



FCS/86/222

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22/9.

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCEAdditional Royal Engineer Support in Northern Ireland

1. The Northern Ireland Secretary sent me a copy of his letter to you of 15 September about his need for further Royal Engineer assistance for construction work at RUC stations and at HM Prison, Maze.
2. As Tom says in his letter, the Provisional IRA are making determined efforts to bring this vital security work to a halt. It is clear that they must not be allowed to succeed and, in the absence of a sufficient number of civilian contractors, we have no alternative but to turn to the Sappers for help. We must be seen to be responding with all possible vigour to this latest PIRA campaign if we are to persuade the Irish to make greater efforts in cross-border security cooperation.
3. I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Tom King, Douglas Hurd and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

CRBudd (Private Secretary)

JP

(GEOFFREY HOWE)
(Approved by the
Foreign Secretary and signed
in his absence)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
22 September 1986



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IRGUND

REPORT OF STATE FOR DEPARTMENT

THE GENERAL SITUATION OF THE IRGUND

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The situation in the Irgund... (faint, mostly illegible text)

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REPORT OF STATE FOR DEPARTMENT
Approved by the
Foreign Secretary and signed
in his absence

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cc BX



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
WHITEHALL
LONDON SW1A 2AZ

SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND
The Rt Hon George Younger MP
Secretary of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall
LONDON
SW1A 2HR

BF // Await Def. Sec's
reply.
CDP
15/9.

15th September 1986

Dear Secretary of State,

ADDITIONAL ROYAL ENGINEER ASSISTANCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

In my letter to you of 11 August concerning force levels in Northern Ireland I concluded by promising to write further in due course about the possibility of additional Royal Engineers assistance being provided for work on two major tasks:

- (a) urgent, operationally essential building work at four RUC police stations at Rosslea, Plumbridge, Carrickmore and Rosemount; and
- (b) the construction of a security fence at HMP Maze which, when completed, would allow the military component of the Prison Guard Force to be reduced to a level where it would no longer be necessary to provide a roulement squadron/battery from BAOR to form that Force.

However, before explaining our further needs for Royal Engineer assistance I must take this opportunity to put on record for you and the colleagues to whom I am copying this letter my profound gratitude for the efforts that the Sappers have so far made and are

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still making in support of the police. There can be no doubt that their flexibility, capacity for hard work and ingenuity in procuring materials in the face of the Provisional IRA threats is an inspiration and a very significant boost to the morale of every policeman in the Province.

Turning now to further RE support for the above items in the RUC building programme, you will no doubt be aware that the Provisional IRA have not only re-emphasised recently their threat to building contractors engaged in work for the security forces but also widened it to cover those supplying items such as food, fuel and transport facilities - and have backed it with two further murders to add to the previous three. Against the background of fear and tension brought about by this most vicious PIRA threat yet (and by counter-threats from Loyalist paramilitary groups) we are striving both to maintain the programme of rebuilding and improving protection at police stations by the use of local civilian contractors and establish viable alternatives to these local contractors. In endeavouring to ease the current problems of getting work done we have been pursuing a number of options. Local RUC stations have been given delegated authority to have small maintenance work carried out quietly. The Police Authority have been doing their utmost to ease the situation and have tried, so far without success, to stimulate local interest in a NI consortium taking on work; a similar idea, under PSA auspices, has made little progress in GB. I understand that the Police Authority are in touch with a Hong Kong firm who had earlier expressed an interest in taking on work. NIO officials are investigating similar radical options.

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-2-

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Royal Engineers it is estimated that it will require the deployment of two successive field squadrons for consecutive four months roulement tours. I believe this programme of work represents a necessary and essential use of RE resources whilst the direct PIRA threat remains and I seek your agreement that one additional roulement squadron be deployed to the Province at the beginning of February 1987 and another four months later. I might add that once some of the work requested has been completed it should reduce the number of soldiers required at Rosslea and reduce the commitment of helicopter flights into Carrickmore.

The task of building a security fence for HMP Maze, on the understanding that its construction secured the end of the military commitment to provide a roulement squadron/battery from BAOR for the Prison Guard Force, has been assessed as requiring Royal Engineer reinforcements of one field squadron with some additional specialists for six months after a minimum initial design and procurement stage of about six months. In terms of time and cost this option has significant advantages over the employment of civilian contractors to carry out the task which has been assessed as taking an overall time of three years (including the six months design stage) - always assuming that contractors could be found to tender for such a highly visible task.

I have authorised the design of the fence to proceed but I am afraid that I am not yet able to come to you with a firm request for Royal Engineers assistance, as agreement has not yet been reached on the

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-4-

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The fact remains that if, in the short to medium term, we are effectively to counter the IRA tactic of attacking exposed police stations and then preventing repairs by means of intimidation, the support of the Royal Engineers is crucial. Not only is it the sole means of securing urgent reconstruction work; it is also the most visible demonstration of the Government's will to meet PIRA's challenge head on and defeat it, and of the Government's commitment to the security and morale of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Speaking to the Sappers on the ground I have been impressed to find how they appreciate the challenge and the importance of their task, and the satisfaction they derive from doing a vital, operational task in support of their colleagues in the RUC.

As I said in my previous letter, my request for additional Royal Engineer assistance is for those four stations mentioned above where the RUC must stand firm and where there is an urgent, operational need to provide blast and mortar-proof premises. In both political and security terms we simply cannot allow the RUC presence in those locations to be overthrown.

I understand that the lead time for preparing design plans and ordering supplies is such that it would not be possible for the work to be started by a squadron arriving at the beginning of November (when the present additional roulement squadron leaves), nor is there in any case likely to be a squadron available before 1 February 1987. Further I understand that if this work is taken on by the

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precise size and composition of the residual Guard Force that will be needed once a fence has been built in order to maintain what we assess as the requisite level of security. We are trying to resolve this problem urgently. Meanwhile you may wish to leave sufficient flexibility in the Royal Engineers Arms Plot for 1987 to keep open the option of using Royal Engineers to build the security fence if, as I hope, the subsequent composition of the Prison Guard Force is agreed, in order that reinforcement from BAOR may cease to be necessary.

To summarise, I shall be most grateful if you will see your way to providing two additional roulement field squadrons to serve successively in the Province from 1 February 1987 in order to carry out operationally essential work on the four police stations named above. I consider this task to be so important to maintaining the Government's security policy here - in the face of both the terrorist threat and criticism from opponents of the Anglo-Irish Agreement - that I should be happy to discuss my request with the Prime Minister and colleagues if you thought that necessary. I shall write again on the security fence at HMP Maze if and when the outstanding issue has been resolved satisfactorily.

I have now seen your letter of 10 September on force levels. I

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shall be replying separately on the main issue but think it important to press ahead with Engineer assistance now.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe and Douglas Hurd and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours Sincerely
Edward
(Private Secretary)

for TK

(Approved by the Secretary of
State and signed in his absence
in Northern Ireland)

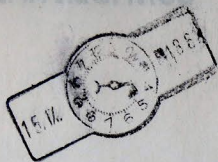
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-6-

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IRELAND: Situation PE21.



shall be replied expeditiously on the main issue but there is
important to press ahead with highest assistance now.
I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Geoffrey Howe and
Douglas Hurd and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours sincerely
Robert
(Prime Secretary)

for TR
(Approved by the Secretary of
State and signed in his absence
in Northern Ireland)

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