

ADVANCE COPIES: FALKLAND ISLANDS

(29)

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GRS 500

(FM BERNE 211350Z)

*interesting - but only
1 perain news.*

CONFIDENTIAL

FM BRITISH INTERESTS SECTION SWISS EMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELNO 26 OF 20 APRIL
INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON

SITUATION IN THE FALKLANDS

1. A BRITISH MEMBER OF BISBA VISITED MRS CHRISTEL MERCER AT HER REQUEST AT HER HOTEL ON 18 APRIL. SHE IS AN ENGLISHWOMAN WHOSE AMERICAN HUSBAND HAD BEEN WORKING ON THE FALKLAND ISLANDS. TOGETHER WITH THEIR TWO SMALL CHILDREN THE MERCERS LEFT THE ISLANDS ON 17 APRIL AND WERE TRANSITING BUENOS AIRES ON THEIR WAY TO THE USA. MRS MERCER WANTED TO TALK TO A REPRESENTATIVE OF HMG AND IN PARTICULAR TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS ABOUT THE ISLANDERS:

(A) THEY NEEDED MORE INFORMATION ON WHAT WAS HAPPENING OUTSIDE AND ADVICE WHETHER TO STAY OR LEAVE. PRACTICALLY ALL

SIDE AND ADVICE WHETHER TO STAY OR LEAVE. PRACTICALLY ALL THEIR RADIO AND OTHER PRIVATE COMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT HAD BEEN CONFISCATED BY THE ARGENTINES AND THE BBC WORLD SERVICE WAS THEIR ONLY SOURCE OF INFORMATION. IN PARTICULAR THOSE EMPLOYED BY HMG ON CONTRACT WORK THROUGH ODA WANTED SOME CLEAR DIRECTIVE ON WHETHER, WHEN AND HOW TO LEAVE.

(B) THEY WERE DISAPPOINTED THAT HMG HAD NOT OFFERED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO ENABLE THEM TO LEAVE THE ISLANDS AT LEAST TEMPORARILY. APPARENTLY THE MAJORITY OF THE FALKLANDERS CANNOT AFFORD TO LEAVE BY THEIR OWN MEANS.

(C) THEY FEEL EXTREMELY ISOLATED AND ARE WORRIED ABOUT BEING CAUGHT IN CROSS-FIRE BETWEEN BRITISH AND ARGENTINE FORCES. THIS FEELING, SAID MRS. MERCER, REFLECTED COMPLETE DISAGREEMENT WITH GOVERNER HUNT'S REMARKS MADE OVER THE BBC THAT THE FALKLANDERS WOULD PREFER TO STAND FAST EVEN IF IT CAME TO A SHOOT-OUT. THE MAJORITY WOULD WANT OUT FOR A TEMPORARY PERIOD.

2. MORE GENERALLY THE MERCERS SAID THE LOCAL INHABITANTS OF STANLEY HAD BEEN REDUCED TO ABOUT 200 PEOPLE, MAINLY OFFICIALS AND ELDERLY. THE REMAINDER HAD FLED INTO THE COUNTRYSIDE. SO FAR LOCALS HAD BEEN POLITELY TREATED BY THE ARGENTINES BUT THEY FEAR BEING HELD HOSTAGES IN AN ARMED CONFLICT.

3. THE MERCERS ESTIMATED THERE ARE ABOUT EIGHT THOUSAND ARGENTINE TROOPS ON THE ISLANDS, MAINLY YOUNG CONSCRIPTS UNACCUSTOMED TO AND FEELING THE COLD WEATHER. LACK OF FOOD SUPPLIES FROM THE MAINLAND DROVE THE TROOPS TO BEG FOR FOOD FROM THE LOCALS. THE MILD WEATHER (IN FALKLAND TERMS) HAS ENABLED THESE TROOPS TO SLEEP IN TENTS AND IN SHACKS BUT SHOULD THIS CHANGE THE MERCERS CONSIDERED THEIR SITUATION WOULD GET DESPERATE BECAUSE OF INSUFFICIENT ACCOMMODATION. SANITATION IS ALSO INADEQUATE. THE MERCERS REPORTED ABOUT 200 CASES OF GASTROENTERITIS AND DYS-ENTERY AMONG THE TROOPS.

4. THEY BELIEVE MOODY BROOK HAS BEEN MADE HEADQUARTERS OF THE ARGENTINE COMMAND. THERE ARE SIX HELICOPTERS STATIONED THERE. THE MERCERS DID NOT SEE ANY TANKS BUT COUNTED SIX ARMoured CARS. THEY DID NOT SEE ANY WORK TO ENLARGE THE EXISTING LANDING STRIP ON EAST FALKLAND BUT REPORTED RUMOURS OF AN ADDITIONAL STRIP BEING BUILT ON WEST FALKLAND. APART FROM A SOLITARY COSTAL PATROL BOAT THE ONLY OTHER SHIP THEY HAD SEEN WAS A FREIGHTER, THE "BAHIA DEL CUSANOR" (SIC) WHICH ARRIVED LAST WEEK AND HAD BEEN KEPT HEAVILY GUARDED AND STRICTLY OUT OF

WEEK AND HAD BEEN KEPT HEAVILY GUARDED AND STRICTLY CUT OF BOUNDS TO ALL LOCALS. A CONSTANT FLOW OF HERCULES AIRCRAFT WERE BRINGING IN TROOPS AND LIGHT ARTILLERY BUT, TO THE BEST OF THE MERCERS' KNOWLEDGE, NOT FOOD.

5. WE ARE SENDING THIS FULL REPORT OF THE INTERVIEW BECAUSE MRS MERCER IS NOT TRAVELLING TO BRITAIN.

JOY 20.4.

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SENT AT RECD AT 211427Z TWPM/ DGB