

# Memorandum

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and  
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To: **A Ingrams, MP** Armed Forces Minister M1016-w14

From: **John H Large** 17 February 2005

Subject: **HMS TIRELESS – INSTITUTION OF MECHANICAL ENGINEERS**  
**MOD REF: JOHN LARGE/04-02-2005-101028-009**

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Minister

I am writing to you to express my concern over the manner in which certain Ministry of Defence officials have dealt with a matter relating to a paper that I am to present at an engineering seminar organised by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMEchE) on 2 March 2005.

The seminar relates to the forensic investigation of power plants (boilers, steam turbines etc) and my paper gives an account of how separate assessments were undertaken for the nuclear propulsion plants of HMS Tireless, which developed a leak in her reactor plant and underwent repairs at Gibraltar in 2000-01, and the Russian Federation submarine Kursk, that you may recall sank off the Kola Peninsular in 2000 being salvaged in 2001. I was involved in both projects, acting as an independent advisor to the Government of Gibraltar on Tireless and I put together and headed up the team assessing the nuclear and weaponry risks and hazards throughout the preparations and salvage of the Kursk, being engaged by the Dutch salvage consortium Smit-Mammoet with the agreement and sanction of the Russian Federation Government.

I expect that your civil servants will provide you with the facts and events leading up to my discontent in greater detail than for brevity I set out here, although if you require further information and detail from me then, of course, I will provide this.

Essentially, my discontent relates to the way in which certain MoD staff have, and I am careful in choosing my words, contrived to mislead the IMechE in order to suppress the publication of my seminar paper. In short, the MoD at first lobbied and then wrote a seemingly authoritative letter to the IMechE stating the paper to be 'unsound' in technical and engineering senses. However, the MoD's internal communications (which I have secured through the Data Protection Act) do not support this claim, showing only two or three rather insignificant factual errors and that the real reason for its desire to suppress the paper arose from the UK's obligations to the United States under the Mutual Defence Agreement (MDA) of 1958.

You will appreciate that I am not knowledgeable about the detail of what can or cannot be discussed publicly under the MDA (this extent of detail is not in the public domain), but if the MoD had approached me directly over this United States issue then, of course, I would have given account to any sensitivity that I had inadvertently included in the Tireless text. Indeed, I invited the MoD to do so when sending it a synopsis and then a 1<sup>st</sup> draft of the paper well in advance of my submitting the final draft paper to the IMechE for peer review. Instead, the

MoD ignored my invitation, later directly approaching the IMechE making claim that my paper was 'unsound' on the basis of its reading of the 1<sup>st</sup> draft.

My claim is (and the DPA document bundle substantiates this) that the MoD itself first identified the mostly likely sleight that would stymie my paper with the IMechE, for example one MoD recipient suggested the paper to be "*unsound and lacking in academic rigour*", going on to state "*I make this point about academic rigor (sic) because hinting at poor academic pedigree is a killer for the Institutes*". Another MoD recipient put forward "*Write to IMechE outlining that MOD disagrees with the JL paper for a variety of reasons. Although a regional body of the IMechE might have previously supported presentations on Kursk. I suspect IMechE HQ will not be happy with an inaccurate submission, flawed in almost every detail being presented in London*". In fact, the 70+ pages of MoD internal wrangling (accessed via the DPA) points to only to a very few (perhaps no more than two or three in number) of relatively trivial factual errors that do not support the claim put to the IMechE that the paper is "*flawed in almost every detail*". Indeed, this claim is quite contrary to the opinion of the senior officer who had regulated and was effectively in overall charge of the Tireless investigation and repair "*. . . The narrative he [Large] gives about TIRELESS and KURSK I would not take serious issue with. . . I'm sure that DNP could make an industry of a detailed rebuttal, but his overall facts are correct*".

Also, I should note to you that the final draft paper was rigorously peer reviewed prior to acceptance by the IMechE and that no amendments or deletions were required by the peer reviewer with the paper being accepted in its unabridged entirety for publication.

The whole business with and approach to the IMechE (which is my chartering Institution and thus important to me professionally) by the MoD has been that of rubbishing my standing as a professional engineer and, in internal MoD communications, I have been quite falsely charged with intentionally taking action "*aimed at raising doubts in the public eye about the goodness of the submarine programme*", "*making improper use of this information*", that "*I knew nothing about submarine construction*" and so on and so forth. I find all of this to be unbecoming conduct by those MoD staff involved.

There are three other aspects arising from this matter that concern me and may be of interest to you:

The first relates to the way in which a very confidential matter relating to the



in this respect, I consider action of the MoD individual to have been entirely reckless and without any justification whatsoever.

Second, one MoD recipient states quite clearly when referring to the paper he recalled to "*seeing this draft some months ago*", that is well before (at least a month) prior to me sending a review copy to the MoD.



[REDACTED] – it seems doubtful to me that the single page abstract that I sent in August could be confused with the 11 page, illustrated draft sent to the MoD in late November.

Thirdly, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Indeed, it may be that Crown ministers were also unaware of the MoD's understanding of the slant of the [REDACTED] when they answered questions (26 October 2000 - Mr Hoon) and submitted evidence to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs (5 January 2001, 18 February 2001 - Mr Vaz).

At a very late stage in my dealings with the MoD over these three issues, the same individuals that had caused to my discontent (or at least naval officers who were in a subservient position to those involved in the deception) endeavoured to assure me on each issue that I should have no concern. However as I have explained above, because this particular MoD group has been individually, or collectively, duplicitous in its approach to the IMechE, I would very much prefer to receive a written assurance on each of these other issues from another source within the MoD that is both authoritative and trustworthy.

In conclusion, I acknowledge that I cannot make demands upon you to further investigate this matter, but I do ask that you consider introducing safeguards and procedures to prevent a recurrence of these ill-disciplined and doubtful practices of this MoD group, perhaps subjecting all of those involved to training to improve their professional behaviour.

Finally, I must express to you my disappointment in the way these individual staff members of the MoD have acted, particularly how certain individuals have seen fit to tittle-tattle about my standing as a professional engineer and, possibly, that their injudicious prattle may have placed me personally [REDACTED] at risk - this is a very sad reflection on a services arm that I once had a great deal of respect for.

That said, I have no criticism of how two officers who have been dealing with me directly on this matter. In this respect, both David Graham and Paul Methven have acted courteously and properly throughout, being as informative and helpful as possible under circumstances that must have been difficult for them.

I have copied a redacted version this note to the President of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, and a full version to each of the two officers cited above.