

Why Bonn's VIP bunker may be useless in the face of nuclear attack

by Stephen Aris and John England

West Germany was threatened by a nuclear attack today, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, senior advisers and some 600 VIPs would take refuge in *Regierungsbunker*, a huge steel and concrete underground shelter in wine-growing country, 15 miles south of Bonn.

In theory, the chancellor would be better protected than the rest of the 60 million population as German roughness stops at *Zivilschutz* (civil defence), leaving the country more vulnerable to nuclear attack than almost anywhere in western Europe. In fact, it would probably not be better

In a book just published, a West German journalist claims that the bunker, which was completed 14 years ago at a cost more than £1,250m, could withstand a direct hit from missiles now in the Warsaw Pact arsenal: "The bunker is perfectionism gone mad", he says. "It is an enormously expensive white elephant".

A spokesman for the West German interior ministry, which is responsible for the bunker, claimed that the book is "badly researched". But he refused to comment on allegations that the structure was effective and unsafe. "I'm sure the British government would take precisely the same attitude", he told *The Sunday Times*.

Officially, the bunker does exist. The ministry of the interior publishes no details and the £7.5m annual cost is buried in the civil-defence budget. But, after months of research and more than 120 interviews with

and cleaning ladies, a freelance journalist, Michael Preute, has revealed embarrassing details of



one of West Germany's best guarded secrets.

"I was shadowed by two men from the military counter-intelligence service, and other security men, dressed as foresters, noted my car's registration whenever I drove near the bunker", says Preute. "But I operated openly as a journalist and experienced no real hindrance."

The bunker was designed as a nuclear-age command post for the West German government. In the event of a nuclear attack it would provide a refuge for the chancellor, the cabinet, 22 members of an emergency parliament, military advisers, civil servants and other VIPs. The complex, which is divided into three main tube-like caverns, lies, in some places, more than a 1,000 feet below the Eifel hills between Dernau and Ahrweiler, just south of Bonn.

One of the caverns is the command centre itself, the other two contain machinery, supplies, heating and diesel oil. There are three kitchens, equipped to serve 10 canteens, and enough food to keep the 3,000 occupants alive for two years.

removed and replenished every 18 months or so", says Preute. "The iron rations, such as rice and cooked ham, often appear on the menus of pubs and restaurants in the locality."

Preute maintains that even if the bunker survived a direct hit it is doubtful if the people inside could stand the oppressive atmosphere long enough to make a significant dent in the groceries.

"The air-conditioning system is complicated and prone to faults", he says. "And although great efforts have been made to keep the caverns cool, it is uncomfortably warm. The original neon lighting had to be replaced with a light yellow system as neon was found to be antiseptic. It made people ill. But the change cost millions of marks."

Even those who spent short periods in the bunker, such as officials from Bonn who play a 14-day war game there each year, suffered psychological problems. "They range from irritability to excessive drinking", says Preute. So far doctors have dealt with some 30 nervous breakdowns. Bunker dwellers are advised to take up bike riding or jogging while there to take their minds off the isolation and claustrophobia.

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'Boy scout' code for nuclear survival

By Andrew Veltch Medical Correspondent

Hospital patients in the South-west will be given advance warning of a nuclear attack: they will know the balloon is about to go up when their doctors start resorting to "boy scout survival techniques."

This has been made possible by the Department of Health's war planners who, on Government instructions, have told health authorities to keep initial preparations for an attack secret in order not to alarm the public.

These covert and unobtrusive (sic) measures are listed in two confidential documents which have been passed to the Guardian. They include crash training courses for staff in boy scout survival techniques, tests of the emergency balloon aerial for the National Health Service communications scheme and the harvesting of crops in hospital grounds.

The Wessex health region's Check List For Use In A War Crisis says: "The Government's policy in a crisis is to keep disruption of the normal life in this country to a minimum for as long as possible. Activity which looks like preparations for war could be misconstrued."

A "Transition To War State" will be authorised by the Department of Health or the Government, says the Wessex document.

Stage 1 is "a covert stage, knowledge of which must be confined to a very senior level." Stage 2 consists of "Unobtrusive Preparatory Action. This stage directs limited activity which could be carried out without inviting public attention." Stage 3 is the "Overt stage"—the full implementation of the NHS war measures.

The measures to be taken in these stages are listed in detail in a document entitled Proposed Transition To War Measures drawn by the joint home defence planning team of the South-western, Oxford and Wessex regional health authorities. The first instruction in the covert Stage 1 is: "Dust off war plans."

There are 50 things that the NHS war officers must do unobtrusively in Stage 2. They are to notify all staff at the first opportunity, train them for war duties and test the emergency balloon aerial. The war officers are instructed to "consider role of dentists, chiropractors, physiotherapists, etc."; "check stockpiles of drugs"; "review protective factors of all buildings, prepare to bring vulnerable properties up to required standard."

Then they must: "Send home staff not fully engaged to carry out individual protective factors (sic) of their homes — inner rooms — water, etc."

After that they will have to "start crash training courses in first aid — fire fighting — radiac instruments — elementary Boy Scout survival, etc." Having harvested "any crops in the hospital grounds," they must "consider what additional ground can be cultivated for quick returns."

