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CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF

Prime Minister

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The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
 Prime Minister  
 10 Downing Street  
 London  
 SW1

13 April 1983

*Dear Prime Minister*

I thought you would wish to know that the visit to the Falklands of the Dependants of those killed in the South Atlantic has been an unqualified success.

The move down by British Airways to Montevideo and onwards on the Cunard Countess had clearly been impeccably organised and, as a result, the families arrived in a very positive and sensible frame of mind and extremely appreciative of what Her Majesty's Government was arranging for them.

I together with the Civil and Military Commissioners met the Cunard Countess as she was steaming into San Carlos Water, and both Rex Hunt and I welcomed them collectively - I on behalf of yourself, the Secretary of State and the Armed Forces and he on behalf of the Falkland Islanders. I passed on to them your personal greetings, good wishes and understanding and reminded them (of which they had no doubt) of how much the visit owed to your personal inspiration.

I then had plenty of opportunity to meet and talk to them individually and in family groups, and I was immensely impressed with their spirit and with the brave and sensible way they were coming to see for themselves and pay their personal respects before picking up the threads of life again. It was very moving (but not at all traumatic) to talk to them and they were so grateful to you and the Government for this unique opportunity. As I told them, they were showing courage and stamina which well matched that of those they had come to honour.



The next morning we held a Service of Remembrance at the new and beautifully constructed War Graves cemetery at San Carlos. Built of Fox Bay stone, it stands facing the sea on a grassy slope directly above the site of one of the first landings on 21 May last year. Here lie buried 14 Servicemen (including H Jones) whose families, wisely I think, decided not to bring the bodies back home, and here too, on the memorial at the back of the cemetery, are recorded the names of all those killed in action at sea and who therefore have no visible grave. There are also two other graves - Lieutenant Taylor RN, a Harrier pilot at Goose Green and Captain Hamilton SAS at Port Howard which are being left where they died, as a result of special arrangements made between the families and the Falkland Islanders themselves who have undertaken to look after the graves with loving care.

The Service itself could not have been better and the atmosphere was just right; and Bishop Snell - Bishop of Croydon who is Bishop to the Armed Forces, gave an excellent and helpful address. The arrangements for the families were first class in every way, as indeed they were for the Press who were there in strength and who, at least for once, appeared in a helpful and sympathetic mood; although time and distance must have slightly inhibited the amount of coverage which appeared back home.

That same afternoon or the next day, the families were taken off in helicopters to places of particular interest to them - to Goose Green (Sara Jones and her two sons went to stay the weekend with Brook Hardcastle who you met at Darwin and who lives within half a mile of where H Jones fell), Fitzroy, Two Sisters, Mount Longdon, Tumbledown etc. This was all marvellously organised and the weather remained kind.

And the final two days were taken up first with a Service at sea followed by small private ceremonies at the spots where the various ships went down. These of course did produce some traumatic moments but they were soon over, and it was something they had to get off their chests: I am sure they will come back feeling closer to their loved ones, refreshed and more at peace. And then there was a visit to Stanley. Here the Falkland Islanders opened their doors and had the whole visiting party to lunch in their various homes. This was a happy occasion and will have done a great deal of good all round.

Throughout my five days in the Falklands I have been mightily impressed with Major General David Thorne, as indeed you were. He not only organised the whole Dependant visit with consummate skill and understanding which will have not gone unnoticed by the Press, but his drive, energy and ability to inspire everyone, in all three Services, to greater depths of performance has achieved staggering results in the nine months he has been there. The accommodation problem has



now been cracked, with the Garrison assured of very reasonable accommodation with the Winter approaching; and the radar situation should be infinitely better by the middle or end of next month with radars installed, by then, on Mount Kent and at Cape Orford in the South West. This should allow us to pull back at least one of the picquet ships.

The Garrison is now well able to do the task it has been given - to deter, to deal with any sneak attacks, within limitations to hit back, and to absorb reinforcements for any widening or heightening of conflict; and all this has been achieved, thanks to General Thorne's imaginative, vigorous, yet tactful handling, with the minimum possible intrusion into or disruption of the life of the Falkland Islanders. He will be a difficult man to follow.

So, altogether, Prime Minister, both from the point of view of the visit, which you did so much to get under way, and from the point of view of the readiness, professionalism and morale of the Garrison, I believe you can set your mind at rest. They were and are what you would wish them to be and the Garrison will be improving the whole time.

May I also just add that David Thorne hands over to Major General Keith Spacie and returns to the UK on 16 April and you may care to see him some time after that.

Prime Minister  
shall I  
arrange?

A. & C. 14/4

Yours Sincerely  
John Bramall

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