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SECRET

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 01-218 2111/3

11a-c  
Agreed - and  
that it will need  
very careful  
presentation  
12~~th~~ July 1989

*Prime Minister*  
The proposal is to  
base the reserve  
battalion in Northern  
Ireland in mainland GB, to reduce  
the risks to families. It will need

*Dear Charles, careful presentation, or it will  
look like 'withdrawal' - a victory for PIRA  
attacks on married  
quarters. CD 16/9.*

ALDERGROVE INFANTRY BATTALION

The Prime Minister may wish to be aware of prospective changes in quartering arrangements in Northern Ireland which the Defence Secretary intends to introduce in order to enhance the security of the families of soldiers serving in Northern Ireland.

You will recall that in November and December last year PIRA made four attacks on married quarters in the Province, and issued a statement to the effect that if the British Army did not evacuate their families from the Province within seven days they would bear the responsibility for any subsequent casualties. Although there have been no attacks on quarters in the Province this year, targeting has continued and intelligence indicates that the threat remains high and is long-term in nature. To counter this threat up to 12 platoons (a battalion equivalent) are currently being deployed to guard quarters, to the detriment of counter-terrorist offensive operations.

The GOC Northern Ireland has been looking at ways of reducing the threat to married quarters and, at the same time, releasing soldiers for offensive counter-terrorist operations. His conclusion, with which my Secretary of State is in general agreement, is that we should seek to bring all Northern Ireland married quarters within secure, guarded perimeters. The bulk of the married quarters currently located outside security perimeters can be tackled only by a longer term programme involving acquisition of new land and building of new houses. But a number of short term adjustments can be made to reduce the number of vulnerable married quarters: the majority of these are already in hand.

Immediate steps to reduce the vulnerability of quarters occupied by the Aldergrove Infantry Battalion are also proposed. In the Antrim area, the vast majority of vulnerable married quarters (some 150) are occupied by families of the resident Aldergrove Infantry Battalion. Whilst it would be possible to build new quarters within an enlarged barracks perimeter at Aldergrove, this would be expensive and would take 3 to 4 years to complete. In the meantime one Company is being employed full-time on security duties to protect these insecure quarters.

Charles Powell Esq  
10 Downing Street



The situation in Antrim is further complicated by the fact that the barracks housing the battalion (Alexander Barracks, Aldergrove) has well exceeded its planned life of 15 years and requires rebuilding. Whilst it may be some years before we can consider reducing force levels in the Province (and it has always been envisaged that the Aldergrove Infantry Battalion would be the first to be withdrawn), it makes no sense in quartering terms to create a sixth permanent barracks. The land currently occupied by the barracks would moreover be ideal for re-providing quarters within a secure perimeter for other Army units in the area.

In the light of both of these considerations my Secretary of State has concluded that the practical solution is for the battalion to remain dedicated to Northern Ireland operations, but that it can do so without operational penalty if based not in Northern Ireland but on the mainland (at Weeton, near Blackpool). Weeton is a secure Camp with most of its married quarters behind an entry-controlled, fully fenced perimeter. The soldiers based at Weeton will remain under the direct command of the GOC NI in the same way as at present. As in the case of a resident battalion, one Company will be deployed at any one time on operations on the ground, with the other Companies at various levels of readiness. The transport time has been taken into consideration and, unless weather conditions were quite exceptionally bad, there will be no diminution of the speed of response of the reserve Companies in an emergency to the Province. Consequently the GOC's flexibility to respond to fluctuations in the threat will not be reduced. Indeed, the reduction in the number of insecure MQs needing to be guarded in the Province will mean that the forces available to the GOC in other areas will be increased.

The first opportunity for this change to take place is next March when the current battalion complete their tour in Aldergrove. In order to allow the battalion which will be taking over the Aldergrove Infantry Battalion task (1 QLR) to prepare fully, we propose to replace 3 QUEENS with a roulement battalion for six months, from March to September 1990. Thereafter 1 QLR will adopt the role of the Aldergrove Infantry Battalion for 18 months. Because this approach to Northern Ireland operations has not been tried before, there will be a review in June 1991 to assess the success of basing the Aldergrove Infantry Battalion at Weeton.

My Secretary of State recognises that this move will entail considerable presentational difficulties, both to ensure that the move is not seen as a 'withdrawal', and to avoid encouraging PIRA in their attacks against married quarters. I should add, in the former context, that there are no plans for further redeployments to the mainland in the short or medium term. My Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland - who has been consulted and is in principle content with our proposals - have directed that officials should prepare a joint plan to deal with



the presentational aspects of the move (including the need to inform the Irish in advance).

The presentational emphasis will be on the need to do away with the unsatisfactory accommodation at Aldergrove and to make the most effective use of available accommodation resources. There will be no question of linking the move with the security of families, and any questions on security will be firmly rebutted. In the meantime, until the move has taken place next March, we will stick to our standard line that we cannot possibly discuss operational matters but that there is no proposal to change force levels.

My Secretary of State would be grateful to know that the Prime Minister is content with what is proposed.

I am copying this letter to Richard Gozney (FCO), Stephen Leach (NIO), and Philip Mawer (Home Office), and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely,*

*John Colston.*

(J P COLSTON)  
Private Secretary

13 JUL 1989





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10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

*From the Private Secretary*

10 July 1989

*Dear Steve,*

NORTHERN IRELAND INQUESTS

The Prime Minister was grateful for the Lord President's minute describing the outcome of the discussion in H Committee on Northern Ireland Inquests. She is content with the outcome and agrees that the proposed Order should be introduced in the Autumn.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Lord Chancellor, the Home Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Attorney General and Sir Robin Butler.

*Yours sincerely,*

C. D. POWELL

Steven Catling, Esq.  
Lord President's Office