

SCRUTINY

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AMERICANS PLAN ESCAPE FROM BRITISH 'FRONT LINE'

'HERE IN ENGLAND, we're in the front lines — where the action is or is likely to be', according to an evacuation plan booklet secretly issued last month to American families in Suffolk. But British residents who live next door to US bases are expected to sit tight while their neighbours may be assisted to flee to 'survival areas'

A BOOKLET of plans for US 'Non-combatant Evacuation Operations' in Britain has been obtained by the *New Statesman*. The booklet was written in August 1983, anticipating a future European conflict. But after the US bombing attack on Libya, it has been handed out in case US families in Britain themselves become bombing targets and have to leave.

The booklet describes Pentagon plans to evacuate families from foreign bases, and to get them back to reception areas in the US within 15 days of leaving their homes. It warns that 'should hostilities ever break out, you may have to return to the United States . . . in a hurry'.

The plan calls for dependants to assemble at a public hall on each base. Depending on the situation, evacuation may take several forms, ranging from a 'gradual and deliberate acceleration of normal rotation processing to the US' to a 'more urgent situation where evacuees are moved as rapidly as possible to survival areas and eventually to the United States'. Neither the location of 'survival areas' nor the type of transport to be used is specified.

An accompanying checklist of items to be included in everyone's personal 'evacuation kit' includes 'money, checkbook, credit cards, auto registration certificates and authorisation for emergency pay'. Among the less essential items to take are 'wills [and] powers of attorney', 'small non-electronic games', 'snack

food', and 'enough clothing to get you to the safehaven'.

Other than this, 'all personal property will be left behind [and] as much as the government would like to, it cannot evacuate pets'. They should either be killed or be given away: 'you will be responsible for the disposition of your pets'. Evacuees are also urged to photograph their houses to 'help document future claims' just in case their homes and property aren't there to come back to.

No foreigners

Foreign nationals cannot be accommodated or protected in the evacuation plan. This is stressed in a warning to US evacuees that 'under no circumstances will foreign nationals (unless they are *bona fide* dependants) be allowed to accompany evacuees'. For example, 'village child minder[s]' will not be allowed to accompany US children whose parents are in the military, and have therefore to stay behind in the British 'front line'.

To make sure no foreigners sneak through, everyone turning up at the 'processing centre' will be

scrutinised to 'verify eligibility' for evacuation, using US passports or ID cards.

The Home Office has repeatedly refused to make evacuation plans for Britons living next to US bases. Current government advice to local authorities states that 'successive governments have concluded that the best protection for the public is to stay at home'. A Home Office press official last week said that the government considered that 'no part of Britain was safer than any other'. Asked about the American view that their bases were in the front line, she referred specific questions comparing US and British local evacuation schemes to the local authority, Suffolk County Council.

Suffolk's Emergency Planning Officer, Bill Hancock, told us last week that he was not aware of details of the US evacuation plans. But he knew that the plans presented 'a special problem'. Nevertheless, there were 'no specific plans for formal evacuation' of British residents in the areas close to US bases.

Information in the leaked booklet, entitled 'Bentwaters/Woodbridge Pamphlet no 400-3', is not supposed to have been passed outside US circles. According to the pamphlet, 'information on the evacuation of US Citizens from foreign nations is disseminated on a NEED-TO-KNOW basis'.



Nuclear or chemical 'special weapons' store at Woodbridge USAF base, Suffolk. US families plan to be well away before the action starts at this English section of the 'front lines'

Data dodgers

AS FEW AS one in 10 of those supposed to register their use of computerised personal databanks may have actually done so, suspects the Data Protection Registry. The deadline under the new Act was on 11 May. Meanwhile there has been much traffic in advice about how to dodge the main effect of the law — which is, from September 1987, to allow anyone to apply to a computer user and ask for a

copy of their own file.

According to the Act, anyone then asking to see their own file should be given a copy of it within 40 days. It is illegal to delete the file first — or to alter it to make it acceptable to the subject.

But Durham University's Registrar is among others who have circulated complex proposals to get round the irksome new requirement. At Durham University, the new law could mean that students could get to know their exam marks. (Why this should be such a hazard to comfortable academic wellbeing is difficult for those outside the cloisters to fathom.)

The Durham plan is to introduce a scheme whereby examination marks are never held on computer for more than 40 days. They must always be 'obliterated in 40 days'. But this could only be done legally, warns Deputy Registrar G. R. Thrush, if the University 'had [first] established a clear routine of . . . obliterating examination marks on a regular basis'.

The Durham University working party also suggests abandoning the use of computers altogether, a suggestion repeated in two recent books on the Act. One of these, published by the National Computing Centre, which contained a chapter on 'Mitigating the Effects of Legislation', had to be withdrawn from publication after criticism. ●

Nuclear convoy: no secrets charges

THE *New Statesman* and the writers of this column are not to be prosecuted for publishing details of RAF 'Special Road Convoys' based on secret instructions issued to Avon and Somerset Constabulary.

Our report (*NS* 29 November 1985) showed the detailed make-up of the convoy which carries nuclear weapons between the weapons factory at Burghfield and bomb stores such as Coulpport on the Clyde, or Honington in East Anglia.

Following the report, which accompanied the Yorkshire TV documentary *Britain's Bomb*, the Avon force launched an investigation into the leak. *New Statesman* editor Hugh Stephenson and writer Duncan Campbell were both interviewed before Christmas and cautioned that a report would be submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

But Avon and Somerset Deputy Chief Constable Jim Sharples this week announced that the Attorney General Sir Michael Havers 'has decided that this is not an appropriate case for the institution of criminal proceedings'. The police therefore intend to take 'no further action'. ●