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Your reference

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Copy of Observer article
attached as requested.

cover-up exposed

← BELGRANO

by ANDREW WILSON

A CONFIDENTIAL document, signed by a senior Ministry of Defence official, recommends withholding from the House of Commons sensitive information about the sinking of the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano.

It was sent anonymously last month to Mr Tam Dalyell, Labour MP for Linlithgow. *The Observer* has obtained the text.

The document was signed by J. M. Legge, Head of DS11, and carried the code number MB9326 3276ME. Mr Legge is listed as a member of the Defence Secretariat staff.

The document advises the Defence Secretary, Mr Michael Heseltine, and his staff not to give the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee details of changes made in the rules of engagement during the approach of the British task force to the Falklands in May 1982.

It says they would reveal that all Argentine warships had been declared legitimate targets for attack from 2 May—and not just the Belgrano, whose sinking with the loss of 368 lives was subsequently justified on the ground that it threatened the safety of the fleet.

They would also disclose that there had been a five-day delay in the issue of the appropriate warning to the Argentines of the extension of the exclusion zone.

The Foreign Affairs Committee will resume hearing evidence on aspects of the Falklands campaign after the summer recess.

Mr Dalyell told *The Observer* last night: 'The document purported to reveal that the writer wished to keep the Select Committee in ignorance of crucial information.'

'I therefore, having consulted the Clerk of the House of Commons, put the documents at the disposal of the Foreign Affairs Committee. You will have to ask Sir Anthony Kershaw, the chairman, about his subsequent action.'

Sir Anthony, who is abroad, was not available last night.

After Mr Dalyell's action, the Ministry of Defence began an inquiry into a leakage.

He said he received three documents in all. The first was postmarked 24 April and sent to him at the House of Commons in a plain envelope

Exclusive

similar to that containing the other papers, said: 'Dear Mr Dalyell, I cannot give you my name but I can tell you that I have full access to exactly what happened to the Belgrano.'

It suggested that Mr Dalyell should put a number of parliamentary questions to the Defence Secretary, who had failed to answer questions put to him by the MP in a letter in March.

Among the questions recommended by the anonymous writer was: 'Did the change in the rules of engagement [for the Falklands task force] on 2 May [1982] refer only to the Belgrano? Or did they go wider? When were the rules of engagement changed...?'

The anonymous letter ended: 'You are on the right track—keep going.'



TAM DALYELL MP:
'Crucial Information.'

The second, and more important, document reached Mr Dalyell in mid-July. It was on three sheets of paper, from which the top of the first and the bottom of the last had been cut. The subject matter carried the heading: 'House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee: South Atlantic ROE.' (ROE stands for Rules of Engagement).

In it the head of DS11, Mr Legge, advised his Minister how to respond to questions put by the Foreign Affairs Committee about changes to the rules during the Falklands operation.

The memorandum says: 'We have discussed the form of our response with the defence commitments staff, DS5 and

DNW, who had particular responsibility for ROEs. . . . Our advice is that we should not provide the committee with a note listing all the changes.'

For one thing, says the document, ROEs are drawn from the Fleet Operating the Tactical Instructions, which is a classified document; and the committee had indicated that it would prefer such a note to be unclassified.

'In addition, the full list of changes would provide more information than Ministers have been prepared to reveal so far about the Belgrano affair.'

For instance, it would show that the engagement of the Argentine aircraft carrier 25 de Mayo was permitted from 30 April, and that the change of 2 May was not restricted to the Belgrano but included all Argentine warships over a large area.

'It would also reveal that while the public warnings and ROE changes for the Maritime Exclusion Zone and Total Exclusion Zone were simultaneous, there was a delay until 7 May before the appropriate warning was issued for the 2 May change.'

'I therefore recommend (the writer goes on) that we should avoid these difficulties by providing the committee with a more general narrative.'

The third document received by Mr Dalyell is the draft of a reply by Mr Heseltine to his questions in March about the movements of the Belgrano and the submarine Conqueror.

Mr Heseltine's letter was never sent.

The draft gives precise information about the Belgrano's position at various times and states clearly that the cruiser reversed course towards her home base at 9 a.m. London time on 2 May, 11 hours before the Conqueror torpedoed her.

Mr Dalyell said last night: 'In my opinion the document does not put at risk the nation's security, or any information involving the Fleet and the Navy. What it does put at risk is the exposure of the truth about the action of politicians, particularly Mrs Thatcher.'

He has repeatedly accused the Prime Minister of ordering the sinking of the Belgrano in order to scupper a Peruvian peace plan.

FACE LIFT : Decorate International Balloon

Briefly . . .

Recall for assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly will be recalled from its summer recess for an emergency debate on Tuesday of the past week's violence.

(Lethal game, page 4).

Tanker hit

A Panamanian-registered oil tanker was hit and damaged by a missile from an unidentified plane off Qatar yesterday.

Liz's vigil

Elizabeth Taylor flies to South Wales today to meet members of Richard Burton's family at Pontryhydyfen, the village where he was born.

Fans injured

Six Liverpool football fans were injured, one seriously, when a railing on the first floor balcony of their London hotel gave way yesterday.

Killer hunted

Police yesterday launched a hunt for the sex killer of a boy aged 10, whose naked body was found outside Bodmin, Cornwall.

