



Ministry  
of Defence

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15 September 2015

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your letter dated 17 August 2015 requesting the following information:

*“The number of accidental deaths or deaths by suicide/open verdict at RAF Benson between 1 January 1989 and [REDACTED] death on 4 September 2011;;*

*The number of accidental deaths or deaths by suicide/open verdict at RAF Benson from the time of [REDACTED] death until the present;*

*The name(s) of any other UK Armed Forces personnel, besides [REDACTED] to have died at RAF Benson during the time periods above;*

*The dates of their death; and*

*The circumstances of such deaths”*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence, and I can confirm that the information in scope of your request is held.

Information which can be released on the number of accidental deaths or suicides at RAF Benson and the date of death is detailed below. Information on name of the deceased and circumstances of death held by the Department falling within the scope of your request, is exempt from release under section 38 (Health and Safety) of the Freedom of Information Act and is therefore withheld.

The information you have requested on name and circumstances of death of the remaining individual falls within the scope of the following exemption under the Act: Section 38 (1)(a) where disclosure of the information would endanger the physical or mental health of any individual. We believe the release of the remaining individual's name could cause psychological and emotional distress to relatives, to whom the MOD has a residual duty of care. Furthermore, to release the circumstances of death could also lead to the inadvertent disclosure of this individual's identity. This exemption is a qualified exemption and, as such, it has been necessary to decide whether, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

The MOD recognises that there is continuing interest in suicides amongst personnel serving in the UK Armed Forces and that in releasing information the MOD would be promoting accountability and transparency. However it is possible that the disclosure or inadvertent disclosure of identities could cause Next of Kin distress and the MOD has a residual duty of care for the next of kin of those Service personnel who die whilst in-Service. In conclusion there is an overriding public

interest in withholding the information requested and for these reasons I have set the level of prejudice against release of the exempted information at the higher level of “would” rather than “would be likely to”. The balance of the public interest was found to be in favour of withholding the information.

Between 1 January 1989 and 4 September 2011, **two** UK Armed Forces personnel (including [REDACTED]) have died as result of a coroner confirmed suicide or open verdict at RAF Benson. **No** UK Armed Forces personnel have died as a result of accidents at RAF Benson in the same time period.

Between 5 September 2011 and 12 September 2015 (the latest data available) there have been **no** UK Armed Forces personnel to have died at RAF Benson.

The two deaths occurred on 12 February 1991 and 4 September 2011.

Defence Statistics (Health) compiles the Department’s authoritative deaths database for all **UK Armed Forces personnel who died whilst in Service** going back to 1984. Information is compiled from several internal and external sources from which we release a number of internal analyses and external National Statistics Notices.

The statistics provided include both coroner-confirmed suicides and open verdict deaths, in line with the definition used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), since research has shown that these deaths share many similarities with suicides except that in the case of open verdict deaths, the intention of the deceased to take their life has not been sufficiently proven to the satisfaction of the coroner.

If you are not satisfied with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely

Defence Statistics (Health)