

15th July 1982

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Various Naval Matters

Thank you very much for your letter of 14th July, together with its enclosures.

I will study these most carefully.

IAN GOW

Commander Michael Ranken RN (Retd)

cc. The Rt Hon Francis Pym MC MP
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PERSONAL

14/7/82

Dear Mr. Gow.

Various Naval Matters

I am sure you are much involved in Falklands business at present in the aftermath of victory. I am seriously concerned that the natural euphoria and pleasure over liberation will not lead us into hasty development projects based on excessive optimism and wishful thinking - sure recipes for expensive failures. I therefore enclose for your information copies of my letters and notes to Lord Shackleton, which try to be a bit more realistic. My views on fisheries around the Falklands are based on personal experience; South Georgia is quite another matter so far as fish stocks are concerned, but of course is more difficult in other ways. Long-term political stability is the pre-requisite for any kind of viable new development, especially if private money is to be invested, and it is certainly most difficult to establish, especially when at the same time we need to build good relations with the rest of South America, something which has been badly neglected for many years, mainly I suspect through complacency.

HMS 'Endurance' has now been abroad for at least nine months, and the crew has had no run ashore at any major centre of population during that time; the ship has spent most of her time at sea or in South Georgia from mid-March. The families seem to be unable to get firm news about the ship's return to the U.K., though there is vague talk of September. The 'Endurance' had an important role in South Georgia and showed that she had much better teeth than have ever been attributed to her by John Nott and his team, let alone by the Naval Staff; the ship and her crew deserved better publicity than they have had, not least for their solo performance before the task force arrived.

I also hear that some people are gunning for her Captain, Nick Barker, presumably for opening his mouth recently to reporters about what he saw in Ushuaia, and reported to London.

Similarly there are said to be those in the FCO who are determined to replace Rex Hunt as soon as they can engineer it. I hope this is resisted at least until well into next year after the 150th year celebrations, and until things are settling down again and new developments are going ahead. The FCO and the ODA are largely to blame for past neglect, and Rex Hunt is one of the few who is untarnished, popular and respected as being determined to do his best for the Islands. I am of course assuming that his best is good enough in a difficult situation, but this time he can call on all the support he needs, something which was almost totally lacking in the right places before 2nd April.

I do not ask for replies or explanations about any of the above matters, but hope you may find it useful to know about them before too many of them surface publicly, and possibly cause unnecessary embarrassment; the 'Endurance' families already have in the Defence Debate, and Eric Ogden is due to put down a written question to John Nott.

The enclosed article (not by me), yet to be published, may interest you in view of current Naval criticism, some of it ill-informed, but not without justification, especially in relation to the entrenched bureaucracy and the political naivety of most senior naval officers. The current inter-service sniping in "The Times" (not so far by Ancient Admirals) is most disappointing after the unique performance of all of them and many others in the Falklands operation acting in unison under clear and firm leadership, as a truly National achievement.

Best regards,
Yours sincerely
Michael Ranken
M.B.F. Ranken.

Encls.