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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE  
LONDON

22 July 1991

*File  
Mr. & Mrs. Nally  
D. Donaghy*

Mr G Collins TD  
Minister for Foreign Affairs  
Iveagh House  
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DUBLIN

Tom King is due to make a further announcement to Parliament tomorrow about the "Options for Change" exercise. This announcement will give details of changes relating to individual Regiments of the British Army.

As you may know, our "Options" exercise involves major manpower reductions affecting the whole of the British Army. Tom King has already announced that there will be significant reductions in the number of Infantry battalions, and that to achieve this, many existing Regiments will have to lose battalions or amalgamate with others. "Irish" Regiments, including the UDR, are not exempt.

I am, therefore, giving you, and your Government, advance notice in the strictest confidence - we have not yet told Parliament - that the Infantry changes to be announced will include the creation of a new Regiment which is to be formed by merging the Royal Irish Rangers and the UDR.

I shall also be giving advance notice to NI Party Leaders (or their deputies) shortly before the announcement - and once again on a strictly confidential and personal basis. Reactions may not, of course, all be favourable - for example, some Unionists may well express concern about the changes proposed - and we shall need to take this into account in public presentation.

/The new

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The new Regiment will, I should explain, comprise one general service battalion (ie with world-wide obligations) and up to seven home (ie Northern Ireland) based battalions. All members will belong to a single Regiment, with a single Regimental HQ and administration. All will be trained to professional infantry standards, sharing training facilities and attending the same courses wherever this is sensible. The Regiment will have a new name: subject to Royal approval, this will be the Royal Irish Regiment. It will also have a new uniform which has yet to be decided. The name 'Ulster Defence Regiment' will disappear.

X The merger - of which further details are still to be worked out - is designed to build on the best features of both the present Regiments. The improvements we wish to see will include the following. First, the full integration, as many have already urged, of the UDR into the Regular Army. Nor will the new Regiment be exclusively NI based. (There will, for example, be cross-postings between the general service and home based battalions, and opportunities for members of the latter to be posted to duties elsewhere in the Army at home and abroad.) Second, the emphasis of the new Regiment will be on achieving highly professional Infantry standards. (The single Regimental structure, unified training programmes and cross-postings will all contribute to this, as we hope will the wider horizons gained from opportunities to serve elsewhere in the Army.)

The new Regiment will also seek to be representative of both traditions in Ireland. Thus we hope that it will draw on the wider recruiting grounds which the Royal Irish have traditionally enjoyed. We also hope that there will be more recruits from the minority community in Northern Ireland.

In short, we aim to create a highly trained, well officered, professional force, free from any sectarian bias, which is - and

/is seen



is seen to be - of equal standing with all other Infantry Regiments of the British Army. The new Regiment will be beneficial in military terms, constituting a larger and, therefore, more flexible force than either of the two previous individual regiments.

So far as Northern Ireland is concerned, members of the 'home-based' battalions will give most of their service there, supporting the RUC in helping to defeat terrorism. The general service battalion will also serve in Northern Ireland from time to time - in common with the general service battalions of other Infantry regiments. It is very much our intention that the new Regiment should be - as the Royal Irish Rangers already is - a model of harmonious working and social relationships amongst people of diverse social and cultural backgrounds, thereby removing any controversy about its contribution in the internal security role in Northern Ireland. We believe that the new Regiment should command the confidence of all men and women of goodwill in Northern Ireland - including both Nationalists and Unionists. X

Two final points of detail: in the period before the new Regiment is formed, some structural changes in the UDR will take place to make it more efficient. 4 and 6 UDR will amalgamate, as will 2 and 11 UDR, to form larger battalions. These changes will not reduce the number of soldiers which the GOC has under his command: they will simply enable the Regiment to provide more effective support to the RUC. Second, the general service battalion will have a standard strength of about 650 all ranks. The total strength of the home-based battalions will be broadly the same as the present total strength of the UDR (about 6,000), and will continue to include both part-time and full-time soldiers.

Yours ever,

PETER BROOKE

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