DEFENSIVE NEWS BRIEF

Subject : HMS TRAFALGAR – 11 CREW MEMBERS REQUESTING NOT TO SAIL.

DTG : 05 MAY 1200

Press Officer : XXXXXXXXXX Defence Press Office
Desk Officer :

Key Messages

- The Royal Navy would never send a submarine to sea unless totally confident that it was safe to do so. Safety remains of paramount importance.

- The Commanding Officer of HMS Trafalgar, and the Navy nuclear safety authorities, are totally confident in the safety of the submarine.

- A number of allegations have been made concerning systems defects onboard the submarine, all of which have been examined; the majority have proved to be unfounded and none had any serious safety implications.

- There are no concerns over the safety of the nuclear propulsion plant.

- There is no question of a mutiny.

- It was a decision by the CO to allow them ashore; given their concerns he assessed it was prudent to land them and replace them temporarily.

- One individual refused to sail. It is possible that particular individual may face disciplinary action because of that.

- It is possible that during 'shake'down' TRAFALGAR might go into FALSANE for further default rectification. That is a normal part of the "shake-down" process.

Key Points Supporting the Messages

- As has been shown many times, the Royal Navy operates its submarine fleet under the most stringent safety regime. We simply would not put a boat to sea unless it was totally safe to do so.

- Following a period of maintenance and repair HMS TRAFALGAR was cleared for sea having undertaken numerous inspections and safety checks. This is standard procedure for any Royal Navy submarine sailing under these circumstances.

- "Shake-down" is one of the final stages in ensuring a vessel is at maximum operational capability. The Royal Navy takes no short cuts on safety, leaves nothing to chance, and applies the highest standards before returning a submarine to operational status.

Questions & Answers

What is a 'shake-down'

A 'shake-down' follows a refit or major period of maintenance. It is where the ship or submarine goes to see to test equipment and systems. Before a submarine goes to shake-down it goes through a complex and exhaustive testing procedure which is fully documented. TRAFALGAR passed that inspection. If there were failing items the submarine would not be allowed to sail.

Why does TRAFALGAR keep going back into Faslane?

It is not unusual that, during shake-down some defects will occur and TRAFALGAR will go back into Faslane. That is all part of the process.

Nothing has happened on HMS TRAFALGAR which puts the submarine or her crew at risk.

Is this a mutiny?

A mutiny only happens when at least two individuals collude to disobey lawful orders. This has not happened in this case.

Will those involved be disciplined?

At the end of the day, the Royal Navy is a disciplined service and it may be necessary for there to be some form of disciplinary action. Two (2) of individuals concerned are now under investigation regarding possible disciplinary issues - none are under investigation for mutiny.

If pressed

Not prepared to discuss disciplinary issues on individual basis.

Have any arrest warrants been issued?

Not prepared to discuss individual disciplinary issues.

What is happening to the 11 sailors?

Most have returned to TRAFALGAR. 3 are medically downgraded. Two (2) are under investigation for disobedience to orders. Neither are under investigation for mutiny.

Are these individuals 'unstable' ?

The Commanding Officer of the submarine was concerned enough about the stress levels of the individuals at the time to put them ashore. This does not mean he considered them unstable. All have undergone medical assessment and none have been medically downgraded although 3 are receiving some additional medical support. The decision to put them ashore was made both in the interests of the individuals and the submarine.

What was TRAFALGAR doing?

Trafalgar was preparing to return to sea following a minor repair to her periscope at Clyde Submarine Base, ready for "shake-down" training following major repairs resulting from her grounding in 2002.

If repairs were successful, why so many incidents ?

Complex systems always need checking and personnel need tp refresh their training. Recent incidents have arisen in the course of the normal checking and refresher training process. These incidents are unfortunate, but prove that pre-sailing preparations, checks and training are both vital and effective.

NB : It is important to stress that there have been no incidents relating to the nuclear propulsion of TRAFALGAR.

Why has TRAFALGAR gone back into Faslane. Doesn't this prove she's not safe?

TRAFALGAR returned to Faslane on Saturday 1 May for defect rectification work on an air bottle in an external tank. It is anticipated she will sail later this week.

This does NOT prove that TRAFALGAR is not safe - what it DOES prove is that, as we have been saying all along, we don't take chances with our submarines. It was decided to take the opportunity to repair this straight away.

Is this defect related to the 12 alleged defects used by the Daily Mirror?

No. The Mirror made claims about emergency bottle groups. This isn't related.

Were there casualties from the recent incidents ?

No. A few personnel were moved ashore for medical assessment following the recent unintended release of diesel fumes into the submarine all returned to duty within 24 hours.

Why did some of the crew refuse to sail with the submarine ?

Some members of the crew told the CO of stress and unease at sailing. The CO's judgement in light of views expressed and stress evident in the men was that sailing should be delayed and they should be landed for expert medical assessment. 12 members of the crew expressed concerns. After discussing their concerns with the CO, one (1) decided to sail, 11 were put ashore.

How many of TRAFALGAR's current Ship's Company were embarked at the time of the grounding in 2002.

Exact figures are not to hand, but between 80-90% of the Ship's Company have changed since then.

Will this delay TRAFALGAR's return to operations ?

No. She sailed on 24 April 04 and will conduct her "shake-down" training as programmed.

Is it the same Commanding Officer who was in Command when she ran aground ?

No.

What happened when TRAFALGAR grounded ?

TRAFALGAR struck a rock at a depth of 50 metres and a speed of 15 knots, some distance off the coast of Skye. There was no radiation risk associated with this incident.

Cost of HMS TRAFALGAR repairs?

The repairs on HMS TRAFALGAR were combined with a planned maintenance period (Revalidation Assisted Maintenance Period (RAMP)). The cost of the repairs was just over £4M (about £1M less than originally estimated). The cost of the RAMP was about £8M.

If pressed: There is no such thing as a typical RAMP. Work packages are tailored to meet the specific requirements of the vessel. All work was fully funded.

Many recent groundings ?... and is RN training adequate ?

RN training is recognised as a world leader. All Naval operations are evaluated to see if there are learning opportunities to be noted. In light of this Naval training is continually evolving. There is always a small risk associated with realistic training in a very demanding environment, though we constantly strive to minimise those risks.

Was / Is TRAFALGAR carrying nuclear weapons ?

This is an attack submarine of the TRAFALGAR class, with nuclear propulsion plant. As has frequently been explained, VANGUARD class ballistic missile submarines carry the UK's nuclear deterrent.

How many submarines does the UK have ?

We have 15 submarines of which 11 are nuclear powered attack submarines like TRAFALGAR. The other four are VANGUARD class ballistic missile submarines, operating the UK's nuclear deterrent.

Additional Q&A following enquiries from SUN on 27 April

One of 2 scrubbers on the boat's air filters which purify and clean the air are out of action.

Yes, one was defective for approximately 24 hours. However the whole point of having two is to allow redundancy so that defects can be fixed. As well as the CO2 scrubbers there a other secondary and emergency systems to purify the air.

Three of four safety experts left the submarine

Three of the submarine's marine engineering mechanics (known colloquially as "stokers") were among those who left the boat

There has been a problem with one of the control rods in the nuclear reactor. Last week when undergoing fast cruising one control rod dropped for no reason which caused quite a bit of alarm - this can result in a loss of propulsion.

There has been a minor problem with a single Control Rod. This is a minor defect and the Design Authority, who originally designed the reactor plant (Rolls Royce, have agreed that the submarine is safe to sail. This decision has been agreed by MOD experts and independently assessed by MOD's Independent Nuclear Auditors.

There was a problem with the periscopes when she set sail from Dev last week. About 4 miles out of port a crew member noticed the search periscope was cracked and instead of coming back the boat continued on to FASLANE where it was subsequently discovered en route that the attack periscope was leaking water.

The search periscope did suffer a crack in its top window which was subsequently fixed in Faslane. It made complete sense for the CO to proceed to Faslane where stores had been pre-positioned for the repair. This also allowed TRAF to get to the areas required for her sea trials and training. We are not aware of any defect with the Attack Periscope.

Rescue hatches - x 2 DSRV covers - when they got alongside at FASLANE some of the shipyard workers noticed that the paintwork and metal work on hatches was chipped and blistered. The source says this could have implications for deep sea rescue - they have to be air tight.

The area of concern in this case was on the inner area of the seat of the rescue hatch and was smaller than a five pence piece. This minor blemish had no impact upon the ability of the LR5 rescue vehicle to dock with the boat should that extremely unlikely event prove necessary.

Out of the 8 salvage valves on board one has been removed. This is where air is pumped into the submarine in an emergency. The one that has been taken away is in a particularly key place because it is close to an area where a lot of crew members would be gathered.

No such work has been carried out on board HMS TRAFALGAR. Salvage valves fitted in nuclear powered submarines are part of a critical system. Under no circumstances would a submarine be allowed to sail without these valves being fitted.

Before TRAF left DEVONPORT there was a steam leak and a crewman was apparently quite badly burnt on the neck when steam leaked from faulty pipework.

There is no medical record of this injury and we e would normally expect to hear about any injury other than the most minor.

HMS TRAFALGAR SAFETY ALLEGATIONS – DAILY MIRROR REBUTTAL POINTS

ALLEGATION 1 -**TRAFALGAR sailed with no ability to drop anchor.**

Not true. HMS TRAFALGAR's anchor is fully functional. The Blake slip (which holds the anchor in place prior to final release) was stiff prior to sailing. After long periods without use such as the recent period of extended maintenance, this is common, and RN submarines deal with it as a matter of routine.

ALLEGATION 2 - **Emergency escape hatches (fwd and aft) both either rusty or with defective paint covering - implication = failure of DSRV to seat properly. Defect brought to attention of DML but not rectified.**

A full escape inspection was conducted by an independent authority at the end of the maintenance period and all defects were cleared prior to sailing. Following surface passage to Faslane, it was discovered that there was a small area, (less than the size of a five pence piece) on the forward escape hatch docking seat where the paint was scored. Additionally, minor paint bubbling was identified on the after escape hatch docking seat. These minor blemishes were inspected by the Engineer Officers in HMS TRAFALGAR and were assessed to be insufficient to prevent successful docking of a rescue submersible with the boat should that extremely unlikely event prove necessary.

ALLEGATION 3 - **Nuclear hot spot on casing above reactor. Casing sentries told not to stand over it.**

Allegations of high radiation levels on the casing are untrue. It is normal procedure when a reactor is operated alongside for individuals to be advised not to loiter over the reactor compartment. This doesn't apply when the submarine is at sea. It doesn't mean the submarine is unsafe, rather that the Royal Navy takes <u>all</u> practical precautions (in accordance with UK legislation) to minimize <u>any</u> potential exposure to ionising radiation.

ALLEGATION 4 - **Secondary Propulsion Motor incorrectly wired when put back in by DML – ran backwards when forward selected**

A new Secondary Propulsion motor was fitted to HMS TRAFALGAR during her maintenance period. After fitting, testing is required to confirm correct operation. When first run for testing it was discovered that the wiring was incorrect, causing the propellor to turn the wrong way. This simply required 2 terminals to be reversed. The secondary propulsion motor is a very low power unit, used to provide steerage way (in the unlikely event of a main propulsion failure) and slow speed manoeuvring. It has no use in surfacing the submarine, either routinely or in an emergency, and could not prevent surfacing taking place.

ALLEGATION 5 - **Reserve fuel rod on reactor defective last week. Problem solved but source of defect still not known.**

There has been a minor problem with a single Control Rod. This is a minor defect which in itself has no potential to cause a reactor accident. The Design Authority, who originally designed the reactor plant (Rolls Royce Marine Power), have agreed that the submarine is safe to sail. This decision has been agreed by MOD experts and independently assessed by MOD's Independent Nuclear Safety Assessors.

ALLEGATION 6 - **Hydraulic oil leak into trim system: implication = carcinogens in drinking water**

A minor defect in a radar mast operating system resulted in a very small amount of Hydraulic oil draining into one compensating tank. This tank is not used to produce drinking water but is capable of connection to tanks from which drinking water is produced. On discovery, the contaminated tank was isolated to prevent cross-contamination.
Whilst in Faslane the contents of the contaminated tank were removed and additional checks were made to ensure that the tanks used to produce drinking water had not been contaminated. These tests proved clear and there has been no evidence of any contamination in the boat's fresh water supplies. The contaminated tank remains isolated pending full cleaning when alongside.

ALLEGATION 7 - **No protective breathing apparatus in Air Purification Department**

Untrue. The correct, designated protective breathing mask filters for entry into the compartment are currently not available. However, air filters were purchased locally on 1 May and provided to the submarine.

ALLEGATION 8 - **An emergency air intake valve on the sub's exterior was broken and temporarily welded over, making it impossible for the boat to be re-floated and the crew rescued if it were damaged and stuck underwater.**

It is unclear what this allegation refers to. In the highly unlikely event that a submarine is unable to resurface, the crew will be rescued by submersible or will escape through dedicated escape towers. The salvage of a sunken submarine is a long term operation for which the dedicated "salvage valves" are fitted. These valves were pressure tested during the maintenance period and their correct position is always verified as part of pre-diving checks.

ALLEGATION 9 - **A new £30M front to the sub - dubbed the 'chin strap' had been welded on in the wrong position so that it was not properly aligned, seriously reducing the submarine's ability to withstand a collision**

Untrue. The "chin–strap" is the main hull-mounted sonar used as the "ears" of the submarine. It is a listening system and makes no contribution to the submarine's structural strength, watertight integrity or ability to surface. When TRAFALGAR suffered its grounding incident in Nov 02 the sonar was badly damaged and this was repaired during the subsequent maintenance period. During the rebuild it was discovered that the sonar was mis-aligned but this was rectified before HMS TRAFALGAR was undocked. The trials which HMS TRAFALGAR is now undertaking include an assessment of the performance of this sonar.

ALLEGATION 10 - **Essential fire fighting equipment is substandard. The hoses do not produce enough foam in time and failed a standard fire test three times**

At the end of the maintenance period routine testing identified that the hoses on some of the fire fighting hose reels did not produce enough foam. The hoses were replaced and the system was stripped and cleaned. Tests were repeated prior to sailing and the foam concentrations produced were accepted by the independent Design Authority (Rolls Royce|).

ALLEGATION 11 - **Gas canisters (known as Emergency Bottle Groups) used for taking the submarine to the surface in an emergency were leaking, leaving them only 80% efficient. In that state they would not be able to surface the submarine if she were at great depth.**

Not true. All emergency bottle groups are at full pressure with no known leaks.

ALLEGATION 12 - **There is a shortage of emergency breathing system masks in the forward sleeping compartment. Up to 20 crew members would not be able to breath if an emergency hit the submarine while they were asleep in bunks.**

Untrue on both counts. There is enough EBS capacity for 150% of Ship's Company, distributed throughout the submarine, including the bunk spaces. The EBS masks are regularly checked and were formally inspected as part of the fire fighting inspection prior to sailing.