

FM DOT 221810Z NOV 83
TO IMMEDIATE NEW DELHI
TELEGRAM NUMBER OTTER 542 OF 22 NOVEMBER

FOR JONES
FROM SALVIDGE

THE FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A DEPARTMENTAL SUBMISSION TO OUR MINISTERS ON THE WESTLAND HELICOPTER PROBLEM. IT IS FOR YOUR INFORMATION. DEFENSIVE BRIEFING ON LINE FOR PRIME MINISTER TO TAKE WILL FOLLOW AFTER FURTHER DISCUSSIONS WITH WESTLAND THIS AFTERNOON.

THE CAA AND FAA HAVE ORDERED THE GROUNDING OF ALL WESTLAND 30 HELICOPTERS PENDING THE INVESTIGATION OF AND ACCIDENT TO AN AIRSPUR W30 HELICOPTER NEAR LOS ANGELES ON 7 NOVEMBER. THE AIRCRAFT WAS ON A SCHEDULED FLIGHT WHEN IT INCURRED A FAILURE IN THE TAIL ROTOR PITCH LEVER AND BECAME UNCONTROLLABLE. THE AIRCRAFT WAS BROUGHT DOWN VERY RAPIDLY BUT IN DOING SO IT HIT OVERHEAD POWER CABLES AND IN THE ACCIDENT ITS TAIL AND BOOM AND MAIN ROTOR BLADES BROKE OFF. THE AIRCRAFT'S CABIN REMAINED INTACT AND THERE WERE NO FATALITIES, ALTHOUGH ONE PILOT AND ONE PASSENGER WERE HOSPITALISED.

THE REASON FOR THE FAILURE OF THE TAIL ROTOR PITCH CONTROL LEVER IS NOT KNOWN AND URGENT INVESTIGATIONS ARE UNDER WAY AT YEovil AND BY THE US FAA WITH THE HELP OF THE CAA AND THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT'S ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION BRANCH. WESTLAND ARE UNDERSTOOD TO BE WORKING ROUND THE CLOCK TO REMEDY THE PROBLEM BUT THE INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE FAILURE IS A SERIOUS ONE AND THE MOD BELIEVE THAT IT MAY BE SOMETIME BEFORE THE W30 IS GIVEN CLEARANCE TO RESUME FLYING. WESTLAND HAVE NOT SO FAR MADE ANY STATEMENT BUT THE W30 PROJECT MANAGER IS TO MEET WITH MOD AND DEPARTMENTAL OFFICIALS ON FRIDAY 25 NOVEMBER TO REPORT ON THE LATEST POSITION.

THE W30 IS A LYNX DERIVATIVE AND ACCORDING TO MEDIA REPORTS THIS MORNING UK AND DUTCH MILITARY LYNX AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN GROUNDED PENDING INVESTIGATION OF THE W30 FAILURE. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE PROBLEM ENCOUNTERED ON THE AIRSPUR W30 WAS EXPERIENCED ON A ROYAL NAVY LYNX ABOUT A MONTH AGO.

WE KNOW NO MORE THAN THAT AT PRESENT BUT A FAILURE SO EARLY IN THE LIFE OF A W30 IS BAD NEWS AND COULD HAVE VERY SERIOUS EFFECTS ON CUSTOMER CONFIDENCE IN THE AIRCRAFT. THE ACCIDENT WAS TO THE W30 - 100 SERIES WHICH WESTLAND HAD DEVELOPED ON A PV BASIS. THE LAUNCH-AID FOR THE W30 PROGRAMME WHICH THE DEPARTMENT HAS MADE AVAILABLE TO WESTLAND IS FOR THE FOLLOW ON - 200 AND - 300 SERIES AIRCRAFT WHICH HAVE NOT YET ENTERED PRODUCTION.

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