

cc B. H. G. L. e

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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PRIME MINISTER

MO 4

27th November 1980

On reconsideration, Mr Pym is getting cold feet about announcing this by written answer - but I doubt that it

Prime Minister

merits a statement or PNQ MS 2/11

For information Mr Pym does not expect serious controversy. MAD

ARMING OF SERVICEWOMEN

In the Statement on Defence Estimates 1980 (Cmnd 7826-I, para 626-8) the Defence Secretary said that the Government was considering whether the traditional attitude to carriage of arms by members of the Women's Services should be revised. Mr Pym has asked me to let you know that he plans to make an announcement on this next Monday in answer to a written Parliamentary Question. I attach a copy of the Question and the proposed Answer.

I am copying this letter to Richard Prescott (Paymaster General's Office), Murdo MacLean (Chief Whip's Office) and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Your sincerely
J D S Dawson

(J D S DAWSON)

N J Sanders Esq



To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representation he has received about the proposal that servicewomen should be allowed to bear arms, and if he will make a statement.

A N S W E R

(Mr Francis Pym)

In the Statement on the Defence Estimates (Cmd 7826) I announced that we were reconsidering our traditional attitude to the carriage of arms by servicewomen for defensive purposes. Although there was extensive press coverage at the time and despite the invitation in the service debates for views to be expressed, interest in this subject has been very slight. I judge that there is a readiness to accept limited change and I have therefore decided that members of the Womens Services can be trained in the use of arms. At first training will be given only to limited numbers. This will be voluntary in the WRAF and compulsory in the WRAC though exemptions will be made for those currently serving who have genuine objections to carrying arms. The number of WRAC involved will depend upon studies into future manpower requirements. WRAC personnel will carry arms for self defence purposes only. The majority of the WRAF will eventually receive training; in addition to being armed for self-defence purposes they will also be armed for station defence duties.

There is no requirement at present for the WRNS to carry arms; and there is no question of members of any of the Women's services serving in a combat role.