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FALKLAND ISLANDS - THE MEDIA

I met the Editors again last night and had a much rougher ride. Their main complaints were:

- a. The dearth of news from the MOD and the fact that more is coming from the Argentine and the US;
- b. That the MOD holds up the release of news (for example, the sinking of the Argentinian cruiser and the loss of the SHEFFIELD) together with hints about (mainly political) news manipulation;
- c. That MOD's reaction is slow and lacks clarity (eg our response to the American based report on 5 May that a major naval engagement was taking place on which we said we had no information);
- d. That MOD language was evasive and ambiguous;
- e. No pictures or films;
- f. That they were aggrieved by the comments in the House of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State.

2. Let me say that one should aim off in relation to these comments and that I made quite a number of complaints myself, especially about armchair strategists, misreporting, and harassment of families. I would also add that there is still a fund of goodwill.

3. Nevertheless, I think we are losing ground. We need to regain it and be more positive and respond more quickly.

4. There are a number of practical steps which we can take and some were discussed at the Chiefs of Staff this morning - this is included in what follows:

- a. We must emphasise repeatedly the major successes;
- b. We must give various groups of the press more background briefing. In particular, we must cosset the defence correspondents rather more and go into more technical detail with

them, using our own experts from throughout the Department. This is starting today and you have asked all the Chiefs of Staff to come up with ideas. It is particularly valuable to lift the lid off Ascension a little and this will also enable us to make arrangements to give proper coverage when the Argentinian prisoners arrive there;

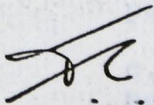
c. We need to be sure that we have regular reports from the Task Group and that we can feed a full - even though unspectacular - diet to our own press. In particular, we need to be able to squash rumours quickly not least when there is a put out by the Argentines, the CIA etc. We also need to provide reassurances for the families of those engaged in the various operations. I recognise the point made about this added imposition on very busy people, but keeping the media and public opinion with us here is absolutely crucial. We can look at this further in the light of the brief discussion this morning;

d. The decision to release or not release will frequently be difficult. What we need is to take a decision quickly.

e. One other most difficult thing is that we simply have not got pictures. I am asking the staffs to work very hard on this (for example, it might be possible to drop some kind of facsimile equipment and bring it into operation or to use some of the existing equipment in the Task Force, though this is very difficult indeed). We still have no pictures of South Georgia and, for example, a picture of a damaged Port Stanley airfield would have a really major effect. It would be helpful if we could look - and I have asked this to be considered by the staffs - at the possibility of lifting of by helicopter some of the photographic material which is hopefully now en route to Ascension Island. It is a very serious handicap that photographs and films are moving at only 20 knots;

f. There are various other items which are also being examined urgently. I am sure that over the next week or so, in particular, there is probably a great need for more on-the-record statements. We should look at having a rather more select panel of armchair strategists whom we could brief. We should use more positive and less evasive language.

5. All these matters, and any other ideas, need to be vigorously pursued. I will ensure this is done and report progress.



FRANK COOPER
7 May 1982