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26 July 1994

Mr. Sean O hulginn  
 Assistant Secretary  
 Anglo-Irish Division  
 Department of Foreign Affairs  
 Dublin 2

Dear Assistant Secretary,

Visit of Brigadier Monro

The new British Army chief in Belfast, Brigadier Seymour Monro, visited here today with the chief civil representative in Belfast, Eric Dalzell. (The civil representatives are NIO officials who liaise with the public on behalf of the British Army.)

Monro arrived here in April for a two-year tour of duty. He is a Scot, the son of a serving Minister in the Scottish Office, and belongs to the Queen's own Highlanders regiment. As part of the Army cutbacks, he told us that his regiment is to be amalgamated with the Gordon Highlanders. The Prince of Wales is Colonel-in-Chief of Monro's regiment and is expected to take that post at the head of the new regiment. You may be mildly interested to know that consideration was given to naming the new regiment after the Prince. The regiments favoured it initially, partly because the Prince shares the name of Bonny Prince Charlie, but they were frightened off by the revelations of "Camillagate". It seems that the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment has been adorned with the soubriquet "Squidgy's Own"! The Highlanders were fearful of nicknames more appalling to contemplate and not fit to put in a polite letter to the Department.

Sectarianism in the Scottish regiments

I raised with Monro the record of some of the Scottish regiments which have a reputation for sectarian abusive behaviour. He accepted that it did exist, less so in the Highland regiments which recruit from that area and have a better denominational-mixture (at the most recent count, he

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thought his own regiment was 30-40% Catholic but that Catholics were more strongly represented in senior ranks; he himself is Episcopalian). On the whole, however, he believed, naturally enough, that the Scottish tend to get on better with people in the streets than Southern English regiments.

#### Army's change of style

This is Monro's ninth tour in Northern Ireland, his fourth in Belfast. He was last here in 1990 when he commanded a battalion; subsequently, he commanded a brigade in the Gulf War. I have made the point before that the average senior British Army officer here will have served at least six or seven tours. Gradually, over the years, the officers who came here in the 1970s and early 1980s have risen to the top and are showing a different approach. They might have done so anyway, but it is very likely that the pressure exerted through the Agreement has had much to do with a change of style. Munro himself believes a significant change occurred under General Waters who left here four years ago. Although Waters was a brusque military type, Munro thought he had led the way for the much more personable and politically sensitive Wilsey and Wheeler.

Munro and Dalzell claimed that relations with the community were much better, that SDLP councillors and Catholic clergy in Belfast would now ring the Army or the civil representatives to get something sorted out rather than make formal complaints, and that everything was working much more satisfactorily. That was not to say that they were complacent, they realised that something could blow up or get out of hand quite easily and offered to give us an informal readout on any incidents if we found that the formal response through the Secretariat was inadequate. (We have been seeking to further improve the latter and some recent changes in personnel here may contribute to it.)

Apart from the new central complaints system which has an independent assessor in the person of David Hewitt, you will already know from reports in the last couple of years that there is now an early-warning system which requires every patrol to report any incident, however minor, which may be the subject of a complaint. If something comes to the attention of their battalion commanding officer or the Brigadier in Belfast, and these officers have not heard about it, the soldiers are in trouble. Our visitors gave an example of how it worked recently in a serious incident. A Para private in Lenadoon was confronted last week by a known IRA "player" who taunted him about life expectancy in the kind of grim banter that goes on in the streets. According to Dalzell, the "player" told the soldier he had heard the screams of a comrade trapped in an armoured car hit by a mortar recently in West Belfast which drew the retaliation of a punch to the head. The soldier realised he had made, in his own words, "a cock up" and reported the incident. Within twenty minutes his commanding officer Colonel Freer was on the telephone to Brigadier Monro; and shortly after that, local clergy and the SDLP were telephoned to say the incident had occurred, and

action had been taken. The soldier was removed from the area immediately (Mr. Dalzell told Ms. Nic Coitir later that in such a case the soldier would be fined and possibly demoted if he was above the rank of private.) This story of self-  
 inculcation may have a slightly surreal air, but there seems to be no doubt from reports the Department receives from the SDLP and clergy in West Belfast that the Army has changed its ways.

#### Change in Army instructions

He identified one important change in Army instructions from his last tour here, which is that soldiers are now instructed to walk away from confrontation unless there is some immediate objective such as an arrest. Even in the latter case, if soldiers can identify the individual, they are instructed to avoid an incident and if necessary leave the arrest for another day. Monro said frankly that this was not Army policy four years ago when soldiers would not wish to be seen to back down. He believes that the better situation that now exists is due mainly to the strong lead from the top about the need for better community relations. There is now much better pre-tour training of soldiers, and instructions are enforced. Answering my question, he also said that granted the shrinking numbers in the British infantry and the high unemployment levels of recent times, the Army could be more choosy about its recruits and they were better quality and more amenable to the policeman/soldier approach. Nonetheless, he stressed the difficulty which the average eighteen year-old squaddie has in dealing at one moment with a civil complaint and in the next with a mortar or gun attack on his patrol.

#### War weariness in Belfast

Another factor in improved relations is what Monro described as the war-weariness in Belfast. There is simply a less aggressive attitude to the Army than there used to be and although Monro, like his predecessor, was not about to exaggerate the importance of a cup of tea, he commented on the greater willingness of the Nationalist community to deal with them.

Monro thought the tensest areas were New Lodge and Ardoyne, "which have a bit of orange about them", and Ballymurphy. He made the interesting comment that where physical conditions have improved in West Belfast, for example, around Divis where the flats have come down (one of the achievements of the Agreement), the Falls Road and in South-West Belfast generally, the atmosphere is better. In North Belfast (where Catholics may see the Army as protectors against loyalist attacks) the recent tour of the 4th Artillery had attracted only four official complaints in six months.

#### Recent developments

When Monro's predecessor was here in April, he said it had become common practice for groups of young men, aged 15 to 25, to isolate a member of an Army patrol and seek to rough him

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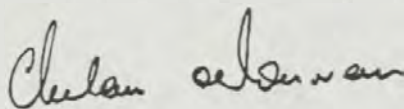
up, take his weapon and his Army pack. Many soldiers had received injuries, including broken jaws or limbs. He was proud that his soldiers had not retaliated although there have been one or two incidents that were near fatal. Monro said the problem continued.

#### Army Yellow Card

You will be aware that following the Clegg judgement in the Court of Appeal here earlier this year, the Army suspended part of the yellow card instructions for opening fire. I asked Monro if an amendment had now been made. He said it had not been officially made because the yellow card applies throughout the British Army and any change needs the approval of London. However, an amendment had been proposed to London which instructs soldiers that they may not consider an oncoming vehicle to be a potential lethal weapon. He expected that the amendment would be included in the yellow card from September but soldiers in Northern Ireland had already been instructed to observe it. He was quite candid in saying that the provision, which was originally introduced to deal with paramilitary attacks, had been abused by the security forces with the result that several young joyriders had been shot in recent years. I said we were glad to hear of the change.

On first impression, we found Brigadier Monro to be an open, straight-talking man. He seems to show the right attitude and he has the right experience. He will be a pivotal figure in the security situation in Belfast for the next couple of years and we think it has been worthwhile getting to know him.

Yours sincerely,



Declan O'Donovan  
Joint Secretary