



Ministry  
of Defence

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

Ref. 2018/15539

Mr C Cole  
[chris@dronewars.net](mailto:chris@dronewars.net)

7 January 2019

Dear Mr Cole,

Thank you for your e-mail of 4 December 2018 asking for information about the UK's Reaper fleet. Specifically, you requested:

*"how many hours has each of the UK's Reaper MQ-9 airframes flown"*

I am treating your correspondence as a request for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. A search for the information has now been completed within the Ministry of Defence and I can confirm that information within the scope of your request is held. Under Section 16 of the Act (Advice and Assistance) you may wish to note that the accumulated total flying hours accrued across the UK's entire Reaper fleet since entry into service is some 106,370 hours.

We do hold recorded information on the flying hours for each of the UK's Reaper airframes. However, Section 26(1) b of the Act provides that we should withhold information which would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of relevant forces. The Act requires that we have to carry out a public interest (PIT) in this respect to show that the reasons for withholding the information outweigh the reasons for releasing the information.

A limited disclosure of the flying hours accumulated across the Reaper fleet would provide a reasonable level of overall understanding of the level of Reaper activity. As a small amount of information has previously been released for Reaper flying hours the public interest in further disclosure of flying hours for each airframe is therefore limited. To release the flying hours for each individual airframe could indicate how many flying hours the aircraft may have left in the airframe design life which would provide potential and actual enemies with information about our capabilities and therefore a tactical advantage to our enemies. There remains a very strong public interest in preserving the RAF's ability to defend the UK and its interests abroad through the effectiveness of its airpower and by withholding tactical information that could aid a potential or actual enemy.

I conclude that the balance of the public interest for providing full details of the number of flying hours for each individual Reaper airframe is firmly in favour of maintaining the exemption under S.26(1)(b) and thus of withholding the information.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this letter, please contact this office in the first instance.

If you wish to complain about the handling of your request, or the content of this response, you can request an independent internal review by contacting the Information Rights Compliance team, Ground Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail [CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk](mailto:CIO-FOI-IR@mod.uk)). Please note that any request for an internal review should be made within 40 working days of the date of this response.

If you remain dissatisfied following an internal review, you may raise your complaint directly to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website at <https://ico.org.uk/>.

Yours sincerely

Paul Webb  
Secretariat 3a1  
Air Command