

E.R.

**CONFIDENTIAL**

196/9

2. SEC/1

PS/PUS (L&B)



cc:- PS/Secretary of State (B)  
PS/Ministers (L&B)  
~~PS/Sir Ewart Bell~~  
Mr Bourn  
Mr Buxton  
Mr Merifield  
Mr Coulson

LETTERS OF CONDOLENCE

The Secretary of State has now considered your minute of 11 September together with Mr Coulson's of 10 September. He agrees with PUS' advice that letters of condolence should issue from the Secretary of State and I am making arrangements to have suitable drafts available at the appropriate London locations as well as being available in Belfast. Our aim will be to issue the letter in time to arrive before the funeral but should this prove impossible (as indeed it might if the letter is written in London) then the Secretary of State again agrees with PUS' advice that the letter should be delivered after the funeral rather than presented to the widow at the funeral.

2. In <sup>the</sup> specific case of a letter being sent to the widow of Private Robert Bennet I understand this was discussed with PUS who agreed that exceptionally Mr Scott should issue that letter and the appropriate arrangements were made.

Neil Ward

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17 September 1984

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PC/84/9/387/ES



PS/Secretary of State (B)

cc: PS/Secretary of State (L)  
PS/Mr Scott (B&L)  
PS/PUS (B&L)  
1. Sir Ewart Bell ✓  
Mr Bourn  
Mr Buxton  
Mr Merifield

2. X

LETTERS OF CONDOLENCE

As you know we were without a Duty Minister over the weekend - the second in succession on which no Duty Minister was in the Province. One consequence was that no letter of condolence could be sent to the widow of Private Robert Bennett, who was murdered by terrorists in Dungannon on Friday 7 September.

2. I know that the relatives of service and RUC personnel who are killed in this way greatly appreciate receiving such letters. Almost as importantly, their comrades also appreciate this gesture of support for the bereaved families. I think that it is right, therefore, that we should continue to make every effort to send out such letters promptly.

3. The timing of these letters of condolence is often difficult in Northern Ireland, when funerals tend to take place very quickly after death. Speaking personally, I dislike intensely having to present such letters at the graveside, and would very much prefer them to be delivered before the funeral. It was also made clear to me yesterday by Colonel Draper, the OC of 8 UDR, that he too would very much prefer to have such letters delivered before the funeral.

4. In the event we were unable to present such a letter to Mrs Bennett either before or at the funeral. I think that she and her three children were too shocked and distressed to be upset still further at this omission on our part. However, it was made clear to me both by her relations and other members of the UDR that such a letter would have been appreciated. May I ask you to consider asking our new Secretary of State, when

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he is appointed, to send such a letter as one of his first acts. It would be very much appreciated and the delay in sending the letter would be much more easily understood if the new Secretary of State were to sign it.

5. To prevent this happening in future, may I also ask you to consider whether it would be possible for the Secretary of State to sign a blank letter of condolence which you could then hold in the safe. The Secretary of State could specifically authorise this to be released and completed if such a death should occur in future when no Duty Minister is on hand.



P COULSON  
Law and Order Division

10 September 1984

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