Lt. Col. Hodgeson (2003 Track 09)

-Enrolment took place in Bicester Police station in Church Street where I was greeted by Supt. Fairbrother, a large gentleman and Sgt Judd.

-Colonel Lloyd Mostyn lived in Hethe and he was appointed to raise the Home Guard in Bicester and surrounding villages. He recruited as his adjutant a Major Fane, a fiery old type army officer who lived in Kidlington. My uncle, Oliver Gilbey who owned where Bure Park is now, was invited to command Bicester and I was invited to start up the HG in Soldern, Fritwell (my home village in those days), Ardley, Somerton, the two Heyford’s and Caulcott. This was in June 1940.

-How I started them up was I went into Bicester and got addresses, then went round and formed platoons or companies in these villages. We were able to organise fairly well thanks to Lloyd Mostyn and Major Fane who were old soldiers and knew something about what to do and we formed up pretty quickly.

-We had problems getting arms initially but in due course we got a few rifles and so on. I can remember very distinctly in August or September a lot of American rifles arrived. They were covered with thick grease which took a considerable time to clean off. We had recruited more volunteers at this time, than we had rifles.

-We developed roles and the railway bridges between Somerton and Ardley used by the Great Western Railway we had pickets out most nights guarding them. Our whole fear was airborne troops arriving. Far more than actual invasion. We thought German parachutists would arrive. We also attended courses in Cowley Barracks which was the HQ of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry. We became a battalion of the local regiment.

-I left school in 1938 and should have gone to Sandhurst but I was a very backward boy and I failed to get into Sandhurst in Sept 1939. I joined up in October 1939 at HOC in London and was told to go away and wait as I was too young. I was given 14 hours to report to Catterick in October 1940 and in March 1941 I was commissioned from Sandhurst and went and joined my regiment the 15th/19th King’s Royal Hussars.

-The HG got better in the town after I had left as they got more organised. I don’t remember calling the HG companies or platoons before I left.

-I think the arms we received in August 1940 were Canadian Ross rifles.

-There didn’t seem to be a bad attitude between the old soldiers who had fought in previous wars and the youngsters who joined as there was a common purpose to defeat the enemy. There were 70 to 80 volunteers in the villages I was responsible for. Each village paraded at least 10 volunteers there was cooperation between ARP and HG.

-There was the ‘cock up’ on the night of Cromwell. Bill Deeley, who was responsible for the Arncott/Blackthorn area. He and I were going on a course on the Sunday morning at Cowley. I rang him early on the Sunday morning to see if I was picking up. He said “I don’t think that we are going!” “Didn’t you get ‘Cromwell’ in the middle of the night?’ “I’ve been standing to since 03:00”

“No I’ve been in bed all night and all my soldiers too!” By this time Bicester had been taken over by new commanders who had failed to get through to me or had forgotten to ring me. So we hadn’t been called out. Of course we all gathered round but went back to bed the next night. Communications were not all that they could have been.

-We took on certain duties in the HG and each evening would take out who was available for patrol. For instance I would go the land farmer at Somerton and ask if he could provide guard on the railway bridge from a certain hour to a certain hour and he would answer yes or no. Then I would go round during the night sometimes to see if they were there and chat with them.

-When it came to discipline I was in a very difficult position of being a boy of 18 and all my chaps were considerably older than me and some were ex NCO’s and so on. They pulled my leg once by saying you shouldn’t say please but bloody well command them to carry out an order. I think I was extremely careful and tactful in my dealings with the men.

-HQ for a time was at Grimsley’s, the fishmonger at Sheep Street in Bicester. It was requisitioned and taken over as Bicester HQ during my short time in the Home Guard. Irt was battalion HQ and then it moved to the Lodge in the Garth. That’s where they were when I left them. Harrison Morgan was prominent in the HG and took over from Gilbey.

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