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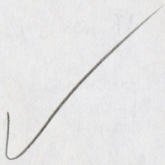
COSE MINUTE

D/DPR/14/26/2

DUS(Navy)

Copy to:

DPR(Navy)
CPO



FALKLANDS: RELEASE OF INFORMATION

DCPR has asked me to let you have a short note about the release of information by MOD on the sinking of the Sheffield and the Ardent.

1. HMS SHEFFIELD

The story of the sinking of a RN ship was run during the afternoon of the 4th May by the Press Association. Mounting embarrassment was caused when the Department would not comment on the story. Finally at 2115 on the 4th May, we were obliged to release the information that HMS Sheffield had been hit and subsequently abandoned. By doing this, we hoped to prevent further damaging speculation and to pre-empt Argentine claims.

2. HMS ARDENT

On Friday 21st May, British troops established their bridgehead at San Carlos. On the same day, the Secretary of State in the press centre announced the successful landing, and in the course of his announcement, considered it right to refer in general terms to the fact that our forces had come under heavy air attack, with five of our ships damaged, two seriously. The following day, the Secretary of State made a more detailed statement to the press in which he named the Ardent as one of the ships hit by the Argentine air attack. It was at this point that he said that HMS Ardent had sunk. It was not until 23 May that we were able to say that all next-of-kin had been informed.

J. A. Asquith

J A ASQUITH
A/DCPR
MB0370 7950MB

9 June 82

Mr Jeffrey

Para 1 above clearly explains why something had to be said & should satisfy Mr Sutchiffe (his para 2).

However, 2 above won't really answer his paras 4-6; the point he is making is that next of kin should be informed before any announcements are made. (I wonder if it was announced on 22 May).

You can't win whatever you do.

8/10/82

CONFIDENTIAL TO CINCPACFLT

The Admiralty Board have considered the representation forwarded with your P7340/40 dated 3 June and have made the following observations upon it.

The Board share the concern expressed by Lieutenant Commander Sutcliffe that the reporting of Royal Navy losses should seek to avoid so far as possible anguish to relatives and friends of members of the ships' companies involved. It is accepted that, ideally, no damage or losses should be announced until after next of kin of any casualties have been notified. Ideally too, for operational reasons, it would be preferred to hold back any information which could conceivably help the enemy. *Furthermore, as losses should be announced until the ship's name is confirmed as given.*

Wider considerations are, however, also involved. It is essential to both international and domestic confidence in the Government's handling of the crisis that they should be seen to release accurate information without delay. This helps to forestall or counter false or exaggerated claims by the enemy, in which there may nevertheless be an element of truth. [Domestically, it is damaging to the Government's credibility if losses are admitted only after there has been speculation, possibly accurate, in the Press.]

These considerations are conflicting and the Government has no choice but to judge each case as it arises. In some it will be necessary to make an announcement sooner than would be desirable on operational grounds and before it has been possible to notify next of kin. In the case of HMS SHEFFIELD; and in the case of HMS ARDENT

As you are aware, following a recent review of the reporting procedure, new instructions have been issued, with your own and CINCFLEET's agreement, re-affirming the basic principle that no

announcement should be made before next of kin have been informed, unless there are overriding reasons to the contrary.

In informing Lieutenant Commander Sutcliffe of the Board's response to his representation, you are requested to assure him that each case has been considered most carefully, with full regard to the feelings of next of kin, and without any desire to dramatise the incident. It is the Board's sincere hope that the new procedure will not prove to be necessary. *have to keep to the minimum the understandable anxiety of the next of kin of those serving in the South Atlantic.*

[Handwritten signature]

- 1. The Flag Officer, Plymouth
- 2. The Captain, HMS [unclear]
- 3. The Captain, HMS [unclear]

STAFF IN CONFIDENCE

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF
NAVAL HOME COMMAND
PORTSMOUTH PO1 3LR

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P7340/40

DUS (N)
Ministry of Defence
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LONDON SW1A 2HB

3 Jun 82

CASUALTY REPORTING - REPRESENTATION BY LIEUTENANT COMMANDER M SUTCLIFFE -
HMS RALEIGH

1. Forwarded.
2. I believe that this is a reflection of the serious concern throughout the Home Command about the way in which casualty announcements have been made. The new procedure, which I understand has now been approved, should alleviate this problem, although the difficult balances which must be struck in deciding whether or not to hold up the announcement of a loss in order that next of kin can first be informed, are always likely to lead to some disagreement.
3. But I consider that the representation is also symptomatic of a wider and deep concern about the handling of all the various public relations aspects of the Falkland Island situation. A concern which is, in my view, well founded and is unlikely to be allayed without a formal examination of all these aspects at a suitably high level.
4. Against this background, I believe it right that the Admiralty Board should deal with this representation.

JAMES EBERLE
Admiral
Commander-in-Chief

Enclosure:

1. Flag Officer Plymouth's 7040/5/P dated 27 May 82 and enclosures thereto.

Information:

1. The Flag Officer Plymouth
2. The Commodore, HMS DRAKE
3. The Captain, HMS RALEIGH

STAFF IN CONFIDENCE
STAFF IN CONFIDENCE

HMS RALEIGH
Torpoint

24 May 1982

The Captain
HMS RALEIGH

Sir

I have the honour to make representation concerning the premature, irresponsible and quite unacceptable release of information to the public and thereby to Next of Kin concerning details of Royal Navy losses in the Falklands crisis.

2. On 4 May 82 a spokesman for the Ministry of Defence announced, dramatically, in the course of the highly subscribed Nine o'clock News that HMS SHEFFIELD had been abandoned after attack. This premature announcement, made presumably to satisfy a news hungry Press must have caused immeasurable and quite unjustified anguish to the hundreds of relatives and to thousands of friends of HMS SHEFFIELD personnel. This premature announcement was probably to blame for the few mistakes then made by Welfare authorities because of the sudden pressure to which they became subject. It was not until 7 May 82 that the public, and some Next of Kin, knew for certain who had been lost. It is of note that Argentina made no claim in the early stages of this incident which would have commanded a specific statement from the Ministry of Defence.
3. Subsequent reports began to indicate to the layman that common-sense and caring had prevailed and losses were on occasion reported with the rider that 'Next of Kin have been informed'.
4. However this trend was not to continue and, shortly after noon on Saturday 22 May 82, in a prepared statement, the Secretary of State for Defence personally and presumably for political reasons announced the loss of HMS ARDENT with the 'Loss' of 20 men and 30 injuries. This was quickly followed by hard News reports as in Enclosure 1 which was bought in Plymouth at 1510 on that day.
5. At the time of this political announcement Naval authorities in Plymouth, on announced telephone numbers, had no details to communicate to Next of Kin. I then shared for some hours the anguish of a Naval wife. When at 1415 on 22 May 82, because of the severe distress of this wife whose husband was serving in HMS ARDENT, I rang the Casualty Cell in HMS DRAKE to be told that they knew no more than had been reported on Television and in the News. This is a disgrace. The wife in question was told at 2015 that, happily, her husband was safe.

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6. I in no way criticise the area Casualty Reporting Organisation: I in no way question the facility for detailed reporting in the Task Group considering the operational implications. I do question the integrity of the political and Public Relations machines which seem continually compelled to satisfy a news hungry Press in releasing a dramatic part story concerning casualties before the rider 'Next of Kin have been informed' can be added. This seems to be done quite without regard to the anguish caused. If one can add insult to this degree of injury, then a tape of ITV programmes on the afternoon of the Secretary of State for Defence's ill-timed announcement will show that it was Cup Final day. Wives, dependants and friends, triggered by a complacent Mr. Nott were denied access to the scheduled National News until extra time had been played. The National News was at that time their only source of information.

7. I quite accept that we all expect casualties as a part of active Service; I endorse that these expectations are borne remarkably well by our wives and dependants; I believe that the expectation of casualties, until made specific (eg a Harrier, SHEFFIELD, ARDENT, etc) is endured well on a shared basis; but I stress that the fortitude of those 'at home' continues to be undermined by these ill-timed, half informed and totally premature announcements to a speculative and irresponsible Press.

8. I submit that urgent action should be taken to restrict News releases until those most concerned have had the privilege of being informed.

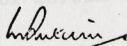
9. Lest any in the administrative chain question my motive for this representation, apart from my own liability for Service in the Task Force I do have a son serving there at sea.

10. I realise, Sir, that this representation will not be within your power to remedy. I therefore request that it be forwarded with urgency to the appropriate authorities.

I have the honour to be

Sir

Your obedient servant



M SUTCLIFFE
Lieutenant Commander, Royal Navy