



Villages wage war as army goes to town in combat training

Dennis Johnson

THE GUARDIAN Friday February 3 1989

PHOTOGRAPH GARRY WEASER

FROM the narrow, unclassified road which climbs across Salisbury Plain between the villages of Tilshead and Chitterne, the view is no longer one of a huge, undulating landscape of rough grazing and scrub. The skyline to the south is broken by what looks like a smart, new commuter settlement, with some houses complete and others, including public buildings, under construction.

This is the new town of FIBUA, created by the Ministry of Defence, or, more specifically, United Kingdom Land Forces. It will never be lived in. Its only purpose is to be sneaked up on, surrounded, penetrated, attacked and fought over by troops in combat training.

FIBUA stands for Fighting in Built-Up Areas. The "mock village", said to resemble settlements on the North German plain, is regarded by the army as an

essential element in its Nato commitments. It is due for completion by the end of next year at an estimated cost of £15 million.

But for the four surrounding real villages of Tilshead, Chitterne, Orcheston and Shrewton, the 30-acre development represents a monument to the arrogance and insensitivity of the Ministry of Defence.

A long campaign to get a public inquiry or some other quasi-statutory investigation of the ministry's plans appears to have come to nothing.

The Wiltshire Villages Environmental Association says consultative plans have been derisory, amounting to little more than a public briefing.

An appeal to the European Parliament, supported by the Wiltshire MEP, Dr Caroline Jackson, has been frustrated by a European Commission ruling that the EEC is "not competent to intervene." The mock village will consist of about 90 buildings.

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The association does not question the need for the project but says its site, on the edge of Copehill Down, will cause serious disturbance. It says noise on 120 "battle days" a year will be offensive, and that projected tank manoeuvring areas, extending 1,500 metres from the "village", inevitably cross the Tilshead-Chitterne road, which will often have to be closed.

The association accuses the military of riding roughshod over residents' democratic rights to have their objections openly investigated.

"Now we learn the army is continuing to buy land on the edge of the plain, where it already owns 90,000 acres," said Mr Dennis Naylor of Chitterne, a committee member. "Modern weapons are so powerful they probably need longer ranges on which to test them. But no one knows their plans."

The European Commission has accepted that nuisance from FIBUA may have an adverse effect on the well-

being of people in the surrounding area", and that Westminster MPs "could point this out to the military authorities".

Three Conservative MPs have already done so. Mr Geoff Harris, an EEC official who will fight the Wiltshire European constituency for Labour, said: "It seems a pity that people should have their basic rights ignored, particularly when the army exists to defend our freedoms."

An army spokesman said planning consent was given by West Wiltshire district council and a public inquiry was therefore not called. The site was chosen for military reasons after 12 had been studied.

"We do not believe the battle days will cause extra disturbance, because Copehill Down is already used for training," he said. "We are simply short of training land overall."

Dons' fury over germ war project

by David Brown
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THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH JANUARY 15 1989

A CONTROVERSIAL "germ warfare" research programme paid for by the Ministry of Defence is to go ahead at Bristol University, despite protests from researchers that it is immoral and "breaches the spirit" of the Geneva Convention.

One lecturer has resigned over the £175,000 project which will try to perfect an "artificial lung" to detect and assess deadly organisms in the air.

A wide market is seen for such a machine, which would be about the size of a suitcase and could be used by agencies such as the United Nations to check suspicious chemical factories like Colonel Gaddafi's plant at Rabta, Libya.

The work will be done at the university's School of Veterinary Science at Langford, near Bristol, home of Britain's biggest aerobiology team.

Since it was established 10 years ago, the team has helped to reduce airborne illnesses in animals by improving the design of cowsheds, stables and horse-boxes.

But it was forced to seek alternative sources of funding for its "germ detector" programme after it failed to win a grant from the Agricultural and Food Research Council.

Despite claims from both the MoD and the university that this is purely defensive research, aimed at providing protection for troops against chemical and biological agents, and that the work will benefit people and animals, 59 lecturers and researchers have signed a petition expressing concern.

Ten signed a letter to the *Veterinary Record*, official journal of the British Veterinary Association, saying: "There are people working at this veterinary school who are now faced with the prospect of their colleagues supporting work directed towards what they consider an immoral end.

"There is no clear dividing line between defensive and offensive measures in the area of biological warfare."

One lecturer, Dr Susan Mayer an expert on treating mastitis in cattle, has resigned and will leave in March.

She said yesterday: "I find the MoD's interest in this area of research immoral. It offends the

spirit of the 1972 Geneva Convention, of which Britain is a co-signatory."

The convention prohibits the development, production and stockpiling of chemical and biological weapons and urges all signatories to make it impossible for biological agents and toxins to be used as weapons.

Dr Mayer added: "We have tried and failed to persuade the university not to accept this MoD grant."

The development of the artificial lung is regarded as one of the most exciting projects at Bristol.

A part from helping to improve the design of protective uniforms for troops, it will tell soldiers how long to wear them.

Although current protective clothing is very efficient, it is heavy and uncomfortable to wear for long periods. But until it is known how long germ warfare organisms remain deadly, troops must err on the side of caution.

The device will also prove invaluable for companies who want to test their air conditioning systems for traces of organisms such as those which cause Legionnaire's disease.



The grim face of germ and chemical warfare

Mr Don Carleton, spokesman for the University of Bristol, said: "We are very happy about accepting the MoD grant. The main use for the artificial lung will be entirely peaceful, and the Ministry has agreed that the results of all the work will be published."

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