

During a recent Parliamentary trip to Afghanistan, the British Army was keen to demonstrate the process by which wounded soldiers are flown in to Kandahar on a Hercules (based at RAF Lyneham) and swiftly transferred across the runway to a C-17 fully equipped with the latest medical equipment.

Members of Parliament were all shown on to the C-17 and posed for photographs with the medical staff on board, were then ushered back to the terminal to watch the incoming Hercules.

The Brigadier who was then flying on with the MPs to Camp Bastion told them that if any had taken photographs of the wounded they should delete them, which they would of course happily have done had there been any. But given that they were 500 yards away at the time and in the pitch dark, there are real doubts about whether any such photographs would anyhow have been physically possible.

On their return to the UK, James Gray MP, whose constituency covers RAF Lyneham and who is Member for many of the ground crew at Kandahar, issued a new release and the photograph with medical staff.

Subsequently he was attacked by a blogger Ian Dale for publishing a picture of a "dying soldier." In response James Gray said "The story is a gross distortion and exaggeration, and clearly designed to be a personal slur and smear of the worst kind." This calumny was subsequently given further exposure by that "reputable" organ the Daily Mail.

James Gray was also on the receiving end of adverse publicity recently over a claim (turned down) for wreaths laid at War Memorials on Armistice Day. We hear even defence ministers have to dip into their own pockets – a disgrace.

Right thinking people might well consider that the most justifiable expense of all for an MP would be for a symbol of the nation's respect for the fallen which he or she lays on behalf of us all by virtue of being elected. Every MP should be at a War Memorial on Armistice Day with a taxpayer-bought wreath.

Biographical note: James Gray is a former Territorial who has done the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, attended the Royal College of Defence Studies, is a member of the Honourable Artillery Company and is Chairman of the Army All Party Parliamentary Group. He has praised the people of Wooten Bassett who spontaneously started to stand in silence as the coffins of UK military casualties pass through their town.