

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

LORD MELCHETT'S VISIT TO 40 FIELD REGIMENT, ROYAL ARTILLERY, AT FLAX STREET MILL ON 28 NOVEMBER 1977

1. Lord Melchett was accompanied by Mr E Martin, DEHL, Mr J Walker, Secretary of the BAN Planning Team, and myself. The Regiment had invited him for a briefing on their Youth Adventure Project.

They met Army and RUC Officers including RUC community relations officers, and one civilian youth leader. The senior officers present included Lt Col Quayle, Captain Lang and Superintendent Wilson.

2. Lt Col Quayle introduced the session by arguing for a prompt, major initiative to wrest popular support from the PIRA. That the time was ripe was shown by a decline in violent incidents; by an increasing local acceptance of the RUC; and by an increasing flow of information to the Security Forces. There was a danger of winning the war, but losing the peace, if the Government failed to produce a quick response to the appalling social and environmental deprivation which the people of the area had to endure. The effects of a successful initiative would be to

- strengthen the position of 'moderate' councillors, (ie SDLP and Alliance as against Republican Clubs)
- strengthen the role of the Area Officers
- deny PIRA the opportunity to control amenities
- reward the courageous efforts of the dedicated youth leaders of the area by providing them with adequate facilities

3. Captain M G W Lang next spoke about the Army's Youth Adventure Project. He said that most youth club programmes were neither adventurous nor

challenging enough to compete with burning buses, throwing stones at soldiers, and joining paramilitary organisations. The Army hoped, through its Youth Project, to provide challenge in a non-sectarian atmosphere; to train potential youth leaders (who would in due course replace the Army); and to improve relations between the Security Forces and the people whose streets they patrolled. (RUC men present testified to their success in this last aim). Over 200 young people had so far taken part in weekend camps in the Mourne Mountains, which had proved a great success both in themselves and as a PR exercise. A typical camp would consist of 50 10-15 year olds mixed by religion, sex and area. They would be recruited by word of mouth: the Project had been given no overt publicity.

4. Captain Lang said that from early next year it might no longer be possible to use Ballykinler as a base camp, although it had proved ideal; the Army wanted to develop it for other purposes. It was important that a satisfactory and permanent alternative should be found: canvas camps had failed in the past.

5. Captain Lang hoped that the Army would shortly be able to hand over its administration and specialist training functions to the RUC and civilian youth leaders.

6. The briefing proper was followed by an open discussion chaired by Colonel Eccles, who spoke of the need to maintain a low profile, and of the risk of a public relations disaster if things went even slightly wrong.

7. Colonel Eccles wanted to see the Belfast Education and Library Board play a more active role, particularly in selecting and recruiting young people, supplying instructors and providing facilities. The Board's youth services tended not to reach those who most needed them, the "unclubbable". If the Board did not soon set about establishing its own adventure projects, a dangerous void would open as normal conditions were restored and the Army

withdrew manpower. The Army had found the Belfast Board far less co-operative than other Education and Library Boards, particularly the Western.

8. Mr Martin agreed that it would be useful to look into the possibility of making more civilian facilities available to the security forces for these projects. The Area Officer for North Belfast suggested that youth hostels would provide ideal premises, at least during the winter. Lord Melchett suggested, and Captain Lang agreed, that school buildings would also serve well, with camp beds erected to create dormitories.

9. He suggested that the SF should locate the new premises, establish the Project in them, and gradually hand over responsibility for it to the Belfast Board. This would be preferable to the Board's simply providing facilities for the SF.

During this discussion, Lord Melchett expressed the view that the direct involvement of the SF at street level was of immense value, both to themselves and to the youngsters. In recruiting the tougher children they were doing a job which the Board was not equipped or staffed to do. (The Board had one unattached youth worker 'on the streets' in North Belfast, compared to the considerable Army and RUC presence.)

10. Mr Walker agreed to provide Lt Colonel Quayle with a schedule of youth and community projects being undertaken or proposed for the regiment's area as part of the BAN exercise to pass to the incoming regiment, before 13 January. [Action: Mr Walker]

11. Two people we spoke to asked for play equipment to be installed beside the Jolly Roger, on ground surfaced by the local people as a play area. [Mr Walker to note]

12. Lord Melchett will be following this meeting up with DENI, to ensure

the facilities needed to replace the Ballykinler camp are made available. He hopes to have a follow-up meeting with Lt Col Quayle before the regiment leaves North Belfast.

*George Hart*  
for BILL SMITH  
PS/Lord Melchett  
7<sup>th</sup> December 1977

cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B)  
PS/Ministers (L&B)  
PS/PUS (L&B)  
PS/Mr Kidd  
Mr Brooke  
Mr Dugdale  
Mr James  
Mr Pritchard  
Mr Marshall  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Ford  
Mr Palmer  
Mr Neilson  
Mr Buxton  
Mr E Martin  
Mr Walker  
Mrs Lister  
Miss Gilpin  
MF