

PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT ON DEPLOYMENT OF 5 BRIGADE AND REQUISITION OF QE2

(Noon 3rd May 1982)

As part of our current plans 5 Infantry Brigade, having completed a period of training, are being brought to short notice to move forward to the South Atlantic area. The Brigade is stationed in the United Kingdom and is already earmarked for out of area duties. Authority has also been given to take up the shipping necessary to transport the Brigade and work to prepare the ships for this role is being set in hand.

This action is being taken because it is only prudent, when contemplating operations - of whatever kind - so far from the UK, to have reserves available nearer the theatre.

Among the ships being requisitioned is the QE2. The Ministry of Defence of course greatly regrets the inconvenience caused to intending passengers, but the QE2's speed, size and facilities make her uniquely suited to carry substantial numbers of troops who must be kept fit and ready for operations, should they be required.

At the same time as the QE2, we are requisitioning two roll-on-roll-off ferries, 'Baltic Ferry' and 'Nordic Ferry' and a container ship, 'Atlantic Causeway' which will be used to transport the helicopters needed for the air support of the brigade.

As you know a statement about the engagement between a British submarine and the Argentine cruiser General Belgrano was made this morning.

There is very little I can add to it. We do not expect further information for some time. What I can say is the cruiser was operating south of the Falkland Islands with two escort vessels. This group of warships presented a significant threat to our ships in the area of the Falkland Islands. The cruiser was hit by two torpedoes. According to our latest reports she had not sunk but we believe that she suffered severe damage.

In addition to air defence activity, ships of the Task Force have also been engaged on anti-submarine operations within the Total Exclusion Zone. Such operations are an essential part of enforcing the Zone.

Surveillance of the Zone continues by air and surface units of the Task Force both by day and night. It was during one such surveillance mission last night that a SEA KING was attacked by two Argentine Patrol craft type naval auxiliaries. Subsequently as I have already announced one of these craft was sunk, and the other damaged.

All our helicopters returned safely. Shortly after the attack, life saving equipment was dropped by helicopter close to the damaged vessel.