Gilbert “Tory Batts” Hethe Home Guard 2003 Track 15



-We went and we signed up for the LDV at the old Police Station opposite the church in Bicester. We heard it on the radio and in the newspapers. I was farming at the time, working with Ted Paxton at the time. The old man who owned the farm was too old to volunteer and couldn’t manage the farm by himself – I thought I had to do my share and went and joined the LDV. I was one of the first to go and join the LDV.

- We used to parade at 9.00am which was awkward. I had to bike to Monks Hethe which was almost 3 miles. I had to milk 12-16 cows by hand, see to the and the other animals and get back here by 9.00am. It was hell of a job and I got into trouble several times and was threatened by Mr Thornton from Mixbury who was the local schoolmaster at Buckingham, with Court Martial because I wasn’t there on time. It was about impossible to get back to change and parade at the village hall in that time.

- We used to be on duty all night. 3 blokes went out at a night from 10.00pm to mid-night. Two more went out from 4.00am to 6.00am in the morning. It was a wet, cold miserable morning and we used to patrol down the Bride Rd to the top of the village along the road there to watch out for any paratroops or things like that. A the weather was so bad I said to the blokes who were supposed to go out on patrol “I tell you what stop in here (the village hall) this morning, no one will know. We can go out the back way and across the paddock then down through the village at 6.00am”. Of course when Thornton came in the morning I was sat there and they were still laid in bed. Of course I got into trouble for that. He was over the top sometimes which was ridiculous but I suppose he had a job to do.

-Tommy Allen made me a Corporal. He was the Sergeant and kept a village shop. I didn’t mind being a corporal because it put me above some of the others.

* Bill Stambrook was made up to a sergeant in the end. He used to stutter a bit. We were marching up the road towards Fringford one Sunday morning and we got to the top of the hill and he tried to give the order to ‘right turn’ towards Fringford but the words wouldn’t come out so we kept marching straight on towards Woolaston instead. We knew what he meant but everyone just kept marching straight on.
* We didn’t have any weapons at first. We had three pieces of iron pipe with a bayonet welded on the end. They were called pikes. That’s all we had. It wasn’t until much later, could have been two years, before we got 3 rifles with five rounds of ammunition each when we went out on the night to morning duty. We had 3 greatcoats and had to give them to the next three that were on duty the next day. That’s how it was. Then you gradually got the uniforms coming through. We had the old pikes for at least 18 months to 2 years before we got the rifles. I’m not sure what they thought we should do with those!
* When I signed up for the LDV at the Police station I cycled in and signed up. There were forms for people to sign up and didn’t appear to be a shortage or people being turned away.
* There were some plane crashes round here but we never got to guard them. I remember cycling to work with Ted Paxton at Monk Home one day and a big de Havilland plane had crashed near Dickie Bagnall’s Corner being guarded by some RAF personnel and they wouldn’t let us go by. We explained that we worked at the farm over there and they let us go round the edge of the field but nowhere near the plane. We didn’t guard any planes ourselves.
* The mood in the platoon was always cheerful and having a laugh and a joke. There was no grumbling or moaning. When there were six were on duty and there three were out on patrol the others were sat in the village hall playing cards. That’s all you had to do at the time.
* We were up in the village hall once and Ted Soames was sat on the floor when he spotted a square on the floor held down by screws. He said “I wonder what that is then?” He got a screwdriver and undid it and it was a cover for a big well in the middle of the room. We thought it might be some sort treasure but it wasn’t.
* By the end we all had uniforms. We did training and drill with things like “attention”, “shoulder arms” and so on. We dug trenches in the side of the bank at the top of the village in case we needed cover for things coming down the road. I don’t remember if we had any road blocks or anything.
* We had a shooting range down in the old stone quarry outside the village. Its all been filled in now. We also used the old stone quarry in the wood by the layby just past the Stratton Audley and Bainton turns on the Buckingham Rd.
* When we were down the local quarry shooting, Henry Harris, whose nickname was Otter and he had been in the Great War. Sgt Allen said “I don’t know where that one has gone Otter, I can’t see it here!” “I don’t know about that but it left this end alright” he replied.
* There was never any aggro between the HG and the ARP but a bit of “We are better than you are, we’re smarter than you are”, or “we’ve got this or that”. In the end we both didn’t have very much and what we would have done if we had been invaded we would never know. There was never any problems between the old soldiers and the youngsters in the platoon. A lot of the younger members of the HG had to go into the regular forces once they reached 18 years old.
* Joh Dewer Harrison used to give air raid warnings. If there was going to be a raid he would come down from the big house at stilswell park on his old bike and blow his whistle as he cycled up the main street. He was about the only one who had a phone in the area at that time. They called his old bike ‘Rusty’. There were some small bombs dropped at Monks Hume and a landmine by the road towards the Barley Mow near Croughton. It made a big crater. Some of the blokes from Brackley came and four of them got inside the ring part of the bomb and carried it over to the lorry.

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