

British handle crisis in usual grand style

by David S. Broder

WASHINGTON — How can we ever repay our debt to the British? Forget the ancient gifts of Magna Carta, Shakespeare and Stonehenge. Their generosity has never been greater than in this past year, nor have we ever needed them more.

In every season of our discontent, they provide the solace that we need to keep our sanity.

Last summer, when Washington was dying of heat and afflicted by a mad rush to dismantle government spending and taxes, the British gave us that most glorious exercise in official extravagance, the Royal Wedding. Their perfect antidote to the bookkeeper mentality of the David Stockmans of this world was the sight of those golden trumpeters and scarlet horsemen (outfitted at public expense), the glass coaches rolling by, and the Queen's ransom of fireworks shooting into the night sky to celebrate the nuptials of Charles and Diana.

In the autumn, when the economy slumped and the politicians began to duck and dodge, here came "Nicholas Nickleby" — eight-and-a-half hours of theatrical sport and splendor, a whole tapestry of colorful characters overflowing the stage, filling the aisles, enveloping the audience in their own love of language and life.

And then, in the endless winter, when rising unemployment and falling temperatures combined to produce suicidal impulses, there arrived the 11 episodes of "Brideshead Revisited," a constant inducement to hang in there just one more week.

From the splendors of Oxford and the revels of London to the decadence of Venice and North Africa, we followed Charles Ryder and the Marchmains through their temptations of flesh and spirit.

When, finally, Sir Laurence Olivier accepted the consolations of the church just before expiring at the end of the deliciously protracted deathbed scene, the timing was exquisite. To go from Olivier's final whispers and Charles' painful parting from Lady Julia just in time to switch the dial to the high drama of the Georgetown-North Carolina NCAA basketball final was to experience the most emotionally satisfying evening in television history. The absolution granted Lord Marchmain had its perfect real-life echo in Georgetown

coach John Thompson's protective embrace of the young player whose errant pass gave Carolina the championship. Soul-satisfying serendipity.

And now, when the world is about to jitter itself to pieces over the threat of nuclear war, here, once again, are the British riding to the rescue. The Falkland Islands caper is the perfect antidote to the tawdriness of high-tech international terror, and the shabby mess 20th century politicians make when they attempt the rites of statesmanship.

The British, bless them, have reminded everyone of what a crisis could be in a time like the 19th century, when great powers took the time and the care to savor the experience.

The British response to the Argentine takeover of that island remnant of empire has been perfect, absolutely perfect. The Queen's national security advisor has not been seen frantically scuttling from TV interview to TV interview in a demeaning effort to save his job. No, indeed. Lord Carrington submits a manly resignation to the prime minister in acknowledgement of the "humiliating" affront to the national dignity.

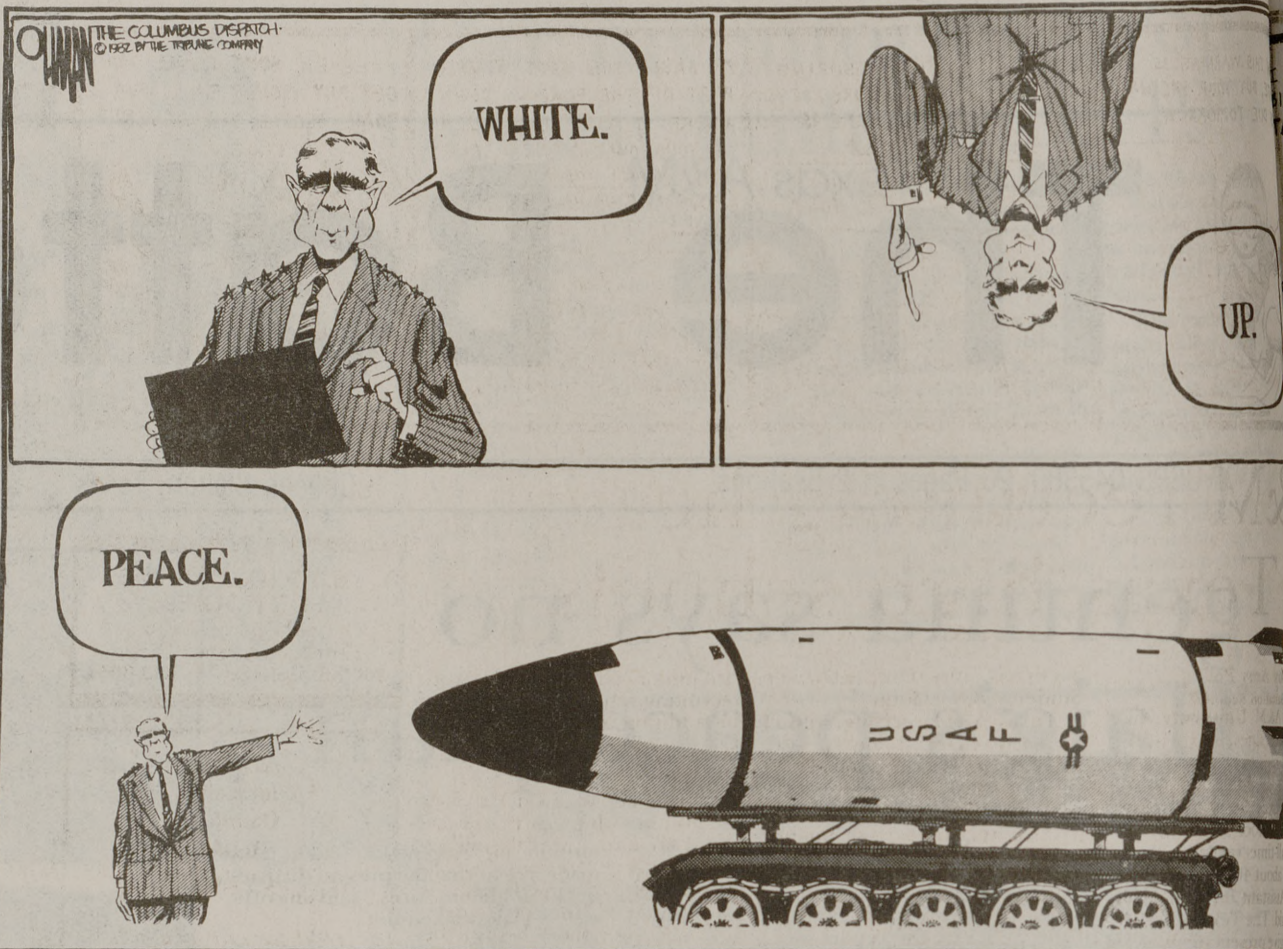
The prime minister accepts it with "a heave hear," and then launches an armada of fighting ships to "recover the Falklands for Britain." Margaret Thatcher, understanding the dramatic requirements of the moment, quotes Queen Victoria: "The possibility of failure does not exist."

But this so swift, stupid retaliatory strike — a launch-on-command of supersonic missiles carrying their destructive warheads through space before human judgement — has verified the provocation.

These are ships of the fleet, leaving Portsmouth with bands and bunting, to the cheers of the townspeople lining the quay. One need hardly mention that, of course, the Queen's son, dashing Prince Andrew, is aboard.

They will steam slowly towards the Falklands, allowing time for diplomacy — and for the drama to build. The race of people that staged the royal wedding, that gave Dickens' genius full rein on stage, that led us to the final moment of that leisurely saga of Brideshead just in time to see the duel of Patrick Ewing and (aptly named) James Worthy — such a people, I say, can be counted on to handle the Falklands crisis in style.

Bravo, Britain!



It's going to be one of those Erma Bombeck kind of days

Editor's note: The following story is true. The names have been changed to protect the innocent — and the single.

Erma Bombeck has been facing these problems all her life, but it's taking me a little time to get used to it.

A few innocent words, overheard and misunderstood, almost had me walking down the aisle. It was news to me — and to my "betrothed."

It was like that old game of "telephone" you used to play during recess in elementary school on rainy days. You know, the one where you whisper a message to the person next to you and by the time the last person gets it, the first person no longer can recognize the message.

It all started with a real phone conversation I was having with an old friend from high school. We were discussing all the things old friends usually discuss: who's getting married, who's having babies and who's getting divorced.

We also reminisced about old and new flames in our lives and I brought up an

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old beau, Mark, and the fact that we once had considered marriage. And now, years later, there is a new Mark on the scene. I even have to remind old friends that even though the name hasn't changed, the person has. Eavesdroppers would have to listen closely to make the distinction.

Unfortunately, they didn't listen closely enough.

In a matter of hours, the news of my overheard "engagement" spread among my friends. Friend A told Friend B, who told Friend C. They all agreed that it was strange that Mark (new) and I were keep-

ing our engagement quiet, but it was not strange enough because they never asked me.

But it's all harmless enough. Right. Until Friend C called my mother to offer congratulations on impending nuptials. It was definitely news to her.

When Mark got home that night, his mother confronted him, wanting to know why he hadn't told her he was getting married. It was definitely news to him.

Mark called me and wanted to know why I hadn't told him we were married. It was definitely news to me.

We finally traced the "news" to the source and set everyone, including Mark's mother, straight about our actual status.

If there is a moral to be gleaned from this story of overheard, exaggerated, riage, then it must be this: If you're to eavesdrop, get it right. And if you think the news sounds strange, call before you call my mother.

Slouch By Jim Earle



"He values his privacy when he's on the phone."

the small society by Brickman



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Tearful reunion for war 'orphans'

by Antonio Kamiya
United Press International

TOKYO — The Japanese recently received a tearful reminder of their war with China and the chaotic days following World War II.

Television and newspapers focused day after day on the plight of a group of 60 Japanese "war orphans" who came from China on a government-sponsored trip to search for their long-lost relatives.

They are among thousands of Japanese who were displaced in northern China 37 years ago.

They returned to their homeland with tales that stirred the nation to tears.

Some spoke of social ostracism, others of political persecution, but most expressed their desire "to return in the armfold of the motherland."

One 42-year-old woman and her father were reunited through matching accounts of how they shared a meal of horsemeat after the father killed the animal during a long journey from the Manchurian hinterlands to Fushun, a coal mining town in northeast China.

"This is the most happy moment in my life," said the 77-year-old father, hugging his sobbing daughter with trembling hands before a battery of press cameras.

Like others, they were meeting at a reunion session organized by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, sponsors of the two-week trip for the 30 men and an equal number of women from Liaoning and Heilongjiang.

To buttress their skimpy childhood recollections, the "orphans" brought along every bit of evidence they could muster — mostly a few fading snapshots.

Brought up by Chinese foster parents, they no longer speak Japanese and some cannot even remember their Japanese names or the name of their parents.

All 60 who came to Japan in search of their kin were issued an official Chinese document that certifies the bearer as a "person of Japanese descent."

The document entitles the person to official Japanese help in tracing relatives in Japan and, failing that, a chance to

settle in the country.

"That's the basic document of identity that we act upon," said a Welfare Ministry official. "And in our files we have about 900 people asking for our help to locate their Japanese parents."

These Japanese descendants are eager to return, they said, because they are still haunted by memories of persecution before Tokyo normalized diplomatic relations with Peking in 1972.

But most of them refused to enter specific charges beyond a general reference to "persecution" during the now-discredited Cultural Revolution. At that time they were harassed by the Red Guards and ostracized at their work places, many of them said.

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