



Ministry  
of Defence

SECRETARY OF STATE  
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
FLOOR 5, ZONE D, MAIN BUILDING  
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

[REDACTED]

4.7.1

27 September 2021

Dear Mr Salter,

Thank you for your Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths dated 3 August 2021 following the Inquest into the very sad death of Corporal Ryan Lovatt. You concluded his death was accidental and highlighted your concerns that an accident of this type could occur again without further action from the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The MOD and I take the health and safety of members of the Armed Forces very seriously and I very much share your desire to prevent any such recurrence.

I am grateful to you for bringing your findings to my attention and I set out below the steps that have been taken on the issues you have raised.

As you highlight in your report, the environment experienced by personnel deployed on Operation CABRIT is unusual. They are providing formal defence output in a contested information space, where vigilance is constantly necessary to minimise the risk of operational or reputational compromise, but in a European nation where there are significant similarities with the UK. Balancing operational readiness, the preparedness to meet a threat with military force, with the requirement to maintain the mental wellbeing of our soldiers whilst deployed is a constant challenge. On Op CABRIT, attempts are made to create opportunities for those deployed to step away from the intensity of their role to relax and recharge. Whilst alcohol consumption is not a primary focus of this activity, it is one of the many UK norms, not usually present on operations, that the operation looks to permit in a controlled manner. Commanders constantly review Force Protection policies, which include rules on alcohol consumption and supervision outside camp.

**Mr D M Salter**  
**Her Majesty's Coroner for Oxfordshire**  
**Senior Coroner's Office**  
**Oxfordshire Coroner's Office**  
**The Oxford Register Office**  
**Second Floor**  
**1 Tidmarsh Lane**  
**Oxford OX1 1NS**

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**Matters of Concern** – *"my concern is that there is not a realistic, workable, or widely understood policy that is capable of being enforced with regard to alcohol on Op Cabrit and that, furthermore, the role of shark watch is not given greater prominence."*

The '2-can rule', which was used on Op CABRIT at the time of this incident, is commonly ordered by all three armed Services on Operations and Exercises where alcohol is permitted but there is a requirement to limit consumption to ensure maintenance of operational effectiveness. On Op CABRIT it was briefed on arrival in theatre and on each occasion before leaving camp. Failure to adhere to standing orders, including alcohol restrictions, is addressed by commanders through a combination of administrative and disciplinary measures.

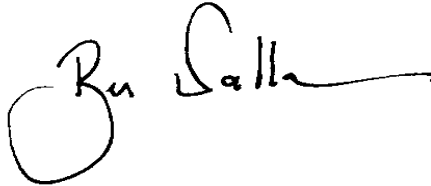
Nonetheless, following this incident there was a comprehensive review of the force protection policy on Op CABRIT. This review has replaced the 2-can rule with impact criteria, moving focus from the amount of alcohol consumed to the negative effects of consumption, in particular on the behaviour of personnel. This more nuanced direction states soldiers must "drink in moderation" ensuring they do not allow their judgement to become impaired or their behaviour to fall short of the Army's values and standards. It is combined with an education programme regarding the consequences of excessive alcohol consumption. I believe removal of the universal 2-can limit ties in with your remark that a less restrictive alcohol policy may reduce temptation to engage in excessive drinking when off camp. The current alcohol policy is at Paras 19–25 of Enclosure 1.

This policy review also considered whether the existing Sharkwatch direction was sufficient. Sharkwatch is an established military protocol, which grew out of requirements in Northern Ireland and West Germany to prevent soldiers being taken advantage of by those who wished them harm ('sharks'). A member of the group is nominated to remain sober, to keep watch in a supervisory role. It was outlined in the Force Protection policy that was extant at the time of Corporal Lovatt's death, but there was no explicit direction that the nominated individual should acknowledge their responsibility. The Sharkwatch policy was amended on 13 Nov 19 to include written orders which include the requirement to keep the group together, to return everyone safely to their overnight location and to report any deviation from orders to the Chain of Command. These orders are to be signed by the nominated individual and retained by the commander. I believe that this change has effectively addressed your concerns about the understanding of this policy and prominence of the role. The current, updated Sharkwatch policy is at Enclosure 2.

Part 1 Orders are issued daily and required to be read by all ranks. These orders contain regular repeats of all aspects of the Force Protection policy, including the prevailing restrictions on alcohol and the actions required of duty personnel, including those undertaking Sharkwatch. This is targeted at ensuring an instinctive understanding of the alcohol and Sharkwatch policy at all levels among the deployed force. An example of recent Part 1 Orders from Poland is at Enclosure 3.

Thank you for writing to me about this important matter. The MOD is a learning organisation and I hope that my response has demonstrated that Defence has learned, and will continue to learn, lessons from the tragic death of Cpl Lovatt. I hope too that Cpl Lovatt's family will draw some comfort from the knowledge that action has been taken to address your concerns.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Wallace". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping tail.

**THE RT HON BEN WALLACE MP**

**Enclosures:**

1. Operation CABRIT Force Protection Policy dated 29 Jun 21.
2. Operation CABRIT Orders for Sharkwatch dated 29 Jun 21.
3. Poacher Troop Orders dated 27 Aug 21.