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COS(Misc) 179/742/1

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SOUTH GEORGIA AIRSTRIP

In accordance with the instructions (1) of the Chiefs of Staff, the attached Note prepared by ACDS(Ops) will be tabled for consideration by the Chiefs of Staff at their meeting on Friday 30 April 1982.

Attachment:

Note by ACDS(Ops). (2 pages).

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Note:

- 1. COS 35th Meeting/82, Item 8.

Clear enough.

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ALQ 062/3		
- 5 MAY 1982		
		Taken

30 April 1982

OPERATION CORPORATE - EXAMINATION OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR AND FEASIBILITY OF CONSTRUCTING AND AIRSTRIP
ON SOUTH GEORGIA

1. In accordance with the instructions (1) of the Chiefs of Staff, an examination has been made of the requirement for and feasibility of constructing an airstrip on South Georgia.

THE REQUIREMENT

2. The only identified requirement for an airstrip is to provide an airhead for the receipt of stores required urgently for ships of the Task Force in advance of a Falkland Island airstrip being made available. This requirement is stated by the Navy Department as highly desirable but not essential. There is one other possible requirement and that is for use by light aircraft to support M Company, Royal Marines at Grytviken.

AIRCRAFT TO MEET THE REQUIREMENT

3. To meet the Navy Department requirement, Hercules aircraft from Ascension, given the right winds, could just make South Georgia with a small payload. However, in the event of bad weather they could not reach a diversion airfield, the nearest of which is in Chile. The aircraft would have to take off from South Georgia for the return flight with a full fuel load and this would require a runway length of 4,000 ft. If longer range freight aircraft, such as VC10, were used they would require a longer and stronger runway.

Note:

1. COS 35th Meeting/82, Item 8.

CONSTRUCTION OF AN AIRSTRIP

M 4. Two possible sites for an airstrip exist on South Georgia but one is unlikely to produce a strip longer than 1,000 ft without major engineering work; there are also aircraft approach problems. The other site might allow construction of a strip 4,000 ft long relatively rapidly if no snags are encountered but the site is 40 miles NW of Grytviken. It is extremely dangerous to assume suitability of both these sites without a ground reconnaissance and allowances must be made for the difficulty of construction during adverse weather conditions. Re-fuelling facilities and a properly constructed hangar would be necessary.

5. It would be impossible to divert any airstrip construction resources from the Task Force because they are required for the higher priority Falkland Islands. Engineers and equipment would thus have to come from the UK. Allowing for time to carry out ground reconnaissance, which would have to be positioned by sea, to assemble the construction force and stores and move everything to South Georgia, it is estimated that it would take about 6 months to complete a 4,000 ft airstrip from the decision to proceed. The time for construction is subject to the results of the reconnaissance.

CONCLUSION

6. It is concluded that the aircraft range and runway length limitations, the site uncertainties and the time it would take to construct an airstrip, indicate that it would not be worthwhile to embark on such a project at present given the expected timescale of operations.

RECOMMENDATION

7. It is recommended that the Chiefs of Staff:
- a. Take note of this paper.
 - b. Agree the Conclusion.