

C-89

OBSTACLES TO RECRUITMENT TO THE UDR

These notes are based on

- (a) my own experience as a potential recruit;
- (b) personal contacts with former 'B' Specials from S/Const to County Comdt level;
- (c) personal contacts with serving UDR personnel from Private to Bn Commander level; and
- (d) my experience as a "referee" for applicants.

General

The details of the formation of the UDR were announced in the White Paper of November 1969 (Cmnd 4188) (copy attached) following the Hunt Committee recommendation to that effect.

Discouragement of Substantial Recruitment from USC

Born out of the death throes of the USC, the UDR from the outset stood aloof from its predecessor and both actively and unwittingly discouraged substantial recruitment from it. What might have been organised as a painless transition from one force to the other was - for political reasons - turned for many into a difficult, at times almost degrading, exercise.

I have not got the exact figures, but from memory I think that 3 of the 7 USC County Commandants were not accepted for service as Bn Commanders in the UDR. No doubt there were valid reasons for this decision, but its effect was that the active support of the top men in 3 counties was to some extent alienated.

The authority of the remaining four (?) County Comdts was undermined by the knowledge that in some cases they were only being engaged for one year and by a device (in Para 8 (i) of the White Paper) which conferred on the Regular Majors seconded to the Regiment a higher call-out authority than that of their superior officers, the ex-USC Co Comdts, now Lt-Cols in command of Battalions, but regarded as "local" as opposed to "regular" members.

No doubt there was difficulty in absorbing the ageing full-time Sgt Instructors of the USC into the new Regiment, but the exclusion of these men created a type of inverted loyalty which influenced many of their part-time associates against joining.

The rejection, without reason, of many ex-Specials was embarrassing to the men concerned and their families and added credibility to the allegations of "discrimination in reverse" under which potentially suitable recruits from "one side" appeared to be debarred in order to keep vacancies open for a none too enthusiastic "other side". Statements by Mr Roy Hattersley and other Labour Ministers did not help in this respect.

In my own case, I experienced a form of group interview for candidates for commissions in the Belfast Bn of the UDR which appeared to suggest that we, as ex-TA Officers, were more welcome than ex-USC Officers.

Screening

In my opinion, screening was pitched at too high a level for men who would be using unsophisticated equipment and guarding targets, the location and functions of which would be equally well-known to would-be attackers.

I have heard complaints from many ex-TA men that having been cleared for service on advanced signal or artillery equipment etc they were being subjected to a much more rigorous screening before being allowed to handle a rifle or drive a Land Rover.

Perhaps I might mention my own case. Having been on the Army's "books" in some form or another for 25 years, and having been cleared for, and until recently "shadowed" a Major's appointment at HQ, NI Command, nevertheless I had to complete a 30-box questionnaire (including details of my long-forgotten cousins who have been in America for over 50 years) before being considered a good enough security risk to command a platoon of infantry at Palace Barracks.

As a "referee" for several applicants, I have been distinctly worried by the attitude of the scrutineers - re-employed ex-Regular officers - and at the briefing which they got, at least in the first year. It is difficult to be objective, but their leading questions suggested that if I were to label a man an active church-goer, or to attribute to him any pro-Ulster sentiment, he would be damned for ever. I also got the impression that the scrutineers were looking for potential international spies in every candidate. A foolish reference on my part to a lad's going off fishing "on his own" led to speculation on the part of the scrutineer as to the possibilities of abnormal sexual habits and the danger of such a person being valuable to the

Processing at the levels described with its inherent delays is frustrating for the candidate and his feelings are soon apparent to others.

Enrolment of Nationalist Sympathisers

Probably without any justification whatever, the very presence in a sub-unit of one or more persons known to have Nationalist sympathies could lead to their being suspected of traitorous intent and to a reluctance on the part of "loyalists" to join that particular sub-unit.

Mobilisation for Full-Time Service

I understood the GOC to say that fewer than 1,000 of the 4,000 members of the UDR were called out for more than a weekend's full-time service last month. Obviously mobilisation was applied selectively having due regard to employment and family commitments. Apprehension about mobilisation, without appeal and for an indefinite period, is obviously one of the greatest deterrents against recruitment and more might be done by way of reassurance to those who would willingly serve at night or at weekends.

Tactics and Discipline

The old USC was a strange mixture of feudalism and democracy. The County Commandants were omnipotent but at village level, I got the impression that the Sub-District Commandants and NCO's were often held more in affection than respect and natural leaders, with no official standing, often had a considerable say in deciding on plans, routes, timings, tactics, etc, often in the light of local knowledge.

Such a contrast, therefore, to the new regime in the UDR with a much more authoritarian atmosphere where the young Army Sergeant told the older ex-Special to "stand at that gate and stop talking". I am not commending or condemning either system, but merely suggesting that the contrast was a bit of a "sickener" to some of the old hands who disliked having their information and suggestions ignored.

Administration

I think it would be fair to say that at local level in the old USC there was a certain cutting of corners and bending of rules. However undesirable in theory, this probably facilitated the smooth working of the organisation and encouraged recruitment. With the heavy super-imposition of Regular staff, one gathers that the UDR "goes by the book" to a greater extent, which is probably not universally

Place of Duty

Much has been said in recent weeks, and need not be repeated here, but the obvious desire of most men is to serve in their home localities.

Conclusion

While the two Governments obviously cannot give the impression of wishing to re-create the old USC in a new guise, nevertheless a little under-the-counter work might be undertaken to bring forward potential recruits who had previously been rejected or discouraged from joining the UDR at a time when it was fashionable to denigrate the USC.



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