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FROM: P JOHNSTON
PS/SIR JOHN WHEELER
30 SEPTEMBER 1994

John Johnston

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30 SEPT 1994

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cc:	PS/Sir John Wheeler (L,B&DFP)	- B/M
	PS/PUS (L&B)	- B
	PS/Mr Feal	- B
	Mr Thomas	- B
	Mr Legge	- B
	Mr Steele	- B
	Mr Bell	- B
	Mr Perry	- B
	Mr Brooker	- B
	Mr Maccabe	- B
	Mr Stephens	- B
	Mr Bramley	- B

John Johnston
Mr Maccabe
for file
Dec 20/9

PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B

VISIT BY SIR JOHN WHEELER TO THE SECURITY FORCES ON TUESDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 1994

The Minister was grateful to Mr Sweeney for the arrangements which went into, and the briefing provided for his visit to the security forces in North Belfast and Lisburn on 27 September.

2. In the morning Sir John visited the Headquarters of 'D' Division RUC at Antrim Road and the Girdwood Roulement Battalion (the King's Royal Hussars); in the afternoon the Minister visited HQNI where he was briefed by CATO on bomb disposals and COSS on surveillance equipment. Mr Perry accompanied the Minister throughout the visit.

RUC Antrim Road

3. The Minister was greeted at RUC Antrim Road by Divisional Commander, Chief Superintendent Symington and his Deputy, Superintendent McConnell. Superintendent McConnell gave a very lucid brief of the Division. It is the largest division in the force covering an area with a population of 250,000 and involves a staff of almost 2,000 (1300 police officers, 400 part-time Reserve and 250 civilians). In their task of maintaining the rule of law the Division is supported by the Girdwood Roulement Battalion and 9 RIR. The specific problems of North Belfast are well known given that unlike the East and West of the City the tribal map is not a sea of green or orange but a pebble dash of strong republican and "loyalist" areas living cheek by jowl.

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4. The area has suffered terribly over the past 25 years with over 700 murders, 22 of them this year. In spite of PIRA's announcement of a cessation the RUC fear a 'loyalist' attack from the Shankill on the Ardoyne, as it was believed that there were scores to be settled from the Shankill bombing and attacks on "loyalist" leaders. The RUC had set up a unit (about 3 years ago) in reaction to an upsurge in sectarian attacks which had spiralled since an incident in August 1991. This initiative included the setting up a joint Operations Room with the military to help co-ordinate operations in the Division and included a radio link with neighbouring 'B' Division which enabled manpower to be re-directed and more efficiently deployed. In terms of policing post-PIRA 'cessation', the Chief Superintendent thought that it was likely that the RUC would face a great increase in other sorts of demands, for example, there are already signs of approaches from the New Lodge for certain gates to be opened on the 'Peaceline'. It was also clear that, even without paramilitary operations, the RUC had a considerable job to fulfil for the community who wanted the thugs moved out. The RUC saw some signs of the community attempting to break free from paramilitary domination and this had been met with brutal re-action in the form of punishment beatings which are used by PIRA to assert its authority. Interestingly, the RUC reported that the protests and rallies being organised by Sinn Fein were receiving very small turn-outs; there were also signs in the graffiti of the area that all were not content with the 'ceasefire' ie '25 years of suffering for what?' and the more gutteral 'You know what you can do with your ceasefire'.

5. The Minister reiterated the Government's caution on acceptance of the 'permanence' of PIRA's 'cessation', particularly while brutal punishment beatings were continuing. Sir John also recognised the very real challenges which will face the RUC even if PIRA's cessation proves to be permanent and noted the continuing need for adequate resources for this vital task.

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Girdwood

6. The Minister was met at Girdwood by Lt. Col. Shirreff and received a briefing by his senior officers. The army emphasised that its 'Mission Statement' had not changed since the ceasefire was announced - ie support of the RUC in their primary task to maintain the rule of law. The post-ceasefire threat comes largely from sectarian violence and civil disturbances. The Army believe that there is still a possibility of PIRA sectarian attacks but contrary to media speculation it is unlikely that PIRA would use the INLA because it would not wish to allow a perception to emerge of INLA as a rallying point for opposition to the 'ceasefire' and it prefers to keep INLA on a very tight rein. On the 'loyalist' side the Army has seen a marked increase in targeting and there is a feeling that the UVF, in particular, have scores to settle. The threat to the security forces from the 'loyalist' side is a reality and the Army have been fired upon so there should be no misconceptions about 'loyalist' squeamishness in attacking the security forces.

7. The threat of civil disorder is likely to increase although the Army have noted that PSF/PIRA demonstrations have been very badly attended. However, the lack of mass turn outs does not seem to worry the Sinn Fein leadership too much as they are confident that they could put 1500 people on the streets (from the 2 Republican estates) if they wanted too. The threat of 'loyalist' civil disorder is also high, particularly if that community feels it is being sold out or that the security forces are concentrating their attention on them rather than the "real enemies"; the riot outside Crumlin Road Court House is an example of this.

8. The outlook for the future suggests that, on the Republican side, PSF has a good hold on the estates but this may change as PIRA hardmen become more frustrated as their influence and status wanes and they may try to hijack the 'troops out' demonstrations. On the 'loyalist' side, the army assess that it is unlikely that the UVF would go into a ceasefire unless they can take the UFF with them. It is also apparent that some members of the UFF will never accept a ceasefire.

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9. The Minister asked if there is any evidence that Republican Sinn Fein were active in the area and what action PIRA were taking to control weapons. The army did not see any strong evidence of RSF and INLA were the only possible Republican alternative. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

10. [REDACTED]

11. During an excellent lunch in the Officers mess, there was some interesting anecdotal evidence of disenchantment with the Sinn Fein leadership among the rank and file. The officers spoke of how uncomfortable PIRA "players" look in shirts and ties and how reportedly frustrated they are at being told to shave in the morning and hang around Sinn Fein Advice Centres. It was also mentioned that Adams turning up to demonstrations wearing his neatly pressed flannels, polo shirts and blazers, carrying a filofax was causing some resentment among the hard-men.

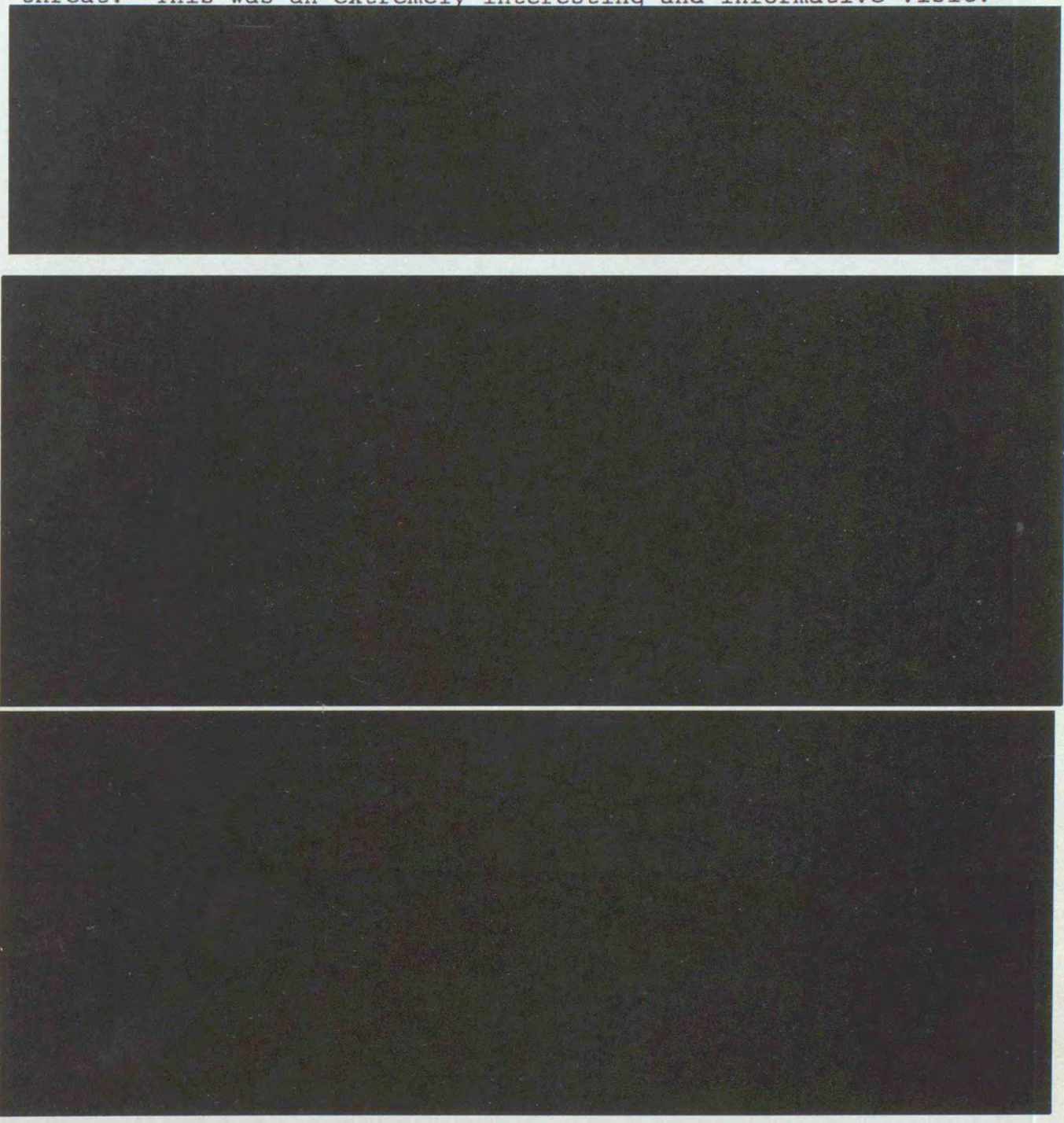
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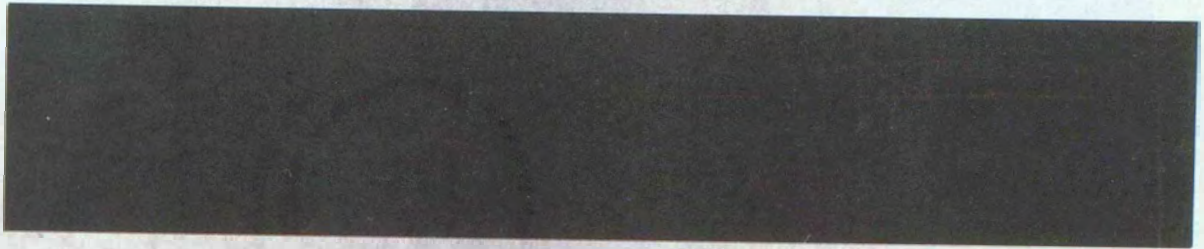
12. After lunch in the officers mess the Minister drove to HQNI and was met by Colonel Davidson (CATO) to be briefed on the bomb threat. This was an extremely interesting and informative visit.



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Conclusion

15. This was a very productive day which enabled the Minister to get a feel for the mood in North Belfast. The visit to Lisburn confirmed the Ministers view that PIRA have not lost any of its operational capability and confirmed the need for ongoing vigilance and defence (by, for example, continuing building programmes.)

SIGNED

Paul A Johnston
PS/Sir John Wheeler
OAB Ext 6498
30 September 1994

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