



Ass
Fem
29/11/82

Ref. A082/0283

MR COLES

Official Despatch on the Falklands Operation

As you asked in your letter of 23 November to Richard Mottram, the Cabinet Office has considered the text of Admiral Fieldhouse's despatch in consultation with the Ministry of Defence in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

2. The despatch is essentially a factual account of the operation which will arouse considerable public interest. One area of potential embarrassment to the Government consists in the account, in the section on pages 1 and 2 headed "Background", of some of the events immediately preceding the Argentine invasion. The text of Admiral Fieldhouse's account will need to be consistent with what Ministers have said to the Franks Committee. No doubt you will wish to check the text against your own records. But in any case the present text needs some amendment. The Ministry of Defence are therefore proposing to Admiral Fieldhouse that he makes the following changes:-

- (a) The first paragraph under the heading "Background" should be amended as follows:-

"On 19 March 1982 it was reported that a party of Argentine scrap metal workers had landed illegally ..."

- (b) The fourth paragraph under the heading "Background" should be amended to read:-

"Also on 29 March the submarine HMS SPARTAN was detached from Exercise SPRINGTRAIN to embark stores and weapons at Gibraltar, for deployment to the South Atlantic. Subsequently HMS SPLENDID was ordered to deploy from Faslane. A third nuclear powered submarine, HMS CONQUEROR, was sailed a few days later. All were stored for war within 48 hours of order."



(c) The first sentence of the following paragraph should be amended to read:-

"On 31 March I was instructed to nominate suitable surface ships in case a Task Force was ordered to conduct operations in the South Atlantic."

3. On page 5, in the paragraph about the establishment of the original maritime exclusion zone, the words "After further discussion" at the beginning of the second sentence are obscure and ambiguous; what discussion? by whom? and to what end? We think that it might be suggested to Admiral Fieldhouse that these words are unnecessary and uninformative, and should be deleted.

4. The Ministry of Defence have considered whether the explicit references to the SAS and the Royal Marines Special Boat Squadron should remain. The normal convention is, as you know, that the presence of the SAS and SBS on operations or exercises in peacetime, for example in a counter-terrorist role, is not acknowledged publicly. But the operations described in the despatch are the normal wartime tasks of reconnaissance and raiding which constitute the overt military role of the SAS and SBS. It would in particular look odd to make no mention of the unit to which the 21 men belonged who were killed in the helicopter accident described on page 10. We think that this is reasonable; but it might be prudent to avoid giving any indication of the extent of SAS and SBS raids and patrols. In particular, we think that it might be suggested to Admiral Fieldhouse that, in line 29 on page 7, he should delete "many" and substitute "a series of".

5. I am sending copies of this minute to Richard Mottram (MOD) and Brian Fall (FCO).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R P Hatfield', written in a cursive style.

R P HATFIELD

26 November 1982

ARGENTINA: HANDLING P. 11.



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