

ROBIN

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IT GIVES ME GREAT  
PLEASURE TO REPLY, ON BEHALF OF MY DISTINGUISHED  
FELLOW GUESTS, TO ADMIRAL STAVELEY'S KIND WORDS  
OF WELCOME; AND IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE, TOO, TO BE  
BACK AT NORTHWOOD AGAIN THIS EVENING.  
THIS HEADQUARTERS HOLDS VIVID MEMORIES FOR ME.

I SHOULD START BY APOLOGISING THAT WE COULD NOT HOLD THIS  
FALKLANDS DINNER ON THE DATE ORIGINALLY ARRANGED  
IN MAY.

/ I WAS THEN

I WAS THEN INVOLVED IN ANOTHER CAMPAIGN - OF A  
POLITICAL NATURE - AND I AM GLAD TO SAY THAT THAT  
CAMPAIGN TOO HAD A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME.

AS WE DROVE THROUGH THE GATES THIS EVENING, I COULD NOT HELP  
RECALLING MY FIRST VISIT.

IT WAS IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN -  
DAYS OF INTENSE ACTIVITY AT EVERY LEVEL OF GOVERN-  
MENT, DAYS OF UNCERTAINTY TEMPERED WITH EXCITEMENT  
AND ANXIETY, AND ABOVE ALL DAYS OF DETERMINATION  
TO RIGHT THE WRONG DONE TO OUR PEOPLE IN THE  
FALKLAND ISLANDS.

/ IT WAS

IT WAS LORD LEWIN - SIR TERENCE LEWIN AS HE THEN WAS - WHO  
FIRST ACCOMPANIED ME TO NORTHWOOD, AND IT WAS  
SIR JOHN FIELDHOUSE WHO WELCOMED ME ON THAT AND  
SUBSEQUENT OCCASIONS.

I WAS IMMEDIATELY GLAD THAT I HAD COME.

IT WAS ST. GEORGE'S DAY, THE DAY WHEN WE HAD  
ISSUED OUR WARNING TO ARGENTINA THAT WE WOULD NOT  
HESITATE TO DEAL WITH ANY ATTEMPT TO INTERFERE  
WITH THE TASK FORCE.

/ SPECULATION

SPECULATION WAS MOUNTING, IN THE MEDIA AND IN DIPLOMATIC

CIRCLES, AS TO WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT: WHAT THE

OUTCOME WOULD BE: THE PROSPECTS FOR A PEACEFUL

SETTLEMENT; THE DANGERS OF A CONFLICT ESCALATING

OUT OF CONTROL.

THAT WAS THE ATMOSPHERE I LEFT BEHIND IN LONDON.

THE ATMOSPHERE AT NORTHWOOD CAME AS A WELCOME TONIC.

ON OUR ARRIVAL, I HAD A FULL PRESENTATION ON THE

OVERALL SITUATION FROM ADMIRAL FIELDHOUSE.

/ HE THEN

HE THEN ESCORTED ME AROUND THE FACILITIES HERE  
TO SEE HOW THAT SITUATION WAS BEING HANDLED IN  
ALL ITS DIFFERENT ASPECTS.

EVEN THOUGH THIS WAS ONLY AT THE OUTSET OF THE  
CAMPAIGN, AND OUR COUNTER-ATTACK HAD YET TO BEGIN,  
THE LEVEL OF ACTIVITY WAS INTENSE, YET NEVER  
FRENETIC.

THE ATMOSPHERE WAS OVERRIDINGLY ONE OF QUIET  
EFFICIENCY; OF CONFIDENCE AND DETERMINATION;  
ABOVE ALL, OF PROFESSIONALISM.

/ THE IMPRESSIONS

THE IMPRESSIONS OF THAT FIRST GUIDED TOUR ARE NOT EASILY

FORGOTTEN:

- THE LONG, NARROW SHIP-LIKE PASSAGES  
CONNECTING DOZENS OF CABINS;
  
- MAPS AND CHARTS TO BE PORED OVER AND  
MARKED WITH PROGRESS AND PROJECTIONS;
  
- THE MEN AND WOMEN IN DARK BLUE, LIGHT  
BLUE AND KHAKI, ALL ABLE TO TAKE THE TIME  
TO TELL ME WHAT THEY WERE DOING.

/ IT WAS AN

IT WAS AN ILLUMINATING EXPERIENCE, AND AN ENCOURAGING ONE.

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON THAT I LEARNT  
DURING THAT FIRST VISIT WAS THIS: NO MATTER WHAT  
MIGHT OCCUR IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC, HERE WAS AN  
ORGANISATION WHICH COULD BE RELIED ON TO ACT WITH  
EXPEDITION, TO COPE WITH ANY CONTINGENCY AND TO  
PROVIDE THE TASK FORCE EIGHT THOUSAND MILES AWAY  
WITH EVERY POSSIBLE ASSISTANCE.

THE TIME WAS FULL OF ANXIETIES.

/ TWO DAYS EARLIER

TWO DAYS EARLIER, TWO HELICOPTERS HAD BEEN LOST  
IN APPALLING WEATHER CONDITIONS ON SOUTH GEORGIA.  
ONLY HEROIC FLYING HAD ENABLED THE SAS PARTY ON  
THE ISLAND TO BE RETRIEVED.

DURING THAT FIRST VISIT, I LEARNT THAT A SEA KING  
HAD HAD TO DITCH IN THE SEA, AND AN ARGENTINE  
SUBMARINE HAD BEEN DETECTED NEAR SOUTH GEORGIA.  
NEVERTHELESS, ON THAT SAME DAY, THE SAS WERE  
REINSERTED INTO SOUTH GEORGIA, AND THE FINAL STAGE  
OF THE RECOVERY OF THE ISLAND WAS INITIATED.

/ ON MY NEXT VISIT,

ON MY NEXT VISIT, THE CAMPAIGN WAS A GOOD DEAL MORE ADVANCED  
AND THE 'HOLE', AS I HAD COME TO KNOW IT, WAS  
CONSIDERABLY MORE CROWDED.

IT WAS AN IMPORTANT STAGE IN THE CAMPAIGN: THE SUCCESSFUL  
LANDINGS IN SAN CARLOS HAD TAKEN PLACE ABOUT  
24 HOURS BEFORE AND THE BEACHHEAD WAS BEING  
REINFORCED IN THE TEETH OF FIERCE OPPOSITION  
FROM THE AIR.

/ THE DAMAGE INFLICTED

THE DAMAGE INFLICTED ON BOTH SIDES REACHED A PEAK,  
WITH THE BRUNT OF THE ARGENTINE AIR RAIDS BEING  
BORNE BY THE SHIPS IN THE FALKLAND SOUND. THREE  
OF WHICH WERE HIT DIRECTLY BY BOMBS.

IT WAS NOT A MOMENT FOR DOUBTS OR DIFFERENCES; AND I WAS  
GREATLY HEARTENED TO SEE FOR MYSELF THAT MORALE  
AT NORTHWOOD WAS, IF ANYTHING, EVEN HIGHER THAN  
IT HAD BEEN ON MY PREVIOUS VISIT.

MORE PEOPLE WERE NEEDED AS THE CAMPAIGN PROGRESSED,  
AND OFFICE SPACE WAS EVEN SCARCER.

/ THIS WAS PUTTING

THIS WAS PUTTING PRESSURE NOT ONLY ON THE MEN AND WOMEN OF  
THE ROYAL NAVY, THE ARMY AND THE ROYAL AIR FORCE,  
BUT ALSO ON THEIR NATO COLLEAGUES WHO HAD BEEN  
SQUEEZED OUT OF THEIR OFFICES TO CARRY ON WITH  
THEIR NORMAL BUSINESS IN TEMPORARY AND OVERCROWDED  
ACCOMMODATION WHEREVER IT COULD BE FOUND.

IN ADDITION, THE NATO WORK WHICH WOULD NORMALLY  
HAVE FALLEN TO THEIR BRITISH COLLEAGUES, NOW OTHER-  
WISE ENGAGED, HAD TO BE DEALT WITH.

/ I AM SURE

I AM SURE THAT I SPEAK FOR ALL OF US WHEN I SAY  
HOW GRATEFUL WE ARE FOR THE MAGNIFICENT AND  
UNSTINTING SUPPORT GIVEN BY OUR NATO FRIENDS AND  
PARTNERS THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN.

DURING THE FALKLANDS CAMPAIGN, THIS WAS MY FRONT LINE: THIS  
HEADQUARTERS WAS THE NEAREST I COULD GET TO THE  
SOUTH ATLANTIC, AND I GREATLY PRIZED THE SENSE OF  
BEING IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE MEN IN THE  
TASK FORCE.

/ NONE OF MY

NONE OF MY QUESTIONS - AND I ASKED A GOOD MANY -  
EVER FAILED TO RECEIVE A STRAIGHTFORWARD AND  
POSITIVE ANSWER.

NOR WAS I EVER AWARE OF ANY SENSE OF RIVALRY OR  
DISSENSION AMONGST THE DIFFERENT STAFFS HERE,  
DESPITE THE PRESSURES OF WORK AND SPACE UNDER  
WHICH THEY LABOURED TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY.

OBVIOUSLY THIS COULD NOT HAVE BEEN SO WITHOUT THE VERY CLOSE  
COOPERATION BETWEEN THE THREE SERVICES.

/ NOT FOR NOTHING

NOT FOR NOTHING WAS THE OPERATION CALLED  
CORPORATE.

BUT I KNOW THAT GREAT CREDIT IS DUE ALSO TO  
HMS WARRIOR, AND THE SUPPORTING STAFF WHO WERE  
CONCERNED WITH THE DOMESTIC AND OFFICE ARRANGEMENTS  
FOR THE INFLUX OF ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL.

WHATEVER WAS TRUE OF THE EARLY AND MIDDLE STAGES OF THE  
CAMPAIGN WAS DOUBLY TRUE OF THE LAST DAYS, THE DAYS  
OF GENERAL MOORE'S FINAL PUSH TO PORT STANLEY.

/ I WAS ABLE

I WAS ABLE TO BE HERE ON BOTH THE SATURDAY AND SUNDAY.

I COULD NOT HAVE STAYED AWAY.

THROUGHOUT THE BATTLE, THE ADVANCES AND THE  
SETBACKS, MY CONFIDENCE NEVER WAVERED, AND I KNOW  
HOW WELL SERVED THIS NATION WAS FROM START TO  
FINISH NOT ONLY BY THE OFFICERS AND MEN ON THE  
GROUND, IN THE AIR AND AT SEA, TO WHOM SO MUCH IS  
OWED, BUT ALSO BY THE MEN AND WOMEN HERE AT  
NORTHWOOD.

/ THE WORK, OF COURSE.

THE WORK, OF COURSE, STILL GOES ON, HERE AS IN THE FALKLANDS  
THEMSELVES, WHERE THE WORK OF REBUILDING THE FUTURE  
OF THE ISLANDS IS TAKING PLACE.

THE SERVICES ARE PLAYING THEIR FULL PART, BOTH IN  
THE DEFENCE OF THE ISLANDS AND THEIR PEOPLE AND IN  
THEIR EQUALLY IMPORTANT ROLE OF PARTICIPATING IN  
ISLAND LIFE.

/ UNDERLYING ALL

UNDERLYING ALL THESE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF INVOLVEMENT WITH  
THE CIVIL POPULATION IS THE MORE SOMBRE AND MORE  
PURELY MILITARY ROLE OF BEING PREPARED, IF  
NECESSARY, TO DEFEND ONCE MORE THE ISLANDS AND  
THE PEOPLE WHICH WE FOUGHT SO HARD AND SO  
EFFECTIVELY TO RECOVER LAST YEAR.

I KNOW FROM MY OWN VISIT TO THE FALKLANDS EARLIER IN THE YEAR  
THAT SERVICE IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC IS DEMANDING  
AND RIGOROUS.

/ BUT I WAS HEARTENED

BUT I WAS HEARTENED TO SEE HOW WELL OUR  
SAILORS, SOLDIERS AND AIRMEN ARE RISING TO THE  
CHALLENGE.

WE ARE ALL GREATLY IN THEIR DEBT.

MR. PRESIDENT, MY FERVENT HOPE - THE HOPE OF EACH OF US -

IS THAT NEITHER THOSE NOW STATIONED IN THE  
FALKLAND ISLANDS, NOR ANY OF YOU, WILL BE CALLED  
ON TO PERFORM AGAIN THE SERVICE SO LOYALLY  
RENDERED LAST YEAR.

/ BUT I HAVE NO DOUBTS

BUT I HAVE NO DOUBTS WHATSOEVER THAT SHOULD IT,  
DESPITE OUR BEST EFFORTS, BECOME NECESSARY AGAIN  
TO ORGANISE FOR A FIGHT, WHETHER IN THE SOUTH  
ATLANTIC OR ANYWHERE ELSE, WE WILL BE ABLE TO  
COUNT ON OUR SERVICES TO PROVIDE THE DEDICATION  
AND EXPERTISE TO FIGHT AND WIN ANOTHER DAY.