

Discussed with the  
Prime Minister.  
P.L. file

PRIME MINISTER

Overboots for the Army

May we have a word?  
The statement needed by  
this incident is  
appealing, no.

I attach the latest letter from the MOD on the vexed question of overboots.

This reply justifies your comments on the previous letter. If the MOD had done a thorough job earlier, they should have discovered the information now contained in this letter about the extra boots issued to the Bessbrook barracks.

However, they have at least now provided answers to the three main points raised:-

(1) Why is a pair of boots not issued to each soldier?

? "Items with a limited use related to a specific job or particular weather conditions are supplied as needed. This makes for a more manageable load and more limited personal responsibility for the individual soldier. It is also more economical."

(2) Did the Coldstreams have insufficient boots?

They were the first unit which had not found itself able to manage within the standard scale of issue, but the issue was increased at their request, and they have been supplied with a further 248 pairs of other types of boot.

(3) Do the boots last?

The Coldstreams end-of-tour report said:

"The overboot proved its worth and was excellent for keeping feet dry and warm. It was not considered good for walking long distances".

/ The MOD



The MOD add that it was not designed for the latter purpose. I have enquired what is meant by the statement that the purpose of these overboots is for "close observation platoons". I gather that close observation platoons are deposited in an area, often by helicopter and make their way to a place where they go into hiding for two or three days to observe activity. The overboots are designed to keep feet dry and warm on such exercises, not for long marches.

Content to leave it there?

F.R.B.

16 February 1983





MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-~~830 7822~~X 218 2111/3

MO 19/3

15th February 1983

*Dear Robin,*

OVERBOOTS FOR THE ARMY

I am replying to your letter of 7th February asking for further information. I am sorry that the Prime Minister was not reassured by our earlier letter. It may be helpful if I go into more detail.

This overboot was originally procured for the ACE Mobile Force (Land) in around 1971, expressly for use by non-tactical personnel, for example aircraft marshallers, aircraft and vehicle maintainers and so on. No doubt because they were used to these overboots in their AMF(L) role, when 40 Commando RM were sent to Northern Ireland in 1979 they requested a trial issue of these overboots for use by their Marines in close observation platoons (COP). This was a conspicuous success - it enabled the COP men to make their way through very wet terrain and still arrive at their observation post with dry feet. It was therefore decided in 1980 to invest in a quantity of these overboots for use by troops employed in that role in Northern Ireland. As a general rule items of kit on personal issue to soldiers are limited to those necessities which they can and will take with them wherever they are sent. Other items with a limited use related to a specific job or particular weather conditions are supplied as needed. This makes for a more manageable load and more limited personal responsibility for the individual soldier. It is also more economical. These overboots were considered to fall into the latter category of kit.

I turn now to the question of the Coldstream Guards request for additional issues of overboots. As explained in our earlier letter the normal issue is 144 pairs per battalion. I believe that the Coldstream Guards are the first unit which has not found itself able to manage within this scaling but at their request the unit holding was raised to 182. We have now established that in response to further requests to HQ 8 Infantry Brigade they were supplied with a total of a further 248 pairs of other types of boot.





Finally there is the question of serviceability. I understand that the Battalion's End-of-tour Report states that the overboot proved its worth and was excellent for keeping feet dry and warm. It was not considered good for walking long distances - but it is not designed for that use.

We would of course be happy to provide any further information on this subject which the Prime Minister might request.

Yours etc,

Richard Mottram

(R C MOTTRAM)  
Private Secretary