



10 DOWNING STREET

VHB
3

THE PRIME MINISTER

21 October, 1981

Dear Sir Peter,

Thank you for your letter of 29 September about HMS ENDURANCE.

I can well understand your concern, given your family connections, at the news that HMS ENDURANCE is to be paid off next year. She has, of course, been a familiar sight, like HMS PROTECTOR before her, in the South Atlantic and Antarctic for many years and during her annual deployments she has performed a wide variety of useful work. Her presence has undeniably helped to underline our commitment to the defence of British interests in the South Atlantic. She will inevitably be missed. I need hardly say that the decision to pay her off was by no means easy.

The problem is essentially one of resources. As you know, a thorough reappraisal was carried out earlier in the year of the defence programme in order to ensure that the several roles undertaken by our armed forces are carried out to the best and most economic effect. Although defence expenditure overall is planned to rise in real terms it has been necessary to take some hard decisions, including a substantial reduction in the size of the surface fleet. Against this background, we have had reluctantly to conclude that the relatively limited contribution made by HMS ENDURANCE to our defence capability does not justify the continued expense of running her. I regret this as much as you do. I must also say that your request that the ship be retained in service until she is replaced would simply represent a continuation of the status quo; there can, I am afraid, be no question of replacing her. We do however intend that RN ships should continue to deploy to the South Atlantic from time to time, though obviously less frequently than HMS ENDURANCE has been able to do.

/ In your letter

SK

In your letter you expressed concern about the future of our economic stake in Antarctica. Let me say that the decision to pay off HMS ENDURANCE should not be seen as in any way foreshadowing the abandonment of our interests in this important region. As it is, it is not the case that the Antarctic Treaty formally expires in 1990: rather there is provision for a review of its operation after 30 years. The Treaty Partners are about to engage in negotiating a regime for exploiting the area's mineral resources, within the framework of the Treaty itself. It is in our best interests that exploitation should proceed on an agreed basis rather than that individual countries should press their separate claims and so risk a breakdown of co-operation.

As for the Falkland Islands, there is no question as to the legitimacy of our sovereignty. The Government is determined to ensure that the Island's territorial integrity is preserved. We shall continue to maintain the Royal Marines Garrison on the Falkland Islands, at its present strength, as a tangible and constant demonstration of our commitment. For all her useful work in the past, HMS ENDURANCE, with her limited military capability, is not essential to the maintenance of that commitment. †

I would not like you to think that the decision on HMS ENDURANCE's future was taken lightly. But I hope that what I have said will help to put the decision in perspective and also to indicate the Government's determination both to see to it that the interests of the Falkland Islanders continue to be upheld and to ensure that our important economic interests in Antarctica are successfully pursued.

Yours sincerely
Raymond H. Dutton

Sir Peter Scott, C.B.E., D.S.C.