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520/237.L

Deputy Under Secretary of State (Navy)

BOARD OF INQUIRY - REPORT INTO LOSS OF HMS SHEFFIELD IN MAY 1982

References:

- A. MOD (NLC)'s D/NLC/1/16/20 dated 29 July 82.
- B. CINCFLEET's 520/235.L dated 31 July 82.
- C. CINCFLEET's 210/1/38.W (Revised) dated 15 July 82 (to MOD(DCDS)).

1. The official copy of the report of the Board of Inquiry into the loss of HMS SHEFFIELD in May 1982 is forwarded in accordance with References A and B.
2. I fully agree with the Board's conclusions and recommendations. With the benefit of hindsight it is clear that the SHEFFIELD was not fully prepared for Exocet attack. She had been lulled into a false sense of security by the ineffectiveness of previous Argentine air attacks. Her loss was an expensive warning and a foretaste of the real Argentine capability.
3. Air Defence This incident highlights the requirement to supplement medium-range SAM with an appropriate point-defence system in the same ship. It is not sufficient to have the two systems in separate ships when providing defence against sea-skimming missiles.
4. Habitability and Damage Control I am concerned at the general conclusions arising from most ship damage reports, that in recent years we have improved habitability at the expense of necessary Damage Control characteristics. This aspect must receive further investigation by design authorities as a result of this experience. Annex B to this letter is relevant.

PERSONNEL CONSIDERATIONS

5. Officer Appointing The concurrent appointment of a Commanding Officer and Second-in-Command who had little or no relevant recent surface ship experience, and were each very inexperienced in air defence, was indeed unfortunate. None of the failings revealed amount to negligence, since without the relevant experience I could not have expected more from these capable and conscientious officers, especially from Captain SALT, who had been in command for only a limited period and at a time of restricted employment for the ship. The selection of officers for command billets has been discussed for more than a year between my staff and the Naval Secretary. Moreover, a recent haul-down report (April 1982) by the Flag Officer Sea Training stated that "With the ever increasing complexity of warfare, it is essential for Commanding Officers to be appointed in relation to both their specialisation and to their past experience and, whenever possible, at a time when they are 'in date' operationally". In February 1982 the Naval Secretary stated that, within the necessary constraints, an effort would be made to appoint Captains to command ships which relate to their background and experience. The loss of SHEFFIELD accentuates the need to pursue this policy to the utmost.

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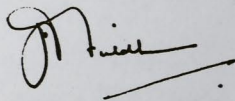
6. Officers' Conduct The Board of Inquiry concluded that the on-watch FWO and the on-watch AAWO each prima facie demonstrated negligence. I have carefully considered their apparent conduct and in all the circumstances I have decided that this is not a case for Court Martial, or other disciplinary or formal administrative proceedings, in respect of either officer and have so informed them. Nevertheless, I, my Chief of Staff, or Chief Staff Officer (Engineering) as appropriate, will see each officer who is shown to have made mistakes in any way in this loss, and will ensure that each fully understands the situation.

7. Senior Ratings I have taken appropriate reporting action in respect of the Operations Room Supervisor's professional shortcomings.

8. Praise The conduct of Lieutenant Commander J S WOODHEAD, the Weapons Engineer Officer, and his Computer Room crew, was particularly praiseworthy and appropriate recommendations for recognition have been made separately.

#### THE REPORT

9. My comments on some of the further action required are in Annex A to this letter. Copies of Annexes K and L of the report have already been passed to the Captain NBCD, HMS EXCELLENT. It is recommended that only extracts from the report dealing solely with Marine Engineering equipment matters should be forwarded, to the group drawn from the Defence Scientific Advisory Council who are looking at lessons learned in the area of ship design.



J D E FIELDHOUSE  
Admiral

#### Annexes:

- A. Comments on Detailed Recommendations
- B. Toxicity of Materials

#### Enclosures:

1. Board of Inquiry Report (original copy)
2. Summaries of Witnesses' Statements (to MOD (NLC) only)
3. Tape Recordings of Witnesses' Interviews (to MOD (NLC) only)

#### Information:

Ministry of Defence (for Sec VCNS)  
The Flag Officer First Flotilla

COMMENTS ON ACTION REQUIRED OR TAKEN IN RESPECT OF HMS SHEFFIELD BOARD OF INQUIRY REPORT

1. Each of the recommendations in Annex B of the Board of Inquiry Report requires action. Comments on some of these recommendations are as follows.
2. The need for 'layered' air defence is emphasised. Medium-range SAM must be supplemented by close-range systems; a Point Defence Missile System and close-range gun armament, both independent from any of the Sea Dart control arrangements, would be complementary to each other in this task. (MOD action required).
3. The need for defensive capability, in all types of ship, against the sea-skimming missile has already been stated in CTF 317's "Equipment Lessons Learned" report. (CINCFLEET's 210/1/38.W (Revised) dated 15 July 82 to MOD(DCDS)).
4. The provision of adequate simulation for 909 Low Target acquisition practice is urgently required. (MOD action required).
5. An investigation is required into the effectiveness of resilient mounts on WE equipment, (MOD action).
6. Although the unused missile propellant was a major producer of smoke there is evidence that significant quantities of noxious and toxic fumes were generated from furnishings and other combustible materials. The conclusion as a result of this experience that desirable improvements in habitability have been made at the expense of essential fire prevention and damage control characteristics is strongly supported. Annex B to this letter also refers. (MOD action required).
7. Only backed or bonded Formica panelling should be left in situ. HMS GLAMORGAN's experience when hit by an Exocet missile on 12 June was that unbacked Formica panelling shattered into razor-sharp fragments from blast and impact, causing several injuries, some serious. This matter is being studied by my staff, but investigation by MOD also is indicated. (Page D-2 para 5 refers).
8. The need for training to operate in conditions of smoke underlines the problem of the current shortage of smoke generators for this purpose. (MOD action required).
9. Although some action has already taken place on the critical Damage Control and firefighting equipment deficiencies listed in the recommendations (Annex B) and in Annex L, investigation and remedial action should continue to be pursued with vigour. (MOD action needed).
10. Action should be taken to enforce a mandatory firefighting PUT for all ranks/rates; at present an average of 40% achieve it. This requires action by Naval Secretary in the case of officers, and by the previous establishments in the case of ratings (in most cases this will be within the purview of CINCPNAVHOME).
11. MOD(DNSY) and the Cabinet Office have been requested (CINCFLEET's 190/0/29.X(a) dated 4 Aug 82) to take the necessary action to write off the classified material held on board. (Page B-2 para 14 refers).

ACTION WITHIN CINCFLEET'S RESPONSIBILITY

12. Completed Action. The following actions have already been completed:

- a. ADAWS 4 Edition 30 Software has reduced 909 acquisition times from the order of 20 seconds to 8 seconds.

b. Degradation of UAA 1 by SCOT transmissions has been reduced significantly by the fitting of filters in UAA1.

c. The practice of operating the firemain de-isolated at action stations arose from a view that this provided maximum back-up for magazine sprays. The SHEFFIELD experience showed that this policy, while providing security against a threat in peacetime which was likely to be internally generated (eg a fire), is inappropriate in action with an external threat. The relevant instruction was changed immediately after the attack on SHEFFIELD. (Page B-1 para 8 refers).

13. Current and Future Action. Current and future action by my staff includes:

a. Trials of an immediate Sea Dart engagement sequence for close-range targets, requiring only a single action by the Missile Gun Director, are currently in progress in HMS NEWCASTLE, as part of a new ADAWS 4 issue.

b. The Marine Engineering recommendations arising from the report are directly within CINCFLEET's area of responsibility, although many are the subject of liaison and follow-up actions with departments concerned.

c. General lessons from this and other boards of inquiry will be included in a compendium report circulated to Flag and Commanding Officers and appropriate training establishments.

d. The specific subject of training and doctrine for defence against sea-skimming missiles will be accentuated in the revision of FOTI O702, currently being undertaken by my Staff and the Maritime Tactical School.

e. Morphine should be distributed to members of the ship's company in accordance with BR 2170 Volume 2 Chapter 36. Medical Officers in Fleet are being reminded of this requirement. (Page R-1 para 3 refers).