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BRITISH ANTARCTIC
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SURVEY ARCHIVES

# BRITISH ANTARCTIC SURVEY

Description of events concerning the ship  
'Bahia Buen Suceso' at South Georgia

RK Handland

Distribution:

Parts of these notes refer to papers previously classified as;

SECRET

DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS CONCERNING THE SHIP 'BAHIA BUEN SUCESO'  
AT SOUTH GEORGIA.

Prepared for;       Magistrate, South Georgia.  
Prepared by;       Headland, R.M. 23-III-1982.

Distribution;       Original, . . . . . Magistrate, for K.E.P. file.  
Copy 1, . . . . . H.E.C.F.I. for information.  
                          2, . . . . . Master H.M.S. Endurance.

ACCOUNT OF EVENTS FROM 16 - III - 1982, DAVIDHOFF AFFAIR.

1. The South Georgia Magistrate made an inspection of Leith Harbour and was transported there by one of H.M.S. Endurance's helicopters. No ships were detected. A notice, previously prepared on base, was deposited in the Villa. It was about 1m x 80cm, white with prominent red and black lettering and read 'BRITISH ANTARCTIC SURVEY...LEITH FIELD STATION...UNAUTHORISED ENTRY PROHIBITED..ENTRADA PROHIBIDA SIN AUTORISACION ' thence the same last line in russian, polish and french. 16-III 82

2. A field party was despatched to Carlita Bay to procede to Leith to put in order, repair, generally improve, etc the new B.A.S. depot in the Customs House at Leith. The old depot was to be removed and it was intended that the notice be displayed outside the new one. Some spanish communications were heard on channel 16 V.H.F. that day (18 - III).

3. The field party discovered the ship Bahia Buen Suceso in Leith Harbour and reported to Grytviken at 16:30 on 19 - III. Details were obtained and transmitted to H.E.G.F.I. by a radio link established to H.M.S. Endurance. The Cable and Wireless pre-arranged emergency listening frequency appeared not to have been attended as contact could not be established with them, two hours were lost in consequence, M/0387/82 refers. At approximately 20:30 the Director of B.A.S., then on board R.R.S. Bransfield was informed in as far as possible in plain language. Communication with H.E.G.F.I. and H.M.S. Endurance was maintained to 01:00 on the 20th, details were passed and another contact arranged for 07:00, 20th.

4. The field party was contacted again on the 20th at 07:00 and asked to stand by while information was received from Stanley. A communication from H.E.G.F.I. was then received and relayed to the ship by the field party. It was received by a person describing himself as 'Captain Briatore'. There had been shooting the previous evening and again in the morning, probably to take reindeer. Owing to this and other circumstances the field party returned, as ordered by the Magistrate, to Carlita Bay for collection.

5. A detailed account of their observations was prepared after an interview at Grytviken and is attached as is a copy of the communication relayed from H.E.G.F.I.

ACCOUNT OF INTERVIEW OF LEITH HARBOUR FIELD PARTY 16:15 20 - III - 1982.

The party, consisting of four men (T. Edwards, B. Lockwood, N. Shaw and R. Banner), had been collected from Carlita Bay at 14:00 and returned to King Edward Point at 15:40.

The party approached Leith Harbour from Stromness by crossing the dividing hills near Hansen Point, at about 14:30 on 19 - III - 82. From the top of the pass a ship was noticed moored alongside the pier near the Villa. The party continued to the station and was met by two men near the cemetery bridge. Greetings were exchanged but no other communication owing to lack of english by the Argentines. The party continued to the whaling station being followed by the 'greaters'. They arrived at the Villa and entered. A table set for twelve and a similar number of men were found. A reindeer was being barbecued outside. About fifty men were in the vicinity, some wearing civilian clothes and others in 'para-military' 'Alpine' type white uniforms. An Argentine flag was flying from outside an adjacent switch tower. The British Antarctic Survey notice was seen where it had been deposited on 16th but it had been defaced; Argentine being substituted for British.

Two of the party (T.E. and N.S.) proceeded to the ship, Bahia Buen Suceso, and asked for the Captain. They went on board and informed the Captain that they represented the British Antarctic Survey, that his presence at Leith Harbour was illegal under Maritime and Falkland Islands law and that he should proceed to Grytvikon, the port of entry, immediately. The Captain counter-claimed that he had clearance from the British Foreign Office, two days ago, to go directly to Leith. He was reminded that the Villa was B.A.S. accommodation and contained food etc for B.A.S. use. An offer was received to provide food and accommodation on board which was declined.

The party re-joined outside the Villa. It had been noted that a powerful radio transmitter was installed there and that preparations for establishing an electricity supply were underway.

The party proceeded to the Customs House where the outer door was found recently smashed in and six of the eight B.A.S. food boxes opened with their contents in disorder. Another offer of accommodation, from the Villa group, was received and declined. The illegality of shooting Reindeer was indicated at this time. No pots etc were in the Customs House and after an unsuccessful attempt to obtain these from the Villa some usable things were gathered from the abandoned whaling station mess.

At about 16:30 a radio contact was made to Grytvikken when details were briefly given and another contact arranged for 17:10. At this time about five shots were heard at ten minute intervals. Despite much local inquisitiveness the party remained the night in the Customs House, in radio contact to 23:00.

They arose at 05:30 breakfasted and resumed radio contact at 07:00 and, at the request of Grytvikken again at 07:30 when the message from H.B.G.F.I. (copy attached) for the ship was passed. The message was prepared by T.E. and taken to the foot of the gangway where an english-speaking officer was asked for. 'Captain Briatore' arrived and the message was received and understood. T.E. was informed that Davidhoff was not on board and that the ship had presents (fresh fruit and vegetables) from him for the British Antarctic Survey. He advised that the ship should procede to Grytvikken to deliver these. Information was also obtained that the shore party (twelve men in the Villa ?) intended to remain about sixteen weeks. No information about the ship's movements was forthcoming.

It was noticed that more bunks had been established in the Villa and that work had commenced very early. In the vicinity were three arc welders, two launches, a large cargo container<sup>SD-11C</sup>, at least thirty-five people and it was noticed that a pipeline (water or fuel) was being connected and the ship's cranes were in use.

The party departed at 08:15 after securing a cupboard and internal door of the Customs House with pad-locks. The Argentine flag was lowered at about this time. While departing and passing through the station several small fires were seen and it appeared that a large number of roughly dressed workers were being left to more or less fend for themselves with little supervision. Many of them appeared to be privately looting. Another two shots were heard.

The party proceeded to Husvik and Carlita Bay for collection without incident. They were in regular radio contact during the day.

Account prepared by R.K. Headland. Seen and concurred with by: S.E. B.L. N.Shaw R.Banner.  
T. Edwards. B. Lockwood. N. Shaw. R. Banner.

5/7

MESSAGE RECEIVED FROM H.E.G.F.I. FOR TRANSMISSION TO LEITH HARBOUR  
FIELD PARTY FOR THE ARGENTINE SHIP:

YOU HAVE LANDED ILLEGALLY AT LEITH WITHOUT OBTAINING PROPER CLEARANCE.

YOU AND YOUR PARTY MUST GO BACK ON BOARD THE BAHIA BUEN SUCESO IMMEDIATELY  
AND REPORT TO THE BASE COMMANDER GRITVIKEN FOR FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS.

YOU MUST REMOVE THE ARGENTINE FLAG FROM LEITH.

YOU MUST NOT INTERFERE WITH THE BRITISH ANTARCTIC SURVEY DEPOT AT LEITH.

YOU MUST NOT ALTER OR DEFACE THE NOTICES AT LEITH.

NO MILITARY PERSONNEL ARE ALLOWED TO LAND ON SOUTH GEORGIA.

NO FIRE ARMS ARE TO BE TAKEN ASHORE.

ENDS.

The message was delivered by Trefor Edwards to 'Captain Briatore'  
at 08:00 on 20 - III -1982

6. Details were passed to H.M.S. Endurance on the evening of 20th. The Magistrate was asked about the possibility of keeping the ship under observation and advised that the matter was considered vital. It was suggested that observations could be made from the pass over Jason Harbour. This was agreed and a party was arranged to depart on the 21st.

7. The Director was advised of developments and concurred with what was intended. An observation party, R.K. Headland and P.Stark, was stationed on the pass at about 11:30. They were equipped with binoculars, a squadcall transceiver and a V.H.F. set. The Bahia Buen Suceso was seen clearly at Leith, in the same place as described by the field party. Occasional emissions of smoke occurred throughout the day. Owing to the position of the ship most shore activity was obscured from view. One of the observation party was fluent in spanish and monitored the ship to shore V.H.F. communications. From this it was determined the shore party had invited the ships captain to lunch, that fueling of the shore base was to be completed before the ships intended departure at 16:00, and that it was intended to shoot another reindeer as the skin on a former was of poor quality. This was relayed to Grytviiken and thence to H.M.S. Endurance generally within the hour. Surveillance was maintained to 18:00 that evening, N. Shaw replaced R.K.H. in the afternoon (16:00). The observation party spent the night at Jason Harbour hut and reported a ships siren sounding at about 19:00. This was probably the departure of the ship, a little late.

8. The observation party climbed the pass early on the 22nd. They reported that the ship had sailed and were asked to remain at their post.

9. The French yacht, 'Cinq Gars Pour', which had arrived at Grytviiken on 14 - III, was cautioned by the Magistrate not to procede to Stromness Bay and reminded that permission must be obtained to visit most areas of the island and provided with a copy of the Conservation Ordinance of 1975. Completely disregarding this she sailed from King Edward Cove at about 09:30 and was seen by the observation party in Stromness Bay at 10:45. She sailed directly to the jetty at Leith where six of the shore party were waiting to receive her. She rendered assistance in recovering a lost small-craft for the shore party and later moored against the Leith Jetty.

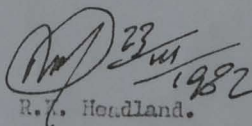
10. All available slides and photographs were developed and printed at Grytviiken that evening. They were prepared for display on H.M.S. Endurance's arrival.

11. The observation party described operations involving 2001 oil drums and a sort of tractor with a yellow crane arm in operation. No more than six men were seen on the Leith jetty at any time. The craft which the French rescued was described as a red landing barge, it had apparently got loose and blown towards the Busen Peninsula near the shore below the observation party's location. The wind direction at the time was appropriate for this. A red launch was also seen against the Leith jetty. The observation party was collected from Jason Harbour in the evening of 22nd.

12. At the request of H.M.S. Endurance the observation post was manned again on the 23rd. Everything (including the yacht) present previously remained. An attempt to contact the yacht by V.H.F. to order her return to Grytviken met no response. Deterioration in the weather rendered observations impossible at about 12:00 and the field party returned to Jason Harbour hut.

13. Liason with the Director was maintained on 23rd and it was noted that events on South Georgia were described on the B.B.C. world service. B.A.S. and I.T.V. field parties around the island were kept informed of events during their normal radio contacts.

14. At 13:00 on 23-III/<sup>st</sup> signal was received from H.F.G.F.I. It was decyphered by 14:00 and this report completed shortly afterwards awaiting tomorrows events.

  
R. J. Headland.

Report seen; *S.M.*

S. Martin.  
Magistrate.  
23 - III - 1982.