

COS(Misc) 190/742/1

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ENCLOSURE

REPATRIATION OF PRISONERS OF WAR AND FOREIGN  
CIVILIANS DETAINED IN SOUTH GEORGIA No. 26

1. The attached Note has been prepared by VCDS(P&L) in accordance with the instructions (1) of the Chiefs of Staff.

2. Unless the Secretary, Chiefs of Staff Committee, hears to the contrary by telephone (Ext 6347) by 1800 on Tuesday 4 May 1982, it will be assumed that the Chiefs of Staff have taken note of the Note and agreed its recommendations.

Attachment:

Repatriation of Prisoners of War and Foreign Civilians Detained in South Georgia (7 pages).

Note:

1. COS 35th Meeting/82, Item 4.

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2 May 1982

COS S26(4)

REPATRIATION OF PRISONERS OF WAR AND FOREIGN CIVILIANS  
DETAINED IN SOUTH GEORGIA

(Note by the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff  
(Personnel and Logistics))

INTRODUCTION

1. Ministers have agreed that 151 Argentinian Prisoners of War (PW) and 39 detained foreign civilians (including 5 non-Argentine nationals) taken by British forces on South Georgia are to be evacuated as soon as possible to Ascension Island (ASI). Thereafter PW and detained civilians are to be repatriated without undue delay.

AIM

2. The aim of this paper is to outline the arrangements for the movement of PW and detained civilians to ASI and to discuss the options for their repatriation.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE GENEVA CONVENTION

3. The guiding rule in handling PW is that they must be treated equally to our own troops in matters of discipline, accommodation, transport, messing, clothing, medical attention and the like, making due allowance for religion and national customs. Evacuation must be effected humanely and detention in a transit camp, which should be air-visibly marked, kept as brief as possible. Article 12 of the Third Convention allows for the transfer of PW to another power, provided that that power is a signatory to the Conventions and

expressly agrees to apply them to PW. If Prisoners receive medical attention they are entitled, on request, to a certificate in respect of the complaint and treatment. We are required to forward a duplicate of such certificate to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

#### EVACUATION FROM SOUTH GEORGIA

4. PW and detained civilians will be evacuated in RFA TIDESPRING escorted by HMS ANTRIM departing South Georgia on 2 May 1982 and arriving ASI on 12/13 May 1982.

5. Since these arrangements were made, the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Uruguay has offered to arrange for an Uruguayan vessel to rendezvous with the evacuating ship and transfer the party for repatriation directly to Argentina. The option of using a third country in this role was considered at an earlier stage and rejected because of the considerable difficulty of transferring the returning party between ships at sea and the acute embarrassment to HM Government should casualties be sustained in the operation. It is not, therefore, the intention to take up the Uruguayan offer.

#### RECEPTION AT ASCENSION ISLAND

6. Security. It is imperative that the detained party should be denied the opportunity of obtaining information on our military dispositions on ASI which could prove to be of intelligence value to the Argentine. This can best be achieved by retaining them in RFA TIDESPRING and landing the party after dark for immediate repatriation by air (see paragraphs 9 to 14). Should immediate

repatriation from ASI prove to be impossible - owing, for example, to the weather or to aircraft unserviceability - the party should be held on RFA TIDESPRING temporarily. It is to be expected that this would be for a strictly limited period of time and would not interfere with operational support requirements.

7. Questioning Argentinian PW. DMSI has stated that there is a requirement to question some of the Argentinian PW and considers that the submarine crew are a particularly attractive target. Questioning would take the form of simple interviews. No duress may be applied to, or discrimination made against, unwilling subjects. To avoid holding PW ashore on ASI it is planned to conduct the interviews on board RFA TIDESPRING. This would be achieved by sending a small team of two TQ-trained interpreters supported by technical advisers and commanded by an officer from JSIW (5 or 6 in total) to ASI for onward movement to TIDESPRING by helicopter, once within range. Questioning is expected to take about 30 hours.

8. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). There is a need to avoid any charge that we have ill-treated PW. There would, therefore, be merit in inviting the ICRC to provide a doctor to carry out a medical examination on their arrival in Ascension. This could take place on board RFA TIDESPRING, but as late as possible before disembarkation. In addition, and also under ICRC supervision, the PW should be photographed immediately prior to their departing ASI.

REPATRIATION FROM ASCENSION ISLAND

9. The return of PW and detained civilians to their country of origin could be carried out by air or by sea either by direct repatriation or through a third country. It is assumed that the former can be ruled out for a British-owned ship or aircraft for fear of detention or harassment.

CONSIDERATION OF OPTIONS

10. It is unlikely, given the timescale of this operation, that a suitable ship could be made available to repatriate PW from ASI to Argentina. Nor, indeed, for reasons of security, would it be desirable to allow a vessel of Latin American origin to call at ASI specifically for this purpose. Given these considerations, and the need for early repatriation, onward transit by sea can be ruled out.

11. The options open to repatriation by air are:

- a. By ATF VC10 from ASI to Montevideo (2 sorties).
- b. By ATF VC10 or C130 from ASI to the UK then on-move by British or third country airline.
- c. British civil aviation from ASI to Montevideo (1 sortie) or third country airline direct to Argentina.

Repatriation by air has the advantage of speed and would meet the requirement to return PW without delay. Also relevant is the political sensitivity of affording to Argentine PW treatment comensurate with that extended to the Royal Marines who were repatriated from the Falklands and South Georgia.

12. The ATF is fully committed and lacks the capacity to undertake the specific task of flying PW from ASI to Montevideo without jeopardising the airlift to Ascension. However, transit via the UK would be possible since ATF aircraft supporting the operation into Ascension are in the main returning empty, although it should be noted that the C130 stages through Dakar and Gibraltar and this could give rise to political, control and other problems on the ground and in the UK.

13. There remains the prospect of repatriation from ASI by civil air, either British or third party; however, DOT(Air) guidance would be needed on the suitability of civil operators to carry PW and on the requirement to seek US agreement to civil flights into ASI. Relevant to these considerations is the possibility of United States assistance, given the recent clarification of their position relative to the two parties in dispute. Help from this direction would be attractive from the security viewpoint since United States civil and military communications and troopng aircraft currently operate through Ascension. Another option would be Brazil (as Protecting Power in the case of Argentina), although this would have the disadvantage - as with other third parties - of offering a potentially useful intelligence picture of military activities and dispositions on ASI with every prospect of this being passed on to the Argentine.

For some options there would be a need to provide guards in aircraft to prevent a hijacking incident; these have not been taken into account in stipulating the number of sorties required.

#### BEST COURSE

15. The best course would be to invite the Defence Secretariat to discuss with FCO and DOT(Air) the possibility of inviting a third country, which for security reasons should be the US, to airlift PW and detained civilians from ASI preferably direct to Argentina or, if that would be undesirable, to Brazil (the Protecting Power).

#### CONCLUSIONS

16. PW and detained civilians should arrive at ASI on 12/13 May 1982. Following questioning and medical examination on board TIDESPRING they should, in the interests of security and of avoiding undue delay, be airlifted from ASI at night either directly to Argentina or to Brazil in US aircraft.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

17. The Chiefs of staff are invited:
- a. To note the arrangements (paragraphs 4 and 5) made for the evacuation of PW and detained civilians from South Georgia to ASI.

- b. To agree the proposed arrangements (paragraphs 6 and 8) for the reception at ASI of PW and detained civilians.
- c. To endorse the proposals (paragraph 7) as regards the questioning of Argentine PW.
- d. To invite Defence Secretariat to discuss with the FCO and DOT(Air) the prospect of inviting the United States to airlift PW and civilians from ASI.
- e. To agree that Defence Secretariat should arrange through the FCO for the International Committee of the Red Cross to carry out an independent medical examination of PW on RFA TIDESPRING immediately prior to disembarking at ASI.

2 May 1982

VCDS(P&L)