

~~Prime Minister.~~

for information.

A & C 23/a

Mr Beetham

Minister

Mr Raleigh

→ PS to Prime Minister

separate copies

WESTLAND HELICOPTERS

1. Please see the telegrams below about the incident with a Westland 30 helicopter in the United States.
2. This is very bad news indeed and will undoubtedly cause problems for Westlands with the Government of India. On one or two occasions in the past the Ministry of Defence here has made the statement that the W 30 is an untried and untested helicopter. Westlands have refuted this allegation by saying that it is merely a derivative of the Lynx, a helicopter well tried and tested in all spheres including the Falklands. The part which failed in the W 30 is, apparently, a piece taken straight from the transmission system of the Lynx helicopter and not a modification which was incorporated in the design of the W 30. This in itself should offer some consolation to potential customers of the W 30 but, nevertheless, I am sure that the French, who are currently in Delhi, will make maximum use of this bad news.
3. I am further concerned that Westlands do not intend giving the Government of India a full briefing until next week. The news of the grounding of both W 30 and Lynx helicopters was apparently carried by the BBC on 22 November and I am sure that the news has by now reached the Government of India.
4. Telegram No OTTER 543 makes three points which the Prime Minister might consider using if this subject arises. I am not too convinced that they will give very much reassurance but, in the circumstances, I think it is the best we can do.
5. I will try to ensure that Westlands are as frank and honest as possible with the Indians when they come to Delhi

DTI to Delhi
SF2 + SF3

/ next

next week.

advice of manager

23 November 1983

R F Jones

→ cc : High Commissioner

HC Demi

FM DOT 221810Z NOV 83
TO IMMEDIATE NEW DELHI
TELEGRAM NUMBER OTTER 542 OF 22 NOVEMBER

FOR JONES
FROM SALVIDGE

THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A DEPARTMENTAL SUBMISSION TO OUR MINISTERS ON THE WESTLAND HELICOPTER PROBLEM. IT IS FOR YOUR INFORMATION. DEFENSIVE BRIEFING ON LINE FOR PRIME MINISTER TO TAKE WILL FOLLOW AFTER FURTHER DISCUSSIONS WITH WESTLAND THIS AFTERNOON.

THE CAA AND FAA HAVE ORDERED THE GROUNDING OF ALL WESTLAND 30 HELICOPTERS PENDING THE INVESTIGATION OF AND ACCIDENT TO AN AIRSPUR W30 HELICOPTER NEAR LOS ANGELES ON 7 NOVEMBER. THE AIRCRAFT WAS ON A SCHEDULED FLIGHT WHEN IT INCURRED A FAILURE IN THE TAIL ROTOR PITCH LEVER AND BECAME UNCONTROLLABLE. THE AIRCRAFT WAS BROUGHT DOWN VERY RAPIDLY BUT IN DOING SO IT HIT OVERHEAD POWER CABLES AND IN THE ACCIDENT ITS TAIL AND BOOM AND MAIN ROTOR BLADES BROKE OFF. THE AIRCRAFT'S CABIN REMAINED INTACT AND THERE WERE NO FATALITIES, ALTHOUGH ONE PILOT AND ONE PASSENGER WERE HOSPITALISED.

THE REASON FOR THE FAILURE OF THE TAIL ROTOR PITCH CONTROL LEVER IS NOT KNOWN AND URGENT INVESTIGATIONS ARE UNDER WAY AT YEovil AND BY THE US FAA WITH THE HELP OF THE CAA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT'S ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH. WESTLAND ARE UNDERSTOOD TO BE WORKING ROUND THE CLOCK TO REMEDY THE PROBLEM BUT THE INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE FAILURE IS A SERIOUS ONE AND THE MOD BELIEVE THAT IT MAY BE SOMETIME BEFORE THE W30 IS GIVEN CLEARANCE TO RESUME FLYING. WESTLAND HAVE NOT SO FAR MADE ANY STATEMENT BUT THE W30 PROJECT MANAGER IS TO MEET WITH MOD AND DEPARTMENTAL OFFICIALS ON FRIDAY 25 NOVEMBER TO REPORT ON THE LATEST POSITION.

THE W30 IS A LYNX DERIVATIVE AND ACCORDING TO MEDIA REPORTS THIS MORNING UK AND DUTCH MILITARY LYNX AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN GROUNDED PENDING INVESTIGATION OF THE W30 FAILURE. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE PROBLEM ENCOUNTERED ON THE AIRSPUR W30 WAS EXPERIENCED ON A ROYAL NAVY LYNX ABOUT A MONTH AGO.

WE KNOW NO MORE THAN THAT AT PRESENT BUT A FAILURE SO EARLY IN THE LIFE OF A W30 IS BAD NEWS AND COULD HAVE VERY SERIOUS EFFECTS ON CUSTOMER CONFIDENCE IN THE AIRCRAFT. THE ACCIDENT WAS TO THE W30 - 100 SERIES WHICH WESTLAND HAD DEVELOPED ON A PV BASIS. THE LAUNCH-AID FOR THE W30 PROGRAMME WHICH THE DEPARTMENT HAS MADE AVAILABLE TO WESTLAND IS FOR THE FOLLOW ON - 200 AND - 300 SERIES AIRCRAFT WHICH HAVE NOT YET ENTERED PRODUCTION.

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