

PRESS RELEASE

SALISBURY CND

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Peter Burt from the Nuclear Information Service shaking the hand of Caroline Lanyon of Salisbury CND at last night's meeting.

The Trident Debate “Britain’s Nuclear Submarines- worth the risk?”

Peter Burt, from the Nuclear Information Service, was the speaker at Salisbury CND’s AGM on Tuesday 26th April. He explained how his organisation sought to provide accurate and objective information about the UK's nuclear weapons programme with the aim of stimulating debate on the UK's nuclear weapons programme and nuclear disarmament.

He described nuclear submarines as complex systems that were inherently dangerous and were operated by fallible human beings.

He illustrated these points by telling the stories of two individual submariners one of whom, whilst acting as an armed guard during a public relations visit to Southampton, killed one of the officers of the submarine and seriously wounded another. The second submariner he described was so disturbed by what he saw as a serving crew member aboard a Trident submarine that he published his observations seeking to make people aware of the safety hazards that were a part of daily life aboard one of these submarines.

Further risks associated with a lack of suitably qualified nuclear engineers, problems with control of work and ageing plant and equipment were discussed. The Navy itself has identified the submarines as the riskiest part of the nuclear weapons chain.

There was a lively discussion of many associated issues, including comments from a former Navy Weapons Officer in the audience who had served time aboard nuclear submarines. The invulnerability of the Trident nuclear-armed submarines to attack is seen as a crucial feature of their effectiveness but Peter identified rapid advances in drone technology and listening devices that threaten this, as well as the opportunities for cyber attack in the communications between a submarine and its command centre. He reminded us of a collision between a Trident submarine and a French nuclear submarine in the Atlantic in 2009 that dislodged high pressure air bottles. The risk of an explosion on board the Trident submarine was significant enough for it to proceed very slowly back to base.

For further information, please contact Caroline Lanyon on 01722 321865