

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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SEC 25 MAR 1993
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PRIVILEGE OFFICE

HOME OFFICE
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LONDON SW1H 9AT
22 MAR 1993

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Dear Alex,

I attach a brief résumé of the events leading up to the explosions in Warrington, and the police response. This refers specifically to the police denials of the terrorists' claim to have given adequate and precise warning. For this incident, the Home Secretary thought it appropriate to issue his own statement commenting on the terrorists' claim, so that the rebuttal was given due prominence on the news media. We are considering what our approach should be for the future to this increasingly common terrorist tactic.

As I mentioned, the Home Secretary is to meet a delegation from Warrington led by the local MPs, Mr Hoyle and Mr Hall, this afternoon. Following that meeting, we shall let you have advice on and a draft reply to the letter from the Chief Executive of Warrington Borough Council to the Prime Minister.

The Home Secretary's current view is that he should visit Warrington, probably on Wednesday. We shall keep you informed of our plans.

Generally speaking, the Home Secretary remains of the view that the Government's strategy of denying the terrorists widespread news coverage of the results of their activities, and of the Government and other spokesmen eschewing high profile statements on media appearances, is the correct one. Other key aims of the strategy are to take advantage of opportunities to reinforce the pointlessness of PIRA's actions, keeping the focus on the victims; and to seek to counter any backlash against the Irish community generally. My letter of 9 December to Jenny Rowe, which I copied to your office, gives more detail. Obviously, the application of the strategy needs to be considered carefully in the circumstances of any individual incident. This can probably best be achieved by the kind of close co-operation we engaged in over the last weekend.

I am sending a copy of this letter to William Fittall in the Northern Ireland Office.

Yours sincerely
J MacNaughton

MISS J MacNAUGHTON

Alex Allan Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

WARRINGTON BOMBINGS: SATURDAY 20 MARCH 1993

At 8am on Saturday 20 March, a male caller with a heavy Irish accent telephoned the office of the Samaritans in Manchester warning that a bomb had been placed at Manchester Piccadilly and that it would explode in 30 minutes. The codeword which he gave, as reported to the police, was a not a recognised PIRA codeword, but in retrospect it bore a vague superficial similarity. There was no explosion, no device was found and the warning was later discounted as a hoax.

2. At 11.58am the Samaritans office in Merseyside was telephoned by a male caller with a heavy Irish accent who said that a bomb had been placed outside Boots, and in response to a request for clarification indicated that he was talking about the centre of Liverpool. He also quoted an unrecognised codeword, different from the earlier one but again, in retrospect, bearing some resemblance to the one normally used by PIRA. He gave a 30 minute warning.

3. In response to this call the Merseyside Police cleared the areas around a number of Boots premises in the city. However at 12.25pm a bomb exploded in a litter bin in Bridge Street, Warrington. This was followed within a minute by a second explosion, again in a litter bin, nearby. Army bomb disposal experts have estimated the explosive charge as comprising about 0.5lb of high explosive.

4. A three year old child was killed immediately and 56 people were taken to hospital with injuries, about five of which were described as extremely serious. A 12 year old boy remains critically ill and four other people are still seriously ill.

5. The Metropolitan Police Anti-Terrorist Branch quickly deployed a team to Warrington and the Head of the Branch, who visited on Sunday, reports that the Cheshire Constabulary, with the assistance of his officers, are dealing very efficiently with follow-up measures, including the extensive enquiries which are underway. A great deal of information is being received from

members of the public but so far there are no very promising leads. Film from security cameras might conceivably be of assistance when it is analysed, but the police are not pinning any great hopes on this.

— IRA. not Govt!

6. The police have firmly rebutted the claim from Dublin that there were precise and adequate warnings beforehand. This is, of course, quite untrue. No call in which Warrington was mentioned was received.

7. There is, naturally, speculation that Warrington may have been chosen in response to the arrest of three people who are believed to have been involved in the gasworks bombing on 26 February. While this may be the case, no indications to that effect have been given by PIRA.

Copies:

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