

Children's Army

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CHILDREN AT WAR in south Arabia: these young boys are being trained to fight the British-officered forces of the Sultan of Oman, who arrived in London on a visit last week.

They are -conscripted at an early age by the rebels, taken from their homes in the Dhofar province of Oman to be indoctrinated in Maoist thought and guerrilla warfare over the border in South - Yemen. The Popular Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arabian Gulf wastes no time in getting at their six and seven year old minds.

" At that age they will all become hard rebels," complains the Governor of Dhofar, "The Front takes their religion from them on the march to Yemen. Each night they stay in a cave and the guard asks- what they will eat. At first they all say Allah will provide. But on the third night when Allah has still not provided, the guard gives them food. From then on it is the Front that provides."

Hawf in South Yemen.

Many of the 400 children there are not in their teens when they use a recoilless rifle for the first time.

Some will be sent to the oil states on the Gulf, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Dubai to wait for an eventual call to action if PFLOAG wins in Oman. But most will fight in Dhofar—against British officers and pilots.

Youths not much older than these are currently tying down two battalions, 20 platoons of special guards, a gendarmerie, nine Strikemaster ground attack jets, two Caribous, eight Skyvans, four Beavers and 12 helicopters.

Indeed, the Sultan has just been forced to complete a £1.5 million deal to add another six Belfast-built Skyvan transports to his fleet. The deal, unlike previous ones, was made without publicity because of growing Whitehall sensitivity to the insurgency.

Films made in South Yemen show that these children are not part of some joke " Lads' Army." Discipline is strict. They handle modern mortars, rocket launchers, heavy machine guns. And they are motivated. At Chinese-style pantomimes, a child will say: "I represent the people of Dubai. The oil is ours and we must take it from the imperialists."

British support in the war crucial to the Sultan. The rebels are dedicated to a long drawnout offensive. It seems likely that these children will soon be pitting their wits against men who got their military training at Sandhurst or at Cranwell.

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