



Ministry of Defence

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MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ARMED FORCES



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D/MSU/4/7/1

25 June 2015

Dear Mr Ridley,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report of 28 April 2015 following the inquest into the deaths of Private Douglas Halliday, Private Alexander Isaac, Lance Corporal David Ramsden and Colour Sergeant Martyn Horton. The Ministry of Defence takes its relationship with HM Coroners extremely seriously and we fully recognise how important it is that we learn all possible lessons to ensure that deaths in similar circumstances in the future are prevented.

Your Regulation 28 Report raised seven concerns that I will address in turn. As you identify in your report several of these concerns will be addressed over a period outside the usual 56 day Regulation 28 report timeframe; the Defence Inquest Unit will provide you with quarterly updates to allow you to monitor the resolution of the issues. The first update will be provided by 25 September 2015.

Suspension Issues

In response to your concerns we are conducting a review of the whole vehicle suspension system with consideration also being given to the rest of the Cougar fleet of vehicles (Mastiff and Wolfhound). This includes:

1. A review of all available data including that recently provided by 1710 Naval Air Squadron (the Structural Materials Investigation team) in order to work out the best maintenance schedule. We aim to complete this and release a safety notice with findings by 30 June 2015.
2. Morgan Advanced Materials has been asked to complete an investigation into alternative bolts by 31 July 2015. Should the investigation prove that alternative bolts are required then we will commence a programme of fleet modifications to replace all bolts across the Cougar fleet of vehicles and review the associated maintenance routine by 31 August 2015.
3. An analysis of the entire spring hanger arrangement (front and rear) to identify potential improvements. This will consist of an initial feasibility review of options, followed by the design, prototyping and testing of proposed modifications or upgrades to ensure that the issues identified have been successfully addressed. We aim to complete this by 30 September 2015 and will then make those improvements across the Cougar fleet of vehicles (and review the associated maintenance regimes) by 31 January 2016.
4. A full vehicle review of the Ridgback vehicle to determine the most effective suspension system and options for implementation. This is a more complex piece of work with a direct read-across from Ridgback to Mastiff and Wolfhound and will involve extensive physical prototyping and trialling before design and testing of the safety and operational

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requirements for operating the vehicle. We will aim to complete the review by 31 October 2016 and make recommendations to Army HQ.

The dates stated at 2 and 3 above have both slipped by one month compared to those stated at the inquest. This is following extensive work to cross-reference the activity that we are taking in response to your concerns, with work already underway under contract with Morgan Advanced Materials. This will help us to avoid overlap or clashing work programmes.

Height Restrictions

Following the conclusion of combat operations in Afghanistan, the Army Capability Directorate for Combat has amended the height policy for vehicle crewmen across the range of in-service platforms to maximise safety for those operating the vehicles. The new policy emphasises the chain of command's responsibility to select and train personnel able to safely and effectively carry out the tasks required of them. Commanders on operations are still able to re-impose specific height restrictions on crew members should operational circumstances or the enemy threat require it. In response to your concerns the Army Capability Directorate for Combat will further review the wording of current policy on height restrictions for Ridgback and will ensure this is based on seating position, rather than the individual's role as part of the crew. The clarified policy is expected to be issued by 31 July 2015.

Lighting

In response to your concerns, Morgan Advanced Materials will provide an upgraded, legislatively compliant lighting system across the Cougar fleet of vehicles. Establishing what this means, and checking compliance with the Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations 1989, will be different for each vehicle. As well as checking legislative compliance we will conduct a subjective assessment of the performance of the lights in comparison with the old system from the position of the crewmen. The final design review is planned for July 2015. The production of circa 750 modification kits of a bespoke design will take 5 months after the final design review has formally signed-off the modification; therefore modification kits are expected by 30 November 2015 and implementation will be complete by 31 December 2016.

Tyre Pressures

As your report identified, there is presently no on-board means (either in terms of vehicle capabilities or by the use of carried tools) to inflate the tyres to the required pressure. The requirement to check and adjust where necessary, tyre pressures is a daily task defined in the relevant Army Equipment Support Publication (AESP). The MOD is currently investigating means to provide the capability of inflating tyres to 110 PSI from systems contained or carried on the vehicle; this work is being conducted in parallel with work to provide a similar capability for the Jackal and Coyote fleets, consisting of circa 700 vehicles. We expect to have identified options to provide this capability by 30 September 2015. In the interim, we have confirmed that sufficient capability exists within the Army Light Aid Detachment¹ to ensure the tyres on deployed vehicles can be maintained to the required pressure without having to return to a main operating base.

¹ A unit of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers embedded within a deployed unit and charged with the provision of immediate equipment support.



AESP Torque References

We are reviewing documentation to check for cross-referencing as you recommend. This review will encompass all of the publications for the 21 different in-service Cougar-based vehicle variants. The AESPs for the Cougar-based vehicle fleets are subject to a major update release every six months. The next is due 31 August 2015; the review work is due to be completed ahead of this date and any major findings will be issued in a Safety Notice prior to the formal publication.

Emergency Lighting

The Vehicle Emergency Lighting System (VELS) modification is on-going. The VELS kits were originally released to the Army and other users in June 2013; as at 02 June 2015 the percentage of the Cougar fleet that has been modified is as follows, with the percentage of the active fleet (vehicles actually being used by the Army and not in storage) shown in brackets: Ridgback 74% (85%), Mastiff 72% (77%), Wolfhound 49% (61%). Based on the time taken to complete modifications to date, the Army are expected to complete modifications on the active fleet² by 30 June 2016 and will not be able to use active fleet vehicles after this date unless VELS is fitted, with the whole of the fleet expected to be completed no later than the end of 2016.

I also wanted to provide you with the reassurance that the Roll Over Drills and Egress Trainer (RODET) is being fitted with VELS as part of the Cougar fleet modifications. As at 02 June 2015 40% of the RODETs have been modified, with the rest of the fleet due to be modified by late 2016.

Component Failure Awareness

A review of current training in respect of component failure awareness has been completed. This has resulted in direction to include additional lessons to reinforce the reasons and timeframe for raising fault reports, and the importance of experienced tradespersons diagnosing and reporting equipment failure to effective equipment support.

I hope this letter provides the reassurance and information that you were seeking and I am content for you to copy it to other Interested Persons and the Chief Coroner.

Yours sincerely,

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² The active fleet is the vehicles that have been issued to field units.