



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Merger of Ulster Defence Regiment and
Royal Irish Rangers.

Speaking Points

- I hope that you found the Government's public response to the announcement of the merger helpful.
- We are naturally interested in the detailed implications of the move and it would be helpful if you were able to bring us up-to-date on developments and to give us your assessment of the political impact which the move has had so far.
- One aspect which is of particular interest to us is the scope which the merger offers for the phasing-out of the part-time element in the present UDR. I cannot emphasise strongly enough the contribution which the part-time members of the UDR have made over the years to the UDR's negative reputation in the nationalist community. An opportunity now exists to make a fresh start. If, however, the new Regiment is going to retain a significant part-time element, many of the old problems may resurface, or indeed, never go away. The beneficial effects of merging the UDR with the Rangers will, in my view, not be achieved unless the part-time element, the origin of so much trouble and controversy in the past, is phased out.
- We would hope also that you will avail of the opportunities offered by the new Regiment to pay particular attention to the ethos and structures of the new Regiment and to ensure the most extensive possible rotation for all members of this Regiment, along the patterns which are normal for the British Army as a whole.

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Merger of Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Irish Rangers

Background Note

Main points of British merger proposals

1. British Defence Secretary King stated to the House of Commons on 23 July that, as part of a wide-ranging restructuring of the British Army, the government was taking the opportunity to "bring the Ulster Defence Regiment more fully into the Army" by merging it with the Royal Irish Rangers. The new regiment would comprise one battalion for worldwide service and up to seven battalions for service in Northern Ireland only. Its recommended title was the Royal Irish Regiment.
2. On the previous day, the Secretary of State had written to the Minister giving him advance notice of the announcement and highlighting some features of the merger:
 - the merger "is designed to build on the best features of both the present Regiments";
 - "full integration" of the UDR into the Regular Army; the new Regiment will not be exclusively Northern Ireland based; there will be scope for cross-postings between the one general service and the seven N. I. -based battalions;
 - the emphasis of the new Regiment "will be on achieving highly professional Infantry standards".

- the new regiment "will also seek to be representative of both traditions in Ireland"; Mr. Brooke hopes for more recruits from the minority community in Northern Ireland;
 - Members of the N.I.-based battalions will give most of their service there. The one general service battalion will also be rotated into Northern Ireland from time to time.
 - The British aim is for the new Regiment to be a "model of harmonious working and social relationships thereby removing any controversy about its contribution in the internal security role in Northern Ireland".
 - The total strength of the new Regiment will be 6,650 comprising one general service battalion (650) and seven "home-based" battalions (6,000: approximately the current strength of the UDR). The home-based battalions will continue to include part-time soldiers.
3. A briefing in the Secretariat (copy on brief) on 26 July yielded the following additional information:
- the merger decision reflected continuing concerns about the sectarian nature of the UDR and the importance of enhancing confidence in the security forces;
 - the British were encouraged by the positive reaction of Ken Maginnis to the announcement and felt that Paisley's reaction was more muted than had been

feared;

- "Some" reduction in the part-time element was expected;
 - the UDR was not being abolished altogether. Political, operational and cost reasons were cited in this regard;
 - cross-postings between the "general service" and "home-based" battalions would be limited.
4. No further briefing has been volunteered on the subject, though there is a readiness to arrange one should particular developments warrant this.
5. The Government issued a statement on 23 July (copy on brief) which noted the proposed changes with interest; stressed the importance of impartiality on the part of the security forces; and detected in the new development an opportunity for significant improvement, particularly in areas such as care and sensitivity in deployment and improved relations with the community. This low-key response was in line with a British request and there were subsequent indications of appreciation for the Government's helpfulness in this respect.
6. All the evidence suggests that the move was inspired by the Army and that the latter would like to see the UDR, which has cast a shadow over its own reputation, subsumed completely within the professional discipline and structures of the regular Army. It is to be expected, however, that NIO Ministers, concerned about a possible Unionist backlash, will plead within the British system

for a very gradual and unobtrusive elimination of the part-time element. Although Seamus Mallon and others have generally welcomed the move, they remain troubled by this aspect above all (the continuing presence of part-timers in the new Regiment).

7. Greater flexibility (i.e. cross-posting) between the various battalions of the new Regiment would also help to counter any suspicions that the UDR has had only a change of name.

Anglo-Irish Division
10 September 1991