

still circulating that a patrol had called in for a drink at the Hughes Hotel (?), Middletown. There were also the allegations of the helicopter running out of fuel; he quite understood that helicopters needed to refuel frequently if engaged on continuous operations, but could any further information be given. Further a curious snippet of information had come from an anonymous 'radio ham' who, it was asserted, had tuned into the Army and Police communicating with the helicopter. Apparently the crew were unable to identify Tynan Abbey, and were told by ground control that they had their map upside down. McCusker understood that the helicopter would normally pick up someone from the SF who knew the locality to act as a guide, but it was alleged that the pilot had said that "there was no one who knew the procedures" on this point.

Replying to these points Mr Goodhart said that there were obvious problems in giving any detailed information about the operation; it was not the practice to give details of security operations, nor was there any intention of changing this practice. He could tell Mr Molyneaux that there were a substantial number of the SF in the area at the time, and it was possible that a patrol had been seen leaving an outbuilding of a farm belonging to a well-known Republican. The patrol was there without the owner's knowledge. The fact that patrols occasionally did this sort of thing obviously was something that we did not wish to be known. But this could have been the basis for Mr Paisley's allegation. It was agreed that it was disgraceful to make such allegations without any substantiation; it was difficult to see how such an allegation could be refuted apart from a straight denial.

Answering Mr Molyneaux's other points, Mr Goodhart said that a number of soldiers did hear the explosions; those on the border sat tight to act as a cut off to augment the other road blocks. This was the correct action; any car would have to pass the

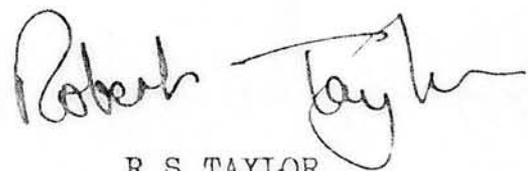
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road block: it was unlikely that the escaping terrorists would take to their feet. As for the allegations about the helicopter, a reaction force was landed at the Abbey and the helicopter was available for tasks; a helicopter's endurance is finite and it did have to refuel. However any allegations that the SF reaction was less than it should have been was ludicrous. The Stronges had refused protection for the past 11 years. They had believed it to be counter productive. The SF operation was all that it could have been; the Chief Constable was entirely satisfied with the support received from the Army.

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In conclusion, Mr Molyneaux said that he would like to wait for the reply to Mr McCusker's letter to Mr Atkins concerning the rumours that an Army patrol in uniform were in the Hughes Hotel, Middletown. Mr Alison confirmed that there was no truth in this; the last visit to the bar was shortly after Christmas. He, Mr Molyneaux, would then like to write about the "wining and dining" allegation, but he thought that this was confined to the Army and should be addressed to Mr Goodhart or Mr Nott. It was agreed, however that MOD and NIO would co-operate closely and that replies to both letters were likely to come from either Mr Atkins or Mr Alison.

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