



Above: The somewhat sinister outline of the Chilmark ventilation towers provides a surreal backdrop to the valley of the river Nadder in Wiltshire.

Chilmark

Home Office plans for the development of a new RGHQ at Chilmark – intended to replace the existing and hopelessly inefficient Sub-Regional Control at Ullenwood near Gloucester – were initiated in the early 1980s. Working drawings were prepared towards the end of 1982 and within three years construction was well under way. Both of the bunkers which it replaced were adaptations of buildings erected in the early 1950s, the former as a GCI station in the Rotor radar scheme and the latter as an Anti-Aircraft Operations Room.

The two-level bunker, which is approximately 200 feet in length and some forty feet wide, is located on gently sloping ground overlooking the Nadder Valley at Ham Cross near Chilmark and is adjacent to the rail interchange sidings of an extensive, former RAF underground bomb store. The Home Office bunker did not take advantage of the existing disused subterranean quarry workings in the area, but the proximity of a significant military site,

and the ramifications of this presence in terms of external ground defence, probably influenced its location.

The building was constructed on a rock plateau excavated into the hillside and, when completed, was covered with earth to a minimum depth of ten feet. External walls are of two-feet-thick reinforced concrete. Little is evident above ground other than a series of prominent ventilation stacks on the hilltop above the bunker, and a pair of inclined entrance shafts into the hillside. Within the structure the lower floor is dedicated to office accommodation and operational areas. The upper floor, which is marginally less well protected against blast and heat, contains the headquarters' dormitories and welfare facilities, although there are also some administrative area there. Almost one third of the bunker is given over to service installations such as standby generators, power distribution cubicles and air-conditioning plant.



Left: A section of the suite of offices provided for the Regional Commissioner's secretariat. The typical 1980s décor, and the quality of the fitting-out, is clearly evident in this photograph. Compare this with the sparseness of the equivalent Regional War Rooms of the 1950s or the Regional Seats of Government of the subsequent decades.

Below: Corridor of power: the central spine corridor on the lower level of the bunker. Excluding the service area, this passage runs the full length of the building and terminates at stairwells at each end. The door to the immediate left is to the military communication suite, the first room on the right housed the uniformed services and is followed by the secretariat offices, the BBC studio and the strong-room.



Above: The servery in the headquarters' restaurant. The high standard of fixtures and fittings within the bunker is evident here too. Note the stainless steel fittings (including refrigerators and deep freezers in the background) and the tastefully tiled floor.





Above: The principal entrance to the bunker, with the ventilation towers on the hillside above. The left-hand incline gives access to the service areas on the lower level, including the generators and air-conditioning plant. The right-hand incline accesses the main administrative areas of the bunker. Both entrance portals give onto narrow, dog-leg corridors terminating in massive steel blast doors that secure the main body of the bunker.



Left: The generator room on the lower floor of the self-contained service area of the bunker. Each of the two generators is capable of sustaining the normal load of the establishment under emergency working conditions. The second unit is a standby in case of a failure of the main plant.



Left: The central electricity distribution room. From here power is distributed throughout the bunker for lighting, heating and ventilation purposes. Switchgear is also provided to control the air-conditioning plant situated on the floor above. Power is normally taken from the national grid but in the event of a grid failure then the main generator would switch in automatically. The internal power plant could also be switched in manually from this point, or remotely simply by pressing a single prominent button in the guard room near the bunker's main pedestrian entrance.