



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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GIBRALTAR

The following appears to be the circumstances which resulted in the shootings of three people in Gibraltar on 6 March. This part of the note is based on press reports.

- 1st Royal Anglian Regiment is currently based in Gibraltar having completed a tour of duty in Northern Ireland (Derry) over a year ago. [Gibraltar is said to be the place from which the tracking of the Eksund was masterminded. It is also reputed that deep in the rock is a mock Ulster village used in military training].
- Mairead Farrell, Sean Savage, Dan McCann and possibly another first arrived in Spain (Costa del Sol) in November 1987.
- They were travelling on false passports, Irish and British.
- They were the object of a joint Spanish/British surveillance operation for a period of months. They were seen in Gibraltar prior to 6 March.
- From mid-February on, a number of British people check into the Rock Hotel in Gibraltar with vague bookings, e.g. "about a week".
- On 5 March the IRA say "We intend to leave something more than a calling card for Mrs. Thatcher's forces shortly".
- On 6 March a Spanish registered Renault 5 is driven into Gibraltar and parked 500 yards from the Governor's residence in front of which the changing of the guard takes place on Tuesdays.
- A second car is driven to the frontier and left on the Spanish side. Its occupants walk into Gibraltar.

- Mairead Farrell, Sean Savage and Dan McCann meet in Gibraltar and walk towards the frontier. They were unarmed and wearing summer clothing.
- Shots were fired at them by plainclothes SAS men when they were 600 yards from the airport on the Gibraltar side (the frontier being on the far side).
- Two were shot together. One either ran and was shot some distance away or was shot and able to run this distance. In any event, the third body was some distance away.
- "An Phoblacht's" version of the incident is as follows:

The three were on "active service" in Gibraltar at the time and had "access to and control over" 140 lbs of explosives. "British forces, with Spanish assistance, had detected the volunteers shortly before they were killed. They were aware that no explosives were in Gibraltar and they knew full well that the three volunteers were unarmed. On Sunday morning, a group of 12 SAS gunmen in plain clothes were landed from a special flight at the airfield close to the Spanish frontier. Along with other security personnel, they staked out the area in close proximity to the border".

On Sunday afternoon at 2.30 p.m. local time, as the three walked past a garage in Winston Churchill Avenue, a quarter of a mile from the border with Spain, "they were identified to the highly-trained and well-armed professional killers who gunned them down without warning".

"Eye witnesses told how two of the volunteers fell dead on the spot while the third managed to stagger 200 yards before collapsing at the King's Lion fuel depot which stands only yards from the frontier with Spain. Having carried out their orders the 12 assassins were immediately flown out of Gibraltar".

- Local security forces attempted to defuse the bomb said to be 500 lbs of \_\_\_\_\_ in the Renault 5.
- Five hours after the shooting 11 people who had made vague bookings checked out of the Rock Hotel.
- On \_\_\_\_\_ March a Spanish-registered Ford Fiesta, whose locks match keys found on one of the bodies, is discovered in an underground car-park in Marbella. It contained \_\_\_\_\_ lbs of Semtex explosives and a timer set at 11h15 which would have coincided with the changing of the guard.

Official information given to us complements the above as follows.

Statement by Howe to the House of Commons on 7 March

- two of the three had a criminal record;
- a fourth, who was under Spanish surveillance, did reconnaissance work in Gibraltar;
- their activity suggests that the terrorist act might be in connection with the Guard Mounting ceremony which takes place on Tuesday;
- Gibraltar Police asked for military assistance;
- shortly before 1.00 p.m. one of those shot was seen to park his car in Gibraltar in an area where the band for the Guard Mounting assembled;
- he was seen making some adjustments to the vehicle;
- an hour and a half later the other two entered Gibraltar on foot and joined the third in town at approximately 3.00 p.m.;
- their presence and actions near the car gave rise to strong suspicion that it contained a bomb, which appeared to be corroborated by rapid technical examination of the car;
- about 3.30 p.m. all three left the scene and started walking towards the border;
- near the border they were challenged by the security forces;

- when challenged they made movements which led the military personnel operating in support of the Gibraltar Police to conclude that their own lives and the lives of others were under threat;
- in light of this response they were shot dead;
- subsequently they were found to be unarmed;
- there was no bomb;
- keys on one of the bodies match a car found on the Spanish side of the border which contained an alias set of passports, electrical tape, wire and an alarm clock;
- keys were found for a third car;
- the search for this car and the explosives is continuing;
- an inquest will be held in Gibraltar.

Information provided by the Foreign Office on 8 March

- Sean Savage had parked the Renault 5 on 6 March with a view to blocking off a space;
- there were alterations to the car which are often an indication of use for a car bomb;
- "suggestion" that security forces believed that one of the three had a triggering device which could have detonated the bomb;
- search for the third car is continuing.

PQ reply by Mrs. Thatcher, House of Commons, 9 March

- In reply to a question by David Harris (Con.) asking whether she agreed that Gibraltar showed the importance of maintaining the PTA, Mrs. Thatcher said that all would agree that there should be no repeat of the Greenjackets, Harrade and Enniskillen atrocities. She said that she was very relieved that this case did not end that way.

Statements made by the Defence Secretary on TV on 10 March

- the Government will cooperate fully with the inquest in Gibraltar and, if requested, will send witnesses to account for the actions of the SAS team responsible;

- the soldiers were acting within the law and had to make a split second decision whether to shoot.

"Sources in Whitehall" on 10 March

- the security forces involved may not appear at the inquest, for their own safety;
- even if they did give evidence the likelihood was that it would be in camera.

PQ reply by Mrs. Thatcher, House of Commons, 11 March

- In reply to a question by Rob Hayward (Con.), Mrs. Thatcher said that most people were relieved that "due to an excellent security operation another terrible tragedy was avoided". She said that she was sure everyone would want to "express thanks to all those involved".

The information received on the killings either through the media or from the Foreign Office or in the form of Howe's statement raises the following questions.

- How close was the surveillance of Farrell, Savage and McCann? How did it miss out on the identity of a supposed fourth person?
- On 6 March were Farrell etc. followed from their hotel in Spain to Gibraltar?
- Was it not apparent that they were wearing (light) summer clothing under which it would be difficult to conceal a weapon?
- Why was it believed that the Renault on Sunday carried the explosives if intelligence showed that the bomb was to explode on Tuesday?

- How could the surveillance have erred in believing that the Renault 5 on 6 March was carrying explosives? Would not the amount (500 lbs) claimed to be in the car have caused the suspension to sag?
- Why were the local authorities still saying that there was 500 lbs of explosives in the car after Howe had said there was none?
- Were Farrell etc. challenged? Eye witnesses do not bear this out.
- Whether or not the three were challenged, why did highly trained security officers feel they had to shoot in the head and chest?
- What information, if any, led to the discovery of the Ford Fiesta in Malaga on 8 March?

#### Reaction in Britain

It is disturbing to note that there was an across the board satisfaction with the killings. When Howe made his statement one lone voice (Eric Heffer) queried whether it was right to kill unarmed terrorists; his query was not well received.

However, since then it is noticeable that there appears to be an acceptance that the killings will be investigated. Michael Mates, M.P., on BBC TV on [7/8] March did not repeat the jingoistic satisfaction expressed by MPs on 7 March but deflected criticism by saying that he wished to wait until he knew the facts. Welcome though this development in attitude may be, it will be used as a means to keep the lid on this matter.

+ D. Owen

Over 60 Labour MPs have tabled an Early Day Motion calling for a full explanation of the incident which it described as an act of terrorism and tantamount to capital punishment without

trial. It will be necessary for the Labour leadership and Conservative MPs to support the motion before the Government takes it seriously.

It is interesting to note the comparison of the British reaction to Loughgall. In that case we received a detailed response to our queries and the British conveyed their regrets. In that case also, a bomb had gone off and the IRA men killed were armed.

In contrast no bomb exploded in Gibraltar, Farrell etc. were unarmed and little has been given to us by way of information even in relation to the Irish passports said to have been used.

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