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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

23 January 1984

Dear Mr. Leadbitter,

Thank you for your letter of 30 December 1983 about the case of Commodore Gerhardt.

The outcome of his trial in South Africa naturally gave rise to considerable press comment and further speculation about his activities, including suggestions that these had in some way endangered operations in the South Atlantic in 1982. If there was any truth in such suggestions it would of course be a very serious matter. As I said in my letter of 12 December, the security authorities have throughout been alert for any developments which might have implications for national security.

In my letter to you of 20 December 1983 I said that there was absolutely no evidence that Gerhardt might have obtained or disclosed information from British sources on operations in the South Atlantic in 1982. I also explained that no British warships had visited Simonstown since 1974. The Royal Navy made no use of Simonstown in connection with the operations in the South Atlantic in 1982. There are in any case good reasons for believing that Gerhardt would not during the period in question have been able to pass to the Russians any such information, even if he had been able to obtain it from non-British sources.

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I have to say that the inquiries that have been made suggest no basis whatever for your surmises that Gerhardt in some way compromised our operations in the South Atlantic; and that I see no need for a Parliamentary statement which could add nothing to what I have already said in answer to Questions.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Thatcher

Ted Leadbitter, Esq., M.P.



Ref. A084/214

MR FLESHER

GT
for *W*

--- As requested in your letter of
4 January, I attach a draft reply that the
Prime Minister may care to use in response
to the latest letter from Mr Ted Leadbitter
about the Gerhardt case.

M.

R P HATFIELD

19 January 1984

DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO
TED LEADBITTER ESQ MP

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30 December 1983 about the case of
Commodore Gerhardt.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

4 January 1984

I attach a further letter the Prime Minister has received from Mr. Ted Leadbitter, MP.

BF |

I should be grateful if you could provide a draft reply for the Prime Minister's signature, to reach me by Wednesday 18 January.

TIM FLESHER

Richard Hatfield Esq
Cabinet Office

NR

Filed 411
CMA



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Prime Minister,
10, Downing Street,
London S.W.1.

30. Dec '83

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Dear Mrs. Thatcher,

I am sorry to write again on the question of Commodore D. Gerhardt. I am sure your previous replies were meant to be helpful.

However, the 17 page indictment against Gerhardt, his conviction, sentence, the importance of the Simonstown base, the significance of the S. Atlantic listening post at Silvermine, the Russian interest and the fact that Argentine was far more informed than expected, combine to suggest that Gerhardt's activities went far beyond 'localised' S. African security and intelligence questions.

The trial was held in camera and I understand the reason for this was the concern of the African authorities about reactions in some countries to what would have been revealed in open court.

Our country's interest is inescapable. We have the third largest navy in the world. It was involved in the greatest battle known in the S. Atlantic. Simonstown was being used.

Exocet missiles were passing through Capetown on the way to Argentine.

Gerhardt is reported as having visited Gibraltar during the conflict.

This man was of the highest importance to Russia. His influence was great. It is inconceivable that he was operating without friends.

Treachery knows no bounds and the higher authority exercising it the more pronounced is the arrogance. We have plenty experience of that in our country to the point where Parliament was of no concern to the betrayers, and history has shown that Home Secretaries and Prime Ministers have been misused and abused.

Is it likely that Gerhardt with all his special naval knowledge and his value to the Russians would be sitting back doing nothing during the Falklands conflict? Is it likely that Russia would have no use at all for their most valued informed who was in the right place at the right time? I think not.



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

We lost far too many fine men out there in the S. Atlantic. There is a duty upon us to be certain they were not betrayed. It is not sufficient for this matter to appear to be settled on the basis 'that there is no evidence to support a view that Gerhardt acted against our interests'.

Advice may have been given to that effect, but this is a very serious matter in which we must be seen to have investigated thoroughly and established with certainty that he did not act against us. Not having the evidence is not quite the same thing as being certain it does not exist.

The gravity of this man's offences, the significance of the U.K involvement in the Falklands, and other factors, does place upon us a grave responsibility. We must find where truth lies.

Men gave up their lives responding to their country's call. For them that was worth the price, but for us that price is too high if they were lost to us in treachery.

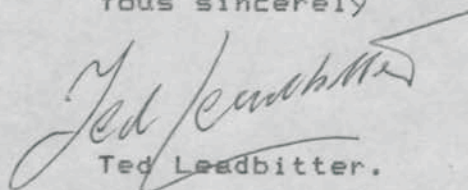
I hope you will consider it right to have the fullest investigation on these lines. The tragic loss of the Sheffield and Coventry, and other shipping, shocked the nation. This was in sharp contrast to the confidence expressed by the Commander of the Fleet at the beginning. We were surprised, shocked, and in serious danger which could only have arisen where Argentine was better informed than we expected.

So I hope you will consider it right to take steps instructing our security services to investigate thoroughly if there is any evidence. Not to have any at the moment is not enough, nor is not having evidence the same as not having knowledge. Our men paid the highest price with their lives responding to their country's call, but that price is too high if treachery was involved. Let us spend some time to be really certain where the truth lies.

I still believe it right that a statement should be made in the House.

As always I value your comments.

Yours sincerely



Ted Leadbitter.