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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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MO 5/21

15th May 1982

*mt*

Prime Minister

To notes

*mt 12/5*

*Dear John,*

FALKLAND ISLANDS - THE MEDIA

Further to my letter of 10th May, my Secretary of State has asked me to circulate for information the record of the most recent meeting which Sir Frank Cooper held with the Editors of the British press.

*h.a. 15/5*

I am copying this note, and the attached record, to the Private Secretaries to members of OD(SA) and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,  
David Omand*  
(D B OMAND)

A J Coles Esq

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

FOURTH MEETING WITH EDITORS ON THE FALKLANDS EMERGENCY

PUS held the fourth in the series of meetings with Editors to discuss media coverage of the Falklands Emergency at 6.00pm on Wednesday, 12 May. CDS was also present. A list of those Editors who attended is at Annex A.

2. PUS began by thanking the Editors for the restraint they had exercised over the reporting of assistance to the UK from third-party countries and for responding to his appeal the previous week that families of Service casualties should not be harrassed. At that meeting, Editors had raised a number of problems over the provision of information to the media. He had immediately arranged for this whole area to be thoroughly reviewed. Work was continuing but results so far were:

a. Fresh instructions had been issued to the Task Force stressing the need for rapid reporting of operational incidents. Immediate reports could not be guaranteed because of communications difficulties and the need for periods of radio silence, but there was already a great improvement overall. (CDS illustrated this by announcing at the meeting the shooting down of two Argentinian A4 aircraft 1½ hours earlier.)

b. Background briefings were now being provided. There had already been two for Defence Correspondents and these would continue twice weekly; briefings were also planned for correspondents from regional news organisations and, possibly, US and European correspondents.

c. Every avenue had been explored to try to arrange for transmission of cine-film (or Electronic News Gathering (ENG) material) direct to the UK from the Task Force. Both technically (because military satellites had narrow bandwidth) and operationally this was simply not possible. It should, however, be feasible to provide transmission by satellite of black/white still photographs. MOD had bought up the 5 sets of suitable facsimile equipment available in the UK; one was already in QE2, and 3 others were being flown immediately to Ascension Island for air-dropping to the Task Force at sea. This facility should be in operation in 7-8 days. The possibility of using MARISAT too was being urgently explored.

d. Pooling. There did not seem to be much enthusiasm for regular pooling of the product of correspondents in the Task Force, apart from the normal use of PA and Reuters, but arrangements had been made for special occasions (eg the Argentine material found aboard the fishing vessel Narwal).

- e. Direct satellite communication from Ascension Island had been established, which would allow transmission of radio and ENG material to the UK. A MOD cameraman and Information Officer had been sent out to produce material for the UK press.
- f. Special arrangements were being made to return quickly from Ascension the film footage aboard ships carrying Argentine prisoners of war which arrived there that evening. The material should be at Battersea Heliport by 1330Z on Thursday. British Antarctic survey personnel, and Misses Buxton and Price would follow on shortly afterwards.
3. In response, Editors saw a need to be able to process film at Ascension and to transmit this over the satellite link (as well as ENG material). It was suggested that British Telecom had some good ideas for improving links to Ascension. PA could make available further facsimile transmission sets which would be compatible with MARISAT. There had been problems with customs clearance of film footage arriving in the UK without the correct documentation. PUS and CDS undertook to follow up all these points immediately. [Contact has been made with British Telecom already and HM Customs have agreed to allow paperwork to catch up after entry of film footage into the UK].
4. In answer to questions, PUS said that MOD could not allow UK correspondents to be based at Ascension Island. Very sensitive operations were mounted from there; the facilities were already under strain; and if the UK press were allowed, we would not be able to refuse US press facilities at the Wide Awake airfield there.
5. One Editor complained about the delay in release on Thursday, 6 May of the news of 2 Sea Harriers being lost. PUS rebutted this, referring to the need to inform next of kin, given that there were only a few Harrier pilots with the Task Force. CDS added that, for operational reasons, he would have preferred that these losses were not announced at all, but the story had leaked and MOD had no option but to confirm it.
6. CDS gave further background briefing on the shooting down of the A4 aircraft and the Argentine attempts to resupply the Falklands by light aircraft and low-level air drops from Hercules. He added that Intelligence Staffs were very grateful to the BBC and ITN for providing film footage they had obtained of Argentine forces (but not shown). This had proved very valuable in, for example, showing that there were no Mirages based at Port Stanley airfield.
7. It was agreed that a further meeting would be held the following week.

COMMENT

Although the Editors seemed appreciative of the efforts being made to improve the provision of information by MOD, there was still a good deal of simmering discontent and suspicion that the Government was trying to control the flow of information for other than operational reasons.

*S Webb*

S WEBB  
PS/PUS

13 May 1982

SUBJECT: PUS Editors Meeting

ANNEX A

VENUE: HR27, MOD MB

DATE: May 12, 1982

TIME: 1750 for 1800

Newspaper, Agency, etc	Reporters	Photography	Other details
BBC External Services	Terry Heron	Deputy Editor	
BBC	Allan Protheroe	J/AG	
BBC TV	Peter Woon	Editor	
Daily Mail	David Tytler	Associate Editor	
Daily Express	Chris Ward	Editor	
Daily Mirror	Peter Thompson	Deputy Editor	
Daily Telegraph	William Deedes	Editor	
Financial Times	G.D. Owen	Editor	
Guardian	Peter Preston	Editor	
ITN	David Nicholas	Editor	
PA	David Chipp	Managing Editor	
Sunday Express	Henry Macrooy	Chief Leader Writer	
Sunday Telegraph	John Thompson	Editor	
Sunday Times	Magnus Linklater	Features Editor	
TRN			
Observer	Ian Lindsay-Smith	Executive Editor	
Daily Star	Brian Hitchens	Editor	
Newspaper Conference	Alex McDonald		
Sunday People	Ernie Barrington	Associate Editor	
Reuters	Graham Stewart	Chief Correspondent	
BBC Radio	Larry Hodgson	Editor	
SUN	KEN DONLAN	Managing Editor	
NEWS OF THE WORLD	PHILIP WRACK	Deputy Editor	
THE MAIL ON SUNDAY	ANTHONY SHRIMSLEY	Editor	
TIMES	FRED EMERY	EXECUTIVE ED	