Phil Butler Launton (28/01/2003) (track 11 &12)



Phil Was an ARP Warden aged 14. He later served in the army (national service)

-My Dad was in the Launton Home Guard. First of all it was the LDV Local Defence Volunteers. When they formed the LDV in 1940 they didn’t have uniforms at first. It was just shot guns, air rifles whatever you could find. A few months after you joined it there were denim trousers, tops and an armband with LDV on them. You didn’t get a tin helmet until a few months after it was formed.

-The rifles were all .303 from the First World War with long sights on, they weren’t the short Lee Enfield’s.

-In Launton the LDV HQ was the Coach House next to the big house in West End where Billy Hawkins lived. Y’know the big red house. It was the stone built building they have converted into a home.

- The first bomb that dropped in Launton was on 26th July 1940. I remember the date because it was my friend’s birthday. It dropped in what is now Jewson’s yard. It was a 50lb screaming bomb. They were trying for the RAF camp. It was a very moonlit night. It was Lewis Penn’s yard and head had a new shed built with shiny galvanised iron roof and they reckon that was what they were aiming for. They didn’t miss by much!

-During that time every night the Home Guard was patrolling and guarding important places like the railway bridge by Mr Deeley’s coming into Launton. They made barriers to go across the road, a tree trunk on a wheel. They put an old car axle underneath the tree truck so they could wheel it across the road and chain it to a post.

-The railway bridge on the Launton Road coming into Bicester near Tubbs crossing has some holes up in the arch where they could put their rifles through.

-The Oxford road from the end of Bicester, King’s End to Kidlington had been built in about 1937 and they put poles with wires on to stop gliders from landing. I think the HG did that.

-There was a funny incident I must tell you about in the Coach House in Launton which involved the HG. About 95% of them were old soldiers who had served in World War 1. One of them who had been a Gunner Observer in the Royal Flying Corps had been badly shell shocked. He was only 20 years old after World War 1 and he had the shakes very bad. His name was Arthur Hazell. His father was the local coal man. Later on the HG got issued with Sten guns and they were giving a demonstration up in the Old Coach House. They had a full magazine on the Sten gun and Arthur got the shakes and let a full magazine of 28 bullets off up through the roof.

-Another thing that they had in 1940 which I don’t know if you have heard about -They had Northover projectors which was a 3” tube on a tripod with a lever on the side which you pulled back on a spring. They used to fill cocoa tins or dried milk tins with gravel and glass or whatever, put it down the barrel fire it and when it came out the tin used to split and it was like shrapnel flying around. I don’t know if they put a gun cotton in behind it to give it a bit of a charge in the tube to help it.

-They had another thing they used to put on the end of a rifle which was cup and used to fire a hand grenade out of it. The cup would fix on the end of the barrel. You had to pull the pin out of the hand grenade, leave the handle on the grenade and slide it into the cup so it fitted tightly. Then they used to put a blank cartridge in and fire it that way. It would go a long way. The .303 was a wonderful gun.

-Another funny story I need to tell you. I used to work with a man who was a neighbour and he had been with the HG in Chesterton. He had a dry sense of humour he was called Arthur Bowers who lived in Green Lane at Chesterton at the time. He was only a lad of 18 or 19 and worked on a farm. He joined the HG. There used to be a Council engineer called Mr Gander and he used to be their Captain. They would meet in Tubbs House in a shed or something there. They were having a lecture one night when Mr Gander asked Arthur Bowers ‘What steps would you take if you saw a stick of German paratroopers landing on Weston – on – the –green airfield?” He said “Big ‘uns Sir!”

-The second lot of bombs that was dropped on Launton was down by the railway lines just beyond the bottom of West End. They dropped there about 100 yards from the railway line. There were 6 high explosive bombs, thousand pounders. They blew large craters and massive boulders out of the ground. I’m sure one of the boulders went to the museum in London because they had imprints of the shells on the them. The craters were massive.

-The next lot of bombs they dropped was in what is Green Close now and they were incendiary bombs. It was Mr Ancel’s field at the time. We went looking for fins and things next morning and found quite a few unexploded ones that had gone in the ground and …..them out. I had them in my shed after they war ended they were still live.

-The next ones they dropped were a couple of petrol bombs down Blackthorn Road. It was 1943 and I was in the ARP at the time. It was at night and the fire brigade had put them out. I went with a friend who was a little bit older than me and he was a bit a daredevil and he set light to the diesel again and you could smell it. It all went up in flames again.

-There was sometime conflict between the ARP and the HG as to their responsibilities. The ARP Warden would come round and order people to put their “bloody lights out”. I had an old uncle in his 80s who lived down Blackthorn Road. The German bombers – when bombing Coventry -used to follow the main railway line right up to Birmingham. He used to work for a Wing Commander who lived in West End, he had a flashlight with a …… battery and big bulbous lens on it. He came out the pub at about 10pm waving his old torch about. The German bombers were travelling up to Coventry at 1 and a half minute intervals following the railway line and the ARP Warden shouted ‘Ned put that bloody light out!”. Well he gave him a bit of abuse and told him the Wing Commander had said the German bombs would slide of the them slated roofs. ……………………………………………….{end}