

CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL

From: PS/Secretary of State (B) cc
27 December 1990

- PS/SofS (B&L) - B
- PS Paymaster General (B&L) - B
- PS/PUS (B&L) - B
- PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
- Mr Ledlie - B
- Mr Pilling - B
- Mr A Wilson
- Mr Alston
- Mr Deverell - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr Wood - B
- Mr McNeill - B

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

PUS/71
 28 DEC 1990
 N.I.O. LONDON

PIRA CEASEFIRE

MA 901 Movement *23699 A*

The Secretary of State chaired a meeting in the Conference Room, Hillsborough Castle on Monday morning, 24 December. The meeting was attended by the GOC, Deputy Chief Constable McAtamney, Mr Ledlie, Mr Deverell, Mr Wood, Mr McNeill and Mr Millar.

2. The Secretary of State had asked for the meeting to consider:

- (a) what further action, if anything, might be taken in addition to his statement on the ceasefire the previous evening;
- (b) the publicity implications of any further action.

✓ 3. There was a general consensus that the PIRA declaration was not operationally significant, since historically there had been a low level of activity in any event over the Christmas period, and that in many respects PIRA were making a virtue out of necessity. It was also acknowledged that the ceasefire was not binding on other groups, such as the UFF or INLA.

4. In further discussion, the Secretary of State agreed that while vigilance generally by the security forces continued to be necessary, there was nevertheless a case for relaxing control at PVCPs. This had already begun the previous evening, with local operational commanders being given discretion to allow passage on demand after dark rather than only in an emergency; and it was now proposed to extend this arrangement by leaving the barriers open

throughout the three-day period. The decision to do so should not be presented formally as a measured response to the ceasefire declaration, though it would of course be interpreted as such. Mr Wood also suggested that the Army might also consider making it clear in response to any press enquiries that the return of 2 LI to the mainland would have happened anyway.

5. The Secretary of State said that he was content to leave it to the GOC to make appropriate arrangements for announcing the decision. Mr Wood would liaise as necessary with the Army Press Office.

Signed

DAVID FERGUSON
Private Secretary

What is nonetheless interesting is the timing and almost cordial tone of the letter. It appears to be part of the Provisionals' response to the speech which my Secretary of State made on 9 November and which made clear not only that HMS had no selfish strategic interest in Northern Ireland, but also that an Irish republicanism seen to have finally renounced violence would be able to seek a role in the peaceful political life of Northern