

Britain's Cover-Up of Inside Job in Fatal RAF Chinook Crash

Evidence points to liquidation of British counterinsurgency team to trick Irish republicans into a defeating political process

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For 17 years the British authorities have lied about the fatal RAF helicopter crash on the Mull of Kintyre in which 25 senior counterinsurgency personnel were killed. Now Global Research reveals new evidence showing that the loss of life was an intentional act of sabotage.

It was the worst single loss of life by Britain's Royal Air Force since the Second World War. On the evening of 2 June 1994, an RAF Chinook military helicopter slammed into a mountainside on the Mull of Kintyre in thick fog, killing all 29 onboard. Among the dead were four RAF crew and 25 of Britain's senior counterinsurgency personnel. The latter – including British Army officers and mainly members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary – had overseen Britain's "dirty war" operations against Irish republican militants during 25 years of conflict in Northern Ireland.

The RAF Chinook – ZD576 – was taking the team of counterinsurgency experts to a high-level security conference at Fort George in Inverness (at the eastern end of the Great Glen). The helicopter took off from Aldergrove in Co Antrim, Northern Ireland, crossed the Antrim hills and the narrow Irish Sea to the Mull of Kintyre, and was to have headed along the Scottish coast to the western end of the Great Glen, thence along it to Inverness. But the ill-fated Chinook never made it to Fort George. About an hour into the journey, at around 6pm, the transport helicopter crashed into a hillside 800 feet above sea level on the Mull of Kintyre.

Initial suspicions of a Provisional IRA spectacular against the British enemy never gained traction. The crash was quickly understood to have been a tragic accident caused by poor visibility in bad fog – weather conditions that are a routine hazard in that part of the British Isles even in summertime.

Official inquiries blame pilot error

A year later, in 1995, an RAF Board of Inquiry (BOI) pointed to pilot error as the most likely cause. Controversially, two Air Vice Marshalls who reviewed the BOI judged that the pilots – Flight Lieutenant Jonathan Tapper and Flt Lt Richard Cook – were guilty of gross negligence; it was a harsh verdict which, in the case of deceased aircrew, should only have been given if there was "absolutely no doubt whatsoever" that the crash had happened due to their fault. The RAF has continued to maintain to the public that this was a simple ferry flight, passing

by the Mull at low level under Visual Flying Regulations (VFR); the planning was portrayed as vague and informal and the pilots were blamed for inappropriate action upon entering Instrument Meteorological Conditions (IMC) near the Mull – that is, simply, that they did not carry out required (and well practised) procedures when they ran into fog.

The official conclusion was that the pilots had elected to fly over the Mull rather than turn away from it, and that they had set up a wrong rate of climb. Apart from this particular piece of bad airmanship, the public has to wonder how such an experienced crew ended up hitting what in reality was an isolated low hill?

After 17 years, the RAF and the British government finally conceded in July 2011 that the pilots were not guilty of “gross negligence”. This was in response to the last official inquiry into the incident chaired by Lord Philip, published the same month, which determined that there were insufficient grounds beyond reasonable doubt to make such a harsh judgment on the deceased. While family and supporters welcomed the partial clearing of the RAF men’s name, nevertheless the official story of what happened to the Chinook remains the same. That is, that the pilots made an error in trying to fly over the Mull, with the emphasis on sudden inclement weather inducing them to miscalculate.

Independent investigation

But a private investigation into the circumstances of the crash has now revealed exclusively to Global Research that the official account is seriously flawed. Disturbingly, there are sound reasons and evidence to indicate that the Chinook was brought down deliberately with the intention of wiping out the counterinsurgency team. And, as we will see, there is a technical “smoking gun” for how this could have been achieved.

British aviation expert Walter Kennedy, who has spent the most part of 17 years independently assessing the incident, said: “All official inquiries have totally misrepresented what happened. There have been so many lies, misrepresentations and obfuscations. Anyone with an avionics background who looks into this will see that the official account is seriously flawed.

“Do I think the Chinook was sabotaged? Absolutely,” added Kennedy, who for 30 years was a member of the Royal Navigation Institute and spent nine years working as a systems engineer in Britain’s military industry and 25 years on navigation systems in civilian aviation.

Kennedy’s investigation into the Chinook crash is based on flight data disclosed, but not followed up, by the official inquiries, and from inspecting the crash site where he interviewed local people. He has also pieced together sensitive information obtained from various RAF sources [1].

What he has found is stunning. “If you work through the flight data each aspect is like a jigsaw puzzle and from the picture that it forms it is obvious that the official story is false. It is fascinating that none of the official inquiries probed the obvious questions that arise from the known flight records. The official line seems to be determined to stick to an account that is demonstrably not supported by the data.

“My report is an objective analysis of the available data from a navigation viewpoint – instrument settings, local knowledge of weather and topography, operating procedures. Not

only the last Lord Philip review but all other inquiries failed to make use of this data – indeed, many factors were severally rubbished, quite wrongly, when not only did they make sense on their own but together correlated into a clear picture. In a complex scenario, when a single picture is consistent with all the known data, the probability of this picture being correct is very high – like a repeated weak signal in signal processing technology, the more you get the more it correlates.”

Official inquiries misrepresent crash weather conditions

The official narrative conveyed in the media continually emphasises extreme weather as being a primary crash factor. This, Kennedy says, is an appalling misrepresentation of the actual conditions prevailing at the time of the crash.

“Understanding the local weather most probable at the time is germane to understanding the crash,” says Kennedy. “The problem the Chinook crew faced was not one of bad weather closing in on them but rather one of avoiding hitting a fixed, fuzzy obstacle that they needed or wanted to get close to for whatever reason.”

Local sources told Kennedy that the conditions on the evening of the crash were typical for that time of day and year. Fog and poor visibility are features to be sure, but the weather is predictable. Also, the fog and cloud are generated from the landmass. Typically, the terrain overlooking the Mull was shrouded in a thin ground-hugging mist on the lower slopes whereas ground above 800 feet was covered in a dense orographic cloud. Offshore, the sea was typically not covered in fog. While the ground detail of the landmass would have been obscured by the mist and cloud, the proximity of the landmass would have been identifiable by the approaching helicopter owing to the contrast in visibility. “They would have been able to see it from a long way off and their navigation would have made them aware of their proximity to it,” says Kennedy.

He points out that the official inquiries into the Chinook crash do not take into account actual weather conditions typical of the Mull of Kintyre. The crew were not overwhelmed by sudden bad weather. As we shall, they were flying deliberately and under control towards a specific point on the Mull – albeit that the point was obscured by localized mist and cloud. Instrument settings and flight plans verify their deliberate movements. Some other untoward factor must explain their final fatal moments.

It is noteworthy that an RAF Sea King rescue helicopter arrived safely at the scene 45 minutes after the crash under the same conditions. This underlines that the conditions were not inordinately hazardous. Also remarkably, the testimony of the rescue helicopter crew about the landing conditions was never brought to the inquiries, at least publicly.

Political motives for liquidation

Before addressing further the technical evidence for sabotage here, first it is important to appreciate the political context at the time of the Chinook incident and thus provide understanding of a powerful motive for why these intelligence assets could have been liquidated.

When the final official inquiry by Lord Philip was published last July, Global Research speculated then on the possibility that the Chinook disaster could have been an inside job by the British authorities for important tactical reasons to bring about an end to the war in

Northern Ireland [2]. Back in the summer of 1994, the British government was conducting furtive negotiations with Irish republicans to entice them into a “peace process” and to accept a political settlement to the conflict that had ravaged Ireland and the United Kingdom for over two decades.

An end to the conflict, largely on British terms, would turn out to be a major prize for Britain’s political establishment. But the problem for the British at that crucial time in 1994 was convincing the Irish republican movement to call off its formidable armed struggle. That was because two previous ceasefires brokered in the 1970s had been used by the British as an opportunity to try to defeat the IRA through covert methods, such as infiltration with informers. As a result, there was an abiding suspicion among republicans of British bad faith. Perfidious Albion were the perennial watchwords. It would therefore take a serious token from the British to assure the IRA that this time around “the war really was over”.

Nearly three months after the Chinook deaths, the IRA announced what many analysts had believed would be unthinkable – its historic ceasefire on 31 August 1994, calling for a “complete cessation of armed struggle”. That move then paved the way for a political process that culminated in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. And the United Kingdom and Ireland have seen relative peace since.

The political gain for the British government from the “peace process” cannot be overstated. A costly and destabilising insurgency in its backyard has been successfully neutralized, and the six-county state of Northern Ireland still remains firmly part of the United Kingdom, under British jurisdiction, and for the foreseeable future. This has secured an ongoing de facto British sway over political and economic affairs in the whole island of Ireland.

Defeating Irish republicanism through ‘peace process’

In many ways, the political process spelt a huge defeat for Irish republicanism in terms of achieving its historic aim of an independent, socialist united Ireland free from British rule. Republicans have become locked into a British-partitioned Ireland where the political framework is constitutionally limited to pursue their vision. Indeed, some traditional republicans complain that the movement under the political wing of Sinn Féin has “sold out” on its principles. Furthermore, the now 17-year-old IRA ceasefire and subsequent decommissioning of weapons means that there is little chance for the armed struggle to be resumed.

So all in all, Ireland, North and South, has been safely returned to the British sphere of influence, politically, economically, culturally, in such an overarching way that it harks back to the colonial era of earlier centuries when all of the territory was seamlessly dominated by British policy.

Understanding this gain for the British establishment underscores the crucial importance of having enticed the IRA into calling its ceasefire and to enter the political process – a process that was framed to thwart opposition to British presence in Ireland. What the British couldn’t achieve by military means, they managed by political means – the defeat of the Irish republican movement. In the grand scheme of things, the sacrifice of Northern Ireland’s counterinsurgency team would be a price worth paying.

Burying dark secrets of Britain’s dirty war

In addition, the men onboard that Chinook would take to their graves many dark secrets about Britain's "dirty war" operations, including how British forces colluded with Protestant loyalist death squads. These proxy death squads were armed and instructed by British Intelligence and are believed to have carried out over 300 murders of republicans and ordinary Catholics during the course of the 1969-1994 conflict – nearly 10 per cent of the total number of dead. Also, as Kennedy notes about the personnel onboard the Chinook: "These men dedicated their lives to fighting the IRA. They were not going to give up on their missions easily. From the British government point of view, they would have been viewed as an obstacle to the peace process it was trying to initiate. They were military men, not politicians."

Exposing the official cover-up of what happened Chinook

To recap, the official version maintains that the pilots were overwhelmed by unexpected poor visibility due to fog. Contrary to their impressive experience and training, the RAF claims that rather than slowing down and climbing at a maximum rate, or turning back out to sea, the pilots inexplicably advanced at an inappropriate rate of climb towards the highest ground in the vicinity – and this inexplicable action on their part was solely the cause of the crash.

But what Kennedy's analysis shows is the following:

1. Flt Lts Tapper and Cook had meticulously planned their trip to include a known landing zone (LZ) at the Mull. A waypoint (A) recorded on the computerized flight plan shows this intention. The recorded directions taken by the Chinook indicate that the pilots were intending to touch base at the Mull, either by actually landing or by homing in on the LZ before proceeding to the destination further up the Scottish coast at Fort George. Both pilots were familiar with the LZ at the Mull, situated some 300 metres from a lighthouse. Says Kennedy: "The inclusion of an element of flight testing in itineraries is normal procedure for all RAF transport even when the transport is for senior personnel."
2. The pilots had been keeping strictly on track until they made a deliberate right turn close in to the Mull. They had been referring to the navigation computer up until that right turn; they were not contravening Visual Flying Regulations, as alleged by the official inquiries.
3. Barometric and radar altimeter settings recovered from the wreckage of Chinook ZD576 were consistent with a landing on, or close pass over, the LZ at the Mull.
4. The power settings were matched at intermediate level, consistent with the helicopter coasting horizontally towards the LZ and fully under control of the crew. "They were slowing down, letting their speed 'wash off', not performing a climb," says Kennedy. Note the official version claims that the pilots were attempting an accelerated climb over the Mull, which could not be the case if the power settings were matched at intermediate level. Local sources, in particular the lighthouse keeper who was familiar with helicopters landing, also said that the engine noise from the Chinook moments before the crash was steady – again indicating that the aircraft was under control at that time and not climbing.
5. The Chinook navigator had the course set that would have taken them "handrailing" up the coast of Islay/Jura – it was obviously their intention to cross back over the sea in a north westerly direction to use this safe, clear route after touching base at the Mull, not to fly over the Mull, as the official version claims.

6. From the lateral position of the Chinook fuselage at the crash site, it appears that the pilots were attempting a “quick stop” manoeuvre in which they abruptly steered the big-bodied aircraft sideways to drastically reduce speed and take it into a vertical lift. Says Kennedy: “Not only is there is no evidence of control problems as the official account claims, but the final manoeuvre attempt showed meaningful control and expert airmanship in the circumstances. What the ‘quick stop’ attempt shows is that the pilots were surprised by their proximity to the ground. They were not flying negligently.”

Comments Kennedy: “The most obvious scenario is that the helicopter crew were approaching that known landing spot at waypoint A on the Mull; it had a safe exit, or “wave-off” option, as there was plenty of room at the elevation of that spot for a moderate turn around the lighthouse back out to sea – it was the optimum spot to aim for, given the turning radii available to a Chinook at high speed, for a turn around the lighthouse.

“One of the lighthouse keepers pointed out to me the approach line that military helicopters had previously taken in the past to achieve that manoeuvre – and the heading would have been 035 magnetic north (035M), which was as found on the Chinook handling pilot’s course selector on his main navigation display.”

Kennedy, who attended the Fatal Accident Inquiry in 1996 and who has gone through the transcripts of all the inquiries, noted that none of these recorded findings and testimonies were cause for further questioning or elaboration. “At the very least, it was apparent that previous inquiries had not had the potential value of the available data made clear to them. Indeed, it seems that it was detracted from at every opportunity. No-one at these inquiries putting questions to the RAF or Ministry of Defence seemed to have any avionics background. Their focus was on narrow legalistic issues, such as: ‘Was it appropriate or not to ascribe gross negligence to the dead crew?’. When technical questions were put, they were easily obfuscated. But anyone familiar with the technical details can see that the official explanation of what happened is demonstrably at odds with the facts.”

“I believed back at the time the original verdict of gross negligence against the pilots was so premature before sufficient exploration of so many issues that it had to have been politically motivated, that the authorities wanted to avert public disquiet by saying that it was ‘undoubtedly pilot error, no sabotage, nothing to see here, move along’.”

Technical ‘smoking gun’

Kennedy’s investigations reveal one further crucial detail that has been denied or obfuscated by RAF officials and the British government in all inquiries so far into the crash. And it is this technical “smoking gun” that points up the malicious aspect of what happened on the Mull of Kintyre and how it could have been perpetrated.

The avionics expert has obtained confirmation that Chinook ZD576 was equipped with a landing device known as a Covert Personnel Locator System. Officially, this is denied, but trusted RAF contacts have unofficially confirmed to him that ZD576 was fitted out with the system on that journey. “All the movements of the helicopter as it was approaching the Mull point to the fact that the crew were coming in for a landing or a near landing and that they were using a CPLS to achieve this. I predicted the use of the CPLS from their movements at the Mull. That has now been confirmed to me by RAF sources. This revelation of a CPLS onboard Chinook ZD576 is grounds enough for another inquiry to be opened,” he says.

The CPLS, explains Kennedy, is a precision guidance system that is intrinsically reliable. It is often used by American and British military helicopters to pinpoint special forces who are trapped behind enemy lines. The system's various manufacturers describe it as being used for "an all-weather approach to assault zones, landing zones and drop zones".

What makes the CPLS particularly useful is that it operates by a portable handset on the ground that sends an Ultra High Frequency radio signal to the receiver onboard the helicopter. Basically, the operator on the ground guides the helicopter to the landing zone and because the helicopter crew are following a unique signal there is little need for the pilots to have external visibility. They are relying on the ground operator to bring them safely to the LZ.

Chinook crew misled by operators on the ground?

On the evening that the pilots flew ZD576 into the fog at the shoreline of the Mull, the instrument settings show that they were preparing for landing. From their experience, they knew that the approach terrain was relatively low lying towards the LZ. Kennedy believes that the operator group on the ground was out of position and that instead of being directed to the LZ, the crew of the Chinook were misled into a "vertical corner" of nearby mountainous terrain. "Because the pilots believed they were approaching the LZ, the lower power settings they had selected would have made it nearly impossible for them to conduct a successful emergency manoeuvre at the last moment to avert collision. The Chinook is normally an agile aircraft despite its bulky size, but without the thrust power, the pilots would have had no chance of negotiating the vertical corner."

Would the operators on the ground not have been in danger from the incoming Chinook?

Near the crash site on the Mull, on the aircraft's track and at about the right distance inland to have caused their over-run of the shoreline, is a large fissure – a natural granite rock trench. Kennedy himself has inspected it. "Anyone hiding in that trench would have had protection from a crashing 20-ton helicopter."

"Whether the CPLS operators on the ground were out of position wilfully or not is for another inquiry to ascertain," he adds. "Had the operator on the ground been half a mile or so up the slope from the landing spot where the pilots expected him to be, all that is known about this crash is explained."

Kennedy is adamant that Chinook ZD576 with all those onboard was deliberately brought down. "From the very beginning, this has smacked of a cover-up. The official account is demonstrably not true in light of the flight and instrument data. Given the strong political motives, there is powerful reason for why it could have been sabotage. And now there is evidence of the technical means by which this sabotage could have been carried out."

If that is the case, then senior people within the British military and political establishment made a call on the lives of those who perished.

Why were 25 counterinsurgency personnel put on one helicopter?

Other questions also need to be asked. Why were all 25 counterinsurgency personnel put on one helicopter? Who took that decision for this irregular security arrangement, especially when there were other aircraft available to spread the transport of the men? If the CPLS was

being deployed, as Kennedy claims, then there should have been a record of this component in the flight plans, which the meticulous navigation pilot, Flt Lt Tapper, would have logged – was this record removed from the pilot’s flight plan after the event?

Intriguingly too, for the Chinook sacrifice to have sent the intended signal to Irish republicans that the “war was over”, there must be senior persons within the IRA ranks who also know the truth of what really happened, and, importantly, would have been tipped off before it happened. This, of course, would have been conveyed to republicans in such a way that would afford plausible denial by the British contacts. Also, given the way the peace process has worked out in hindsight to the historic disadvantage of republicans, much to their bitter regret no doubt, it is unlikely that they would disclose their fatal error of buying into such a dirty trick.

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NOTES

[1] For further technical information on the 1994 Chinook crash, readers may contact Walter Kennedy directly at walterkennedy7525@gmail.com

[2] Chinook Disaster: Did Britain Sacrifice Counterinsurgency Top Brass to Defeat Irish Republicans?

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=25635>

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