



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 01-218 2111/3

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14th April 1988

Dear Nigel,

Thank you for your letter of ³⁰ March about visits to graves in the Falklands. It may be helpful if I explain the background to the Falklands Families Association (FFA)'s request.

All next of kin, plus one companion, have had the opportunity to visit graves in the Falklands at the MOD's expense. Most undertook these "official" pilgrimages in 1983. A few were unable to go then and did so later. One or two next of kin, because of their personal circumstances have yet to go, but will have the opportunity to do so, again at MOD expense. They may accompany the FFA party if the FFA's 1989 visit takes place.

In addition to the "official" next-of-kin visits, the FFA organised a visit in April 1986. Some of the visitors had already visited the Falklands under the official scheme. Some were relatives who were ineligible for the official visit - for example the parents of married Servicemen whose wives and children had already visited. The MOD was unable completely to waive travel costs for the FFA visitors but was able to help by charging the lowest economic "duty" rate for the return flight to the Falklands. It also proved possible to reduce very substantially the cost to the FFA of travel within the Falklands as they were able to take passage in ships which were performing their normal duties and in helicopters which were also, in part, fulfilling official duties. The Chairman of the FFA, Mr Des Keoghane, was appreciative of the help given by the MOD.

The FFA is now in the early stages of planning a further visit to the Falklands in October or November 1989. Mr Keoghane wrote to the MOD on 16 January to ask if the MOD could help by again charging the lowest concessionary air fare. This has been agreed: the standard economy fare is £1850 return; by booking in advance and accepting cancellation penalties this fare can be reduced to £1,150 (APEX); a third "duty" fare of £800 which is not normally available to the general public is available to other Government Departments and is offered to Falkland Islanders and others where the flight is

Nigel Wicks Esq
10 Downing Street



deemed to be in the public interest. This "duty" rate of £800 return has again been offered to the FFA. No commitment can be given at this stage to the charges which may be levied for travel by Service transport within the Falklands. As before, the Services will help if they can, but charges will have to be levied at least on an extra cost basis for special visits by Service or contract transport.

I would add one further consideration as far as the MOD is concerned - that we should not be seen to be offering to the families of those who died in the Falklands facilities that we do not offer to the families of those who have been killed in other theatres.

Turning to the question of assistance from the South Atlantic Fund, as you are aware, the Trustees cannot make a block grant to the FFA toward the cost of visits as the FFA is not a registered charity. I understand that the Trustees have also considered whether they might, on an individual basis, subsidise therapeutic visits to the Falklands by next of kin if justified by psychiatric reports: however this approach is fraught with difficulty and it seems unlikely that this will be pursued. The latest development is that Mr Michael Mates, MP is seeking professional advice with the aim of obtaining charitable status for the FFA, thus enabling the Trustees to make a block grant to the FFA if they wished, which could be used to help defray travel costs of visits to war graves. The Trustees would still have to be satisfied as to the existence of need: this could be difficult to establish in the case of, for example, second or third visits to the Falklands for those who were not next of kin or dependants. It will be some time yet before the Trustees will be in a position to take a final decision.

To sum up, the MOD will help the FFA with travel arrangements for the FFA's projected 1989 visit as far as possible and will reduce charges to the minimum level compatible with the requirements of public accountability. Under the terms of the South Atlantic Fund's Trust Deed it is not possible for the Trustees to make a grant to the Falkland Families Association for a visit which is desirable, but falls short of necessity. However, if the Falklands Families Association is granted Charitable Status the Trustees of the SAF will then consider whether a block grant might be made to the Association to assist with a further visit.

I hope this is helpful in explaining the situation.

Yours aff,

(W C CLARK)
Private Secretary

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