MR. BISHOP

I submit herewith my report to the Prime Minister in reply to
his minute of 9th May.

I am not sure what procedure the Prime Minister will wish to
adopt about this report. But we have only three flimsies. If the
P.M. wants copies circulated to a number of people perhaps you will
let us know fairly soon in order that the necessary copies can be made.

I think you know that I had arranged to be away for the week after
Whitsun (I shall be at my home until Tuesday morning). If there is
a likelihood that I shall be wanted during this week it would be
convenient if I could be told before Tuesday morning.

[Signature]

18th May, 1956
REPORT OF AN ENQUIRY ON AN
INTELLIGENCE OPERATION
AGAINST RUSSIAN WARSHIPS
PRIME MINISTER

I. INTRODUCTORY

My terms of reference are set out in your Minute of 9th May, a copy of which is annexed (Appendix I). You asked me to carry out on your behalf an enquiry into the circumstances in which Commander Crabb undertook an intelligence operation against the Russian warships in Portsmouth Harbour on 19th April, the enquiry to include (a) what authority was given for the operation, and (b) why its failure was not reported to Ministers until 3rd May.

I have seen 12 witnesses. A list, which provides a key to the initials used in this report, is given in Appendix II. A summary of the evidence, which has been seen by the witnesses, is available if required.

I acknowledge gratefully the great help which I have had and the candour with which my enquiries were answered.

I think I can best discharge my task if I give first a bare chronology of the main events; and then set out for the consideration of yourself and the other responsible Ministers the essential points about each of the main issues which seem to me to arise.

I have tried to do this as objectively as I can, with as little intrusion as possible of personal judgment. I have also done my best to present matters as they must have appeared to the officers concerned at the moment of action, without drawing on hind sight.
II. CHRONOLOGY

December 1954

The Admiralty notified intelligence organisations of their requirements to have information about the under-water noise characteristics of Russian warships. This requirement was given first priority by the Admiralty.

October 1955

Russian cruiser Sverdlov visited Portsmouth. Under-water examination was carried out and produced useful results. At the same time, H.M. ships visited Leningrad where they were subjected to intensive intelligence probes by the Russians, including the use of divers.

22 February 1956

A meeting was held at the Admiralty to discuss the rate opportunity for intelligence procurement presented by the Russian naval visits to Western European naval ports.

Mid-March 1956

Another meeting was held at the Admiralty about intelligence operations to be carried out against the Russian warships at Portsmouth, and specifically mentioning the use of frogmen.

6th April 1956

The First Lord asked the Prime Minister for authority to carry out operation CLARET against the Russian warships.

10th April 1956

1 minute setting out the list of possible operations to be carried out during the B. and K. visit. (Appendix III(a)) As a result of this conversation gained the impression that Foreign Office clearance had been given for the proposed operations against the Soviet warships.
12th April 1956

The Prime Minister minuted to the First Lord of the Admiralty in connection with the proposal to mount operation CLARET, "I am sorry, but we cannot do anything of this kind on this occasion". The Foreign Office were aware of this decision.

Commander Crabb arrived in the evening at Portsmouth and went to the Sallyport Hotel where they both registered in their own names and addresses. After doing this, Crabb telephoned a naval officer (from H.M.S. Vernon) who was going to be asked to give unofficial help in the operation. On this day was introduced to the Chief Constable and Chief Superintendent of Portsmouth Police.

Tuesday, 17th April

Wednesday, 18th April

The Russian ships berthed at Portsmouth. It had been intended that Commander Crabb should carry out a dive early in the morning but our own security precautions prevented this from being done. A practice dive was carried out in the early evening when Crabb approached close under water to the Russian ships but returned to his launching boat after about half an hour in order to make some alterations to the weights which he was carrying. The naval officer, who was giving unofficial help, observed that very little oxygen had been used and that Crabb appeared to be in good trim. That evening Crabb visited some friends living at Havant.

Thursday, 19th April

and Commander Crabb left their hotel just before six in the morning. They picked up the naval officer who was helping them and went into the dockyard. The dive commenced just before seven o'clock, when Commander Crabb had in his oxygen cylinder enough gas for two hours under water. His operating instructions were to restrict himself to an examination of the rudder and screws of
the Russian cruiser and it was estimated that this would not take more than one hour.

By a quarter past nine when Commander Crabb had not returned, and the naval officer realised that there had been a serious mishap and they carried out as best they could a search of the area. Throughout the whole of their time on the boat and during their search, they neither heard nor saw any sign of abnormal activities from the Russians.

The mishap was reported and to N.L.D.'s representative at Portsmouth who arranged a further search with a motor launch. N.L.D.'s representative explained that a full search with all available facilities could be arranged, but it was not advised, since it would reveal the whole story without there being any hope of saving Commander Crabb (who was weighted). Later the naval officer who had been helping reported the occurrence to the Captain of H.M.S. Vernon, who immediately acquainted C.-in-C., Portsmouth.

During the day returned to the hotel, paid his bill and Commander Crabb's and removed their baggage.

Friday, 20th April

Saturday, 21st April

In the evening Admiral Kotov, who had spent the day informally with Admiral Burnett (Chief of Staff to C.-in-C., Portsmouth) said, over the coffee after dinner, that three of his sailors had seen a frogman about 8 o'clock in the morning of the 19th, but he was not proposing to make any fuss about it or to lodge a complaint.
Mr. Dean spoke on the telephone to Sir L. Kirkpatrick, who was at Chequers. This conversation was in connection with as Sir L. Kirkpatrick had no knowledge whatsoever of the frogman operation. Mr. Dean made no reference to the mishap at Portsmouth.

_ was informed of Admiral Kotov's comment to Admiral Burnett.

Sir L. Kirkpatrick was informed by Mr. Dean of the presumed loss of Crabb.

Mr. Pendock (Commander Crabb's employer) rang up the naval officer at Havant with whom Commander Crabb had spent the evening of 18th April, to seek news of him. This naval officer reported the matter to the Admiralty.

At this stage D.N.L agreed that it was of the utmost importance to keep Commander Crabb's activities quiet until after the Russian visit was over and they both agreed that the only hope of preventing early publicity and embarrassment to H.M.G. would be for the Admiralty to assume responsibility for action and admit sponsorship, but D.N.L still hesitated to accept responsibility on the Admiralty's behalf.

A meeting was held in the morning with D.N.L, the Director-General of M.I.5.

Three main conclusions emerged from this discussion. They were:

5.
(i) D.N.L. agreed to submit to V.C.N.S. that the Admiralty should at once assume responsibility for covering the operation;

(ii) It was agreed that if the matter were put to higher authority in one Department it would, at the same time, have to go up to higher authority in the other Departments concerned;

(iii) It was agreed that the top priority was to prevent the story breaking while the Russians were still in England;

That afternoon V.C.N. S. agreed that the Admiralty would have to provide cover and he also agreed that a naval officer, Captain Sarell, should go to see Mr. Pendeck to try and persuade him to keep quiet. At the meeting that this was decided together with D.N.L, the Director-General of M.I.5 and

No developments took place other than the not unimportant consideration that it began to look as if it were possible that the story might not break.

A meeting with D.N.L, Captain Sarell, the Director-General of M.I.5 and A brief was drafted which it was proposed that the Admiralty would use if they had to answer any questions about Crabb. Later in the day the Secretary to the Admiralty was informed of the incident and was asked to approve the draft brief. He said he would decide on Monday, 30th April, whether or not to inform the First Lord.

6.
Captain Sarell informed Commander Crabb's mother of the presumed death.

After discussion in Portsmouth which was directed to seeking local advice on appropriate action, Superintendent Lamport of Portsmouth Police removed pages from the hotel register.

The Russian ships left Portsmouth.

Saturday, 28th April

Captain Sarell interviewed Commander Crabb's ex-wife.

The press began to ask the Admiralty questions, and they answered these questions on the lines of the brief which had been agreed on 27th April.

There were reports about Crabb's disappearance in the press - mostly speculative.

The Secretary to the Admiralty decided not to put the case to the First Lord. Although the Admiralty had been forced to assume shared responsibility, Sir J. Lang learned that Sir L. Kirkpatrick had decided not to tell the Foreign Secretary until the Admiralty told their Minister. On the picture as presented to him, he thought that the risk of a bad break was small and so he decided to carry the responsibility himself and not to tell the First Lord.
Sir L. Kirkpatrick felt the responsibility for the operation lay with the Admiralty and that it was for these reasons that the Admiralty had decided to accept responsibility for the cover story - they had not, so far as he knew, spoken to the Foreign Office about this. But the fact that they had decided to put out the cover story suggested to him that it was primarily for them (the Admiralty) to approach their Ministers.

1st May

Press stories continued, but no hard facts were reported which could give cause for serious alarm.

2nd May

Press reporters discovered that pages had been removed from the register of the hotel where [Commander Crabb] stayed and the hotel proprietor and the police were vigorously questioned. It was clear from the questions asked that the press knew that Commander Crabb had stayed at the hotel in the company of a man [ ]

3rd May

The morning papers gave considerable publicity to the hotel register incident and it was clear that an all-out press campaign was about to begin with the identity [ ] as one of the central features.

No hope could now be entertained that the matter might be kept quiet.

Later that afternoon, the First Lord of the Admiralty was informed and in the absence of the Foreign Secretary on duty Mr. Dean told the Minister of State.

4th May

The Prime Minister learned what had happened.
III. THE OPERATION ITSELF

It is right to start with a few general remarks about the operation itself.

Since December, 1954, one of the standing intelligence requirements notified by the Admiralty has been information about the underwater noise characteristics of Russian warships. Indeed, this comes first in the list of Admiralty requirements since the information is necessary for the effective use of certain types of mine and torpedo. The news that M. Bulganin and M. Kryuchkov were coming to Portsmouth in a Russian cruiser provided an important opportunity to obtain this information since Russian warships are rarely within range.

It is perhaps of interest that when British warships visited Leningrad in October, 1955, the Soviet authorities made a great effort to obtain intelligence information about our ships. It was obvious that most of the visitors to the ships were naval personnel or technicians. I have been given detailed particulars about this. For example, constant efforts were made to break away from conducted parties and a visitor who had disclaimed knowledge of English would constantly come out with a question such as "How is your squid stabilised?" and one visitor was found with a paper parcel under his arm which was found to contain a camera. An unnecessarily large number of divers laid a mooring buoy near the ships. Such instances could be multiplied.

The conclusion which it is sought to draw from this is that the Russians would expect [illegible] to make use of any corresponding opportunity open to them to obtain information about Russian ships.

Forbidden.

F. J.
How much relevance has this to the matters which I have to enquire into? Setting aside the all important issue whether it was appropriate to carry out a frogman operation on the occasion of the visit of Mr Bulganin and M. Krushchev, it is, I think, fair to say that from the point of view of those whose duty it is to collect information there was nothing unusual about the character of the operation proposed. Indeed, one can go further and say that provided the operation was carried out with due precautions there was no reason why it should be attended by any special risks.

This is perhaps the place to record that due precautions were not taken in carrying out this operation.

Furthermore, Commander Crabb should not have been allowed to spend so much time in Portsmouth where he was likely to meet people he knew. He was brought to Portsmouth on the 17th April with a view to the operation being carried out on the following morning when the Russian ships anchored at Portsmouth.
I feel bound to mention this since, had due precautions been observed in carrying out the operation, there is no reason why its failure should have involved the Government in any way or caused any embarrassment.
V. WHY WAS THE FAILURE OF THE OPERATION NOT REPORTED TO
MINISTERS UNTIL 4TH MAY?

The answer to this question is bedevilled by the fact that the Admiralty
regarded the Foreign Office as responsible for the operation, while the
Foreign Office thought the Admiralty were responsible. How did it come
about that these contrary views were held?

It is true that the operation was carried out in response to an Admiralty
requirement, but the operation of April 1956 - like the operation of
October 1955 and the help
given to the operation by the Admiralty was described as unofficial.
At the stage when the operation was being planned, both the Admiralty[
ook the view that the operation was one for which the Foreign
Secretary's approval was required, always assuming that a Minister’s
approval was necessary.

In the Admiralty's view, therefore, the operation was essentially one
for which the Foreign Office were responsible. After the Admiralty took
over responsibility on 25th April for providing cover they regarded
themselves as having a shared responsibility with the Foreign Office.

The Foreign Office, as already stated, unaware until Sir Norman Brook’s enquiry that either had - or was
supposed to have - given F.O. approval to the operation. They seem to
have assumed that the operation was one for which the Admiralty was
responsible.

It is apparent that there is some lack of clarity about which Minister
is responsible for operations in this country for
which specific Ministerial authority has not been given. I conclude
that this is a point which merits further examination. In the event, it is
clear that neither the Admiralty nor the Foreign Office officials throughout the crucial period regarded their Department as having the major or primary responsibility for the operation. The attitude of officials in each Department was that they would tell their Minister as soon as the Minister in the other Department was told - but not before. Looking back, it is perhaps a pity that the senior officials of the two Departments did not have direct discussions on this point.

I am also told by officials of both Departments that they had considerable hopes that the prompt measures taken by the Admiralty from 25th April onwards in dealing with Commander Crabb's employer and relations would prevent the matter from breaking in the press.

Again, there was the consideration that during important parts of this period Ministers were very heavily occupied in important discussions. B. and K. did not leave this country until 27th April. No doubt all these arguments have some validity. But in my discussion with the officers concerned - which of course, includes several very senior officers of great experience - I found general agreement that, apart from the greater wisdom which hindsight brings, it would have been both right and prudent to tell Ministers what had happened at a considerably earlier stage than was done. You may well come to the conclusion that this is the right view. But I cannot think that, given all the circumstances, the mistake was a very serious one. One thing is clear and that is that it is impossible to single out any one individual from the dramatis personae as deserving of special blame in this respect.
VI. OTHER MATTERS

Two other happenings in the narrative of events call for comment. The first concerns the action taken by the Portsmouth Police in removing two pages of the hotel register of the Sallyport Hotel where Commander Crabb had stayed. According to the particulars furnished to me, the Portsmouth Police were asked to advise what action should be taken about the hotel register but were not authorised to act.

The discovery on 2nd May that pages had been removed from the register was the mine the firing of which finally led to the all-out press campaign. And it is thus arguable that this action by the Portsmouth Police which seems to have been taken without full authority from London, was a serious error.

I do not take this view. The removal of pages from the register cannot, I think, be regarded as an unreasonable precaution. This is reinforced by the fact that it became clear later that the press knew that Commander Crabb had stayed at the hotel in company with a man. I have not, therefore, thought it necessary to investigate whether the action of the Portsmouth Police was taken without due authority.

The last happening which must be commented on is one which you may be surprised that I have left to the end, namely, the fact that your decision of 12th April against operation CLARET did not become known to those who were mounting the frogman operation.

Looking at the matter first from the Foreign Office end, it is clear that if the misunderstanding had not occurred,
and if [ ] had submitted the matter to the Foreign Office as should certainly have been done, then the senior officers at the Foreign Office would have linked up your decision on the CLARET proposal with the frogman operation, and the latter would not have been allowed to go forward.

Looking at the matter now from the Admiralty end, the fact that you had ruled against CLARET was notified to the Foreign Office by the Military Branch of the Admiralty. It may be asked why D.N.I., who knew about the plans for the frogman operation, did not also communicate the decision [ ]. The answer is that he did not regard it as any part of his business to do so. Further, I think he took the view that higher authority did not regard the same standards or tests which applied to what was done by the Admiralty as governing what should be done.

Many of those concerned [ ] should, I think, share the view expressed in the last sentence. Nevertheless, I think you will conclude that some amendment is called for in the existing arrangements [ ], both as regards Ministerial authority and more generally.

While I am not asked to consider questions of organisation and could not do so without greatly widening the scope of my enquiry, I hope I shall not be thought to be going too far if I suggest certain points which seem to me to deserve investigation.

I understand that the difficulties of obtaining information abroad have led in recent years to more and more operations being mounted in this country. I think it is also accepted that the failure of an operation in this country has far more embarrassing effects than failure of an operation abroad. This is in part due to the extreme vigilance of the British press and their readiness to take every advantage of any apparent slip by any Government organisation.
It seems to me, therefore, that the degree of careful preparation and forethought necessary for all operations is greater in this country than elsewhere. This applies not merely to the arrangements for the operation itself, but to those aspects of the plan which are directed to

It seems to me that the most essential point is that measures should be introduced which would ensure that proposals for operations in this country are in future subjected to a far more rigorous test and scrutiny by all those concerned.

At the same time, it would also be desirable for two related matters to be examined:

(a) the question of Ministerial responsibility for certain types of operations which does not seem to be altogether clear (see page 17);

(b) arrangements to make sure that decisions given by yourself or some other Minister in regard to an operation put forward by one Department, are automatically brought to the notice of other Departments likely to be concerned.
VII. SUMMARY

A report of this nature does not lend itself to a summary of conclusions and what follows is more by way of an epitome of the main points.

If the operation had been carried out with due precautions there was no reason why it should have been attended by any special risk. But, in fact, those who carried out the operation failed to observe a number of precautions which should have been taken. The main responsibility for this must be shared.

Failure to seek the authority of the Foreign Office for the operation was due to a misunderstanding.

The delay in informing Ministers of the failure of the operation was largely due to the fact that the Admiralty regarded the Foreign Office as having been responsible for the operation while the Foreign Office thought that the Admiralty were responsible. It was not due to lack of consideration of this point by senior officials in the Departments concerned [Section V].

The reasons why your decision against operation CLARET were not notified are analysed both as regards the officers concerned and as regards possible faults in organisation [Section VI].
Suggestions are made as to certain matters of organisation which might be examined. Perhaps the most important of these are measures to ensure that all proposed operations in this country are in future subjected to a more rigorous test and scrutiny. Another is the definition of Ministerial responsibility for operations carried out in this country [Section VI].

I am much indebted to Mr. T.J. Bligh, D.S.O., O.B.E., D.S.C., and to Mr. W.R. Darracott, D.S.C., for all the help I have had from them, more particularly in connection with the hearing of witnesses and the notes of evidence.

18 May 1956.

Edward Bridges.
SIR EDWARD BRIDGES

I wish you to carry out on my behalf an enquiry into the circumstances in which Commander Crabb undertook an intelligence operation against the Russian warships in Portsmouth harbour on April 19.

Your enquiry should include the following points:-
(a) what authority was given for the operation, and
(b) why its failure was not reported to Ministers until May 4.

My object is to establish, by independent enquiry, what the facts are and where responsibility lies. When the report of this enquiry is available I will consider, with the responsible Ministers, what disciplinary action, if any, should be taken.

I have asked the Ministers in charge of the Departments concerned to give whatever instructions are necessary to ensure that officers in their Departments give you all the assistance you may require in carrying out this enquiry.

A.E.

May 9, 1956
APPENDIX II

TOP SECRET

List of Witnesses, some of whom were seen on more than one occasion

Foreign Office

Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.

Mr. P.H. Dean, C.M.G.

Vice-Admiral Sir William Davis, K.C.B., D.S.O.,
Vice Chief of Naval Staff

Sir John Lang, G.C.B.

D.N.I. - Rear-Admiral J.G.T. Inglis, O.B.E.,
Director of Naval Intelligence

(N.I.D. = Naval Intelligence Division)

M.I.5

The Director General