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20.7.82

Mrs Beager - DS11

SW/82/873
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E48

SIXTH MEETING WITH EDITORS ON FALKLANDS EMERGENCY

PUS held the sixth in his series of meetings with Editors on media coverage of the Falklands emergency at 6.00pm on Wednesday, 9 June. A list of those who attended is attached at Annex A.

2. The Editors raised a number of practical problems they were encountering:

a. They did not know the whereabouts of their correspondents. PUS said that all 28 were now ashore with either 3 Commando Brigade or 5 Infantry Brigade, but MOD would not expect to know exactly where they were on a day-to-day basis since they would obviously move about with the units to which they were attached.

b. Certain correspondents, particularly Max Hastings, appeared to be filing a great deal more material than others. PUS said that access would vary depending on the units to which correspondents were attached. MOD had not asked for special treatment for any correspondents; since Hastings was filing mainly background articles rather than current reports, he was probably able to get access to communications facilities at quiet periods more readily than other correspondents.

c. Delays in MOD's clearing tapes and forwarding pooled material. CPR said there were occasionally problems when the Duty Officer needed to consult operational staffs on a point about which he was uncertain, but generally we were clearing tapes within a few hours. As for pooled material, there seemed to be problems in transmission to some newspapers (particularly The Times) but generally the system seemed to be working well (comment - most Editors seemed to agree).

3. On pictures, PUS said that there was now a steady flow of still pictures being sent over the facsimile machines with the Task Force. No solution had been found to the problem of transmitting TV film direct from the South Atlantic. The position would probably improve once the Islands had been repossessed; discussions were already taking place with BBC and ITV about the possible use of satellite facilities and it might also be possible to fly film out to Latin American countries for transmission from there.

4. Several Editors raised questions over censorship, including:

a. Were pictures being censored? They were surprised that none had been received showing the devastation and casualties following the battle at Goose Green and Darwin. CPR said that no instructions had been sent to the Task Force for any category of pictures to be withheld. All those received in MOD from press photographers had been forwarded, but MOD had held up two by Service photographers.

b. Why was MOD placing brackets around certain passages in written copy they forwarded, annotating it with requests that the material should not be used? PUS said that MOD had no powers

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to censor material received from correspondents in the Task Force, but it was clear that some written copy and voice reports were being sent without any form of local scrutiny. (This was hardly surprising given the very difficult conditions in which operations were now taking place on land.)

Accordingly, MOD occasionally requested that Editors excise certain details on operational grounds. This was an imperfect process but necessary if important operational information was not to become available to the Argentines. Several Editors said that requests for material not to be used were being made for broader reasons, including "bad taste". CPR explained that standing instructions to those concerned provided for deletions on operational grounds only and that he was to be consulted personally before requests were made for any other reasons. On one or two occasions he had exceptionally asked that certain information (eg gory details of casualties) be withheld to avoid causing distress to families. He would be happy to look into any case where Editors felt that unreasonable requests were being made.

c. Why were names of Servicemen invariably deleted from copy? PUS explained that this had been adopted as a policy in the emergency, because of the assistance that would be given to the interrogators of captured personnel by any background information they had about individuals concerned. But he accepted that circumstances had now changed somewhat and he would review the policy.

5. In discussion of casualty reporting, there was understanding of MOD's dilemma in wanting to inform next of kin before issuing statements but being faced with exaggerated Argentine claims about the damage inflicted. IRN raised the particular case of damage to ships the previous day; based on MOD's early announcement, they had been taking the line that casualties in the support ships Sir Tristram and Sir Galahad were light, but they were now getting reports which suggested that this was not true. PUS explained that initial reports - which were often not reliable - had suggested casualties were heavy in Plymouth but light in the two supply ships. In fact, it was becoming clear that the position was precisely the opposite. He accepted that in such circumstances MOD should take steps to correct any misleading impression given, even if they were unable to give precise details. In this case, we now had firm reports of only 5 casualties in Plymouth, but it could be several days before the position on the support ships became clearer because casualties had been dispersed to many locations and it could well be unclear how many personnel had been aboard them when they were struck, since they were in the process of unloading. [A statement was issued by MOD shortly after the meeting indicating that casualties were likely to be higher than at first thought.]

6. PUS then initiated a discussion about the arrangements for correspondents on the Falkland Islands after repossession. This was likely to be a difficult issue to handle. There could be no question of completely free access for the world's press, since the numbers involved - or the order of thousands on previous experience - would swamp local resources. But MOD was sympathetic

to the FCO's desire for foreign journalists to be given some facilities, and no doubt the UK media would also like to send more personnel too. Access was likely to be a problem, particularly if the Total Exclusion Zone was still in force, and MOD was currently thinking about the possibility of chartering a ship in Latin America to take a limited number (perhaps 100) correspondents to the Falklands and to provide a base for them once they were there. This was likely to cost about £1M to charter, with additional costs if Marisat and a helicopter deck had to be fitted. MOD would obviously be looking to recover costs from the news organisations concerned. He suggested that MOD might meet to discuss the problems and possible solutions with a smaller, representative, group of Editors. This was agreed.

Comment

7. The Editors seemed to be in a niggling mood (though few of them seemed to share the same niggle). The overall impression was of frustration at the lack of material coming from the South Atlantic - exacerbated when their particular correspondent had been out of touch for some time. But their comments did not suggest any general support for the allegations made in one or two recent articles that MOD was deliberately holding back or "managing" the news from the South Atlantic.

S Webb

10 June 1982

S WEBB
PS/PUS

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H H Mills Esq, Paymaster General's Office

SUBJECT: PUS EDITORS MEETING : Falklands

VENUE: HR 27, MOD MB

DATE: 9 June 1982

TIME: 1750 for 1800 hours

ANNEX A

	Newspaper, Agency, etc	Reporters	Photography	Other Details
1	Newspaper Proprietors Assoc	John LePage	Director	
2	Newspaper Society	Gordon Fage	Secretary	
3	Newspaper Conference	Alex McDonald	Chairman	
4	" "	Mark Barrington Ward	Vice-Chrm	
5	Press Association	David Chipp	Editor in Chief	
6	BBC External Services	Ken Brazier	Editor	
7	BBC Radio	John Wilson	Editor (News, Current Reports)	
8	" "	Larry Hodgson	Editor (Radio News)	
9	Financial Times	Geoffrey Owen	Editor	
10	BBC TV	Peter Woon	Editor	
11	BBC	Alan Protheroe	A/DG	
12	Daily Mail	David Tytler	Assistant Editor	
13	Daily Express	Edward Dickinson	Dept Editor	
14	Daily Mirror	Richard Stott	Deputy Editor	
15	Daily Telegraph	William Deedes	Editor	
16	Sunday Telegraph	P. Worstholme	Assoc. Editor	
17	Guardian	Peter Preston	Editor	
18	IRN	Peter Thornton	Deputy Editorial Director	
19	ITN	David Nicholas	Editor	
20	Reuters	Graham Stewart	Chief Correspondent	
21	Sun	Ken Donlan	Assist. Editor	
22	Sunday Express	Mike Toner	Executive	
23	Observer	Donald Trelford	Editor	
24	Daily Star	Phil Mellor	Deputy News Editor	
25	Mail on Sunday	B. Shrimpsley	Editor	
26	TIMES	Fred Emery	Executive Editor	

SUBJECT: PUS Editors Meeting (2)

VENUE:

DATE:

TIME:

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NS DIST (11.6.12)

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	Newspaper, Agency, etc	Reporters	Photography	Other Details
27	Sunday Times			
28	New Standard	Roy Wright	Deputy Editor	
29	News of the World	Derek Jamieson	Editor	
30	Sunday Mirror	Peter Wilson	News Editor	
31	Economist	Not attending		
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