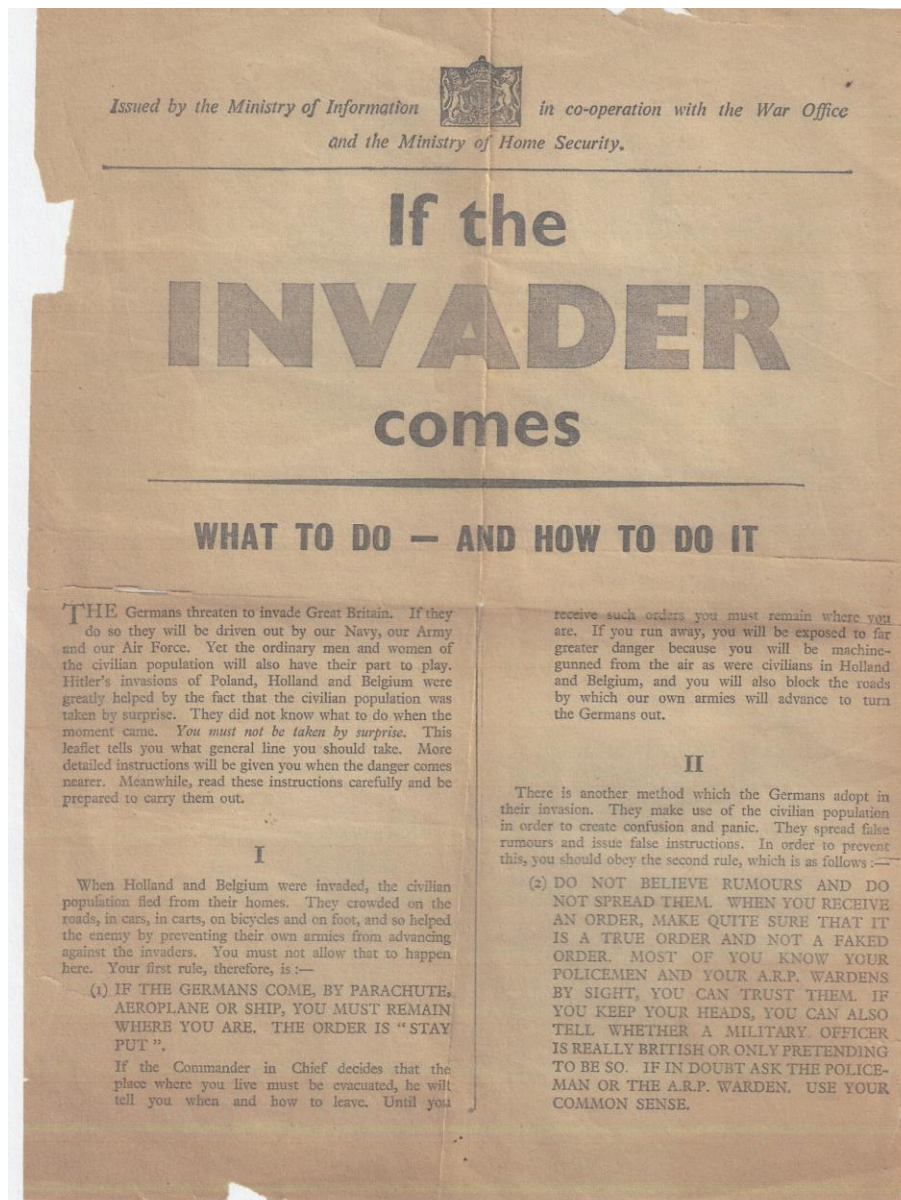


The Village in World War 2

The Home Guard

The initial call for a volunteer force to counter the threats of Fifth Columnists, Parachutists, spies, real and imagined, came as the German assault on France, Belgium and Norway commenced. Anthony Eden, the Secretary of State for War (and later Prime Minister) broadcast on the BBC on 14th May 1940, the formation of a Local Defence Volunteer (LDV) force and called for volunteers. Within a week and relying on the County Lord Lieutenant and the Territorial Army Association, an organisation covering the whole county existed albeit in a very rough and ready state. The initial organisation of LDV "Groups" was based upon the Police districts with Mountsorrel being part of the Loughborough Group under the command Major Charles Martin.

Whilst that initial recruiting rush was taking place the Government recognised that more was needed to be done to inform the public and published information leaflets in the expectation that invasion was imminent.



III

The Army, the Air Force and the Local Defence Volunteers cannot be everywhere at once. The ordinary man and woman must be on the watch. If you see anything suspicious, do not rush round telling your neighbours all about it. Go at once to the nearest policeman, police-station, or military officer and tell them exactly what you saw. Train yourself to notice the exact time and place where you saw anything suspicious, and try to give exact information. Try to check your facts. The sort of report which a military or police officer wants from you is something like this :-

"At 5.30 p.m. to-night I saw twenty cyclists come into Little Squashborough from the direction of Great Mudtown. They carried some sort of automatic rifle or gun. I did not see anything like artillery. They were in grey uniforms."

Be calm, quick and exact. The third rule, therefore, is as follows :-

- (3) KEEP WATCH. IF YOU SEE ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS, NOTE IT CAREFULLY AND GO AT ONCE TO THE NEAREST POLICE OFFICER OR STATION, OR TO THE NEAREST MILITARY OFFICER. DO NOT RUSH . ABOUT SPREADING VAGUE RUMOURS. GO QUICKLY TO THE NEAREST AUTHORITY AND GIVE HIM THE FACTS.

IV

Remember that if parachutists come down near your home, they will not be feeling at all brave. They will not know where they are, they will have no food, they will not know where their companions are. They will want you to give them food, means of transport and maps. They will want you to tell them where they have landed, where their comrades are, and where our own soldiers are. The fourth rule, therefore, is as follows :-

- (4) DO NOT GIVE ANY GERMAN ANYTHING. DO NOT TELL HIM ANYTHING. HIDE YOUR FOOD AND YOUR BICYCLES. HIDE YOUR MAPS. SEE THAT THE ENEMY GETS NO PETROL. IF YOU HAVE A CAR OR MOTOR BICYCLE, PUT IT OUT OF ACTION WHEN NOT IN USE. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO REMOVE THE IGNITION KEY; YOU MUST MAKE IT USELESS TO ANYONE EXCEPT YOURSELF.

IF YOU ARE A GARAGE PROPRIETOR, YOU MUST WORK OUT A PLAN TO PROTECT YOUR STOCK OF PETROL AND YOUR CUSTOMERS' CARS. REMEMBER THAT TRANSPORT AND PETROL WILL BE THE INVADER'S MAIN DIFFICULTIES. MAKE SURE THAT NO INVADER WILL BE ABLE TO GET HOLD OF YOUR CARS, PETROL, MAPS OR BICYCLES.

V

You may be asked by Army and Air Force officers to help in many ways. For instance, the time may come when you will receive orders to block roads or streets in order to prevent the enemy from advancing. Never block a road unless you are told which one you must block. Then you can help by felling trees, wiring them together or blocking the roads with cars. Here, therefore, is the fifth rule :-

- (5) BE READY TO HELP THE MILITARY IN ANY WAY. BUT DO NOT BLOCK ROADS UNTIL ORDERED TO DO SO BY THE MILITARY OR L.D.V. AUTHORITIES.

VI

If you are in charge of a factory, store or other works, organise its defence at once. If you are a worker, make sure that you understand the system of defence that has been organised and know what part you have to play in it. Remember always that parachutists and fifth column men are powerless against any organised resistance. They can only succeed if they can create disorganisation. Make certain that no suspicious strangers enter your premises.

You must know in advance who is to take command, who is to be second in command, and how orders are to be transmitted. This chain of command must be built up and you will probably find that ex-officers or N.C.O.'s, who have been in emergencies before, are the best people to undertake such command. The sixth rule is therefore as follows :-

- (6) IN FACTORIES AND SHOPS, ALL MANAGERS AND WORKMEN SHOULD ORGANISE SOME SYSTEM NOW BY WHICH A SUDDEN ATTACK CAN BE RESISTED.

VII

The six rules which you have now read give you a general idea of what to do in the event of invasion. More detailed instructions may, when the time comes, be given you by the Military and Police Authorities and by the Local Defence Volunteers; they will NOT be given over the wireless as that might convey information to the enemy. These instructions must be obeyed at once.

Remember always that the best defence of Great Britain is the courage of her men and women. Here is your seventh rule :-

- (7) THINK BEFORE YOU ACT. BUT THINK ALWAYS OF YOUR COUNTRY BEFORE YOU THINK OF YOURSELF.

The initial organisation was quickly restructured to meet the growing and very real threat of invasion and by the end of July 1940 the LDV had become The Home Guard and were organised on regular army structure with a Leicestershire Zone HQ Based at the Magazine in Leicester controlling ten battalions across the county. Two battalions, Loughborough and Charnwood used Mountsorrel Drill Hall as their HQs, Loughborough under the command of Major Charles Martin and Charnwood under Colonel W S Toller.

The Mountsorrel Platoon was Nr. 2 Platoon, Western Company, Charnwood Battalion, under the command of R H Orton of Rothley.



Mountsorrel Platoon, 10th (Charnwood) Battalion, Leicestershire Home Guard

5th Row: Unknown, Ernest Perkins, Mr Johnson, Unknown, Albert Davie, Unknown, Roland W Holland

4th Row: Unknown, Mr Pierpoint, George Harrahd,, Alf Burrows, Randall Dodge, Ernie Hill, Johnnie Alen, Mr G Proud

3rd Row: Mr A Gilliver, Unknown, Mr Bond, Len Bosworth, Sid Proud, Unkown, Reg Webster, Stan Rodwell

2nd Row: Reg Pearson, H Brewin, Harry Wood-Antill, Fred Kent, Mr Wesley, Harrold Newman, Maurice Wignall, Cpl Albert Clarke

Front Row; Sgt Harry Ward, Sgt Charles Bradley, CSM Richard Smith, Capt. Orton, Lt. Rose, 2nd Lt Rymes Coles, Sgt Roland Goodman MM, Sgt Cecil Allen, Sgt Proud, Sgt Stafford

(Names as shown on the original)

As the war progressed and the fear of imminent invasion faded the Home Guard was again reorganised taking up a much greater role in home defence and allowing the regular army start to prepare for what was to be D-Day. In this final reorganisation the county was split into four area "Groups" supported by Zonal Troops providing reconnaissance and transport capabilities along with a Home Guard Anti-Aircraft unit based in Leicester. Locally the Mountsorrel Platoon became part of 10th (Charnwood) Battalion and tasked with guarding manufacturing facilities in the village assessed as critical to the national war effort. Factory units in the village that were guarded were:

- Alvis Mechanisation, Castle Works
- Frigidaire Limited, Boundary Road
- Taylorcraft (Aeroplanes) Limited, Leicester Road

Also guarded were the Mountsorrel Granite Company's facilities with their explosive stores.

Amongst weapons issued to the Home Guard was the Spigot Mortar or “Blacker Bombard” used for point defence and as an anti-tank weapon. Whilst originally designed as a mobile weapon it was also used mounted on a substantial concrete block, one of which still survives on private land in the village near Baron’s Way.



Home Guard Spigot Mortar Crew



Spigot Mortar mount in Mountsorrel

With the success of D-Day and the advance of Allied Armies into Europe the need for the Home Guard fell away and the decision was taken nationally for a stand down. This was marked in London by a parade in Hyde Park on 3 December 1944 of detachments from across the country with the salute being taken by the King.

Having been stood down in 1944 and disbanded in 1945 the Home Guard was resurrected in 1952 in the face of a mounting threat from the Soviet Union. In its new guise it lasted until 1957.

The book “To the last round” by Austin J Ruddy provides an excellent and very detailed history of the Home Guard in Leicestershire and Rutland, a copy is held in the Museum.