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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1

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28th April 1982

has seen.

Prime Minister

MA

A.J.C. 25/4

Dear John,

DEATH OF AN ARGENTINE PRISONER

Following the discussion at Cabinet this morning, my Secretary of State has asked me to give you further details of the incident in which an Argentine prisoner was shot. Communications with the task group at South Georgia are very difficult and we have only just received a fuller report. This information is, I must emphasize, provisional until the report of the Board of Enquiry is received.

On the day of the shooting the Captain and members of the crew of HMS BRILLIANT inspected the Santa Fe. They found that it was sinking and, as it was moored alongside the only jetty in Grytviken, they decided that it would have to be moved. They asked the Argentine Commander for assistance and he agreed. The Royal Marine Guard party were briefed by British submariners about the dangers of the exercise and the possibility of sabotage.

The submarine was successfully started up but when it had got a few hundred yards from the jetty it suddenly lurched to port. The Argentine Commanding officer shouted to a crew member to pull a lever to blow more air into the submarine to keep it stable. The crew member moved to do this but the Royal Marine Guard, believing that the man was about to pull another lever which is nearby and which floods the submarine, shot him to prevent the boat being scuppered. The submarine was righted and is now on the other side of the bay, half sunk but sealed, with the body of the Argentinian still on board. Although we have no details of this the assumption must be that it was difficult to remove the body in circumstances where those concerned believed that the boat was about to sink.

The Marine concerned is young and was apparently under strain in the wet, dark and dangerous conditions aboard the Sante Fe. He had been specifically told to guard against the possibility of the particular lever being used to scupper the submarine. Those concerned are aware of the political sensitivity of the incident and the need for a full and urgent report. I gather that the Board of Enquiry will be completed very soon. We will, of course, let you have the details as soon as possible. In the meantime the incident will be treated as sub judice.

A J Coles Esq

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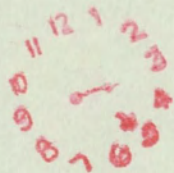
In view of the need for a quick decision my Secretary of State has directed that, when the body can be recovered, it should be buried on shore with full military honours rather than at sea. This is in line with the requirements of the Geneva Convention in these matters. It will also give the Argentinians the opportunity to recover the body to Argentina at some future date, should they wish to do so. To take the body from South Georgia to Ascension for transshipment to Argentina would be logistically difficult and would, of course, carry the risk of keeping the incident in the public eye over the next few days.

Yours ever

Nick Evans

(N H R EVANS)

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