

COS (Misc) 103

ATTACHMENT TO
COS (Misc) 103/742VI

9/4/82

DISEMBARRASSMENT OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS FROM TF 317.8 -
PREPARATIONS

1. There may be a requirement to disembarrass T~~o~~ 317.8 of nuclear weapons at Ascension. A paper which identifies the military implication of removing the weapons to the Islands and either storing them there or transporting them by sea or air to the United Kingdom is being drafted and will be taken at OD(SA) on Monday 12 April.
2. If the disembarrassment is to be achieved with the minimum delay to the Task ~~Force~~^{Group} certain steps will have to be taken in advance of the main ~~Force~~^{Group}'s arrival on 17 April. However, it would be preferable to start the Operation with the Frigates on 16 April. These preparations are designed to ensure that as far as possible the off-loading is carried out in accordance with current nuclear weapons safety procedures and that the preparations themselves remain covert.
3. The main activity involves the mounting of an airlift by 5 VC10s and 3 C130s of specialist teams and equipment from RAF Honington to Ascension. Thirteen containers will have to be moved from Devonport to Honington by road. This should not attract any attention since ordinary lorries can be used. The latest time the lorries would have to leave Devonport is 13 April but moving earlier and at irregular intervals would increase security. The balance of containers is held at Honington and on board RFA RESOURCE who is with T~~o~~ 317.8.

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TOP SECRET

COS TS7(5)

2038/1

B.2/4

The specialist teams consist of an RAF Loading Team, RAF Special Safety Team, Naval Environmental Monitoring Team and a small number of RN Nuclear Weapon Technicians. The total team numbers approximately 40 men and includes AWRE personnel. Minimum notice to move consistent with efficient operation can be given in order to preserve security.

5. It is anticipated that the first aircraft will arrive in the Ascension Islands on 14 April. It will be difficult to conceal the purpose of these preparations from any US personnel on Ascension airfield who have previous nuclear weapon experience and thus there is a possibility that this operation may become known to the US authorities from 14 April.

6. Preparation of the weapons onboard the "peacetime" ships will need to be started before arrival at Ascension. However this activity will be confined within the nuclear weapon magazines and the embarked Press will be unaware of the situation.

7. The off-loading from ships and the return of weapons to the United Kingdom is based on an extraction rate of 12 weapons per day. The safety implications of a higher rate are under examination but are thought to be considerable.

8. With the exception of loading the lorries within the RNAD taking the containers from Devonport to Honington which should start on 12 April no other physical preparations need to be taken in order to meet the planned air movement schedule which is based on starting disembarrassing from 16 April. The penalty of delaying loading containers until 13 April would be to compress the rate of arrival of the lorries thus making the move more overt.