (and indeed to the Boston area to coincide with the Taoiseach's visit there) had been inspired by the NIO if not in fact paid for by them.

7. Dougal clearly welcomed the outcome of the Irish Independent opinion poll on the strong level of support in the South for the Sinn Fein/SDLP talks. Dougal said that he had very little information on what was happening within the talks, but there was a clear impression that serious issues were being discussed and the great majority of the SDLP were wholeheartedly supportive of Hume. He did feel that there was a serious problem with Eddie McGrady and with the fact that he was opposed to a central development of SDLP policy. However, Dougal believes that a major part of McGrady's difficulty is the fact that he has not yet become comfortable with his role at Westminster and he feels very much the junior part of the Hume/Mallon relationship there.
8. Dougal also mentioned that he had a brief meeting with Frank Millar, former general secretary of the OUP, who now works with Independent television in London. Millar commented of the Hume/Adams talks that Hume's central message to Adams was "ease off, we've won". Millar was very cynical about the present Unionist leadership and felt that there would be no political progress within Unionism until present leadership decided to go or were pushed by the membership of their respective parties.
9. Dougal said that the Anglo-Irish Conference meeting in London on 25 March had provoked a very positive reaction among the nationalist community in the North. He felt

that it had created a new political momentum behind the Agreement and brought the work of the Conference closer to the realities of peoples' lives. In fact, Congressman Kennedy's visit had, among other things, highlighted the very serious economic and social level of deprivation in West Belfast. Following the Conference meeting, he had raised with Denis Kennedy of the EEC Office in Belfast, the prospect of EEC finances being made available for West Belfast. Dougal said that he had been surprised by Kennedy's dismissive attitude towards his enquiry. He told Dougal that he was not aware of any submission from either Government to the Community for any particular additional resources for West Belfast.

10. Dougal felt that the neglect of West Belfast stood in sharp contrast to the announcement by the Secretary of State of a £15m expansion which would create over 500 new jobs at the Moy Park poultry farms at Craigavon, Dungannon and Moira. The instinctive reaction of a large number of nationalists would be - "that's very good news but can we have some jobs too please". Dougal said that there were serious economic problems also developing on the social welfare budget in Northern Ireland which would hit very large sections of the nationalist community. As he understood it, the British Government intended to cut up to £40m from the social welfare budget in the coming year. That, taken together with the effects of the poll tax, if it comes into law, will be a major blow to the nationalist community. The poll tax has the added disadvantage that it is not related to the ability to pay, is levied on every adult living in a property and does not take into account large family-size.



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Press Section,  
27 April 1988.

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