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ARMY

Ref: 38X FOI 2017/05605

Date: 21 July 2017

Dear [REDACTED]

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION – INFORMATION RELATING TO MORTAR ATTACK ON
NEWTOWNHAMILTON SECURITY BASE ON 19TH MARCH 1979**

Further to our letter dated 22 June, I can confirm that your request for information has been considered under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA 2000), and the process is now complete.

You asked for the following:

"I respectfully seek anything held re a fatal Mortar attack on Newtownhamilton SF Base on 19 March 1997 and on an incident at Foxfield sangar in Forkhill some 6 weeks later in which 800 rounds of ammunition were expended. Troops involved were from D and B company 3 Queens (3rd Bn Queens Regt) who were on a Roulement tour of South Armagh between Mar & Jul 79."

I can confirm that the MOD holds some information relating to the mortar attack of Newtownhamilton security base. This information has been located in a range of documents. The relevant extracts from these documents¹, where not subject to exemptions from disclosure (see below), are provided at Annex A.

Some of the information contained within the disclosure is considered to be exempt from disclosure under S26 (Defence), as it would or would likely prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of any relevant forces. Section 26 is a qualified exemption therefore we are required to carry out an assessment of the public interest before determining whether the information should be withheld.

The factors for this public interest have determined that whilst disclosure would demonstrate openness and transparency it is outweighed by the detrimental effect public disclosure would have in revealing the capabilities of military operational planning. I have also concluded that disclosure of this information would prejudice the capability and effectiveness of the Armed Forces as disclosure would compromise the methodologies and practices employed in the gathering and analysis of information. Therefore the public interest in maintaining the exemption under Section 26 clearly outweighs the public interest in disclosure and that this information is therefore properly

¹ The remaining information in these documents was outside of the scope of your request and therefore would have been redacted if the document itself was released.

exempt. In addition, careful consideration under Section 38 (Health and Safety) must be given to the impact release of some of this information could have on the wider community, including family members, friends or relatives. I have completed this consideration, as part of a public interest test, and concluded that whilst disclosure may be of historical interest, the health and safety of individuals must be taken into account especially where release would be likely to endanger, the physical or mental health of any individual. Some information has therefore been redacted under Section 38 of the FOI Act.

Some of the information contained within these documents constitutes personal information, such as names and addresses. Under FOIA 2000 this information is exempt under Section 40 (2) by reason of the first condition under Section 40 (3) (a) (i), as disclosure would contravene data protection principles under the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA 98). This is an absolute exemption and does not require a public interest test to be conducted in order for this information to be exempt from disclosure. Therefore all information has been redacted.

No-one has been convicted for involvement in this incident and therefore it remains an open case. Release of these documents must be carefully considered under Section 31 (Law Enforcement) of the FOIA 2000. I have completed this consideration, as part of a public interest test, and have concluded that the public interest in withholding some of the information under Section 31 outweighs the public interest in full release. Some information is therefore partially exempted from disclosure. I appreciate that the incident took place 38 years ago and the passage of time can be a factor in diminishing the applicability of exemptions to information. However, in this instance the passage of time is less relevant as the PSNI continue to investigate Troubles-related incidents and the overall balance is in favour of partial exemption. In reaching this conclusion I have consulted the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and they have informed me that release of this information could adversely impact on any investigative process, and may jeopardise any future prosecutorial process.

Under section 23 (5) (Information supplied by, or relating to bodies dealing with security matters) the MOD neither confirms nor denies whether it holds any additional information in scope of your request, which would be exempt under section 23. Section 23 is an absolute exemption and not subject to a public interest test.

In addition, under section 24 (2) (National Security), which is a qualified exemption, the MOD neither confirms nor denies whether it holds any additional information in scope of your request, which if held would be exempt under S24. Section 24 is a qualified exemption and is subject to a public interest test. This should not be used as an indication that such information is or is not held.

You also asked for information regarding an incident at Foxfield Sanger in Forkhill some 6 weeks later in which around 800 rounds of ammunition were expended. I must advise that despite a search we have been unable to locate any information relating to this incident. If you could re-submit and refine your query the MOD may be able to provide some information. For example, you may clarify your request by specifying an exact date. However, please be aware that any new and refined request will still be subject to an assessment of its merits and exemptions from release may apply.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance.

If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1st Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed.

Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely

Army Secretariat

Extracts from Various Documents Relating to Mortar Attack Newtownhamilton
Security Force Base – 19 March 1979
FOI 2017/05605

RMP Gazette – 20 March 1979

7 Murder of Security Forces

CCRIO C2920/9

On Mon 19 Mar 79, information was received from HQNI, BFPO 805, that about 1348hrs that day, Newtownhamilton Security Forces base, South Armagh, had been subjected to a mortar attack during which [Redacted] Pte Woolmore P L, 3 Queens, BFPO 811, had sustained fatal injuries. In addition six other military personnel and a RUC Constable sustained various injuries. All the casualties were conveyed to the Military Wing at Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast, where their conditions are said to be not serious. The mortars, which were homemade, were launched from the back of a flat bed lorry. Reg No [Redacted], that had been hi-jacked earlier that day.

Daily Operations Brief 19-20 March 1979

4. Brigade Statistics: 1 x Soldier killed
5 x Soldiers injured
2 x RUC injured
3 x Civilians injured

3 Inf Bde

2. There was a mortar attack on the RUC Newtownhamilton. 9 x mortars were fired and 4 hit the base. 1 x soldier was killed, and 5 x soldiers and 2 x RUC were injured (none listed). 3 x civilians were also injured.

3 Infantry Brigade

Mortar Attack

NEWTOWNHAMILTON (3 Queens). At 0945 hours 4 armed and masked men hijacked a blue 8 wheeled Tipper Truck (Henner type) VRN [Redacted] in [Redacted]. The owner, [Redacted] was held at his home by 2 of the gunmen. He was later released at 1405 hours.

At 1348 hours 9 x mortar bombs were fired at

RUC NEWTOWNHAMILTON

4 x mortars landed inside the base, causing considerable damage, and 5 x mortars landed on surrounding buildings (1 on Shoe Shop, 2 on the Northern Bank, 2 on the Whitecross Hotel). There were no blinds.

Pte Woolmore, Peter Leslie (single 21)

was killed in the attack and 5 other soldiers received shrapnel injuries. They were CASEVACED by air to MPH at 1429 hours where they are currently not listed. 2 x RUC Constables and 3 x civilians were also injured, but none seriously.

The FP for the attack was established as the blue Tipper Truck [Redacted] which was parked at the junction

NEWRY RD/RATHOLE LANE

some 150 metres from the base.

At 1429 hours there was an explosion on the back of this lorry.
The area was declared clear at 1951 hours.

RUC NEWTOWNHAMILTON are investigating.

Casualties

- a. Mil killed 1
- b. Mil injured 5
- h. RUC wounded 2
- o. Civ wounded 3

HQNI Operational Summary – for period 132359 – 202359 Mar 79

GENERAL

1.One soldier has been killed and 5 soldiers and 2 RUC wounded, all in a mortar attack against NEWTOWNHAMILTON.
- 4 Mortar attack NEWTOWNHAMILTON 19 Mar. At 1342 hrs 9 mortar bombs were fired at RUC NEWTOWNHAMILTON from a truck 150m away on the NEWRY RD/RATHOLE ST junction. One soldier was killed and 5 soldiers and 2 RUC were wounded, not seriously. Full details in Annex B.
8. Search Operations. 5 RE search teams were deployed after the NEWTOWNHAMILTON mortar attack. Two searches have been route clearance operations of 3 and 91/2km respectively.
- 9 Engineers Operations
- b NEWTOWNHAMILTON As a result of the mortar attack on the base 5 RESTs and 4 x 10 ton tippers were deployed to assist at the scene.

Casualties 1979 as at 21 March

Army Killed: 2

HQNI Log Sheets – 19 Mar

Serial	DTG	To	From	Event	Action
2	1347		3	Received message from 3 QUEENS at 1348 hrs to say NEWTOWNHAMILTON is under mortar attack. 8-10 rds landed in SF ¹ base. Some civilian workers were trapped under rubble. 1 x RUC and 3 x SF cas. (Army)	
				NB All details of Newtownhamilton Mortar attack are found on INCIDENT REPORT	
7	1420		3	NB 2 x med wheeled tractors en route to NEWTOWNHAMILTON from CASTLEDILLON to help move rubble.	

Daily Occurrence Book

Serial No	DTG	Details of Occurrence	Action
783	19 Mar 19 2335 hrs	<u>MURDER OF SECURITY FORCES</u> Place: Newtownhamilton SF Base, South Armagh Date: 19 Mar 79 Time: 1348 Hrs Deceased: [Redacted] Pte Woolmore P L 3 Queens BFPO 811 Text: As a result of a mortar attack on the above place, date and time Pte Woolmore sustained fatal injuries, seven other military personnel and one RUC constable sustained various	CCRIO No. 02920/9

¹ SF Stand for Security Forces

injuries. All the casualties were conveyed to the military wing at Musgrave Park Hospital, Belfast, where their conditions are said to be not serious.

Extract from EOD Log

<u>EOD No</u>	<u>DTG Tasked</u>	<u>Bde/Unit</u>	<u>Type of Incident</u>	<u>Operator</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Grid</u>
135144	191510 Mar	3Bde/ 3 Queens	Expls x 9	[Redacted]	Newry St, Newtownhamilton 100m north of SF Base and Newry St at SF Base at RUC Stn and dwellings at Junction With Armagh St	[Redacted]

Incident

A blue & grey HINO Tipper Lorry, was hijacked near border crossing H23 at 0930hrs 19.3.79. At approximately 1340hrs the same day it was parked in Newry St, Newtownhamilton, and at approximately 1345hrs 9 mortar bombs were launched from the lorry landing in the SF Base, the RUC Stn and other premises in Newry Rd, 100-150m away. Casualties were: SF – 1 killed, 4 injured, Civilians 3 injured.

<u>EOD Action</u>	<u>Explosives</u>	<u>Dets</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
[Redacted]	Nil	Nil	[Redacted]

MORTAR ATTACKS

<u>Ser</u>	<u>DTG</u>	<u>Total Fired</u>	<u>Hit Target</u>	<u>Missed Target</u>	<u>Exploded</u>	<u>Neutralised</u>	<u>Details</u>
74	191348 Mar 79	9	4	5	9	-	Total of 10 mortars, RUC NEWTOWNHAMILTON,4 exploded inside base, 4 exploded in nearby Premises, 1 MIL (K), 5MIL (W) 2 RUC (W), 3 CIVS (W), the other mortar was left deliberately on lorry to explode which happened.