

## **An Auxiliary Unit in Harberton**

### **Stan Finch's memories**

When war broke out I was in the Auxiliary Units, three of us from Harberton and three of us from Harbertonford. We were trained in guerrilla warfare. If the Germans landed we had to stay behind. We had the Elephant tunnel up in Tristford Copse, and if the Germans had pushed inland we were supposed to do as much damage as we could. We were trained in the use of explosives, blowing up railway lines and tank traps that sort of thing. It was a branch of the Home Guard really. I used to go up every three weeks to a place called Highworth near Swindon. My employer, which was the post office, would be paid, and I would be off on a lorry or train. I was a corporal. I had to be trained and then come back and teach the others what to do. The Elephant had provisions, tinned stuff and rum. There was a gallon of rum for each of the 6! They thought the Jerry was coming all right you know. Goodness knows what would have happened if they had of tried it. But anyway we had provisions for at least three weeks, half a dozen Thompson machine guns and ammunition, Sten guns and lovely 2.2 rifles with telescopic sights on them and silencers, they were beautiful things. We also had a lot of gelignite and plastic explosives. We took the arms home with us. You wouldn't have known the place was there. You could walk right over the top of it. At the end of the war there was a lot of gelignite and plastic explosives left. I was up there one day and I saw George Trigg the policeman come up with a telegram and I saw him through the lookout hole go up to Aunt Lucy's house and I had a foreboding that it was about Donald (Hawken, his cousin,) and it was. It was the telegram to say that Donald was missing.

[Flying Officer Donald William Carlyon Hawken, who was in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (166 Squadron) died in an air crash on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1944 at the age of 23, and is buried in Dunkirk Town Cemetery. His parents John Carlyon Hawken and Elsie Maude Hawken, and his wife Ivy Mabel Hawken, were from Harberton, Devon]

There were two other references to the Auxiliary Unit in Stephen Finch's memoirs:

1. I was in the auxiliary unit during the war and we had an underground elephant [tunnel] there, sunk entirely in the ground, put there by the Army Engineers, with two escape routes. We were training for guerrilla warfare.
2. [I was a corporal. I had to be trained and then come back and teach the others what to do]. The rest of them went to a place called Thornton near Exeter, up the Exe Valley.