

Mr Butler

PERB



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Press Secretary

4 October 1982

Dear Mr. Miller,

Attached please find my response to your request for written evidence on the role of the Press Office at 10 Downing Street during the Falkland Islands conflict.

I am sorry I am a few days late, but as you know I have been away for the past fortnight on the Prime Minister's tour of the Far East.

You will no doubt let me know if you wish to pursue any other matters in oral evidence.

Yours sincerely
B. Ingham

B. INGHAM

Douglas Millar, Esq.,
Clerk to the Defence Committee,
House of Commons.

HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE

THE HANDLING OF PRESS AND PUBLIC INFORMATION DURING
THE FALKLANDS CONFLICT

WRITTEN EVIDENCE FROM THE CHIEF PRESS SECRETARY,
NO 10 DOWNING STREET

The Government's objective during the crisis can be simply stated: to recover the Falkland Islands and the Dependencies by negotiation, if possible, but if necessary by force of arms, making every effort to minimise the loss of life.

This overall objective, and the recognition from the outset that the use of force might become necessary, set the broad policy framework within which information staff conducted their operations on behalf of Ministers.

Information officers, as servants of policy, sought to help secure the Government's objectives while at the same time preserving their integrity and longer-term effectiveness.

The task of informing the media and, through them the public, of developments in policy, measures and operations rests primarily with the responsible Department. Only that Department is equipped by background, expertise, flow of information and resources properly and fully to inform the media and public, taking account of all the circumstances.

The responsibility cannot be delegated to or assumed by another Department or by the Prime Minister's Press Office. But No 10 Press Office can and does assist individual Departments to get over their message. It did so during the Falklands crisis on the basis of information supplied by the lead Department which also provided guidance on its presentation. In this case the two main sources of information and guidance were the FCO and MoD.

One of the tasks of the Chief Press Secretary to the Prime Minister is to co-ordinate at official level the presentation of Government policy and measures. In doing so he seeks to ensure that Departments are aware of wider considerations and events in making announcements or conducting information exercises.

During the Falklands crisis the main instrument of co-ordination was a daily meeting lasting some 30 minutes generally attended by representatives of the FCO, MoD, COI, Cabinet Office and the office of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Paymaster General under the chairmanship of the Chief Press Secretary or his deputy. The purpose of the meetings was to take stock of developments and their implications for the public; to bring the Departments and Offices up-to-date with events; to anticipate, in so far as this was possible, events over the next 24 hours; and to agree on or make recommendations about the action required.

In addition, No 10 Press Office maintained hour by hour contact with those of Departments to keep abreast of events and developments and to secure guidance on the information to be disclosed and its presentation. Where possible, a No 10 Press Office representative attended Departmental press conferences or briefings.

The Chief Press Secretary and his staff brief a large number of journalists, both British and foreign, in the course of the normal day, both individually and in groups. The demand for group briefings greatly increased - and was met - during the crisis. The prime sources of information presented in such briefings were the policy Departments - predominantly FCO and MoD. No 10 Press Office did not take the lead in making announcements about the progress of hostilities or losses and casualties.

After the decision to dispatch the Task Force the Chief Press Secretary came under heavy direct pressure from editors (who believed they would not be represented on board) to make more media places available. He urged MoD Public Relations staff to:

- increase the small number of media places initially set aside; and
- accredit to the Task Force a media team representative of press, radio and television.

The MoD responded by increasing the number of places on offer. But it remained clear that, because of the constraints on the number of media berths available, the heavy demand for places and the marked reluctance of individual newspaper groups (as distinct from BBC/ITN) to contemplate pooling even within their group, MoD was never going to be able to satisfy everyone.

Sh.

CHIEF PRESS SECRETARY
10 Downing Street.