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BY BAG

SAVING TELEGRAM

DUBLIN TO FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

TELNO 22 SAVING

15 AUGUST 1969

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Addressed to FCO telegram No. 22 Saving of 15 August.
Repeated for information Saving to Washington and U.K. Mission New York.

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IRISH ARMY TROOPS DEPLOYMENT

14 - 15 August 1969

My tel 188.

The following further survey of the Irish military background has been prepared by Brig. McMullen.

BACKGROUND

The reported strength of the regular element of the Irish Army, taken from the latest strength returns (30 June) is

| | | |
|----------------|------|---|
| Officers | 975 | ✓ |
| Men | 6207 | |

This represents about 60-65% of establishment. From these numbers the following 'over-heads' have to be found:

- a. Staff for - Department of Defence/G.H.Q.
 - Three Command Headquarters
 - Six Brigade "
 - Schools and other training establishments and Depots.
- b. Administrative staffs for a large number of old fashioned and uneconomical barracks throughout the country.
- c. Training cadres with FCA (= Territorial) units.
- d. A Group of 400-500, mainly combat, troops with U.N. in Cyprus.

The net result is that the number of active combat troops available for use at short notice is very small: at a guess any one of the seven regular battalions of infantry scattered about the country would be hard put to it to raise more than a couple of hundred fighting men at the drop of a hat.

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The First Line Reserve strength is about -

400 officers

1500 men

These are men who have recently completed their allotted span in the Regular Forces and are the only Reserve immediately available for call-up.

TROOPS DEPLOYED

On Thursday 14 August, the Irish Government announced that the Army had been ordered to establish:

a. Five Field Hospitals at:

FORT DUNREE - (an old coast Defence Fort at the mouth of Lough Swilly).

LETTERKENNY - (Co. Donegal).

CAVAN.

CASTLEBLAYNEY (Co. Monaghan).

DUNDALK.

Each hospital was to be manned by:

2 Doctors

5 Nurses

5 Medical Orderlies

b. Two Refugee Reception Centres at:

FINNER Camp - (on the West coast between Bundoran and Ballyshannon)

GORMANSTON Camp - (on the East coast about 7 miles south of Drogheda).

Both of these are hutted camps normally used by regular and FCA units for their annual training during the summer months. In addition Gormanston is the permanent home of the Flying Training School of the Air Corps, and incorporates a small aeredrome.

The evening papers in Dublin on 14 August carried banner headlines proclaiming widespread mobilization of the Irish Army, but the Irish Government have always maintained that the only troops brought into the Border area, in addition to the purely Medical were those necessary to set up and support the hospital and Refugee Centres. This statement has been confirmed by a senior officer of the Irish Army in the course of informal contact - (see our Telegram under reference 188).

Support duties for which troops would have to be found include

/a. Domestic

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- a. Domestic administration.
 - b. Communication, including provision of transport and escorts for refugees and casualties.
- Local Protection. In addition to the obvious need for protection from pilferage, the Irish Army authorities see a very real danger of possible attack with petrol bombs etc. by militant Paisleyite factions from across the Border.

RESERVES

On Friday 15 August the Irish Government announced the call-up of the First Line Reserve to bring units up to strength in anticipation of British acceptance of their proposal for a joint British/Irish peace-keeping force.

On enquiring at G.H.Q. whether they were putting forward any proposal, for the organisation and control of this force, we were told they had not started to think about it yet.

The call-up of reserves was not cancelled when the proposal for a joint peace-keeping force was rejected by the British Government, since the Irish Government still has hopes of forcing its acceptance.

COMMENT

- a. No figures for the number of troops deployed near the Border have been released, but it is not difficult to believe that the basic requirements for the support of the hospital and refugee camps - say 150-200 for each of the seven posts - would in itself impose a sufficient strain on the readily available regular manpower of the Army to necessitate some troops being drawn from all Commands, even from as far afield as Cork.
- b. Neither the Press nor the people of the Irish Republic are used to seeing much of their Army, except at the Curragh and in the vicinity of the barracks in their garrison towns. Therefore eye-witness accounts of the number of troops seen on the move and encamped in unaccustomed areas are likely to be very unreliable and generally erring on the side of exaggeration.
- c. Senior Officers of the Irish Army are very conscious of their shortage of manpower and are, I believe genuinely surprised - and perhaps a little flattered - that anyone should think their modest show of force near the Border threatening or provocative.
- d. The addition of the First Line Reserves will provide welcome relief to the manpower situation and, even if the Joint Force proposal is finally dropped, we may well find the Army anxious to hold them so long as they have to maintain their position along the Border.

SIR A. GILCHRIST

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En Clair

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elno 200

18 August 1969

UNCLASSIFIED

The Queen may like to know that the only expression of sympathy and regret over recent insults to Her Embassy and Her flag we have so far received from any member of the peerage resident in the Irish Republic came from old Billy Wicklow, the 8th Earl of Wicklow, a Roman Catholic.

Sir A. Gilchrist

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