

copies to:

PS/PUS

Sir L Allinson

Lord N Gordon Lennox

Mr Moberly

Consular Dept

News Dept

WAD

A J Coles Esq

No 10 Downing St

Mr Howarth, NENADMr Mark Thatcher

The Algerian Foreign Minister telephoned this office at 1300 today. I explained that Lord Carrington was on his way to Brussels.

M. Benyahia said that an Algerian military aircraft had just located Mr Mark Thatcher and his two companions. The aircraft had made a low pass over their car, which was 400 kilometres south of Tamanrasset. The party had erected a tent. I enquired about their condition. M. Benyahia said that they had all signalled to the aircraft.

M. Benyahia said that the Algerians were now sending a helicopter carrying a landrover in order to recover the party. The helicopter would have to fly 300 kilometres to land the landrover, which would then have to make a further 100 kilometre journey. I asked how long this would take. He thought two to three hours, but this may have been a guess off the top of his head. He said that the party would be taken back to Tamanrasset by the same route.

I promised to inform No 10 immediately of this news, and I have of course done so. I said that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary had of course personally followed with close attention the search operation mounted by the Algerian Government, and were extremely grateful for everything the Algerians had done. I also thanked the Foreign Minister warmly for taking the trouble to telephone the news himself and assured him that it would be received with the greatest of pleasure.

You have received a similar story from our Embassy in Algiers, who in turn have heard from HM Ambassador at Tamanrasset. The Ambassador has rightly pointed out that until the identities of the people who waved to the search aircraft are confirmed, we should exercise some caution: but that on the whole the signs are good.

M. Grenier of the French Embassy telephoned Sir Len Allinson at about the same time to pass on the same story. It has now been carried by the news media, including the BBC radio news at 1335.

As soon as the identities of the party are confirmed, we should send appropriate messages of thanks. I shall naturally consult No 10 about this: but in addition to those sent by the Prime Minister, I am sure that Lord Carrington will wish to send a personal message to M. Benyahia. We must also not forget the other Governments which have assisted, including the French, Malian and possibly Senegalese.

I hope it would not be premature to add a word of thanks to you for your considerable efforts in this matter over the past two days.

*RM/Lyne*

(R M J Lyne)

14 January 1982