

FALKLAND ISLANDS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Note of an oral evidence session held in Room 1/99
Old Admiralty Building, London SW1
on Monday 8 November 1982

PRESENT

Lord Franks - Chairman
Lord Barber
Sir Patrick Nairne
Mr Merlyn Rees MP
Lord Watkinson

Mr A R Rawsthorne } - Secretariat
Mr P G Moulson }

Witnesses

Mr T Blake
Mr J Cheek

Note taken by MPO Reporter

CHAIRMAN: We would like to thank you very much for coming to talk to us. We have a few questions we would like to put to you. If you would like to make any statement first, please do; otherwise I will go ahead with the questions. How do you feel?

A. (MR BLAKE): I have no statement to make. Q. May I ask you what was your role in the Falkland Islands government?

A. (MR CHEEK): Was, or is?

Q. Was - because we cut off on 2 April when the invasion took place. We are concerned with investigating the months leading up to that, with past history so far as may be relevant, but we cannot look beyond 2 April so our questions are addressed to the period before.

A. I was, and I still am, an elected member for Stanley West, being elected in October last year, 1981. Is that all you want?

Q. No, I wanted to know a little more. As an elected member what were your responsibilities? How did you consider you related (a) to the Governor and his staff; (b) to the population of the islands? Of course, you had been elected by them, but in the actual working out of a political life, if you could say a sentence or two about how it worked with you I would be grateful.

A. (MR BLAKE): If I could explain, we do not have, or had not at that stage, specific responsibilities within the government. We are purely members of the legislature, both John and I. I was also at that stage, and still am, a member of the executive council, but again without a specific responsibility. We do not have offices which are responsible for particular departments, or we had not at that point.

LORD BARBER: Do you meet frequently and regularly, once a week or once a month - the legislative council and the executive council?

- A. The executive council meets once a month. The legislature meets under its standing finance committee at about the same time, usually at the same time, and the legislature proper meets two or three times a year depending on the volume of business required.

- (MR DE Q.): And is the executive council purely advisory, if I may ask?

- A. Yes, it is.
CHAIRMAN: In effect?

- A. We are advisory to the Governor. This is our status. Two members of our council, myself being one, are elected by members of the legislature to sit on that council for either 18 months or 12 months. The reason for the difference is that when a council starts its life you have one member elected for 12 and one for 18 so that you have a perpetual revolve of members.

Q. I realise. It is part of the difficulties of this comm.
Q. Thank you very much. How did you regard - and this is I am afraid always pre-April 2 - the British Government's responsibility to the islands?

- A. (MR CHEEK): I would say satisfactory over the last two or three years. There has always been some doubt. Although the British Government for quite a number of years said that the wishes of the islanders were paramount we have always had some doubt. In fact within the islands we have tended to have doubt of the FCO rather than the British Government. Whether you can differentiate between the two I do not know but certainly most councillors, or just islanders if they are interested in the subject - and a large number are and were - would probably have differentiated between the British Government and the Foreign Office. For the last two or three years - certainly my own personal feeling from the middle of last year - we felt that the attitude of the British Government was hardening towards Argentina against any possible handover. That is my own personal feeling.

Q. Can you give me any evidence, as it were, or indications, which led you to that view?

- A. Not really; it was a lot of small things.

Q. It was hunch, feel?

- A. Yes.

- (MR BLAKE): I think we have probably had a better rapport, if you like, with the Foreign Office, because this is the office we deal with, over the last three years. There was a degree of animosity to one or two ministers but really and truly at least we have had much more contact with them directly.

Q. The next question: did you think that the islands were adequately defended? Alternatively, what else should have been done?

- A. (MR CHEEK): It is very hard to answer that question now, thinking back.

Q. I realise. It is part of the difficulties of this committee in this job.

- A. No, I think I probably felt they were not adequately defended. I would have expected somewhere in the region of 150 to 200 men, but we were always assured that the numbers could be increased very rapidly and we took that assurance at its face value.

Q. Who used to tell you that, if I may ask?

- A. A number of ministers. I believe Ridley did; I believe Rowlands did.

Q. That would be in 1977?

- A. Yes.

- (MR BLAKE): We have never as a government made any move to ask for a bigger unit and, therefore, basically I do not feel we can claim that the islands were not adequately defended.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: Could I ask, Mr Blake, did the council ever discuss defence matters in the last year or two, or even so to speak contingency measures in case something happened?

- A. No. The defence of the islands was between the unit commander and the Governor and, presumably, the Minister of Defence, but we did not discuss defence matters.

- (MR CHEEK): Apart from indirectly; we were obviously concerned when there was word that the Endurance would be withdrawn, and that in a way was defence.

CHAIRMAN: Certainly; it was the naval presence.

- A. (MR BLAKE): There was a motion in council with regard to the withdrawal of the Endurance, that we looked upon it as desertion of the South Atlantic and the British Government's interests therein. Yes, in this respect there was a very strong protest made from the islands with regard to the withdrawal of the Endurance.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: When would that be?

- A. In January - on 16 January. January of this year?

- A. January of this year, yes.

- (MR CHEEK): Also, associated with that, we had heard that the fuelling facilities at Port Stanley for the navy were possibly being withdrawn, at the same time or after the Endurance. Although in a very roundabout way it is associated with defence, we discussed that, and were perturbed that they might be withdrawn.

CHAIRMAN: What did you do? Did you make representations to HMG through the Governor, or did you just discuss?

- A. (MR BLAKE): No, we passed a motion in council which goes immediately to the Secretary of State deploring the withdrawal of the Endurance. That is our direct link if we so choose.

Q. If we go back in our minds to early 1982

- January/February/early March this year - how did you then see the future of the islands and - the other half of the question - how did you think the British Government saw the future? What I have in mind is, of course, that in the

previous stretch of time Mr Ridley had visited the Argentine, and you, there had been discussions, and at large in the islands. Mr Ridley had been attacked in the British Parliament, and you had had elections and, if I remember, in the early part of 1982 you councillors were returned - either the same or different. It is at that stage that I ask my question. How did you see the future of the islands then, and how did you think the British Government was seeing the future of the islands?

- A. (MR CHEEK): If I may go back to the elections - in fact in October/early November - I stood on a platform then that as we had various agreements with the Argentine and as we were continuing our discussions with the Argentine I felt we should do so. I would have wished that they had not started in the first place but I did not want it to be seen that the Falkland Islanders were breaking off those agreements. At the same time I was not willing to give anything more to the Argentines and if, by so doing, the Argentines broke off any more talks, I would have been very happy. In fact they did that, but not in the way I envisaged. As to the British Government, I suppose I hoped they would continue to provide the defence and help us with any external communications if the Argentines broke off those agreements.

Q. Which presumably would have to be mainly by sea because of the difficulty of using airfields in Latin America?

- A. Yes. Certainly I felt, and I know a number of other people felt, that we were willing to accept the hardships, if you can put it that way, of less frequent communication, more expensive fuels etc, rather than become more and more dependent on the Argentines.

- (MR BLAKE): Yes, again as an election platform I believed that we should not close the door to discussion with Argentina. Any way of settlement we should not close and this, I think, was the attitude we tried to maintain into 1982, that we were

willing to talk to them and find out where we could reach agreement. As I said earlier, I think our rapport with the Minister of State, and even the new minister, was improving, and at least we seemed to be able to talk in fairly straight terms with the Argentine, and we hoped to continue to do so.

LORD BARBER: Could I ask a question, and you must not assume for one moment that there is any personal view behind this question, but it is a question which other people are putting. Bearing in mind that at this time the chairman is talking about, a number of newspapers in the Argentine were stating quite specifically that if they did not reach agreement and did not get sovereignty in due course they would invade the islands - that may have been bluff, it may not have been bluff, but at any rate that is what was being said in the Argentine press - would you have thought in those circumstances if you had really thought invasion was a real possibility as the Argentines were saying - some of their commentators - it was reasonable for the British Government to provide as it were ad infinitum defence of the islands at enormous cost if they were really going to be sure that there would be no successful invasion of the islands? I am trying to get at what was the view at about this time of yourself and of the islanders. I am not talking about the people who were soft or the hard-liners but the general view, because this is something which has been written about. I am talking about the period early this year.

- A. I had no knowledge of Argentine newspaper press reports stating that they would invade the islands. This I had not seen or heard of. With regard to defence, to be quite honest I was guided by a comment of Mr Ridley's when he visited us, when he told us that if we provoked the Argentine there was no way in which the British Government could defend us. That was said specifically to me, and I believe it was said also at his public meeting in Stanley. I do not know that it was said there but it was said to myself, so really and truly on April

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Fools' Day - because we worked from April Fools' Day, not from 2 April - I thought, "This is it as far as we are concerned".

MR REES: May I pick up a point there. It was my impression, which you have just dashed but you are giving the evidence, that Mr Ridley said firmly on the islands that they would be defended, at the meeting.

LORD WATKINSON: In answer to a question.

- A. (MR CHEEK): Yes, but at the same time he certainly told me - I cannot remember whether it was at the public meeting - that if for some reason the Argentines did attack without warning then obviously there was not a defence there. In fact he went on, after saying that they could not in those circumstances defend the islands, to say that they would re-take the islands.

MR REES: He did?

- A. Yes.

- (MR BLAKE): I was not at the public meeting.

LORD WATKINSON: I think this was at a public meeting in answer to questions, and I think it was taped at the time. **Why** we are interested in it, it was thought that that tape was in fact re-played in Argentina.

- A. (MR CHEEK): Going back to your previous question, whether we thought that the British Government should continue to defend us, considering the expense and everything, the British Government had always said that our wishes were paramount and that they would preserve them. I do not think it was up to us to say that the British Government could not afford to do this. If at any time the British Government turned around, not only in the past but in the future, and said, "We can no longer afford to defend you", then that is the new reality for us and we have to make our own decisions then, but at the moment the reality for me, and before 2 April, was that the British Government said that our wishes were paramount and they would defend us. That still has not changed.

MR REES: It is very difficult for us, at least for me as I have not been to the Falklands. You explained something to me just now, that you did not know what was going on in the Argentine - and why should you - in the way of press reports. Did the fact that over here there was all the talk about Endurance, of defence reviews and the sale of carriers, and all that sort of political discussion over here, impinge on you at all?

- A. Yes, I think we were very conscious of it. In fact it was Tim who said he had heard nothing of the newspaper reports.

CHAIRMAN: This was from Argentina?

- A. (MR BLAKE): Yes, the Argentine press reports.

- (MR CHEEK): After we returned from the UN talks on, I think it was, 1, 2 or 3 March - I cannot remember the exact date...

Q. The talks of 26 and 27 February?

- A. Yes. We arrived back on the Tuesday, whatever date that was. I think the reports started coming out after that, and we were obviously conscious...

- (MR BLAKE): Those we were conscious of.

- (MR CHEEK): At that stage. In fact I left the islands on 10 March and I was very conscious of it as we came through Buenos Aires to come to London. I still was not sure. I did not believe that the Argentines would invade at that time of the year.

MR REES: But you were aware of the discussions in Britain about defence?

- A. Yes.

CHAIRMAN: Did you ever envisage that the islanders could agree to cede sovereignty to the Argentine?

- A. (MR BLAKE): No.

- (MR CHEEK): No.

LORD BARBER: Lease-back?

CHAIRMAN: Let me put it to you: I was assuming that the last thing which was discussed was lease-back. That would

involve ceding sovereignty in the titular sense and, in return, there would be a period, however long or short it might be, of British administration, British ways, British life etc, but the piece of paper would be stamped Argentine, not British, so far as titular sovereignty went. Are you including that in your answer?

- A. (MR BLAKE): No, I am not. There was a faction of opinion in fact in the colony which I think, given the right conditions, would have accepted the transfer of titular sovereignty. When I say 'given the right conditions', the right number of years and the right number of noughts on the end of those years.

- (MR CHEEK): And also I think it was a matter of who presented the idea, certainly.

Q. How it was done?

- A. Yes. I think the gentleman who did it was not the person who could have persuaded us. My own estimation was that within two or three days after it was suggested to us possibly as many as a third were in agreement, and that number then dropped off after that.

Q. That corresponds to the information we have had too. I have the impression - and this is derived solely from reading papers, not from contact either with the islanders or with the ministers concerned - that possibly some earlier ministers, eg Ted Rowlands, found it easier to get on and be understood. What was the difficulty with Mr Ridley because he was clear, definite, knew what he was saying; how not persuasive?

- A. (MR BLAKE): I think it was a difference in approach. My impression of Mr Ridley was that he believed if you pressed the right button you would get an immediate and straightforward reaction. I believe he used this approach to the Falkland Islanders. He would press a sensitive point and get an explosion to find the reaction to a sensitive issue. Instead of suggesting gently that perhaps we might consider this he

would go in absolutely boldly with a very sharp needle and dig, and there would be an explosion and he would get his answer. I think that was his method of approach. This was my impression, and this was possibly the difference.

- (MR CHEEK): Yes. I would put it down straight to personality. The personalities are completely different.

LORD WATKINSON: Could I just ask a question there. The Governor is obviously in a difficult position because he is in a way your voice and yet he is equally HMG's voice. It is difficult for us, I think, to see how you really assessed the chances after the Ridley visit, or perhaps it would be fairer to say after your elections in November last year. Did you think you would go on getting away with it, so to speak? One other part of the question: were you prepared if relations with the Argentines got worse to face the fact that you might have to depend on a ship four times a year with no communication to the South American mainland and so on? Did you put that as a better option than agreeing to lease-back and sovereignty?

- A. Yes. I would say yes I did. I think I mentioned something along those lines five minutes ago.

CHAIRMAN: Yes, you did. Would you agree, Mr Blake?

- A. (MR BLAKE): Yes, I would. Rather than a total transfer of sovereignty I think 99 per cent of the islanders would live on mutton and spuds for the rest of their days.

MR REES: May I just follow that up briefly. Again it is very difficult, for me anyway, to make a judgment on this because I do not know the Falklands and I do not know the nature of the elected representatives. I should tell you that even in our House of Commons, despite the party lines - and we have been on different sides of the fence - there are often cross-currents, which go very much across party lines, which are not often understood. But you are not party members, you are independents. How many of you would there be?

- A. (MR CHEEK): Elected members, six.

Q. I listen with great interest to what you say and I find it extremely valuable. Would what you say, do you think, add up to the general view of the other four as well? If you were two members of party X then you might likely have the same view, but out of the six...?

- A. Regarding the Argentine question, which is what we are really thinking of, of the six I would tend towards the softer line of approach rather than the harder. I would be more of a liberal.

Q. It is a general view of your colleagues which you are expressing?

- A. Yes.

- (MR BLAKE): Yes, you have got a firmer line and a softer line, but basically only one member dissociates himself from contact with Argentina completely.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: At the last election was there much argument at the hustings so to speak - the stage before the vote - on policy towards Argentina, or actually was the election dominated by other things, although I know the general outcome of the election was a hardening of view towards the handling of the dispute?

- A. The elections were on relations with Argentina.

- (MR CHEEK): Practically nothing else. As a friend of mine was saying just the other day, he almost wished he had stood for being pro-Argentina just to see what would happen because we were all to a certain degree as we have shown ourselves to be, with some variations. I think we were elected more on personality rather than whether we were hard or soft on Argentina.

CHAIRMAN: When you took part in negotiations with Argentina what was your role?

- A. (MR BLAKE): We were part of the team. We could speak as and when we chose.

Q. And did?

- A. And did. Work that the problem should be approached with the possibility of the success being in favour of both parties, then hopefully we could have it through.

Q. Moving on to the next point, there were these talks in New York on 26 and 27 February. What did you think of the outcome of them? What impression was left on your minds?

- A. I thought we had reached a sensible agreement. It seemed that we had worked out a way forward of continuing discussion providing we got ratification from the other members. Despite the fact that we negotiated that agreement twice, once on Friday and again on Saturday after they had been in touch with Buenos Aires, ending up with virtually the same results, I thought that on the whole we had reached a reasonable compromise.

LORD WATKINSON: And, therefore, providing the islanders backed you, so to speak, did you then see another round of negotiations coming up in another two or three months?

- A. Yes.

- (MR CHEEK): My own feeling is to a certain extent the same as Tim's, that we had gained ourselves at the best another year without a breakdown of talks between the two of us which, as I said before, I always wanted them to initiate. I never wanted us to be the cause of a breakdown but basically I thought we had gained ourselves another year.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: What did you envisage the next round of talks would be about?

- A. (MR BLAKE): The next round - this is assuming we had gotten off the ground - would certainly have included the sovereignty dispute. They might have broken down at that point because we had insisted, and they had accepted the fact, that we should negotiate with the possibility of either side ending up with the sovereignty. I think probably at that point we would have agreed that we had stated our positions, and we would have then gone on possibly to examine their approach to the needs, I do not know. Sovereignty was quite definitely going to come up but, of course, we would have spent as much time as possible, I think, trying to get the discussions moved elsewhere, but with the fact that they had agreed in New York that the problem should be approached with the possibility of the outcome ending in favour of both parties, then hopefully we could have got through.

Q. Do you have anything to add?

- A. (MR CHEEK): No real addition to that.

MR REES: In the talks in the Argentine this was not the first time, as I recall, that two islanders had been at negotiations.

- A. (MR BLAKE): No.

Q. But there were two islanders clear in their minds representing the people on the islands. Is there any sense in which at the end of those talks - and if it were the case I would not be criticising, I am simply asking - the Argentine negotiators said, "We are not going to get very far with that lot. They had fresh elections in the autumn. They will have heard something about them because there were LADE people on the island who no doubt would have reported back", and so on. Is there a sense in which they would say, "We are not going to get very far. These islanders have got harder. What does paramouncy mean?" and all that? Would it have influenced them? Was there anything that you said or did - quite properly, I would not have grumbled - that might have led to that inference?

- A. (MR CHEEK): I am sure there was thinking along those lines; obviously there was from what happened. But I thought we had given them enough to at least give it a try for another year even knowing how we felt. But at the same time it was very obvious that they had great difficulty in persuading their own government in Argentina to agree with what they agreed to. It was also obvious that they were not making any decisions themselves.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: How would that have been so obvious to you?

- A. You could almost see them running out to the telephone.

- (MR BLAKE): The ground rules we drew up on Friday afternoon almost, and on Saturday morning we went back to square one and drew them up again, ending with exactly the same results. The first set of ground rules we produced on Friday. But they telephoned Buenos Aires that night and they were told to go back and start again. So on Saturday we proceeded to start again and we drew up the same lot of ground rules.

CHAIRMAN: And this produced that joint communique?

- A. Not the joint communique but the working paper that we had. We started on the joint communique also on Friday night and we thought on Friday night that next morning we would probably be finished by lunch, even if, as meetings do, they carried on to fill up the available time.

LORD WATKINSON: You knew in your hearts that sovereignty was not disposable, that was a sticking point for you, and you must have known that, as you said, the Argentine delegation was very tightly constrained, they had to get on the telephone and so on all the time, but yet with all that in mind you really did think that at least you could go to another round of negotiations?

- A. (MR CHEEK): Just one point: you do have a copy of the working paper, I presume?

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: Yes, we have.

- A. (MR BLAKE): I really believe that we might have found a way when neither side owned the sovereignty. Providing we could talk with a stable government we had in the future some hope of settling the dispute. This we wanted to do in the long term, this was our aim, but without giving away our world.

CHAIRMAN: Thank you. Then may I go on. Did you believe that the Argentines if talks broke down would invade the islands before taking other measures - for example, interrupting communications? Had you any views about the order of events and in what timescale?

- A. (MR CHEEK): Yes. They talked about wanting a reply, our decision, within a month. Thinking about it now I think that month was probably quite important but I do not think any of us took too much notice that they wanted a reply within a month. I thought if the talks broke down, if there was not any agreement to continue those talks, that come somewhere round June/July they would start withdrawing the air service, a build up of withdrawals of whatever they were doing, and if they were going to use force I expected it in the spring. That is assuming that there was no start to the talks.

Q. Your spring?

- A. Oh yes.

Q. Septemberish?

- A. Yes, September/October. I never believed that they would invade in the autumn. As it was, we had the best autumn in 60 years, but...

- (MR BLAKE): John has said that they asked for a reply within a month. In fact they would have got a reply within a month.

Q. Yes, because of course a reply was in draft and had been sent to you.

- A. We had agreed. That was on 16 March. We had finally reached agreement on both issues.

- (MR CHEEK): Yes, if they withdrew their sabre rattling, as it were. It was very difficult getting a blanket agreement in council while that sabre rattling, which started the day we arrived back, continued.

Q. Can you explain to us on what thoughts or on what evidence you relied in thinking that if things got rougher - leave alone when for the moment - it would begin with what I would call economic measures? Why that rather than, shall we say, taking another Dependency? They had played around with Southern Thule. Why this order rather than another order of events? What led you to think that it would be what we call here in the committee economic measures first?

- A. (MR BLAKE): It would be so easy for them to cut off communications without any repercussions, they run no risks, therefore if you want to put the screws on to someone, I would have expected them to use the soft option first. They had taken Southern Thule. That did not make a ha'p'orth of odds to anyone because no one even admitted to it for 12 months, and when they did everybody swore it was a purely scientific effort. So really and truly it was the soft option from both sides. But one does not normally, even in a country like Argentina, expect people to go to war if there is an easy soft option.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: But the soft option would have had no impact at all on the islanders, you could have stuck it out without any difficulty.

- A. (MR CHEEK): But they would still then have had the further option of the use of military force. Thinking of it in that respect, okay, the use of the first option would possibly have given the British Government a warning, thinking about it now. But I am talking about then.

CHAIRMAN: It is ex post facto?

- A. Yes.

LORD WATKINSON: In those soft options did you expect a repetition of any of the rather odd adventurist things of the past, like landing an aircraft on a bit of the Falklands or something like that, a sort of commando raid?

CHAIRMAN: The Condor?

- A. (MR BLAKE): I would not have expected something like that because those were individual publicity stunts.

- (MR CHEEK): Also we knew that the Argentine Government in March/April had much more control over the country. I thought they might have gone to the extent of taking South Georgia or one of the outlying islands as a continuation of their soft option and then withdrawing again.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: Had you ever considered how long you could have put up with the soft options - they would have caused some inconvenience?

- A. Several of us hoped that Argentina would break off. We did not like this dependence on Argentina. We did not like them being in a position of being able to put the screws on, and a fair number of us would have preferred...

Q. Whatever alternative measures could have been devised to go on permanently?

- A. Yes.

- (MR BLAKE): It was the good old way, this is the popular one, that basically it was what used to happen in the good old days and therefore it was acceptable. How long it would have continued after that when we found that the mail did not

come in, then we would possibly have started screeching to Britain to send a mail drop down or something - I do not know.

CHAIRMAN: How did you react to the South Georgia incident? I am not talking about the first one in December 1981 but the second one, which I think began on 19 March. What did you make of it? What significance did you attach to it at the beginning and as it went on?

- A. (MR CHEEK): For myself, I left the islands on 10 March. I was in England...

Q. So you were not present?

- A. I was not present. Also I was on a fairly hectic course. But I was watching it and in a way I thought yes, it was the start of the screws going on, if you like.

Q. You did?

- A. Yes.

Q. We have to ask always on what basis did you think that? Did you have evidence for it or was it a hunch?

- A. Only that I was reading the same papers here as you were - that plus a hunch.

- (MR BLAKE): It was quite obvious...

Q. You were there?

- A. I was there. We did not meet in council at that point because it met only three days before, just before John left. I think the general opinion was that here was a possible Southern Thule and they had to get off. There was no way in which we in the islands would have countenanced them staying on South Georgia. We were determined to have them off if we could possibly get the British Government to kick them out. There was no thought in our minds that, "Oh well, it is only South Georgia, after all". South Georgia had to be cleared.

LORD WATKINSON: More important than Thule?

- A. More important than Thule. Having accepted Thule - this is the thing - we were not going to have a gradualist takeover.

- (MR CHEEK): I would qualify that: a lot of us had not accepted Thule.

- (MR BLAKE): Not accepted Thule, but it was a fait accompli.

CHAIRMAN: It was a fact at the time?

- A. It was a fact.

- (MR CHEEK): We were still objecting.

Q. May I pursue just for a moment: as I remember, two ships put in, one to begin with and one later. The first ship that put in, the Bahia Suceso, unloaded a number of men and I think they ran up the Argentine flag, and the reason given for what they were doing was that they had a scrap merchants contract and they were going to take away the iron scrap and sell it at a profit, what you might call an ordinary commercial operation. Did any elements in what they were doing in the very early days make you think that that was not all there was to it, or did you think that might be all that there was to it?

- A. (MR BLAKE): It never occurred to me that that was all there was to it. You do not take a naval auxiliary vessel into disputed waters and run up your national flag and say it is just to collect scrap metal. They were just pushing us to see how far they could go.

LORD WATKINSON: Did you know about the Davidoff visit in December of last year?

- A. We heard about it because a French yacht saw them coming out and reported it. They were very unlucky actually to have been seen.

Q. In December?

- A. In December.

Q. But a French yacht was also involved in the landing on 19 March, was it not?

- A. Was it?

Q. Was it the same one?

- A. (MR CHEEK): I do not think so.

Q. This was just coincidence, in other words?

- A. Yes.

Q. But were you not in fairly close contact with the British Antarctic Survey in Grytviken? You get their signals and everything. Were they not the first people to tell you about this?

- A. (MR BLAKE): No, we do not. We are not the government of the dependencies. The Governor is the High Commissioner for the Antarctic Territories. So you have him and Cambridge.

Q. I just wanted to be sure about that. So really the Grytviken people went straight back to England?

- A. I assume so.

Q. And you were not tapped in to their communication net?

- A. (MR CHEEK): I am the engineer in charge of the cable and wireless communication system and I knew about it at the time, but not as councillor.

MR REES: You were born in the Falklands?

- A. Yes.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: Mr Blake, could I just draw you out a little further about what you were saying about your reactions, which I entirely understand. Do you take the view - it may be difficult to exclude some hindsight but let us try - that the scrap merchant operation and the landing on the 19th was something that was always part of an Argentine naval plan? Do you see a direct link between what was happening and...

- A. (MR BLAKE): In hindsight I think it could be possible but at the time I believed it was the thin edge of the wedge. It was beginning to absorb the outlying islands. Probably after South Georgia we would have had Beauchene and the Jason islands and they would have gradually taken over piecemeal.

Q. So you saw this as a kind of super Southern Thule to begin with, no more than that?

- A. Yes.

LORD WATKINSON: How did you get your information? When did you first hear about the arrival of the boat on the 19th - from the British wireless or from the Governor?

- A. The Governor went on the air about that time. Datewise I cannot say.

Q. That is my recollection too.

- A. He went straight on the air and said they had landed and they had been told to get off or go and book in properly like any other visitor.

LORD BARBER: Did the islanders think that there was anything wrong in principle in an Argentine national having a contract to take off scrap?

- A. There would have been a fairly large group of islanders who would not have liked it, but as we were taking off their oil we could hardly object to them taking off scrap. We were committed even at that stage to furthering normal trade.

CHAIRMAN: Do you feel that the invasion as it happened could have been foreseen?

- A. (MR CHEEK): I would have thought that the British - foreseen by how much?

Q. Well, you say what you want to.

- A. I would have hoped that British intelligence and their embassy in Buenos Aires would have had enough information to give, considering the planning involved, at least two or three weeks' warning.

Q. You began that statement with the word hoped. Hopes are not evidence. Did you have any evidence which would lead you to think that there might be an invasion around the time when it in fact happened?

- A. No.

Q. None?

- A. (MR BLAKE): None at all, but I would have expected the British Government to have reacted rather more strongly than just sending the Endurance, particularly when it was announced that the Argentines sent a frigate down there. I would have hoped that by 20 March they would have at least despatched something that could deal with grubby little weed catchers, as my father-in-law once referred to the Argentine vessel.

LORD WATKINSON: The frigate was a bit later on I think.

CHAIRMAN: About 24 March.

LORD WATKINSON: You probably realised at that point that even if the United Kingdom had sent a taskforce it could not have got to you very quickly, but presumably you would have

liked to have heard the news that Britain was sending more ships down to the South Atlantic.

- A. I think if we had heard the news that Britain was sending a nuclear submarine down to the South Atlantic - and there were enough gossip mongers locally to tell us, they can virtually fly according to local rumour - we would have believed that they would have been down there in about a week.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: Were there any contingency measures for the civilian population? After all, there had been threats of invasion and noise about invasion for a great many years. I am old enough to remember the threat of invasion to this country and the Home Guard measures that went on here. Were there any measures of that kind in the island?

- A. In the first instance in a minor degree, in that the marines trained our defence force and exercised with them and they also trained individuals out on the farms who would be available as guides and so on should there be an invasion. But that was really the contingency planning. There was no planning with regard to evacuation or building of shelters or anything of this sort.

Q. Should there have been?

- A. If we had done this we would probably have built shelters six or eight years beforehand and we would have found that the public works department was storing kerosene or something in them when they wanted them. But I do not think that there was any evidence in 1981/82 to suggest that the situation was any different now from what it had been.

Q. This is not a matter about which you are critical?

- A. No.

LORD WATKINSON: I think there was quite a lot of coming and going of Argentine personnel through the airline, because you could not stop them coming, they did not require a permit. I think they used to come in and do jobs and go back again. And of course you had the airline office in Port Stanley. Did you have any contacts with those chaps?

Would you have got any line on what was going on by talking to them, or were they more or less boycotted?

- A. You met them occasionally socially at all levels.

But, as when I was travelling through Argentina and meeting Anglo-Argentines in the Argentine, the one thing I did not discuss with them was the dispute. So it would not have been likely that we would get a line on their thinking.

CHAIRMAN: Are there any other points that you would like to raise with us?

- A. The only other point I would like to make is that I do not believe that the delegation we sat with in New York - that is, the Argentine delegation - had any pre-knowledge of what went on in April. At the end of our discussions when we had drawn up our ground rules and drawn up our joint communique we then tossed in a few bits that we wanted to get off our chests and we complained about the overflights and so on and said that we did not like this at all, also the visit to South Georgia in December, and it was resolved by both sides that we would reach a settlement of this dispute by peaceful means. I have a note of that in the jottings that I took at the time.

LORD WATKINSON: And you thought that was pretty genuine on the whole?

- A. I thought it was genuine.

- (MR CHEEK): I feel slightly different. Looking at my notes and thinking back now, their insistence on having a reply within a month, I think they had some idea whether they knew an actual invasion was going to take place, but that certainly measures were going to be taken by the Argentines if there was no sign of any form of agreement to continue these negotiations within a month.

Q. But you must not use second thoughts any more than we must. At the time did you both really feel that the continuance of negotiations was anyway a pretty good bet?

- A. (MR BLAKE): Yes.

- (MR CHEEK): Yes, slightly better than fifty-fifty.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: From a military angle, from direct experience of the invasion - we have had some evidence on this - did you get the impression that the Argentine military people had planned the invasion very carefully or did you get the impression that a lot of it was being ad hoc. It has been suggested that the logistics side was very ad hoc. Equally there has been some evidence in the other direction. What is your view, Mr Blake?

- A. (MR BLAKE): I think the landing itself was carefully planned, the fact that while they sailed round Port Stanley they had already landed troops on the back of Stanley. I believe they had given until midnight on April fools day for a definitive answer with regard to sovereignty and it is my impression that in fact at that time, at midnight on April fools day, the Argentine forces had already landed. I do not know what time the first refugee went out of Stanley but I know it was about midnight and he saw troops coming up from Port Harriet. That was definitely while Galtieri was talking to Reagan. But whether it was still within the deadline period of midnight for the transfer of sovereignty...

Q. That is something one will never really know, when their first landing was.

- A. I am sure at that stage the troops were already at the back heading for Moody Brook. This was the first thing they hit. They hit Moody Brook and there was an almighty bang before they engineered themselves with one of their warships into Port Stanley.

Q. So this idea that they were not going to kill anybody was absolute nonsense?

- A. They were going to kill the marines anyway.

Q. If the marines had been in Moody Brook they would have been wiped out, would they not?

- A. Yes. I think they were hoping that we would not expect them until some time the following day.

- (MR BLAKE): We finally got a copy in New York, but there was not a copy available in Stanley. But that is the only thing that was kept from us.

Q. Then you appeared to be going on to say there could be something different later.

- A. Yes. I think they expected, and I expected, that the fait accompli would have been sufficient and that they could at least have reached an agreement with regard to a future transfer or something. I am sure they did not expect the reaction they got. So it left them rather on a limb. They had about 2000 troops and some ships in Port Stanley, some heavy vehicles in Port Stanley, and presumably enough food on board for those troops, but again gossip has it that the men who came ashore had nothing with them to eat. When it became obvious that Britain was not going to negotiate this away, then they had suddenly to build up their forces. At that point this is when the ad hoc arrangement started, and it did not really work.

SIR PATRICK NAIRNE: Thank you.

MR REES: Is there anything else subsequent to the invasion - though it is not our concern, but it is our concern before - that leads you to say, "Oh yes, they were planning it before"?

- A. Nothing that I have come across.

- (MR CHEEK): Nothing first hand.

Q. It has been alleged in some of the newspaper articles here that some of the island representatives - I have forgotten in what form it was put, that somehow British governments had double crossed the islanders in their discussions with the Argentines at New York or anywhere else. That is the allegation, that things were kept from you and so on. Is there any substance in that?

- A. (MR BLAKE): The only thing that was kept from us was part of the bout de papier. We did not get a complete copy until we got to New York.

CHAIRMAN: That was the January paper?

- A. That was the 27 January paper.

- (MR CHEEK): But we finally got a copy.

- (MR BLAKE): We finally got a copy in New York, but there was not a copy available in Stanley. But that is the only thing that was kept from us.

- (MR CHEEK): Certainly at the meeting itself, unless other people were doing the double crossing, the people involved in the talks with us, I could not see that they would have any time, because we were starting very early in the morning and we invariably went out for a meal in the evening, so unless they were doing it at night, or as I say had someone else. But certainly there is no impression of that at that meeting in February, that there were in fact two sets of negotiations, one with us and a separate one.

MR REES: Or in any other respect?

- A. No.

CHAIRMAN: Thank you very much indeed. We are very grateful to you for coming and giving us your views.

(The witnesses withdrew)