

W Coles

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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

Prime Minister (2)

AT 30/9



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

Willie Rickett Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

30 September 1985

Even worse than the 10/9
MT,

Dear Willie

MAZE PRISON ESCAPE

You will wish to have a full report for the Prime Minister of the escape from H M Prison Maze on 25 September. I attach a note setting out the facts as we now know them.

Sir James Hennessey is urgently engaged on his review, and we must await his report before it will be possible properly to assess what went wrong. As you know the Secretary of State spoke publicly shortly after the incident, and has made clear his determination to ensure all possible steps are taken to prevent security being breached again. He will wish to consider the terms of further public comment in the light of Sir James' report.

Yours ever

Derek

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REPORT ON MAZE ESCAPE INCIDENT AT HMP MAZE ON
SUNDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 1983

BACKGROUND

On Sunday, H7 was exclusively occupied by Republican prisoners. Prior to the Loyalist protest action in October 1982 it had been a mixed block housing both Loyalist and Republican prisoners. At 2 pm there were 126 prisoners in H7 in 4 wings of 31; 31; 31; 33. There were 24 Prison Officers in total on duty in the Block under the command of an Acting Principal Officer. There is no reduction in the manning of security posts in Maze on Sundays: though there are fewer Prison Officers in the prison because there are no visits and no prison work on Sunday.

INCIDENT - SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

At approx 2.45 pm a prison orderly in the Circle area at the centre of H7 asked to see the Principle Officer in charge. On entering the office the prisoners produced a hand-gun but was immediately tackled by one of the two Prison Officers present. Only when a second prisoner entered also carrying a gun was the office taken over.

At the same time Prison Officers in all 4 wings were attacked by prisoners and over-powered and the officers guarding the 2 grille gates between the wings and the central circle were also attacked - in one case by a prisoner with a gun and in the other by a prisoner with a screw-driver. Each H Block has a central control room which acts as a control and communication link with the Governor through the Emergency Control Room of the prison. Prison Officer Adams was on duty in the control room of H7. He was shot twice in the head by a prisoner in the circle firing through the grille gate into the control room.

At this point the prisoners had internal control of the whole H Block with keys to all wings and with no alarm having been

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raised by the seriously-wounded Prison Officer Adams.

A prison orderly in the Block (McFarlane) emerged from the Block and began sweeping the yard. He approached the Prison Officer at the double-lock gate at the perimeter at H7 and told him that he had been sent to clean the area inside the inner gate. The Prison Officer opened the inner gate to admit McFarlane and was then forced at gun-point by McFarlane to walk back to the Block.

At this point the prisoners then had control of the perimeter of H7.

At approximately 3.25 pm the kitchen van bringing the meals for the prisoners in H7 from the central prison kitchen arrived at H7. When the Prison Officer got out of his van to unload the meals a prisoner with a gun forced him into H7. Inside H7 it was explained to the van driver that he would be required to drive the van from H7 to the main gate on the prison perimeter.

The Prison Officer driver drove the van out of H7 with 37 prisoners concealed in the bak and one prisoner kneeling on the floor of the cab with a gun pointed at the Prison Officer's stomach.

The van passed through two manned control gates without being searched despite the standard security rule at Maze that all vehicles are checked when passing through a control gate.

The Prison Officer driver was instructed to park the van in the transport parking area adjacent to the main gate and tally lodge. At this point the prisoners disembarked and attacked staff in the main gate and tally lodge area. Despite being heavily outnumbered the staff resisted strongly and one Prison Officer (Ferris) was stabbed and later died. A number of others were also injured. The outer main gate in the perimeter wall of the prison was opened by a prisoner operating the hydraulic mechanism.

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The alarm went off at this point and two Prison Officers in their cars outside the main gate who were about to enter the prison drove their cars into the main gate area to block the exit.

As vehicular escape in the kitchen van was impossible the prisoners ran out the main gate and across the fields chased by Prison Officers. As a number of the escaping prisoners were wearing Prison Officer clothing the Army guard in the tower at the main gate was unsure as to whether any particular person was a Prison Officer or an escaping prisoner and in the event shot one person who was an escaping prisoner (Murray) who had just shot a pursuing prison officer in the leg. 10 prisoners, including Murray, were quickly apprehended and returned to the prison. A further 9 have since been apprehended leaving 19 prisoners still unlawfully at large.

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