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HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

September 17th 1981

The Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
London SW1.

Dear Prime Minister,

Thank you for your kind words. It has been a privilege to be a Member of your Government.

When you next consider reshaping your administration, I hope that you will give serious thought to restoring the practice of having one Junior Minister for each of the Armed Services. I quite understand the political problems of appointing a new Minister for the Navy immediately after Keith Speed understandably felt that he had to speak out about the proposed reduction in the size of the surface fleet, but the new Ministerial structure is untidy and does not fit the sensible Service and administrative framework which now exists. There are, I believe, better ways of diminishing inter-Service rivalry.

I am particularly sorry that I was not able to establish a proper scheme for making the superb training facilities of the Armed Forces more widely available to young people. Of course there are problems. Any form of military training is expensive. The Army would prefer to spend any extra money on real recruits, while the Department of Employment wants all the money it can get for its own projects. All that is understandable, but we are now faced with the absurd position where the Armed Services have to increase the current volume of youth unemployment by slashing recruiting quotas at a time when so many of our excellent training establishments are under-used. A number of imaginative proposals have been put forward, and I understood from John Nott that you have supported them. I hope they will not be forgotten now.

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At the same time, I hope that a proper determination to stick to financial targets will not inhibit the development of sensible policies. To give just one example: the British Forces in Germany employ several thousand foreign civilians on a variety of guarding and transport tasks. Studies show that much of this work could be done more cheaply by British soldiers, but these savings aren't made because it is feared that any change involving the use of more British soldiers would push us above the upper limit set on the size of the British Army on the Rhine, and would encourage the Treasury to demand compensating cuts elsewhere. It cannot make sense to preserve German jobs while potential British recruits are turned away.

I am particularly glad that I am being succeeded by my old friend, Jerry Wiggin, who knows the Territorial Army so well. At a time when we are sensibly planning to substantially increase the strength of our Reserves, it always seemed particularly frustrating to have to impose such tight restrictions on the training time that the Territorials are allowed. Jerry Wiggin will be well placed to see that the expanded Reserve Forces get the resources they need.

During my many visits to the Armed Forces in recent months, I have found wide admiration for your courage, your determination and your evident understanding of the importance of our defences. I share that admiration.

Yours ever

Philip Goodhart

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