

## **THE HOME GUARD**

*Two texts were quoted in the Parish Magazine of August 1940; the first indication that local men had rallied to defend their homes: "There is nothing new under the sun" Ecclesiastes 1 v9, and a lengthy quotation from the book of Nehemiah, chapters 4-6, which includes: "and fight for your brethren, your sons and daughters, your wives and your houses" etc.*

### **THE XIVth PLATOON 17th SUSSEX BATTALION HOME GUARD**

*Recollections of Mr. C. W Shelford, C. O. Danehill Platoon. Mr. David Etherton, aged 6 on the outbreak of war; Mr. Henry Goodenough, born 1915, who was an A.R.P. Warden, then living at Chelwood Gate. And my own memories.*

By June 1940 the war had reached a critical stage. Our Army, and that of the French, had been entirely defeated and it was only through the miracle of Dunkirk that we had any troops left but we had lost most of our equipment. Hitler seemed invincible and particularly his Air Force. The dive bombers had caused the most frightful havoc in modern warfare and his Air Force was thought to be supreme. It was really only the Air Force that mattered. We had superiority in the Navy, but no ship dared appear in the Channel as it was far too narrow and could be bombed relentlessly from the coast. It was believed that Hitler would very soon get complete domination of the air. Churchill had already said that we would "fight to the last man when we were invaded". At that time it really was a question of when. (C. W. Shelford,)

*On June 26th Mr. Anthony Eden, the War Minister, broadcast to the nation on the gravity of the situation, announcing the formation of "Local Defence Volunteers", able-bodied men - young and old could enrol.*

The first thing, of course, was to form some sort of organisation, and this was done by finding the most suitable person in each village and telling him to get on with it. In our case it was Major the Hon. Rupert Barrington. He had ended the Great War as a Brigadier, but as a regular had returned to his original rank. He was running the Isle of Thorns for Mr. Herbert Wagg. I telephoned Major Barrington and offered my services. I think I was the first to join. There was to be a platoon in each village and a district battalion. (C. W. Shelford}

Able-bodied men over the age of 16, those in reserved occupations and the men over 'call up' age were asked to attend local meetings and offer their services. I remember attending the meeting at the Memorial Hall when the local unit was formed. There was a considerable sense of urgency. Major Barrington was in charge, and there were ex-service men from the First World War all willing to offer their services. Names were taken and the likely duties explained. We made out own armbands with the initials L.D.V. proudly on view. The old hands soon fell into old army routines and helped by instructing the young ones in matters military. 'Sections' were formed, each with a mixture of ages, to undertake the various duties, in Danehill & Chelwood Gate - training sessions were organised. (P.G.L.)



**THE XIVth PLATOON 17th SUSSEX BATTALION HOME GUARD 1944  
WITH CADETS & A.R.P. WARDENS.**

**Back Row** Lt. Col. Clementi Smith - W. Penfold - H. Baker - L. Simmons - W. Ford - G. Etherton - F. McKellow  
C. Keel - G. Brown - L. Gasson - S. Wenham - W. Godley - ... Sanderson - A. Lucas - F. Bates - H. Goodenough

**2<sup>nd</sup> Row** W. Dixon - D. Lucas - J. Bates - F. Awcock - G. Stevens - H. Standing - W. Miles - C. Bates ("Major")  
E. Etherton ("Tim") - H. Sherlock - R. Hichins - H. Baker ("Bun") - E. Carter - E. Cobby - J. Turner - E. Walder -

**3<sup>rd</sup> Row** A. Burley - Mr Long - C. Newnham - E. Edwards - H. Warnett (Bert) C. Hall - J. Hames - C. Shelford  
J. B. Gardiner - A. Smith ("Whiffer") A. Turner - A. Marten - C. Manners - ... Husband - ... Rist - L. Gasson

**4<sup>th</sup> Row** F. Baker - C. Smith - B. Gasson - G. Turner - G. Smith - W. Anton - J. Comber - P. Marten - D. Bates.

One of the first things to happen caused us a great deal of amusement. We were told to parade in Danehill, just opposite the Vicarage, where we were to be reviewed by the Colonel. We were an odd-looking lot. We had our forage caps and L.D.V. armbands. Some of us insisted on wearing the forage caps sideways on and one man in particular had a very large straw behind his ear. Major Barrington had somehow got us to stand straight when two cars, both very large, were seen coming down the hill. The cars stopped in front of us and a very smart aide-de-camp leapt out of each and opened the door. Out of the first came General Hilliard in full uniform with every medal under the sun, followed by his second-in-command whose name I cannot exactly remember; it was something like Colonel Blood. He was also dressed in full military uniform. General Hilliard addressed us and said what a fine body of men we were and what a splendid defence the country now had. After about three minutes they got back into the cars, the aide-de-camps banged the doors and away they went. Rupert Barrington was slightly amused by all this and couldn't help laughing with us all when they had gone.

*(C.W. Shelford)*

Telephone Exchanges, at The White House, Danehill (then The Orange Tea Rooms) and at Chelwood Gate were likely targets and guards were mounted there. An empty butcher's shop, adjoining the tea room and exchange, was taken over to be used as a guard room. I remember sweeping sawdust off the floor. We took our guard duties, one old, one young, in turn, two hours on and four hours off duty, patrolling the road outside the exchange. In the late evening and at daybreak we walked up Church Hill to watch from the top of the hill south of Christopher Fields for any sight of incoming aircraft, parachutists or any other likely invaders. A Searchlight unit was stationed at Furners Green behind Mr. Tunks' grocers shop (Chandlers). One of the younger volunteers spent the night at the unit with bicycle at the ready. We acted as messengers, who, in the event of a breakdown of telephone services, could cycle to HQ at Danehill with any messages received through the Searchlight units radio.

As winter closed in and invasion seemed less likely, the guards mounted at the telephone exchanges were the main duties performed. The guard room was moved from the cold butcher's

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shop to a more comfortable 'barn' behind the tea rooms. This was a room often used for small meetings and whist drives etc. It had an open coal fire. The Chelwood Gate guard room was in a shed next to the Telephone Exchange, opposite Sandy Lane. One of my memories of those nights on duty were the stories of the First World War recalled by the old soldiers, some quite unsuitable for a young man's ears.

*(P. G. L.)*

Soon the name changed from Local Defence Volunteers to the Home Guard. The Home Guard grew fast, denim uniforms and forage caps were produced which made us look a little more like soldiers and, what was more important, we were issued with rifles. The Canadians had shipped thousands of their Ross' rifles over to us. These had a 3.00 bore instead of the 3.03 of the British 'Lee Enfield'. The Canadians also supplied the special ammunition needed. It was a first-class modern gun - we soon became an armed force.

Much to my regret Major Barrington retired fairly early and it was then that I was made Officer in Charge with the rank of Lieutenant. I do not think there were any Captains, but there were one or two Majors hanging about; one of them was Lord Castle Stewart. He was great fun to work with, always good for a joke. He was succeeded by Colonel Henriques from Nutley - a very nice man to work with. The Colonel of the Battalion was Mr. A.N. Stewart who lived at Chuck Hatch, just south of Hartfield, again a very able man, but Colonels and Majors didn't really matter. The whole thing was based on the village Home Guard. Two other men were made officers; Mr. Gardiner, for the Danehill, and Mr. Hames for the Chelwood Gate parts of the Platoon. Mr. Gardiner, who kept the shop in the middle of the village, had been a sergeant in the First World War. He was an exceptionally brave man and had won a medal. I think the D.C.M. Mr. Hames and his wife looked after some people (*Mr. & Mrs. Pepper at Danehill Lodge*. PGL). I often walked down the path by the school and up the other side of the valley to spend hours talking to Mr. Hames in the kitchen. Mr. Hames had been a regular soldier for many years. He was very efficient and knew all about training. Lieutenant Gardiner represented everything that was best in the First World War. Lieutenant Harries was able to keep us up to date with modern military thinking and methods - I had wonderful support from them. There were so many others: Sgt. Hall, Sgt. Edwards and so many, many more. We had many adventures and the Platoon as a whole did well, winning a Battalion shooting prize. On one occasion we contained Italian prisoners who were very excitable and quite definitely had thoughts of a mass escape.

*(C. W. Shelford)*

Bert Warnett told us that the Home Guard had been called out the previous night. There had been a disturbance by the Italian prisoners at Cherrills. The Home Guard were each given one round of ammunition and then surrounded the building. The rioting went on until the Home Guard were given the order to "fix bayonets" and close in; that did the trick; all was quiet after that.

*(Henry Goodenough)*

There was much concern when, early one morning, the sound of a rifle shot was heard in Danehill village centre. A bullet was found embedded in the door post of the disused butcher's shop. Later it was established that one of the Home Guards (of mature years and now anonymous) had been aiming his Ross Rifle, forgetting it was loaded..... no action was taken.

*(P. G. L.)*

The Home Guard, of course, included many different characters; a lot of them had served in the First World War; things must have been very different on the Western Front in France. My father belonged to the Home Guard and, after several months, was issued with a Sten gun. I thought it was a toy and sometimes, when he was at work, I took it to pieces - a good job he did not have to use it for real!

The Home Guard used to parade in front of The Orange Tea Room, now The White House, on Sunday mornings. Mr. Shelford of 'Latchetts' was the Commanding Officer. There were sand bags

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surrounding the door and windows of the brick building behind the tea room used as their headquarters. The Home Guard, just as in 'Dads Army' held exercises with the Army. Big, round, concrete blocks were in place beside the road near The Corner Shop. These were for tank traps. There was a tank regiment stationed at Sheffield Park which drove up the A275 to 'attack' the Home Guard at Danehill. The 'traps' were rolled into position across the road in readiness for the onslaught. The tanks rumbled up the road - and simply climbed over them - I wonder what they did next?

*(David Etherton)*

We worked with the Home Guard later on and did exercises with them - we did some firing practice.

*(Henry Goodenough)*

I volunteered for service in April 1941. The experience of joining the Army was a little less traumatic as a result of the training I had received with the Home Guard.

*(P. G. L.)*

*Mr. Brian Gasson born 1929, remembers:-*

I joined the Army Cadets attached to the Home Guard. We used to meet for training once a week in a hut in the garden of Chelworth, Admiral Beamish's house.

I was attached to the signals section of the Home Guard. I remember helping Ernie Baxter running telephone wires on cotton reels on telephone poles. In an emergency Lt. Jimmy Gardiner, who had one of the few village telephones, would walk down to Orchard Cottage, which was at the bottom of the cemetery steps, with a message. I would then cycle with it to Mr. Shelford, the C.O, at Latchetts.

There was a small ammunition store at the old sand pit in Freshfield Lane. There was also a rifle range there. We sometimes practiced firing rifles and Bren guns on the Forest near Old Lodge.

*'Dads Army', repeated so frequently on television, is the picture that most people have of the Home Guard, illustrating the slight chaos of the organisation, the old soldiers, youths and unlikely civilians providing many amusing situations.*

*We may now regard the Home Guard with affectionate amusement, but remember that in 1940/41 events moved with considerable speed. When there was a very real threat and sense of danger, local men did what they could to help in local defence.*

*The Occasional Paper of 3rd December 1944 included:-*

### **TO THE XIVth PLATOON 17th SUSSEX BATTALION HOME GUARD**

“A salute to the Home Guard, thanking the Home Guard for their efforts”.....“For four years, throughout the hardest days of the war, a grave responsibility rested upon the Home Guard. Upon you a large measure of the safety of this depended.”.... “You willingly gave of your time” ...and .. ..“a word of praise to your ladies who for four years spared your help at home for the sake of the common good”.

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### **AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS**

In 1940, when the first bombs were dropped in Danehill everybody was worried and started building air raid shelters. I was living with my parents in the cottage on the junction of Horsted Lane and the A275, now called 'Clover Cottage'. My father, Mr. West, our neighbour and Mr. Jack Dixon of St. Alans got together and built our shelter. It was just around the corner into a bank in the garden of 'Greenacres' the home of Cecil (Bogey) Awcock. When the shelter was finished I remember spending a lot of nights sleeping in it with the other families.

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I remember the bombs dropping on the village, especially the 1000 lb bomb at Perrymans Hill which shook our house - my father took me to see the crater which was very big.

During the blackout the K.R.P. Wardens came round nightly to check if you had any lights showing. Several houses had sticky tape on the windows to try and prevent the windows being shattered by bomb blast.

Most able-bodied men were in the Home Guard or the A.R.P. The head master, Mr. Bird, was in the A.R.P., a little sign, a white 'P' still on the wall of the school house, was to show that there was at least one stirrup pump at the school. There were Bofors guns near the searchlights to shoot at the raiders caught in the searchlights. They had sound detectors to track the aircraft - even us children could recognise the drone of German planes.

*(David Etherton)*

I was an A.R.P. Warden. We had lessons on First Aid at Stocklands and used to practise bandaging and that sort of thing.

I worked for Mr. Walder at the bakery. Mr. Walder and I were in the A.R.P., Bill Frost was in the Fire Service and Bert Warnett in the Home Guard. We often compared notes; between us we knew quite a bit of what happened.

I joined the Red Cross before the war. When there was an air raid warning, we had to report to the depot at Forest Row. There was a warning soon after war was declared. I cycled quickly to the depot. All the stretchers, blankets, etc. had been taken up to London for a likely emergency; later they were returned.

One night a lot of incendiary bombs were dropped. There were fires all round, some up in the trees. One fell through the roof of Breeches Bennett's house. He threw it out of the window with a shovel. The next morning Lt. Col. Clementi-Smith called on my wife. He was very annoyed - no one had reported the bombs to him and he was in charge of A.R.P.

One day there was a restriction on using the roads. Mr. Walder was told that all vehicles must be off the road by 8 a.m. We had to bake early that day. Norman Mitchell and I got to The Red Lion from Twyford at about ten past eight. Norman drove the van over the road onto the grass by the pub hoping to get round the corner without going on the main road. Ron Awcock, a special constable, was on duty. He said we must not go on and that we must take the van back across the road. Norman ignored him and drove back to the bakery saying that, as he was going into the army in a few days, he did not care if he was reported. The army was all over the place - in the woods and by the sides of the road. *[Norman Mitchell was in the Army by August 1940].*

*(Henry Goodenough)*

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## **AIRCRAFT DOWN**

### **MESSERSCHMITT Bf110. CRASH - ASHDOWN FOREST**

27th Sep. 1940 between Ashdown cricket ground and "Gale".



*From "THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN" by Richard Townsend Bickers. Published 1990 by Guild Publishing by arrangement with Salamander Books Ltd.*

*Chapter 2 The Height of Battle by Mike Spick,*

**p. 138.** "There were two days of intensive fighting before the month ended, on

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September 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> (1940).

September 27<sup>th</sup> started with the usual reconnaissance sorties, then, a formation of Bf 110 Jabos escorted by 109s raided southern England in what

appeared to be a fairly purposeless incursion. Intercepted, they lost eight of their number." (*Details of other raids*)

**A CRASHED MESSERSCHMITT Bf110  
(Not the one at Chelwood Gate)**

3 Bf 109s, 21 Bf 110s, and 15 JU 88s were written off, two further JU 88s crashed after a mid air collision over France.

British losses totalled 28: 15 Spitfires and 13 Hurricanes were written off and yet others force landed. More seriously 20 R.A.F. pilots were killed and a further five badly hurt."

**p 180.** "Friday September 27th (1940)  
(Weather) :Fair

Day: Raids on London and Bristol thwarted.

Night: London and Liverpool areas raided

Aircraft Losses: RAF 28, Luftwaffe 54.

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### **LOCAL PEOPLE'S MEMORIES OF THE CRASH.**

"I was loading bracken onto a horse and cart, the bracken had been cut to make a fire break around "Gale", Ron Wheeler aged about 7 or 8, the grandson of my employer, Mr Charles Wheeler, was with me. Tom Arnold, who worked for Lord Cecil, came over to speak to us. There was an awful noise above us and we saw a plane coming down, it burst into flames and then dived straight into the ground with an enormous bang, it was about 30 yards away from us. We all started to run as ammunition started to explode and there was this awful fire raging, for a while I did not realise what was happening.

When I looked around I realised that the horse had bolted, Tom had run with young Ron into the big house. My main concern was for the horse, someone called out "get down there are bullets flying about" but I ran towards the main road. Ben Turner was with the horse and I managed to calm it down a bit and started leading it back to the stable. As I was passing the Red Lion I fainted, when I came round I was in Mr Macmillan's place opposite being given brandy. I was in a state of shock which was not surprising after what I had been through. It was something I shall never forget.

(One thing I will not forget was seeing a boot with a leg in it lying on the ground).

I had a small piece of the plane which I carried in my pocket for years. There were some burns on the horse".

*(Verbal Account of the crash by Fred Wood)*

When the German Messerschmitt ME 110 was shot down beside the Ashdown Forest Cricket Ground, my uncle George, who was the blacksmith at the Forge, and my father went to the site in their old Ford van to collect the bodies of the two German fliers. They were buried in Danehill churchyard but have since been removed to Germany.

*(David Etherton)*

Alice Manklow and I were local 'post ladies' during the war. During the early morning blackout, we took our bikes into the Post Office to load up for the early morning delivery. One morning two long crosses, laced up in canvas, arrived addressed to Ron Awcock, the undertaker, from the Red Cross. These were for the graves of the German aircrew. We tied the parcels to the front carrier, only to find that we could not get the bike through the doorway. So they had to come off and be tied on again as best we could in the dark.

*(Win Stepney)*

### **TYPHOON CRASH LANDING -WOODGATE 13th FEB. 1943.**

*From BOMBERS OVER SUSSEX 1943-45.*

*by Pat Burgess & Andy Saunders. Published Apr 1995.*

13th Feb. 1943. "A Typhoon of No 1. Squadron, Biggin Hill, piloted by Sgt. R.W. HORNALL experienced an engine fault and made an emergency landing near Woodgate Farm, Danehill, the starboard wing was smashed off of the kitchen garden boundary. The pilot was unhurt and was able to telephone his squadron from the orderly room of the 5th Canadian Armoured Division nearby.

An R.A.F. Typhoon aircraft crash-landed in the corner of the field near Woodgate - just below where The Pink House has been built at Cumnor House School. Everybody was amazed how he missed the electric cables in the field. The pilot escaped with minor injuries. Lots of people went up there to look at the crashed plane.

*(David Etherton)*

*Henry Goodenough remembers going to see the crashed aircraft. "It had crashed into the cupressus hedge". Brian Gasson remembers sitting in the cockpit of the Typhoon.*

I was driving the van down Wych Cross hill when there was a lot of air activity. I stopped the van and got out. Some planes flew over very low. I could see the swastikas on the wings. They

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machine-gunned the Isle of Thorns and flew on to Nutley. When I got home Gladys said "You have got mud all over you" - that was because I threw myself on the ground.

We worked with the Home Guard later on and did exercises with them. We had some firing practice. We were awakened by the sound of the first flying bomb. I said to Gladys, my wife, "they are flying low tonight".

*(Henry Goodenough)*

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