



Duncan Campbell on weapons shipments

Nuclear convoy

THIS HEAVILY GUARDED RAF convoy crossed Britain at least twice during July, and was seen in Devon and Suffolk. This is probably the first photograph to be taken of a nuclear weapons convoy and its vehicles.

This picture was taken by a private photographer at Ivybridge, Devon, north of Plymouth early on Saturday, 10 July. In the early evening of the 24 July, two weeks later, a similar convoy was seen again by a CND official travelling around the A45 bypass of Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. The road it took goes to RAF Honington, where there is a nuclear weapons store for RAF Buccaneers. Aircraft based there would attack Warsaw Pact ships or Soviet Baltic coast cities in war.

The convoy comprised five heavily armoured lorries of a unique design. Flanking the lorries were two Royal Air Force vans carrying armed police, and MoD police outriders. The convoy, here shown on the Ivybridge bypass, was followed by a fire tender and a specially converted emergency control bus (not shown) seen to contain a rack of rifles, a considerable array of special communica-

tions equipment, provision for further armed escorts, and two motor cycles. The extraordinary security and safety precautions taken conform to those required for nuclear weapons transport in the United States (British safety regulations for transporting nuclear weapons are not published).

Observers also reported seeing two officials escorting the Devon convoy who appeared to be wearing American uniforms. This would be required if the nuclear weapons being transported were American in origin; if so, the convoy would almost certainly have left from RAF St Mawgan, Cornwall, where a US Naval Aviation Weapons Facility guards nuclear weapons reserved for war-time use by British, Dutch, and Belgian anti-submarine units.

Questioned by journalists last week, the Ministry of Defence suggested that the Devon convoy might be a shipment of munitions unloaded from the Atlantic Causeway which recently docked in Plymouth. However, on 10 July that ship had not reached Plymouth. Officials of the Ivybridge Labour Party, who initially received the photographs, questioned the Ministry of Defence about the contents and safety of the shipment. But the standard official answer to any direct question about nuclear weapons invariably goes no further than 'we cannot confirm or deny. . .'. □