

Revealed: scheme to bastion of

Churchill's astonishing turn Tiree into the last the British Empire



As the Germans blitzkrieged their way across Europe, the Government was already making plans to secure the future of the monarchy by hiding them away from Hitler's forces. The location they chose was a tiny, yet heavily defended Scottish island populated only by Gaelic-speaking crofters. MEG MILNE reports on the secret plans to turn the Hebrides into a Royal redoubt

IN A bid to save the entire Royal Family at the height of the Second World War, Prime Minister Winston Churchill drew up a secret plan to evacuate them to a remote Scottish island, it was revealed yesterday.

As the German army stormed across Europe, fears of an invasion grew and Churchill decided his last stand on British soil would be on the Hebridean island of Tiree.

To draw up the plan, he gathered his top military and government advisors at the Whitehall War Room - an underground bunker - for a secret meeting.

They decided that, if invasion was imminent, the Royal Family, including those in the line of succession, would be taken to Tiree.

Also included in the plan were Churchill himself, his entire War Time Cabinet and senior members of the Government.

Unknown to the British public, Churchill had already set up over 20 top-secret war bases in the Western Isles, including a major facility on Tiree.

The bases were set up in 1940, when the Germans invaded and occupied Norway.

At that time Churchill believed invasion would come over the North Sea, round the north of Scotland to the Western Isles.

Until Churchill set up his network of secret bases, the entire West Coast of Scotland was an open back door to Britain. Once the bases were set up, the door was closed.

But later on, when British Intelligence and resistance groups in Europe confirmed that the invasion would come across the Channel, Churchill put his Tiree escape plan into operation.

The King, Queen and Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret would be taken from Buckingham Palace to a military airfield close to the capital and flown, under escort, to Prestwick.

The other members of the Royal Family, Churchill, the Cabinet and senior Government officials would follow. From Prestwick, they would be

flown on to Tiree, which was then virtually a heavily defended island aircraft carrier.

Travel to and from the island was completely restricted and every islander required special passes to sail to the mainland.

One reason Churchill chose Tiree was its unique security - there were only several hundred Gaelic-speaking crofters living on the island. It would be almost impossible for the Germans to infiltrate without being detected.

Churchill's secret plan to use Tiree to save the royals and democracy has been revealed by author Mike Hughes, 44, in his book, *The Hebrides at War*.

"It is an amazing story, which has never been told before. It has taken me almost ten years to research", says Mike.

"There have been rumours about how important the Western Isles were to the war effort over the years but now we know the plan existed.

"Churchill had tremendous foresight in setting up over 20 bases scattered from Benbecula to Tobermory.

"At the height of war, there were over 2,000 troops stationed on Tiree.

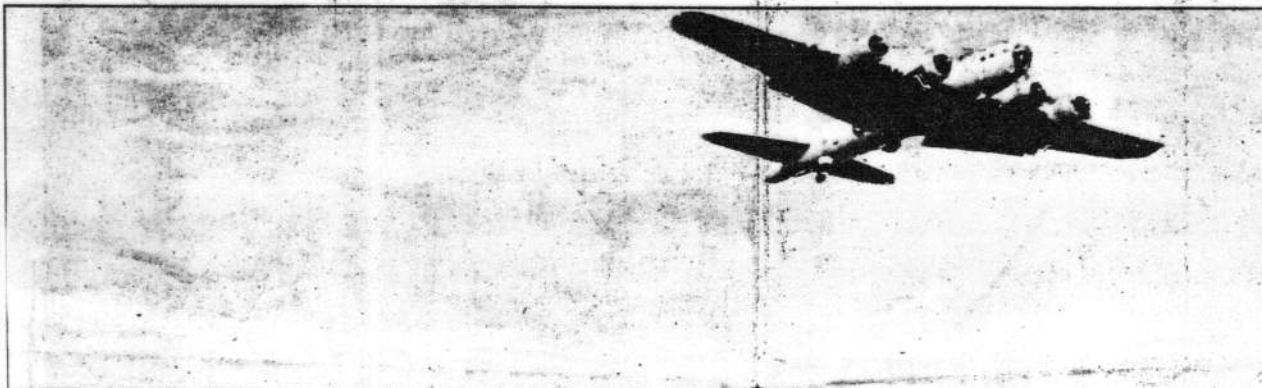
"If the Germans invaded, Churchill's plan was to quickly move the royals and the Government from London to Tiree.

"If the Germans could not be beaten in the south of England the planes would then fly everyone to Iceland, then Greenland and on to Canada.

"Churchill would set up a government in exile and the royal family would live there until they could return to Britain."

ON Tiree, part of the defences included the Dad's Army island Home Guard of 80 crofters and fishermen including retired crofter Hugh Maclean, now 83. Yesterday he said: "At the time everything had to be kept very hush-hush and, as you can imagine, security was extremely tight because of the vital importance of the island to Churchill.

"Even although I was a member of the Home Guard and known to the troops as an islander, I was stopped



FLIGHT TO SAFETY: In the event of a Nazi invasion, Winston Churchill planned to fly the Royal Family to the relative safety of the Scottish islands before sending them on to North America if the Germans were not repulsed

nd challenged several times by the oldiers who were armed with fixed ayonets.

"There were a lot of camouflaged ilitary buildings on the island and a zens of Nissen huts all over the ace. There was no electricity on the land but the military installed their wn underground headquarters and a enerating station.

"The story of what happened here uring the War has remained secret r so long it is nice to know that the 'uth has now come out."

"To cover up the importance of the land as the royal escape route, Churchill stationed a Coastal Com- and base as well as a 518

Meteorological Reconnaissance Squadron on the island.

The 518 air crews provided important weather information needed to plan bombing raids on Germany.

Ironically, in 1944 the 518 Squadron were instrumental in bringing the war to an end and safeguarding democracy and the royal family.

The information from Tiree revealed to Eisenhower and Churchill a weather window on June 6 1944 giving the long-awaited green light for D Day.

● *The Hebrides at War* by Mike Hughes is published by Canongate Books.

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