

Bases build-up

US plans for Britain include 8,000 hospital beds, for war use only, reports Duncan Campbell

WHILE EVERYONE waits expectantly for the arrival of the first ground-launched cruise missiles at Greenham Common, US officials are seeking final approval for plans that would expand US military forces in Britain to a level unknown for 30 years. Between now and 1988, according to the proposed 1984 US defence budget now being considered by the Congress, hundreds of millions of dollars will be spent on new bases, facilities, aircraft and war stockpiles throughout Britain.

Three of these developments are particularly controversial. There is to be a new £300 million network of at least fifteen 'standby hospitals', to be used only by US service personnel in wartime. New projects planned for the US Poseidon submarine base at the Holy Loch indicate that, instead of withdrawing from the base as new, longer range Trident submarines come into service, the US Navy is now likely to stay in Scotland for the foreseeable future. The US military construction budget for 1984 also reveals that a third British site - Alconbury, near Huntingdon - is to be a cruise missile support base. None of these plans have yet been disclosed or announced by the Ministry of Defence, or by US officials in Britain.

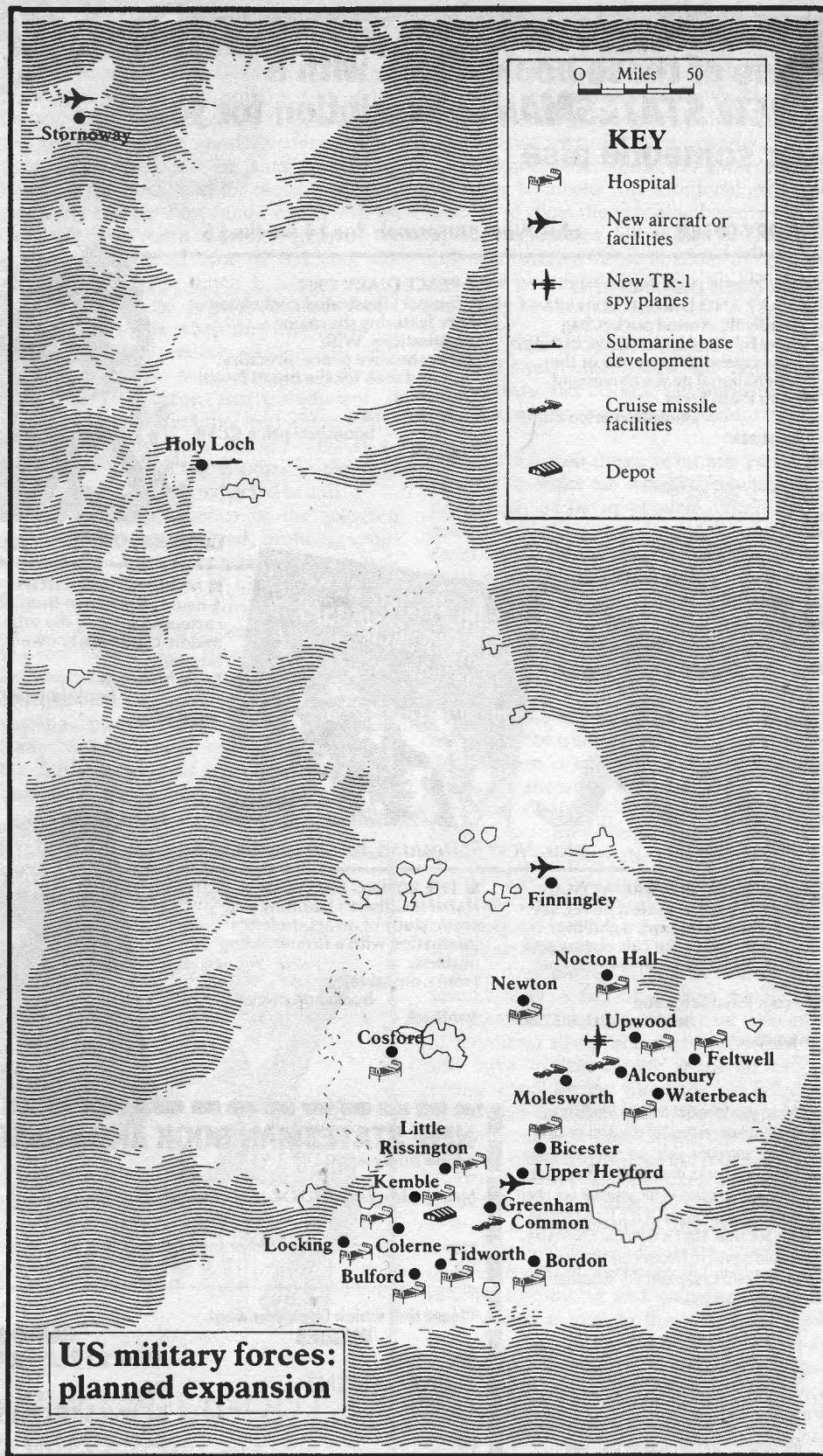
According to these officials, the level of US Air Force personnel in the UK has now reached 27,600 (including 1,400 British civilian employees). This now matches its size in 1953, at the outset of the Cold War. Total US military personnel in Britain are now more than 30,000. During the next two years, an additional 2,000 or more USAF personnel will be needed to maintain and operate new aircraft and support bases.

New developments planned in Britain for 1984 and 1985 have been agreed in principle by the US Congress. Final approval for these 1984 Defense Appropriations will be given in the next three or four weeks. Work on the new bases can then begin.

The war-only hospitals are needed, because US military planners are now preparing for a protracted war in Europe, which would rapidly exhaust existing US medical facilities. In applying for funds, US government officials explained that:

The government of Great Britain is not capable of providing medical support for the estimated number of casualties which would be incurred in a European war.

Each of the new hospitals will have 500 beds and is likely to cost \$32 million (about £20 million). The equipment and facilities will



be stockpiled. A second 500-bed unit is to be installed at Little Rissington USAF hospital in Gloucestershire as an 'aeromedical staging unit', making a total of 8,000 new hospital beds, all to be kept in mothballs. Other new hospitals are to be built in Spain, Portugal, West Germany and Italy - but the largest number are destined for the UK.

Plans for the first two US wartime hospitals, at Little Rissington, Gloucestershire, and Locking, near Weston-super-Mare,

have previously been disclosed in the *New Statesman*. The full new network now planned (see map) includes:

- US Air Force: Little Rissington (built); Upwood (under construction); Bicester; Nocton Hall; Kemble; Bordon; Newton; Waterbeach; Feltwell.

- US Army: Cosford; Colerne; Bulford; Tidworth.

- US Navy: Locking; second location agreed with the British government, but site

unknown — more may follow.

The cost of the entire network has not been published, but figures have been given for the cost of the 'prepositioned fleet hospital' at Locking, which will cost \$32 million — \$6 million for conversion of the site, and \$26 million for stockpiled medical equipment, operating theatres and drugs.

The US Navy has also confirmed that it wants to stay on at the missile submarine base on the Holy Loch 'at least until the end of the century', by applying for nearly \$10 million to construct a new 300-foot long pier, loading dock and storage warehouses at Sandbank, a small village in the Loch. This will enable US Navy cargo ships, called Taks, to bring supplies direct to the Holy Loch. At present the transports have to unload at Fairlie, an anchorage on the south of the Clyde, requiring a journey by sea or by road through Glasgow to reach the Holy Loch. The US Navy prepared plans to withdraw from the Holy Loch in 1975 and has already withdrawn from its two other overseas submarine bases at Guam in the Pacific and Rota in Spain. But it is now sitting tight in Scotland.

Other projects revealed in the 1984 US Defense Budget include (see map):

- RAF Alconbury to be designated a cruise missile support base and 'beddown location' for the missiles that will be sited nearby at Molesworth. The cruise support facilities will cost \$15 million. Alconbury is also the home for a new TR-1 spy plane squadron for high altitude reconnaissance and electronic surveillance in Europe, which is now being built up. More than 1,300 new USAF personnel are being deployed at Alconbury.
- RAF Finningley, near Scunthorpe, to be a US Collocated Operating Base. New ammunition, fuel dumps and shelters are planned at a cost of nearly \$12 million. In war, Finningley would be used by US Air Force Phantom fighters normally based in the United States.
- Kemble, Gloucestershire is already being extensively developed as a maintenance depot. It has now also been chosen as the site for the new USAF European Distribution System warehouse, which is to hold aircraft spares for wartime use. This project was originally planned to go to Prestwick, but was moved after a public row. In May, the Ministry of Defence proposed lengthening the runway at Kemble to accommodate the new US requirements.
- A \$6.5 million extension to the Electronic Security Centre at the electronic intelligence base at Chicksands, near Bedford. According to the congressional testimony, intelligence 'information gathered (at Chicksands) is not shared with NATO nations'.
- At Upper Heyford, preparations are now being made to support the new '42nd Electronic Combat Squadron' of 12 EF-111 high-powered jamming aircraft. The jammers would help the existing F-111 bombers at Lakenheath and Upper Heyford to jam air defence and missile radars in Eastern Europe during nuclear or conventional attacks. 650 new USAF personnel are going to Upper Heyford.

Stornoway, also shown on the map, is already under development at NATO expense as a forward base. It will be used by US reinforcement aircraft travelling to and from Europe, and as an operating location for US anti-submarine warfare aircraft.

New Statesman 21 October 1983

The new bases revealed by the Pentagon's 1984 budget bring the total of US bases and facilities in Britain to over 110. Including RAF bases used only for housing (and shared ranges and supply depots), there will soon be over 160 US military bases and facilities in Britain. □

Analysis of the US Defense Budget by Bill Atkin and Richard Fieldhouse of the Institute of Policy Studies, Washington.

NATIONAL PARKS

Country sides

Ian Brotherton on the politicisation of park authorities

'THIS IS NOT JUST a Bill. It is a people's charter for the open air. For everyone who likes to get out and enjoy the countryside. Without it they are fettered. With it the countryside is theirs to preserve, to cherish, to enjoy and to make their own.' These are the words with which, on 31 March 1949, Lewis Silkin commended the Bill that was to lead, during the '50s, to the designation of the ten national parks of England and Wales.

THIS ENGLAND

£3 book tokens for entries printed (on postcards, please).

□ Mrs Thatcher and the First Sea Lord, Sir John Fieldhouse, were made special members of the Worshipful Company of Glovers of London yesterday. The occasion gave the Prime Minister an opportunity to put her spare single gloves to good use for the company has a scheme for sending single gloves to one-handed people. 'I have got one or two single gloves at home which I kept in the hope of finding the other half of the pair again,' said Mrs Thatcher. 'Now I shall be able to send them to the company. As you prosper yourself you ought to do something for others'. — *Daily Telegraph* (W. M. Richards)

□ Governments, of course, never interfere in the editorial freedom of television, although I gather that the Prime Minister's view is that the programmes on Channel 4 tend to be overloaded with lesbians, Trots and Left-wingers. — *Scottish Daily Express* (Andrew Burke)

□ A punkrocker who thought his four inch spiky haircut was his crowning glory was fired by his employers, Rolls Royce, an industrial tribunal heard yesterday. Mr Howard Parry, the training manager and a former RAF officer, said: 'His hairstyle was unacceptable. It represented a safety hazard. The spikes projected from the surface of his head for some distance and an accidental movement could have injured a supervisor leaning over him.' — *Guardian* (Simon Montgomery).

The parks are national not because (as in the USA) the land is owned State, but because the whole nation values and has an interest in them. This interest is represented on each park authority by members appointed by the Secretary of State for the Environment (in the case of Dartmoor, Exmoor, the Lake District, Northumberland, the North York Moors, the Peak District and the Yorkshire Dales), or the Secretary of State for Wales (in the case of the Brecon Beacons, the Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia). These ministers' appointees are advised to take account of the wider national purposes of the parks — while authority members appointed by the county and district councils protect the more local interests.

Although the ministers' appointees have always been outnumbered two-to-one by local representatives, the balance between conservational and recreational interests and those of farming and landowning has always, hitherto, been maintained.

That balance has now been upset — largely because half of the 66 members appointed by Tory ministers in April 1980, '81, '82 and '83 have interests in farming, forestry or land-owning (one of these is the main occupation of 25 of them). More logically, perhaps, farming and landowning interests also predominate among the members appointed by county and district councils. As a result, there is real doubt as to whether some of the park committees are any longer able to give proper consideration and weight to the conservation and recreation purposes of the parks — particularly when agricultural applications are being considered.

Why has this happened? The reasons are political, both in the party and the wider sense. Party influences in the parks have increased since the mid-1970s. Included among the 1975-79 Labour appointments, on a far greater scale than hitherto, were former and prospective members of Parliament, local councillors, party agents, trade unionists and others known more for their party affiliation than for their interest in the parks or their purposes. Predictably, they were removed at the first opportunity and replaced, in ever greater numbers, by members more acceptable to the Conservative administration that was returned in 1979. Indeed, so drastic were the changes that the average length of service of an appointed member was reduced to a little over two years. Ten or so years earlier, the average service had been almost 11 years.

The main intention behind recent Conservative appointments seems to have been the benefit of the soft, voluntary approach to the resolution of conflicts between agriculture and conservation advocated by the National Farmers' Union and the Country Landowners' Association, and severely criticised by the whole conservation movement during the passage of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

For making appointments to the parks, ministers are required, by statute, to consult with the Countryside Commission. Until the mid-1970s, they did lean heavily on the Commission's suggestions (drawn largely