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MINISTER OF STATE FOR
THE ARMED FORCES

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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D/MIN(AF)/AH/9/4

62 December 1989

Dear John

CDF 7/dec

Since 1980 we have been developing our policy on the deployment of Irish named regiments to Northern Ireland with a view to extending such deployments consistent with good relations with the local community, and taking into account Regimental and Irish sensitivities.

The present policy of permitting Irish cavalry regiments to serve in the Province was introduced in 1980. A year later 5 INNIS DG served on a roulement tour in Fermanagh in the infantry role. In 1983 the QRIH deployed to the Maze Prison as the Guard Force, and 5 INNIS DG are currently serving another rural roulement tour.

The benefits to the Army of being able to add Irish infantry battalions to the Emergency Tour Plot are self-evident; the NI commitment would be shared more widely and thus turbulence among units would be reduced. Against this background, it was decided in 1986 that steps should be taken towards further deployments of Irish Regiments. Consequently, in June last year, it was agreed collectively that 1 R IRISH should serve on a rural roulement tour between Sep 88 and Jan 89.

The tour was considered to be highly successful by the RUC as well as by the Army; relations between the Battalion and the local community were very good; there were no serious incidents involving the local population nor allegations of harassment against the soldiers. Indeed, the RUC indicated that there would be no police objection to other Irish named regiments being included in the roulement rota.

Given this absence of controversy over the deployment of 1 ROYAL IRISH, it is proposed that 2 R IRISH should deploy to Northern Ireland on a rural roulement tour in the second half of next year. Further, and on the assumption that this deployment is also a success, we have concluded that the Rangers should thereafter be added, as a matter of routine, to the Arms Plot for rural roulement tours in NI. The intention will continue to be to avoid deployments to sensitive areas, in particular the main urban areas of Belfast and Londonderry, and as before, members of the Battalion will be screened for any adverse NI trace before deployment.

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On the assumption that you are content that the Irish Rangers deploy in this way, and that the first regular deployment should be by 2 R IRISH next year, I suggest that our officials co-operate nearer the time of the deployment to finalise any presentational aspects necessary.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Douglas Hurd and David Waddington, and to Sir Robin Butler.

Yours ever
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ARCHIE HAMILTON

Rt Hon John Cope MP