



Ministry
of Defence

FOI2016/09714

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14th November 2016

Dear [REDACTED]

Release of Information

Thank you for your correspondence dated 18 October 2016 which has been considered to be a request for information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000. You requested the following information:

'I am seeking under FOI information details of the frequency during the Cold War of collisions at sea between vessels of the Royal Navy and Navy of the Soviet Union. I appreciate names and details of incidents may remain classified, but I would be interested in understanding how often these events occurred as a result of Cold War operations.

How many collisions were there between 1950-1990? How are they divided up as:

- Royal Navy submarines and Soviet Union submarines*
- Royal Navy submarines and Soviet Union surface vessels*
- Royal Navy surface vessels and Soviet Union submarines*
- Royal Navy surface vessels and Soviet Union surface vessels*

How many more incidents could be described as near misses? How many of the collisions resulted in Royal Navy casualties? How many RN vessels were taken out of service for 'a significant period' following such a collision. Is it recorded to what effect this had on the operation capability of the Royal Navy during the period?'

I can confirm that the Department does hold some information within the scope of your request; however, the information you require regarding collisions at sea during the period of the Cold War is not held centrally and would require a search to be made of the entirety of ship and submarine operational records covering 1950-1990. To produce this data would involve a manual search of individual records. Therefore, a review of over 18,000 operational records would be necessary to provide you with the level of detail you describe for the 40-year period requested. The manual search element would take an estimated 151

man-days of staff effort at a cost of £30,275.00, and exceed the appropriate cost limit under the FOI Act.

Section 12 of the Act makes provision for public authorities to refuse requests for information where the cost of dealing with them would exceed the appropriate limit, which for central government is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3.5 man days in determining whether the department holds the information and locating, retrieving and extracting it.

Major collisions during this period were recorded in BR 134 Collisions and Groundings and editions are available in ADM 234/1054 in The National Archives as indicated at the following hyperlink:

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2096962>

Further information of a Board of Inquiry into the notable incident of a collision between HMS Ark Royal and a Soviet Kotlin class destroyer in the Mediterranean during November 1970 is also available in ADM 330/54, ADM 330/55 and ADM 330/91 at The National Archives as indicated at the following hyperlinks:

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C3033967>

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/record?catid=8160942&catIn=6>

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The Ministry of Defence is permitted to withhold information where an exemption is considered justifiable. As the information you requested is already available to the public we have assessed your request falls under the absolute exemption at section 21 – Information reasonably accessible to the applicant by other means – of the Act. Consequently, we are not obliged to provide you with the information.

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, 1st Floor, Zone K, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail 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, <http://www.ico.org.uk>.

Yours sincerely

Navy Command Secretariat – FOI Section