

THE IRISH TIMES

13 D'OLIER STREET, DUBLIN 2
THURSDAY, JULY 26, 1990

An Irishman's Diary

THE hills, glens and lochs of Scotland used to resound to the skirl of the bagpipes, the wail of emigrants, the clash of claymores and the glug of emptying whisky bottles.

Some of those sounds still remain, but a new sound has come to the Highlands — the sound of warplanes, contour flying to keep under imagined enemy radar.

As we sailed up Kilbrannon Sound, between Kintyre and the island of Arrann, in south-west Scotland recently, Jaguar and Thunderbolt jets broke the silence of the sea with a thunderous sound which reverberated on the cliffs.

We had already been warned about the nuclear and other submarines which use this part of Scotland's seas for manoeuvres and on the way to and from Holy Loch in the Firth of Clyde.

Tales of trawlers being towed by their nets by the submarines abound. One former trawlerman, Peter Ramsay, of Portpatrick, told me he had seen trawlers being towed by submarines on a few occasions. "In one case, a trawler fishing alongside us was towed for a great distance. Luckily, the trawl gave way before any great damage was done. The fishermen around these parts are gravely concerned about the whole thing."

Mock Targets

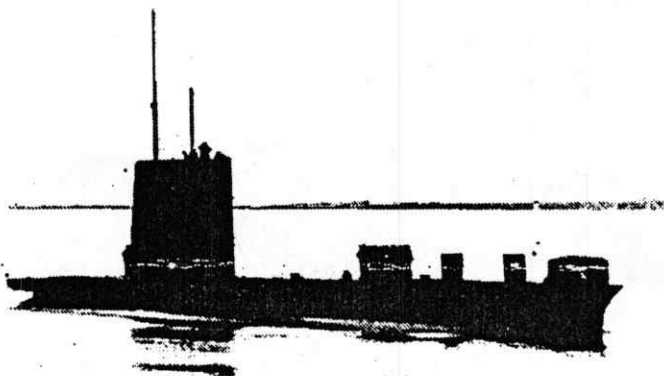
Before we sailed from Bangor, Co Down, for Scotland, we had been told of the submarine danger. We heard that submarines used visiting yachts as mock targets and for detection exercises.

In two weeks of sailing Scottish waters we saw no submarines on the surface, although we met many people who had seen them, but we were trailed by a submarine for about four miles. The periscope and for a short while the top of the conning tower, were visible through binoculars.

We were on the alert for the submarines but the war-planes were another matter altogether.

We had passed the famous Mull of Kintyre when three jets came at us at about 200 feet. They were out of sight before we could get our binoculars focused on them. The jets came out of the surrounding hills and then were gone.

This was to be repeated many times as we sailed between Kintyre and Strathclyde; the calm and silence of the sea



Submarines . . . a hazard in Scottish waters.

suddenly broken by the roar of jet engines. The contrast in speeds is startling — these jets can travel at about 250 times our cruising speed of around 6 mph.

Apart from the submarines and the jet planes, as if they hadn't enough problems, trawlermen recently hauled up in their nets explosives and chemicals dumped by industrial companies in the Firth of Clyde.

Stampede Cattle

A farmer, Alistair McKeen, from the island of Bute, told me: "These planes stampede our cattle and they put a fright on other livestock. We've been complaining about it for years, but nothing ever seems to be done."

Annie Fraser, a visitor from the mainland to Arrann, summed it up: "The British are turning Scotland into a huge training ground for planes and submarines."

The House of Commons Defence Select Committee is holding an inquiry into low-flying jet aircraft. But all the military manoeuvres around Scotland's Highlands and seas are probably the price the Scots have to pay to the British Government for large subsidies which go to the area. Without them, the huge drain of emigration would be even worse.

It seems the "war games" will go on.

At Campbeltown, towards the southern end of the Kintyre peninsula, there is a reminder of the fairly recent military past. The pleasant town at the head of Campbeltown Loch looks like a small more tidy version of Dun Laoghaire, with impres-

sive stone houses around the bay and harbour, formerly used by rich businessmen and industrialists from Glasgow as a weekend retreat.

A steamer once plied between Campbeltown and Glasgow at weekends to bring these rich Glaswegians the 70-odd miles to their stately seaside homes.

There is an imposing memorial to the dead of the two World Wars on a green overlooking the seaford. There was the expected list of soldiers, airmen and sailors who died, but then I noticed the names of six civilians killed in an air-raid on Campbeltown during the last war.

It seems that a German bomber which had strayed from a raid on Glasgow dropped bombs on the town, hitting the Royal Hotel at the edge of the harbour, killing four civilians who were drinking in the hotel and two who were walking on the street outside.

Nose Cone

For many years, the nose cone of a bomb was used to hold an ornamental display of flowers in the foyer of the hotel, but whether it came from the bombing raid is not certain.

The nose cone, about a foot wide by 1½ feet high, was put into storage by John Lee, a Yorkshire man who took over the hotel three years ago. He told me that it did not suit the decor of the hotel, but he intends to put it back on display in the hotel eventually.

Finally, a piece of Scottish wit on a council dust cart in Campbeltown: "Keep Scotland tidy; leave your rubbish in England."

TOM GLENNON