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THE PERSONAL SECURITY AND SAFETY OF PRISON SERVICE STAFF - THE DEPARTMENT'S OBSERVATIONS

NOTE FOR HM CHIEF INSPECTOR

1. Any assessment by the Department of the threat to Prison Service staff as perceived by them must be founded on measurable factors - reported threats, assaults and killings. We believe and the RUC agree that there is a general threat from terrorist groups and in addition we are aware from time to time of more specific threats to individuals. All staff are aware of the general threat although the effect this has on the quality of life of each individual will vary considerably. Where a specific threat is received the officer is informed and appropriate measures are taken (see paras 7 - 9).

2. This paper is complemented by 5 annexes:

Annex I - table of incidents, threats etc.

Annex II - advice to staff on security.

Annex III - guidance to staff regarding security equipment ie body armour, door communication devices.

Annex IV - personal firearms - background to issue and guidance on use.

Annex V - sick leave during 1982.

3. The information in Annex I represents the threats and incidents which have been reported by prison staff. The first general threat was issued against prison staff in June 1973 and the campaign of physical attacks began in 1976. Although we are not privy to the

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thinking of paramilitary groups it was in the latter year that the phasing out of special category status commenced. Hostility takes many forms ranging from verbal abuse to murder and is an attempt to undermine the morale of the service. Annex I illustrates the nature and extent of the threat to officers and their families which emanates from both Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups. A separate note on prison officers killed has already been provided.

4. The Department is both aware of and sensitive to the security background against which officers have to work and live and this has been the subject of frequent consultation with the Prison Officers Association. We have made a particular point of listening to the views of staff on matters of personal security and safety and where necessary appropriate measures have been taken. The final responsibility for personal security rests with the individual officer and much effort has been directed to ensuring that officers and their families are aware of this. Examples of the type of advice made available by the Department are given at Annex II.

Practical Protection Measures

5. Since 1976 22 serving and retired members of the Prison Service have died as a result of terrorist attacks and many more have been injured or had their homes attacked. Provision was made for personal protection in the form of lightweight body armour and firearms (see paragraph 6) and two-way door communicators have also been provided. The issue of communicators began in May 1979 and body armour was made available from December of the same year. The delay in issuing body armour was caused by the need to obtain supplies from the United States, British equipment being unsuitable, and by the necessity to adequately

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test the item chosen. Copies of the circular instructions to all staff on the issue of armour and communicators are attached at Annex III.

Firearms

6. The Department has taken the unique step of supplying firearms for personal protection off duty. Weapons are issued on loan free of charge on application and subject to the granting of a firearms certificate by the Chief Constable. Officers retain the weapon so long as they remain in the service. In addition those officers who retire may apply to retain the weapon for 12 months after retirement.

The 9mm Walther is the official weapon held by most officers although some still possess the Webley .38 revolver pending retraining in the Walther. 1752 official issue weapons are held with a further 327 private weapons. It is now the policy of the Chief Constable not to issue certificates for private weapons. We have no information on the reason why some 800 members of the service opt not to carry weapons - some may feel that the possession of a gun may attract trouble rather than deter it. A more detailed history of the issue of firearms and the circular of guidance on their use is at Annex IV.

Assistance to Officers under specific threat

7. Where a specific threat is notified by or confirmed by the RUC special measures are taken to reduce the risk to the officer and his family. Where an officer decides not to move house his home may be protected with special equipment eg makrolon glazing which is bullet resistant.

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8. Where the officer decides or is advised to move out of his house he may be assisted by:

- (a) the offer of a short-term tenancy of one of the quarters in the Prison Service College complex at Millisle, Co Down.
- (b) the payment of allowances under the removal regulations to assist financially in a move to permanent accommodation. These payments cover legal expenses, removal costs etc and can amount to £3,000. In addition an advance of salary of up to £9,500 if the officer is unable to finance from his own resources the purchase of a new home.
- (c) a transfer to another establishment which may involve a move of house.

The assistance of trained welfare staff is available at all stages and where an officer decides not to purchase a new house the Welfare Officers liaise with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to ensure that priority is given to the acquisition of a house in a "safe" area. Since January 1982 when statistics were first kept 20 officers have been assisted to move house.

9. Very exceptionally approaches may be made to the Home Office to accept an officer under a particularly severe threat on transfer to the English service. This happens very rarely. Recently a Principal Officer was transferred at senior officer rank to a prison in England.

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Sick Leave

10. In 1982 an in-depth study of sick leave was undertaken. Some of the results are shown in Annex V. It is not possible to draw any firm conclusions on the effects of living under threat. Out of 8018 absences totalling 58,561 days only 100 totalling 3886 days were listed as nervous illness. That is not to say that all those absences were job-related. Conversely some of the absences due to other causes - stomach upsets, debility etc - may have their origins in stress. 2/3 of staff had sick leave of less than 10 days in 1982 and the overall figures equates more with industrial civil servants employed on outdoor jobs than general civil service grades.

11. Where the Department is aware of sick leave related to the security threat there is close consultation with our Medical Advisers and psychiatric advice is sought where necessary.

12. The Staff Welfare Service pays particular attention to those officers who are suffering from stress-related illness. Close contact is also maintained with the widows of murdered officers.

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ANNEX IV - FIREARMS

1. The Department was first approached in 1972 by the Prison Officers Association for the issue of firearms for the off-duty protection of staff. It was decided that the request could not be granted but the POA was advised that this did not prevent an officer making application to the Chief Constable for a firearms certificate for the purchase and holding of a private weapon.
2. In June 1973 following the issue of threats by the Provisional IRA against officers and their families it was agreed that those officers who wished should be issued with .22 star pistols provided they had been granted a firearms certificate by the Chief Constable.
3. Increased hostile activity against prison staff in April 1976 led to an upsurge in the demand for official issue weapon which could not be satisfied by .22 star pistols. .38 Webley revolvers were then issued.
4. By September 1976 the POA was expressing dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the Star pistols and the bulkiness of the .38 revolver which was difficult to conceal. In January 1977 it was decided to replace the Star Pistol by 9mm Walther however the POA gave an assurance that they were satisfied with the .38 revolver. Further criticism of the Webley revolvers was made by the POA and in 1980 it was decided to make the 9mm Walther pistol the standard official issue firearm. The changeover depended on retraining and all but a few recent recruits have been issued with Walthers.
5. Firearms training is presently carried out by the RUC, however the Department has under consideration the establishment of its own training unit.

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ANNEX V - SICK LEAVE 1982

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ABSENCE RATES BY PRISON ESTABLISHMENT

ESTABLISHMENT	AVERAGE* IN POST STRENGTH	NO OF ABSENCE SPELLS TAKEN IN 1982	ABSENCE SPELLS PER MAN	NO OF DAYS LOST DURING 1982	DAYS LOST PER MAN
Belfast	579	1,566	2.7	10,378	17.92
Maze Cellular	953	2,795	2.93	24,789	26.01
Magilligan	297	1,315	4.43	7,311	24.62
Armagh (Male)	26	79	1.72	352	7.65
Maze Compound	501	1,405	2.80	8,799	17.56
YOC, Hydebank	203	430	2.12	3,587	17.67
PSC	32	25	0.78	650	20.31
Armagh (Female)	88	396	4.19	2,594	29.48
Maghaberry	33	34	1.03	101	3.06
HQ	5	0	-	0	-
TOTAL	2,737	8,018	2.93	58,561	21.40

ILLNESS TYPE

Nature of Illness	Number of absence spells taken in 1982	Number of days lost in 1982
Stomach Illness	2,696	6,279
Headaches	413	770
Nervous Illness	100	3,896
Colds, flue, etc	2,491	13,680
Fractures, broken bones, etc	47	2,750
Back problems	455	5,898
Cardio-vascular diseases	21	734
Injuries other than fractures	455	5,415
General debility	47	641
Other Illnesses	1,293	18,508
TOTAL	8,018	58,561

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