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DESKBY 040600Z (ALL ADDRESSEES)

FM VILA (NFT) JUN 80

TO IMMEDIATE MODUK ARMY

TELEGRAM NO 348 OF 4 JUNE.

AND TO MODUK AIR ACDS OPS AND DMO

INFO FCO

FOR MODUK (ARMY) MODUK(RAF)

ACDS OPS AND DMO FROM GUTHRIE

SIC 13D

INFO FCO (REF TELNO 246 OF 2 JUNE).

NEW HEBRIDES.

1. THE CURRENT THREAT IS TWO FOLD. FIRST, IN SANTO SOME 800 ISLANDERS ARE IN REVOLT. THOUGH POSSESSING SOME FIREARMS IN THE MAIN THEY ARE ARMED WITH SPEARS, CLUBS? BOWS AND ARROWS. THERE IS A HARD CORE OF SOME 40 FRENCH NATIONALS, MOSTLY COLONS OF MIXED BLOOD, SOME WITH MILITARY EXPERIENCE WHO MIGHT WELL RELISH FIRING ON A WEAK BRITISH FORCE.
2. SECONDLY, THOUGH THE REST OF THE NEW HEBRIDES IS CURRENTLY QUIET THERE IS A DANGER OF UNREST SPREADING BEYOND SANTO AND VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS OCCURRING ON OTHER ISLANDS AND IN PARTICULAR IN VILA ITSELF.
3. THE THREAT COULD WELL CHANGE QUICKLY. THE SITUATION DETERIORATING IN VILA AND FRANCOPHONE SYMPATHISERS THREATENING STABILITY IN OTHER ISLANDS.
4. IN VIEW OF THE CURRENT THREAT AN ASSAULT ON SANTO BY THE BRITISH ALONE SHOULD BE IN BATTALION STRENGTH. THE RISKS IN USING A SMALLER FORCE WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE. THE ASSAULT FORCE WOULD SEIZE AND HOLD FOR AS LONG AS NECESSARY:
 - A. AIRFIELD
 - B. POLICE STATION
 - C. GOVERNMENT OFFICES
 - D. PORT
 - E. INSURGENTS HQ AND RADIO STATIONIT IS UNLIKELY THAT MANY OF THE RINGLEADERS WHO WOULD FLEE INTO THE JUNGLE WOULD BE DETAINED. THE BATTALION COULD NOT BE EXPECTED TO ROUND THEM UP. ONCE KEY POINTS HAD BEEN SEIZED THE ASSAULT FORCE COULD BE REDUCED IN SIZE. POLICE COULD REASSUME CONTROL.
5. THE ASSAULT COULD BE DONE FROM THE SEA OR BY PARACHUTE. I DISCOUNT AN INITZAL AIR LANDING AS SANTO AIRFIELDS ARE HELD AND HAVE BEEN BLOCKED BY OIL DRUMS. IF BY SEA AN ADEQUATE FLOTILLA OF ASSORTED LOCAL BOATS COULD BE ASSEMBLED. THERE ARE A VARIETY OF OPTIONS OPEN FOR EMBARKING FROM NEARBY ISLANDS AND DISEMBARKING ON SANTO WHICH I AM INVESTIGATING.

Read in full (a military assessment).

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6. IF BY PARACHUTE THERE IS MORE THAN ONE POSSIBLE DZ AND ONCE AN AIRFIELD IS SEIZED AIRLANDING COULD FOLLOW. I WILL OVERFLY DZS LATER TODAY. UNTIL I HAVE DONE A MORE DETAILED RECCE I AM NOT IN A POSITION TO ADVISE ON THE PREFERRED METHOD OF ASSAULT BUT BOTH ARE CERTAINLY FEASIBLE.

7. IF AN ANGLO/FRENCH FORCE ASSAULTED SANTO I WOULD THINK THE BRITISH COMPONENT COULD BE REDUCED TO A COMPANY.

8. NOBODY SHOULD BE UNDER ANY ILLUSION THAT FRENCH NATIONALS COULD BE SHOT IF A BRITISH FORCE ASSAULTED SANTO.

9. IF A BRITISH ASSAULT ON SANTO IS UNACCEPTABLE AT PRESENT AND JOINT BRITISH/FRENCH ACTION CANNOT BE AGREED AS A PRECAUTION TROOPS COULD BE MOVED TO VILA. IF TROOPS WERE AT VILA THEY WOULD:

- A. BE SEEN TO BE DOING SOMETHING BY THE BASICALLY TIMID MELANESIAN
- B. BE ABLE TO ACCLIMATIZE. THE EFFECTS OF THE JOURNEY SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED.
- C. BE ABLE TO PLAN FUTURE OPERATIONS AND POSSIBLE ASSAULT ON SANTO.
- D. BE ABLE TO BACK UP THE LOCAL POLICE WHO WILL QUICKLY COME UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE IF THE SECURITY SITUATION DETERIORATES.
- E. CAN BE ON THE GROUND AND BE IN A POSITION TO REACT QUICKLY. THE FRENCH AT NOUMEA COULD BE IN VILA IN 5 HOURS.

10. I AM ASSURED THAT THE PRESENCE OF TROOPS ON VILA WOULD REDUCE TENSION AS OPPOSED TO INFLAMING THE LOCALS.

11. IF THIS ALTERNATIVE TO AN ASSAULT ON SANTO WAS THOUGHT DESIRABLE - AND IT IS BY THE RESIDENT COMMISSIONER - A BATTALION HQ AND TWO COMPANIES WOULD BE SUFFICIENT. ADEQUATE ACCOMMODATION CAN BE ARRANGED AT VILA. IF THE SITUATION REMAINED THE SAME ON SANTO AND AN ASSAULT AT A LATER DATE BECAME NECESSARY BY THE BRITISH ALONE THE REMAINDER OF THE UNIT CONCERNED COULD REINFORCE. FURTHERMORE THERE WOULD BE A CHANCE THAT WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME THE SUPPORT FOR AND RESOLUTION OF JIMMY STEVENS AND HIS SUPPORTERS WOULD WANE AND THE BATTALION HQ AND TWO COMPANIES MIGHT WELL BE ABLE TO SEIZE SANTO KEY POINTS BY THEMSELVES.

12. IF THIS SECOND COURSE OF SENDING TROOPS TO VILA WAS DEEMED PREFERABLE TO ASSAULTING SANTO RAF ADVISER'S INITIAL FEELING WHICH WILL BE CONFIRMED TODAY IS THAT VC10 CAN LAND AT VILA SUBJECT TO PERFORMANCE LIMITATION. C130 WOULD BE REQUIRED TO REMAIN IN THEATRE TO MOVE TROOPS FROM VILA TO NEARBY ISLANDS IF REQUIRED.

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13. AFTER A MORE DETAILED RECCE OF THE ISLANDS WHICH WILL INCLUDE AIRSTRIPS I WILL SIGNAL AGAIN.

14. IF IT WAS DECIDED TO DEPLOY INITIALLY A FORCE TO VILA AND THE ASSAULT ON SANTO WAS RULED OUT FOR THE TIME BEING ON PURELY OPERATIONAL GROUNDS AND I STRESS PURELY OPERATIONAL GROUNDS THERE WOULD BE MERIT IN THE "IN ROLE" PARAS BEING DEPLOYED EVEN THOUGH THEIR ARRIVAL WOULD BE SLOWER THAN IN SPEARHEAD BATTALIONS. THE SEA LANDING ON SANTO IS NOT DIFFICULT AND WE WOULD KEEP OUR OPTIONS OPEN IF THE ASSAULT ON SANTO WAS ORDERED AT A LATER DATE.

15. I HAVE HAD THE GREATEST ASSISTANCE FROM THE BRITISH RESIDENCY. HOWEVER THEIR STAFF ARE LIMITED IN NUMBERS AND I WOULD RECOMMEND SENDING MILO AND AN AQ ADVISER ON THE FIRST AVAILABLE CIVIL AIRCRAFT.

IN ADDITION IT WOULD GREATLY ASSIST POLICE IF A GOOD YOUNG CAPTAIN COULD BE MADE AVAILABLE TO ACT AS 2IC OF POLICE MOBILE UNIT FOR ONE MONTH. RESIDENT COMMISSIONER HAS ALREADY REQUESTED THIS IN TELEGRAM 326 OF 1 JUNE, PARA 5 TO FCO. THESE REQUESTS ARE STRONGLY SUPPORTED BY THE RESIDENT COMMISSIONER WITH WHOM I HAVE DISCUSSED THIS TELEGRAM.

STUART

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