

Duncan Campbell reveals another nuclear base

The high school with the cruise missile

A THIRD BASE for US nuclear cruise missiles is secretly being developed at High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire. The base — once the HQ of the US Air Force in Britain — is now ostensibly only a High School for American children.

In the last few weeks, a preliminary detachment of the 7555th 'Theatre Mission Planning Squadron' has moved in and Post Office technicians have been working on new installations in a bunker below the school, said to be five storeys deep.

The role of High Wycombe in cruise missile deployment has been revealed to the US Congress Armed Forces Committees, but not to Parliament. When we questioned the Ministry of Defence this week about the base, their first reaction was an absolute denial.

Senators have been told that High Wycombe will be one of three 'theatre planning' centres for cruise, planned at a preliminary cost of \$19.9 million. The Senate insisted that NATO, rather than the United States, should pay for the missile bases, although they are under sole US control.

Further information about the 'Theatre Mission Planning System' was provided by William Arken, a senior analyst of the Centre for Defence Information in Washington. The High Wycombe system is a critical part of cruise missile deployment, which provides the missiles' computers with the programming necessary to reach their targets. No actual missiles or their launchers will be stationed at High Wycombe.

Computers, to be installed on 'Level 3' of the bunker, will store a mass of information about the topography of likely launch areas in the UK, likely targets, and routes between the two. These are necessary to programme the cruise missile's built-in computer on exactly where to fly. The High Wycombe computers will provide a production line for computer 'discs' which are then inserted into the missiles — telling them where to go and when to detonate. The discs will be taken from High Wycombe to wherever the cruise missile units may be. They normally travel in groups of four launcher vehicles, carrying sixteen missiles. In



New base at High Wycombe

peacetime, only non-nuclear armed missiles will be allowed out of the bases at Greenham Common, Berkshire, and Molesworth, near Northampton. However, one 'flight' of 16 missiles on each base will be on alert, with warheads armed at all times.

The RAF is now believed to be selecting suitable launch sites to which the cruise missiles would move in a crisis. But these locations are extremely secret, and nothing will be done at the sites which could lead to them being identified. Pentagon officials have told

the Centre for Defence Information that the missiles will be guarded on operations by armed USAF security police and not by the RAF, contrary to Ministry of Defence assurances. Tests, to be held in Texas this spring, will determine how many such armed police are necessary to secure the missiles against interference by anything from Russian paratroops to dissident British civilians.

The US plans to start operating the cruise missiles at Greenham Common in December 1983, and site construction is planned to start this summer. However, planning is being delayed and the schedule for the second base at Molesworth has been put back by several years. One reason is a fairly common belief — shared by British MPs on both sides of the House — that the cruise missiles are merely a bargaining chip for future SALT-type negotiations. The other reason is that NATO's construction funds have virtually run out. Thus the US Senate decided to pay for the construction and demand a refund from NATO.

After enquiring of the US Air Force, the Ministry of Defence confirmed a day and a half later that High Wycombe would indeed be developed for cruise missiles and nuclear targeting. They described the base as 'a computer system to support USAF missile and aircraft route planning in the European theatre'. □