

Thomas McWilliams

21st October 2013

Dear Mr Haass,

My name is Thomas McWilliams and I come from a family of eleven boys and one girl. I would like to take this opportunity of sharing with you the story of the brutal killing of our loving brother Paul who was shot dead by a British army soldier on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1977 in Belfast. Paul was just 16 years of age when he was killed. At approximately 8.00am on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> August Paul and my other brother Christopher were walking through the Westrock estate near the vicinity of Corry's timber yard perimeter wall. This would have been close to our family home. As my brothers made their way along the street a single shot rang out and my brother Paul fell to the ground. He had been shot in the back and was severely wounded. A British soldier who was situated in Corry's timber yard had fired the shot. My brother Christopher ran to a nearby neighbour's house to raise the alarm. First aid was administered to Paul while they waited on the arrival of an ambulance. Paul was taken to the Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH). As the ambulance made its way to the RVH it was stopped by the British army and searched delaying it on getting to the hospital as quickly as possible. Unfortunately our brother died before he reached the hospital.

A short time after the incident in which my brother was killed the British army issued a statement claiming that Paul McWilliams had been shot dead while throwing a petrol bomb. Our family have always rejected these claims. In their statement the British army had claimed that there had been serious rioting in the area prior to the killing of my brother. They never produced any evidence to back up these claims of rioting. At the inquest into my brother's death an open verdict was returned. None of the soldiers who were responsible for his death attended the inquest. A military representative read out statements on their behalf. None of the clothes Paul was wearing that day or his possessions were ever returned to our family despite repeated requests from the family to have these items.

Ten years after the death of my brother in 1998 a painful reminder of what happened that day was visited upon us with the publication of a book recalling the experiences of British soldiers during the conflict in the North of Ireland. In the book **Brit's Speak Out**, a former member of the Light Infantry Regiment, Bob Harker who was stationed in the Ballymurphy area at the time made reference in the book to my brother's killing. Bob Harker described the scene inside the army barracks after my brother had been shot by the British army. A Regimental Colonel wearing full ceremonial uniform (Queen Elizabeth of England had been visiting the North that day as part of the Queen's Jubilee celebrations) visited the army barracks to speak to the soldiers. He said that Paul's killing had been in retaliation for the shooting dead of a British soldier that morning. Bob Harker states in the book that the Colonel's opening remarks were *"well chaps it's a sad thing that we have lost one of our soldiers today, but we had a good kill this morning."*

There is no evidence whatsoever to link our brother Paul to any petrol bombing incident. On the morning he died a forensic examination was carried out on both of Paul's hands for any evidence of contact with flammable liquids. All of the tests proved negative despite the fact that the British army claimed that twenty petrol bombs had been thrown. For 35 years our family have been given a bitter pill to swallow. The person who pulled the trigger and took our brother's life has never been

challenged in any way for what he did. He didn't even have the decency to make a detailed statement about what actually happened that morning. He claimed he acted in accordance with the British army's Yellow Card rules. However, 35 years on he refuses to speak to the HET.

In September 2011, I engaged with the HET regarding our brother's murder. We believed it was an opportunity for our family to find the truth of what happened on that fateful morning. The HET promised us that they would leave no stone unturned and that they would get to the truth of what happened. At the start of the review we decided we would give the HET the benefit of the doubt, but as time went on we became more and more dissatisfied with the way they were conducting the review into Paul's death. We started to notice that they were skirting over things issues we felt were important to the investigation. The HET seemed to want to minimise a lot of things. There was also the manner in which they treated former British army soldiers. How they would give them pre-interview materials before interviews. There was also the so called pragmatic approach that they were using when interviewing these former soldiers. We believed these soldiers should have been treated as suspects in a murder case. We found there was no transparency or accountability in HET cases. There was no verification of illness that former soldiers claimed they were suffering. They could refuse to co-operate with the HET yet there was no medical reports produced to support their claim.

In September this year I attended a meeting of the Northern Ireland Policing Board were I heard the Chief Constable Matt Baggott talk a lot about the HET and how they would be reformed following the HMIC inspection. I believe the HET are beyond reform and that they should be disbanded. I have no faith or trust in the HET carrying out a proper investigation as to how my brother was killed. Our family have been completely let down by the HET. I would like to see a completely independent body set up to replace the HET. The new body should be Article 2 compliant and be able to effectively and independently carry out proper investigations into state killings. No investigation will bring back our brother but families deserve to know the truth about how their loved ones were killed especially in state involvement killings. If the evidence finds that former soldiers committed serious crimes then they should be brought to justice regardless of how long ago it occurred. Any new body set up to deal with the past must also have powers to compel those in involved in state killings to co-operate with investigators. Those who carried out state killings are not above the law, they never were above the law and they never will be above the law.

Yours Sincerely

Thomas McWilliams