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*With the compliments of*

FALKLAND ISLANDS DEPARTMENT

Prime Minister

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Falklands  
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Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
London SW1

VISIT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT HON MRS MARGARET THATCHER MP,  
TO THE FALKLAND ISLANDS, 8TH TO 12TH JANUARY 1983

Her Majesty's Civil Commissioner at Stanley to the  
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

SUMMARY

The Prime Minister, accompanied by Mr Thatcher and Sir John Fieldhouse, paid an official visit to the Falkland Islands from 8th to 12th January 1983. This was the first visit by a British Prime Minister and more of a personal pilgrimage. An historic and momentous occasion (paragraph 1).

2 The visit had to be kept secret for security reasons, a difficult feat successfully accomplished. Despite only 20 minutes notice of her arrival, Stanley townsfolk turned out to give Mrs Thatcher a spontaneous, sincere and moving welcome (paragraph 2).

3 The programme was divided roughly equally between the civilian and military communities. The Prime Minister met as many Falkland Islanders as possible in the time available, both in Stanley and in the Settlements. She also visited RAF and Army units and ships of the Royal Navy, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the Merchant Marine. She and Sir John Fieldhouse laid wreaths at the sites of the war dead and visited the battlefields (paragraphs 3-5).

4 The most emotional moment of all was when the Prime Minister received the freedom of the Falkland Islands at a large reception held in Stanley Town Hall. The audience's response to Mrs Thatcher's speech was the most enthusiastic ever witnessed in the Falkland Islands (paragraph 6).

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At a meeting with Executive and Legislative Councillors, the Prime Minister learned of life during the Argentine occupation and discussed what now had to be done to build a worthwhile future. Councillors mentioned breaking up the larger farms, the establishment of a 150 mile fisheries zone, tourism, philately and the opportunities created by the presence of a large military garrison. They also emphasised that no Islander had any wish to resume negotiations with the Argentines for as long as the Argentines equated negotiations with the transfer of sovereignty. A Legislative Council Select Committee expected to make recommendations in July for modifying the internal constitution of the Islands (paragraphs 7-9).

6 The Prime Minister had wide-ranging discussions with the Military Commissioner and his staff. Main topics were the airport, accommodation and roads (paragraph 10).

7 The Prime Minister expressed her concern over the interruption in education for the settlement children caused by the Argentine occupation and agreed that it was essential to provide accommodation for them in Stanley by the beginning of the school year (paragraph 11).

8 Coverage by the media was extensive, despite the secrecy surrounding the visit (paragraph 12).

9 A tribute to Diplomatic Service staff and the military for their magnificent support (paragraph 13).

10 The departure was as well-guarded as the arrival (paragraph 14).

11 A full but enjoyable programme and an intensely moving experience for all. Islanders were grateful to have been given the opportunity to thank Mrs Thatcher personally for sending the task force. Many believed that, had she not been Prime Minister, the task force would never have sailed (paragraph 15).

12 The visit was the best morale booster that Islanders could have had. They will now look forward to the future with more confidence (paragraph 16).

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(Confidential)  
Sir,

STANLEY  
18 January 1983

The Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP, accompanied by Mr Thatcher and the Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Sir John Fieldhouse, paid an official visit to the Falkland Islands from the 8th to the 12th of January. This was the first visit to the Falkland Islands by a British Prime Minister. After the events of last year, it was more of a personal pilgrimage than an official visit. It was an historic and momentous occasion for Islanders and indeed for all those privileged to have been present.

2 For security reasons, no announcement about the visit could be made beforehand: that the secret was kept both in London and Stanley was a feat almost as incredible as the liberation of the Islands by the British task force in 10½ weeks last year. In the village atmosphere of the Falkland Islands, gossip and rumour abound. The slightest hint of an impending visit by the Prime Minister would have been flashed around the Islands by "diddledee" radio (2 metre amateur band) within minutes. My driver-cum-valet-cum-majordomo is, for all his other excellent virtues, one of the biggest culprits in this regard. I hope that he has forgiven me for denting his reputation as the best harbinger in the Islands and for telling the white lie that we were preparing for a large crowd of journalists who could not all be accommodated at the Upland Goose Hotel. No one in the Islands really believed that the Prime Minister and her party could travel 8000 miles from London, change aircraft at Ascension Island and land at Stanley Airport without the news breaking. I must here pay tribute to the BBC TV team that was due to leave four days before the Prime Minister's arrival, after being

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the Islands since before Christmas. I had to tell them to stay without explaining the real reason: I think they guessed but they kept it to themselves. They and local journalists were invited to the airport for the Prime Minister's arrival but were not told who was coming. As soon as Mrs Thatcher was recognised stepping out of the Hercules, the local broadcasting officer telephoned his studio, which interrupted its normal programme to announce the Prime Minister's arrival. In the 20 minutes or so that it took to travel along the 4 miles of pot-holed and battered road from the airport to the town, the people flocked out of their houses and gathered in crowds along the route to welcome the Prime Minister. It was spontaneous, sincere and moving. Mrs Thatcher stopped at various points in the town, got out of the familiar maroon taxi, and shook scores of townsfolk by the hand. Children and old men presented flowers quickly plucked from conservatories. Eyes were moist and voices choked. For a normally undemonstrative community, it was a remarkable display of affection.

3 The Prime Minister's programme (copy attached) divided her time roughly equally between the military and the civilian communities. She had expressed a wish to meet as many Falkland Islanders as possible. The Military Commissioner achieved this by flying her to four main settlements in East and two in West Falklands and gathering Islanders to these centres by helicopter from other outlying settlements. In Stanley the Prime Minister met a large cross-section of Islanders at receptions in Government House and the Town Hall and during visits to junior and secondary schools, the hospital, the Post Office, the power house and Public Works Department. She visited the site for the new Government housing

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scheme and was most impressed with the quality of the buildings under construction. She also visited the Falkland Islands Government Air Service hangar and saw the Beaver being reassembled.

4 On the military side, Mrs Thatcher visited all Royal Air Force units at Stanley airport and saw the massive amount of work being done there by the Royal Engineers. She also visited the site for the floating hotel, the coastel, due to be moved into position shortly to relieve the tented accommodation on the airport; the Argentine minefield at Rookery Bay; the new camp under construction by 69 Gurkha Field Squadron at Navy Point; the Royal Air Force Search and Rescue Detachment at the Camber; the Army Post Squadron; the military bakery and the Army Post Office. In the settlements, she visited 129 Field Battery, Royal Artillery, at Fitzroy; Y Company of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Hampshire Regiment, at Goose Green; the forward operating base for Harriers, the Royal Air Force Chinook detachment and the support platoon of the Royal Hampshire Regiment at Port San Carlos; the new camp under construction by 51 Field Squadron, Royal Engineers at San Carlos; the Gurkha Royal Military Academy Sandhurst Demonstration Company at Port Howard and A Company of the 1st Battalion the Royal Hampshire Regiment at Fox Bay East. At sea, she visited HMS ANTRIM, HMS CHARYBDIS, RFA FORT GRANGE and Stena Inspector.

5 During her stay, the Prime Minister laid wreaths at the Cross of Sacrifice in Stanley, Blue Beach War Cemetery at San Carlos, the grave of Lieutenant Taylor RN at Goose Green and that of Captain Hamilton, The Green Howards, at Port Howard. Sir John Fieldhouse also laid wreaths on behalf of the Armed Forces. Early on the last morning of her visit Mrs Thatcher walked in the wind and rain through

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Argentine positions on Mount Tumbledown while the Military Commissioner described the events of 13 June, when the Scots Guards successfully stormed the defences, thus opening the way to Stanley. Seeing the difficult terrain, she marvelled that they had ever been able to take Tumbledown. She also saw the main landing beach at San Carlos and the place where survivors from the Sir Galahad and Sir Tristram were landed at Fitzroy. She saw from the air the precarious position of the 2nd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, during their attack on Darwin and Goose Green.

6 Perhaps the most emotional moment of all came when the Islands' Financial Secretary, the Honourable Harold Rowlands, conferred upon Mrs Thatcher the freedom of the Falkland Islands at a public reception in Stanley Town Hall, attended by practically all the civilian residents of Stanley. As the senior Falkland Islander in Government service, Harold Rowlands remained in Stanley during the Argentine occupation and administered the Government in the absence of myself and the Chief Secretary. He echoed the sentiments of all Falkland Islanders in expressing his pleasure at being able to thank Mrs Thatcher in person for the liberation of the Falkland Islands. He described the occasion as the greatest moment in his life. He thanked her not only for the liberation of the Islands but also for the rehabilitation and development of the Islands. He pledged Islanders to build a better future and thus to ensure that the battle had been worthwhile and that the men whose lives had been lost would be remembered. I am assured that Mrs Thatcher's reply received the most enthusiastic reception ever witnessed in the Falkland Islands. The biggest cheer came when she said, "Today again the Union Jack flies over Port Stanley, and may it ever fly there." This had

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particular significance for me as it was in the same Town Hall that on the 2nd of April General Garcia told me that the Argentines would stay on the Islands forever.

7 At her meeting with Legislative and Executive Councillors, Mrs Thatcher learned from senior Councillor William Goss how the Argentines had tried to tempt Islanders by offering to leave them strictly alone in return for an Argentine presence in the Falkland Islands. But Councillor Goss would have none of it and told the Argentines he was confident that the British task force would liberate the Islanders. He said that, when the people of Stanley heard the task force shelling the Argentine positions around town, the sound was sweet music to their ears. The last three days of the campaign had been the most worrying, but it was a most remarkable achievement that Stanley had been recovered with the loss of only three civilian lives, especially when it was considered that the Argentines had taken up military positions in the town. In reply, the Prime Minister said that she hoped that the experience of the invasion would never be repeated, but those who had been involved could take pride in what had been achieved, including the effect on Britain itself. Each Councillor in turn thanked Mrs Thatcher and the members of the task force for restoring the Islanders' freedom.

8 Turning to the future, the Prime Minister suggested that Councillors should discuss what now had to be done to build a future of which not only the British Government and the Islanders but also the families of those who had fought could be proud. Councillor Tony Blake thought that the key to improving the Islands' agriculture was the breaking-up of the present large holdings into family farms which would be developed not for current profit but for long-term capital improvement: his New Zealand experience had shown how

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successful this was. Councillor Tim Blake agreed that the present form of farming was ceasing to be profitable, but considered that the best answer for the Colony was diversification. He favoured the development of the Islands' deep sea fisheries, using the 150 mile protection zone in which to license fishing. Other Councillors saw the potential of tourism but recognised the difficulties in the absence of a civilian air link with Latin America. There was further scope for philately and the presence of a large military garrison provided opportunities for employment and a market for fresh meat and vegetables. Councillors realised that the first six months since liberation had been taken up with rehabilitation, but they were now looking forward to development in the light of the Shackleton report, on which they were grateful to Her Majesty's Government for their generous response. They were totally committed to building a brighter economic future for the Islands. Britain had provided the necessary security and pledged the desired development funds: it was now up to the Islanders to make the most of the opportunities thus created. The Prime Minister suggested that it would be helpful to set a timetable for as many as possible of the various goals.

9 Turning to political development, Councillors emphasised that no Islander had any wish to resume negotiations with the Argentines for as long as the Argentines equated negotiations with the transfer of sovereignty. The Prime Minister agreed. The problem was that Argentina would not be prepared to have discussions except about sovereignty and, because this was unacceptable, it prevented discussion on other areas of cooperation. Councillor Tim Blake explained the work being done by his Select Committee on the

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structure of the Falkland Islands Government. He hoped that by July proposals would be produced for modifying the internal constitution of the Islands and the electoral procedures, but he stressed that his committee had no intention of formulating proposals about the Islands' future relationship with Britain.

10 The Prime Minister had wide-ranging discussions with the Military Commissioner and his staff on force levels, deployment, the nature of the threat and military relationships with the civilian population. She complimented Major-General Thorne on the progress so far achieved, and offered any further help that he might need. She was particularly concerned about the vulnerability of a single runway and hoped for an early decision on the siting of a future permanent airport. She was concerned also about the welfare of the garrison and hoped that the objective of having most of them out of tented accommodation by the austral winter would be achieved. She expressed concern about the state of the roads in Stanley and to the airport and recognised the need to employ a civilian contractor from the United Kingdom as soon as possible to prevent a complete breakdown in road surfaces during the coming winter.

11 During her visit to the schools in Stanley the Prime Minister expressed her concern over the interruption in education for the children in Camp caused by the Argentine occupation. Secondary school-children had missed almost a year of formal education and she agreed that it was essential to provide accommodation for them in Stanley by the beginning of the school year. She also recognised the need for more travelling teachers in Camp. She suggested that we might consider reducing the 5 years' apprenticeship now being

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erved by trainee artisans in view of the difficulties of binding young persons for so long when labour was short and hourly paid unskilled workers could earn more than apprentices.

12 Coverage of the visit by the media was extensive and facilitated by the provision of a Chinook helicopter to carry both the press and the Prime Minister's military escort. A combined effort by the Falkland Islands Broadcasting Service and the British Forces Broadcasting Service produced an edited version of the day's events every evening on the local radio, and international coverage was augmented by the arrival on the second day of the visit of an ITN team and other journalists from Britain. Microphones and cameras were thrust in front of the Prime Minister wherever she went and she sustained the barrage with unflinching good humour and patience. To confuse journalists on the date of departure, she postponed a press conference scheduled for the last evening but managed to speak to British journalists on board one of HM Ships and give a special interview to the local Penguin News and the Falkland Islands Broadcasting Service without arousing suspicion.

13 The configuration of the Hercules used for the long and arduous flight from Ascension to Stanley restricted the Prime Minister's party to her Principal Private Secretary, Mr Robin Butler, a Private Secretary, Mr John Coles, her Press Secretary, Mr Bernard Ingham, and a duty clerk, Mr Alan Logan. This meant that my FCO staff bore the brunt of the clerical and communications work and the Royal Military Police were entirely responsible for Mrs Thatcher's personal protection. A platoon of the Royal Hampshire Regiment was also on hand at instant readiness, and Blowpipe detachments were

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employed ahead of her during her settlements tour. I should like to pay tribute to them all for the efficient and unobtrusive way in which they performed their respective duties. I should also like to record my thanks for the magnificent support given by Major-General Thorne and his staff at all stages in the preparation and implementation of the programme. The security forces were kept in a state of high alert for the duration of the visit and every precaution was taken to meet any retaliatory act that the Argentines might have been tempted to take.

14 The Prime Minister left as she had come, in great secrecy, and was well out of range of the mainland before the news of her departure was released.

15 I was advised by Sir Robert Armstrong that Mrs Thatcher did not like much spare time on visits such as this. The Military Commissioner and I packed as much into the programme as we possibly could and, in the event, left her with no spare time at all. I am confident from her obvious enjoyment, however, that she would not have wished it otherwise. The visit was an intensely moving experience for us all. Mrs Thatcher said that she had been deeply touched by the warmth and kindness of the welcome she had received everywhere she went and from everyone she had met. She said she knew that what was being expressed to her was the loyalty of the Falkland Islanders to Britain and their gratitude for the professionalism and gallantry of the task force in freeing the Falkland Islands from the domination of an invader. But this was only part of the story: what Islanders were also expressing was their undying gratitude to Mrs Thatcher for sending the task force. Many of them believe that, had she not been Prime Minister, the task force would never have sailed and they would

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have remained under Argentine domination.

16 In coming 8000 miles to see for herself, the Prime Minister has boosted morale on these Islands as nothing else could. The residents of this shabby, shell-shocked and overcrowded town needed a tonic: a visit from the Prime Minister was the perfect medicine. Like the Argentine invasion, they can now hardly believe that it has happened; but whereas the invasion was a ghastly nightmare, the Prime Minister's visit was a joyful dream. Islanders will now look forward to the future with more confidence, sure in the knowledge that they have a staunch champion of their cause at the helm in London.

17 I am sending copies of this despatch to Her Majesty's Ambassadors at Washington, Santiago, Montevideo, Brasilia, the UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations and to the Head of the British Interests Section, Swiss Embassy, Buenos Aires.

I am Sir

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rex Hunt', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Sir Rex Hunt

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PROGRAMME FOR THE VISIT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE RT HON MRS  
MARGARET THATCHER, TO THE FALKLAND ISLANDS. 8-12 JANUARY 1983

Saturday 8 January

- 1700 Arrive Stanley Airport. Met by Civil Commissioner &  
Lady Hunt, Military Commissioner, Chief Secretary  
& Mrs Baker, SRAFOFI Group Captain Wilson
- 1830 Briefing by Military Commissioner. In attendance  
SNOFI Captain D S Dobson RN and SRAFOFI
- 2030 Dinner at Government House

Sunday 9 January

- 0915 Fly from Triangle to RAF Stanley: met by SRAFOFI
- 0925 Visit RAF Stanley including engineer works  
0930-0945 Briefing  
0945-0950 View airfield from ATC  
0950-1005 Drive through Admin/Engineering complex  
1005-1010 Drive down runway  
1010-1020 view HARRIER  
1020-1030 view PHANTOM  
1030-1035 visit rock crusher  
1035-1040 drive past quarry to Coastel site  
1040-1050 visit Coastel  
1100-1110 visit FIADGE
- 1145 • Attend meeting of Executive and Legislative  
Councils at Government House
- 1245 • Lunch with Councillors at Government House
- 1500 • Briefing on bomb disposal and mine clearance
- 1515 Visit minefield at Rookery Bay
- 1545 Fly to Navy Point
- 1555 Visit RAF Search & Rescue Detachment
- 1605 Visit 69 Gurkha Field Squadron
- 1635 Visit Camber Jetty area
- 1700 Visit Port Squadron
- 1725 Visit Bakery
- 1740 Visit Field Post Office and Stanley Post Office and  
Philatelic Bureau
- 1755 Return to Government House

Sunday 9 January contd

1845 Lay wreath at Cross of Sacrifice  
1700 Attend Evensong, Christchurch Cathedral  
2030 Attend Dinner at Britannia House

Monday 10 January

0830 Depart Triangle for Fitzroy  
0847-0945 Visit Fitzroy  
0847-0910 Visit Settlement: met by The Hon R E Binnie  
0915-0940 Visit 129 Field Battery: met by Major S Hamilton  
0945 Fly to Goose Green (fly over Darwin)  
1010-1125 Visit Goose Green: met by Mr E M Goss, Mr B Hardcastle,  
Lt Col D H Neville, Royal Hampshires  
1010-1020 Visit Cemetery  
1025-1055 Visit Settlement  
1055-1120 Visit Y Company 1 Royal Hampshires  
1125 Fly to Port San Carlos  
1145-1240 Visit Port San Carlos: met by Mr A Miller  
1145-1155 visit HARRIER FOB  
1155-1200 visit Royal Hampshires  
1205-1225 visit Settlement  
1225-1240 visit CHINOOK: met by Wg Cdr M Meyer  
1240 Fly to San Carlos  
1255-1405 Visit San Carlos: met by Mr P Short, Major E C D Carter  
1255-1345 Lunch  
1345-1405 Visit Blue Beach Cemetery  
1405 Fly to Kelly's Garden Camp  
1415-1430 Visit Kellys Garden Camp: met by Major D Stephenson  
1430 Fly to Port Howard (fly over Ajax Bay)  
1452-1520 Visit Port Howard Settlement: met by Mr R Lee  
1520 Fly to Cemetery  
1530-1545 Lay wreath and visit Gurkhas  
1545 Fly to Fox Bay East  
1612-1705 Visit Fox Bay East  
1612-1640: visit Settlement: met by Mr R Cockwell  
1640-1705: visit A company R Hampshires: met by Major Hughes  
1820 Return to Government House



Monday 10 January contd

1910-2030 Attend Reception in Stanley Town Hall  
2100 Dinner at Government House

Tuesday 11 January

0915-1145 Visit Rehabilitation works in Stanley, schools  
and Hospital.  
0915-0925 visit Public Works Department yard.  
Carpenter's Shop and Metal Workers Shop  
0930-0945 visit new housing estate, Race Course Road  
0950-1000 visit Beaver Hangar  
1005-1015 visit Power Station  
1020-1110 visit Senior and Junior Schools and Camp  
Education Department  
1115-1145 visit Hospital  
  
1220 Depart Triangle  
  
1250-1430 visit HMS ANTRIM  
  
1520-1545 visit RFA FORT GRANGE  
  
1555-1620 visit STENA INSPECTOR  
  
1620-1645 visit HMS CHARYBDIS  
  
1700 Return to Government House  
  
1915-2030 Drinks at Government House  
  
2100 Dinner at Britannia House

Wednesday 12 January

0545 Depart Triangle by Sea King  
0600-0630 Visit Mount Tumbledown  
0640-0710 Visit Seal Point  
0715 Breakfast Government House  
0740 Depart Triangle by Sea King  
0800 Stanley airport (engine trouble)  
0930 Depart Stanley Airport