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CIO-SPP-Information Rights Compliance

Our reference: D/CIO/3/18/1/612  
(21-12-2011-141621-001)

Your reference: FS50444068

*27* February 2013

**ICO CASE REFERENCE FS50444068**

As you are aware, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has been working with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) with their investigation of your complaint concerning the collision of HMS Vanguard and the French submarine "Le Triomphant" in February 2009, ICO case reference FS50444068.

As part of the investigation, MOD has reviewed the information in scope of your request and identified that some information previously withheld can be disclosed. This is attached at Annex A. You will note that the information redacted at Para 1 of the 'Report on HMS VANGUARD collision dated 27 Feb 09' is withheld under section 24 (national security) and section 26 (defence) of the Act.

A copy of this letter goes to the Information Commissioner.

*Yours sincerely*

## **INFORMATION IN SCOPE OF THE FOI REQUEST IDENTIFIED FOR RELEASE**

### **Ministerial Brief dated 17 Feb 09**

Para 2 – It is known that HMS VANGUARD was involved in a collision with the French ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) FNS LE TRIOMPHANT.

Para 3 – Which the Secretary of State notes:

- That HMS VANGUARD and her crew are safe and no damage to nuclear weapons or propulsion plant occurred.
- That Continuous At Sea Deterrence (CASD) was not broken and is being maintained.

Para 7 – Every aspect of the planning and execution of each SSBN patrol is rigorously analysed by the MOD Strategic System Performance Assessment & Analysis Group (SSPAG). In this instance, the regular SSPAG team will be augmented with a submarine command experienced Captain and Commander. The aim is to accelerate the process and permit a full review of decision making at all levels.

Para 14 – Following the publication of a newspaper story about the collision on 16 Feb 09, a press line has been agreed with Ministers and shared with the French:

Two submerged SSBNs, one French and the other UK, were conducting routine national patrols in the Atlantic Ocean. The two submarines came into contact at very low speed. Both submarines remained safe and no injuries occurred. We can confirm that the UK's deterrent capability has remained unaffected at all times and there has been no compromise to nuclear safety. HMS VANGUARD returned safely to Faslane under her own power on 14 Feb.

As you would expect, the MOD takes this incident very seriously and a thorough review is underway. We will act on any lessons that might be identified.

### **Ministerial Brief dated 23 Mar 09**

Para 1 – To report the outcome of analysis of the circumstances surrounding the collision between HMS VANGUARD and FNS Le TRIOMPHANT.

Para 2 – That the Secretary of State notes:

- Comprehensive analysis of the circumstances surrounding the collision between HMS VANGUARD and FNS Le TRIOMPHANT is complete.

Para 5 – The Strategic System Performance Assessment & Analysis Group (SSPAG), augmented with two senior submarine command experienced officers, has

conducted a comprehensive review into the circumstances surrounding the collision between HMS VANGUARD and FNS Le TRIOMPHANT.

Para 10 – Nuclear Safety. Nuclear propulsion and weapon safety was not compromised during this incident. The nuclear system is robust and designed to withstand shock and has considerable redundancy, as would be expected in a war fighting vessel. The shock received and logged by the Strategic Weapon System in this incident were within normal tolerable limits.

Para 16 – As a department, we should be consistent and robust that this was an unfortunate and highly unlikely accident involving two vessels operating totally independently as they conducted national deterrent patrols.

## **Report on HMS VANGUARD collision dated 27 Feb 09**

### **Introduction**

Para 1 – In accordance with the Reference we were tasked with establishing the facts relating to the collision between HMS VANGUARD and FNS Le TRIOMPHANT at XXXXX, XX XXX 09. In producing this report the Assessment Team have had access to the following sources of information:

- Written Statement from Crew
- CR<sup>1</sup> Narrative and CO's Record of Incident
- SSPAG/MDAG<sup>2</sup> Analysis
- Signal Logs
- Interviews and discussions with key personnel
- Reference Documentation
- FASFLOT Command Estimate
- Verbal Reports on Structural Damage (SFM<sup>3</sup> Clyde and CSSE<sup>4</sup>)

### **HMS VANGUARD Pre Patrol Training**

Para 14 – VANGUARD undertook a standard package of pre patrol training.

Para 15 – Leading up to 'on-crew' the submarine undertook a standard package of shore training. FOST<sup>5</sup> Training Reports all state that VANGUARD was well prepared for this training and achieved the required standards. When interviewed, FOST SCTT<sup>6</sup> Head of Training (HOT) stated that the VANGUARD Sound Room team were the strongest of operators he had seen.

Para 16 – The package of sea training had been previously agreed at the Submarine Training Advisory Group (STAG) and was predicated on key changes in the Command Team, and the time available during the period for DCT<sup>7</sup>. The performance of the Operations team merited the comment, '*Throughout this period*

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<sup>1</sup> Control Room.

<sup>2</sup> Military Data Analysis Group.

<sup>3</sup> Ship Fleet Maintenance.

<sup>4</sup> Chief Strategic Systems Executive.

<sup>5</sup> Flag Officer Sea Training

<sup>6</sup> Submarine Command Team Trainer.

<sup>7</sup> Directed Continuation Training.

*the Operations department displayed safe basic tactical procedures in both deep and shallow water'.*

Para 17 – Of note, the Sound Room team onboard VANGUARD performed well at sea and were assessed as Very Satisfactory.

Para 19 – HMS VANGUARD achieved an overall assessment of Very Satisfactory for her DCT and was deemed by FOST to be 'ready for operations'. During the Defect Rectification Period (DRP) the CO briefed CAPFASFLOT on his intentions for patrol at the Hot Brief and outlined his Command Estimate, this was well considered and comprehensive.

#### Post Collision Activity

Para 34 – Specifically a secondary shield survey, a reactor core integrity check and missile testing were reported as correct. It is the view of the Assessment Team that these checks confirmed that both the Reactor and Strategic Weapons were safe and that no compromise to nuclear safety had occurred.

#### Conclusion

Para 48 – At no time was nuclear safety compromised and the Strategic Weapon System remained inside tolerable limits at all times.

#### Recommendations

Para 49 – The Assessment Team would wish to make a number of recommendations associated with this incident. They are split into three areas; Strategic level concerned with higher level policy and direction, Operational level aimed at the HQ function and the tactical level associated with unit issues.

#### Tactical Level

Whilst earlier implementation of these recommendations would not have had a bearing on the collision, they were issues noted by the Assessment Team in the course of the compilation of this report and are considered worthy of mention in order that appropriate action can be taken.