

49th Anniversary: McGurk's Bar Families Challenge Chief Constable to Prove IRA Lies

Ciarán MacAirt, Paper Trail, December 4th 2020



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On 49th Anniversary, McGurk's Bar Families Challenge Chief Constable to Prove IRA Lies

The families of the 15 victims killed in the McGurk's Bar Massacre have challenged Chief Constable Simon Byrne to prove police claims in an RUC Special Branch briefing to Stormont officials days after the bomb that ***"two of those killed were known IRA members"***.

Among the 15 civilians murdered in the bar and family home on 4th December 1971 were two children, James Cromie (13) and Maria McGurk (14).

The families recently secured unredacted copies of (1) Conclusions of a Joint Security Committee Meeting at Stormont Castle held on 16th December 1971; (2) The RUC Special Branch Assessment which was Agenda 1 at this high-level meeting.

The Joint Security Committee meeting included the Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Brian Faulkner, and his Minister of State in the Ministry of Home Affairs, John Taylor – now Lord Kilcooney – who has upset the families on numerous occasions with his false allegations about the explosion.

Also present were the General Officer Commanding, Lt General Sir Harry Tuzo, who was in charge of the British Army in the north of Ireland; Chief Constable Graham Shillington of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and Assistant Chief Constable David Johnston, Head of Special Branch.

Serial 5 of the Special Branch Assessment of Agenda 1 regards the McGurk's Bar Massacre:

"Circumstantial evidence indicates that this was a premature detonation and two of those killed were known IRA members at least one of whom had been associated with bombing activities. Intelligence indicates that the bomb was destined for use elsewhere in the city."

Ciarán MacAirt, a grandson of two of the McGurk's Bar victims, discovered reference to this high-level meeting in Public Records Office Northern Ireland (PRONI) nearly a decade ago and it featured in the Police Ombudsman's report of 2011 as proof that the police briefed the Northern Ireland Prime Minister and the General Officer Commanding.

Nevertheless, this is the first time that the families have secured the unredacted files as previously MacAirt was denied access to the contents due to "National Security".

MacAirt has now raised a Freedom of Information request with the police for provenance of the Security Branch Assessment and challenged Chief Constable Simon Byrne to prove that two of the victims were members of the Irish Republican Army and the RUC had credible intelligence that it was an IRA bomb for another target.

MacAirt said:

“The Chief Constable of the RUC and the head of RUC Special Branch lied to Government about our loved ones and we want to know why. I had to find this critical evidence as neither RUC nor PSNI released it to historical investigations. None of the previous historical or police investigations were able to tell our families the source or provenance of these heinous RUC lies which criminalized each and every one of our loved ones.”

“We have since discovered that the ‘line’ that the McGurk’s Bar Massacre was a result of an IRA ‘own-goal’, had its origins in a secret agreement between Brigadier Frank Kitson and the RUC hours after the attack.”

Brigadier Frank Kitson informed British Army 39 Brigade around 4 hours after the attack:

“RUC have a line that the bomb in the pub was a bomb designed to be used elsewhere, left in the pub to be picked up by the Provisional IRA. Bomb went off and was a mistake. RUC press office have a line on it – NI should deal with them.”

[Reference <https://mcgurksbar.com/frank-kitson-implicated-in-mcgurks-bar/general-sir-frank-kitson-implicated-in-mcgurks-bar-cover-up/>]

MacAirt continued:

“So, on the 49th anniversary of the murder of our loved ones and the subsequent police cover-up, we challenge Chief Constable Byrne to prove the provenance of his predecessor’s lies and provide evidence that the police simply did not create the McGurk’s Bar lie to suit its own sick political agenda. Chief Constable Byrne can access that information immediately as it is buried in Police Service of Northern Ireland archives.” /ENDS

Notes for Editors:

- Ciarán MacAirt is a grandson of two of the victims. MacAirt’s grandmother, Kathleen Irvine, was murdered in the attack and his grandfather, John, badly injured.
- Contact Ciarán for further information via info@mcgurksbar.com



1971/Joint Sec/50.

CONCLUSIONS OF A MEETING OF THE JOINT SECURITY COMMITTEE HELD ON THURSDAY
16 DECEMBER 1971 IN STORMONT CASTLE AT 10.30 AM

PRESENT:

The Prime Minister (in the Chair)
The Minister of State at the Ministry of Home Affairs
The Senior Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Home Affairs
The GOC
The Chief Constable
The Government Security Adviser
The Deputy UK Representative
The Security Liaison Officer
The Assistant Chief Constable Crime Special Branch

ALSO PRESENT:

The Secretary to the Police Authority
Mr C P Milway
Mr B Cummings

Mr T Cromeey

1. SPECIAL BRANCH ASSESSMENT

The Assessment reflected a stepping up of IRA activity.

The Assistant Chief Constable Crime Special Branch said

- (a) that field intelligence had failed to produce a single copy of the leaflet reputedly in circulation in Catholic areas warning that city and town centres would be subjected to bomb attacks before Christmas and should be avoided. It could well be deliberate rumour spreading designed to achieve its own effect on seasonal trading, though the possibility of attacks could not of course be ruled out;
- (b) that there was no evidence of an IRA list of 'marked' persons.

On (a), the GOC and Chief Constable confirmed that additional watch was being kept, and it was agreed that efforts should be made, eg in the course of this afternoon's Parliamentary proceedings, to publicise the need for stores and shops to take special precautions.

The GOC said that Army strength in Strabane had been trebled.

2. SCHEDULE OF INCIDENTS AND SITUATION REPORT

The GOC and Chief Constable said special attention was being paid to security provision for possible target personnel living within 5 miles of the border.

The Chief Constable referred to the Committee's decision last week to approve the arming of the Chief Security Officer at Chichester House (Ministry of Commerce). He had since had a similar application in respect of 3 security guards at the Europa Hotel and had authorised the issue of a firearms certificate to one of them who was fully trained ex-Army. He had also authorised the issue of

SPECIAL BRANCH ASSESSMENT FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 15th DECEMBER 1971I. GENERAL SITUATION

1. The period under review has been one in which the I.R.A. has suffered badly at the hands of the Security Forces and has reacted, predictably, in a vicious and indiscriminate manner.
2. For their part the Brady I.R.A. have sought to bring the commercial life of the City centre of Belfast to a halt by attacks with explosives on commercial premises and Protestant-owned properties. These have been mounted with a reckless disregard for human life and with the apparent aims of capturing newspaper headlines and of provoking a Protestant backlash which could be used to justify their actions. In the latter aim they failed. In the Border area they have initiated a campaign of assassinations against members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and have continued to attack other elements of the Security Forces with explosives and firearms. There have been almost daily armed attacks by groups operating from within the Republic of Ireland.
3. The Goulding I.R.A., despite their apparent trend towards attempting to achieve their aims by political and subversive means, have undertaken a series of "punitive" attacks on the property of members of "the Establishment" using arson and explosives as reprisals for Security Force operations in "working-class areas". As in the attack on Senator Barnhill, they have not hesitated to resort to murder to accomplish their aim.
4. There has been a total of 61 explosives attacks during the period and a further 9 attempts have failed. Of these only 19 attacks and 3 attempts have occurred in Belfast, possibly reflecting the increasing difficulty being experienced in importing explosives into the City and the extent of the damage done to their organisation by the Security Forces. Elsewhere there have been 10 explosions in Londonderry, 7 in Strabane, 8 in County Tyrone, 6 in Co. Armagh, 7 in Co. Down and 4 in Co. Fermanagh. Of these, the majority have occurred in areas close to the Border and it is known that a large proportion were externally mounted by groups operating from within the Republic.
5. The most disastrous explosion of the period occurred on 4th December. McGurk's bar in Belfast was totally demolished killing 15 people and wounding a further 13. Circumstantial evidence indicates that this was a premature detonation and two of those killed were known I.R.A. members at least one of whom had been associated with bombing activities. Intelligence indicates that the bomb was destined for use elsewhere in the City. It is also relevant that three other members of the I.R.A. arrested on 11th December, while conducting a final reconnaissance of their target,