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TRANSCRIPT OF “FILE ON 4” – “WINGING IT?”

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THE ATTACHED TRANSCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A RECORDING AND NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS, THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY.

“FILE ON 4”

Transmission: Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Repeat: Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2019

Producer: Mick Tucker

Reporter: Jane Deith

Editor: Gail Champion

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#### ACTUALITY OF TORNADO FLYPAST

DEITH: Last month, the RAF Tornado flew its farewell sortie. The Cold War era plane, which went to war in Iraq, Kosovo and Afghanistan, has now retired from the frontline.

PILOT: It's been an utter privilege, best job anyone could have.

DEITH: The Tornado will be replaced by the new era of fighter planes, flown by the next generation of pilots. There's no shortage of recruits eager to strap themselves in. But soaring numbers are finding their wings are being clipped. This programme started with trouble inside what's supposed to be one of the best military flying training systems in the world; a story told by sources the Ministry of Defence wants to stop us speaking to.

READER IN STUDIO 2: People's training is taking six or seven years when it should take three. People are leaving, so the military is shooting itself in the foot.

READER IN STUDIO 1: It's a huge contract and it's fundamentally failing. There are so many elements that just aren't working. They do initial officer training and then everything stops for at least a couple of years. I mean, they're stuck.

DEITH: We reveal serious problems with the outsourcing of the training at the heart of our defence capability, a system where hundreds of pilots sit waiting to fly, while a private company is paid for 'ghost' courses with no-one on them.

#### EXTRACT FROM ROYAL NAVY ADVERTISEMENT

PRESENTER: You think, you start, you learn, you fly, you chase, you fly, you save, you pull, you pause, you help, rise, find, hunt, save, shout, shoot, learn, live - a life without limits.

TYSLER: I think anyone that's ever flown something like that or have been in a small aircraft or likes the feeling of flying, yeah of course, you see it and you think, oh, I wish I could be up there.

DEITH: Lieutenant Charley Tysler was an officer in the Royal Navy and was pursuing her dream of becoming a helicopter pilot on the Merlin Mark 2 – the submarine hunter.

#### ACTUALITY OF PIGS

DEITH: Today she's chasing pigs – on her farm and campsite in France.

TYSLER: We have two glamping domes, two pigs, one goat, three miniature donkeys, two turkeys and about forty chickens.

DEITH: Charley started learning to fly when it was taught in-house, by the military. But her flying training stalled so many times, she says, it was part of the reason her Navy career ran aground.

**TYSLER:** On paper, when you joined up, it was meant to be 18 months from finishing at the Naval College at Dartmouth until you were fully trained and had what they call your wings. The elementary flying training took longer for us to progress through due to problems with the aircraft whilst we were there, so the whole fleet of Grob tutors were grounded. I can't remember how many months they were grounded for, maybe six or seven, I think. There's an expression that they use called 'ground happy', which is clearly the absolute opposite to that, but where you just end up sitting unable to fly.

**DEITH:** After getting to grips with the Grob – the small fixed wing plane - Charley was meant to move up to helicopters. But there was a long wait. The military calls it a 'holdover'.

**TYSLER:** So I finished in June 2011 and I didn't start flying again until November 2012, so quite a long gap. We had no real idea how long it was going to last or when we would get back to training. I managed to get myself a job over at the UK Maritime Component Command in Bahrain. I returned six months later in April 2012 and went straight to a different job at Navy Command Headquarters and also was drafted in to do the Olympics.

**DEITH:** A year and a half went by. Defence cuts in 2010 had meant Harrier pilots had switched to helicopters, taking training places. After her basic helicopter course, Charley was back on hold for another six months – bringing the delays to two years in total. As something useful to do, she went on an escape and survival course in Cornwall. She injured her knee and was called before a Navy medical board. It gave her a year's grace to see if surgery helped. But a naval employability board decided to medically discharge her anyway, saying it couldn't keep her training place open for her. The decision letter said:

**READER IN STUDIO:** You will be aware that pilot training places are extremely limited. Given the amount of time you have spent in training, the length of time downgraded leading to skill fade and the time still needed to get you to trained strength, these places need to be allocated to personnel who will be able to complete all aspects of operational deployment.

DEITH: The Navy said Charley would need another three years to get fit and qualify as a pilot. That would eat into the time left on her commission - her contract. And acknowledging - quote - deficiencies in training capacity, the Navy made a calculation. It's set out in her employability board document:

READER IN STUDIO: It is not deemed value for money to invest in a further three years on the untrained strength and an operational conversion unit slot for this officer against others in the training pipeline.

TYSLER: I wasn't given the chance to rehabilitate fully due to the medical discharge process. I absolutely feel like my length of time spent on the untrained strength did have an impact on the decision to medically discharge me. There were delays in flying training and there was nothing I could do about that. Throughout those delays I always worked hard to make sure that I was actually giving the Navy value for money and not just taking a pay cheque.

#### MUSIC – INVICTUS GAMES CHOIR

DEITH: And when she was injured, she was a poster girl for the Navy, as a member of the Invictus Games choir.

TYLER: Subsequent to that, I was nominated rather ironically for an award at the Women in Defence Awards for outstanding contribution to the Armed Forces in the same year that I was medically discharged and told that I was not value for money.

DEITH: Charley's now fighting for compensation for the loss of her Navy career. Keir Hirst is her solicitor.

HIRST: The medical panel had said that ultimately she would be fit for flying duties, or that she would have had a very good chance had sufficient time for rehabilitation been allowed. And yet the decision was still made to medically discharge her and it will simply have been made on a rather crude value for money exercise. If you're in a situation where your career has been delayed by two years and unfortunately you then suffer

HIRST cont: an injury which has an adverse impact on your career as well, and then a decision is made in respect of your employability by the armed forces, you're at a genuine disadvantage because you never get the time back, and so if you were a fully trained pilot at the point of discharge, then you'll be in a much stronger position.

DEITH: You're saying if the training system had been better organised and she had gone through on time, she might still be in the Navy today?

HURST: She would have a much better chance of staying in the Navy because she would have been in the trained strength.

DEITH: Charley Tysler believes she's fit enough to fly a helicopter and that the delays in her training may have cost her her career. The MoD told us it can't comment on individual cases. Charley paid a personal price, but the hold ups were costing the MoD dear too. So around that time, it started handing over flying training to the private sector, the new Labour Government having given a multi-billion pound contract to a company called Ascent. A partnership of defence giants, Lockheed Martin and Babcock International, Ascent was supposed to reduce cost and deliver a world class Military Flying Training System to prepare aircrew for the next generation of planes. But we can reveal the number of flying students stuck in a holding pattern has soared, costing the public purse millions while they wait. We'll give you the hard numbers in a minute. But while you're on hold, some music:

MUSIC

SINGER: Hello darkness my old friend, it looks like I'm on hold again ...

DEITH: We were leaked this. It's actually an amateur music video, featuring pilots gazing longingly at helicopters as they while away the hours, lying on beds looking at clocks, someone else asleep under a Christmas tree. Whoever made this, they have a lot of time on their hands, and they're pretty frustrated.

SINGER: Nobody knows what the hell is going on, or what is wrong ...

DEITH: We'd heard holdovers were getting worse, not better; that some people were waiting up to three years to start elementary flying lessons, so we asked the Ministry of Defence how many people were on hold in the training pipeline last year. It told us it didn't know, because figures weren't readily available. That was in this email on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February. Which is strange, because on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, the MoD had replied to a request from someone else with really up to date numbers. That person has passed them exclusively to us. In one year, the number of those on hold waiting to start elementary flying training has more than doubled, from 85 in February last year, to 190 this January. In the summer of 2016, there were just 11 people on hold. When you include officers waiting for more advanced courses – like fast jet or helicopter training – the number on hold is now 350 - twice as many as this time last year.

SINGER: But Ascent they delayed us once again, I'll trust them when I'm flying ...

DEITH: And boy, the delays can be long. The average wait for an RAF officer to start helicopter training is two years. The estimated time for an RAF officer to reach fast jet operational conversion unit is up to 90 months. That's seven and a half years. The Conservative MP Dr Julian Lewis is Chair of the Defence Select Committee.

LEWIS: As a first step, I would expect that the committee will, in the light of your findings, we will be writing to the Secretary of State, asking how this situation has arisen. One can only imagine the huge degree of frustration which people will experience if they are kept waiting for seven or eight years when the normal time expected to be able to qualify is something of the order of half that period. There is a huge danger of a loss of potential talent. The idea that somebody might be waiting until their late twenties before they can graduate as a fully-fledged RAF fast jet pilot is clearly ridiculous, unacceptable and will have to be resolved speedily.

DEITH: RAF Valley on Anglesey is the home of fast jet training. A lot of our information has come from Valley. As the delays in the Military

DEITH cont: Flying Training System have increased, so have the sensitivities. People want to talk, but they are scared to put their heads above the parapet. So we've been building a picture from a small army of secret sources. Our two main sources have a detailed working knowledge of training inside RAF Valley. They've asked to be anonymous, so we've got actors to voice what they told us about MFTS:

READER 1 IN STUDIO: It's a huge contract and it's fundamentally failing. There are so many elements that just aren't working and that's why many of us left. The training system's not doing justice to the young trainee pilots. They do initial officer training at RAF Cranwell, and then everything stops for at least a couple of years. I mean, they're stuck in holding jobs, which lowers their morale, wastes their early potential and delays their progress to the frontline.

READER 2 IN STUDIO: The waits now can mean people's training is taking six or seven years when it should take three. Which isn't great when you consider the Military Flying Training System was supposed to cut delays and people being on hold. People are leaving, so the military is shooting itself in the foot.

#### ACTUALITY OF TRAINING SESSION

KITSON: .... Low flyby ....

DEITH: Matt Kitson joined the Navy from the Royal Marines. He's teaching in a small two-seater plane here, but he moved to the fleet to train as an observer – effectively a helicopter commander.

KITSON: An observer navigates the aircraft, operates the weapons systems, the radars. The Merlin would have been antisubmarine, so you go out and you use sonar buoys to plot or to try and find submarines and track submarines and then, you know, it's identify friend or foe in a war scenario and potentially engaging with the weapons systems. You're at low level, at night, on night vision goggles potentially, over the sea.

DEITH: Everything's against you.

KITSON: Everything's against you, yeah, and for people like myself who join the military, that's what you aspire to do. You want that challenge.

DEITH: Matt passed the selection test – called grading – and was waiting to do the basic flying course, run by Ascent, at RAF Barkston Heath in Lincolnshire. But his training never got off the ground.

KITSON: I think the most frustrating part was that after doing grading, which is an incredibly challenging week or two weeks on the squadron, doing different maths tests and being in the back of the aircraft trying to do the job of an observer, working as a crew, we thought, 'Okay, we've got a bit of momentum now, we're actually doing something that we joined to do.'

DEITH: Yeah, it's becoming real.

KITSON: Yeah. So then to be said, right, you're going to a squadron with no set date of when you're starting to join, it was just, oh it'll be in six months, then that six months may be nine months, and then that became a year, so with no set date you've got a load of highly motivated guys - it's frustrating.

DEITH: When you asked - because you must have asked - what's the delay, what's the hold up? What was the answer?

KITSON: A lot of the courses ahead of me, the guys that joined ahead of me, had been changed from pilots to observer because of the defence cuts. There was a new aircraft coming in that had to go through certification and all the processes it takes to get an aircraft into the military.

DEITH: It's not cheap keeping officers hanging around. Matt was being paid about £40,000 a year to kill time. A recent Freedom of Information request revealed the half-year wage bill for officers on hold was almost £5 million. So it's probably reasonable to double that to £10 million for a year. That's before you even start to work out the cost to the military when officers like Matt Kitson leave.

## ACTUALITY OF PLANE TAKING OFF

DEITH: After two years, Matt Kitson got tired of waiting. He jumped ship. He wears a commercial pilot's uniform now, flying long haul to places like Kuwait. The MoD says last year fewer than ten officers left before completing their MFTS training.

RIPLEY: I visit military bases, and increasingly people were telling me, something's not quite going right here. We've got all these young flight lieutenants, and pilot officers who are, you know, running charity events or, you know, organising RAF wives events and all those sort of odd jobs.

DEITH: Tim Ripley is a defence journalist. He says delays in training, ironically, got worse when in 2015, the Government reversed the defence cuts and poured money back into the military, creating a bottleneck.

RIPLEY: David Cameron and Michael Fallon and George Osborne were mesmerised by the idea of boost defence spending and we were going to show the Russians that we were going to invest in defence and bring more Typhoons into service, two extra squadrons. So the requirement for pilots and air crew goes up considerably. Yet that defence review did not make a corresponding increase in the budget available to the MFTS organisation, to buy or rent or lease extra planes and extra simulators and train up and employ extra instructors, ergo there's not enough room on the courses for the pilots who are going through this process.

DEITH: So in that case, it's not necessarily Ascent's fault. If they're being flooded with trainees, that's the fault of Government.

RIPLEY: This is an issue to do with the higher level budgeting of the MoD. And there wasn't any extra resource put into the training organisation to put more pilots through.

DEITH: Ascent wouldn't be interviewed. But the Ministry of Defence did let me speak to the RAF officer responsible for the introduction of the Military Flying Training System. He's Air Commodore Simon Edwards.

EDWARDS: It's normal to have a degree of holding officers in the training system, to gather them together and then to get them ready to be called forward to the next stage of training. At the moment, the numbers of holding officers are greater than we would expect and they're holding for longer than we would wish.

DEITH: And I've spoken to former RAF officers who say, yes, we all went on hold, but we could count the time in months, not years. And now you're got 350 officers on hold, and for a fast jet pilot to go from initial officer training to reaching their squadron, the average is up to seven years. I mean, that's extraordinary.

EDWARDS: So the length of hold at the moment is quite long, but it's also happened in the past. At the same time, you make the most of the time that is there and do the broadening and the development that earlier than perhaps you would otherwise do, so holding time isn't necessarily wasted time.

DEITH: But people have told us about doing filing, rearranging offices, organising charity events. That's not really, you know, it's not even part of the job they're going to be doing, is it? So how useful is that?

EDWARDS: So I know that we take our people's positions very seriously and that includes, of course, the people who are holding today and they are employed in real jobs, fulfilling required roles. We even have people working in our air traffic control towers, augmenting that capability.

DEITH: This looks dysfunctional and it looks like a waste of public money.

EDWARDS: So the Military Flying Training System is not dysfunctional. I go out and I see it, and what I do see is a highly professional organisation that's already delivering a great deal of flying training. Nor do I see a waste of money.

DEITH: He was keen to say they're delivering enough aircrew for their current frontline commitments. Our sources say one of the big problems is a shortage of flying instructors – something they describe as a constant battle. Many have been tempted by the offer of six figure tax-free salaries with BAE Systems training the Saudi Air Force. The MoD told us getting the balance of instructors right is something it takes very seriously.

#### ACTUALITY OF GROB

DEITH: As pilots move through their training, they change planes.

#### ACTUALITY OF TEXAN

DEITH: Fast jet students are due to move up to the Texan T6, which Ascent bought from America, and the MoD approved. But, according to our sources, students haven't been able to fly them over water.

READER 1 IN STUDIO: They haven't yet able to use some of the brand new Texan T6 aircraft for training students. It's an issue with the plane's certification. The T6 that was bought uses an American harness, but the RAF wants to change it to a British one, which will cost a huge sum of money. They also have problems with the life raft and life jacket, so the aircraft can't yet be flown over water, which is a problem when you're training at RAF Valley, which is based on Anglesey - an island.

#### ACTUALITY OF HAWK 2

DEITH: The MoD bought the next plane up, the Hawk T2. But our sources say there aren't enough available to fly.

READER 2 IN STUDIO: The last I heard, the fleet serviceability of the Hawk T2 was still woefully below what was specified in the contract. That's not Ascent's fault, but without enough aircraft, the training output can't be met. I suspect this is why the Hawk T1 is being dusted off at Leeming.

DEITH: He's talking about the 1970s 'analogue' Hawk T1 being brought back into core training in North Yorkshire to take up to six fast jet pilots a year.

READER 2 IN STUDIO: Bringing the Hawk T1 back for flying training? It's both funny and incredibly sad. Plus I don't know how it will work, because it's a very different aircraft to teach on than the Hawk T2 - the syllabus just doesn't transfer across.

DEITH: Air Commodore Simon Edwards told us there are seven Hawk T2s available on average. But he admitted they need to update the safety features on the Texan T6 before students can learn on it later this year. The MoD says training partners are working to resolve teething problems quickly. Without aircraft and instructors at full strength, it's not easy for Ascent to get people through the courses on time, as per the contract. But there is a way to do it - on paper at least. Our sources told us it's called 'zero-loading'.

READER 1 IN STUDIO: The contract says that flying training courses have to graduate by a certain date otherwise Ascent are penalised financially. The shortage of instructors and the Hawk T2 problems weren't necessarily Ascent's fault and the MoD insisted on recruiting students, even though it had no way of training them, so the MoD agreed to help Ascent out. They decided between them to start zero-loading courses, which meant running them with no students on them. It was to give the impression that things are on track.

READER 2 IN STUDIO: You have a training plan for the year. When you zero-load a course, you write it in the plan, but there won't be anyone on it because it never takes place. It's a phantom course. A new course would start every six weeks. I think about one in four were zero-loaded. So, for example, course number 10 might be followed by course 12, which meant course 11 was zero-loaded.

DEITH: I asked Air Commodore Simon Edwards for an explanation.

EDWARDS: When a course is planned and, for reasons that are not, for which the training provider Ascent cannot be held to blame - an example might be perhaps the RAF base where they, where the RAF is up resurfacing its runway for example, then you would zero-load a course, which meant that because it's not Ascent's at fault for non-delivery of the course, that they would receive a payment regardless.

DEITH: How much would Ascent be paid for a zero-loaded course?

EDWARDS: I don't have the figure readily to hand, but I could probably dig it out. But I don't think I can talk about that; that would be commercially quite sensitive. The MFTS contract is to make sure that we have a partnered approach with our training partner provider, which is Ascent, and work together to deliver the courses when expected.

DEITH: However, you said, you know, it's important to deliver courses as expected, but you're not delivering a course because they don't have anyone on them. Can you see how that looks dodgy to people?

EDWARDS: So there's ... I, there's nothing dodgy about the contractual arrangements with Ascent, not at all. It's just, I guess, how we balance out and make sure that the right value for money is delivered overall.

DEITH: But value for money for a contract to have courses with no one on them?

EDWARDS: So the, the contractual relationship that the ... the contracts that have been established with Ascent has been proven to be value for money and we will be reviewing that regularly.

DEITH: So because it's not Ascent's fault, they're paid for courses they don't actually have to run?

EDWARDS: The way I understand it is that because the provision of the course and the capability is what we need to drive the value for money overall, then I suppose from time to time then that would be the case.

DEITH: He did add that if courses are cancelled for reasons that are Ascent's fault, then it's not paid. But calling paying for phantom courses value for money overall seems to be putting a positive spin on it. And defence journalist Tim Ripley says the top brass can't pretend they haven't got a major problem.

RIPLEY: They're sending pilots to America to train with the US Air Force. I mean the guys in America probably cost a million pounds a pop to send them there. But, most significantly, they're sending a hundred, they call them multi engine pilots - these are the guys who fly the big planes, transport planes, patrol planes, radar planes - and they're sending them to a ... basically a company in Bournemouth that trains airline pilots, and they're putting them through their training course. So it's a very big deal to do this and it shows how serious the situation is.

DEITH: Bournemouth's come about because one of Ascent's five multi-engine planes – the Phenom 100 – is out of action after two of the aircraft clipped wings. L3 Commercial Aviation, down at Bournemouth Airport, has dug the MoD out of a hole by agreeing to train pilots for three years.

#### ACTUALITY AT BOURNEMOUTH

DEITH: So they're packing their buckets and spades and going to the seaside. They're being put up at a hotel on the seafront. We tried to have a chat with them at breakfast, but they were tight-lipped, except to say, 'We don't make the decisions.' Safe to say, not everyone studying at L3 is happy the RAF has landed on their course.

CADET [VOICED]: I think, at any one stage, you've got about thirty RAF cadets at L3. But there just aren't enough planes and enough instructors to go around.

DEITH: This is a private L3 cadet paying just under £100,000 out of his own pocket to train as an airline pilot. He wants to be anonymous, so an actor's speaking his words.

CADET [VOICED]: The RAF receive absolute priority and it's going to take me probably a year more to train than it should have done. When you've been waiting a week or two weeks to fly a plane and you're just about to go out to fly, and you suddenly get called back and told you're not flying, because an RAF person needs to go.

DEITH: Great for them, not for our private student. L3 told us airline training programmes are facing some delays due to a pressure on resources like instructors, but said the RAF make up 7% of enrolments this year and have minimal impact on the commercial airline students. The Ministry of Defence told us the cost of sending pilots to Bournemouth for three years is £7.2 million. And we can reveal it has another expensive hole it needs digging out of. A new source, who heard we were investigating MFTS, rang me to let me know the backlog of helicopter trainees at RAF Shawbury is so bad the MoD's looking to send around forty of them to Cobham Helicopter Academy in Newquay, starting this year. In his interview, Air Commodore Simon Edwards would only say outsourcing rotary training is on the table. Sub-subcontracting military flying training hasn't just happened at beginner, or even advanced level. The skies above Boscombe Down in Wiltshire have always seen the best of the best.

#### EXTRACT FROM 1954 ARCHIVE

PRESENTER: Flying tests carried out by selected pilots seconded from the RAF and fleet air arm, range from high speed flight at high altitude, to spinning and stalling ...

DEITH: Today the MoD airfield is home to the Empire Test Pilots' School, or ETPS, run jointly by defence contractor Qinetiq and the RAF Air Warfare Centre. Test pilots 'road-test' aircraft to set the parameters – the maximum height and speed, for example – for flying them. Astronaut Tim Peake is a graduate of ETPS. Only top flight pilots need apply.

PARR: When we took a flight to Ireland one time, when he was very young, he was about eight, he got to sit in the jump seat. I have a photograph of him putting his thumb up and a cheesy grin, you know, usual cheesy grin from Alex. And he came back and he said, 'I am going to be a pilot one day.'

DEITH: Julia Parr's son grew up to be Flight Lieutenant Alex Parr of the RAF and later, a tutor at the Empire Test Pilots School.

PARR: He was patient, so he was a very good teacher. He had started to teach his little boy, who was only five, he taught him extremely well how to ski and I watched him very, very carefully show him exactly how to do things properly and how to put his bindings on. It was very methodical and very meticulous, which was how Alex was, really.

## MUSIC

DEITH: Alex Parr had flown fast jets and always come back safe. But he lost his life in a two-seater light aeroplane, at one of the world's top flying schools. The inquest, last December, found he died when the plane, a Romanian Yak 52, suffered an unexplained loss of fuel to the engine and crashed during an emergency landing. Alex was in the front seat, a civilian pilot in command was behind and was badly injured, but survived. Qinetiq had subcontracted an aviation training company to run one of its courses. But the company subcontracted the pilot, and he then subcontracted the plane. It had several broken instruments. A Ministry of Defence report, called a Service Inquiry, said the multiple instrument failures, as well as inadequate preparation for the flight, were contributory factors in the accident. It said the school didn't do due diligence checks. Qinetiq told us:

READER IN STUDIO: The Service Inquiry, Air Accident Investigation Branch and the Coroner's Inquest all concluded there was no link between the outsourcing of the Yak 52 and the accident. However, we are always determined to learn lessons which can help us to continuously improve, and minimise the potential for accidents.

DEITH: The MoD report says sub-subcontracting a civilian to carry out a defence activity created gaps which weren't found, and it talks about aggravating

DEITH cont: factors, like the pilots not wearing suitable helmets, and other factors – not checking the parachutes, and the school relying on the training company to provide an airworthy plane without sufficient assurance. The report says, although these factors didn't cause Alex Parr's death, they contributed to create an environment that made an accident more likely. It says no-one grasped the reality or assessed the risk of a sub-subcontractor operating a borrowed aeroplane, and this led directly to ETPS personnel flying in an aircraft that was unfit for purpose.

LEARMOUNT: I'm David Learmount. I'm an aviation journalist. Before that, I was an RAF pilot and a flying instructor. I'm not sure I've seen quite such a complex chain for subcontracting. We're talking about one pilot who was a civilian and another pilot who was military, and one of the problems with fragmentation is lines of command, lines of responsibility. The more lines there are, the more blurring there is, the more room there is for errors and carelessness to creep in. And something really fell apart on the day that this aircraft was contracted. The aircraft was in a rubbishy condition. There were so many things on it that didn't work, particularly one of the gauges, the rpm gauge, which tells you about the performance of the engine. They didn't have a readout for that.

DEITH: And how much of this was complicated contracts and how much of it was the safety culture, the approach to safety at the school?

LEARMOUNT: The significant thing about the military report on this is it said lessons have obviously not been learned from previous occasions. As soon as you start splitting up an organisation by subcontracting, the more divisions there are, the more room there is for error and carelessness to creep in.

DEITH: And the MoD report ends with a warning – 'We need to ask ourselves why this could happen under the gaze of the world's premier test pilot school.' The company which ran the training is no longer in business. The pilot it hired to take Alex Parr up that day told us the MoD's report is misleading. He says the issues with the Yak 52 didn't affect the safe operation of the plane and weren't relevant to the crash. Qinetiq says the Empire Test Pilots School has a military ethos. But it appears the oversight of this contract was anything but disciplined and precise.

## MUSIC

PARR: I miss him for his children. I think it's so sad, because they are lively they are lovely and he could have shown them so much and he was a lovely dad. We are all so sad because he was a good guy.

DEITH: The MoD declined to comment on Alex Parr's death. Qinetiq says it's made changes to the culture and procedures at the school, and says:

READER IN STUDIO: The family of Flight Lieutenant Parr remain uppermost in our thoughts and we are deeply sorry that this tragic accident occurred at the Empire Test Pilots' School. We have set up an Aviation Technical Excellence team to oversee the outsourcing of third party aviation services, and we have sought independent external advice to ensure we remain aligned with best practice.

## ACTUALITY AT WHITEHALL

DEITH: A pilot's career can be short, and dangerous. The Ministry of Defence says MFTS is the biggest transformation of military flying training in a generation, and when it's complete - expected to be 2020 - it will be a world-class system. But a few steps from the MoD, at the defence think tank, the Royal United Services Institute, Professor John Louth says we can't afford for potential recruits to see the flying training system struggling.

LOUTH: If they think it's not what it was or it's not as good as it can be, that impacts enormously upon people who we want to fight for us, because the moment she or he thinks that it's not for them, they have options to go and do other things. The worry I have is, how many people now in Government are spending time talking about the complexities of a contract rather than thinking about the individual who will be flying and fighting for us in a few years' time? Defence is still a human activity.

DEITH: We would have liked to have talked to the Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson, who's been warning recently that Britain can't risk being seen as a 'paper tiger' but must be prepared to use hard power against countries that flout

DEITH cont: international law, but he wasn't available. Defence journalist Tim Ripley says if the Government's serious, then the military flying training system needs to be radically improved, so that if we need to react, we have the air power we need.

RIPLEY: The British armed forces are great in a crisis. They're great at, you know Falklands War, bolt from the blue, scraping things together, getting a plan going and doing the job. The analogy I perhaps would make would be with Afghanistan, where this was an eight year campaign that involved sustaining a commitment.

DEITH: So a long sort of grind, a gruelling campaign where pilots get burned out quite quickly?

RIPLEY The kind of scenario where it is more important that you have a constant throughput of new people all the time. They're potentially doubling the time it takes to get a pilot into the frontline, and given the shortages that they have of pilots, and the need for more pilots at the frontline, makes it even more troubling that they haven't cracked this.

#### ACTUALITY OF TORNADO

DEITH: Everyone agrees winging it is not an option. As the plane which flew through the long war in Afghanistan - the Tornado - heads for the hangar, we need the right pilots in the right planes for the next Afghanistan - wherever and whenever that might be.