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Northern Ireland  
British Forces Post Office 550...

Lisburn

GOC 3

Personal for:

Officer Commanding  
Armoured Infantry Training and Advisory Team  
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I think that it might be helpful if, in advance of you starting to plan your pre Northern Ireland tour training, I outlined a few factors which are fundamental to Army operations in Ulster today. We will discuss these further when we meet during your pre-tour reconnaissance.

As in every counter insurgency campaign that there has ever been, perceptions are vital. They are fundamental to creating the atmosphere and opinions which either create sympathy and generate support for the terrorists, or alternatively alienate them from the community. As you know, 'Hearts and Minds' is the shorthand which has been used in the past as a generalisation to describe the proper government response to this verity. There is of course far more to it than this. However, there is one fundamental deduction which must shape the way in which soldiers of every rank work within the Province if they are to be effective. It is that the Army cannot operate as a blunt instrument - simply carrying out defined military tasks within set rules and "terms of reference", in a robotic manner as "military men". Each and everyone of us at every level must have acutely tuned antennae to sense changes of mood, intelligence and perceptions. Whenever a formation, unit or sub-unit fails to maintain the sensitivity of their antennae, experience shows that it is only a short time before they start to stumble from one avoidable stupidity or error to the next. The terrorists note and exploit these failings with amazing speed.

This need for antennae affects every area, but particularly complaints and passage of information: I shall return to both subjects later.

The matter of our own casualties also plays a very major part in the public perception of how the campaign is going: who is winning and who is losing.

In general war over concern about own casualties can be seen as defeatist. Provided that a formation or unit fulfills its mission - captures Mount Fumbledown or Cassino Monastery or whatever the case may be - then provided the casualties do not so weaken the unit that it becomes operationally non-effective, a success can be claimed. And for soldiers the inevitable collateral of family and personal suffering which casualties create is just one of those things which we all have to accept when we decide to join the Armed Forces.

But in Ulster the situation is quite different. Fighting an enemy enjoying all the freedoms gained from operating outside the law, the Security Forces, operating strictly within the law, are only infrequently able to achieve a terrorist kill. Each kill and each arrest and subsequent successful prosecution of a terrorist usually represents thousands of man hours work by the Security Forces. Yet in the assessment of win or loss - move towards law and order or move towards anarchy - it is the body count between the terrorists and the Security Forces which the public in the Province morbidly use as their barometer and on which their perceptions rest. And unless we can alter the general perception to believe that law and order is triumphing over anarchy there can be little hope of progress in political or other areas. Therefore we simply cannot afford - in any context - avoidable casualties, and particularly of soft targets.

Yet since returning to the Province I find that it is still the case that in almost all the incidents in which our soldiers are killed or injured, close analysis eventually discloses that there has been an elementary mistake in soldiering or in applying well rehearsed and tested drills or in obeying regulations. This particularly applies to soldiers killed off-duty.

With an enemy as capable as ours we cannot afford to hand them such easy victories on a plate - as a result of self-indulgence, bravado, idiocy, lack of skill or lack of supervision.

Supervision is the key to preventing these mistakes. One of the vital ingredients of successful counter-insurgency operations is the determination to identify and eliminate small errors - to check and double check, in the knowledge that soda law always operates: if anything can go wrong it will. This is contrary to our approach elsewhere, where if something has operated well for a time the natural inclination is to avoid disturbing a successful system. But terrorists operate by discovering patterns and disrupting them, and capitalising on the unexpected. Therefore our obligation is to display an infinite capacity for taking pains, to examine every detail and make sure that it is sound, still appropriate, relevant and the best that can be done - practically and intellectually. We must continually ask questions such as: When did each soldier last zero; are all their field dressings in the same pocket; has he got his ID discs on; why is there a blood group marked on his webbing and anyway is it his own... Why is he carrying compromising material in his filofax; why can he not recognise the local 'players'.....?

On and on until we are really satisfied that all the detail is right for everyone for today - not yesterday.

There are no alleviating circumstances such as the pressure or in some cases the tedium of long resident tours which can justify anything less than a totally professional response to the threat, on and off duty, throughout the Province.

As commanders it is our personal responsibility to ensure that and act accordingly. I will not tolerate any commanders at whatever level who cannot measure up to the leadership and discipline challenge which the threat provides.

I now turn to the matter of intellectual commitment in the campaign. As I have already said success partly depends on the application of well tried procedures and drills. But in equal measure it depends on out-thinking the terrorist on a day to day, minute by minute basis. This needs the total involvement, all the time, of every soldier at every rank. None of us has a monopoly on good ideas. Therefore encourage everyone to think innovatively and laterally - and particularly to think across boundaries and look at what other people are doing. But at the same time do not change existing arrangements, just for the sake of it. Any change, seeking improvement, must be the result of thorough informed analysis - your predecessors, competent men, have spent many hours trying to deduce the best solution too. And before you make fundamental changes, clear them with your Brigade Commander. He may know something which you do not!

Thinking across boundaries includes passage of information, both laterally and vertically. Police and Army boundaries, though necessary, are artificial. They mean nothing to the terrorists except where he can exploit the bureaucratic delays which they produce. We cannot afford to be introverted and compartmentalised. Similarly speed of 'vertical' communication is vital. An incident, seemingly trivial at first, can rapidly escalate so that it is a matter of Province concern hours later and national concern soon after that. The war of words is as important as the war of bullets and we are too often beaten by the terrorists and their supporters' very quick, skilful but unscrupulous presentation of events. If we are to match them it is vital that information, bad news and good, flows upwards as quickly as possible so that everyone in the team from the NIO downwards can play their part in winning the information battle and discrediting the terrorists. In this context, and in that of passage of information laterally across boundaries, insist that if you have something that is important and worth passing on, it gets to the commander or official who needs it in time.

If you have any doubts it is your responsibility to speak to him personally. Information passed "through staff channels" and lying at the bottom of some junior staff officer or officials' in-tray is useless - for all the effect that it will have it might as well not have been sent at all.

One of the areas in which the rapid passage of information particularly applies is that of complaints. It is well established that the terrorists and their supporters use a mass of fabricated complaints against the Security Forces as a means of trying to discredit them and increase their alienation from the Nationalist Community. The Government's natural concern about such alienation as a factor hindering normalisation and good relations with the BOI is also skilfully played upon by the terrorists to try and limit the scope of operations of the Security Forces. Some inconvenience - delays as a result of checkpoints and collateral damage during searches etc - is inescapable in any counter terrorist operation. However we must recognise that if in the past and still today there were not some cases of real stupidity or wilful rudeness or careless damage by policemen and soldiers, the terrorists would have little prospect of success from their allegations of widespread insensitive behaviour. I have looked very carefully into the whole matter of complaints. I entirely accept that the number of cases in which soldiers offend, almost invariably under some sort of provocation, is in the circumstances amazingly low. Nevertheless in the context of what has gone before in the Province and the heightened sensitivities that have resulted, each 'offence' is one too many and entirely unhelpful. Incidents which anywhere else would be seen as an innocent soldiers' prank or just an expression of youthful high spirits can give real offence. Your soldiers must understand this.

In either case - spurious false complaints made to try and put pressure on you or acts where there has been wrong doing - the sooner that the facts are established and remedial action can be taken the better. Please talk to my Civilian Advisor at HQNI about this during your reconnaissance.

Lastly, do please ensure that before training starts your soldiers do really understand what the Army is trying to do in Ulster. As I go around visiting units I find that many, some quite senior, do not. To help you explain our task I enclose a short 'Concept of Operations'. It is deliberately brief and written in very simple language because I want to ensure that every single soldier is in absolutely no doubt about where he fits in. I would like it read to every one under your Command. The only reason that I have not issued it as notice board information is that in the wrong hands someone would inevitably, but probably deliberately, "misunderstand". Clearly it is not for the press. The only reason I have not classified the concept higher is so that all ranks may hear it. Please ensure that it is safeguarded and accounted for properly.

I am conscious that this letter might be read as being negative - a list of DON'Ts rather than DOs. It is not. It is simply that if during your pre-tour training and your tour all your officers, SNCOs and soldiers do not get these fundamentals right first, all the other positive things that you plan will come to grief and be frustrated.

When you visit me I will want to hear your first thoughts on your concept of operations and how it will affect your unit structure and training and I shall also want to talk to you about:

Intelligence; and  
Working relationships with the RUC.

Meanwhile, if there is anything about this letter which is not clear to you or any other subject where you need advice, do not hesitate to ask.

I much look forward to seeing you.

## CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

1. Whatever your rank, you will receive such instruction in preparation for your deployment on operations in Northern Ireland. There is a great deal to learn in a short time.

2. Each deployment area has different characteristics and different tasks require a wide variety of skills. However, whatever your job is going to be, it will be in support of the overall Concept of Operations for Security Forces in the Province.

### AIM

3. The aim of this letter is to explain the Northern Ireland Concept of Operations.

### THE CONCEPT

4. Operations are conducted under "Police Primacy". This means that wherever possible the maintenance of public order and anti-terrorist operations are conducted by the Police. This is because it is the Government's policy that all operations should be within the Civil law. Captured terrorists are tried and sentenced as criminals within that same law.

5. The Army supports the police. It is only employed on tasks where military skills or equipment are required or because more manpower is needed than the police can provide. But whatever we do we must do it to the very best of our ability.

6. The police and army consist of "standard units" (in our own case the 'green army') and specialist units (Special Forces). Together they produce the three basic and interdependent activities of counter terrorist operations. These are Reassurance, Deterrence and Attrition. In very general terms the "standard units" provide the constant presence on the ground to give Reassurance and Deterrence. Because good pre-emptive tactical intelligence is very scarce and hard to get, Attrition operations are usually carried out by the specialist units - but not always.

7. The way that the standard units and the specialist units should work together to get success can be compared with an old-fashioned tiger hunt. The most experienced hunters are placed in what is judged to be the very best position from which to get a shot. These are the specialist units. The beaters surround the area of jungle where the tigers are expected to be and drive them on to the guns. These are the standard units. Beating requires great skill and coordination to prevent the tigers breaking out of the cordon, or killing some of the beaters. Frequently the tigers break back, make a mistake, and expose themselves to the beaters. This is the opportunity for the beaters, who also carry guns, to get a tiger.

8. The only difference is that in our case, it is either kill or capture as appropriate, within what is permitted by the law.

## ESSENTIALS FOR SUCCESS

### INTELLIGENCE, BRILL AND ALERTNESS

9. Unless you use all your skill, powers of observation, intelligence and alertness all the time - on duty and off - you will simply be a mobile target. This applies to everyone from drivers, clerks and fitters to riflemen.
10. Lucky breaks are rare. We make our own luck by our skill, and clever use of what we see or hear. Security Forces deaths and injuries are usually the results of lack of alertness, basic mistakes in soldiering or lack of self discipline.

### DISCIPLINE AND PROPOGANDA

12. When the terrorists cannot find a way of attacking us they use smear tactics. As they do not have to tell the truth their propoganda campaign is very effective. Most of what they say about bad behaviour by soldiers is lies. But it is believed by many, particularly in the nationalist community. The reason is that there are still a few soldiers who are rude, get drunk or use unjustified violence. The damage that they do undoes the hard work of all the rest. It makes people sympathise with the terrorists, believe what they say and so be prepared to help them.

13. You must exercise self restraint when provoked - as you will be. Your own personal impeccable behaviour is vital.

### PROCEDURES AND INITIATIVE

14. You will be taught very many standard procedures during training. They have been developed after long experience. Most concern tactical drills. Others, equally important, are administrative - such as rules for booking out. Obey them. You ignore them - for example by walking through a gate in South Armagh - at your peril.

15. Do not think however that the application of these drills is a substitute for initiative. They are designed to make sure that you instinctively operate safely, leaving most of your brain uncluttered so that you can exploit every situation as it develops as skillfully as possible.

### AGGRESSION

6. All your training is designed to enable you to fulfill the demanding and essentially passive tasks involved in avoiding Resistance and Deterrence and yet when the opportunity offers switch instantaneously, safely and skillfully, to the advantage of fleeting opportunities to achieve Attrition.

7. Paragraph 12 talks about good behaviour. But do not confuse two totally separate requirements. It does not mean that we should ever adopt a passive role towards terrorists. Everything discussed above is based on the fact that the soldier's primary role in Ulster is to kill or capture them - within the law - whenever we possibly can.