

OBSERVER

## Scotland

ISSUE

REVEALED: THE SCOTTISH OFFICE'S SECRET WAR BUNKERS

## Rifkind gets two new nuclear HQs

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EXCLUSIVE

by CALLUM MACRAE

THE Government is building two huge, multi-million pound nuclear bunkers in Scotland to operate as emergency centres of government in the event of war. The 'zone headquarters' will each be able to accommodate between 180 and 200 personnel, including Malcolm Rifkind, Secretary of State for Scotland, and senior Ministers.

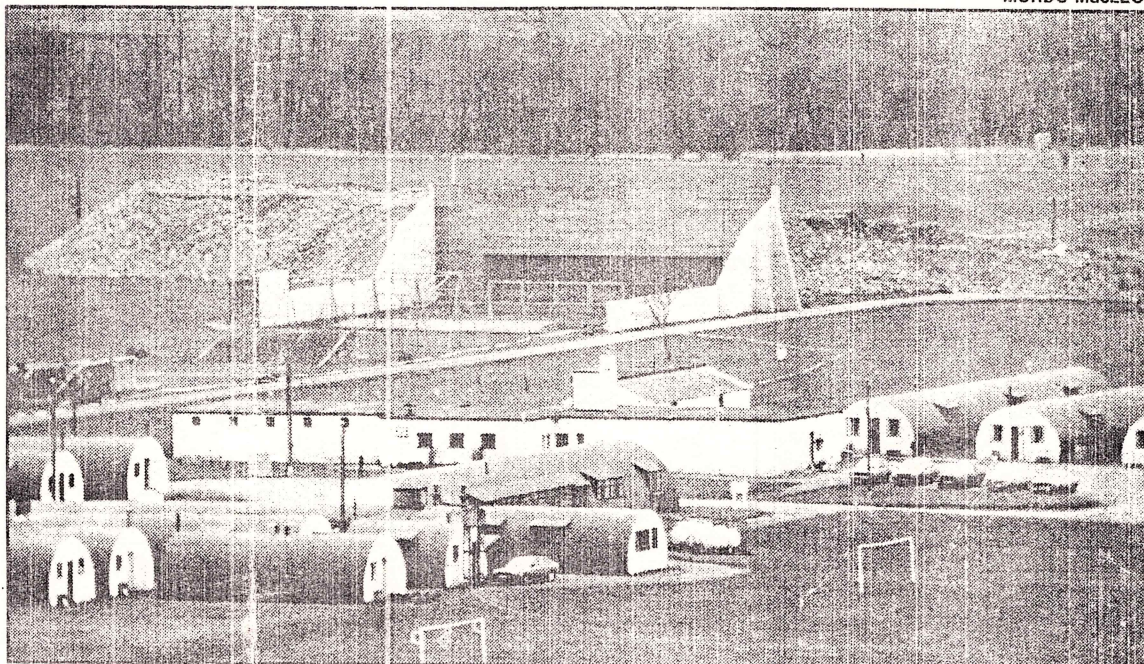
The bunkers, at the Cultybraggan Army training camp near Comrie, Perthshire, and the grounds of Peel Hospital near Galashiels, will replace both of Scotland's existing emergency government centres. North Zone operations, at present controlled from Troy Wood near Anstruther, will be transferred to Comrie. The South Zone HQ at Kirknewton will be moved to Galashiels. But the decision to relocate the facilities so far from main population centres — and to abandon a relatively modern facility at Kirknewton — has surprised informed observers.

Work has already started at Comrie. *Observer Scotland* has obtained a copy of a map showing the bunker in the north east corner of the training camp. It also shows some of the proposed service alterations and the location of a 'proposed radio mast'.

Local people have described a major shallow excavation and a large pit 'up to 100ft deep' on the site. The sinking of the pit and the arrival of two large metal tanks provoked fears that a fuel dump was to be built.

However, Mr Duncan Campbell, an authority on civil defence matters who has examined plans for a similar bunker in England, said at the weekend that the tanks and deep pit were probably part of a self-contained sewage system. The bunker itself would be built in a large trench about 20 to 25ft deep. It would probably be two storeys high and supplied with air by four intake and output shafts. The whole construction, of re-inforced concrete three to six feet thick, would be covered by a mound of earth.

Dr James Irvine, who owns Cultybraggan Farm nearby, said local people were disturbed by the new development. 'What on earth is a



The nuclear bunker at Comrie, visible behind the Army camp's high-walled rifle range

nuclear bunker doing in Comrie?' he said. 'We want to know what is going on.'

Mr Gordon McCartney, a member of Comrie Community Council, said that when they first inquired about the mysterious excavations two months ago, they were referred by the Scottish Home and Health Department to the Army, and by the Army back to the Department. Local district councillor Ewen Cameron was quoted in the local paper, the *Strathern Herald*, complaining that because Crown property was involved 'they can do virtually what they like'. No permission had to be obtained and no-one was consulted.

However, late last month when the *Strathern Herald* asked the Scottish Office to allay local fears, it was told that an 'administrative centre' was to be built 'for possible use by the Government in an emergency'.

Last Thursday the community council was given a similar message, although it was also told that the plan was 'to replace an existing building which was not purpose-built'. The council was assured that 'nothing in any way hazardous to the local population' would be stored there.

Last week initial inquiries by *Ob-*

server *Scotland* met with a similar response. However, late on Friday evening, after we had put our findings to the Scottish Office, a spokesman confirmed the central role to be played by the two new bunkers.

Emphasising that the centres had a 'purely humanitarian' civil defence role, he added: 'It is to do with survival and control. It means maintaining central government links with local authorities to keep business as usual for as long as possible. There is nothing Machiavellian or sinister about this.'

Nevertheless, Tayside emergency planning officer Mr John Smith, who is responsible for dealing with such situations for the local authority, said he had been told nothing about a Government centre at Comrie.

The other bunker, the new Southern Zone HQ, is to be built underneath the car park and walled garden area of Peel Hospital, four miles from Galashiels. Rumours of a plan to build a nuclear shelter of some sort have been circulating in the area for some time, but its purpose, although suspected by civil defence expert Alan Walker of Edinburgh University, has not been confirmed until now.

The news that Kirknewton was to be abandoned was greeted with considerable interest and not a little surprise by Mr Campbell. He said: 'Until Anstruther, Kirknewton is a relatively modern facility which was extended, considerable cost, to many times original size during the late 1960s. It has also recently been upgraded, with new radioactive fallout removal facilities and new communication facilities.'

Suggesting that it was 'almost conceivable' that the bunker was being moved from Kirknewton for reasons of strategic danger, or because it was becoming out of date or mechanically structurally unsound, he added: 'The only reason for moving Kirknewton function south must be because somebody else wants to use it for some other purpose.'

'At the moment a new Nato facility for co-ordinating supplies has to have location somewhere in Britain. It may be that this international Nato facility will come to Kirknewton.'

The Scottish Office later denied that this was the intention. A spokesman said it was still too soon to say what would happen to the old bases.