

City garage owner's crucial part in war effort

# DAD'S ROLE IN WIMMIE'S SECRET ARMY



AN EYE ON THE ENEMY: Too shortsighted to enlist, Roy Ferguson joined Churchill's shadowy Auxiliary Unit, and left daughter Vivienne

BY CHRIS MILLS

HE may have filled your car up and wiped your windscreen but garage owner Roy Ferguson was Exeter's last and top secret defence against an invasion by Hitler.

To his customers, he was just the unassuming Poisløe Bridge garage owner in his mid-30s, whose less than perfect eyesight had prevented him from volunteering for the navy. But in fact, and as his family only learned decades later, Roy was a member of Churchill's Secret Army, a select band ready to spring into ruthless action against the Nazi invader.

As well as serving in the Home Guard, Roy was secretly recruited by his local GP for the city's own shadowy Auxiliary Unit.

Formed in 1940, these trained guerrilla units had their own arms caches full of plastic explosives, pistols and Sten guns which would have been used to harry German columns, had Hitler invaded Britain. But after Adolf postponed the invasion plan,

codenamed Operation Sea Lion, the units were finally disbanded in 1944.

But such was the secrecy of the organisation there was no formal recognition of its termination. Roy who ran the Poisløe Bridge filling station until 1965, eventually died in 1986.

Before his death he did tell his children a little about his real wartime role.

Daughter Vivienne Fitzgerald, who now lives in Pinhoe, explained: "He told me very little about it and I think my mother knew almost nothing at the time on the basis that knowing more would have put us in more danger."

"I can actually see him doing this sort of thing. He was a very quiet person but he thought a lot of his country and his family, although he was never gung-ho about it."

"He was probably precisely the sort of quiet person they were looking for."

He mentally wanted to go into the services as an engineer in the navy but his eyesight wasn't good enough.

"So he continued at the filling station, which was a reserved occupation, and served in the Home Guard."

"Years later, like every child I asked 'What did daddy do in the war?' And I remember my mother said, 'Oh, he was only in the Home Guard'."

"It's lucky for us the Germans didn't invade as we would probably not have been here today."

In Occupied Europe and Russia, German forces treated such guerrilla units brutally, torturing those captured alive, killing their families and often shooting a percentage of the local population as a grim warning.

It appears Roy was recruited by his GP, Dr Page, of Spicer Road, because his job as a filling station manager would have allowed him to speak to a huge number of people without arousing any suspicion. His job as courier was to help supply a fighting patrol

of men living rough with a combination of arms, fuel and information.

Their hiding place and cache would have been built in 1940 and possibly designated as an emergency food store.

Similar units were in place across the region, including in Mid Devon, where a cache was discovered buried beneath a hill near Thorverton in the 1980s.

Roy's son Neil, who lives in War-wicksire, added: "He only told me about 20 years ago long after the war had finished."

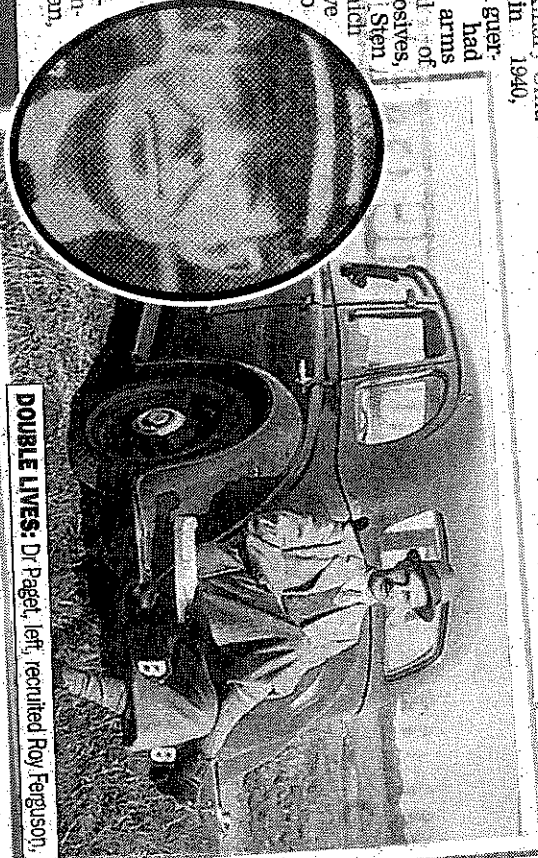
"I can't quite remember how it came up."

"It may have been prompted by a television item on the units and I believe it's entirely possible our mother may have never known."

"The obviously was taking a risk though I doubt whether he or the others were aware of the atrocities that happened in Occupied Europe and what could conceivably have happened to him."

"I don't know what would have happened and whether he was prepared to die if the Germans had invaded."

DOUBLE LIVES: Dr Page, left, recruited Roy Ferguson, centre, to courier supplies to fighters in readiness for invasion by Hitler



RESPECTFUL: Lionel Howell

## WAR DEAD REMEMBERED

A SEASIDE town in Devon is to unveil a roll of honour of the names of its war dead.

Carved granite scrolls containing the names of almost 500 ex-servicemen and women who made the ultimate sacrifice are to be erected at Emouth for the first time.

It follows seven years of detective work by Lionel Howell to trace the fallen of two World Wars, and conflicts in Korea, the Falklands and Iraq.

The unveiling ceremony at the war memorial in Strand Gardens takes place on August 14 — the day before the 60th anniversary of Victory over Japan.

Mr Howell, who is behind annual celebrations in the town to mark the end of World War Two, has stepped up his appeal for more names to go on the list.

He has helped raise £8,000 for the memorial of inscribed granite slabs which will be placed at the corners of the existing war memorial.

A shortfall of £700 is expected to be met by a fundraising concert at Holy Trinity Church, on April 13.

It has been organised by local policeman Colin Dance of the City of Exeter Railway Choir 97 from Buddleigh Salterton, which will be performing on the night.

Mr Dance, who also belongs to Lympstone Band, said: "We hope to raise the outstanding balance at our concert and urge as many people as can to come along and support this worthy cause," he said.

Mr Howell added: "For seven years I have been collecting names of people from Emouth who have died in conflicts from World War One onwards."

"The town, unlike others in Devon, has never had the names of its war dead on public view."

"Initially we wanted them inscribed on the war memorial, but this could not be achieved. So instead, they are going on granite slabs which will go alongside names until the end of April to be added to the roll of honour and appealing to everyone with names to supply them to me so they can be inscribed on the memorial."