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With the Compliments

of the

27/5/76

Secretary

Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear General,

extra piece of paper
for your brief. Sh. W. G.

at de papier was handed in by the
this afternoon. It should be
item 12 of your brief for the meeting
Mr. Marilyn Rees.

response to our request for any
e information on the subject of
2 km overflights. Note, however, the introduction
of new material on "Topcover" on page 3.

27/5/76

The attached bout de papier was handed in by the British Embassy this afternoon. It should be inserted under item 12 of your brief for the meeting of 28th May with Mr. Meryl Rees.

The paper is in response to our request for any further available information on the subject of 2 km overflights. Note, however, the introduction of new material on "Topcover" on page 3.

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OVERFLIGHTS

1. In our bouts de papier dated 4 May and 13 May 1976, we requested permission for two programmes of Border overflights by the British Army for photographic reconnaissance purposes. The Department subsequently sought additional information about the purpose and the scope of these programmes.

PURPOSES

2. The main purpose of these flights is to compile a comprehensive photographic record of those parts of the border in which cross-border incidents most frequently occur. These flights would take place in RUC areas H, K, L and M and the adjacent border strip in the Republic. We expect that this operation would entail ten series of flights, in other words a total of 50/60 individual flights spread over three months or so. This number might need to be slightly supplemented if there were equipment failures or unexpectedly adverse weather conditions.

3. At a later stage, we may wish to seek permission to supplement this photographic record in order to survey, with particular care, certain areas of the border where a number of incidents occurs within a short period. It is not possible to predict which areas of the border will warrant a second look in this way, or indeed whether a second look will be necessary at all. If the need arises, we would propose to seek clearance for a separate and limited programme of overflights in the area concerned.

OPERATIONAL NEEDS

4. The operational purposes of the photographic record are:

(i) to identify whether there are any improvised explosive devices or command wires which have not been detected;

(ii) to trace the illegal crossing points which are most frequently used by terrorists;

(iii) to locate potential terrorist firing positions or positions which have already been used;

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(iv) to compile a full picture of the terrain to help operational planning in the North - for example in siting posts to observe illegal movements across the border in both directions.

In all of these cases, it will be of the greatest value to have a photographic record of the area immediately across the border from the North.

DEPTH OF PENETRATION

5. The depth of penetration of the Republic's airspace would normally be the distance from the border to the object or area to be observed plus 500 metres for contingency purposes and to cope with problems of aircraft manoeuvrability. We expect that the majority of overflights will be within one kilometre of the border. But there may well be circumstances in which we will wish to include in the photographic record features which are themselves one kilometre or even slightly more from the border. For example, radio controlled explosive devices may be detonated from a considerable distance, especially where the border is overlooked by high ground. In some cases, command wires have been 800 metres or more in length. It may also be necessary to photograph tracks or gullies running a kilometre or more into the Republic in order to build up a complete picture of the approach to individual illegal crossing points. Finally, in exceptional circumstances, there may be firing positions on high ground located around one kilometre from the border.

6. To make an adequate three-dimensional photographic record of the sort of features described in the previous paragraph it is necessary to photograph from oblique as well as vertical angles. This may involve an aircraft having to fly at a horizontal distance of 500 metres or more in any direction from the target feature. In addition it is sometimes necessary to have a further operating margin of 500 metres for manoeuvre and safety reasons. When several of these factors apply simultaneously, the aircraft conducting the photographic survey may well need to fly between the two and three kilometre bands. This is the reason for our original request for clearance in principle to a depth of 3 kilometres in order to avoid the need to make periodic applications

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for political clearance of individual flights which may go just outside the two kilometre band. The depth of overflight in each case would, of course, be for agreement, along with other details, between the RUC and Garda Síochána.

SHARING OF INFORMATION

7. Relevant information obtained from these flights will be made available to the Garda.

TOP COVER

8. For safety reasons it would also be highly desirable for aircraft conducting photographic surveys in the South Armagh border area to be "covered" by a second aircraft operating at about 1500 feet. The purpose of this system, which is now general practice north of the border in the South Armagh region, is to observe and deter attacks on the survey aircraft. Missions of this type appear to have reduced the number of attacks on helicopters in South Armagh. The need for occasional cover of this kind is illustrated by the fact that helicopters operating in South Armagh have been fired at on eight occasions in the last six months, twice (on 14 December and 9 May) from positions thought to be in the Republic, resulting in one case in a casualty. It should be emphasised that the covering aircraft would be subject to the same limits as the first aircraft and would not be permitted to return fire if the first aircraft was attacked.

9. It is the view of the British authorities that there is a clear operational requirement for the programme of overflights outlined above and that the scale proposed is the minimum consistent with the operational need. It is hoped that, in the light of this explanation, the Department will be able to authorise the programme of overflights planned between crossings L1A and K27, originally scheduled for 17/23 May.

27 May 1976