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From the Private Secretary

11 February 1985

Falkland Islands: Mount Pleasant Airfield: Opening Ceremony

The Prime Minister has considered the Foreign Secretary's minute of 7 February on this subject and in particular the various points for decision in paragraph 14.

The Prime Minister's views are:

- i) the airfield should be renamed "Mount Pleasant Airport";
- ii) the Palace should be approached formally to seek agreement for Prince Andrew to perform the opening ceremony;
- iii) the Prime Minister thinks that only one Cabinet Minister should attend the opening and that it should be the Secretary of State for Defence. She sees a risk that attendance by more than one senior Minister would look like a "junket". Her view is that one Cabinet Minister and one junior Minister is the maximum necessary;
- iv) she agrees that civilians should be well represented in the VIP guest list.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Private Secretaries to members of OD and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Charles Powell

L.V. Appleyard, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

JK

020

~~FERB~~

CDP



In the light of this,
I am recording the
PM's view that the
Deputy Secretary should
attend. CDP 11/2.

PRIME MINISTER

Falkland Islands: Mount Pleasant Airfield

I have seen the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's minute to you of 7 February. I ^{with} CDP? find myself in strong agreement with his approach to the opening ceremony for Mount Pleasant Airfield.

Wills

Privy Council Office
11 February 1985

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PRIME MINISTER

OPENING OF MOUNT PLEASANT AIRFIELD

The actual points for decision in this rather lengthy minute are:

i) Agree to call it Mount Pleasant Airport (rather than airfield, which sounds exclusively military)?

Yes

ii) Agree to approach the Palace formally for agreement that Prince Andrew should perform the opening ceremony?

Yes

iii) Agree that both Environment Secretary and Defence Secretary should attend, with junior Minister from the FCO? (This is trickier. There might be some criticism of over-lavish Ministerial attendance. But Michael Heseltine is very keen to go and his budget is paying for the airfield.) Or limit to Defence Secretary and junior Environment Minister?

iv) Agree strong civilian component in guest list (see last page)?

C.D.P.

Simply one S.M. is enough
and that must be defence.
Anything more looks like a
"jumble"!
not

8 February 1985



PM/85/12

PRIME MINISTERFalkland Islands: Mount Pleasant Airfield: Opening Ceremony

1. The construction of the first runway at Mount Pleasant airfield, the new airport in the Falkland Islands, is due to be completed by the end of April. It is planned that a party from London should fly in for the opening ceremony on 14 May.

2. This event will attract considerable diplomatic and media interest. Presentational aspects need careful thought. I have discussed these briefly with the Secretaries of State for Defence and the Environment. We have not, however, been able to agree on all points. This note identifies the outstanding questions.

The nature of the project

3. As we all know, the airfield is being constructed with defence funds to fulfil an urgent defence requirement. But we have all recognised from the outset that we were seeking to achieve a two-fold objective:

- i) the military objective of defending the Falkland Islands more effectively (and more cost effectively) by enhancing our rapid re-inforcement capability. It is envisaged that construction of the airfield will make possible reductions in force levels and thus in garrison costs, in particular after the completion of the second runway in spring 1986.
- ii) the economic and developmental objective of improving the Islands' links with the outside world. Construction of the airfield represents a positive response to the proposals made in the Shackleton Reports of 1976 and 1982. When the Secretary of State for Defence announced our decision on the airfield on 27 June 1983 he stressed that this would "give a powerful boost to the economy and infrastructure of the Islands".



4. While we all recognise that the military function of the airfield will predominate at least in the short term, it is hoped that civilian operations will gradually gather momentum and assist the development and diversification of the local economy.

Presentational aspects of the opening ceremony

5. In my view it is entirely right that the opening should be celebrated with a certain éclat. Construction of the airfield is a landmark in the life of the Islands. It is also an impressive achievement of the British civil engineering industry to which attention deserves to be drawn. We should demonstrate our pride in the speed and efficiency with which British construction companies have completed a substantial project on such a remote site.

6. However in view of the interest which we can expect the British and international media to take, we all recognise that the civilian/military balance of the occasion will need to be carefully judged:

- i) it is helpful vis-a-vis the Falkland Islanders themselves that the airfield should be seen not only as a reaffirmation of our commitment to their security, but also a contribution to their long-term prosperity;
- ii) it is helpful too vis-a-vis world opinion that we should emphasise our commitment to the long-term economic and social well-being of the Islanders (a commitment to which we are bound under article 73 of the UN Charter). In particular, it will help us in pursuing British interests elsewhere in Latin America if the civilian aspect of the occasion could be emphasised in that way;
- iii) Argentina is bound to react sharply whatever the exact form of the opening ceremony. We should not be deterred on that account. But it is only sensible that we should avoid gratuitously giving a pretext for a repetition of Argentine allegations that we are engaged in the "militarisation" of the Falklands or using them as a "strategic base".

.../The



The name of the airfield

7. We are all agreed that it would from now on be right for the airfield to be called "Mount Pleasant Airport". Both the Civil and Military Commissioners have recommended this change. They rightly feel that "airfield" has the wrong connotations, and is scarcely appropriate to such a large-scale project.

Ministerial representation and the form of the opening ceremony

8. In considering the form of the opening ceremony and the nature of ministerial representation, we all recognise the need for a careful presentational balance to be struck between the civil engineering aspects of Mount Pleasant (DOE), the overall administrative and developmental responsibility for the Islands (symbolised by FCO/ODA representation), and its military aspects (MOD), without allowing these to predominate.

9. We should also have in mind the fact that HRH Prince Andrew is due to be on duty tour in the South Atlantic until very shortly before the time of the opening ceremony. If he could play a central role in the ceremony I have no doubt that this would give great pleasure to the Islanders; but it is likely to increase the volume of Argentine protests. We need to consider too whether it would be best for him to take part in a civilian capacity rather than in his presently modest naval rank of Lieutenant.

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J. Gray
21/1/2015

10. Where the form of the ceremony is concerned, we are all agreed that it would be appropriate for the airport to be handed over to the Civil and Military Commissioners jointly. In the normal way this could most appropriately be done by a Ministerial representative of the Department of the Environment,



as the Ministry responsible for the Property Services Agency. The Environment Secretary would be very willing to play that role: but because of the military aspects the Defence Secretary has also had it in mind to take part. I should be content for the Foreign Office to be represented by a Minister of State. My own feeling is that one Cabinet Minister would be enough and that Defence too could be represented by a Minister of State. But I should not wish to stand in the way of the Defence Secretary, if you felt that he should be in the party as well. He points out, with some justice, that the Airport has been financed from his budget.

Composition of the VIP Party

11. Ministers apart, we are agreed that it would be appropriate for the VIP party to contain a strong civilian component. Lord Shackleton should certainly rate a place, perhaps even some part in the ceremony, in view of his commitment to the Falklands and their economic development, and his family connections with the area. Other civilian representatives might include members of both Houses of Parliament with strong Falklands connections; the Chairman of the Falkland Islands Company (the former owner of the land on which the airport is built); and representatives of the contractors. I attach an initial list of suggestions on the civilian side.

Aircraft type

12. A decision has not yet been reached on the type of aircraft which will undertake regular services. And it is not yet clear whether an RAF or civilian aircraft is most likely to be available for the initial flight. We can be certain that press photographs of an aircraft with RAF markings would be used to support unhelpful propaganda against us. But operational considerations must clearly be decisive in this.

/Threat



Threat Assessment

13. In view of the nature of the proposed VIP party we are asking the Joint Intelligence Committee to prepare an early assessment of the threat of some form of harassment by Argentina.

Conclusions

14. In the light of the above considerations, I recommend that:

- (i) the airfield should be renamed "Mount Pleasant Airport";
- (ii) if he is available, HRH Prince Andrew might play a central role in the opening ceremony;
- (iii) among Ministers, the Secretary of State for the Environment should take the lead. It is for consideration whether or not the Secretary of State for Defence should go. FCO representation need not be at Cabinet level;
- (iv) the VIP party should contain a strong civilian component along the lines I have described.

15. I am copying this minute to the Secretary of State for the Environment, to OD colleagues and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

(GEOFFREY HOWE)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
7 February 1985



Preliminary list of civilian VIPs (excluding Ministers) to participate in the inaugural flight

Lord Shackleton

Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal (President, Falkland Islands Trust)

Sir A Kershaw (Chairman, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee)

A representative of the Labour party

A representative of the SDP/Liberal Alliance

Mr Eric Ogden (Chairman, United Kingdom Falkland Islands Committee)

A representative of the British Antarctic Survey (Dr Laws, Director)

Mr Ted Needhan (Chairman, Falkland Islands Company)

Representatives of the Contractors

Officials