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## Local & National

### Former soldiers to benefit from £2m care service

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I would welcome any help that comes to the UDR and their families

Wednesday, December 05, 2007

By Claire McNeilly

More than 60,000 former soldiers are set to benefit from a new £2m care service that was launched today.

The fund was set up to help ex-members of the UDR and home service Royal Irish Regiment to deal with the legacy of the Troubles and to re-adjust to civilian life.

There will also be re-training available for around 2,000 soldiers who were made redundant earlier this year.

Speaking to the Belfast Telegraph today, Jim Wright, a former Warrant Officer with the Fourth Battalion based in Omagh, welcomed the news and said the investment into an aftercare service was essential.

"Anything that can help soldiers in their transition to civilian life has to be commended," he said.

"It's a starting point. It's good to see something actually being done - and that it's accessible."

The 45-year-old Belfast man, who left the Army in 2001 after 24 years of service, said that it is difficult for soldiers to re-adjust to civilian life.

"It takes a lot of time - about two years - to get back into it," he said.

"Military life is completely different to civilian life. You're in a routine in military life. You are working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year and if you're told to do something, you just get on and do it.

"It is particularly hard for ex-UDR and home service RIR soldiers to adjust because of the backdrop of the Troubles."

The provision of the Aftercare Service fulfils a government pledge that a publicly funded welfare organisation would be set up after the RIR home service battalions were disbanded this summer.

Its aim is to help former soldiers adjust to civilian life.

Londonderry UUP councillor Mary Hamilton, whose brother-in-law, a part time UDR soldier, was shot dead at work in 1972, praised the fund's establishment.

"I would welcome any help that comes to the UDR and their families," she said.

"Those soldiers risked their lives and limbs. They risked their families' lives to protect the country and they seem to be forgotten about."

The Aftercare Service will offer advice on how to qualify for welfare and benevolent support, job training and access to medical care.

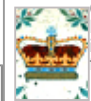
The service will be based at Palace Barracks in Holywood, and 12 of its 25 staff will be located at TA centres in Coleraine, Enniskillen and Portadown.

Colonel Mark Campbell, the last commanding officer of the home service battalions, said the service would help acknowledge the debt owed by the community to those who served in the UDR and the Royal Irish.

"We must acknowledge the debt owed by the community to our colleagues with more than warm words," he

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During the Troubles, 271 locally recruited soldiers were murdered, and more than 600 were left physically disabled.

The Minister for the Armed Forces Bob Ainsworth welcomed the establishment of the vital service.

"I am pleased with the rapid progress that has been made in setting up this service," said Mr Ainsworth.

"The Government's commitment reflects its obligations to treat these soldiers and their families with fairness and dignity."

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