

# Ignoring wider issues

Madam,

WELL, a year in planning and Exercise Short Sermon has gone in a flash (literally).

The MoD hailed the exercise a success and I guess from their point of view it was. Not only did they deal with a theoretical accident on board HMS Sovereign, but they achieved an almost total news blackout of how they did it.

Basically during the exercise the MoD had a submarine with a serious fire which led to the reactor going out of control.

Eventually a hole developed in the hull of the vessel from which radiation began leaking out.

Having failed to plug the hole, using a helicopter to drop water balloons, their final solution was to sink the submarine within the base, using a warship to fire high velocity shells into it.

To end the exercise at this point and claim it is a success is to ignore the wider issues.

This is only the start of our problems. Here we would have a submarine at the bottom of the Gareloch spewing out radioactive material.

Not only are you contaminating the Gareloch and surrounding area, but being tidal, the Clyde and beyond then becomes radioactive.

Having just spent around £10b on the Trident base you would not be able to use it again.

HMS Victorious will have to remain at 12 berth for evermore. HMS Vigilant having returned from America would not be able to enter the base and HMS Vanguard would have to go elsewhere after its patrol.

A cynic would think that the reason for the news blackout is clear. Exercise Short Sermon has shown that at the end of the day a serious accident would inevitably lead to a disaster.

Yours etc., Name and Address supplied.

# Short Sermon – a public relations nightmare

Madam,

THE base public relations officer, Steve Wilmot, totally missed the point in his reply to our letters criticising Exercise Short Sermon.

There are many aspects

of the exercise that I could take issue with, however, what is totally absent from his reply is any comment about the Navy's answer of what to do with a submarine spewing out radioactive material into the atmosphere.

When I was first told in a pub in Helensburgh on the evening of the exercise that the Navy's scenario was to bring in a warship and fire high velocity shells into the ballast tanks to that it sank at its berth, I thought someone was pulling my leg!

The following day, several of the journalism students confirmed that this was exactly what they had been told.

A community councillor from Dunoon then phoned Whitehall and had it from the horses mouth so to speak.

So yes, the Royal Navy did issue 30 press releases during the exercise, but only to the pre-ten press pack.

All the real media got was a long boring lot of vague nonsense before the exercise. After the exercise, the RN issued some bland statement about it all being a big success.

Sorry Steve Wilmot, I don't think most people round here would consider that a submarine gradually leaking the contents of its reactor into the Gareloch would by very 'successful' for us.

And I'm sure for you, trying to work out how to turn that PR nightmare into something acceptable to the Scottish people was quite stressful.

You appear to be the voice for the Navy so come on, tell us, what would you do with a submarine with a leaking reactor? We await your reply.

Yours etc., Jane Tallents,  
John Street,  
Helensburgh.

# OUR P

## Sub shelling beggars belief

Madam,

REGARDING the recent letter from Mr Willmot (Public Relations Officer, HM Naval Base Clyde, Faslane) he stated that the Base held a 'real press conference at the off-site before the exercise.'

Pity the Base hadn't held one afterwards. The Navy's solution – the

shelling and sinking of a radiation-spewing machine in the Gareloch – would beggar belief if MoD Whitehall hadn't confirmed that this action 'was an option'.

In the western United States, there are areas so highly contaminated with radiation that they are known as 'National Sacrifice Zones' – 'Sacrifice' in the sense that the government washes its hands of responsibility by admitting the area cannot be decontaminated.

Theoretically (of course) it's possible that

the Garelochside population is now living in one of these zones.

To maintain the aura of realism, will the Navy now continue monitoring of the stricken submarine and report to Argyll and Bute on contamination levels?

And will Argyll and Bute (in the interests of public safety of course) let us know what these theoretical levels are?

A nuclear accident's consequences would last a thousand years or more, not three days.

Yours etc., Jeanne Brady, Cove.

Hel Adv. 18 Dec 97.

Hel. Adv.  
11. Dec 97