

CONFIDENTIAL

Philip Goodheart
wrote to me first. He
should have written
facilities if he
wants them.

Prime Minister.

Ref. A09044

This is far from easy.
Will you like to discuss with Mr Ryan
and NNSA, as suggested below?

PRIME MINISTER

N.B. I do not intend to
give any interviews, not

HL
20 vii
attached

Frederick Forsyth's Proposed Book about the Falklands

You will remember that Frederick Forsyth wrote to you on 15th June about his proposal that he should write a book on the Falklands crisis with particular emphasis on the Task Force.

2. I have since had an opportunity of discussing the project with Mr. Forsyth in some detail. What he has in mind is a chronological narrative of the "hundred days" of the crisis, from the day when Davidoff and his men landed in South Georgia to the day when General Menendez surrendered in Port Stanley. It would be a day-by-day account, with straight narrative interleaved with descriptions of "what it felt like to be there", which would follow through the actions, reactions and feelings of those involved at every level: in No. 10, the Cabinet, the Ministry of Defence, and the Task Force from commanders to privates, ratings and pilots. He would hope for help in ensuring that the narrative was comprehensive and accurate. The other element in the story would be based on interviews in some depth with 50 participants at home and in the fighting, selected as the people through whose eyes the events would be described. It would not be an instant journalistic account; nor would it be an official history, though he would want it to be as accurate as possible. It would, however, require official co-operation, and he would be willing to submit the manuscript for scrutiny from the point of view of official secrets.

3. Mr. Forsyth does not envisage an account which also covers the Argentine side of the affair. It would be as seen from the British side. No doubt Mr. Forsyth is well aware of the potentialities of what he has in mind as a best-selling book; but he would also like, from patriotic motives, to put on record the competence and gallantry of those involved in the operation. He thinks that the book would take eight months to write, and four months to publish. If he were able to start in September, the book would be in the shops and on the bookstalls in September 1983. He is perfectly well aware of the possible political significance of that date.

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4. The book would not be an official history. Nor would he want it to be, or to be described as, an "authorised" account: he would not wish to be thought to have accepted the limitations on his freedom to write what he wanted which might be implied by that. The responsibility for the book would be his, and he would write it; but he would be assisted by four researchers. He would need official help, in three ways:

- ✓ (1) having prepared his narrative, he would like to be able to check it for accuracy;
- ✓ (2) he would want us to select and locate 500 participants from all levels in the affair; all would be "screened" by him or his researchers, and they would select 50 of those screened, for interview in depth;
- ✓ (3) he would want those interviewed to be given assurances that they could speak freely, without getting into trouble with higher authority.

In exchange for that help, he would be prepared for his manuscript to be scrutinised for breaches of secrecy and security, so long as excisions were solely for genuine secrets unwittingly revealed and not for grumbles and candid comments.

5. I have also discussed Mr. Forsyth's proposals with the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. We all agree that they have considerable attractions. There are two main areas of difficulty. The first is whether the Government could justify giving Mr. Forsyth the privileged access he wanted, and refusing it to other bona fide applicants for similar access. If we refused access to other applicants, there could be Parliamentary and public criticism of giving Mr. Forsyth preferential access and enabling him and his publishers to make a lot of money. If we did not withhold access from other bona fide applicants, we could in theory be involved in a considerable diversion of effort into satisfying the approaches made. The second difficulty relates to the Franks Committee. Although Mr. Forsyth would intend to concentrate on the Falklands campaign - i. e. the sequence of events from 2nd April onwards - he would want briefly to cover the run-up to the crisis, and this would involve questioning officials and others about matters into which the Franks Committee will be enquiring.



6. As to the first difficulty, the flood of books about the Falklands crisis has already begun. Both the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have been approached by the Sunday Times to provide the Insight team with a detailed account of the events between the Argentine invasion on 2nd April and the departure of the Task Force on 5th April for a book which the team is preparing to bring out in six weeks' time. Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins are known to be writing an account of the affair for publication in six months' time - the Christmas market, perhaps. Max Hastings will obviously be writing an "I was there" book about the Task Force and the repossession; Simon Jenkins will be writing about the London end, on which (as has been evident from articles in The Economist) he is already fairly well informed. He has been making inquiries about seeing people. There will no doubt be similar approaches from others. The Ministry of Defence propose to deal with approaches made to them by offering applicants short interviews with two or three selected officials who would be authorised to disclose operational details of movements of ships, aircraft and troops which are already in the public domain, or which can be made public without prejudicing security. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have a more difficult problem, in that questions to them are likely to relate to politically sensitive matters such as Ministerial discussions and the content of advice given to Ministers. They therefore propose to be more restrictive in meeting requests for information, and to confine themselves strictly to facts which are already public knowledge.

No 11

Agreed.

7. There would be no difficulty in offering Mr. Forsyth whatever help and information is given to others. But that falls far short of what he would be asking for; and his ability to do the sort of book he proposes depends on his getting it.

8. He said at first that he would want the help given to him, in the selection, location and encouragement of participants, to be exclusive. When I said that I thought that it might be difficult for Ministers to justify exclusive privileges, he said that perhaps he would not need to insist on that: what he would be engaged on would be a special kind of account (on the analogy of The Longest Day by Cornelius Ryan); not many people would want to do that kind of account; and, once he had established a head start, it would not be worth anyone's while to

compete. He would have to talk to his publishers, to see if they were prepared to run the risk of not asking for exclusive privileged access. They may be less prepared to do so given the publicity which Mr. Forsyth's proposal has now received, apparently as a result of a leak from the Ministry of Defence (see extract from yesterday's Sunday Times).

9. There remains the question whether the Government would also be prepared to run the risk. Information about the facilities made available to Mr. Forsyth would become public; the Government would have to make public, perhaps in a reply to a Parliamentary Question, the nature of the help given to Mr. Forsyth and the conditions under which it had been given, including the fact that similar help would be given to other authors on similar conditions if they applied. Other authors might think that Mr. Forsyth had a head start and that it was not worth trying to compete; but some might think that, if they moved fast, they could do a rush job and beat Mr. Forsyth to the bookstalls. In that case we should have to provide them with whatever assistance we had given to Mr. Forsyth.

10. The alternative - which Mr. Forsyth and his publishers would no doubt prefer - would be to make the help given to him in the selection, location and encouragement of participants unique to him; or to make the conditions such that in effect only he would want it. Apart from asking him to submit his script for security scrutiny, I think that it might be necessary to ask him and his publishers to make a significant proportion of the proceeds of sales of the book over to the South Atlantic Fund. I did not try this idea out on Mr. Forsyth, and I have no idea what he or his publishers would think of it; they could hardly be expected to be enthusiastic. We should not need to seek such an undertaking if the help given was not to be exclusive to Mr. Forsyth.

11. The second problem is the overlap with the Franks Committee. Mr. Forsyth will want to start his book with an account of the events leading up to the Argentine invasion, starting from Davidoff's arrival on South Georgia. But I think that he would be prepared not to interview people about the events of that period until after the Franks Committee had reported; or at least until the Committee had finished taking evidence.



12. Mr. Forsyth made it clear to me that his intention was that his narrative should cover events in Whitehall and Westminster, and events at the United Nations in New York, as well as events in the South Atlantic. I think that we could allow those who participated in events in the South Atlantic to talk reasonably freely, provided that they kept off sensitive questions of intelligence and possibly of details of weapon performance. Discussions in 10 Downing Street and elsewhere in Whitehall and events in New York seem to me to present much greater difficulty. Clearly Mr. Forsyth could make use of anything published at the time; but I think that we should have to tell those whom he interviewed that they could not give him or his researchers confidential information about the contents of Ministerial discussions or of Sir Anthony Parsons's private discussions with the United Nations Secretary General and others in New York; and we should have to tell Mr. Forsyth that such instructions had been given.

We cannot reveal this.

Agreed not

13. The questions to be decided are:

1. Are Ministers prepared to authorise the giving of help to Mr. Forsyth on the basis he seeks it (paragraph 4(1), (2) and (3)) subject to certain conditions?

2. Should those conditions include:

- (i) an undertaking by Mr. Forsyth to submit his script for scrutiny and to accept excisions on grounds of breach of secrecy and security;
- (ii) an instruction to those interviewed not to disclose information about intelligence matters, or sensitive details of weapon performance;
- (iii) an instruction to those interviewed not to disclose confidential information about contents of Ministerial discussions in Whitehall and Westminster or of diplomatic discussions in New York.

3. Should the help be non-exclusive?

4. Are Ministers prepared to allow exclusive help to be given, under certain conditions (e.g. that a significant proportion of the proceeds of the book will be given to the South Atlantic Fund)?

It would be reasonable to ask for something because it would help us.

14. I am sending copies of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence, with whom you may like to discuss the matter before any further approach is made to Mr. Forsyth.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

19th July, 1982

Atticus

STEPHEN PILE

Will Forsyth go to war?

FREDERICK FORSYTH has been discussing the definitive book of the Falklands War with Number 10. Might this explain the difficulties that other writers attempting the subject have encountered at the Ministry of Defence?

When the war ended last month, the author of the Dogs of War and the Day of the Jackal, met his friend Bernard Ingham, who is Margaret Thatcher's chief press secretary.

The main topic of discussion was the idea of applying Forsyth's proven skills as a thriller writer to an account of the South Atlantic conflict.

"I am not a military writer

as such, but this was a rare war with a beginning, middle and end, like a good adventure story. At some point there will be the ultimate academic history, but after the raft of paperbacks there is room somewhere in the middle for a book which does the war from start to finish without going into individual details."

Ingham next wrote to Mrs Thatcher, who is a Forsyth fan and once complimented him on his books.

She clearly liked the idea because the MoD even started talking about money. Shouldn't Whitehall have a 50 per cent cut of the royalties, they asked.

Certainly, Forsyth is not writing anything else at the moment and would be free to start immediately. However, he is worried about his independence in this venture and has gone to Majorca for two weeks to think about it.

"It is certainly interesting enough, but I have a gritty notion of my own independence. I don't want a ministerial imprimatur."

Meanwhile in London his agent was pursuing her course. Diana Baring, of Curtis Brown, said: "He has no intention to write about the Falklands. I have just talked to him and he has not even thought of it." Forsyth really should tell her what's happening.

All this has obviously led to some confusion in the Ministry of Defence. The growing feeling there is that Freddie Forsyth is entirely unsuitable. What is more, the instruction from Number 10 has been interpreted in some quarters as meaning that no other writers should be given information.

Lamenting this development, Ingham said: "You know how messages get screwed up from HQ to the front, and vice versa."



Forsyth: pondering

■ And now for the story that Max Hastings missed. Why does Port Stanley have the cheapest television sets in the world?

When the Argentinians arrived they immediately set about broadcasting propaganda and Tom y Jerry, the dubbed drama of two Hispanic and potentially violent mice. To this end they offered the locals cheap hire-purchase TV sets, upon which they had paid only one instalment when they were liberated by Hastings and others.

And so the Falklanders have the cheapest sets in the world, but gained at the greatest price possible.