

# CORRESPONDENCE

## The NATO Codification System

SIR,

Reading the article by Mr. Harrison (*J.N.E.*, Vol. 26, No. 3, p. 433), it would appear to the uninitiated that we have solved the unique identification problem for engineering artifacts. Regrettably, that is not the case. We have a perfectly satisfactory system but the effectiveness of the screening out of duplication is questionable. I can quote cases where four NATO Stock Numbers exist for an identical item of supply from one manufacturer. While some of this duplication may result from minor changes to specification titles, the majority results from inadequate screening. Unfortunately, I cannot propose a solution to the problem outlined above.

Mr. Harrison also suggests that project designers can interrogate the National Codification File at Hullavington. Most headquarters departments do not have terminals ready for use by designers nor do our contractors, who perform much of the detailed design, have easy access to Hullavington. What arrangements have been made to permit the practising designer access to this vast stock of information.

(Sgd.) J. G. Ferrie,  
Commander, R.N.

SIR,

Thank you for allowing me to reply to the letter from Cdr. Ferrie published in this edition of the *Journal* in which he queries the effectiveness of NATO Codification screening. Firstly I should stress that my article was informative and only intended to provide a general background to the NATO Codification System and its development within the RN—nevertheless I welcome the opportunity to respond to Cdr. Ferrie's assertion.

Clearly I do not dissent from his statement that in NATO Codification we have a perfectly satisfactory system but equally I accept that any system however perfect suffers from the frailties of its human operators. The more complex the system the greater is this margin for error, and the NATO Codification system which is a highly disciplined process governed by numerous national and international rules falls into this category. Nevertheless, to put the matter into context, since 1974 approximately 230 000 new items have been offered by DG Ships for entry into the RNSTS inventory. Of these 65% have been screened out to existing items thereby effectively preventing proliferation of the inventory and it is against this background of considerable success that any shortcomings in terms of operator error must be set.

NATO Codification screening is undertaken by hundreds of different codifiers located within the three service departments and the approved contractors operating on their behalf and total accuracy and a zero error situation is clearly not achievable. Our aim is thus to achieve the highest standards possible whilst accepting that human error when it does inevitably occur can be retrieved by various post codification inspection and review techniques designed to maintain the integrity of the codification data base. We also respond to reports from interested parties both within the Ministry and outside although these are often ill informed through lack of detailed knowledge of material specification and performance characteristics, etc. Nevertheless if Cdr. Ferrie will write to me with precise details of any suspected duplications (excluding those under the generic heading of 'O' rings for which a special rationalization exercise is in hand) I will arrange for them to be investigated.

Regarding the second paragraph of Cdr. Ferrie's letter, for Navy Dept staff relevant information can be obtained on request through the Royal Naval Codification Agency (RNCA) at Copenacre.

(Sgd.) G. L. Harrison.