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HMS ENDURANCE: PROPOSED VISIT BY BBC DEFENCE CORRESPONDENT

1. Mr Christopher Wain, the BBC Defence Correspondent, has asked to be able to visit HMS ENDURANCE next week with a two man film crew during her final visit to the Falkland Islands. He wishes to film normal activities onboard and also to interview the Captain. In addition, while in the Falkland Islands, he hopes to film stories about the Islands themselves and about the Royal Marines detachment (WF 8901).
2. DPR(N) is strongly in favour of agreeing to Mr Wain's request. He believes that it would bring good naval publicity, providing the Commanding Officer were given firm guidance. Moreover, and awkwardly in this context, Mr Harold Briley, the BBC South American Radio Correspondent, is also onboard which might make it difficult to turn down Mr Wain's request.
3. I must confess to some misgivings. The BBC TV Pebble Mill programme on the Falklands and ENDURANCE last November gave rise to a spate of correspondence and undoubtedly served to fuel the public indignation reflected in an Early Day Motion deploying the ship's withdrawal. Even if Mr Wain's visit to the ship were confined to taking photographs and an interview with the Commanding Officer were ruled out, the transmission of a programme about ENDURANCE on the BBC news at peak viewing time - the Pebble Mill programme was transmitted in the middle of the day - would be bound once again to whip up the opposition to ENDURANCE's imminent paying-off.
4. DPR(N) has pointed out that, if Mr Wain is turned down, there would be nothing to prevent him from using the Pebble Mill material as background and producing a story about HMS ENDURANCE; at worst, he might even say that the MOD refused him access to the ship. He will, in any case, be visiting the

Falklands and there is nothing to stop him being photographed on the quayside at Port Stanley with the ship in the background; and he would, presumably, have no difficulty in finding local critics of the withdrawal decision.

5. That is obviously a risk that would have to be taken. The BBC could simply be reminded of the earlier Pebble Mill filming and of the fact that Mr Briley is already onboard and told that one correspondent at a time was enough. I have to say that DPR(N) thinks that this explanation is unlikely to hold water.

6. I would, on balance recommend that Mr Wain's request be turned down. The Minister will, however, wish to bear in mind DPR(N)'s warning that Mr Wain might take umbrage and that refusal might, in the absence of our being able to exercise any form of control over his activities while in the Falklands, result in less balanced treatment than if Mr Wain's request were granted. If the Minister felt that this point should be given fuller weight, I recommend that Mr Wain be permitted to do no more than film onboard ship and that no interview with the Commanding Officer should take place.

7. I should be grateful if you would seek Mr Blaker's early views; I understand that Mr Wain's present intention is to go straight from covering the NPG Conference at Colorado Springs to the Falklands.

19 March 1982

N H Nicholls

N H NICHOLLS
Head of DS 5