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FO 371/154804  
Return by (26/12/2009)  
7707667 (Ms Susanna van der Watt)

Closure status: Open  
S 14/11/2009 10:51:03

CLOSED  
UNTIL

154804

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West and Central African Department

J 1225/1

GENERAL

122

FROM G. Mmishy

SUBJECT:

SECRET

No. S-5708/S9

Dated Oct. 10

Received Oct. 12

Reconnaissance of the Prince Edward Islands,  
in the Southern Indian Ocean

References

MINUTES

Mr. Perry spoke to me about this; and I told him that, if the Air Ministry wanted an approach made to the S. African Govt. before November 1, they must apply to the C.R.O. He told me that he was going to do that.

(Printing Instructions)

154804

(Outward Action)

Mr Perry A. 14 18/10  
P. to Air Comd Chd 1/12

2. Meanwhile I know

nothing at all about the Prince Edward Islands and should be most grateful if-

(Action completed)

(Main Indexed)

AD  
A.

km  
14.2.63

1962  
J 1225/file

if you could give me  
some recent information  
about their status and  
(briefly) their history.

R. R. R.

13/10

Likiep

The early history of these islands & the grounds on which we regarded them as British territory is given at p. 123-125 of Conf. Print 16839.

In 1947 it was proposed that, in order to strengthen the British title, they sh<sup>d</sup>. be attached for administrative purposes to some British territory. [AS 548/8/51 1947]

The Union of S. Africa expressed an interest in the islands. They thought that military considerations made it necessary to strengthen the British claim to sovereignty, in view of their possible importance as a site for a meteorological and direction-finding station in the event of a direct air route being established between S. Africa and Australia. [AS 5064/8/51]

The transfer was effected on 29/10

Number of copies.....

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of enclosures.....

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN

Minutes  
29<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1947 (Marion Is.) and  
4<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1948 (Pr. Edward Is.)  
when the national flag of the  
Union was hoisted. A  
Proclamation was issued  
on 24<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1948 to the effect  
that H.M.G.'s sovereignty  
over the two islands was to  
be exercised by H.M.G. in the  
Union of S. Africa.

AS 312/16/51  
1948.

Notes were exchanged  
between the two Govts in  
Feb. 1949 confirming the  
transfer.

AS 1812/15227/51  
1949.

C. Wolfe  
11/10/61

halv

REF

17/10

RUSA to see c.c.  
20/10

THIS COPY  
THE ORIGINAL HAS REMAINED  
IN THE OFFICE OF THE  
SECTION  
IN THE RECORDS SECTION

A) Page Gen C.R. Price CRO to  
H.G.D. Ross Pretoria DEF 105111 cd 811

REF

22/11

TS 23

RUSA to see

Does the Librarian's note  
mean that these islands are no longer  
British territory?  
See ref.

he spoke.

T.M.H.  
27/11

Library (the matter)

P.V.S. 13 1/2

I attach the pp. on which my minute was based. They show that the rights, title & interests in the Islands which HMG in the U.K. formerly possessed were transferred to HMG in the Union of S. Africa. Now that there is no Government of H.M. in the Union I do not know what the position is. Is it in any way similar to that of the Mandated Territory of S.W. Africa which has, I believe, reverted to U.K. administration?

No

C. Woulfe  
30/11

Mr Waterfield shd also see

THIS IS A COPY  
THE ORIGINAL HAS BEEN RETAINED  
IN THE DEPARTMENT UNDER SECTION  
3(4) OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT 1958

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN

we shd  
like to be kept informed please  
W.C.A.D may have missed the  
genesis of this as they weren't  
really interested in S. Africa  
- defence last summer. Ref

The Chiefs of Staff, when  
 discussing the future defence  
 relations with S. Africa, were  
 exercised lest we lose the  
 all important strategic air  
 routes there. As an  
 alternative, and as part of  
 the general Air Ministry  
 for <sup>politically</sup> uninhibited air staging  
 posts, the COS invited the  
 Air Ministry to reconsider <sup>the</sup> Prince  
 Edward Islands. There was  
 some uninformed talk of  
 possibly buying or leasing the  
 Islands, if they proved useful.  
 (The CPO did not comment on  
 this except to endorse the  
 general understanding that the  
 Islands now belonged to  
 S. Africa). The Air Ministry  
 are now making their  
 reconnaissance, but I understand  
 informally that they haven't  
 much hope that the Islands  
 will /

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN

will be any use - too far South - too windy & cold etc. And in any case the COS will probably only need the islands if we lose S. African staging facilities, or did not, <sup>for political reasons,</sup> <sub>just</sub> them over a particular operation which requires a round Africa route. On the use of S. Africa for strategic air routes I shall be sending W&A a separate minute.

As regards Prince Edward Islands & relations with S. Africa P. & S. generally, subject to the political dept's judgment, support the Dir Min.

As regards jurisdiction over the Islands, Dir foxed. Libramp's minute seems to show further investigation, or probably legal advice, is required. I had no idea S.W. Africa had reverted to British admin. According to Sir Price's

Price's letter of March 16  
1960 the S. African  
Govt regards S.W Africa  
for most practical purposes  
as a part of the Union,  
while the U.N maintain it  
should be under U.N Trusteeship.  
Gov Price tells me that is  
still the position, as he understood  
it.

J. Waterford  
1. XII

Mr Faber.

S.W. Africa has not  
reverted to British  
administration. The position  
is as gov state in  
gov minute. The  
national flag of the  
Union was apparently  
hoisted in these islands,  
and <sup>at the time</sup> ~~these~~  
of the Union gov't. <sup>at the time</sup>  
was H.A.G. in the  
Union

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Union. I should have thought there could hardly be any question now that these islands were S. African. We apparently <sup>sought</sup> S. African agreement when we made the original photographic survey.

2. I doubt if it is worth seeking a legal opinion. I think we can only await S. African reactions to our latest démarche.

R. Fale

5/12

RSD (R. Waterfield)

libray <sup>aw</sup> 15/12

still Fale an opportunity to ask the Afri Uni what they are doing about the humanis - JML 18/12

REF 19712

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN



Euter soon J

SECRET

AIR MINISTRY,  
WHITEHALL,  
LONDON, S.W.1

tel: Trafalgar 8811  
Extn. 6190

Ref: S.5708/S.9

RECEIVED IN  
ARCHIVES  
12 OCT 1961  
J. P. S. /

10th October, 1961

Dear Faber,

I am writing to you about our making a reconnaissance of the Prince Edward Islands, in the Southern Indian Ocean.

The requirement for the reconnaissance stems from an examination we have been making of possible future re-inforcement routes in the event of our losing staging facilities on the African Continent. The Prince Edward Islands, which consist of two islands about 14 miles apart, Prince Edward Island and Marion Island, at 46° 38 minutes south, 37° 55 minutes east, would form a convenient stage between Ascension and either Mauritius, Gan or Perth. Both islands are uninhabited except for the 9 men of the South African Meteorological Research Station which has been on Marion Island since 1947.

We have, of course, studied all the material on the islands which we have been able to locate in London, including aerial photographs taken by Valiant Aircraft based on Cape Town. Unfortunately, the photographic cover obtained was limited because the aircraft were operating at extreme range and the islands are almost invariably cloud covered. Statistics show that there has been no completely cloudless day from October, 1950 to April, 1952. We have also obtained a number of photographs and charts through the Service Liaison Staff in Pretoria.

From this evidence, the prospects of establishing an airfield in the islands are not too bright. But we can only be sure by making a survey on the ground. We propose, therefore, to send out a small reconnaissance party of up to five surveyors and other experts, who are expected to take between two and three weeks to cover both islands. From their report, we should hope to be able to decide whether a further detailed survey is justified or whether the islands are clearly unsuitable for the purpose we have in mind.

I should be grateful for your help on the political aspects of such a reconnaissance. No doubt you will wish to consider whether there is any objection in principle to it and, of course, whether any formal approach to the South African Government will be necessary.

I understand that the most favourable weather conditions for the survey occur between now and March. We do not, therefore, have too much time before we shall have to get down to making firm arrangements and I should be most grateful for anything you can do to speed political clearance of the project.

Yours sincerely,

(L. G. PERRY)

R. S. Faber, Esq.,  
Foreign Office,  
London, S.W.1

Registry No. J 1825/1

Top Secret.  
Secret.  
Confidential.  
Restricted.  
Open.

RSF  
17/10

Draft Letter

To:  
Mr. L. G. Perry,  
Air Ministry.

From:  
Mr. Faber

Copy to:  
T. W. Aston, Esq.,  
C.R.O.

NOTHING TO BE WRITTEN IN THIS MARGIN.

RECEIVED  
DIVISION

RSD to  
see  
a-a.

RF  
17/10

187/11 187/12

+1 B

You spoke to me about your letter No. S.5708/S.9 of October 10 about the proposed reconnaissance of the Prince Edward Islands.

2. I explained to you that the Commonwealth Relations Office would be responsible for the conduct of our relations with South Africa until November 1. If there was any question of approaching the South African authorities before that date (as you thought there was) it would be for the C.R.O. to initiate action. *you said you would write to them.*

3. We shall not take any action ourselves unless we hear further from you or the C.R.O.

From our own point of view we do not see any reason why an approach should not be made to the South African Government (I gather that the Islands were transferred to the Union on December 29, 1947 and January 4, 1948); though it might be better to represent the reconnaissance as being of a more or less routine nature. It might be as well to stress that we were not very hopeful of results. During the forthcoming negotiations we do not want to give the South Africans too many reasons for regarding us as being dependent on their goodwill.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Aston in the C.R.O.

SECRET

FOREIGN OFFICE, S.W.1.

October 18, 1961.

You spoke to me about your letter No. S.5708/S.9 of October 10 about the proposed reconnaissance of the Prince Edward Islands.

2. I explained to you that the Commonwealth Relations Office would be responsible for the conduct of our relations with South Africa until November 1. If there was any question of approaching the South African authorities before that date (as you thought there was) it would be for the Commonwealth Relations Office to initiate action. You said you would write to them.

3. We shall not take any action ourselves unless we hear further from you or the Commonwealth Relations Office. From our own point of view we do not see any reason why an approach should be made to the South African Government (I gather that the Islands were transferred to the Union on December 29, 1947 and January 4, 1948); though it might be better to represent the reconnaissance as being of a more or less routine nature. It might be as well to stress that we were not very hopeful of results. During the forthcoming negotiations we do not want to give the South Africans too many reasons for regarding us as being dependent on their goodwill.

4. I am sending a copy of this letter to Aston in the Commonwealth Relations Office.

(R.S. Faber)

L.G. Perry, Esq.,  
Air Ministry.

SECRET

COMMONWEALTH RELATIONS OFFICE,  
DOWNING STREET, LONDON, S.W.1.

B., C.B.E.

*Rw*

R. S. Faber

COMMONWEALTH RELATIONS OFFICE,  
DOWNING STREET,  
LONDON, S.W.1.

8th November, 1961

*With the Compliments  
of*

Major General Price

RECEIVED IN  
ARCHIVES  
14 NOV 1961

*J1925/1A*

re correspondence about a  
the Prince Edward Group  
, SAZ.27/4/5 of the 25th  
ographic survey which the  
ing an R.A.F. Valiant  
You will doubtless have  
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to Air Commodore Rump  
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) correspondence, after  
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... was made after Rump had obtained clearance from  
the Department of External Affairs and reported to the Air  
Ministry (No.A/26 of 16th January). We also gather that  
South Africans were given copies of the rele...

COMMONWEALTH RELATIONS OFFICE,  
DOWNING STREET,  
LONDON, S.W.1.

DEF.105/1  
CONFIDENTIAL

8th November, 1961

Would you please refer to the correspondence about a survey of possible landing places in the Prince Edward Group resting with your predecessor's letter, SAZ.27/4/5 of the 25th October, 1960. It concerned the photographic survey which the Air Ministry proposed to carry out, using an R.A.F. Valiant operating from a base in South Africa. You will doubtless have had an opportunity of seeing the letter which Group Captain Griffiths at the Air Ministry has sent to Air Commodore Rump (no.1881/D.D.Ops.(A.T.)/1669 of the 23rd October).

2. Johnston's advice on the 1960 correspondence, after taking informal soundings, was that so long as we explained our purpose frankly it was unlikely that the South Africans would object either to the basing of the Valiant in South Africa or to the air survey. He thought that the South Africans should be given copies of the photographs obtained.

3. We so advised the Air Ministry and now understand that the survey was made after Rump had obtained clearance from the Department of External Affairs and reported to the Air Ministry (No.A/26 of 16th January). We also gather that the South Africans were given copies of the relevant photographs.

4. The Air Ministry say that the material has been studied, but that because of weather and other considerations it has only limited value. The information, supplemented by charts, etc., obtained through Rump's staff, indicates that the prospects of establishing an air field in the Prince Edward Islands are not very good, but a ground survey is necessary to confirm this. The Air Ministry therefore wish to send out a small reconnaissance party (of up to five surveyors and other experts) who would spend about three weeks reconnoitring Prince Edward and Marion Islands. Such a reconnaissance would enable a decision to be taken as to whether the islands are clearly unsuitable. They suggest that if this reconnaissance is agreed, their party might be carried to the islands on the South African vessel which serves the Marion Island Meteorological Research Station. As weather conditions are said to be most suitable between now and March, firm arrangements would need to be put in hand very shortly.

5. If, in the context of current defence discussions, the High Commissioner sees no objection, would he please make the necessary approach? Since we do not wish to give the South Africans too many reasons for regarding us as being dependent upon their goodwill, it might be best to represent this as being of a more or less routine nature, and to say that we are not very sanguine about the

results/.....

H. G. M. Bass, Esq.,  
PRETORIA.

CONFIDENTIAL

- 2 -

results. If on the other hand the High Commissioner feels any doubts about the wisdom of making an approach at this stage, will he then please say what course he advises?