

Glasgow Herald Feb 1st 90



Testing ground: nuclear submarines lie berthed at the Faslane base, awaiting checks on their reactors.

Reactor fault puts pressure on base

Picture: ARTHUR KINLOCH
Report: KEITH BRUCE

THE Faslane submarine base on the Gare Loch was a hive of activity yesterday after the Royal Navy's discovery of a nuclear reactor fault in a Valiant class vessel.

There were believed to be eight submarines at the base, two Polaris, four nuclear-powered vessels, and two diesel craft, an unusually large number. On the Gare Loch itself, protesters from the peace camp in an inflatable dinghy flew the symbol for radioactivity.

The peace campers, using a boat that had only just been returned to them after being confiscated by Ministry of Defence police, were watched by two police launches and Royal Marines in four larger inflatable craft.

All five of the Navy's Valiant class submarines are now in port for checks after the discovery of the fault. According to sources, HMS Valiant, Conqueror, and Courageous are at Faslane; HMS Churchill is in Rosyth; and HMS Warspite, in which the fault was found, is in Devonport. Another Polaris is also at Rosyth.

The Ministry maintained no vessels were being recalled from patrol to undergo inspections. But analysts said it was a remarkable coincidence for all five to be in port at the same time.

A Ministry spokesman said there was no danger to personnel working on a refit, and added: "The submarines are not unsafe. Safety is paramount."

The fault, believed to be a hair-line crack in the primary cooling system of the reactor, was found in Warspite, the second oldest of the Valiant class boats, during a refit at Devonport.

The Navy said it knew of no faults in any submarines except Warspite, though independent sources said it was understood cracks had been discovered in the cooling system of all five of the Valiant boats.

Scottish CND said yesterday that two anonymous phone calls to its office had warned of problems with submarines based at Faslane. One caller had referred to a "potential Chernobyl". The campaign yesterday called for a public inquiry.