



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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SECURE FAX NO. 582

14 May 1992

TO: HQ FROM: BELFAST Pages: 1
FOR: Pat Hennessy/Declan Kelleher — not Copied
FROM: Sean Farrell

Paratroopers in Coalisland

1. The subject came up at this afternoon's Joint Secretariat meeting.
2. Alston gave an account of the phone conversation between Mates and Minister Flynn which broadly accords with the account we have received from T Dalton. He acknowledged receipt of our note sent subsequent to the verbal representations made which had caused Mates to phone Minister Flynn. Mates stressed that the matter was being taken very seriously. The behaviour of the Paras had been absolutely unacceptable and he stressed that breaches of discipline of this nature would not be tolerated. He mentioned that the British authorities had taken the unusual step of making public the fact that the officer in charge had been suspended.
3. Turning to the question of removing the Paras from Northern Ireland (or from contact with the public in Northern Ireland - which was the sense in which Alston had understood Minister Flynn to make the point), Alston observed that there was no way in which the British Army were likely to exclude a significant infantry unit, such as the Paras from Northern Ireland. He added that two battalions of the Parachute Regiment had served in Northern Ireland recently with no significantly higher rates of complaint about their conduct than was the case with other regiments. (He did, however, acknowledge the joy-rider shooting incident as an exception to this.) He felt therefore that to question the Regiment's suitability on a blanket basis was a bit wide and that one shouldn't get the issue out of proportion. He added that Mates would be speaking to Minister Flynn again in the matter tomorrow evening.
4. Our response, from Mr O'Donovan, was that it had long been our policy that the Paras were not suitable for use in Northern Ireland. He acknowledged that there had been a relative lack of complaints about their behaviour during the last tour of duty in Belfast. However, Mr O'Donovan stressed that our contention remained that we had never considered the regiment suitable for use in Northern Ireland. The points we were making now should be seen against this background. We had noted the Cappagh incident and the understandable effect this would have on soldiers' morale. However, what had happened on Tuesday night was simply unacceptable, as the British side, by their actions, had acknowledged. Since the deployment of the Paras in East Tyrone in April, there

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had been a string of serious complaints to us about their behaviour. Mr O'Donovan asked for clarification of the British Army press release, which was ambiguous on the issue of whether or not the troops would be back in Coalisland tonight. Mr O'Donovan stated that he expected the formal response to this incident would be made through the Secretariat.

5. Mr Kyle of the British side has now responded with clarification on the last point. He has reported to us that:
- the issue is being handled sensitively by the local security forces;
 - the Para Regiment will still be operational in the Coalisland area in accordance with security force regulations;
 - the particular soldiers involved in the incident in Coalisland on Tuesday night will not be on duty in Coalisland tonight;
 - these soldiers could, however, be on duty elsewhere.