



Ministry
of Defence

Air Command Secretariat
Spitfire Block
Headquarters Air Command
Royal Air Force
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP14 4UE

Ref. FOI2016/07928

By email: [REDACTED]

12 September 2016

Dear [REDACTED],

Thank you for your email of 19 August requesting the following information.

To ask HMG how many crew members or volunteers have died whilst carrying out search and rescue duties from the RAF Search and Rescue Force creation in 1941 until it was disbanded on 18th February 2016.

And for the number of fatalities by year to be released.

Note: The fatalities should have occurred whilst the individual was working for / seconded / volunteering for RAF SAR in the UK.

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000. I can confirm that we hold information on the subject you have requested. However, it has been assessed that the costs for which we are permitted to charge in providing this information will exceed the appropriate limit. This appropriate limit is specified in regulations and for central government is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3 and a half working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting the information.

For example, in order to ascertain the crew members or volunteers who have died while carrying out search and rescue duties from the RAF Search and Rescue Force since 1941 to the end of 1945 alone would involve the RAF Air Historical Branch checking several thousands of individual casualty cards, which would take approximately 134 hours and even this may prove inconclusive. As this would take in excess of 3 and a half working days, under the terms of Section 12 of the FOI Act, this means that we are not obliged to comply with your request. Conclusive information could be obtained if individual casualty files were recalled and examined; this clearly would increase the amount of time needed even further.

Under Section 16 of the Act, the Department is required to provide advice and assistance. Consequently, you may wish to note that the MOD may be able to provide some information in scope of your request if you reduce or refine your request to bring the cost of compliance

under the limit. For example, you may wish to note that the MOD does centrally hold some information relating to crew members or volunteers who have died while carrying out search and rescue duties since around 1970. Before this date, it may be possible for the Air Historical Branch to provide information in respect of historical casualties on a squadron specific basis, or, alternatively, for a specific year after the end of World War II. I should stress that in both instances it cannot be guaranteed that all deaths for those periods could be provided. Please let me know if you would like to refine your request. I would be happy to consider that.

Additionally, and as you may be aware, you may wish to note that The National Archives (TNA) in Kew, London, is the official repository for all documents generated by government departments, including the MOD, which have been selected for permanent preservation under the Public Records Acts. TNA holds all those over 30 years old and the major source for information on RAF units and formations is the Operations Record Book (ORB) of the unit or formation (known also as RAF Form 540). These will contain information related to crew members or volunteers that have died whilst carrying out search and rescue duties. You should note that the quality of ORBs is variable, with some containing more information than others.

The documents in the National Archives open collections are accessible to members of the public and may be studied by any interested individual. Members of the public may visit TNA in person or request a private researcher to undertake work for them. A fee will be charged for this service. The National Archives Catalogue is online and can be searched from their website. The website also gives access to the National Archives guides to searching their records, opening times, and other useful information.

Web: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/

The address of TNA is as follows:

The National Archives
Ruskin Avenue
Kew
Richmond
Surrey
TW9 4DU
Tel: 020 8876 3444

To assist you with any TNA search, you may wish to be aware that the following squadrons were associated with RAF Search and Rescue activities:

22 Squadron; 202 Squadron; 269 Squadron; 275 Squadron; 276 Squadron; 277 Squadron; 278 Squadron; 279 Squadron; 280 Squadron; 281 Squadron; 282 Squadron; 283 Squadron; 284 Squadron. 84, 103 and 228 Squadrons also had involvement in Search and Rescue activities.

If you are not satisfied with this response or 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, 2nd Floor, 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,

[Signed]

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the sender.

Air Command Secretariat