

RESTRICTED

ec wkl

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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
Telephone 01-~~3307822~~ 218 6169

MO 5/21

17th November 1982

Dear Tom,

Yes not

Prime Minister

Contact with Mr. Nott's

reply?

A.J.C. 17/11

Following the exchange he had with my Secretary of State and subsequently with the Prime Minister during Questions yesterday about RAF Fort Austin, Tam Dalyell MP has now written the attached letter on the same subject, which he has copied to Lord Franks.

My Secretary of State does not propose to deal with any points of detail in his reply but feels that it should cover Mr Dalyell's allegation that there is an inconsistency between what the Prime Minister said to him during Questions on 26th October and what the Prime Minister and my Secretary of State said yesterday.

If the Prime Minister is content Mr Nott proposes to reply to Mr Dalyell on the lines of the attached draft.

Yours ever

*[Handwritten signature]*

(D T PIPER)

A J Coles Esq

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Thank you for your letter of 16th November about RFA Fort Austin.

I made it clear in the House that RFA Fort Austin sailed from Gibraltar on 29th March to replenish HMS Endurance. The Prime Minister also made this clear when you later raised the matter with her. I really cannot help it if you do not accept what we said - but it is the truth.

Nor can I understand why you are having difficulty reconciling what the Prime Minister and I said yesterday with what the Prime Minister said to you in the House on 26th October. It was made clear in the House on 30th March, following the illegal landing on South Georgia by a party of Argentine citizens, that HMS Endurance was being retained in the area for as long as necessary. It was against this background that RFA Fort Austin sailed to replenish HMS Endurance.

In her reply to you of 26th October, which you seem to regard as somehow inconsistent with all this, the Prime Minister was repeating that she had no warning before 31st March of the invasion of the Falkland Islands. I see no inconsistency here.

Since you copied your letter to Lord Franks I am doing the same.



cc. WK

ds

CP

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

18 November, 1982.

Mr. Tam Dalyell, MP

The Prime Minister agrees with the reply which Mr. Nott proposes to send to Mr. Dalyell's letter of 16 November about RAF Fort Austin.

A. J. COLES

D.T. Piper, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

RB



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

1  
16/11/52

Dear John,

Your answers to Question  
Number 10 to Ron Leighton,  
to the supplementaries, and  
the Prime Minister's reply to  
me on Fort Austin are  
astounding.

Do you and the Prime  
Minister seriously suggest that  
the 16,500 (?) ton RFA Fort  
Austin was sent to the  
South Atlantic as a routine  
operation to supply HMS



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Endurance. (3500 tons)

You should not insult  
us by supposing that  
the House of Commons is  
so stupid as to believe  
that.

The fact is, as you  
know, and as the National  
Union of Seamen have submitted  
documentary evidence to the  
Funnell Committee, that



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to the anger of the  
crew of the Fort Austin  
who believed they were  
going home to Britain.  
BFA "Fort Austin" was  
diverted to the South  
Atlantic on 28<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup>  
March. The decision  
to change course to  
the South Atlantic, and  
not to return to Britain  
came in the form of  
an order from London.



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So why do you and  
the Prime Minister try  
to pretend otherwise to  
the House of Commons?

In your answer to  
my supplementary question,  
you said "Of course"  
Ministers knew about it.

Since Fort Austin was  
carrying supplies for  
HMS "Conqueror", and

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Since Fort Austin, either  
then and/or later carried  
Junk round and/or real modern  
weapons, it would have  
been shocking if Ministers  
did not know of this  
most important decision  
to divert ships.

If, as you indicated  
Ministers were fully aware  
to the decision to send  
major ships to the South





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Atlantic, why did Ministers  
not inform the Prime  
Minister of such a  
crucial set of decisions?  
Or did they? No  
Theater did not answer  
the question I put  
to her.

If you and other  
Ministers did indeed  
tell the Prime Minister,  
what is the explanation



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of the Prime Minister's  
reply in this exchange,  
on Tuesday  
which I enclose?

How could the  
Prime Minister use the  
phrase "out of the  
blue" in relation to  
Wednesday 31st March?

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When I went before  
the Franks Committee  
on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, Lord  
Franks said that  
he would be interested  
in any additional  
information I felt  
I ought to give.  
Therefore, I am sending  
a copy of this letter  
to Lord Franks.

Yours sincerely  
The Secretary