

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



<b>Reference Code:</b>	2006/133/676
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	[May 1976]
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	4 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
<b>Access Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Aughnacloy - Delays at British VCP

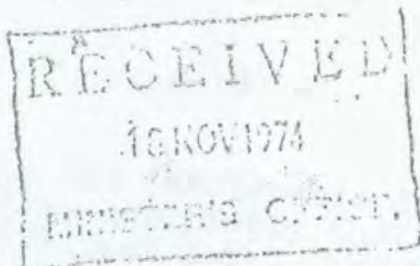
1. There have been exchanges over a number of years with the British authorities concerning Aughnacloy, a checkpoint regarded by the British as difficult to man in so far as it is very vulnerable to sniper fire. Numerous shooting incidents are reported over the years to have taken place near the VCP. Complaints about delays at Aughnacloy reached a particularly high level in November 1974. Deputy Harte felt constrained to personally bring one instance to the attention of the Northern Ireland Secretary of State. Copy of his letter attached.

2. Following repeated representations by the Department culminating in the raising of this matter by the Minister with the Secretary of State in March 1975 the British authorities constructed a "hanger" or type of covered shed through which six cars could be checked simultaneously. In December 1975 there were representations from the ITGWU that some of their members' jobs in an Emyvale concern were in danger because their employers might have to curtail production due to delays experienced in clearing produce through Aughnacloy. Subsequent reports showed the hanger was only in use at peak hours and that at other times delays were likely. We are aware of one further complaint about delays at Aughnacloy in the current year and the question has been raised by Deputy Blaney recently. It now appears that the hanger is no longer in use even at peak times. Cars are being checked one at a time at all times.

3. Recent representations regarding delays at Aughnacloy have been replied to with references to the exigencies of the security situation. The Minister may wish to press for, at a minimum, the bringing back into use of the hanger at peak rush hours.

DÁIL ÉIREANN  
BAILE ÁTRA CLIAIR, 2.  
(Dublin, 2).

15th November 1974



*Mr Sean Donlan*  
*For your information*  
*Sent 11/11/74*

Dear Mr. Rees:

It is with deep concern that I write to you concerning the delay in having cross Border traffic cleared at the Army check-point at Aughnacloy, Co. Tyrone.

This is a matter of general complaint about which, I, as a public representative, have been approached on a number of occasions by my constituents and other people concerned; and in turn which I have reported to your office, but there does not seem to have been any marked improvement - in fact if anything, the matter has deteriorated. My personal experience in the past few months, and particularly on Friday night last the 8th inst., bears this out, and I feel you should be acquainted with the facts of this particular occasion.

I arrived at the check-point and took my place in the queue of cars at 9.45 p.m., and accepting that there would be an inevitable delay, my friend (who is in fact the Minister for Justice's Personal Aide) settled down to listen to the radio. After thirty minutes or so, as we had not moved more than an inch, we became concerned about the delay, and thought that there must be something wrong up front, which would correct itself in a few minutes, and that then cars would begin to move again. However, after one hour, I decided to leave my car and go forward and check if any cars were being allowed through as the position was totally impossible to understand. When I got to the check-point I spoke to a young soldier who politely told me that, while I had his understanding and sympathy, there was nothing that he could do, but said that he would get a senior person to speak to me. When this person approached, he was most unhelpful and bad mannered, and was not in the slightest bit interested in the points which I was trying to make to him. Naturally, this made me change my attitude, and I became somewhat frank with him, and expressed my total disgust. I was about to go to my car when I was invited to go the office to speak to someone more senior. I hesitated to accept the invitation, but felt that as I had nothing more important to do, that I would go. Nevertheless, I did sense that had I declined, that I would possibly have been taken by force. I could be wrong about this point, but it is my honest assessment, based on the attitude and approach of the soldier concerned.

When I got to the office, the army person there (I was not told his rank) was more concerned about my not being able to produce my driving licence, than he was about my complaint.

- 2 -

concerning the intolerable delay. My judgement of this conversation was simply that if I could be caught wrong on any technical point, the book would be thrown at me. This attitude was adopted in spite of the fact that I had already submitted my Diplomatic Passport, which in fact was also questioned.

No-one seemed to be interested in the fact that children were in some cars and had been waiting for up to three hours. The person who interviewed me in the office was fair, frank, and officious, but not at all receptive to altering the situation, or indeed, indicate that he would be helpful.

When I returned to my car I had now been almost two hours in the queue; in fact it was 12.15 a.m. before my car was cleared - exactly 2½ hours delay.

While I fully appreciate the need to check and examine traffic, there is no excuse for the delay which is inexcusable and extremely unfair to people travelling long distances, and more particularly to parents who have children with them.

I am reluctant to express the reasons put forward by people as an explanation for the delay, but it is generally accepted as being the explanation. I am personally convinced that the exercise at the check-point is to delay more than to detect, and the examination is not thorough and really only elementary.

On Friday night the average time to clear a vehicle was 10 to 12 minutes, which means that from five to six cars were getting through. To the best of my knowledge only one soldier was doing the actual checking, and while I am not in position to say how many soldiers were present, I did notice that at least ten were in conversation with each other and not directly involved. Perhaps they were under orders for other duties; but the net position was the excessive and extremely unfair delay.

I would ask you to appreciate that it must be considered a risk to delay a car from 9 o'clock to midnight and subject the occupants to risk, particularly young children by having them travel on lonely roads at a very late hour. In my own case, I never asked for or expected a concession, as I was in no particular rush, since I could afford to wait all night. However, I did not appreciate that I had phoned my home from Dublin to say I would be home about 10 p.m., and when I arrived at 1.30 a.m. my wife was on the point of phoning the Gardaí and the R.U.C. to check my whereabouts. I might also add that

- 3 -

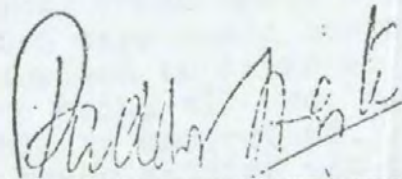
she was in a dreadful condition and near panic. This is a point which no doubt causes concern to other families in similar circumstances, and it should not be ignored lightly; and it is a point which I would ask you also to consider.

Finally, I do not mean to reflect on the duties of any army personnel on Friday, because the state of affairs exists when the personnel is different, and I do not object to the searching of cars - in fact I commend the action - but I do find fault with the delay, and I would request that arrangements be made to avoid any undue delay. My other point is that this is the only cross Border check-point at which intolerable delays are experienced.

You might also look into the circumstances under which soldiers must perform their duties, as they are not very becoming to the needs of serving soldiers in this modern age.

Trusting you will give this matter your early and immediate attention.

Yours sincerely,



Patrick Harte T.D.  
(Chairman All-Party Committee on  
Irish relations)

The Hon. Mr. Merlyn Rees M.P.  
Secretary of State  
STORMONT  
Belfast  
N. Ireland.

C.C.s to Dr. Garret FitzGerald T.D. Minister for Foreign Affairs  
His Excellency, The United Kingdom Ambassador to  
Ireland.