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File



12 089

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

10 January 1985

SOUTH ATLANTIC NAVAL TASK GROUP STRENGTH

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Minister's minute of 9 January explaining the position on the Naval Task Group which will deploy to the South Atlantic on 17 January.

I am copying this letter to Peter Ricketts (Foreign and Commonwealth Office).

Charles Powell

John Oughton, Esq.,  
Office of the Minister of State for the Armed  
Forces,  
Ministry of Defence.

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~~SECRET UK EYES A~~ 11MINISTER OF STATE FOR  
THE ARMED FORCES

LOOSE MINUTE

D/MIN(AF)/JS/5/1/5

9 January 1985

Prime Minister

THE PRIME MINISTER

MS

JV

9/1

SOUTH ATLANTIC NAVAL TASK GROUP STRENGTH

1. I thought you would wish to be aware before Questions tomorrow that the Press Association yesterday reported that the next naval task group which will deploy to the South Atlantic on 17 January 1985 will be reduced from three ships to two. This follows local speculation in Plymouth following the removal of HMS Danae from the group. This has been mentioned in to-day's ... TIMES only - report attached.

2. The background to this is that shortly before Christmas the Secretary of State agreed, at the request of the Chief of Defence Staff, that this reduction should be made in advance of the forthcoming consideration of Falklands Force levels by OD(FAF), because this would avoid the unjustified deployment of a frigate to the South Atlantic, when the Chiefs of Staff had decided that the threat did not justify her sailing.

3. In the event of any further Parliamentary or press enquiries we propose to follow our standard line of not commenting on

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operational deployments to the South Atlantic or on South Atlantic Force levels.

4. I am copying this to Geoffrey Howe.

*J.S.*

JOHN STANLEY



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MOD

1 ROYAL ANDREW

BY JOHN VINCENT PA STAFF REPORTER

PRINCE ANDREW SAILS FOR THE FALKLANDS TOMORROW IN A NAVAL FORCE WHICH HAS BEEN REDUCED FROM THREE WARSHIPS TO TWO.

THE REDUCTION REFLECTS THE GOVERNMENT'S CURRENT ATTITUDE TO THE ARGENTINE THREAT LESS THAN THREE YEARS AFTER THE INVASION AND FORMS PART OF A BIG CUT-BACK IN THE FORTRESS FALKLANDS BUDGET.

THE PRINCE MAKES HIS EMOTIONAL RETURN TO THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AS LYNX HELICOPTER PILOT ON THE FRIGATE BRAZEN, WHICH WILL PATROL THE 200 MILE PROTECTION ZONE WITH THE PORTSMOUTH-BASED FRIGATE HMS DIOMEDE.

MF

2 ROYAL ANDREW

BUT THE DEVONPORT-BASED FRIGATE DANAE, WHICH WAS SCHEDULED TO HAVE JOINED THE FIVE MONTH TOUR OF DUTY, WILL NOT NOW MAKE THE TRIP.

DURING THE CURRENT FINANCIAL YEAR BRITAIN IS SPENDING £684 MILLION DEFENDING THE REMOTE OUTPOST. BUT THE 1985-86 BUDGET IS DOWN TO £552 MILLION.

DEFENCE SOURCES SEE THE £132 MILLION REDUCTION NOT SO MUCH AS A CUT BUT MORE OF A 'NATURAL PROGRESSION', REFLECTING A DROP IN THE SIZE OF THE GARRISON.

THE PROJECTED ANNUAL COST FALLS A FURTHER £62 MILLION TO £490 MILLION IN THE 12 MONTHS ENDING IN MARCH 1987.

MF

3 ROYAL ANDREW

A NAVY SPOKESMAN IN PLYMOUTH CONFIRMED THAT DANAE HAD BEEN DUE TO SAIL FOR THE FALKLANDS, BUT WAS NOW NOT DOING SO.

'THERE IS PLENTY OF WORK FOR EVERY SHIP WE CAN GET HOLD OF IN NORMAL NATO AREAS AND SO DANAE WILL BE A USEFUL ADDITION TO THE SHIPS AVAILABLE FOR DUTY,' HE SAID.

A DEFENCE MINISTRY SPOKESMAN IN LONDON SAID THE CHANGE IN PLANS FOR DANAE WAS 'NOT SIGNIFICANT IN CASH TERMS.' THE CREW AND THE BILLS WOULD STILL HAVE TO BE PAID IF THE SHIP WAS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN NOT THE FALKLANDS.

HE ADDED: 'WE PRODUCE A LEVEL OF EQUIPMENT AND TROOPS IN THE SOUTH ATLANTIC DEPENDING ON THE CLIMATE AT THE TIME. IF THE SITUATION SUDDENLY WORSENEED WE MAY HAVE TO DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF SHIPS.'

MF

4 ROYAL ANDREW

DEFENCE MINISTRY FIGURES SHOW A £2.088 BILLION EXPENDITURE ON THE FALKLANDS FROM THE TIME OF THE ARGENTINE INVASION TO THE END OF MARCH 1985.

PRINCE ANDREW, WHO SERVED AS A SEA KING HELICOPTER PILOT ON HMS INVINCIBLE DURING THE FALKLANDS WAR, WILL FLY HIS HIGH-SPEED TORPEDO CARRYING LYNX HELICOPTER ONTO BRAZEN AS SHE MAKES HER WAY FROM DEVONPORT TO PORTLAND TOMORROW BEFORE HEADING SOUTH.

THE QUEEN'S SECOND SON - WHOSE HELICOPTER IS NICKNAMED BRAZEN HUSSY -- WILL ACT AS ONE OF THE SHIP'S ENTERTAINMENT OFFICERS, HELPING TO ORGANISE FILM SHOWS, VIDEOS, CONCERTS AND RECORD REQUESTS FOR HIS SHIPMATES.

END ET

08/01/12-21