

I REPORTED at nine am sharp last Friday at Kirton's Rapier Barracks for my first ever flight, let alone my first trip in an army helicopter.

We were quickly briefed by Capt Mark Joslyn on the main details of the exercise — and the terrible deeds of the fictitious Scottish despot "Ival The Oil".

It was not until the helicopter pilots and crew were briefed that I realised the scale of the operation, with about 40 men going over last-minute details with Capt Joslyn.

We were taken to the advance recce party which awaited the take-off of the first of the mighty Chinooks, the American-built giants which saw plenty of action during the Vietnam War.

Members of the party told us to watch out as we boarded the beast as the ramp would be very slippery.

Crouching down I was nearly blown over as the blast from the helicopter's rotor blades reached us.

When the signal was given we ran to the back of the machine where it opened up like a big fish ready to snap up a shoal of minnows.

What we were warned not to do was approach the front for, as the rotor blades can dip as low as four feet, we would not live to regret it!

As I clambered aboard I felt reasonably okay, although there was no chance to ask the driver to put me off at the next stop.

Five minutes into the short flight, I actually began to enjoy my first foray into the skies.

Swinging below us were two Land-Rovers — but safe in the knowledge a Chinook could lift its own weight, I began to scan the countryside through a porthole.

There was little time for admiring the countryside as we were soon over Scampton.

Touching down the back opened up and we were out in the open again.

It was then that the name of the helicopter was brought home to me as a warm draught of air hit us up the backs.

Chinook is the American Indian term for a hot wind, which this one certainly was!

Four Land-Rovers were cleared of landing straps and we were driven off to set up the Rapiers which had been dropped off a few hundred yards away.

With several units dropped in by following Chinooks and Pumas it was not long before the

# A flight into the unknown

IMAGINE the scene . . . it's 1996, Scotland has been denationalised for four years and, worst of all, the dreaded Ival the Oil is leading another Scottish uprising.

However unlikely it might seem, that was the scenario behind Exercise Key Lift which brought frenzied helicopter activity to the Kirton Lindsey area last Friday.

The wily Scot had advanced as far as Hadrian's Wall to reclaim ancient rights.

Men and machinery of the Kirton-based 16th Air Defence Regiment's 14th Battery had been involved in setting up defensive cover for Second Division to intercept Ival and his force in the Catterick area of Yorkshire.

radar-tracking Rapier Missiles were set up.

The real thing costs £50,000 — so blanks were loaded for this exercise by the gunners, who had their routine down to a fine art.

Even a generator, powered by a Hillman Imp car engine, fired into life at the first attempt.

It seemed that we were soon clambering aboard one of the noisy beasts once again to return to Kirton Lindsey.

Sitting there, with a chill wind up the back of my shirt, I pondered for a moment on the amount of money spent at practising war.

As a Rapier missile costs £50,000 I shudder to think how much one of the helicopters would set you back.

Perhaps next time the Government announces another £50 million on the Defence Budget I will understand where a tiny part of it goes to.

One consolation about the trip back was it was much quicker without a load, but the helicopter pilot flew a lot lower and occasionally banked her over as if he was out for a Sunday drive in the family saloon.

As we left the cold Chinook that comforting draft of hot wind hit us again.

I had enjoyed my insight into the key role of air defence and the logistics of an exercise such as Key Lift.

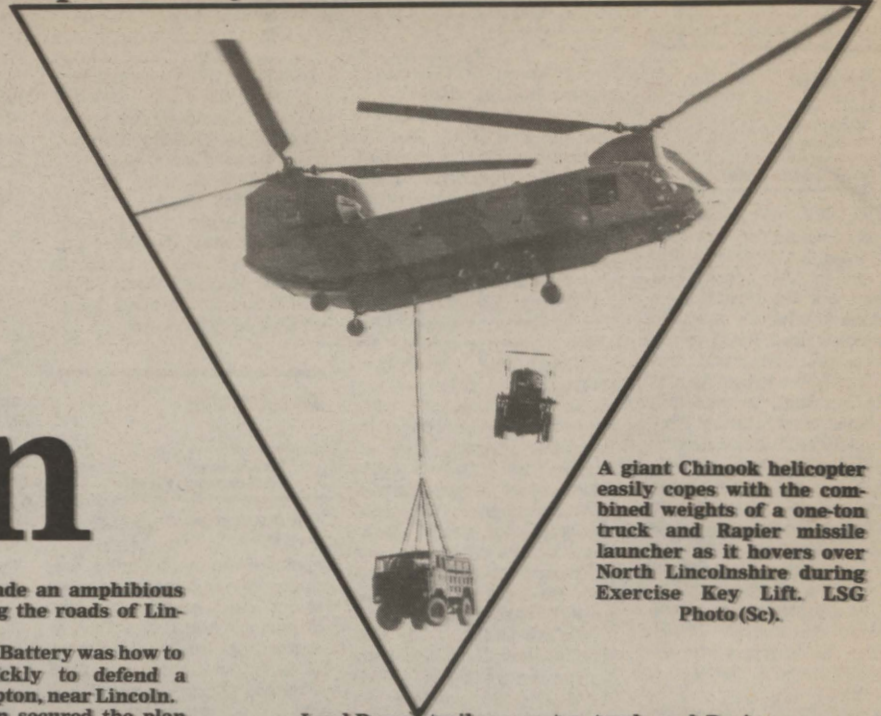
But the canny Scot had made an amphibious landing on the Wash, strafing the roads of Lincolnshire along the way.

So the headache for the 14th Battery was how to deploy their resources quickly to defend a tactical location at RAF Scampton, near Lincoln.

Once the position had been secured the plan was to assess the situation before being moved on over the weekend to the Stanford Training Area in Norfolk.

It might sound simple enough, just load nine Rapier units on to their launchers and tow the whole lot down to Scampton.

But, with the roads out of use the job of transporting the nine units, including ¾-ton

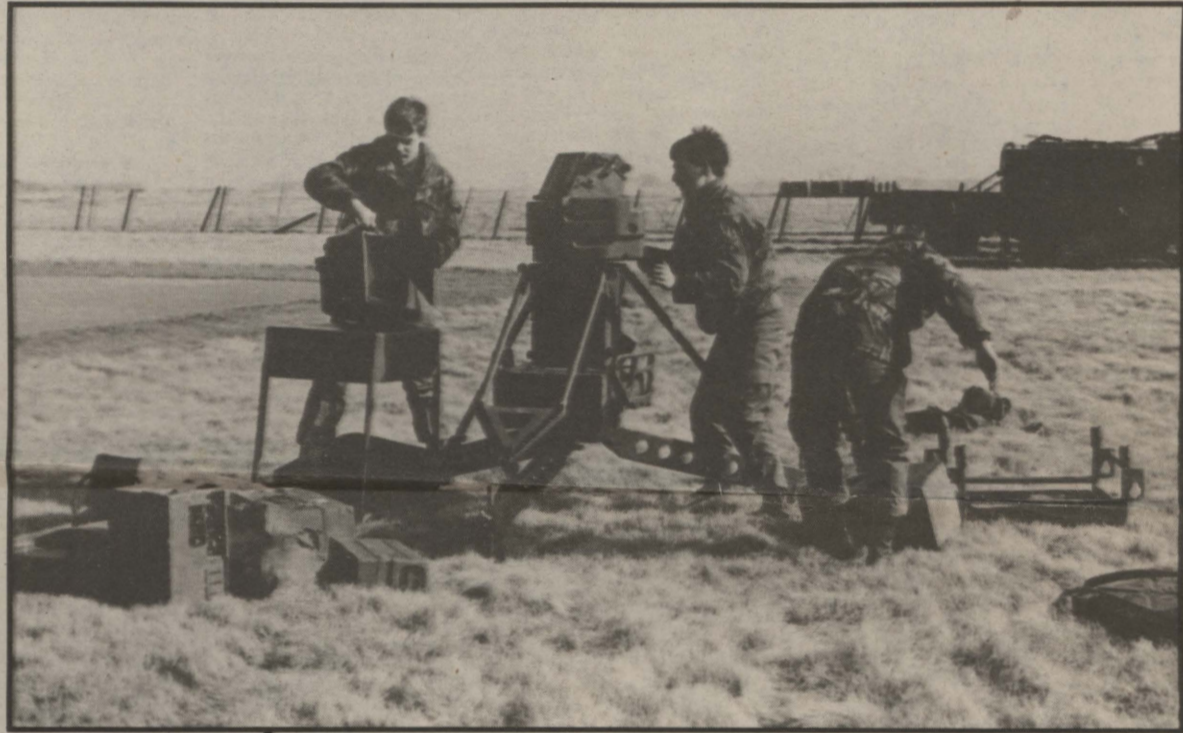


A giant Chinook helicopter easily copes with the combined weights of a one-ton truck and Rapier missile launcher as it hovers over North Lincolnshire during Exercise Key Lift. LSG Photo (Sc).

Land-Rover, trailer, one ton truck and Rapier launcher each, plus 170 men fell into the hands of the RAF.

To complete the task three Chinook and two Puma helicopters were required, but the RAF laid on two extra Pumas.

One of the Chinooks had come from Germany for the exercise but the rest were from RAF Odenham, Kent.



Above: Like a well-oiled machine, men of the 16th Air Defence Regiment 14 Battery set up the sophisticated Rapier missile radar equipment at RAF Scampton. LSG Photo (Sc).

Right: Frenzied foreground activity as one of the smaller Pumas deposits a ¾-ton Land-Rover at RAF Scampton. LSG Photo (Sc).

Below: Minutes after being planted on the tarmac at RAF Scampton, a Rapier missile launcher is equipped to provide cover against the advance of an imaginary enemy. LSG Photo (Sc).



Following directions from a man on the ground a Chinook helicopter pilot skilfully lands a one-ton truck and Rapier missile launcher at RAF Scampton. LSG Photo (Sc).