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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
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Mike Pattison Esq
Private Secretary to
the Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London S W 1

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19 May 1981

cc Mr Ingham

Prime Minister

*This stay was likely to
get out at same stage*

Dear Mike

FIREARMS FOR THE RUC

MAP 19/1

When Roy Harrington wrote to Michael Alexander on 13 February prior to the Prime Minister's meeting with President Reagan, he mentioned inter alia that despite the American ban imposed on the export of Ruger pistols to the RUC, weapons were continuing to be received from the suppliers in this country.

We have so far been able to avoid embarrassing the American authorities by raising this with them and have not pressed the suppliers of the RUC in this country to tell us where they have been obtaining the weapons. Firearms dealers have, however, known about the deliveries and it has been felt for some time that they would eventually become more widely known. This is now happening; Mr Fergus McAteer, Co-chairman of the Irish Independence Party, has evidently learnt what has been taking place, and there is some resultant publicity.

It is difficult to assess how the US authorities may react. Any loss or delay in the delivery of further weapons would not be serious: the Chief Constable has recently said that he has adequate weapons to meet present operational needs. But the propoganda which United States opponents of the Government's Northern Ireland policies will seek to make of the affair will be unwelcome, especially at the present time of acute US interest in events in Northern Ireland. However, our line is that the Government has not been involved in any subterfuge: the Police Authority acted entirely legally in purchasing the weapons within the United Kingdom. It would not be consistent with our past practice to name the supplier, but obviously we would want to emphasise that in purchases of this kind only responsible firms are used, and we have no reason to believe

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that this was not so in this case. In the interests of security it would not, of course, be appropriate to give numbers or types of weapons used by the police. Defensive briefing is in the hands of the Press Offices.

I will naturally keep you informed of any developments. I am, in the meantime, sending a copy of this letter to Roderic Lyne (FCO).

Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins

M W HOPKINS

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