

People's Democracy March.

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Headquarters

THE ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY

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should be addressed to:
INSPECTOR GENERAL, R.U.C.

Minister ^{20/2/69}
Mr. Bell ^{20/2/69} To see
P.S(S) 19th February, 1969.

Dear John,

I have had enquiries made into Miss Bernadette DEVLIN's allegations as reported in the Belfast Telegraph dated 6th January, 1969 - photocopy attached.

It is entirely wrong for Miss DEVLIN to imply that the marchers were deliberately led by the police into an ambush at Burntollet. The main organisers of the march were informed by the police before they reached Burntollet of the dangers they may encounter. Michael FARRELL, one of the organisers, using a loud hailer, addressed the marchers and told them of the dangers ahead. Notwithstanding this warning it was unanimously agreed to continue the march as planned. At that time there would have been about 600 in the march, and it was evident that they were prepared to proceed despite police warning.

Two police Land Rovers were in front of the procession. The occupants of both vehicles dismounted and took up position at the head of the parade. Police flanked the marchers on the left side. Other police were placed near the bridge and in a nearby field. A group of civilians who were opposed to the marchers attempted to block the roadway. There was no great strength in this group which broke up and dispersed as the police vehicles and escorting police moved forward. At this stage, police and marchers were subjected to a fusillade of missiles from counter demonstrators who occupied fields on the right hand side of the marchers. The front of the parade got through without much difficulty. The weight of the attack increased considerably. Counter demonstrators were now occupying fields on both sides of the road. A petrol bomb exploded near the rear of the marchers. This created confusion and panic among the marchers, many of whom ran off in various directions. Police assisted in marshalling whatever marchers were on the road and getting them on the way towards Londonderry.

It is wrong for Miss DEVLIN to allege that the front line of police ran through the barrage of stones, etc., when they should have stayed behind and afforded protection to the marchers. Due to the action taken by police the front part of the parade got through reasonably safely. The escort police drew their batons and charged the attackers, otherwise greater danger and injury would have been experienced by the marchers.

There were two police tenders immediately behind the marchers. As soon as it became apparent that active opposition was being encountered at Burntollet the personnel in both tenders dismounted and gave all the assistance possible. Police did not re-board the tenders until they were some distance on the Londonderry side of the bridge, and at a point where the re-formed parade had halted. At this stage some of the marchers were demanding that police would go to Burntollet to deal with the attackers. A Head Constable explained that there was a party of police handling this aspect and that his rearguard party, now in the tenders, may be required again at danger points ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Bill McKernan

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