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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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2nd June 1982

*Seen by the Prime*

*Minister*

*Dear John,*

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EXOCET ATTACK, 25TH MAY

My Secretary of State thought that the Prime Minister would be interested to see the attached report, prepared for the Chief of the Defence Staff, on the attack by Exocet on 25th May in which the Atlantic Conveyor was struck.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to the Private Secretaries to the members of OD and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*John ...  
David Omand*  
(D B OMAND)

A J Coles Esq

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1. You may be interested to know more about the EXOCET attack on 25 May in which ATLANTIC CONVEYOR was struck.

2. At the time the ship was in company with elements of the Battle Group operating in the Total Exclusion Zone to the north east of the Falkland Islands. First, the sequence of events (which is illustrated on the attached diagram):

a. At 1936 Agave radar (Super Etendard) was detected to the north west by two ships of the force, the destroyer EXETER and the frigate AMBUSCADE, on their electronic warfare sensors. All ships took immediate, pre-planned countermeasures. AMBUSCADE, the westerly ship, fired a pattern of chaff from her 4.5 in gun to confuse the enemy's target indication appreciation and simultaneously deployed a protective pattern of chaff from her 3" rocket launcher to decoy missiles. Other ships including the carrier HERMES also fired chaff.

b. 30 Seconds later, 1 or 2 aircraft were detected by AMBUSCADE on radar at a range of 28 miles.

c. After a further 30 seconds BRILLIANT detected the same aircraft at 26 miles.

d. At 1938 AMBUSCADE detected Agave radar lock on.



e. At 1939 missile release was detected by BRILLIANT and AMBUSCADE. Further preplanned countermeasures were taken. AMBUSCADE resowed a full pattern of chaff believing herself to be the target. The attack aircraft turned away immediately.

f. 41 seconds later two missiles were seen on radar in HERMES, BRILLIANT and AMBUSCADE. The missiles were then seen to veer towards the chaff pattern laid by AMBUSCADE at 1936. Having passed through, or under, the chaff the missile homing heads restarted a search pattern and one certainly achieved acquisition on ATLANTIC CONVEYOR who was struck in the starboard quarter.

3. This was a copybook performance by the warships against a well conducted attack by the Argentines. The ships were alert, professional and carried out the correct procedures. It was sheer bad luck that, having decoyed the missiles from the designated targets, ATLANTIC CONVEYOR was within the restricted search area of the missiles' homing heads; she had no self protection capability of her own and the warships were then unable to help her. With a missile such as EXOCET, a ship targetted must rely on its own defences; it is virtually impossible to destroy the missile except down the line of its flight path.

4. There are some other points of interest. The attack aircraft approached very low from the north west. It is probable



that they had been in-flight refuelled and came from Puerto Deseado. There appeared to be no form of tactical direction but the Super Etendards could have been advised of the Battle Group's operating area by enemy forces on the Islands who would observe our own aircraft flight patterns on their radar. Having made a detection the Argentines fired at the nearest radar echo and then beat a hasty retreat - also at low level. Of course, as they have no airborne early warning capability, the Battle Group could not obtain warning of the forthcoming low level attack until the Argentines were obliged to transmit. This meant that there was no time to use our fighters.

5. We have been closely studying our tactics and material countermeasures against the Argentine EXOCET threat - whether launched from airborne or surface platforms - ever since the start of the Falklands crisis and particularly in the light of the attack on SHEFFIELD. The advice given to the Task Force has proved sound in practice. There is now a further new material countermeasure available to them; a jammer which was designed, trialled and produced within a very short timescale for mounting on a Lynx helicopter. This jammer will seduce missile homing heads even after they have locked on. The first jammers were delivered to the Task Force last week and, given any intelligence of attack, could be invaluable in its defence. We are also doing what we can to give RFAs and Merchant vessels employed on this Operation some self protection capability against these missiles. 15 3" rocket (chaff) launchers systems similar to those fitted in our warships are available and

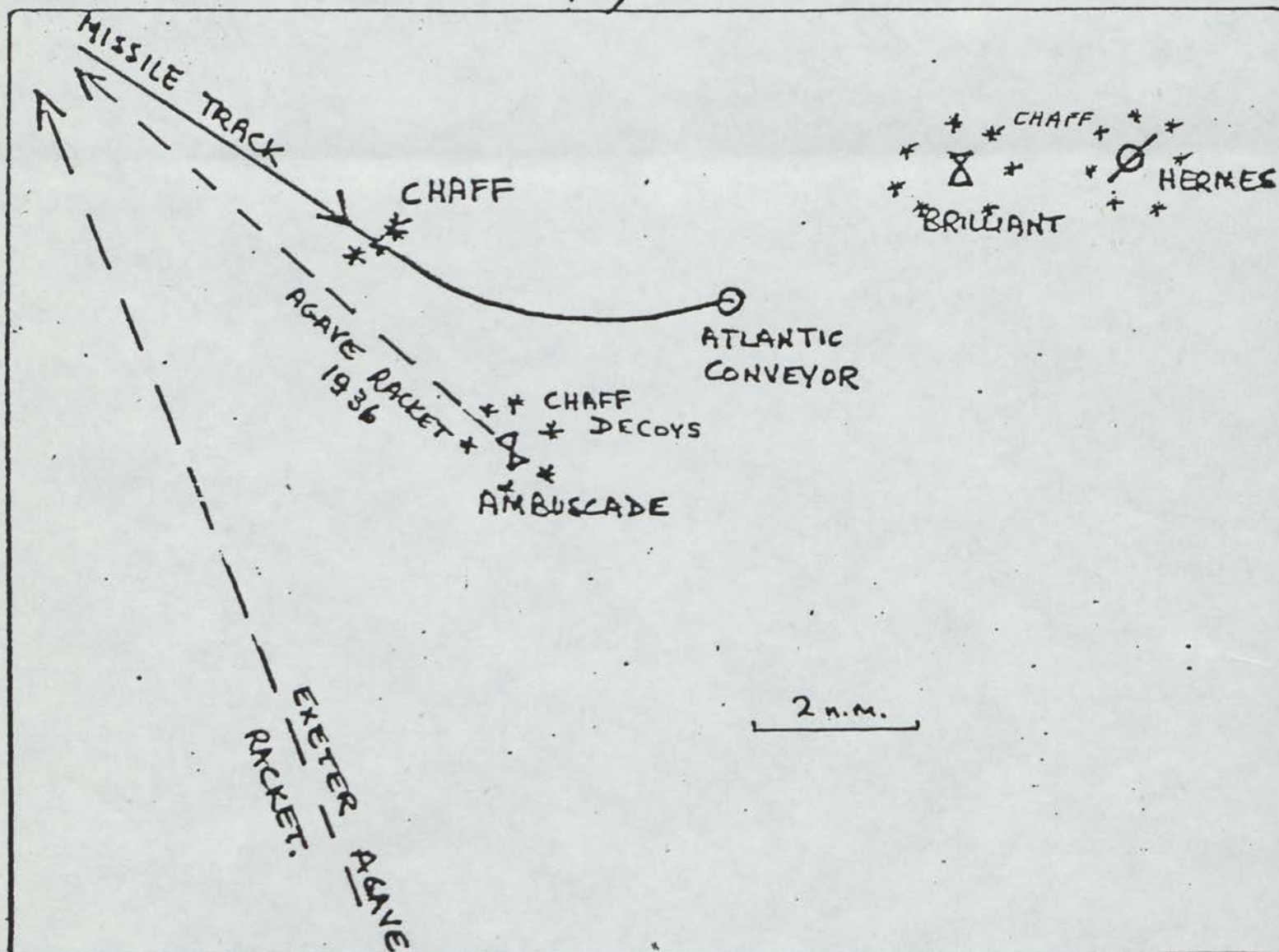
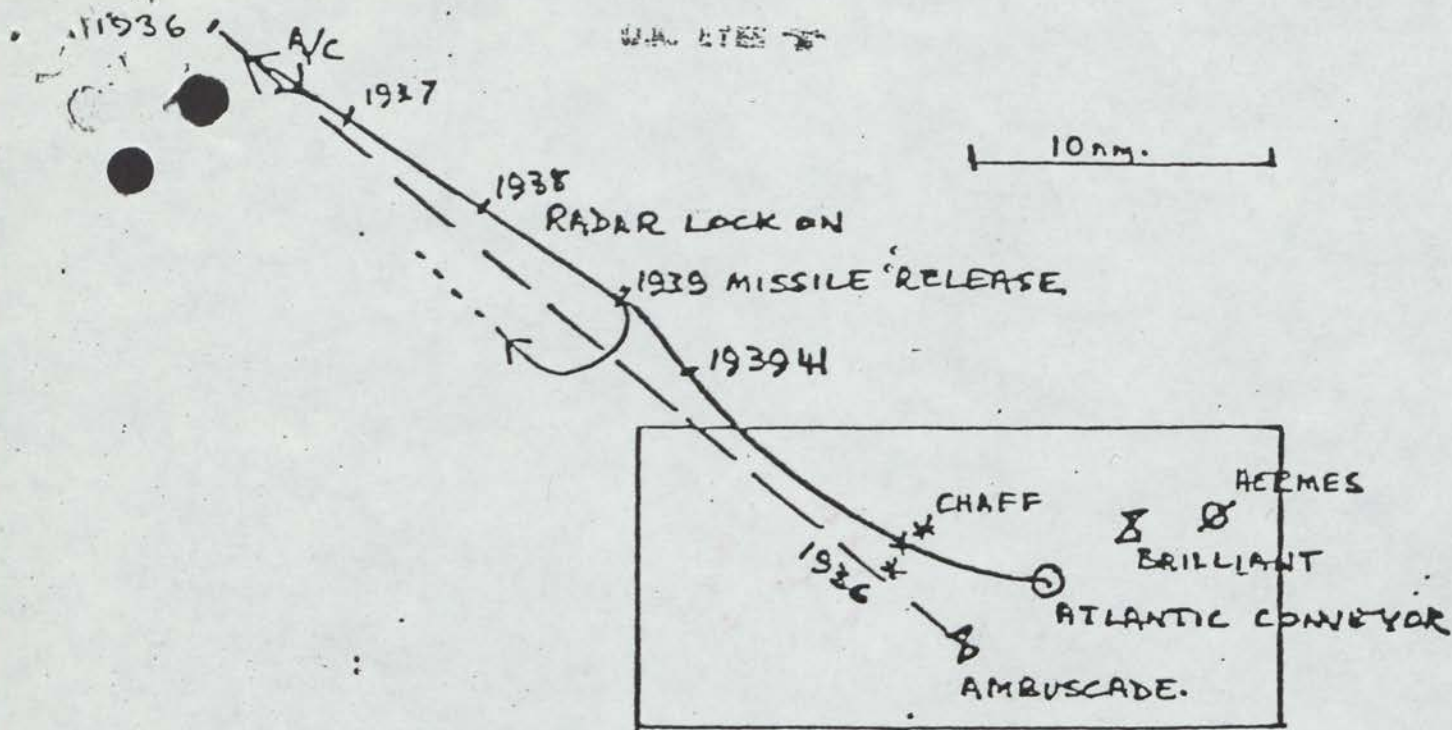
CINCFLEET has been asked to state his priorities for fitting. It may be possible to install some in ships already deployed and this is being investigated. We are also making arrangements to send out some small hand-held radar warning receivers which have a limited capability but could give early warning to merchant ships of approaching aircraft.



INITIAL DETECTION

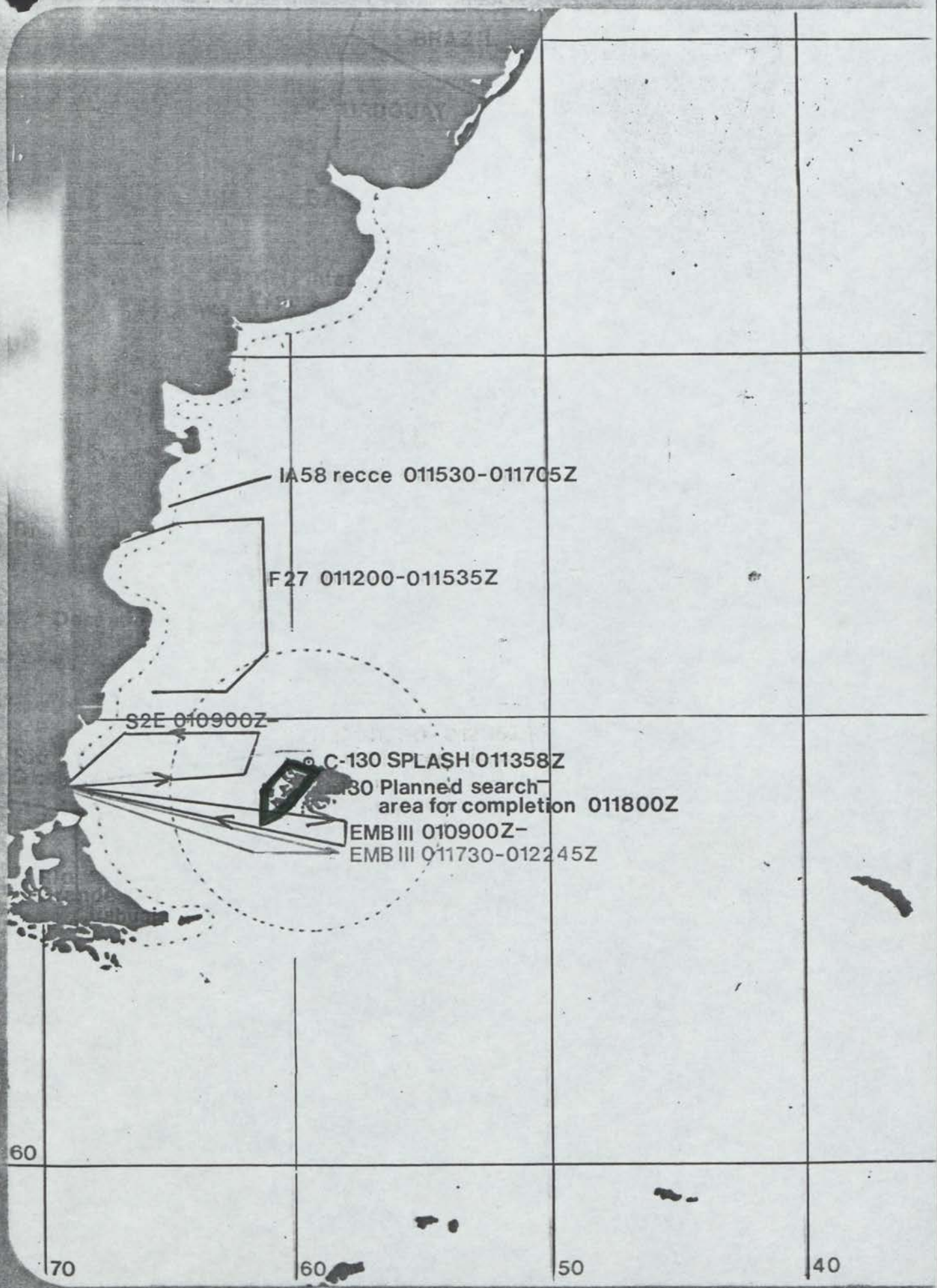
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IA58 recce 011530-011705Z

F27 011200-011535Z

S2E 010900Z

C-130 SPLASH 011358Z

C-130 Planned search area for completion 011800Z

EMB III 010900Z-  
EMB III 011730-012245Z

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