

INQUIRY LEGAL TEAM CHAPTER 3 FACTUAL EVIDENCE SUMMARY

PART 6: 15 AUGUST 1998 (after 15:04)

1. This factual evidence summary comprises a selection of first-hand witness accounts for the period **after 15:04**.¹ The purpose of the summary is to provide the Chairman, Core Participants and the public with a digest of accounts that are in the Inquiry's possession relating to the explosion, its effects and the immediate responses of the emergency services and the British army. The evidential summary is an overview and is not intended to provide a recitation of everything that each account contains, nor does it contain every account.
2. This summary contains details that some may find distressing. Only the evidence that is necessary in order to understand relevant events after the detonation of the bomb is set out in this summary. The Inquiry has no wish to sanitise the terrible aftermath of the bombing, nor do we wish to set out graphic, distressing detail unless that is strictly necessary. The summary will refer to locations and people, including physical descriptions. Some may find these details distressing.
3. This summary will be separated into the following sections:
 - 1) RUC and traffic wardens
 - 2) Ambulance service
 - 3) Fire service
 - 4) British army
 - 5) Civilian victims and families, by reference to Chapter 1
4. The Chairman has already received personal statements and heard oral evidence during Chapter 1. This summary is not intended to repeat what was heard in

¹ The 24-hour clock is used for the timings that are referred to.

Chapter 1, but to place some of that important evidence into the context of Chapter 3.

5. Unless otherwise indicated, ranks of RUC and British Army officers are recorded as they were on 15 August 1998, to avoid confusion about the chain of command or the relative authority of the individuals at the time.

Section 1: RUC and Traffic Wardens

6. The Inquiry understands that Constable Douglas Stewart's radio transmission was the first report to police of an explosion having occurred. The explosion occurred while Constable Stewart was making a radio transmission. The sound of the detonation can be heard in the background of the transmission, and Constable Stewart said: *"this has exploded"*.
7. The detonation was recorded on the Communication Room radio as having taken place at 15:04:20. Subsequent radio transmissions, including the various requests for assistance made, were recorded and transcribed.
8. The RUC officers who were in the town at the time of the detonation described hearing a large explosion and seeing a plume of black or grey smoke. Many stated that they immediately started running/travelling towards the seat of the explosion. The seat of the explosion was immediately outside number 39/41 Market Street.
9. Some officers described their reaction to the location where the bomb had detonated. For example, Constable Norman Haslett recorded in his statement to the RUC dated 18 August 1998 that *"my first reaction was that the bomb had not exploded at the Courthouse"*. In his statement to the Inquiry dated 28 November 2024, which he read into evidence on 18 February 2025 during the Inquiry's Chapter 1 hearings, Norman Haslett stated: *"I then remember the radio transmissions on the police radio network; I'll never forget them... I'd never heard screaming like that on the police net before or since"*.
10. Similarly, Sergeant Irvine recorded in his statement dated 19 September 1999 that he was in the area of the Royal Arms Hotel during the police evacuation. He said that, when the bomb exploded, *"I didn't think that the explosion came from the top of the*

town which had been evacuated”. He described seeing the dust over the brow of the hill where the bomb had detonated. Further, Constable Walker’s statement dated 1 September 1998 recorded that when he saw the dark plume of smoke, *“I said that’s not w[h]ere the bomb was supposed to be”*.

11. The officers described what they saw. Constable Haslett said in his 1998² statement that the scene was *“chaotic”*. He stated: *“the street was wrecked, strewn with glass and debris with a car engine block lying in the middle... Alarms were sounding and there was a lot of confusion and panic”*. He described trying to assess which casualties needed the most urgent attention. In his Inquiry statement, he said: *“If there is a hell... then I’m fairly certain that what I saw and heard and smelled just at that moment must have resembled it”*.
12. In his statement dated 29 September 1998, Reserve Constable Rodney Allerton recalled the *“horror”* of the scene, which he said was *“total carnage”*. Constable Louise Stewart’s statement dated 19 August 1998 recorded that *“there was pandemonium... people kept coming up and screaming for help to find people”*. Sergeant McCracken’s statement dated 23 August 1998 stated that *“the street was littered with debris, car parts, glass and tiles. I have never seen anything like it”*.
13. Some officers described the scale of what they were faced with. In his statement dated 24 August 1998, Sergeant Salter said that there were approximately two hundred people in Market Street *“with the majority of them injured, some lying on the ground, ones walking towards me and others walking past... the age of most injured ranged from children to elderly”*.
14. Police officers described their actions at the scene, including giving first aid, using vehicles to convey people to hospital, providing comfort to the injured or dying and searching buildings to find people. Some officers described civilians and other emergency services helping them.
15. Many officers were injured. For example, in his statement dated 20 August 1998, Constable Palmer described being showered with glass. In his statement to the Inquiry

² See paragraph 9 above.

dated 5 February 2025, which was read into evidence on 18 February 2025, Constable Palmer said as follows: *“All I can recall is a flash of light, a great suction and a sharp piercing pain in my back. At the moment the bomb exploded I was a short distance away and shards of glass from the shop windows fell into my back”*.

16. Further, in his statement dated 30 September 1998, Sergeant Thompson stated that the force of the explosion threw him into a shop window. In her statement dated 14 September 1998, Constable McBurney said that she was outside Spic and Span when she heard the explosion. She said: *“I felt a strong wind and my breath was taken away for about five seconds. I felt debris flying past my body from behind, clipping me as it went. I opened my eyes and realised that a bomb had exploded and that we had walked right into it.”*
17. Many officers described seeking help from whatever source they could. For example, Constable Haslett’s 1998 statement³ recorded that he asked the crowd at his cordon if there were any doctors, nurses or first aiders who could assist in the town centre. In his statement dated 23 August 1998, Constable Morrell recorded running to Boots and Superdrug to get first aid supplies. He said that members of the public stopped and asked if they could do anything to help. They said that they were first aid trained, and Constable Morrell said that he and those people went back to the scene to assist the injured.
18. Constable Palmer⁴ also described a man jumping into the bomb crater - which he said was full of water at that stage - and searching with his hands to see if there was anyone in it.
19. The Traffic Wardens also described in their statements what happened at the scene and what they did to assist. In his statement dated 18 August 1998, Traffic Warden Thomas Kerrigan said that there was *“just utter chaos”* at the scene. He described asking someone to get a car to bring the injured to hospital, stopping traffic at the Dublin Road to keep the area clear for the emergency services, and later going to another junction to assist.

³ See paragraph 9 above.

⁴ See paragraph 15 above.

20. Some of them were injured. Traffic Warden Marguerrita Larsen's statement dated 22 August 1998 recorded that she was blown forward by the blast. She described sustaining multiple injuries. In her statement dated 24 August 1998, Traffic Warden Rosemary Ingram described how there was a *"loud loud bang, a really sharp bang and then the debris started to come round us"*. She saw *"Rita's"* (Marguerrita's) injured hands and she said she *"was in a daze"*. She said *"it was awful, I was crying and calling for someone to get an ambulance"*. She was also injured. She described going to hospital with other victims including a baby, who she looked after. In her statement provided to the Inquiry for Chapter 1, which was read out in hearing on 11 February 2025, Ms Ingram further described the *"complete turmoil"* at hospital and recalled what she saw there.
21. Other police officers gave evidence about what was happening away from the scene of the bombing, including the impact on police communication systems. In his statement dated 24 May 1999, Reserve Constable McNally, who worked in the Communications Room at Omagh station, stated that he heard *"a massive explosion"* and realised that a bomb had exploded. He said that the Communications Room lost the complete telephone system and the Command and Control computer system. He stated that they retained their radio communications *"but obviously initially this was very busy"*.
22. He went on to say that the first telephone call that was received in the Communications Room was from an alarm monitoring company. They had phoned to report of an alarm going off in Market Street. Reserve Constable McNally said that he informed the person of an explosion and requested him to telephone Ambulance Control in Londonderry, Fire Control in Lisburn and Tyrone County Hospital to request them to send assistance to Omagh. He said that he was aware of numerous and serious casualties from the radio transmissions.
23. In his statement dated 3 December 1998, Sergeant Martin Millar, who was also working in Communications at Omagh station, stated that the explosion disabled the Command and Control system, the MSW system⁵ and the telephone switchboard. He stated that he resorted to writing the incident log by hand. In his statement dated 26

⁵ The Inquiry understands this to mean Medium Short Wave.

May 1999 Sergeant Millar said that the police were left only with radio communications with callsigns and they were unable to contact any outside agencies.

24. There were statements from those officers in charge. In his statement dated 18 August 1998, Sergeant Marshall described hearing “*a very loud bang*”. He recorded that he went to the seat of the explosion and described hearing screaming and alarms. He saw a large part of a vehicle in the middle of the road which was on fire. He said that he tried to allocate two people, being uninjured members of the public or police, to remain with each of the seriously injured. He stated that there was an initial shortage of vehicles in the initial few minutes.
25. Sergeant Marshall said that he instructed members of the public to remain with the casualties and ensure that they were taken to hospital as soon as possible. He further recorded that an Ulsterbus arrived at the scene and he said that all of the walking casualties got onto it. He also described, like many other witnesses, the water main being split and water gushing onto Market Street. He said that this hampered the rescue efforts.
26. Sergeant Marshall also described making “*various radio transmissions requesting as many ambulances, doctors and nurses*” as they could get. He described how, once the majority of casualties had been moved, he made further radio transmissions urgently requesting a doctor to attend the scene.
27. He said that, at this stage, he decided to take charge of the scene. He recorded instructing that white tape be put up across the junction at Market Street between Nichol and Shiels and the Kozy Corner Public House. He stated that he instructed all police to form a line in front of the tape. Sergeant Marshall said that he divided the police line in two halves and instructed them to carry out a systematic search of all the buildings in the immediate vicinity to try and locate any further living casualties.
28. When Sergeant Marshall gave evidence to the Inquiry as part of the Chapter 1 hearings on 18 February 2025, he described the challenges of what he faced at the initial scene: “*...we had a severe lack of equipment to deal with what was in front of us. I kept asking [police] on the radio for medically trained people. I was screaming looking for doctors and nurses all the time... I just ordered people – my own constables and members of*

*the public to go to wherever they could... anything they could get their hands on that would soak up blood and stop further bleeding”.*⁶

29. Sergeant Marshall also went on to describe in his 1998 statement the process followed, with a British Army Doctor, Captain Potter, to pronounce life extinct in relation to each person who had died.⁷
30. Inspector Joseph Johnston’s RUC statements said that as he was leaving the station to go to the town centre in relation to the evacuation efforts he heard the explosion. He saw a cloud of smoke and, on his journey, overheard a radio transmission stating that there were casualties. He described in detail what he saw at the scene, and commented: *“I was not prepared for what I found”*.
31. He said that he established that all available police were present or near the scene. He said at this stage, Sergeant Marshall was directing operations and *“he appeared to have a system going which was working satisfactorily with the resources available”*. He said that he decided that Sergeant Marshall should remain in charge of the scene.
32. Inspector Johnston said that he made a number of radio transmissions requesting that additional resources be made available and that all necessary agencies be tasked to the scene. He described the difficulties contacting Omagh Station. He described his various actions at the scene, including having vehicles moved to make the road more accessible for emergency services. He recorded directing that an incident log be brought to the scene and opened. He said that, after some time, Reserve Constable Cowan arrived with an incident log and he appointed him as the log keeper.
33. Inspector Johnston described reassuring people who were concerned about loved ones and reassuring police: *“During my time at the scene I spoke to a number of persons including police in an effort to try and reassure them to come to terms with the horrendous task that had been thrust upon them without warning... I spoke to local clergy, councillors and other persons who were concerned about loved ones. I tried to reassure them as best I could that all was being done that could be done”*.

⁶Day 13 | Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearing | James Baxter, Richard Scott, Norman Haslett, Philip Marshall, read statements of Julian Elliot and Allan Palmer – Omagh Bombing Inquiry page 96.

⁷ See paragraph 24 above. Further detail is deliberately not included in this summary.

34. Inspector Johnston also recorded speaking to local Army Commanders and requesting that they put patrols into the town centre and around the area. He said that one Army Commander requested that the remainder of the town be cleared as there may have been other bombs planted. Inspector Johnston said that as there were not enough police resources to carry out that task, he requested that the army clear the town. He said that he asked a small number of police and Inspector Aiken to assist.
35. Inspector Johnston later described directing other officers to take charge of the Incident Command Post, Omagh Leisure Centre, where families were gathered to await information, and the temporary mortuary that had been set up at Lisanelly Army Camp. He said that he briefed Superintendent Baxter and Chief Inspector Skuce when they arrived at the station.
36. Officer 15 made a statement to the RUC dated 27 September 1999. In it he said that he was on duty working in his office at Omagh RUC station when he heard a loud bang which he immediately recognised was a bomb explosion. He saw a pall of smoke which he said appeared to be coming from the vicinity of the town centre. He said that he made his way immediately to the Communications Room where he was informed *“that there had been bomb scares relating to the courthouse area of the town”*. He stated that he drove to the scene accompanied by Inspector Johnston and Sergeant McCleery. He described being met by *“a scene of devastation”*.
37. He recorded being briefed by Officer 7 and Detective Constable Neill regarding casualties. He said: *“as there was no communications with Omagh police Station I returned to that location to inform the Communications Staff of the extent of casualties and damage and to try to contact more CID staff.”* He said that he rang Detective Superintendent McArthur and briefed him regarding the bomb, before returning to the scene. He described briefing Constable Dickson to go to the hospital and act as Liaison Officer in order to gain as much information as possible. He described being briefed by Sergeant Marshall and later briefing Detective Sergeant McMaster at 16:22. He also described briefing Detective Superintendent McArthur, Detective Chief Superintendent Anderson and Detective Superintendent Stewart. He described later attending at the temporary mortuary at Lisanelly Army Base and Omagh Leisure Centre.

38. Superintendent William James Baxter provided a statement to the Inquiry dated 24 October 2024 which he read into evidence on Tuesday 18 February 2025 as part of Chapter 1. He stated that, having been informed of the bomb warning, he became aware of the explosion from a radio news bulletin. He recorded that he was unsuccessful in contacting the Control Room in Omagh and immediately commenced his journey to Omagh from the Bangor area in County Down at speed. He stated: *“I was immediately briefed and took command of the follow up operation satisfying myself that all appropriate agencies and support was available. I immediately implemented the Major Incident Plan through RUC Headquarters, and I met with the Chief Executive of Omagh District Council to ensure co-ordination of the local Major Incident Plan.”*
39. Superintendent Baxter also described attending at the scene of the explosion at 18:07 accompanied by Superintendent Murphy. He stated that he was briefed by Sergeant Marshall in relation to the number of fatalities and the locations of those who had died. He said that at approximately 18:16, the Chief Constable arrived at the scene and was briefed by himself and Superintendent Murphy. He provided an account of his later actions, including attending a press interview given by the Chief Constable, attending at Omagh Leisure Centre which was being used as a waiting area and an information centre for relatives and attending the temporary mortuary which had been set up at the bubble gym at Lisanelly Military Barracks.
40. The Inquiry has also received a witness statement from Sir Ronnie Flanagan, former Chief Constable of the RUC/PSNI. In his statement he said that he was in Headquarters in Belfast when he first heard about the bomb. He received a phone call informing him of a bomb detonation in Omagh. He said that he set off as quickly as he could to travel to Omagh. He said he would have been driven in a police car and received information en route. He found Superintendent Baxter on his arrival. He said: *“I wanted to understand what had happened and to check they had whatever they needed to deal with the incident. Jim [Baxter] was deeply upset, as was everyone else I met. I stress that I knew Jim to be a very good officer and, whilst being very upset, he was in control.”* He gave his other recollections of the day of the bombing in his statement, including performing immediate interviews and attending at Omagh hospital.”

41. The Inquiry has audio and transcripts of police radio transmissions following the detonation. These contain detail about the situation faced by officers and others on the ground. They also include, for example, the location of the Incident Control Point which was moved from the junction of Dublin Road and Market Street to Campsie Bridge and then to Drumragh Avenue.
42. A number of police officers described the scene at hospitals. For example, Constable Walker's statement dated 1 September 1998⁸ recorded that he took casualties to Omagh County Hospital in a police Land Rover, and he said that he was one of the first to arrive there. He said that he informed nurses to expect "*a massive number of casualties to arrive*". On returning to the scene, he said he could see "*complete mayhem*". He then went back to hospital with another victim and described what he saw and did there. Later, hospital staff approached him and said that they could no longer cope with the number of people who needed help. He said that, as a result, he spoke with other senior staff members who confirmed that both Enniskillen and Dungannon hospital were available to treat less injured people if it could be organised to have them moved there "*by whatever means*".
43. Constable Walker stated that he ran to the outside of the Casualty Department and shouted for those who had cars to come forward and assist him in moving less injured people to the other hospitals. He said that "*I got an immediate response with numerous people volunteering to help in any way they could*". He estimated that he assisted in transferring approximately 30 people to other hospitals.
44. The Inquiry also heard evidence during Chapter 1 of some police officers who had roles at the leisure centre and the temporary mortuary. For example, on 18 February 2025 Counsel Mr Rafferty read the personal statement of Sergeant Julian Elliot. Sergeant Elliot described being sent to Omagh Leisure Centre to set up an incident centre. He described how he and other officers attended there, and "*rapidly a massive amount of people started to arrive, literally hundreds*".⁹ He said that he later attended at the army camp, in order to get information, and said it was "*a horrendous sight... For*

⁸ See paragraph 10 above.

⁹ [Day 13 | Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearing | James Baxter, Richard Scott, Norman Haslett, Philip Marshall, read statements of Julian Elliot and Allan Palmer – Omagh Bombing Inquiry](#) page 19.

the people at the scene and the people managing that, the trauma involved was enormous".¹⁰ He described going back and forth between the leisure centre and the mortuary to get information for families waiting. He described giving the news to families about their loved ones.

45. There is also detail about both the temporary mortuary and the Leisure Centre in the transcript of RUC radio communications between 16:23 and 18:16.

Section 2: Ambulance Service

46. As set out earlier in this summary (at paragraph 22), Omagh RUC station had been contacted by an alarm company when the bomb detonated, and Reserve Constable McNally stated that he had asked them to immediately notify Ambulance Control in Derry/Londonderry, Fire Control in Lisburn and Tyrone County Hospital¹¹ to request them to send assistance to Omagh.
47. A number of paramedics provided statements to the RUC. Those paramedics were both local paramedics based at Omagh Ambulance Station and others based at hospitals such as Altnagelvin in Derry/Londonderry who attended after the detonation. In their statements, the paramedics described in detail giving first aid to the injured, how the victims appeared and the type of injuries sustained by them, taking them to hospital, searching for survivors and recovering the bodies of those who had passed away. They also described their work at hospitals, as well as transferring patients between hospitals. In his Sequence of Events statement provided to the Inquiry, Detective Chief Inspector Peter Billingsley lists 25 individuals who provided such statements.
48. Michael Forde was a member of a local crew and was based at Tyrone County Hospital. In his statement dated 27 May 2002, he said that he was with his three colleagues - Tony McLaughlin, John Sharkey and James McDermott - in the rest room

¹⁰ [Day 13 | Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearing | James Baxter, Richard Scott, Norman Haslett, Philip Marshall, read statements of Julian Elliot and Allan Palmer – Omagh Bombing Inquiry](#) page 21.

¹¹ In relation to the impact of the bombing on Tyrone County Hospital, see in particular the Inquiry's transcript dated 19 February 2025 at pages 74-82: [Day 14 | Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearing | Anne Cullen, Simon McLarnon, Rodney Patterson, John McClaughry and Alison McCullagh, read statements of Helen Kerr, Christine Rodgers and Mary McGovern and closing comments – Omagh Bombing Inquiry](#). Counsel Mr Greaney KC read an overview report provided by the Chairman of Sperrin Lakeland Trust dated 27 August 1998.

when they heard the bomb going off. He recorded that he thought it was one of his colleagues who phoned Ambulance Control to tell them of the bomb. He said that they got the ambulances out, side by side, waiting for word to go. He said it was 5 to 6 minutes after the explosion when they received official clearance to attend the scene. He said that on his arrival at the scene, he could see *“the devastation, it was a nightmare, a war zone, rubble”*. He described tending to the injured.

49. In his statement dated 23 May 2002, Tony McLaughlin stated that he telephoned Ambulance Control at Altnagelvin when he and his colleagues had heard the bomb go off. He said that he asked them if they had received any word of an explosion, and they had not at that stage. He asked if they would go into Omagh to see if they were needed. He said that Control told him to wait until they rang police in Omagh. He said Control then came back and said that they were needed in the middle of town. Two ambulances made up of the four men then made their way to the scene. He said that he and John Sharkey were the first ambulance crew to arrive. He said that he immediately declared a major incident and requested senior officers and as many ambulances as were available.
50. Mr McLaughlin described being met by the manager of the bus depot, Paddy McGowan, who approached him and asked was there anything he could do. Mr McLaughlin said that he told him to get an Ulsterbus and to get the walking wounded to hospital.
51. Other paramedics were off duty but came into work. For example, in his statement dated 14 September 1998, Reginald John Martin stated that he was off duty at the time of the detonation but he had heard the explosion. He then went to his office at the rear of Tyrone County Hospital and said that he found the place *“deserted”*. He stated that he phoned Ambulance Control in Altnagelvin and was told that there had been a bomb and that anyone available was needed. He described getting into one of the ambulances himself and driving to the scene of the explosion.
52. Similarly, in his statement dated 21 December 1998, Thomas Murphy stated that he heard emergency vehicles passing the main road near his home, and he phoned into Ambulance Control at Altnagelvin. He was told about the explosion. He was told that

there was a large number of casualties, and that emergency services were looking for all available personnel. He went to Omagh and then to Tyrone County Hospital.

53. The paramedics gave various descriptions of what they saw at the scene. In his statement dated 9 April 2002, John Sharkey said he saw a “*scene of destruction*” upon his arrival. He described going to treat the injured and taking them to hospital.
54. In his statement dated 15 September 1998, Thomas Blee, who was also off work at the time but went to assist in the rescue efforts, said “*there were so many people there and my priority was to help those most in need. The scene was just chaos*”. Similarly, in his statement dated 13 June 2002, William Bredin, whose crew arrived in Omagh from Altnagelvin at around 15:45, said there was “*total devastation all around us*”.
55. Other paramedics gave evidence about the actions of the ambulance service after the injured had been taken away from the scene. In his statement dated 3 September 1998, Marshall Gourley said that he had come from Altnagelvin with his call sign Raymond Boyd and an observer, Richard Quigley. He said that, on their arrival at about 15:40, he was told by police that all of the walking wounded and the other injured persons had been taken away. He stated that he was requested by a policeman to help search for survivors who were possibly trapped in the rubble of the damaged buildings. He said that he met other police who were performing similar duties.
56. Those ambulance personnel in positions of authority also provided accounts. Ethel McClintock was a Leading Ambulance Paramedic stationed at Strabane Ambulance Station. Her statement is dated 27 October 1998. She recorded that she was told of the explosion at 15:11 by 999 call and she was told to go to Omagh. She stated that she and her partner, Charles Brown, arrived 15 to 20 minutes later. She said that in the immediate area of the explosion she could see members of the RUC, Army and the Fire Service, as well as people in civilian clothing.
57. She said that a member of the RUC informed them that all survivors had been taken to Tyrone County Hospital. She stated that a former army officer, Roy Bonner, informed Charles Brown and her that there did not appear to be any remaining survivors. She described the work she did in relation to the victims at the scene. She said that she

was acting as the Incident Control Point in relation to the tasking of ambulances and crews at the scene.

58. In his statement dated 16 September 1998, Alan Cahill described being notified of the explosion by Ambulance Control at 15:19. He said that he went from his home in Derry/Londonderry to Omagh and he spoke with Ethel McClintock (who he described as the Incident Officer). She told him that all injured people had been removed from the scene and that only those who had died remained. Mr Cahill stated that he assumed control. He said that he spoke with Sergeant Marshall who informed him that the RUC intended to fully search the scene. Mr Cahill stated that he waited for that to be completed. He said that he then arranged to have the victims' bodies moved to the temporary mortuary at Lisanelly Army camp. He said that he later went to Tyrone County Hospital and liaised at the helicopter pad with army and police as patients were prepared for removal to other hospitals at Altnagelvin and the Royal Victoria Hospital by helicopter.
59. Further, James Christie's statement dated 21 December 1998 stated that he was employed as the Director of Operations for the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service based in Belfast. He described working with Alan Cahill and said that they supervised the movement of those who had died. He described later going to Tyrone County Hospital to assist arranging the movement of seriously injured people to other hospitals.

Section 3: Fire Service

60. Thomas Chapman's statement dated 17 September 1998 provides an overview of the response of the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade to the bomb's detonation. Mr Chapman said that Brigade Control received a call from the police at 15:09 and it mobilised two appliances from Omagh as well as Assistant Divisional Officer ("ADO") Warren.
61. Mr Chapman stated that, on arrival, appliances and officers were met at the scene "*by hundreds of casualties*". He said that it was immediately apparent that the incident would involve more resources, which were requested.

62. He recorded that an initial reconnaissance revealed a small fire in the wreckage of the vehicle carrying the device, and in the roof space of an adjoining building. He said that there were, at that stage, an unknown number of fatalities and an unknown number of trapped people in partially collapsed structures. He stated that the *“many casualties in the streets were being attended to by the attending ambulance personnel, the police, and civilians”*. He said that whilst Brigade personnel also assisted with this, there were other more pressing tasks that required their skills. He said that a hose reel was deployed to address the small fires, and it was left in the centre of the street to be readily available in case of further outbreaks.
63. Mr Chapman recorded that the scene was divided into two sections by the Fire Brigade, with ADO Warren taking command of the north side of the street and ADO Langtry the south side. He stated that it was decided to make a thorough search of each building, starting at the upper part of the street. He said that many people had either left or had been dragged from the buildings, however the Fire Brigade assisted many people that were injured or shocked from buildings and took them to the casualty collection area. He said that the search proceeded well, and as more appliances arrived, it became possible to search from both ends at each side of the street.
64. Mr Chapman stated that, at this point, the police informed everyone working in the rubble that another device was suspected. He stated that a short time later an assurance was given that no device could be confirmed. He said that, despite the uncertainty, works amidst the rubble of Libby’s Pine Emporium and SD Kells resumed. He described the later works of the Brigade including continuing searches. He said that the Fire Brigade left the scene of the bombing at 21:59.
65. The Inquiry also heard a similar overview account on behalf of the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service at its hearing on 19 February 2025 provided by Area Commander David Doherty.¹²

¹² Day 14 | Commemorative and Personal Statement Hearing | Anne Cullen, Simon McLarnon, Rodney Patterson, John McClaghry and Alison McCullagh, read statements of Helen Kerr, Christine Rodgers and Mary McGovern and closing comments – Omagh Bombing Inquiry _ pages 65-72.

66. In his Sequence of Events statement on behalf of the PSNI, Detective Chief Inspector Peter Billingsley states that a total of 50 fire officers attended Omagh on the day of the bombing.
67. Firefighters in attendance at the scene gave statements that described what they saw and did there. Assistant Divisional Officer (“ADO”) Gerard Warren in his statement dated 5 November 1998 said that at 15:12 he was mobilised as the officer in charge to an explosion and fire in Omagh, arriving at 15:13. He said that he responded immediately in his staff car along with two fire appliances from Omagh station. These were called “FO21” and “FO22”. He described his actions at the scene, including administering first aid and undertaking an assessment of the scene. He said: *“I could see hundreds of people in panic streaming out of Market Street”*. He also said that he saw *“hundreds of people running in the direction of Hospital Road – many had suffered horrific injuries”*.
68. Some members of those initial crews stated that they had been off duty and were alerted by buzzer at the time of the bombing. For example, in his statement dated 24 November 1998 David Canning stated that he was a part time fireman who was at home when the bomb exploded. He heard a loud bang. He said that shortly afterwards he was paged to go to Omagh Fire station, which he did immediately. He said that he and his crew, which included firefighters Sayers, Scott, Blee, and Mark and Paddy Quinn, were the members of the first appliance at the scene.
69. In his statement dated 26 October 1998, Patrick (Paddy) Quinn said that he was a part time fireman and was in his shop at the time of the bombing. He said that when the bomb went off, the window of his premises shattered. He looked out the back door and could hear high pitched screaming. He stated that he went home to check on his family, and his “alerter” sounded. He said that he immediately went to the fire station where he joined his crew and they went to the scene where they arrived at approximately 15:12. He said the scene was *“absolute devastation. It was just total chaos, people running, screaming. People had their clothes blown off”*. He said that the first person he saw was his mother sitting on the kerb comforting an injured person. In his statement he described his and his crew’s work at the scene, including checking for fire, searching damaged buildings and assisting other emergency

services. Firefighter Quinn also gave oral evidence to the Inquiry about the bombing on 17 February 2025.

70. Some statements provided the details of successful rescue efforts. For example, in his statement dated 14 December 1998, Sub Officer John McGuigan recalled attending at the scene with his crew from Irvinestown Fire Station. He described releasing a young girl who was locked in a shop by breaking a pane of glass in the door. In his statement dated 15 December 1998, leading Firefighter Paul Johnston also described working with Sub Officer McGuigan to free the young girl.
71. ADO Gerard Warren’s statement¹³ went on to describe his position of authority and the tasks he undertook in that regard. ADO Warren described ordering an appliance (FO21) to be made the Control Point for the passing of messages to and from the fireground. He stated that he ordered 2 hose reel jets be retrieved to work to extinguish the fires, and for “*extinguishing media*” to be deployed in the streets to cover further outbreaks of fire. He recorded asking for an inner cordon to try to keep people away from the worst affected buildings. He said that by this time, another appliance (FO24) arrived which he ordered to become the Incident Control Point. He described his work at managing the scene. He said that the scene was divided in two between himself and ADO Langtry.
72. ADO Warren stated that the search and rescue operations continued for some time, with Brigade Personnel assisting other emergency services to attend to the injured, trapped and those who had died. He said that, as more resources arrived, “*it was possible to begin a thorough and systematic search of each premises*”, which was done with the Brigade working alongside police teams.
73. Further, Assistant Divisional Officer (“ADO”) John Langtry’s statement dated 24 October 1998 recorded that he was off duty at home when he heard the explosion. He said that he immediately contacted the Brigade Control room and informed them that a device had activated in Omagh town centre, and he ordered them to mobilise himself and all appliances from Omagh station. In his statement, he said that “*many casualties and fatalities*” were found during the Brigade’s search. He said that the

¹³ See paragraph 67 above.

initial procedure adopted involved sifting through all of the debris in each premises. He said that he was involved in every search on the SD Kells side of the street. He stated that the Omagh crews were reinforced by crews from Newtown Stewart and Fintona after twenty minutes.

74. In his statement dated 20 November 1998, Divisional Officer Eoin Doyle described arriving at the scene at 16:13. He described receiving a brief from ADO Warren. He said that he directed searches to be undertaken. He described his various actions taking command of the incident, including working with senior RUC officers to ensure that a complete search was satisfactorily carried out. He said that he commanded the incident until Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig's arrival at 16:28. Assistant Fire Chief Officer Peter Craig's statement is dated 6 January 1999 and describes his actions in controlling the scene thereafter.

Section 4: British Army

75. In the Sequence of Events statement provided on behalf of the Ministry of Defence ("MOD"), Colonel Peter MacMullen stated that the explosion could be heard in the 1st Queen's Lancashire Regiment ("1 QLR") Operations Room in Lisanelly Barracks. He referred to the statement of the former Officer Commanding of C Company, Major Janes, dated 24 November 1998. Major Janes recorded in his statement that *"I heard a dull boom, using the external Closed Circuit cameras manned from the Operations Room, we could clearly see a smoke plume in the direction of the town centre"*.¹⁴
76. Colonel MacMullen stated that the British Army were first formally notified of the explosion by the RUC at 15:11, with the first evidence of a request for support at 16:29, but *"it is likely... that the military were automatically providing the required support to the RUC and other emergency services"*. In his statement to the Inquiry dated 24 October 2025, former Captain of 1 QLR, Michael Peebles, provided information received from, and communications with, the RUC during the period after detonation, as well as the actions taken by the army during that period.

¹⁴ Major Janes refers to the explosion occurring between 15:06 and 15:08 that day. Colonel MacMullen states that the time of explosion was 15:06 (paragraph 22). The bomb in fact exploded at 15:04.

77. In his statement Captain Peebles, who was the battalion watchkeeper, stated that he sent a message to the Province Incident Net (“PIN”) to all stations in Northern Ireland at 15:08 hours stating “*Contact, 1506, Explosion, Omagh Town Centre – wait out*”. He said that at 15:10 the RUC Radio Net gave the first report of fatalities, saying that the High Street was not cleared in time. Captain Peebles said that the military had a RUC radio in their Operations Room, and he could hear screaming and cries for help on it. He said: “*the RUC officers were understandably frantic and highly distressed*”.

78. Captain Peebles went on to state:

“I could not understand why the High Street was not cleared, as the progress of the clearance had been good – it was at this point I asked Gazelle 5 (the military helicopter) to give us the Grid of the seat of the explosion by radio... I plotted the grid on the map and I specifically recall telling those in the ops [operations] room – this is a mistake. I went back to Gaz 5 [and] asked for them to confirm the grid a second time. The pilot came back with the same grid... I said to the pilot “confirm that this is at the bottom of the hill / the bottom of the High Street”. He confirmed as correct. This was some distance away (possibly 200-300m) from the Court House notified target”.

79. The 1 QLR Omagh Bomb Post Incident Report contains an entry at 15:11 as follows: “*Gaz 5 on Task. Seat of Explosion confirmed as High St/ Market St junction. Casualties confirmed ambulances required.*”

80. In his statement, Captain Peebles deciphered the contents of a log which he kept at the time of the bombing. For example, he stated that at 15:15 a message was sent out on the Lisanelly Camp Tannoy for any medical staff to report to the guard room. He further stated that at 15:16 an army ambulance deployed. He also referred to a number of other related entries during this period, including: an entry at 15:34 stating that any ambulances should rendezvous at Strule Bridge where casualties were being moved to Tyrone Hospital, and that “Puma 7” was stood by for the move of casualties. Captain Peebles said that, at this point, both 8 Brigade and Headquarters were offering any assets needed to deal with a mass casualty situation. At 15:36, an update was received that “Puma 7” was, among other things, being prepared to extract casualties

from Tyrone County Hospital. There was a further call on the base tannoy for medical staff at 15:59. He described the other entries in the log, which detailed the military response at the scene, including assisting with transferring victims of the bombing and checking for secondary devices.

81. Major David Sanderson was the Battalion Second in Command of 1QLR at the time of the bombing. He was based in Omagh. In his statement to the Inquiry dated 17 November 2025, Major Sanderson stated that he was in the garden of his Army Quarters cutting the grass when he heard a large explosion coming from the direction of Omagh town centre. He said he was conscious that his wife and son had gone shopping to the town centre. He stated that he went swiftly to the Operations Room to assist with the military response.
82. He explained that initially the military response would have been *“initiated from whoever was on duty at the time of the Operations room”*, which would initially have been the Duty Watchkeeper, and then the Operations Officer.¹⁵ He stated that would be followed by the deployment of the on-call company commander, Major Janes, as part of the initial response on the ground. He stated that operational reporting would have been shared via radio across Northern Ireland, recorded in a written log, and through the police. He said: *“it took some time to establish an understanding as to the scale of both destruction and casualties, and the urgent requirements this situation subsequently demanded”*.
83. In his statement to the RUC dated 14 July 2000, Major Sanderson stated that between approximately 15:20 and 17:30 he remained in the Operations Room. He stated that he was the most senior officer there and so he ran the Operations Room, assisted by a number of others. He, and other MOD personnel, referred to the Standard Operating Procedures (“SOPs”) and Aide Memoires that were in place.
84. Major Sanderson also explained in his statement that: *“the process for urban operations followed a sequence of 4Cs: Confirm, Clear, Cordon, Control. In the case of Omagh, the detonation of the bomb would have served as confirmation of the*

¹⁵ The Duty Watchkeeper was Captain Peebles. The Inquiry understands that the Operations Officer was Captain Bruce Park.

device. The remaining sequence was conducted in support of the Ammunition Technical Officer (ATO) and the RUC, ensuring, as best as possible, that no secondary devices were present and ensuring that the clearance, cordon and subsequent control was effective”.

85. In his statement provided to the RUC dated 20 August 1998, Major Sanderson provided further detail regarding the actions he took: *“I immediately tasked the company commander Major Jones¹⁶, ATO and Captain Potter the camp doctor to Market Street/Strule Bridge. I then co-ordinated the military support for police and assistance as and when required. This consisted of establishing a loose cordon around the scene and ferrying casualties to the Tyrone hospital or waiting vehicles.”* He said that at around 16:30 he became aware of the extent of the injuries and fatalities and he described his role in setting up a temporary mortuary in the bubble gym and locating personnel to run it.
86. The former Officer Commanding of C Company of 1 QLR, Major Rupert Janes, provided a statement to the RUC dated 24 November 1998. He was in the Operations Room prior to the detonation and had been notified of the bomb warning by Captain Peebles. He stated that: *“My Company were on standby, following the initial phone call, we could not get in touch with the RUC... At about 15:20 hours that day, the Commanding Officer ordered us to deploy, to find out what had happened. About 15:25 hours that day, I left the Barracks with 3 x land rovers containing a multiple of 2 teams, my own team with my Company Sergeant Major. Also in convoy with us were 2 x Army technical Officers (ATO), Tactica vehicles and the medical team, in a civilian marked Ambulance. A total initially of about 20 military personnel.”*
87. He described what they saw at the scene of the bombing. He said that there were already several fire engines, other public service vehicles and a number of public service personnel in attendance. He said that he began deploying a cordon, moving people back from the crossroads at Market Street/Dublin Road between 100 to 150 metres back down each exit road. He said that the High Street, towards the Courthouse, was cleared by the RUC but *“his men”* went around *“the back way”* and helped to set up a cordon at the West end of the High Street, by the courthouse. He

¹⁶ The Inquiry Legal Team believes this to be a reference to Major Janes.

described the actions of the military at the scene, including liaising with the RUC, providing medical support and setting up an Incident Control Point to co-ordinate the arrival of more troops. He stated that there were around 49 soldiers on the cordon which stayed in place until midnight.

88. In his RUC statement dated 29 June 2000, former Commanding Officer of 1QLR, Lieutenant Colonel David James stated that he was in the Operations Room at the time of the detonation. He described hearing a loud bang and said that the room shook. He stated that, at that point, he tasked a Gazelle helicopter to fly over the town and establish the seat of the explosion. He said that after about 15 minutes he received notification from the helicopter that the explosion had occurred 400m-500m away from the Courthouse on the High Street.
89. Lieutenant Colonel James said that he left the barracks at around 15:45 and was escorted to the town centre with between 15-20 personnel. He said that cordons had been established prior to his arrival and were being manned by soldiers from his unit. Major Janes stated that he was in charge of them and Lieutenant Colonel James assisted him, and this included liaising with RUC officers. He described later that evening escorting Colonel Heron and Major Nicholson (the Deputy Commander and the Deputy Chief of Staff respectively of 8 Infantry Brigade) to the scene of the bombing and the temporary mortuary at the bubble gym.
90. In his statement to the Inquiry dated 24 October 2025, Lieutenant Colonel James provided further detail about the military actions that were taken. He stated that the Northern Ireland Standard Operating Procedures were actioned, and that any support was to provide the 4 C's (see paragraph 84 above: *"confirm there is a legitimate device; clear people away from the area to keep them safe; cordon the area to secure it and control, by establishing control points"*).
91. Lieutenant Colonel James also gave an interview in 2000. He gave further detail about the impact of the blast on the Operations Room, stating that there was a short, compact but loud thud and then a shockwave hit the building. He said that as soon as that happened, the Operations Room started the tape recorder. He also described tasking the helicopter to establish the seat of the explosion. He described what the Operations Room heard on the RUC radio. He said that there was no tasking of the

military but they got the standby company together and sent them into town in their Land Rovers. He said: *“they were on the ground by I think within 20 minutes or so”*.

92. He then described receiving a situation report, getting into his combats and going to the scene of the explosion with reinforcements. He said that, by the time they arrived, *“there were obviously quite a few troops on the ground around the seat of the explosion itself. And the police were in the process, the fire brigade were there as well.”* He described what he saw and did at the scene.
93. During his interview, he stated that all of the helicopters in the province had been redirected to their airspace because the Tyrone County Hospital was *“being swamped, they needed to use other hospitals and so all the helicopters were moved down there, landed at Tyrone County Hospital and then a simple triage was carried out and they would fill the helicopters with the sort of injured that needed to go to particular hospitals.”*
94. Lieutenant Colonel David James provided a further statement to the Inquiry dated 28 August 2026 regarding the account he gave in 2000. He said that he was in contact with Major Janes who had given him the situation report. He said he joined Major Janes on the ground.
95. Captain Bruce Park, who was the Battalion Operations Officer for 1QLR, provided a statement to the Inquiry dated 22 June 2026. He said that the explosion occurred during his journey to Lisanelly Barracks, which he undertook immediately when notified by the 1QLR Operations Room of the bomb warning. He said that on his return to Lisanelly Barracks, he went to the Operations Room and was *“briefed on the situation and the disposition of 1QLR callsigns which by now had been deployed to assist with incident response and putting in place a protective cordon”*. He said that he deployed Gazelle 5 which allowed him to better understand the impact of the explosion, to review all cordon locations and better understand the likely threat to those locations from secondary devices.
96. He said that once he was back in the Operations Room, he *“continued to oversee the immediate response, coordinating the use of military assets to support the RUC, liaising with [Brigade] HQ, tasking additional helicopter support, reconstituting*

callsigns within [Lisanelly Barracks] (in order that we could sustain ongoing support to the RUC) and supporting the establishment of a temporary Mortuary and Chapel of Rest”.

97. In his statement made to the RUC dated 13 July 2000, Captain Park said that he recalled visiting the scene of the bombing on 15 August 1998, but it was purely to ensure that soldiers deployed on the ground were in the position that they were meant to be in and to ensure that they were aware of what was going on.
98. Staff Sergeant Adam Modd, who was an Army Technical Officer at the time of the bombing, provided a statement to the RUC dated 28 September 2000. He stated that at the time of detonation, his team had been waiting for confirmation in immediate response. He stated that after contacting the Operations Room, the team were deployed to the town centre. He said that his team stopped on the Drumragh Bridge close to the town centre where they set up an ICP (which is understood by the Inquiry to be an “Incident Control Point”). He stated: *“I went forward alone and having seen the results of the explosion my initial actions were to quickly check the rest of the vehicles in the area for secondary IEDs. Having completed that we assisted the RUC and Fire Brigade in the treatment and evacuation of casualties, also initiating a secondary cordon.”* He stated that they assisted at the scene until about 17:30.
99. In his evidence to the Coroner on 25 September 2000, Staff Sergeant Modd said that he arrived on the scene between 10-15 minutes after the explosion.
100. Major Jonathan Whitaker provided a statement to the RUC dated 19 September 2000. He was the Senior Ammunition Technical Officer at the time of the bombing. In his statement he stated that he arrived at the scene at around 16:15. He described meeting the EOD Operator, Staff Sergeant Modd. He described his actions at the scene, including ensuring that all explosive safety considerations had been considered, controlling the scene to make access easier for essential personnel and preserving forensic evidence in or about the seat of the explosion.
101. Private Stephen Robertson provided a statement to the RUC dated 8 June 2000. He said that he was present at the scene of the bombing within approximately half an hour of the explosion in his capacity as military dog handler. He stated that he was

instructed to perform a cursory search of the rubble with the dog. He described later carrying out further searches to set up cordon points.

102. Captain Samuel Potter provided two statements to the RUC dated 19 and 20 August 1998. Captain Potter said that he was the Regimental Medical Officer with the 4 Royal Irish Regiment. He was based at Lisanelly Medical Centre within Lisanelly Army Camp. He said that he was at home within the army complex at the time of the bombing, and he heard the explosion. He stated that he immediately went to the Medical Centre and organised all of the medical staff. He said that they waited for about 15 minutes until they received direction to go to the scene of the explosion. They arrived at about 15:30. He described the process of pronouncing life extinct on those who had died. He also described later attending at Tyrone County Hospital with his team and assisting with the casualties there, before attending at the temporary mortuary at the bubble gym in the army barracks.
103. Captain James Hill provided a statement to the RUC dated 26 October 1998. He stated that he was the duty doctor in Lisanelly Army Camp in Omagh. He heard the explosion and was deployed to the scene at around 16:15. He stated that, on his arrival, he found that most of the injured had been removed from the scene. He said that Captain Potter was at the scene. He said that he therefore went to the Tyrone County Hospital in order to help out there. He described assisting medical staff and arranging helicopter airlifts to Musgrave Park Hospital.

Section 5: Civilians

104. The Inquiry heard evidence during Chapter 1 from many people, including civilians who were at or near to the scene when the bomb detonated. Oral evidence was heard between 28 January 2025 and 19 February 2025 and is available on the Inquiry's website.
105. A post-incident IED (Improvised Explosive Device) report by Inspector McArthur, RUC, dated 21 October 1998 stated that, at the time of the explosion, approximately 250 to 300 members of the public were gathered at the junction of Market Street and Dublin Road in a cordon position believed to be a safe area.

The Inquiry Legal Team, 18 September 2026.