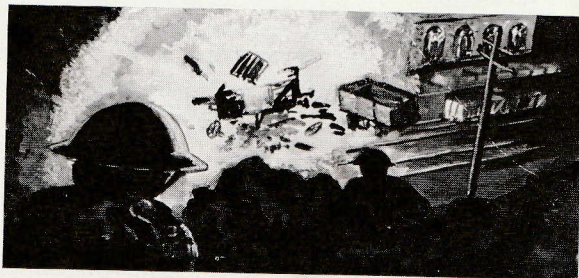


ends a  
wartime

## Major in the Home Guard . . . 'secret army'

# ANCE LEADER

in a small wood. You lifted a small tree to reveal the entrance. At Stobswood, the hide-out was next to the pit heap, in some scrub. There was a third near Acklington airfield where you had to squeeze behind a tree. The entrance was in the bankside, covered with moss.



Each hide-out was constructed of brick and contained bunks for nine to twelve men. There was food to last a month, explosives, ammunition, weapons and usually a concealed 'air pipe'. 'There was a hide in Hartford Woods. The entrance consisted of a flat tray on balanced rollers. Over the tray we grew a pile of brambles. It would have been near-impossible to spot it even inside the clump of brambles as the entrance opened by pulling a small ring attached to a wire,' said Mr Hall.

'On another exercise I was shown a flat expanse of lawn about living-room size. I was told there was a bunker beneath and instructed to find the entrance. I discovered—after examining almost every blade of grass—that it was opened by a partly-concealed matchstick attached to a wire.' Such were the kind of concealment places constructed for the miner 'maquis' of Bedlington. Their exploits sprang readily to mind for Mr Hall. 'What a fantastic bunch of chaps they were. Their fieldcraft was magnificent. I had one man who could actually catch rabbits with his bare hands, and proved it to me repeatedly. On one occasion we saw a rabbit in a field rubbing his whiskers. Tommy—I can't remember his second name, but he was a leading poacher—said: "D'ye want that rabbit, Sor?" Then off

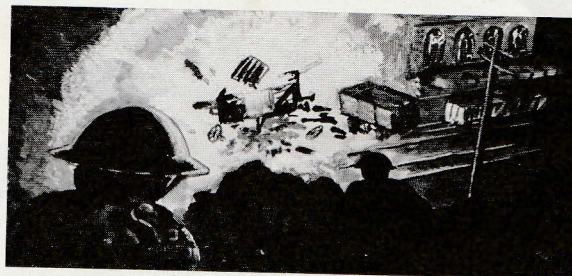


Photo: Newcastle Evening Chronicle

he went on his stomach. You could not see him move, but if you looked away for a few seconds you could see he had advanced a couple of yards. He just crept up to that rabbit and lifted it. It was truly amazing—and can you imagine what damage a chap like that could have done after an invasion?'

Mr Hall, who now lives in retirement in a cottage in Morpeth, recalled other exploits of the Bedlington miners when they were chosen for personal guard duty for the Royal Family in Balmoral. 'The men were so good that they were invited to remain longer. During that time I met the Royal Family personally, even played games with the Princesses.'

The task of the Royal guard was to spot intruders inside the Balmoral grounds. Outside the boundaries guard duties were performed by regular troops. Each of the twelve-man patrol was instructed to stay under cover—and to keep out of the way of the Royal Family. They flitted from tree to tree with faces blackened or maintained watch in hideouts strung along the hill slopes above the castle. Each incident was reported to



Major Hall. 'One of our chaps was actually spotted by the King and Queen when they strolled in the grounds. I was rather annoyed about it at the time,' he said.

At Balmoral, however, there was time for recreation when formalities were relaxed and the Royal Family joined mess functions and chatted with their guards. Mr Hall still retains copies of a plan of party games drafted by the two Princesses.