



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Meeting between the Minister for Justice and Mr. Mates

(15 May 1992)

In their telephone conversation Thursday the Minister stressed the need for a swift and decisive response to the Government's representations. The Minister noted that the officer concerned had been suspended from duty. However he emphasised that this was not enough: in particular "the Paras would have to be removed from contact with the public in Northern Ireland"

The British told us through the Secretariat last evening that while the particular soldiers on involved in Tuesday's incident would not be on duty last night in Coalisland, they could be on duty elsewhere. Moreover the Para Regiment would still be operational in the Coalisland area. While there are some indications that the Paras are in fact staying off the streets (in accordance with their undertaking of "sensitivity") this is clearly not an acceptable response.

We have again today reminded the British side (copy attached) that it remains our view

- that the Parachute Regiment is inappropriate for deployment in Northern Ireland
- that the troops currently there should be removed from contact with the public
- their further deployment in the Tyrone area would be widely regarded as provocative and would be unhelpful in every respect

The Minister might wish to reiterate these points. He might also enquire (i) progress on the criminal investigation and (ii) what disciplinary action has been taken against soldiers other than the suspended officer.

A Background Note on the involvement of the Paratroop Regiment in Northern Ireland is attached.

Confidential.

The Parachute Regiment in Northern Ireland

The Record

1. There have been constant tensions between the nationalist community and the Parachute Regiment over the years. The Paras are trained as assault troops, with a particular emphasis on aggression. (This was vividly exemplified in a recent British TV documentary on a typical Para induction course). We have consistently taken the view that this Regiment is not suitable for use in Northern Ireland. This view is strongly held by seasoned observers such as Fr. Denis Faul who see the presence and associated misbehaviour of the Paras as a propaganda godsend to the Provisional IRA.

2. In addition to the current problems in Co. Tyrone, the following examples are illustrative of some of the difficulties with the Paras over the years:
 - Arguably the most traumatic development in the years since 1969 was 'Bloody Sunday', 30 January 1972, when troops of the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment (1 Para) shot dead thirteen civilians (a fourteenth died later) who had been taking part in a Civil Rights march in Derry. The official report into the events (the Widgery Report) essentially exonerated the Paras and has remained a source of contention to this day.

 - an article in "The Guardian" of 1 February 1989 profiled the memoirs of British Army Brigadier Peter Morton. Morton had been OC of 3 Para (the same battalion responsible for the recent assaults in Coalisland) in South Armagh in 1976. He recorded in his diary at that time that he was "keen to avenge

the deaths" of soldiers killed by the IRA during a previous assignment. Elsewhere, he writes "what we want is dead terrorists, not empty cartridge cases". As the recent incidents at Coalisland indicate, there appears to be an ethos in the Paras which demands some sort of revenge following attacks on their members. (It will be recalled that the Coalisland incidents occurred just hours after a Para lost his legs in a mine explosion at Cappagh).

- currently, six paratroops (also members of 3 Para) are awaiting trial arising out of the killing of two teenage joyriders in West Belfast in September 1990. One has been accused of murder, two of attempted murder, one of altering evidence and all six (including a Lieutenant) of perverting the course of justice i.e. being engaged in an attempt to distort and cover up the facts of the case.

Current deployment

3. On the basis of our Army's assessment and information obtained from our own contacts in the North, the current situation appears to be as follows:
 - 1 Para, headquartered in Palace Barracks outside Belfast, is a resident (i.e. two-year tour) battalion, which arrived in February 1991 and is due to leave in February of next year). This Battalion maintains a quick reaction group (about 30 soldiers) at Woodbourne Barracks in West Belfast. There are often problems between nationalists and this group who tend to arrive first at flashpoints;
 - 2 Para was stationed in Fermanagh between March and July 1990 as a roulement (i.e. short stay: normally 4½ months) battalion, but do not appear to be in

Northern Ireland at present;

3 Para (which was involved in the Coalisland incidents) has been in East Tyrone (essentially Cookstown, Dungannon, Coalisland, Pomeroy, Coagh) since the beginning of April. We understand that their tour is for 3 months. Normally, a Para short stay battalion is sent to Northern Ireland at half strength but we heard from one of our nationalist contacts that the OC of 3 Para (Colonel Burls) has stated that they are at twice normal strength. He offered this recently as a reason for their substantial presence on the ground. We also heard from a contact that a reconnaissance unit of the Coldstream Guards was recently in the area. (This would normally suggest that the Coldstreams would be the unit to replace the Paras at the end of their tour). We are aware, however, that Ken Maginnis M. P. has asked for the prompt replacement of the Paras by the Kings Own Scottish Borderers (who are currently believed to be in reserve).

Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs
15 May, 1992

W8845

Menage from Irish Side

SECURE FAX NO. 587

15 May

15 May 1992

TO: HQ

FROM: BELFAST Pages: 1

FOR: Pat Hennessy

FROM: Bryan O'Brien

Ref. Your SF 424

I have sent the following note to the other side:

Paratroop Regiment in Coalisland (Log No. 1447)

With reference to the exchanges in the Secretariat yesterday and particularly the unsatisfactory nature of the "clarification" provided by Mr. Kyle, I am to advise you that we maintain our view that the Regiment is not suitable for use in Northern Ireland. The troops there at present should be withdrawn. In the aftermath of this week's and earlier events in the Tyrone area their continued deployment would be widely seen as provocative and would contribute neither to maintaining the peace nor enhancing nationalist confidence in the Security Forces.

We look forward to an early and comprehensive response to the matters raised in our note dated 13 May.