



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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D/S of S 138/79

20th June 1979

Dear Mr Cartledge,

With your letter of 8th June to Roger Facer you enclosed a copy of one which the Prime Minister had received from a Mr P H James about the training and equipment of United Kingdom troops in Northern Ireland, and you asked for a draft reply.

Since, as you said in your letter of 11th June, the Prime Minister has said that Mr James' letter should be taken "very seriously indeed" the enclosed draft Private Secretary reply examines in detail the points which Mr James raised.

I am copying this letter to Joe Pilling (Northern Ireland Office).

Yours sincerely,

Jill Ferguson

p.p. (D T PIPER)

Bryan Cartledge Esq.,
10 Downing Street

Prime Minister
Content that I
should reply in
these terms.
JH
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Yes - but -
it is not
that convincing
and I remain
very unhappy about
some of the
points. But the
reason may be
lack of sufficient
resources.
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The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter of 6th June about the training and equipment of troops in Northern Ireland. Since it would be a matter of serious concern if troops were inadequately prepared for their arduous duties in the Province I ^{sh} would like to ^{respond} ~~deal~~ ^{to} in detail with the points which you have made ^{in some detail.}

2 It may be helpful if I were to describe the basis of the Northern Ireland training system. The responsibility for deciding on the training required and the time needed to prepare a unit for operations in Northern Ireland rests with the Commanding Officer as a normal function of command. The Northern Ireland Training and Advisory Teams (one in BAOR and one in UKLF) provide training advice and assistance, and the unit's superior Headquarters ensure that the unit is given all the assistance it needs and is fully prepared for its tour. I can assure you that Northern Ireland

/ training ...

training is given the highest priority. I understand that The Queen's Own Hussars, whom you mention particularly, have expressed themselves totally satisfied with the training arrangements and believe that the Regiment was fully prepared for its tour in Northern Ireland.

~~E~~ The time which a unit requires for training will depend on its role and previous experience. Non-infantry units are advised to allocate a minimum of eight to ten weeks, although many individuals will commence their training well before this. The Commanding Officer of The Queen's Own Hussars, who are not inexperienced in Northern Ireland duties, having completed two successful tours in recent years, allocated ten weeks for the training.

~~by~~ The need to reorganise and train non-infantry units for operations in Northern Ireland is fully appreciated, although in fact many of the qualities needed -

/ alertness ...

alertness, observation, fitness and initiative - are those required of all soldiers, irrespective of role. Non-infantry units are given additional assistance through the attachment of a team from an infantry battalion with recent Northern Ireland experience, and they are advised to allocate more training time than infantry units.

/ ~~E~~ I attach a note on the points raised in the Appendix to your letter about various detailed aspects of equipment and training.

~~R~~ The Prime Minister hopes that this letter will reassure you that the closest attention is given to the training and equipment of needs of troops serving in Northern Ireland. Our soldiers there do an excellent job in very difficult conditions, and they deserve no less.

TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Age and Serviceability of Self Loading Rifles (SLRs).

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The SLR entered service in the British Army in 1956 and we are now considering its replacement. All SLRs are relatively old and well used, although still effective weapons. All weapons are inspected by the armourers of the unit drawing weapons for Northern Ireland and defective weapons are replaced. Each SLR requires an individual gun aperture setting, sufficient to cock the weapon but not so great as to cause too large a recoil. Each weapon is adjusted by the firer to ensure there is no delay in firing. If he is not satisfied the weapon is replaced.

2. Training of SLR for Royal Armoured Corps Recruits.

All soldiers using the SLR in Northern Ireland are given thorough training in its use. Most soldiers will have completed the full eight to ten weeks Northern Ireland training and will have been in possession of their SLRs for this complete period. If for any reason they join the training later, it is the duty of the Squadron Commander to ensure that their weapon handling is of the required standard. There are facilities for training to be continued if necessary in Northern Ireland before the soldiers take up duties.

3. & 4. Urban Patrol Boots. All units going to Northern Ireland receive a 100% allocation of patrol boots. Both The Queen's Own Hussars (QOH) and the Blues and Royals (RHG/D) received all the boots they demanded. The boots are a relatively new issue and there may have been production difficulties in ensuring their timely arrival. However, even if there were such difficulties there would have been no need for individuals to purchase boots from civilian sources; the standard issue boot is perfectly adequate and was used by units for the first eight years of the Northern Ireland campaign.

5. Gloves. Until recently Northern Ireland combat gloves were issued only for units completing tours there during winter. Gloves are now issued to all units, and the system will change in September to ensure that units

/ receive ...

receive their gloves two months before deployment. Units currently receive their gloves on arrival in Northern Ireland; RHG/D received 426 pairs and QOH are receiving 450 pairs.

6. Radios. A41 radios are not outdated. They continue to be used by some infantry battalions in BAOR. A41 radios supplemented by pocket 'phones for the Urban Dry Training Area phase of training are perfectly adequate to prepare for Northern Ireland. CLANSMAN radios are not used in Belfast, the location of both QOH and RHG/D.

7. Watercannon and Nitesun. The watercannon, which has not been used in the Province for over two years, would be operated by a specialist unit. There is no requirement for units under training to see or use it. There are three Nitesun equipments available in the BAOR area for use by units on Northern Ireland training if required.

8. Individual Weapon Sights (IWS). Both units were issued with 30 IWS for training.

9. Baton Rounds 45 Grain. Because of a technical fault the round has been temporarily withdrawn from training. Because of its power this round is seldom used in Northern Ireland, and then only under strictly controlled conditions.

10. Land Rovers and Riot Control Equipment. These are not in short supply. "Pigs" are only used during the intensive final fortnight's training, which is quite adequate to practice vehicle drills. The vehicles are driven by Royal Corps of Transport drivers both on training and in Northern Ireland.

11. Tin City UDTA. The use of the Tin City UDTA is a climax to the training for Northern Ireland. Training prior to this takes place in barracks which is as challenging and imaginative as the unit makes it. Indeed some units have found 'Tin City' to be an anti-climax after their own in-house training.

12. Accommodation. A hutted camp is available for units during the winter months and a tented camp is used during the summer. Early May was unfortunately cold this year but it did not prevent QOH completing their training.

13. Mock-Ups and Models. Units receive large quantities of maps, air photographs, photographs and videotapes of their areas. Additionally, patrol commanders deploy at least one week early to their areas in order to familiarise themselves with the ground. Mock-ups and models are not thought to be necessary.

14. RHG/D Casualties. Two soldiers of RHG/D were killed by terrorists. While any such casualties are to be deplored, those suffered by RHG/D are not exceptional. The infantry unit in the adjoining area lost three soldiers in the same period.