



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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HUGH COVENEY

Impressions gained at private dinner with:

General John de Chastelain - 28/01/97.

1. Nice guy (age 60)
2. Interesting history and background:
 - MOTHER, ~~NEUWA~~ Welsh (Irish Catholic).
 - FATHER - 2nd World War - Romania; Scottish Huegenot (presbyterian), worked in Oil Business.
3. John in U.S. with his mother and sister up to 1943 came back to U.K. (1943) to boarding school North of England.
4. After war his family moved to Canada - his Father to work in Alberta with oil company.
5. John remained in Edinburgh; intended to go to Oxford after military service in U.K.
6. Father subsequently advised him to consider Canadian forces who would subsequently pay for his 3rd level education. He never left and ultimately became Chief of Staff.
7. Served all over Canada; Cyprus (U.N.) under Irish Commander Quinn; NATO etc.
8. Prime Minister Mulrooney appointed him Ambassador to Washington (1993) - Very unusual to appoint a non professional diplomat to that post. New Prime Minister recalled him from Washington and then asked him to take over his previous job as C.O.S. which he agreed to do for 2 years only.

9. Offered his resignation over army video scandal - resignation not accepted - served out his 2 years.
10. Thinks Mitchell should chair Strand 2 - and he himself the Decommissioning body - has said so (informally) to British; surprised that he was ever asked to chair Strand 2. Recalled Mitchell's answer when media enquired at time of publication of International Report who would chair decommissioning body. Believes he was probably chosen for Strand 2 to assuage Unionist fears about Mitchell which may have died down by now.
11. He seems sensitive to being considered pro U.K. and pro Unionist. In fact he was surprised that someone of his background (religion, U.K. passport, etc) should have been thought suitable in the first place. He struck me as being anxious to be seen as utterly independent and his own man.
12. He is in for the long haul - mentioned two years or more.
13. He previously knew Mitchell (though not well) from his time as Ambassador in Washington - was involved in a T.V. debate with him at that time.
14. He doesn't think Irish delegation can do anything more than we are doing and feels we are playing it about right.
15. George, Harry and himself appear to get on very well and are all very committed to the process.
17. A useful and informative meeting.