

Westwood, Cranford Rd, Rushwick, Worcester WR25TA  
1st Oct. 1982 Tel. Worcester 422560.

Dear Mrs. Thatcher,

R416

The enclosed photostat is of a letter from my niece Elizabeth Cockwell whose husband Richard is Manager of a sheep ranch in W. Falkland where they live with their two young sons.

I hope that you may find it as gripping as I have & as heartening. However, my particular reason for sending it was the views expressed in paras. 1 & 2 on page 3, which I think you may find interesting - & perhaps cheering!

Wishing you the greatest success in your very difficult job. —

Yours sincerely,  
Geese Coats

(Mrs. G. Coats)

Fox Bay East,  
Falkland Islands,  
South Atlantic.

31st August, 1982.

Well, at last I have finally got myself organised enough to get down to writing to you - we have so many letters from all our friends and relations and it was really heartwarming to have them. We ought to have replied much earlier but things have been very chaotic here over the last few months, and we are only just beginning to see our way clear.

We had nothing like the troubles that Stanley, Goose Green and Darwin had, to say nothing of several small farms close to Stanley, but were unfortunately occupied here at Fox Bay by the Argies about three days after they took Stanley. It was pretty well inevitable because of being the central point of the West as well as having the small Government settlement here - the Post Office and Wireless Station, run by Ken Halliday and his wife, Joyce. A couple of days after the Argies came here, all the rest of the people decided that they would rather leave, except for George Stewart, who said that if we could put him up he would stay here too. Also there was Sue and Rosie Binnie out at Coast Ridge House, and the only link they had with anyone was through the telephone to Fox Bay, as the Argies banned the use of all local radios very early on. It seemed a good idea at the time for all the people to go as the soldiers were very nervous and every time anyone wanted to go anywhere they would poke guns at you - it was rather disconcerting! And for those who couldn't manage any Spanish - very frightening. Richard and I found very early on that if one stayed calm and very "British" and reasonable and so on, they simply didn't know how to handle it; and so although they kept saying we should stay in, we used to tell them we had to go out to look after animals etc. In fact they got used to it and let us go around the settlement looking after everybody's hens, dogs etc. We were not allowed to leave the settlement, once everybody else had gone, so it was just the five of us there for about three weeks.

Then suddenly a large helicopter arrived with 14 civilians on it from Stanley - men, women and children. They were expelled as "undesirables", as far as we could gather for much the same sort of reason, if one could call it that, as Bill Luxton and his family had been expelled right out of the country. These people stayed with us in the house until after the liberation. So we were fairly crowded, but fortunately most of them were absolutely marvellous, and we were certainly glad of the company by that time! We had dug a hole in the foundations under the house in case it came to some sort of a fight here, and were able to extend this to fit in all the people who felt that it was a good idea. Only one family thought it was unnecessary, but the rest of us spent every night down there for the last month, after attacks from Brit helicopters, naval guns and Harriers. Actually we used to rather enjoy these attacks as the Arg were at last getting something to make them run around instead of strutting about all over the place - or slouching about would be more like it in most cases. We thought they were pretty shambolic (well they were) until we heard stories of what they had been like in other places.

The British servicemen tell us that "our" argies must have been by far the most professional garrison around judging from the siting and finishing of positions, the layout and marking of the minefields etc. So fortunately we do not have the horrible mess or battle damage of some other places.

So, what we did was kept our spirits up, and Richard in particular worked very hard to try and keep the farm together so that we would have something to work when the Arg had been driven out! Because he and George ran around every day and kept their eyes open, they were able to stop a lot of the damage that would have occurred otherwise. Also it must be said that one of the Arg officers (the 20C - a captain) was a decent man and saved us from a lot of things, I think. He could not stop our radios being taken away - they came in one day and drove us all out, searched for radios: it was cold, boring and a lot of us wanted to go to the loo by the end of that time, as you can imagine! Richard had had a hunch that morning that they were going to do this and we had hidden away one radio in an obvious place (so they would think - Aha, we've got it!) and took to bits and scattered another one. They didn't find either so we could go on listening to B.B.C., and also to the half an hour "Doctor's Time" on the R.T. in the morning, which was all the local traffic permitted - and we were not allowed to go on at all. Not even to let the wives of some of the men who had been sent out here know that they were all right. The use of the R.T. by us was chopped on the morning after the Stanley people arrived, after I had passed a message to say that they were all here and all right (actually the Arg had made me the local Postmistress as the Hallidays had gone, and I made the excuse that they wanted their mail forwarded). It caused a bit of consternation at the time but other than not allowing us to use the R.T. any more nothing else happened.

So the occupation had it's interesting moments, but the best thing was the Harrier attacks etc. - we would feel really jolly for quite a long time after that sort of thing. The Arg major here got very upset as the shells had gone through one of the civilian houses they had taken over and one of his men had been wounded - he said that the British were terrible friends to have "They fire on civilians" (They tried to make us believe that 11 civilians had been killed at Darwin) but I don't think that he could understand that this was a war, and not the usual Arg Army exercise of killing a few communist "terrorists". As a matter of fact we all expected a far greater number of casualties, both military and civilian. Of course it was pretty ghastly when we heard on the Doctor's time that the three women had died, especially for the people who had wives, children, parents etc. in Stanley. But in the end it could have been so much worse. The British forces did a fantastic job.

The surrender here was taken by H.M.S.M. "Avenger" and was very low key, deliberately. It was wonderful though. The strangest incident at this time was the first night of the liberation - the Stanley people were still here and in addition about nine Naval officers and matelots. Some of us were sitting up in the kitchen to keep the Navy company (they were maintaining a watch system on the "prisoners" (actually they were still in their billets as there was nowhere else for them to go)) when there was a scuffle outside, and who should it be but the Arg major and the captain - the one I mentioned before - with a bottle of champagne. "I said we would drink champagne on the day of the victory" said the major "Yours is the victory - here is the champagne." So they came in and the major gave a faultless speech about drinking to the brave men on both sides and to those who had died etc. and then away they went again to their billets. A very bizarre incident.

Since then we have had a succession of servicemen here - the Marines, Gurkhas, Navy (at odd and unpredictable times!), and at the moment we have a company of Queen's Own Highlanders. They are doing a very good job of clearing up all the Arg trenches, etc. Sometimes they are almost as difficult to understand as the Gurkhas!

That brings me to the next thing - several of us here have heard from friends in U.K. that there are all sorts of reports of us being disgruntled, and barely tolerating the continued presence of British Servicemen and such things as that. We are very concerned about this, and are doing all we can to say to as many people as possible that most of us certainly feel extremely grateful to the British servicemen, and the government who sent them, for the fact that they got us out of a very nasty position, and by their continued presence are preventing such a thing happening again. We certainly couldn't have done it by ourselves! It is probably true that there are some people who are having a hard time to adapt to a changed situation; it's not always easy, and it must be said that Stanley in particular is very crowded. Also a lot of us are still I think suffering from the stress that very naturally happened as a result of the occupation. But when I hear of a vociferous minority, however entitled to their opinion, getting repeatedly quoted in the press to the exclusion of all other shades of opinion, and presented to you in Britain as the "typical Falkland attitude" it makes me very cross. If you can spread the word around that it's not like that at all you will be a great help!

Our situation is different, but it is the Argentines who robbed us of our peaceful little existence here, and I'm sure most people have the sense to see that, if nothing more. By this I'm referring to the fact that our lives could not long have continued in the same way. The population was slowly but surely declining, the economy (if that is not too grand a word!) was stagnant, and a lot of us think that if the Arg had continued their former policy of talking and waiting they would have been able to walk into an empty Falklands in ten years, maybe less. The writing was on the wall for our former way of life in any case. It is now very important for the people here who have any "go" in them to make sure that the lives of the people who died will not be tragically wasted. By mentioning people with "go" I'm not dismissing other people - it would be a pretty difficult place to live in if everybody was like that, and of course most of us can make some contribution or another - we are just a little country community, rather more self-reliant than most in fact, through necessity; with the mixed bouquet of opinions as is usual in such communities.

I'll come off my hobby horse now - we're all fine, George is still living with us, and is very welcome to continue to do so as I need hardly say. He has been a real help, especially in keeping the cheerful tone about the place. Our personal plans are a little confused at the moment, but the Falkland Wool Mill is definately going to get off the ground. We are not at all sure where it is to be located - with improved communications which will be sure to follow with a garrison here, it no longer is absolutely necessary to start the enterprise in Stanley. There are other problems, such as power supply and water, but our main reason for planning on Stanley originally was that it was so difficult to shift goods, machinery etc. from Stanley to the camp (also prohibitively expensive) and then the market was there, whereas now it's here too. It may be possible to set it up at Fox Bay and we are at this time considering it. The future of the farm is in some doubt too, over the sale and all that. But apparently letters are being written and we should know for certain within a month or two what is going to happen about that; and whether it will be a good idea for Richard to stay on as Manager under new ownership or even under the old ownership if they agree to certain terms about the mill and other things. In that case I will set the thing up with Richard when he can manage it, but we are very seriously thinking about a partner. Very difficult I know; one has to be very careful!

The children were very good all through the occupation, and have settled down well again now. When the Arg were here they were sensible, brave (when they first came Richard had been taken away with one group of soldiers and another group came up here and were obviously terrified that the boys and I were hiding Marines somewhere. This was just after South Georgia was taken so they were terrified of Marines, as well as the effect the Marines had in Stanley which we only heard about afterwards. The kids were held at gunpoint in the passage and were impressively cool although their eyes were sticking out rather! I was pushed around the rest of the house in front of a very cold gun but the worst thing was having to leave them there out of sight.) Anyway they were good, and also when the Stanley people came there 7 children altogether in the house, and they shared everything pretty well. We were very proud of them. Now, they have settled down and are getting on with "homework" - a correspondence course from Stanley as I have given up teaching full time - I simply couldn't do it with all to be done down here and a more or less constant stream of visitors (all very welcome I must say!)

So that just about brings this rather long letter to the end - I hope you understand that we are not all disgruntled and unhappy but trying hard to get on with things here - "with a lot of help from our friends" to misquote the song!

I think you have probably heard most of this news - I hope there is something new for you in it! It was lovely to hear from you - by the way the yacht did survive - she very wisely blew ashore and got very stuck in the mud so the Argies couldn't take her, as I think they may have done. Also all the British naval shells missed her! So she's fine - was undamaged by being on the beach - we are thinking of letting the servicemen use her (qualified skippers only!) as rest and recreation, in return for maintainance. She would be based here of course! I think it's a good idea especially in return for maintainance which it looks unlikely we will be able to do ourselves.

Anyway we are planning to visit England next summer (yours, that is!) It'll be lovely to see you.