

Apology can go a long way

(Editorial, [Irish News](#))

The British army's apology to the family of Daniel Hegarty, whom they wrongly branded a terrorist, again underlines the importance of acknowledging blame and saying sorry.

The 15-year-old was shot dead by a soldier in the Creggan area of Derry during Operation Motorman in July 1972. Even though it was clear at the time he had no involvement, the army persisted in describing him as a terrorist in military publications, causing his family continued anguish.

It took a long and determined campaign, but in 2002 Northern Ireland Office minister Des Browne – now defence secretary – wrote to the Hegarty family confirming the teenager was not considered a gunman.

The statement came as an enormous relief and should have been the conclusion of that particular issue. However, the family endured renewed suffering in July this year when the review of Operation Banner again described him as a terrorist.

Now the Ministry of Defence has admitted the reference was inaccurate and accepted Daniel was innocent. The MoD also apologised to the Hegarty family and agreed to withdraw the document.

This was an unfortunate and avoidable episode, although the family has welcomed the army's apology, which has come relatively quickly.

However, this was a mistake that should not have happened and there are lessons to be learned for officials involved.

Hopefully, the army will also get the message that an admission and apology can go a long way towards mitigating the pain caused to relatives of victims.

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