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 Date: 16 August 2007

Dear XX XXXXXXXX,

**Request For Information – Various Incidents Involving Nuclear Weapons**

Further to my letter of 20 July 2007, concerning your request for draft or final unpublished reports investigating four incidents, I can confirm that the consultation with subject matter experts in relation to the reports that we hold is now complete.

The following information falls within the scope of your request:

June 1985 near Glasgow

- Special Weapons Incident Report. Reference: RN/AWRE/92A/5123 – dated 6 November 1985.
- Special Weapons Incident at Helensburgh on 20 June 1985. Reference: D/SSC/CPT/7001 – dated 10 July 1985.
- Special Weapons Incident Report. Reference: D/SSC/CPT/7001 – dated 30 June 1985.
- Phase 2 Examination of 2 A3TK REBs involved in convoy vehicle incident at Helensburgh on 20/6/85. Reference: SDE/2065/JLD/127 – dated 21 August 1985.

January 1987 in Wiltshire

- TCHD Accident - West Dean 10.1.87 – AWRE View. Reference: SDE/PFG/105/07 – dated 16 January 1987.
- RAE Report on Dean Hill Incident. Reference: RAE/14/3/18 - undated.
- Military Convoy Accident, 10 January – Report of the Board of Inquiry. Reference: D/ACDS(Pol/Nuc)211/2/19/1 dated 20 March 1987.
- Board of Inquiry into West Dean Incident held at RAF Support Command on 11 January 1987. Reference: MoD/F102 S No.569 – dated 11 January 1987.

### December 1987 at Coulport

- RNAD Coulport Jetty Missile Loading Incident, 3 December 1987. Report of the Board of Inquiry. Reference: SDG 9003A – dated 14 December 1987.
- RNAD Coulport – Missile Loading Incident on 3 December 1987. Reference: D/Sec(FS)/48/16 (AYA/0632/88) – dated 10 February 1988.
- Missile Loading incident. Dated 3.12.87.

Disclosure of the information you have requested has been considered with reference to the applicability of the Act. In all cases, the balance of public interest for and against the release of the reports was considered with, in accordance with the Act, a presumption in favour of release.

The FOI Act provides a framework within which decisions can be made as to whether the balance of public interest lies on the release or withholding of information on a case by case basis. The Act therefore contains a number of exemptions to the general right of access. The exemptions ensure that decisions to release or withhold information are taken with the interest of the public as a whole firmly to the fore.

I am, in accordance with the provisions of the Act, enclosing copies of all the reports that fall within the scope of your request. A limited amount of information has been redacted, full details of which are provided at Annexes A to C. In addition, personal names have been withheld, as they were not asked for, nor are they considered to be a substantive part of the information requested.

I would wish to clarify our position in respect of a statement in one of the reports (Serial a. Annex B) relating to a South Atlantic "Rough Handling Incident". Paragraph 3.2 states "there was significant damage to the bomb casing, but none to the warhead internals as demonstrated by a detailed strip-down". This would appear to be at some variance to the information we released in December 2003, on the transfer of nuclear weapons during the Falklands Campaign, where we reported that "no weapons were damaged, and in what was considered the worst case, a container sustained severe distortion to a door housing". We have no way, some 25 years after the event, of confirming or validating what were personal visual descriptions of the damage. However, as all the weapons were containerized, it is our belief that the term "bomb casing" is a reference to the container. This is supported by the fact that our records show that on return to the UK all weapons were examined by a specialist team and were found to be "safe and serviceable".

The information supplied to you continues to be protected by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988. You are free to use it for your own purposes, including any non-commercial research you are doing and for the purposes of news reporting. Any other reuse, for example commercial publication, would require the permission of the copyright holder. Most documents supplied by the Ministry of Defence will have been produced by government officials and will be Crown Copyright. You can find details on the arrangements for re-using Crown Copyright from the Office of Public Sector Information at: <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/index.htm>.

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In keeping with the spirit and effect of the Freedom of Information Act, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. The MOD therefore will be simultaneously posting the information you requested, together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context, in our online FOI Disclosure Log at <http://www.foi.mod.uk>.

If you are unhappy with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Director of Information Exploitation, 6th Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [Info-XD@mod.uk](mailto:Info-XD@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain unhappy following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate the case until the internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>.

Yours sincerely,

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## **June 1985 near Glasgow: brake failure on a nuclear weapons carrier – Four Reports**

### a. Special Weapons Incident Report.

Whilst there is general public interest in access to information about nuclear weapon safety and security, there is also public interest in safeguarding national security and in not releasing any information that might prejudice national security. The release of current codewords could potentially compromise the effective authentication of internal Nuclear Accident Response Organisation communications. The balance of public interest lies clearly in MoD being able to move nuclear materials as securely as possible, the release of current codewords could, particularly in the short term, hinder this ability. The harm in releasing current codewords clearly outweighs any public benefit. Current codewords have therefore been withheld under Section 24 (National Security) of the FOI Act. Personal names have also been withheld, as they are not relevant to the information requested.

### b. Special Weapons Incident at Helensburgh on 20 June 1985.

Whilst there is general public interest in access to information about nuclear weapon safety and security, there is also public interest in safeguarding national security and in not releasing any information that might prejudice national security. The release of current codewords could potentially compromise the effective authentication of internal Nuclear Accident Response Organisation communications. The balance of public interest lies clearly in MoD being able to move nuclear materials as securely as possible, the release of current codewords could, particularly in the short term, hinder this ability. The harm in releasing current codewords clearly outweighs any public benefit. Current codewords have therefore been withheld under Section 24 (National Security) of the FOI Act. A personal name has also been withheld, as it is not relevant to the information requested.

### c. Special Weapons Incident Report.

Whilst there is general public interest in access to information about nuclear weapon safety and security, there is also public interest in safeguarding national security and in not releasing any information that might prejudice national security. The release of current codewords could potentially compromise the effective authentication of internal Nuclear Accident Response Organisation communications. The balance of public interest lies clearly in MoD being able to move nuclear materials as securely as possible, the release of current codewords could, particularly in the short term, hinder this ability. The harm in releasing current codewords clearly outweighs any public benefit. Current codewords have therefore been withheld under Section 24 (National Security) of the FOI Act. Personal names have been withheld, as they are not relevant to the information requested.

### d. Phase 2 Examination of 2 A3TK REBs involved in convoy vehicle incident at Helensburgh on 20/6/85.

Whilst the public have an interest in the safety of nuclear weapons (past, present and future), the release of any nuclear weapon design information could be used by a mischievous or in the worse case scenario, a rogue state. The balance of public interest

clearly lies in MoD withholding sensitive nuclear weapon design information, as the potential harm is greater than any benefit of releasing the information. Nuclear Weapon design information has therefore been withheld under Section 24 (National Security) of the FOI Act. Personal names have also been withheld, as they are not relevant to the information requested.

**January 1987 in Wiltshire: a nuclear weapons carrier overturned after skidding on ice**

a. TCHD Accident - West Dean 10.1.87 – AWRE View.

Whilst there is general public interest in access to information about nuclear weapon safety and security, there is also public interest in safeguarding national security and in not releasing any information that might prejudice national security. The release of current codewords could potentially compromise the effective authentication of internal Nuclear Accident Response Organisation communications. The balance of public interest lies clearly in MoD being able to move nuclear materials as securely as possible, the release of current codewords could, particularly in the short term, hinder this ability. The harm in releasing current codewords clearly outweighs any public benefit. Current codewords are therefore withheld under Section 24 (National Security) of the FOI Act. Personal names have also been withheld, as they are not relevant to the information requested.

b. RAE Report on Dean Hill Incident.

Personal names have been withheld, as they are not relevant to the information requested.

c. Military Convoy Accident, 10 January – Report of the Board of Inquiry.

Whilst there is public interest in understanding the measures that MoD takes to ensure that nuclear weapons are transported safely, there is public interest in safeguarding national security and in not releasing any information that might prejudice national security. Any attack against a nuclear weapon convoy has the potential to lead to the damage or destruction of a nuclear weapon within the UK. The release of any information relating to the constitution of a nuclear weapon convoy should it be made public, would assist terrorists in the planning and prosecution of an attack against the convoy. The balance of public interest clearly lies in MoD maintaining the security of nuclear weapon convoys. Convoy information is therefore withheld under Section 24 (National Security) of the FOI Act. Personal names have also been withheld, as they are not relevant to the information requested.

d. Board of Inquiry into West Dean Incident held at RAF Support Command on 11 January 1987.

Whilst there is public interest in understanding the measures that MoD takes to ensure that nuclear weapons are transported safely, there is public interest in safeguarding national security and in not releasing any information that might prejudice national security. Any attack against a nuclear weapon convoy has the potential to lead to the damage or destruction of a nuclear weapon within the UK. The release of any information relating to the constitution of a nuclear weapon convoy should it be made public, would assist terrorists in the planning and prosecution of an attack against the convoy. The balance of public interest clearly lies in MoD maintaining the security of nuclear weapon convoys. Convoy information has therefore been withheld under Section 24 (National Security) of the FOI Act.

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There is no public interest in photographs identifying personnel involved in the accident inquiry. There is no public interest in data relating to officials, such as private addresses, driving licence numbers and telephone numbers. Such photographs and information are not relevant to the information requested, and could lead to the identification of an individual. There is public interest in safeguarding the identification of a person involved in historical nuclear operations as they could be targeted by journalists or anti nuclear organisations. The balance of public interest clearly lies in maintaining the privacy of a living individual who can be identified. We have no way of confirming if those named or photographed in this report are still living, therefore this information has therefore been withheld under Section 40 (Personal Data) of the FOI Act. Personal names have also been withheld, as they are not relevant to the information requested.

**December 1987 at Coulport: a missile collides with trailer supports because of a crane driver error**

a. RNAD Coulport Jetty Missile Loading Incident 3 December 1987

Personal names have been withheld, as they are not relevant to the information requested.

b. RNAD Coulport – Missile Loading Incident on 3 December 1987

The report mentions Enclosure 2 and Enclosure 11. We do not hold these, or other Enclosures.

Personal names have been withheld, as they are not relevant to the information requested.

c. Missile Loading Incident

Whilst there is general public interest in access to information about nuclear weapon safety and security, there is also public interest in safeguarding national security and in not releasing any information that might prejudice national security. The release of current codewords could potentially compromise the effective authentication of internal Nuclear Accident Response Organisation communications. The balance of public interest lies clearly in MoD being able to move nuclear materials as securely as possible, the release of current codewords could, particularly in the short term, hinder this ability. The harm in releasing current codewords clearly outweighs any public benefit. Current codewords have therefore been withheld under Section 24 (National Security) of the FOI Act.