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Chun an Aire Gnóthaí Eachtracha: To the Minister for Foreign Affairs

To ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of occasions on which permission was given to British Air Force personnel to over-fly the Border other than on mercy missions.

- Joe Dowling

For answer Thursday 13th May 1976

REPLY

Initial

Since 1 January 1973 the Royal Air Force has received permission to overfly the border on 58 occasions. 43 of these flights fall within a programme of photographic reconnaissance for the Northern Ireland Ordnance Survey, which is up-dating its maps; on 6 occasions RAF planes have been used for transport between Belfast and Dublin; on 1 occasion an RAF plane was used to photograph suspected explosive objects or incendiary devices lying on the Border and permission has been granted for 8 RAF overflights as part of a British programme of Meteorological research. While the Deputy's question refers to British Air Force personnel, I should perhaps add that under permission given for British Army aircraft, 209 overflights have been authorised in the same period.

Chun an Aire Gnóthaí Eachtracha: To the Minister for Foreign Affairs

To ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs what guarantee he has got from the British Government that the border will not be crossed by the British Army and Air Force personnel in the future.

- Joe Dowling

To ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of incursions by the British Army (a) on foot; (b) in armoured vehicles; (c) in transport other than armoured vehicles; (d) in civilian attire and (e) by helicopter.

- Joe Dowling

To ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs the number of reported incursions by the British Army into the Republic in 1973, 1974, 1975 and to date in 1976; and the action taken in each case.

- Joe Dowling

To ask the Minister for Foreign Affairs if, in connection with British Army personnel operating in the Republic in civilian attire, he considers that there is sufficient provision in international law to deal with the situation.

- Joe Dowling

For answer on Thursday, 13th May 1976

REPLY

With your permission, a Cheann Chomhairle, I propose to take Questions 29 to 32 together and to circulate detailed statistics in tabular form with the Official Report.

On a number of occasions I have received assurances from the British Government that everything possible will be done to prevent British military personnel from crossing the border without permission. I can assure the House that, as has been said here before, the Government takes a serious view of all unauthorised crossings.

All reported incursions are carefully examined. Where sufficiently specific and reliable information is available, the incidents, unless they have first been reported on and regretted by the British authorities themselves, are raised with the British authorities and an explanation sought. The total number of cases discussed with the British authorities was as follows in each of the years in question:

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 1973 | - | 47 |
| 1974 | - | 121 |
| 1975 | - | 68 |
| 1976 | - | 25. |

Of that total, the British expressed regret for 144 cases, 19 cases are the subject of discussion and it was not possible to agree on the facts in relation to the other cases.

A State's troops may not, under international law, operate within the territory of another State except with the consent of the latter State and irrespective of whether such troops are clad in civilian or in military attire.

NUMBER OF BRITISH ARMY BORDER INCURSIONS REPORTED
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS 1973-1976

| YEAR | (a) On foot | (b) In armoured vehicles | (c) In other transport | (d) No. of instances under (a), (b) & (c) in which civilian attire was worn | (e) Helicopter | (f) Other aircraft | TOTAL |
|----------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|--|-------------------|-----------------------|-------|
| 1973 | 18 | 4 | 11 | 1 | 38 | 5 | 76 |
| 1974 | 24 | 7 | 22 | 0 | 72 | 7 | 132 |
| 1975 | 13 | 6 | 17 | 1 | 31 | 4 | 71 |
| 1976 to 12 May | 8 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 10 | 1 | 25 |
| TOTAL | 63 | 18 | 55 | 5 | 151 | 17 | 304 |