



FILE

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Ireland

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

7 February, 1983

B/F

OVERBOOTS FOR THE ARMY

Thank you for your letter of 4 February which I have shown to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister does not find the explanations in it satisfactory. The fact is that members of the 1st Coldstreams, whom she met during her visit to Bessbrook, took the trouble to produce these overboots and to complain to her that an insufficient number were available and that they wore out quickly. Mrs. Thatcher would have expected that this specific complaint would be investigated. The Prime Minister does not understand why the fact that these overboots are slipped on over an individual's own footwear leads to the conclusion that they should not be issued as part of his personal kit; but, since it is open to the battalion to apply for an increase in their supply, she would like to know whether this point had been conveyed to the Bessbrook garrison, whether they had so applied and whether an increase has been granted.

Nor does the Prime Minister find the answer to the point about serviceability adequate. Again, the fact is that a complaint was made to her. Your letter does not say by whom you have been assured that the boots are satisfactory, but she wonders whether this point was specifically checked with the 1st Coldstreams who took the trouble to put the point to her.

Finally, Mrs. Thatcher was surprised that it had taken so long to produce a reply on this point, especially since it is not evident that enquiries have been made of 1st Coldstream by whom the complaint was raised.

Could you please let me have a further letter quickly.

E. E. R. BUTLER

Miss Jane Ridley,
Ministry of Defence



MO 19/3

Prime Minister

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This answers the point raised with you by the Coldstream during your visit to Bessbrook barracks.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1

Telephone 01-930XXXX 218 2111/3

FEB

4.2.

Send the letter back. The answer would do me.

Soldiers have
I received a note
was the factory letter
A manufacturer
of course. I will
show it to
Anthony Day.

4th February 1983

Dear Robin,

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M O D of course

OVERBOOTS FOR THE ARMY

I am sorry not to have replied earlier to your letter of 23 December about overboots for the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards at Bessbrook but we have been looking into this question in some detail. There are really three aspects to this problem: availability, durability and country of manufacture.

The normal requirement for patrol overboots in Northern Ireland is set at a total of 1500 pairs. This is the quantity judged necessary to maintain an actual "dependency" in the field of 144 pairs per battalion. That of course is not sufficient to give each man a pair of overboots, nor is there any need to do so. The overboots are, as the name suggests, simply slipped on over an individual's own footwear as he goes out on patrol; and they are not therefore issued as part of a soldier's personal kit. The unit holding of 144 pairs is not immutable and it is always open to a battalion to apply for their supply to be increased. In fact some 38 extra pairs of the standard overboot have been supplied on request to Northern Ireland as well as some 155 pairs of obsolescent rubber overboots.

Why not?

We find the complaints about the serviceability of the overboots rather surprising. They are standard issue to the Canadian Armed Forces and before the Prime Minister's visit there had not been a single report of poor durability. We believe that if this were a real problem reports to this effect would have emerged before now; but, to be doubly sure, we have checked through the command chain in Northern Ireland and we have been assured that the boots are quite satisfactory.

By whom?

Northern Ireland is not the only place where this kind of overboot is required. They are also issued to our Commando/Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (Land) units, and there is some demand for them in the Falklands. Nevertheless, as a whole we only need to purchase annually some 1500 pairs. I am afraid that British manufacturers are simply not interested in going to the expense of setting up a production line to meet the limited MOD demand for a very specialized product. Nonetheless it is normal practice for our staff to consider,

R Butler Esq



each time a purchase needs to be made, whether or not it is cost effective to procure them from the UK industry. It is, of course, just possible that additional demand for them in the Falklands may raise the overall requirement to a level where UK industry can offer a competitive quote; but, for the time being, it is more economic to purchase the small quantities required off-the-shelf from our Canadian allies.

I am copying this to Jonathan Spencer (D of I), with particular reference to the overseas procurement point.

Yours ever,

Gene Riddey