



SECRETARY OF STATE

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
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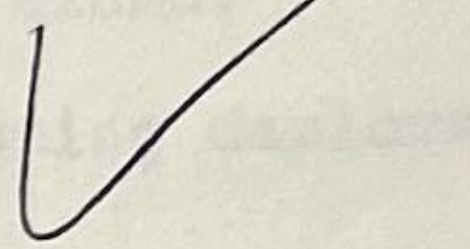
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*M.A.*  
*may be useful to*  
*pm?*

*John 1/7.*  
*Prime Minister*

*John 1/7.* 1 July 1996

*Dear John,*



**NORTHERN IRELAND - DEPLOYMENT OF PARACHUTE REGIMENT BATTALIONS**

You asked for a note on the current deployment of a Parachute Battalion to Northern Ireland.

Since troops were deployed to Northern Ireland in 1969, the three battalions of the Parachute Regiment have routinely been posted to the province, in the same way as all other Infantry battalions. All these units, plus the Royal Marines and some artillery and armoured regiments acting in the infantry role, take their turn either to serve on a residential tour (currently 30 months) or on an unaccompanied tour (currently 6 months). **The Parachute Regiment takes its turn like all other units. To remove the Parachute Regiment from this plot would impose additional strain on the rest of the Army and damage our ability to meet Ministers' publicly stated aim of an average Operational Tour Interval of 24 months.**

Ever since "Bloody Sunday" in January 1972, when thirteen civilians were shot dead in Londonderry by soldiers of The 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment (1PARA) at the end of a civil rights rally, the regiment has been singled out by republicans and some sections of the nationalist community, who have argued that PARA battalions should never be allowed to serve in the Province. From time to time when it becomes known that a PARA battalion is due to return to Northern Ireland, the deployment is criticised on the grounds that the regiment's disciplinary record makes it unreliable in so delicate a situation. And, if recognised whilst on duty, members of PARA units have often been subjected to extreme abuse and harassment. This has diminished over the years, and more recent tours, even after troops resumed the wearing of regimental berets during the ceasefires, have passed without significant difficulty. Regrettably, there have also been some *disciplinary*

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incidents over the years - notably of retaliation - which have re-fuelled suggestions that the PARA battalions are less disciplined than other Regiments.

The consistent judgement of successive administrations has been that the occasional lapses by PARA personnel are far outweighed by the standards otherwise maintained by the regiment while serving in Northern Ireland. To disqualify the Regiment from serving there would imply that we accepted these unfounded criticisms. Both NIO and MOD Ministers have steadfastly repeated this view whenever the subject is raised. PARA battalions are therefore treated the same as any other battalion and it has not been the practice for Ministers to request or be given special notice that they are to deploy to Northern Ireland.

I attach notes on the recent and forthcoming deployments of PARA Battalions to NI.

The article by Sean Rayment in today's Daily Mail is written by a former member of the regiment who has maintained sufficient contacts with it to be aware of impending deployments. He has no grounds for his allegation that the deployment is part of a "get tough" response to recent PIRA attacks.

Yours ever,

*Mike*  
(M A VENABLES)  
Private Secretary



### RECENT AND FORTHCOMING PARA DEPLOYMENTS TO NI

In recent years PARA battalions have served in Northern Ireland on the following tours:

Jul-Nov 1988 (Armagh roulement battalion)  
Feb 1989- Feb 1991 (Holywood resident battalion)  
Mar 1990-Jun 1990 (Fermanagh roulement battalion)  
Feb 1991-Jun 1993 (Holywood resident battalion)  
Jun 1993-Aug 1995 (Holywood resident battalion)  
Nov 1994-May 1995 (Belfast roulement battalion)

Two PARA battalions are scheduled to return to the Province during the next 12 months:

- 2 PARA is to be deployed on a six month tour in South Armagh, starting at the end of September 1996.
- 1 PARA is to be deployed on a six month tour in East Tyrone starting at the end of June 1997; this is the first time that the regiment will have served in the area since the Coalisland incident in 1992 in which there was a serious incident of indiscipline after a member of the Regiment lost both legs in a PIRA landmine explosion.