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PS to US of S(AF)

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Chief Welfare Officer
 C of F(N)
 MDG(N)
 SIC6
 DS15

Operation Corporate - Repatriation of Bodies

Reference A: D/NIC/19/1/2 dated 21 April 1982

B: D/USofS(AF)/JW/25/5/7 [T19/82] dated 23 April 1982. - ATTACHED

1. Thank you for your loose minute at Reference B which conveyed the views of US of S(AF) on the burial of fatalities which may arise during Operation Corporate and sought an update on certain aspects of the brief provided at Reference A.
2. The serious misgivings which US of S(AF) has expressed regarding authorising limited repatriation are noted. He wished to be informed of the outcome of our investigations into limited repatriation of bodies. Full details are given below.
3. DNOT has confirmed that it would be feasible to utilise deep freeze capabilities in all the ships of the force, including the large capacity in CANBERRA and UGANDA and the EDATS trawlers which have considerable capacity to store bodies prior to repatriation to the UK. The extent to which this could be utilised, however, would depend upon operational requirements, deployment of the vessels, the weather conditions, effect on morale, running and maintenance problems associated with refrigeration plant. These are all matters which the Task Force Commander would have to take into account when exercising his judgement. Such decisions are best left to local Commanders, who need to make instant decisions unhampered as far as possible by too many constraints imposed by the MOD. It inevitably follows that the recovery of bodies from combat zones would be selective and as US of S(AF) has rightly pointed out could lead to considerable problems in attempting to justify selections made. The official response to selective repatriation could be that recovery of bodies and subsequent repatriation was governed by the operational factors mentioned above.
4. In the past, wars, limited wars or confrontations, it has been the policy of the three Services to bury the dead either at sea or on land; and only in exceptional circumstances allow repatriation. After the Suez Crisis NIC records show that provision was made exceptionally to allow the repatriation of remains at public expense of nine Royal Marine Officers and other ranks because of possible desecration of the graves.

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5. During peacetime it is customary to arrange repatriation of bodies with Baker Britt & Co Ltd, who under MOD contract make the necessary arrangements. They have agents throughout the world, who prepare the bodies for conveyancing by air to the UK. There are, for example, separate agents in Brazil, Chile and Uruguay. DS5 advise that the FCO consider that Brazil is probably the best country to negotiate an agreement with for the landing of bodies for repatriation to the UK. However, no approaches have as yet been made to the Brazilian authorities over this matter.
6. It has been established that there is no crematorium on the Falkland Islands (which rules out the option of repatriation of ashes) and storage facilities are minimal. There is, however, the Stanley Cemetery which has a "consecrated reserve" area of 91.25m x 78m. There are at present 33 War Graves spread throughout the site and these are maintained by Stanley Town Council on behalf of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission who act on the MOD's behalf. There is unlikely to be any objection to further burials at the cemetery.
7. There is an old Norwegian Whaling Station Cemetery on South Georgia in which Shackleton is buried. It is believed to be approximately 35 square yards and surrounded by a picket fence, and contains 63 graves covering the period 1846-1962 and there is currently space for 4 graves. It is maintained by the British Antarctic Survey Team. It is unlikely that this is consecrated ground but there is room for expansion. In addition there are three or more other small cemeteries with burial space available.
8. The question of flying out a team of embalmers to Ascension Island has been investigated. We are advised by SIC6 that this could be arranged by an extension of the existing contracts of either the Kenyons Ltd or Baker Britt & Co Ltd. Baker Britt have been approached informally and have confirmed their willingness to provide such a team. However, CINCFLEET does not consider this practicable as the accommodation problems on Ascension Island are severe. One alternative to a team of embalmers would be for part of the Naval Party on Ascension Island to act as an agent for Baker Britt & Co Ltd, and they would be responsible for preparation of the bodies of those personnel, who have been medivaced there and subsequently die. This is under active consideration by CINCFLEET but NLC believes it may be neither practicable nor desirable as preparation of bodies is a highly specialised task. It is understood from oral discussions with the FCO Administrator of Ascension Island that personnel, (excluding the American personnel from the US Base who are repatriated) are buried within a matter of hours, at the most 48 hours after death. The Ascension Island authorities have no deep freeze facilities; the "mortuary" is a small hut with no air conditioning. The US authorities have limited deep freeze facilities which are primarily used for the storage of food, however, the British Administrator does occasionally use these on an ad hoc basis for the storage of bodies. Special considerations over cleansing the deep freeze will of course apply after utilisation in this way.
9. There are, we are advised, two cemeteries in use on Ascension Island. The first is "Deadman's Shore Cemetery" which is very small close to the shore and the ground is subject to erosion, as there have been complaints about skulls being washed up on the beach. This is clearly unsuitable for the purpose of burying any casualties in this operation. The second cemetery is "Georgetown Cemetery" which is on consecrated ground and is interdenominational. There is space within the walls for approximately 50-100 further burials.

The burial space could be extended by moving the walls as there is limited space outside the cemetery. We have been advised by C of F(N) that in the event of burials taking place on unconsecrated ground a blessing of the grave may take place during the service. The ground could then be consecrated at a later date by a Bishop.

Falkland 10. As stated in reference A para.3, should a component of the British Force have to evacuate part of the Islands after burial of dead, Argentina would be required, under the terms of the Geneva Convention, to accord proper respect to the grave.

11. On balance it is considered that because of lack of facilities and accommodation problems the employment of a team of embalmers should be ruled out; those personnel who die on Ascension Island should be buried either at sea or on the Island. Where, however, the next-of-kin has expressly asked for repatriation and the body is held on ship in refrigerated storage eg. a hospital ship, it may be possible to transfer the remains by helicopter to the Island for immediate flight back to UK. RAF Movements advise that it may be possible to use one of the daily flights from Ascension Island to UK.

12. With regard to paragraph 1 of Reference B, NIC agrees having consulted both DNSC and Secretary to 2 SL, that with the exception referred to in para.10, in the normal course of events those killed or dying on shore on the Falkland Islands or Dependencies should be buried there unless the bodies are recovered for burial at sea. Those fatalities which occur at sea should be buried at sea unless the Command decides that burial ashore is practicable and desirable.

13. Subject to US of S(AF)'s approval NIC, therefore, proposes to inform CINCFLEET at the earliest opportunity, and on the lines of para.12, that the Task Force Commander should be told that the decision on whether to bury at sea or on land in the Falkland Islands and Dependencies and Ascension Island is entirely at his discretion; repatriation of bodies would then only take place in the circumstances stated in para.11.



H. NICHOLSON

NIC 2

NA 216 7621MB.

29 April 1982

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42



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of 25

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR THE ARMED FORCES

LOOSE MINUTE

D/US of S(AF)/JW/25/5/7

5/21

[119/82]

NLC 2 - Mr Nicholson

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FALKLAND ISLANDS OPERATION - REPATRIATION OF BODIES

Reference: D/NLC/19/1/2 dated 21 April 1981

US of S(AF) has noted your minute at reference and has some initial views on the plans set out in it for dealing with fatalities on Operation Corporate. He agrees that any fatalities during sea engagements should be buried at sea and believes that any occurring on the Falkland Islands or Dependancies should be buried on the islands. He agrees with the proposal in your paragraph 4 to investigate the possibility of flying out a team of embalmers to Ascension Island, where he believes there to be a strong case for handling fatalities on a similar basis to that used by the RAF for major peacetime aircraft accidents.

However he has serious misgivings about authorising limited repatriation of bodies from combat zones on a selective basis, as suggested in paragraphs 2, 5 and 6 of your minute. He believes this could lead to considerable problems in attempting to justify selections made. He would be grateful for another report on the arrangements for the handling of bodies on land when the unresolved issues mentioned in your last three paragraphs have been further investigated.

23 April 1982

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D O ARNOLD-FORSTER
PS/US of S(AF)

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PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR THE ARMED FORCES

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JS
To note the
outcome of the
discussions with 2SL
AG & AMP.
JSR

LOOSE MINUTE

D/US of S(AF)/JW/25/5/7

JS

APS/Secretary of State - Miss Ridley

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Chief Welfare Officer

C of F (N)

MDG(N)

DGAMS

DGMS(RAF)

SLC 6

OPERATION CORPORATE: REPATRIATION OF BODIES

US of S (AF) authorised the attached signal for despatch by NLC after consultation with 2SL, AG and AMP on the basis of NLC's minute of 29 April.

It was agreed that selective repatriation using such limited resources as might be available would be an undesirable departure from past practice. The Task Force Commander is therefore instructed that if fatalities occur the bodies of those dying South of Gibraltar should not be repatriated. However the bodies of any members of the force who die North of Gibraltar, for example on hospital ships, may be repatriated at the local commanding officers' discretion.

The Task Force Commander is given total use of his own discretion to decide on land or sea burial South of Gibraltar. US of S (AF) and the three services gave careful consideration to the suggestion that the instructions should include a preference or recommendation that soldiers and airmen be buried on land. However it was agreed not to include this because it would be an undesirably divisive recommendation for a combined service operation, was not required by precedent and would place a greater burden on the Task Force Commander by affecting his powers to use his own discretion.

It was recognised that if fatalities occur during hostilities then the policy on repatriation will probably attract some criticism. However US of S (AF) is convinced that this policy is right and defensible.

D O Arnold-Forster

30 April 1982

D O ARNOLD-FORSTER
PS/US of S (AF)
MB 6273 2452MB

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CINCFLEET 01/1031#.

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FROM MODUK
TO CINCFLEET

C O N F I D E N T I A L DELTEXT
SIC AAA/19F/W5C/W5B
FROM NLC

305051

1. OP CORPORATE
2. POLICY ON DISPOSAL OF BRITISH DEAD.
3. DEATH SOUTH OF GIBRALTAR: NO REPATRIATION OF BODY. BURIAL AT SEA OR ON LAND AT TASK FORCE COMMANDERS DISCRETION.
4. DEATH NORTH OF GIBRALTAR: REPATRIATION OF BODY AT COMMANDING OFFICERS DISCRETION

NAME H NICHOLSON, GRADE PRIN, BRANCH NLC, TEL 7621
BT

DSC/ROW
AODO