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RELEASE OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAPTURE OF DARWIN AND GOOSE GREEN

At OD(SA) on 9th June we agreed that action should be taken to refute allegations in the media that the Government had released operational information about the capture of Darwin and Goose Green which had been damaging to British Forces on the ground. Steps have been taken to inform defence correspondents and others of the facts and I rebutted this charge in the course of answering questions after my Statement to the House of Commons yesterday, as did Lord Trenchard in the House of Lords.

2. As I said in the House I have had the allegations thoroughly investigated. The reports from the correspondents who were with 2 Para before their attack on Darwin and Goose Green probably originated from BBC World Service broadcasts which they heard a few days before the attack. These broadcasts reflected the prevailing newspaper speculation that an attack on Darwin and Goose Green was imminent. Indeed the Daily Express announced on its front page the capture of Goose Green two days before the attack. It is quite understandable that someone on the spot might have felt that official circles in London had been indiscreet. There is no evidence of MOD indiscretion and it was unfortunately all too easy for the armchair strategists to work out for themselves that Darwin and Goose Green were likely to be our first objectives. The MOD denied reports at the time that were patently false but there was really no way in which we could have stopped all speculation without confirming the real nature of our plans.

3. The Argentine garrison at Goose Green was reinforced shortly before the attack, but our assessment is that this was because the



Argentines came to the same conclusions as armchair strategists in this country, in time to send their reinforcements.

4. I am copying this minute to members of OD(SA) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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Ministry of Defence

11th June 1982

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Viscount Trenchard: My Lords, I have decided that it is quite impossible for my right honourable friend the Secretary of State to please everybody in relation to information in a state of hostilities when the country is not at war. There are those who ask him for more; there are those who ask him for more earlier. There are those who tell him to give less, and to give it later. I am certain that whatever my right honourable friend does he will be open to criticism. There are important factors of every kind. The military ones are supreme, and the safety of the task force is supreme; but there are factors which affect the backing for the operation in this country and abroad, and they are important, and they have to be taken into account in terms of the kind of information that is given.

I take this opportunity of saying that the much publicised suggestion by certain correspondents with the Second Battalion of the Parachute Regiment that the Ministry of Defence revealed a forthcoming attack on Darwin and Goose Green, as far as I can see, is completely without foundation. My right honourable friend caused an inquiry to be made immediately and we can find no evidence of any such revelation. It is true that in all areas of the media, in a situation of free media, there was speculation that the most likely place for a first attack, which one look at the map would reveal, was Darwin and Goose Green, and there was a great deal of speculation, including a World Services BBC programme. I believe that the correspondents concerned have confused speculation with what was issued by the MoD, which in fact was late, was after the event, and we were criticised for the fact that it was late.

Mr. Nott: We are criticised both for giving too much information and for giving too little. Every hour of every day we must make a decision on whether to release information. The maximum amount of information is, rightly, required by the British public and we are not withholding any information that does not damage the operational objectives of the task force and that is not upsetting to the families. However, the more information that we can give, the better.

There have been some misunderstandings in the task force. The suggestion has been made that my Department has released information that will damage our forces on the ground. I have carefully checked every such suggestion and I can find no evidence that any damaging information has been given by the Ministry of Defence. What has sometimes happened is that reports have been based on speculation here at home rather than on actual information.

Mr. Nott: I am conscious of the fact that day by day we are criticised for giving too much or too little information. The criticism comes from different quarters, and sometimes from the same quarter, but from different directions. However, no one is entitled to information that puts any life at risk. In making that difficult judgment in each case, it is right that we should rely largely upon the advice that we receive from the operational commanders on the spot. In the last resort they are the people best able to judge whether information is likely to be damaging to their actions.