

SUKEO

AIRU PDR

25 AUG 2023

NO 8/23

NAME

Witness Statement of  
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N5859

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Witness name: N5859

Statement Number: One

Dated: 25 August 2023

Exhibits: N5859/1-6

## INDEPENDENT INQUIRY RELATING TO AFGHANISTAN

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WITNESS STATEMENT OF N5859

DATED: 25 August 2023

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1. I, N5859, am making this witness statement in response to the twelfth Rule 9 request to the Ministry of Defence, which was issued on 04 August 2023 and concerns a request for evidence about the 'ITS/1' and any data deletion that occurred. I am informed by those assisting me in the preparation of this witness statement that the S-Delete programme was run on ITS1 in the period June to August 2016. Specifically, paragraph 1 requests:

*A witness statement from N5859 addressing the following:*

- a. A description of his role within HHQ(UK) at the time of the deletion of data from ITS1;*
- b. His knowledge of and/or involvement in the planned data migration of ITS1;*

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- c. Whether or not he was aware of the S-Delete programme;*
  - d. Whether or not he was aware that S-Delete was to be used as part of the data migration of ITS1;*
  - e. Any other information he may be able to provide in relation to the deletion of data from ITS1.*
2. I confirm I am the person to whom the nominal N5859 was ascribed for the purposes of the Operation Northmoor investigation.
3. By way of background, I joined the British Army in 1986, [REDACTED]

Details of Military Service

[REDACTED] I joined the Royal Corps of Signals and I undertook a number of roles within the regular army serving in the UK, Germany, Northern Ireland, the Balkans and Afghanistan. In late 1999, I was diverted into what was then the new trade of Information Systems. Upon qualifying into the Information Systems trade I undertook a role firstly as database administrator and then an Information Systems Engineer, across various posts in project teams bringing online new systems for defence. A key part of all my roles in this time was the development of plans to; maintain current systems, establish new systems and migrate data from systems approaching obsolescence to their replacements.

4. I first undertook a role within UK Special Forces in around 2007 or 2008, when I was posted into [REDACTED] UKSF4

Details of Military Service

[REDACTED] My role at the time was WO1 [REDACTED] UKSF4 Operations (Information Systems) (WO1 UKSF4 Ops (IS)). As WO1

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UKSF4 Ops (IS) I was responsible for the Communication Information Systems (CIS) support for ITS1 ITS1 was the UKSF Command and Control (C2) IT system, which was comprised of a number of fixed and deployed 'nodes'.

5. In this role and of relevance to the inquiry, I deployed to Afghanistan in December 2011 as SFHQ(A) J6 WO1 IS. This was a role in SFHQ(A) (the overarching UKSF taskforce in Afghanistan) with a focus on information systems. I was responsible for the provision of CIS support to all of UKSF group activity in theatre. This included the roll out of an operating system upgrade on the deployed ITS1 nodes, the deployment and roll out of SharePoint onto the deployed ITS1 nodes and in theatre meshing. Prior to in theatre meshing, the deployed nodes would communicate with each other via satellite link and the hub in UKSF4 In theatre meshing allowed the nodes to 'speak' to each other directly, significantly improving the performance of applications and service between deployed nodes. While I was based at SFHQ(A), I would travel out to the sub unit HQs across the whole of the SFHQ(A) area of responsibility, to have management oversight of and assist in the upgrades to the relevant ITS1 nodes.

6. I returned from Afghanistan around April or May 2012, [REDACTED]

Further Details of Military Service

[REDACTED] I took up postings outside the UKSF Group until 2015. During these postings, I was responsible for the planning of deployments of new CIS, the recovery and removal of legacy CIS, the planning of upgrades to CIS and support to deployed Information System engineers. In the course of these postings I deployed to

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Afghanistan on multiple occasions, as part of the migration of users from several legacy CIS systems onto a single replacement system (DII-LD). While this was not a deployment with UKSF group because the task was supporting the activity of Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), UKSF group users came within the scope of the task.

7. I returned to [UKSF4] in April or May of 2015 as the SO3 J7 Capability (IS), I additionally held the title of [UKSF4] Technical Officer Telecommunications (Information Systems) (TOT(IS)). I set out this role in further detail in response to the Inquiry's questions below.

8. I left the role in April 2018, and I retired and left the army [Details of employment since leaving the Army]

[REDACTED] I currently work as a contractor for MOD.

*A description of his role within HHQ(UK) at the time of the deletion of data from ITS1*

9. Between April or May 2015 and April 2018, I was employed as SO3 J7 Capability (IS) with the title of Technical Officer Telecommunications (Information Systems) (TOT(IS)) within HQ [UKSF4].

10. In this role I was, in effect, the senior military subject matter expert on information systems. I was responsible for; the capability development for future information systems, managing the development of in service systems and the bringing into service of new systems. To break those down in turn:

- a. Capability development for current and future information systems is the consideration of what UKSF's next CIS would need to be able to do. This

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had two key elements, capacity management and requirements management. The first, is identifying where either current or future CIS would require increased storage or increased number of users and advising on the changes required to enable this. The second is identifying from end-user comments what further capability may be required, and identifying either new software, or new systems that could meet this capability and how it could be integrated with the current systems. In both elements of the role, my function was advisory, I was not the decision maker nor did I have financial responsibility for the procurement. This sat either with SFHQ(UK) or [REDACTED] in Defence Equipment and Services (DE&S).

- b. Managing the development of in service systems is the planning and execution of upgrades, either in software or in hardware of UKSF's current systems. Examples would include the updating of operating systems on UKSF CIS, such as the upgrade I had previously provided to the ITS1 node in Afghanistan in 2011.
- c. Bringing into deployment of new systems was for the purposes of my time as SO3 J7 Cap (IS), the replacement of ITS1 with ITS8, which is the current UKSF C2 IT system. This became a very large task and the primary focus during my time in post.

11. As SO3 J7 Cap (IS), I formally directly reported to OF3 IIA10 as Officer Commanding J7 Capability Branch. However, IIA10's focus as OC J7 Cap was tactical communications, not information systems, and therefore I regularly

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worked with and reported to Chief of Staff [UKSF4] (COS [UKSF4]), directly into the [PT1] project team and the SO2 IS in [SFHQ(UK)]. I believe that COS [UKSF4] was [OF3 IIA7] at the relevant time period.

*My knowledge of and/or involvement in the planned data migration of ITS1;*

12. As I set above, the focus of my time as SO3 J7 Cap (IS) was the replacement of [ITS1] with [ITS8].

13. I was responsible for the management of a team of 9 contractors that conducted the planning and coordination of the [ITS8] delivery. This was a local delivery team which was part of a much larger program team lead by [PT1].

As a high level overview, this entailed:

- a. Moving the Central [ITS8] node from [Location Given] where it was developed, to [UKSF4] and having it installed in [UKSF4] and powered.
- b. Planning the deployment of other [ITS8] 'hub' nodes into [Details of UKSF Hub Locations]. Having each hub installed and powered.
- c. Preparing [ITS1] for data migration.
- d. Migrating the data from [ITS1] onto [ITS8], ensuring information coherence between the central node and the hub nodes, that is, ensuring that they all have the same consistent information.
- e. Migrating the users from [ITS1] to [ITS8], such that once the migration is complete, when a user went to log in, they were provided access to the same files and information that they had on [ITS1] on [ITS8] post migration and at first log on to the new system.

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f. Planning for the decommissioning of the [ITS1] system, which was still live at the time I left the military.

14. As such, the data migration was just one aspect of a much larger, highly complex CAT-B programme<sup>1</sup> that was being delivered by [PT1] which I provided support to. I was not involved in the preparation of data for migration at a 'hands on, day to day' level, nor did I have the administrative privileges to do so. I would not have hands-on involvement with the minute by minute of the replacement or the data migration.

15. My day to day role was twofold, firstly, I would provide leadership, management and coordination of a nine-man team of contractors provided under contract by [PT1]. Secondly, I would review technical documents and advise the chain of command, [PT1] and SO2 J6 [SFHQ(UK)] on their contents or any required changes.

16. The data migration was the responsibility of [Civilian Contractor 1] under a contract that was the responsibility of the [PT1]. [CC1] sent two contractors to conduct the data migration. One of these contractors was [N5858], who was highly experienced and was, I believe, the system architect for [ITS1], the other was [N5857] an on-site Level 4 Support<sup>2</sup> [CC1] contract engineer.

17. I should add that I was not solely responsible for the planning elements of the entirety of the [ITS8] project. A large amount of the planning had been

<sup>1</sup> Procurement programmes are graded in various categories. As far as I can recall CAT-B programmes are valued up to [Figure Given].

<sup>2</sup> Level 4 support engineer is a deep technical specialist in one or more IT key skills such as networking, virtualisation, Microsoft technologies.

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conducted by my predecessor [N3223] (N3223) and her predecessors who would have inputted on the overall replacement plan, reviewing technical documents and advised [SFHQ(UK)] and [PT1] on the technical detail, highlighting and commenting on any concerns to the [PT1] team who coordinated the entire programme on behalf of the MOD.

*Whether or not I was aware of the S-Delete programme;*

18. Until receipt of this Rule 9 request I would have been unable to recall S-Delete if asked. I am now aware in the course of preparing this witness statement that S-Delete is part of a suite of programmes that were used as part of the [ITS1] migration. I cannot be certain if I would have known of S-Delete or circumstances in which it was intended that the S-Delete function should be used in my role J7 Cap (IS)

19. Having been shown MOD-221-0001161-A (Exhibit [N5859/1]) it is apparent to me that I must have become aware of the programme around the 9<sup>th</sup> January when [OF3 N5966] requested technical detail on the programme via email. This was consistent with my role of providing technical advice to the chain of command. In responding to the email I would have spoken to either [N5857] or [N5858], to obtain further technical detail and supporting information.

20. As I now understand S-Delete, it was a specialist tool that would not be in general use. I would not have used it in the course of my duties, nor had I been asked or ordered for it to be used.

*Whether or not I was aware that S-Delete was to be used as part of the data migration of ITS1;*

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21. Within the [ITS1] data migration plan, of which the RFQ 28 'transition plan' and RFQ 28 'transition strategy' was an enabling activity. I exhibit both documents as MOD-221-0001215-A (Exhibit N5859/2) and MOD-221-0001216-A (Exhibit N5859/3). They are both high level, technical, documents that outline the phases and steps that of the data transition.

22. Neither document refers to S-Delete nor the specifics of how data migration would be conducted. I cannot recall being aware that S-Delete was to be used on [ITS1] as part of the data migration process.

23. Having seen Exhibit N5859/2 3PAR is the specific storage architecture used on [ITS8]; I can recall the [CC1] engineers being sent on the 3PAR course, to train them on the capabilities and features of 3PAR and to prepare them for the data migration process. I can recall them returning from the course having found it useful and having been advised on best practice by the instructors. I can recall being aware that they would be running programmes to optimise the data for migration, although not specifically S-Delete. I did not attend the 3PAR course myself, and I cannot recall being aware that S-Delete was to be used as part of that optimisation. I believe I only became aware that S-Delete was to be used following the 9 January 2017 email. N5859

24. I have been shown MOD-221-0001263-A (Exhibit N5859/4). While I had not seen [OF2 N5595's] report before, I can recall the meeting with [OF2 N5595] where the use of the programme on [ITS1] was discussed. In the report [OF2 N5595] states:

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*The work was conducted as part of the [CC1] on site engineer contracted support duties and was therefore conducted without the awareness of or oversight of the military chain of command.*

25. I agree that the [CC1] contractors did not have members of the chain of command standing over their shoulders watching their every move. However, the RFQ 28 transition plan was delivered as part of a deliberate statement of work on behalf of [PT1] to facilitate data migration from [ITS1] to [ITS8]. RFQ 28 was a planned and scheduled activity that I and other members of the chain of command would have been aware of, as part of the migration plan.

*Any other information I may be able to provide in relation to the deletion of data from ITS1.*

26. Having been shown RMP-221-0001152-A (Exhibit N5859/5) and RMP-221-0001153-A (Exhibit N5859/6) I can recall that I met with the RMP team on 2-3 prior occasions to discuss the [SFHQ(A)] node, however I don't recall RFQ 28 being specifically discussed, though it was clear to them that we were migrating systems and a subsequent agreement that they could have access to the Hubs post data migration to [ITS8]. I also recall that the RMP team, had a specific focus on data integrity, yet they as a team, including their cyber lead, they appeared to have a limited understanding of the complexity of CIS systems such as [ITS1] or [ITS8]. Given that, their initial intent was to recover only the hard disks from the [SFHQ(A)] node, to try and rebuild a [ITS1] node from its component parts once it had been decommissioned by [SFHQ(UK)]. On the advice of [UKSF4], they were provided with the entirety of the hardware components and hard disk drives from the [SFHQ(A)] node. I recall having to

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explain fundamental CIS architecture concepts such as virtual machines, RAID arrays, Microsoft Exchange servers and Unix servers.

27. For example the employment of Redundant Array of Independent Disks (RAID), which splits files up among multiple hard disk drives, in order to provide resilience and allowing for a data to be recovered should one or more hard drive fail, is commonplace architecture in the building of CIS/datacentres. A system configured in RAID is constantly managing and optimising where and how data is stored, moving and allocating file segments automatically across disk segments to improve system performance. This is an automatic process managed by the system. This concept was difficult for the RMP to understand from a data integrity perspective, who appeared to be used to smaller less complex systems. Consequently, I am uncertain as to whether the RMP fully understood the complexity of how [REDACTED] ITS1 was configured, the automatic management of data at the bit level, how and where it was stored on [REDACTED] ITS1, the storage architecture of [REDACTED] ITS1 and the function and effect of S-Delete on a system configured in this way.

28. I have read the assurances given by [REDACTED] OF4 N2311 in her email of 4 October 2016 (**Exhibit** [REDACTED] N5859/6) and note that I am copied to that email. The assurances would have been based upon the [REDACTED] UKSF4 understanding of what was going to be done within RFQ28. I do not recall [REDACTED] OF4 N2311 coming to me for advice on the provision of the assurances, I expect she would have approached COS [REDACTED] UKSF4 and I would have, in turn, advised the COS. I do not specifically recall advising the COS on the topic nor any discussions with [REDACTED] PT1 or the [REDACTED] CC1 contractors.

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29. Finally, as the Inquiry may be aware, on as many as three occasions in the proceeding twelve months, the [ITS1] servers, which were only accredited to hold UK SECRET data, were contaminated with [above] [secret (AS)] data. Each incident was individually reported through the MOD formal MSIR process, through [UKSF4] security cell to [SFHQ(UK)] Security and wider MOD, including the [ITS1] Security Assurance Coordinator (SAC).

30. At the time, [above secret] files would have been deleted from the [ITS1] servers in order to bring the servers back down to their accredited classification and continue operation. Prior to data migration, It was mandated, I believe by the SAC, that any residual [AS] data at the bit level on the [ITS1] servers was purged before any data migration to [ITS8]. This was to ensure that there was no data cross-contamination of a new UK SECRET system as it was commissioned into service. I cannot recall the exact details of the purge of the [above secret] data.

31. I am unaware of any specific plan or policy for the purge of [above secret] data from a UK SECRET system given that such data should not be on the system in the first place. However, whatever activity that would have been carried out would be in accordance with Joint Service Publication 440 – The Defence Manual of Security, which governs data retention and security, and approval and advice of the SAC and of both the [UKSF4] and [SFHQ(UK)] security cell.

32. This is the only example of a deliberate data purge and cleansing from [ITS1] that I can recall.

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Statement of truth

I believe the contents of this statement to be true.

Signed:  Signature

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