

GRIFFYDAM HOME GUARD

**WITH SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION ON
OTHER LOCAL HOME GUARD PLATOONS**



BY SAMUEL T STEWART - OCTOBER 2021

PREFACE

Surprisingly, there is little in the way of surviving records about the "Home Guard" and what is available in official records is sparse. In the absence of anyone left locally who may have memories, even if passed down through a generation, the author has once again found that the newspapers are a favoured research tool, although even then most of the information is centred around the towns and cities. However, importantly, one newspaper has provided a partial photograph of the Griffydam Home Guard which is the only one that has become available at the time of writing.

Although this publication is focused around the Griffydam Home Guard, a supplementary section has been added to record any information currently to hand on other local Home Guard platoons

Hopefully this record of information obtained to date will give the readers a flavour of what the Home Guard organisation was all about. Maybe it will jog a few memories and thereby attract further local information and photographs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without obtaining a copy of the excellent book entitled "TO THE LAST ROUND" The Leicestershire and Rutland Home Guard 1940-1945 by AUSTIN J. RUDDY, it would not have been possible to write this publication and the author is appreciative of some of the facts and figures provided on the Leicestershire Home Guard organisation which have greatly contributed to the authors understanding of the part the Griffydam's Home Guard played in it. Some statistics on the 11th Ashby-de-la-Zouch Battalion have been used in this publication whilst respecting Austin Ruddy's copyright.

Thanks to Coleorton Heritage and Terry Ward for allowing his article on the Coleorton Home Guard to be featured.

Thanks to Bis at Swannington Heritage for supplying information on Swannington Home Guard.

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INTRODUCTION

The **Home Guard** (initially named the **Local Defence Volunteers** or **LDV**) was an armed citizen militia supporting the British Army during the Second World War. Operational from 1940 to 1944, the Home Guard had 1.5 million local volunteers otherwise ineligible for military service, such as those who were too young or too old to join the regular armed services (regular military service was restricted to those aged 18 to 41) and those in reserved occupations. Men aged 17 to 65 years could join, although the upper age limit was not strictly enforced. Service was unpaid but gave a chance for older or inexperienced soldiers to support the war effort. Prime Minister Winston Churchill was a vocal supporter of the Home Guard and it was at his insistence that its name was changed from the LDV in July 1940.

Excluding those already in the armed services, the civilian police or civil defence, approximately one in five men were volunteers. Their role was to act as a secondary defence force in case of invasion by the forces of Nazi Germany. The Home Guard was at first a rag-tag militia, with scarce and often make-do uniforms and weaponry. Members were taught simple German phrases, showing how the threat of a German invasion of Britain was felt to be a very real one in 1940. The Home Guard ultimately had a serious purpose and increasingly provided useful training for younger men before their call up to the Army.

The Home Guard were to be employed to try and slow down the advance of the enemy even by a few hours to give the regular troops time to regroup. They were also to defend key communication points and factories in rear areas against possible capture by paratroops etc. A key purpose was to maintain control of the civilian population in the event of an invasion, to forestall panic and to prevent communication routes from being blocked by refugees / evacuees to free the regular forces to fight the Germans. The Home Guard continued to man roadblocks and guard the coastal areas of the United Kingdom and other important places such as airfields, factories and explosives stores until late 1944, when they were stood down. They were finally stood down on the 3rd December 1945, eight months after Germany's surrender.

Over the course of the war 1,206 men of the Home Guard were killed on duty or died of wounds, **none of which were inflicted in battle with the enemy.**

This valuable addition to the Army is the largest "part time" army ever to be built up. Its training and organisation, (coupled with the fact that each unit was an integral part of its district and its members therefore knew every inch of their locality, made it a valuable anti-invasion force. Although, except for a few encounters with escaped German prisoners-of-war, or an occasional airman baling out over Britain, they never had occasion to fight Germans on British soil. The knowledge that this huge citizen army was "at the ready" must have counted with the Germans in the formulation of their plans. However, by their splendid work with A.A. and searchlight units, the Home Guard fought the Germans in the air. They also helped to defeat the menace of the flying bomb. In addition, the Home Guard in Britain, by shouldering much of the responsibility for the actual defence of this island, released regular Army units for service overseas. The Citizen Army, as it will always be remembered with respect, has a proud record. And

even if its members following "Stand Down" on December 3rd 1944 put aside their uniforms, they were still on reserve just in case.

Finally, we should not forget that the Home guard was made up of men who worked by day and gave up their evenings to partake in Home Guard duties. They also took part in exercises during the weekends all for no pay. They were a special breed of men and youths, the likes of which we will never see again.

GRIFFYDAM HOME GUARD

From the Leicester Evening Mail - November 11th 1940



Griffydam Home Guard ("C" Company) and part of the Ashby Battalion which was affiliated to the "Leicestershire Home Guard" formed a guard of honour at the wedding at St. Peter's Church, Highfields, Leicester of Mr. E. F. Whyman of **Griffydam** and Miss. E. Howe, of Belgrave Street, Leicester.

From the Leicester Evening Mail - Thursday March 13th 1941

GRIFFYDAM HOME GUARD EFFORT

As a result of a successful whist drive and dance organised by the **Griffydam members of the "Home Guard"**, the sum of £7 - 3s. has been handed to the Griffydam, Pegg's Green and Coleorton soldiers "Comfort Fund".

Griffydam Home Guard, Platoon No.3., were formed between July and September 1940, and were part of the No. 3. Company known as : " Breedon and Coleorton". The transition from the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers) to the Home Guard was still taking place at this time.

The No. 3. company headquarters was: "The Three Horseshoes", Breedon-on-the-Hill.
 The company commander was: J. Shields
 Second in command was: The Revd C. M. K. Parsons

No.3. Company consisted of the following platoons:-

Platoon	Platoon Headquarters	Platoon Commanders
No.1. Platoon	Breedon-on-the Hill	T. W. Thurley
No. 2. Platoon	Worthington	C. Platts
No. 3. Platoon	Griffydam	J. Ford
No. 4. Platoon	Staunton Harold	The Earl Ferrers
No. 5. Platoon	Osgathorpe	A. Millward
No. 6. Platoon	Cole Orton	A. Walker
No. 7. Platoon	New Lount Colliery	Frank Hodges (M.D. of New Lount Colliery)

The headquarters for the Griffydam and Worthington platoons was the *Waggon & Horses* and *Malt Shovel* public houses respectively. John (Jack) Ford, thought to have been the landlord of the Waggon & Horses at the time, was the commander of the Griffydam HG. An evacuee who came to Griffydam from London during the war and remained there afterwards, recalled in a recent interview that the Home Guard met in two Nissen huts at the rear of the Waggon and horses pub. Apparently, one hut was for storage (presumably armaments and explosives) and the other was a meeting room with accommodation. After the war, squatters apparently lived in these huts.



1927 Map of the Waggon & Horses and surrounding buildings



Waggon and Horses c.1895 on RH side

During the transition from the LDV in 1940, the above platoons were part of the "Ashby-de-la-Zouch Battalion", which in turn was affiliated to the Leicestershire Home Guard. The Ashby Battalion HQ's was the Drill Hall in Ashby and was under the command of Major W. H. Sowter. Second in command / adjutant was Captain L.A. Statham.

The Ashby Battalion was originally made up of 4 companies as follows:-

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| No.1. Company | Ashby-de-la-Zouch |
| Platoons - | Ashby, Donisthorpe, Measham, Moira. |
| No.2. Company | Coalville |
| Platoons - | Swannington, Broom Leys and Greenhill, Ravenstone and Hugglescote, Bardon, Whiwick. |
| No.3. Company | Breedon and Coleorton |
| Platoons - | Breedon-on-the-Hill, Worthington, Griffydham, Staunton Harold, Osgathorpe, Coleorton, New Lount Colliery |
| No.4. Company | Snarestone etc. |
| Platoons - | Snarestone, Appleby Magna, Heather, Packington |

As can be seen from the above, these companies included various platoons from around the district. Each of these are given in order starting with No.1. platoon for each company as shown in the example on the preceding page.

Some re-organisation took place in the Leicestershire Home Guard at the end of 1940 and it then consisted of 12 Battalions. Each Battalion was made up of various platoons.

The Ashby Battalion was re-named the 11th (Ashby-de-la-Zouch) Battalion which was still affiliated to the Leicestershire Home Guard. They came under the command of Lt-Colonel L. A. Statham from 23.11.1942. following the death of Major W. H. Sowter, who had previously commanded the Ashby Battalion. The Battalions HQ still remained at the Drill Hall, Ashby.

The 11th (Ashby-de-la-Zouch) Battalion was divided into seven companies A, B, C, D, E, F and G as shown below and Griffydham was part of "C" Company whose HQ's was still at the Waggon and Horses. There would have been various platoons within these companies but unfortunately no records are available.

A Company HQ:	Donisthorpe Colliery
B Company HQ:	20 Wood Street, Ashby
C Company HQ:	"Waggon and Horses, Griffydham
D Company HQ:	The Grammar School, Appleby Magna
E Company HQ:	Tower Chambers, High Street, Coalville
F Company HQ:	Owen Street, Coalville
G Company HQ:	Drill Hall, Coalville

The other 10 Leicestershire Home Guard Battalions, were made up from the Leicester Group (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th); Melton Mowbray Group (5th & 6th); Market Harborough / Bosworth Group (7th & 8th), and Loughborough Group (9th and 10th).

SOME RELEVANT LEICESTER NEWSPAPER ARTICLES - INCLUDING INFORMATION ON BATTLE TRAINING

From the Leicester evening Mail - Wednesday 24th July 1940

AXIS PARTNERS RAVE ABOUT THE HOME GUARD

MEMBERS of the Home Guard can feel proud today. The Axis partners are exceedingly annoyed about them, and both the German and Italian radios today declared that the Home Guard is "a contravention of international law."

Bremen, broadcasting in English, muted: "Although the British people are misled, they are nevertheless murderers, but the vilest criminals of all are the members of the British Government who started such illegal activities." "The British", the announcer added, "would do well to heed the German warning".

The people of Rome, according to the Berlin dispatch from Rome comments : "England seem to regard Churchill's war as a mass attack by civilians. The formation of such crops of hedge - hoppers is contrary to International convention, "such a violation of International law justifies the adoption of suitable measures".

The result of such illegal British measures will lead to a frightful war of destruction, the responsibility for which will rest with the British Government alone.

EXTRA TEA PLEASE

From the Leicester Evening Mail - Thursday 01 August 1940

Major Sir Jocelyn Lucas (Con., Portsmouth) is to ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food on Wednesday If he will arrange with the competent authorities that Home Guard posts permanently manned can be provided with extra tea and sugar rations in view of the extra hours worked by the occupants, on the basis that they are only entitled to "Ordinary Civilian Rations".

HOME GUARD FARES

From the Leicester Evening Mail - Friday 02 August 1940

Lord Denman has given notice that he will ask the Government "whether members of the Home Guard are expected to pay their own railway fares when proceeding to and from rifle ranges."

From the Leicester Evening Mail -Tuesday 20th August 1940

BLANKETS FOR THE HOME GUARD

MR. EDEN stated in the House of Commons this afternoon that the Home Guard is being provided with blankets. Over 350,000 had been issued, and the issue was

proceeding at the rate of 80,000 a day. Mr. Gibson suggested, amid laughter, that the Minister should consider economising in blankets by enrolling men who were so fit that they could sleep without blankets. Mr. Eden stated that the provision of gumboots and serge uniforms for the Home Guard was under consideration.

From the Leicester evening mail - 3rd August 1940

HOME GUARD TIE

The war office announce that the question of issuing an official tie by the HG authorities is now under consideration. Statements to the effect that such a tie has already been designed and approved are unauthorised and incorrect

From the Leicester evening Mail - Saturday 19th October 1940

TIN HATS AND CAPES FOR THE HOME GUARD

SIR EDWARD GRIGG, UNDER SECRETARY FOR WAR, at the opening of a new training school for HG commanders and instructors, said it had been decided not to compromise with the many forms of mild steel helmets to the HG. They were being received at a considerable rate every week, and there was a great demand for great coats. A trench cape had been devised for the HG, and there would be a large issue in the near future. Every man should have his battledress either in denim or serge in the next few weeks.

From the Leicester Evening Mail - Monday 16th December 1940

HOME GUARD DINNER

E company of Ashby Battalion of the Home guard held a dinner at Coalville West End W.M.C. on Saturday night. Mayor W. Sowter, the Battalion commander presided, supported by Capt. F. Surman, the company commander, and Capt. Statham of Ashby.

From the Leicester Evening Mail - Saturday 29 March 1941

REGISTRATION TIMES

The classes of men exempted from registration under the Order are exactly the same as those exempted from registration for military service, such as Dominions subjects not ordinarily resident in Great Britain, members of the armed forces other than the Home Guard, **ministers of religion, lunatics, mentally defective and blind persons.** - Men should state the precise nature of their occupation when registering. To avoid waiting, men should as far as possible attend local offices for registration at the following times, the letters representing men whose surnames begin with:-

A to B—12.30 p.m. and 1.30 p.m. C to F— 1.30 p.m. and 2.30 p.m. G to J— 2.30 p.m. and 3.30 p.m. K to O— 3.30 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. P to S— 4.30 p.m. and 5.30 p.m. T to Z— 5.30 p.m. and 5.30 p.m. Men who cannot attend in the afternoon should attend between 9 a.m. and 11 am.

A LEICESTERSHIRE INVASION EXERCISE

From the Leicester Evening Mail - 9th October 1942

The whole of western Leicestershire, including Ashby, Coalville, Loughborough and Hinckley will be the scene of "BATTLE" this weekend when the Military, Home Guard and Civil Defence services combine in a realistic invasion exercise. "ZERO HOUR" is 9 O'clock on Saturday evening with "CEASE FIRE" at noon on Sunday,.

Asking for the co-operation of the public, the authorities point out that residents in the areas where operations are taking place, should not be alarmed by explosions and large movements of troops, or **if invading troops creep through the garden plots.**

Road users are also warned that during Saturday night, there may be a considerable amount of traffic on the roads, with vehicles being driven without lights.

The above article refers to "Excercise Partridge" which took place on Saturday and Sunday the 11th of October. This was reported to be the largest county exercise to date and the second major exercise to take place in 1942.

The premise of the exercise was that Germans had invaded our shores and had reached and captured Leicester and were advancing on Loughborough, Kegworth and Coalville.

The HG was organised into an enemy attacking force (Germans) and a defending force (British). [The latter included the 11th Ashby Battalion of which the Griffydam HG platoon was part of.](#)

It would be impossible here to record all the events that took place but the following information taken from the Leicester Mercury is worthy of inclusion particularly as it involved local activity at Coalville:-

Coalville people took a keen interest in the invasion exercises, several hundred taking part. There was a striking demonstration of street fighting in the centre of the town, as troops armed with rifles and automatic weapons, tackled an invading force .

Effective road blocks were erected after dark, and motorists were stopped by troops and questioned. As dawn broke, the battle began in earnest. As the invading force neared the outskirts of the town, the military took up positions at vantage points, shop entrances, road junctions and behind any effective cover, while other defenders were cunningly hidden in the centre of the town. Scores passed by the spot near the Memorial Square without noticing troops with a machine gun between shrubs covered with camouflage netting.



Defending Home Guards taking cover behind the Coalville War Memorial on the traffic island

From the Nottingham Evening Post - Tuesday 30th March 1943

"BATTLE OF THE TRENT"

How We Beat The "Germans". "The biggest test ever" is apt description of the great Home Guard exercise which was held in the counties of Notts., Derbys and Leicestershire on Sunday over a period of 10 hours.

More than 30,000 were engaged, the majority being Home Guards, but they brought into play all the intricate training they have gone through during the winter months to prepare them to play an important role in the defence of this country against a possible attempt at invasion by Germany. New schemes of mobile defence were tested, and although, from a military point of view, the main object was to test liaison and inter-communication between the military, the Home Guard and the Civil Defence authorities*, it was also highly desirable that the War Office should know exactly the potential defensive strength of the Home Guard fighting an invading army. For the purpose of the exercise, it was presumed that on March 20th the German invasion of this country had begun with landings of seaborne troops on the coasts of Norfolk and Dorset, and air landings in Bedfordshire and Oxfordshire, their main object being to cut London and the Channel ports off from the rest of the country. In five days this had been, achieved, and the German forces were firmly astride a line running from Worcester to the Wash. On March 25th the enemy commenced and advance north-west, with the one object of seizing bridgeheads along the river Trent. On Saturday it was presumed that they were close to their objective, having by-passed the city at Leicester, which had been found to be too strongly defended. On that date, a British mobile column had captured a German staff car, in which was a document showing that the 106th German Infantry Division intended to attack on the morning of Sunday, their objectives being every bridgehead on the Trent from Gunthorpe to Swarkestone, near Derby.

PARATROOPS.

In order to prevent interference from strong Home Guard forces around Nottingham, the Germans dropped paratroops at dawn round the city to hold main roads leading in and to attack vulnerable points and centres of communication together with certain airfields. The attackers' strength included men of the R.A.O.C. and the 5th, 6th and 10th Battns. of the Leicestershire Home Guard, under Lt.-Col. C. E. Winter' between Nottingham and Gunthorpe; further Regulars and the 9th and 11th (which included the Griffydam platoon) Leicestershire Battns and 11th and 13th Derbyshire Battns. of the Home Guard, under Major R. F. Taylor, between Nottingham and Swarkestone; and the paratroop detachment under Lt.- Colonel C. A. B. Elliot which comprised Regulars and 1st, 6th, 7th and 11th Battns. of the Notts Home Guard, together with the 9th Derbyshire Battn., whose objectives have already been stated.

Facing this formidable attacking force were Regulars R.A.O.C. and the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 14th Battalion of the Notts Home Guard under Col. J. T. Leslie on the east; further Regulars and two battalions of Home Guards on the west under Col. D. E. Williams and a third defensive force at Leicester, under Col. H. W. H Taylor. By six on Sunday morning everything was ready for the exercise. Thousands of Home Guards were in position, waiting for the attack on the bridgeheads. The River Trent Patrol defenders had manned their craft, and were assisting in the defence of Holme Lock. Civil Defence wardens in villages throughout the area of attack were out, too, their part being to report movement of enemy paratroops and ground forces, stationed at an aerodrome which was to be one of the enemy's first objectives, were in defensive positions on the edge of the aerodrome.

PIGEONS EMPLOYED.

One thing was abundantly clear from the exercise, and that was the all round enthusiasm of the Home Guard for their tasks. The general plan included something for every platoon to do, while a new feature of the liaison and inter-communication was the use of a newly-established pigeon service by the Home Guard. Both sides extensively used cycle dispatch riders, the Home Guard having been materially strengthened in this branch since last summer. Major-General Harter, at the conclusion of the exercise, issued a statement for the Press, in which he said while certain sections of the attackers gained their objective, he was on the whole satisfied that the defenders had won the battle. He said he was particularly struck with the Home Guard for dealing with paratroops, and there was great improvement in this form of warfare compared with last summer. The mobile sections, too, were up to their work, but there was a vast difference between the attacking and the defending Home Guard. The attackers undertook quite consider operations, and a Leicestershire battalion, forming one of the group converging on Trent Bridge and industrial undertakings, must have marched ten miles at least going into battle, and making a violent assault on the defenders. Praise was due to the men of the Belvoir and Quorn battalions for their part in this attack. The battalion succeeded in their attack Sawley bridge, and went on to infiltrate across the Trent towards Derby The enemy paratroops, supplied the 1st Notts Battalion of the Home Guard distinguished themselves by boarding a train and gaining access to a defined objective near Trent Bridge, while another party boarded a barge, in which they proceeded down river to Holme Lock, where they surprised the garrison. The 6th and 11th Notts H.G, together with the 9th Derbyshire H.G.. who also represented paratroops, were still fighting hard at the end of the day, although the defenders were gradually gaining control.

Leicester Evening Mail - Friday July 9th 1943

OFF DUTY BAN ON HOME GUARD UNIFORMS

The War Office emphasised today that it does not wish Home Guard's to wear their uniforms when not on duty except in circumstances where it is absolutely warranted.

It was pointed out that if a man really has no time to go home and change after Home Guard duty, He ought to change at his office, or other place of work, though it is realised that very exceptional circumstances may justify him wearing his uniform off duty.

Leicester Evening Mail - Saturday 1st July 1944

BREEDON HOME GUARD

William Henry Briers (20), miner, of Breedon-on-the-Hill. was summoned at Ashby for falling to attend Home Guard parades without reasonable excuse on six dates in February.

He was fined 30s. and 15s. costs in the first case, and the other five were dismissed on payment of costs, the total fine and costs being £3. 5s. White said Briers told him he was working on the night shift and preferred morning parades instead of evenings. There were no morning parades at Breedon. **The colliery officials said there was no reason why the man should not parade before going to work at 10.10 p.m.** It was stated that Briers had attended only seven out of 94 parades, but had done better recently.

STAND DOWN DAY

Eight months after Germany surrendered, the official "National Stand Down Day" for the HG was fixed for Sunday December 3rd, 1944 and stand down parades took place all over the country. The following extract from the Leicester Advertiser is of interest as it relates to the 11th Ashby-de-la- Zouch Battalion of which Griffydam HG was in "C" Company.

Home Guard Companies from the Coalville and Ashby areas paraded at Coalville and then marched to the Regal Cinema, where, in the presence of members of the local urban council , Col G. German DSO read the King's message. Lt-Colonel Statham, CO of the 11th (Ashby-de-la-Zouch Battalion), read a message from General H. E. Franklyn, C-in-C.

Lt-Colonel Statham then said, he was proud of the 11th Battalion, whose men had more proficiency badges than any other Battalion in the North Midland District. The Battalion then paraded in Marlborough Square and marched to the War Memorial where Colonel German took the salute

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION ON LOCAL HOME GUARD PLATOONS

PEGG'S GREEN HOME GUARD (10B PLATOON) IN 1944 OUTSIDE THE RED LION INN



Back Row L to R – (1) Cyril Marshall, (2) Ken Harrison, (3) Mr. Fern (4) B.Walker
(5) Mr. Collins, (6) B.Hall, (7) H.Brooks.

Middle Row L to R – (1) Bill Blakey (New Engine Inn landlord), (2) Mr. Fairbrother,
(3) Gordon Morley, (4) Jack Leeson, (5) John Archie Burton, (6) T. Shaw (7) ?? (8) ??

Bottom Row L to R – (1) W. Nutting (2) A. Bromley (3) Arthur Else, (4) Sire Weston,
(5) Gerald Burton, (6) Brian Hickling, (7) Vic Clements

Unfortunately no records have been found which mention the Pegg's Green Home Guard 10B platoon even though all other local home guard platoons are recorded including Coleorton, Griffydham, Osgathorpe, Worthington, Swannington etc. The 10B platoon number does not appear to bear any relevance to the numbers used for the other local Home Guard platoons.

The photograph was shown as being taken in 1944 and it was on December 3rd 1944 that the Home Guard was officially "stood down".

The author has come to the conclusion that the Pegg's Green Home Guard was not formed till 1944 and that is why they don't seem to have been recorded.

Perhaps someone will come forward with information which will provide the answer.

COLEORTON HOME GUARD

The reader needs to refer to pages 6,7 and 8 to gain an understanding of how the Coleorton No.6. platoon who were in turn part of "Company No.3. - Breedon and Coleorton," fitted into the overall organisation of the Home Guard.

The following excellent article was researched and written by Terry Ward of Coleorton Heritage group:-

Rosine House and the Coleorton Home Guard

Rosine House was initially a house and farm and part of the Beaumont Estate. Part of the house became a butcher's shop in the late nineteenth century starting with Drayton Walker in 1881 and continued well into the twentieth century under the auspices of successive generations of the Walker family. The family originally rented the property, prior to buying it from the Beaumont Estate.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, George Albert Walker (Bert Walker) was appointed head of the local home guard platoon with the rank of First Lieutenant, although some villagers recall he was also known as 'Captain Walker'. His daughter, Esme Glenville (nee Walker) recalls the Coleorton Platoon drilling and marching to a drumbeat in Walker's Yard and in the next field to Rosine, as the parade ground. Part of the house that was once the butcher's shop was converted into the Quarter Master's Store with uniforms, rifles and ammunition. Esme's mother helped to look after the stores: giving out the uniforms, stripes and other insignia when necessary.

Blackout was introduced. This meant that no lights were allowed to be visible at all. Windows needed to have shutters to prevent the light showing through the curtains. Esme's father made theirs; they were frames of plywood covered with a thick type of sugar paper. They had to be fitted to the windows (upstairs and down) every evening. If there was just a chink of light showing there would be a knock on the door by the PC Bobby Grant on his patrol round the village and a loud shout of "Put that light out!"

As the war progressed sentry duty was introduced by the Home Guard. A hut was obtained and positioned on the corner of Farm Town Lane near the railway bridge. The hut was used by the men on sentry duty. It had a primus stove fuelled by paraffin which gave out some warmth and was used for boiling a kettle. (Bill Platts recalled that shortly after the sentry hut was obtained, one of the sentries accidentally discharged his rifle through the roof!) Each shift was four hours, two hours on and two hours off. Two sentries were posted on the bridge and two near the old barn on Farm Town Lane. Their brief was to stop all traffic, including pedestrians, with the words "Halt, who goes there, friend or foe?" The sentries were in uniform with a rifle over their shoulders, they were a formidable sight. Two amusing incidents occurred. One over-zealous sentry stopped a taxi turning on to The Moor from the A50 with "Halt! Who goes there? Friend or foe?" It took some time for him to be convinced that it was his cousin, returning from a night out in Coalville with his family. On another occasion two men were returning from work at New Lount Pit; they were stopped and asked the customary question, to which they replied: "You know who we are!" The sentries returned: "We don't,



for all we know you might be German spies!" Identity cards had to be produced ... then all was well.

Do you have any wartime memories of the Coleorton Home Guard or any other wartime memories of Coleorton you might wish to share? If so why not contact Sandra Dillon on 01530 440000 or Terry Ward on 01530 835701 or by e-mail enquiries@coleortonheritage.org.uk

NEW LOUNT COLLIERY HOME GUARD

The reader needs to refer to pages 6,7 and 8 to gain an understanding of how the New Lount Colliery No.7. platoon who were in turn part of "Company No.3. - Breedon and Coleorton," fitted into the overall organisation of the Home Guard.



New Lount Colliery Home Guard. August 1941.

They are from L to R:-

Row 5 - ?, ?, E Arnold, J Evans, R Grumitt, ?, ?, ?, W Warren, B Webster, J Webster, D Clayton, ?, ?.

Row 4 - D Mee, E James, C Hall, F Hodges, J Widdowson, ?, ?, ?, T Hodges

Row 3 - H Garner, H Dandow, J Stewart, ?, ?, ?, ?, W Rolands, F Griffin, B Williams, A Hodges

Row 2 - F Platts, R Hastey, G Widdowson, C Martin, A Denholme, F Hodges, S Bolland, G Naisbitt, H Rowell, R Hodges, T Haylock

Row 1 - H Broster, A Hewkins, J Naisbitt, G Broster

WORTHINGTON HOME GUARD

As the Worthington Home Guard were in the same "Coleorton and Breedon No.3. company, as Griffydam, and their headquarters were at the Malt Shovel and Waggon and Horses public houses, only a stone's throw from each other, then it was felt that this excellent article written by Ralph Walker on his memories of the Worthington Home Guard should be included here.

The reader needs to refer to pages 6,7 and 8 to gain an understanding of how the Worthington No.2. platoon who were in turn part of "Company No.3. - Breedon and Coleorton," fitted into the overall organisation of the Home Guard.

WORTHINGTON REMEMBERED BY RALPH WALKER

I recently met up with an old Worthington boy, Stan Whyman, who had to emigrate to Whitwick, but was still able to get our church magazine. He was disappointed not to have read anything about the Home Guard. He also wondered why the motorist who was stopped, replied that he had a sister in the W.A.A.F. Well, Stan, the answer might be that we had just arrived on the Top Brand to begin a patrol when we stopped a car; unusual because little traffic was out at night. Perhaps we thought we might catch a Fifth Column infiltrator. There was first the driver who said he was going to Hinckley, he was very English and everything seemed alright. One of our lads behind shouted out "Have you got a German in the boot?" To which the driver quickly replied "O No, - but I have a sister in the W.A.A.F." This was a common quip in wartime, a bit of a silly retort in reply to what might have been thought as a somewhat nonsensical question and perhaps meant to be the end of further chat.

On a later patrol when the position had been moved to Newbold Lane, just round the corner from the top of Wardle's Lane, a lady cyclist was stopped at around midnight. Could we have a lady spy roaming the lanes at such a late hour? I don't think so. She said she had been to a dance at Melbourne. We had to see her identity card, for which she rummaged in her shoulder bag amongst papers and photos. We asked her to come into the Guard Hut to search, where the light was little better, being a farm hurricane lamp. The card was found. She was from Coalville and as tea was being brewed, she was given a cup before setting off. She quickly returned to the door of the hut as she could not find her bike. We quickly guessed our mates on patrol were playing about but had then marched off towards Newbold. We searched around and looked in hedge bottoms and eventually found it; it had been lifted over a gate to a small field that used to be at the corner of Standingdale Lane. At last the young lady cyclist, not the least upset, set off for Coalville and we told her to run straight into the two blokes, marching back from Newbold.

Going back to its formation, the Home Guard was originally known as the Land Defence Force and we wore an armband around the jacket sleeve, which was marked L.D.V. - Land Defence Volunteer. After Dunkirk, the country was left with depleted numbers in the Army and few tanks and artillery. The Government was pretty certain that the country would be invaded, possibly by parachutists; these had been very successful in Europe. It

was thought necessary to establish a force in order to keep careful look-out for any such invasion throughout the country. This force came into being in almost a matter of days and every town and village quickly organised such a force. Worthington soon had a platoon of about thirty volunteers, which formed part of a Company made up of several villages, with the Company Commander being Major John Shields of Breedon Hall. Our Platoon Officer was Charlie Platts, a genial character who served as an infantryman in the First War. Night patrols on the Top Brand were quickly arranged from 10.00 pm until 6.00 am. After a short time a few rifles were made available with ammunition kept at the Platoon H.Q. at the Malt Shovel. Army denim overalls were issued as a battledress and practice on rifle ranges was undertaken. It was difficult at the start trying to become a kind of reserve army unit but as time passed and more training was given and various exercises carried out, the platoon became more efficient.

I had better recount some of the lighter moments because in the early days it all seemed a bit trivial to have grown men going out with sticks and playing boy-scouts again, but quickly an undercurrent with a more serious attitude developed.

When half of the platoon attacked the rest from the Cloud Hill direction at the bottom of the fields at the end of Manor Drive, little Kay Hinsley (who was a gnome-like figure of about five feet tall) told Big Jim Smith (a giant of a man almost seven feet tall but not too quick with his mental reflexes) that he had been shot and was dead. Big Jim did not quickly comprehend such a death and, to show he was fully alive and well, proceeded to jump the brook. His foot slipped on the bank and he landed in the middle. Little Kay quickly disappeared, as he knew if Big Jim could lay his hands on him, he would be pushed under the water.

Again on another exercise when the Breedon Home Guard attacked Worthington, there was another who would not accept that he was dead when they were attacking the Worthington Station area. There was an argument and blows were struck - a real fight, eh! All for your country.

When Worthington Platoon was detailed to capture Breedon Church, defended by a real Army Unit, their plans were not too well laid as most of them were captured at the base of the hill.

On a very horrible night on the Top Brand when the fog was too bad for the Company Commander to journey round and inspect, we patrolled until midnight and then returned to the hut, which was in the corner of a field on the Cloud Wood side of Bull Hill. We were well equipped, having a spare mattress on the old iron bedstead, so all the quite young patrol got their heads down. Some time in the night we were awakened with the hut full of smoke. Where the heated stovepipe went through the wooden side of the hut, it must have been smouldering for sometime, then as flames appeared they were extinguished with some sand that we had there. After making the stove safe we retired again but overslept because we were knocked up by two patrolling policemen who had noticed that our fence had not been put back. Why this memory is so distinct is because they told us that Hess, Germany's Deputy Leader had landed in the country. We quickly got home. Mother was up with the usual breakfast fare on the hob at the Malt Shovel - country fresh eggs and bacon. Some food wasn't too scarce in villages, with a pig-sty and fowls in the garden. From the kitchen window I saw Tom Smith from Town End Farm walking across the lane. "What's up Tom?" I shouted. He replied "As we came off

guard I brought the cows home from Davis' field first inside Middle Brand and after tying them up in the shed, I'm one missing." He was on a retrieving mission, not very military I add, but what a night although the rain had come and cleared the fog away.

When half of the platoon attacked the HQ, which was the Malt Shovel, the defenders left Joe, the publican, together with a runner to observe from the bedroom and clubroom windows for any likely approach by the attackers. Two of the attackers went to Brook's Pear-Tree farm and got then to tackle a horse and cart. The two were then concealed under a small pile of hay in the cart, which turned the corner down Bull Hill Lane, where there used to be four small cottages with an entry up to the back of the Malt Shovel premises. As the cart passed they slid out quickly and dashed up the entry, through the back door and captured the HQ. Joe was pretty furious having been taken out by raiders out of the blue so soon after the exercise had begun.

Another episode was the chase after the parachutist. It was time for parade one evening when an object was noticed floating across the sky beyond Cloud Wood. A gang quickly commandeered a small lorry in the street and set off, thinking it could be glory this time. They reached the top of Bull Hill and the thing was still visible. Yelling instructions to the driver, they sped along the lanes until eventually on the way to Loughborough, the object could be seen descending, but disappointment on arrival as it turned out to be a partly deflated barrage balloon which had broken loose from its moorings near Derby. The clever one with the scarf said "I told 'em it wouldn't drift along like that". Still that's how the Home Guard behaved. As in "Dad's Army", they didn't always conform to reality.

These lighter stories of the Home Guard are related as many of you would have watched the programme "Dad's Army" on TV and possibly thought that some of the incidents were quite silly and a bit stupid, but all this happened throughout the country. Perhaps Worthington like Dad's Army did enjoy good ratings.

SWANNINGTON HOME GUARD

Leicester Evening mail - Monday 16th December 1940

SWANNINGTON HOME GUARD DANCE

The No.5. (Swannington) platoon of the Home Guard, held a dance in the "Miner's Welfare Institute" on Saturday night. The proceeds were for "The Local Comfort Fund" (for injured soldiers).

Initially, when the Swannington Home Guard were formed in 1940, they were known as No.1. Platoon under the command of C. V. Lane and part of No.2. Company, Coalville, whose headquarters were at the Drill Hall. Their company commander was F. J. Simmons and the second in command was R. O. Dalby.

The other platoons in No.2. Company, Coalville were No.2. Broom Leys and Greenhill; No.3. Ravenstone and Hugglescote; No.4. Bardon and No.5. Whitwick.

The above newspaper report is important in that it provides a platoon number for the Swannington Home Guard at that time (No.5). This was following a reorganisation and platoon No.5. would have almost certainly been part of one of the companies that formed the three Coalville companies E,F,G which were incorporated into the 11th (Ashby-de-la-Zouch) Battalion, which was in turn affiliated to the Leicestershire Home Guard. It was likely to have been "G" company whose headquarters remained at the Drill hall, Coalville.

Swannington Heritage trust have been kind enough to supply the author with what is known about their Home Guard although that is mainly hearsay. The local headquarters were in the upstairs room at the "Fountain Inn" shown in the following old photograph. This has now been converted into residential accommodation.



HEARSAY

The Newcomen haystack boiler in the Califat Spinney was allegedly damaged by Swannington Home Guard. [Newcomen Boiler | Swannington Heritage Trust \(swannington-heritage.co.uk\)](#) There are two versions of this story:-

1. A member of the Home Guard threw a grenade into the boiler - exceedingly unlikely considering the small size of the hole at the top, although dropping a grenade into the boiler would be plausible.
2. An army instructor demonstrated to the Home Guard how to use explosives to blow up a tank and the boiler was the most suitable item.

As the boiler was conserved during the 1990s there is not any evidence to show which scenario was more likely.

The other story is that the Home Guard used the Coleorton Railway tunnel for machine gun practice - seemed a good way to stop them spraying bullets everywhere!

SUPPLEMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHS



Leicestershire Home Guard lapel and cap badges



Photograph of a Home Guard platoon
being taught basic German language phrases
Note that the instructor was wearing the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers)
armband, so this was before July 1939
when the name was changed to the Home Guard

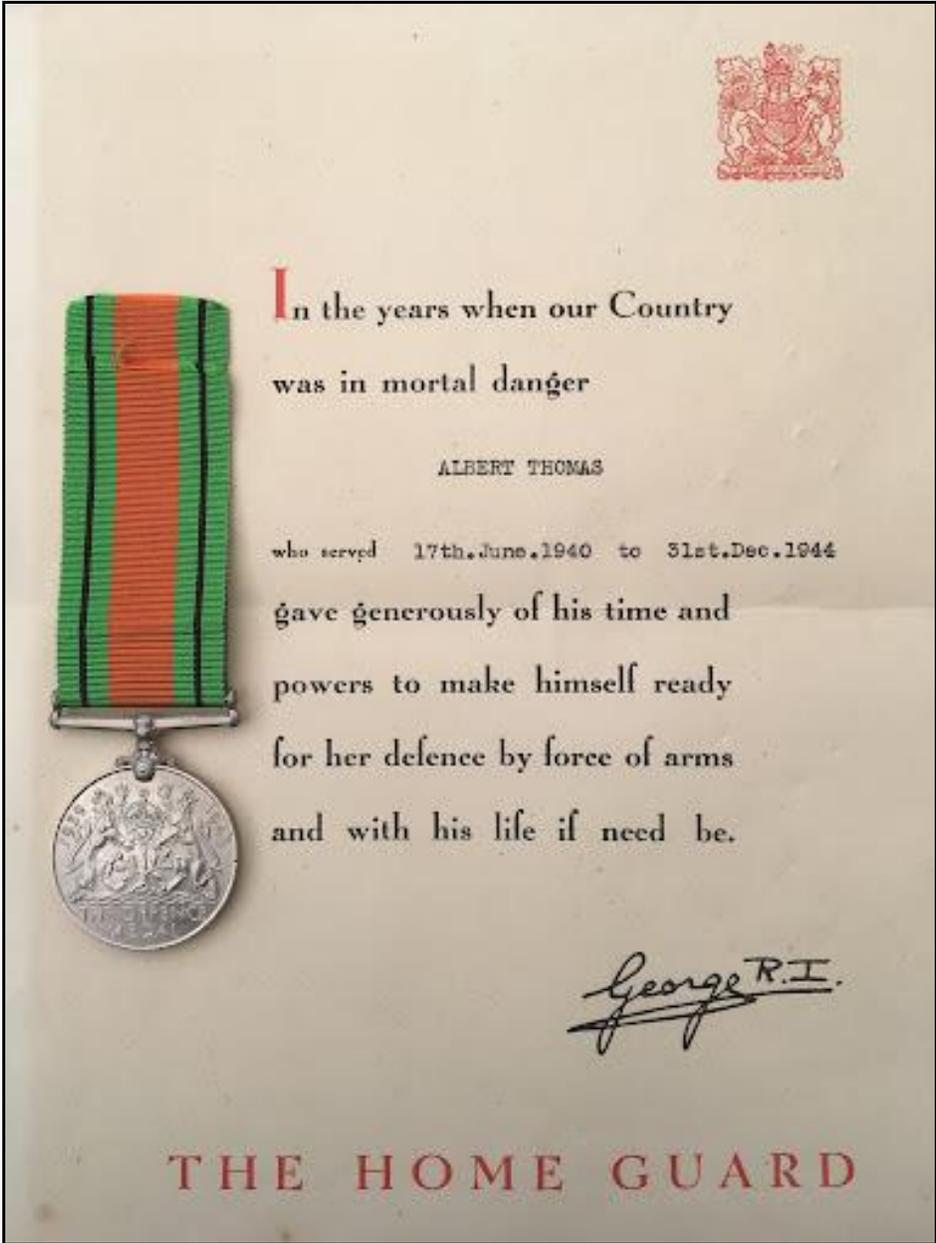


Leicestershire HG on civilian-military exercise



Leicester HG receiving instructions on the Lewis Gun in 1940

EXAMPLE OF HOME GUARD CERTIFICATE OF THANKS FROM THE KING



In the public domain on the internet