

## John Osborne Mennear

Date: 28th February 2011

Recorder's name: John Mennear (son)

1/ What were you doing before you were recruited?

Worked at Elemore Colliery 1935 – 1948 as trap door operator then miner, worked as a pony putter, driller, had deputy's tickets, stayed as a miner due to earning greater money. Actually working as a pony putter when joined the Home Guard and Auxillary.

2/ How and when were you recruited?

Recruited out of the Home Guard in late 1941 or early 1942? One of the existing auxiliary members (?) recruited me as they were looking for young single men, the basic role was explained when I was accepted, ie wouldn't be able to return home when the invasion started, made aware couldn't get any help or medical, otherwise would have risked family and community, couldn't go home as this would risk German reprisal. Told that anyone wounded would be expected to shoot themselves or be shot or take cyanide capsule which was kept in the OB.

3/ Which Patrol did you join, and who else was in it?

I was a member of the Unit that is described as the Hetton Unit – however I can categorically say that I was never in the OB described on the web site at Roughdene near Copt Hill south of Houghton le Spring. I have not previously been aware of this OB existence.

I had originally remembered the following names - Sgt Johnny West, (Hetton le Hole), Spud Murphy (Easington Lane), Jimmy ? (Moorsley), a n other ( Easington Lane), John Mennear ( Easington Lane), A n other, (Peat Carr Estate)

Once I was prompted by the list published on the web site I immediately recalled additional names and can correct certain spellings and address errors as follows;-

Sgt. Norman.Hopper of 29 Lyons Colliery, Hetton. – knew him well as Sgt in Hetton Home Guard. Sgt in Auxiliary Unit was Sgt Johnny West, 34, Coal Bank Terrace  
Cpl.( ? ) Jimmy.Jarvis 60 Wades Row, High Moorsley, Hetton  
Pte. J. McCall ( known as Spud Murphy) 134 Elemore Lane, Easington Lane, Hetton  
Pte. GeorgeWoodland 36 Springwell Terrace,Hetton  
Pte. J.H. Gulliver 9 Eskdale Street, Hetton  
Pte J Mennear 119 Brickgarth, Easington Lane, Hetton

Pte. R. Fisher 15 Rochdale Street, Hetton – not known by me, I do not recognise name

4/ Tell me about your OB?

This was in Cocken Wood near Finchale, access pathway adjacent to cottage on west side of Lumley road.

Wooden Hut about 12 x 8 foot, (only used for clothes and sleeping bags, stayed over on Saturday nights only, before back to work) this was in wood near the gamekeepers cottage adjacent to path, land belonged to the Nicholson family who owned the Vaux brewery,

OB based in the middle of the wood, constructed of excavated underground chamber dug out by unit before I joined, escape route 20 yards down towards river. Entrance hatch covered by turf with bush growing on top, not a spring loaded hatch. Entrance led down a ladderway, internal layout was similar to the drawings on web site, benches etc, damp but not waterlogged. Everything lifted off the floor, I believe all the explosives and arms etc were kept here.

5/ Who was your I.O. and where was his HQ?

Did not know who the Intelligence Officer was, knew when the Commanding Officer was coming but only spoke to Sgt West. All information was given via Sgt West. CO was from Low Fell. We were never told anything else, simply Low Fell, Newcastle way.

6/ What training did you get?

All explosive training, fire pots, time pencils, cordite, ordinary fuses, knew how to fell trees, blow railway lines, military targets – planes, lorries, petrol dumps etc. Training weekends organised at Castleton in N. Yorkshire led by the Green Howards regiment.

7/ What equipment did you have?

The Unit was equipped with .38 Smith & Wesson revolvers, rubber truncheons, knobkerries, sten guns, Enfield .303 rifles, commando knife and one sniper rifle BG explosive (blasting gelignite – trees, railway lines etc), fire pots with time pencils (planes and similar), cordite wasp fuse cord (eg wrapping around fuel cans used with time pencils for instantaneous inflammable explosive), grenades, sticky bombs (attach to tanks etc) – all stored in OB (Operating Base). Sten and .38 revolver ammunition was interchangeable.

All team issued with cyanide capsule, instructed to use it if wounded or captured to avoid compromising local inhabitants as no help could be expected.

8/ Do you know of other Patrols?

Aware of something in Haswell, Wheatley Hill and Birtley – loose talk from the commanding officer – ie I've come from x and I'm off to y over a period of 3 years, not sure when I knew this. I never knew any information about who was in any other Unit.

9/ What did you do after the war?

Continued working at Elemore Colliery as a miner until 1948 – then joined Carl Rosa Opera Company in London, following a successful audition. Singing is a life long passion

from a young age, including dance bands, concerts, 'help the war effort' etc, latterly with Male Voice Choirs.

10/ What do you think of a seeking a medal for the Auxilliers?

Nothing but right, often wondered why there was never a representation or mention at the Remembrance Ceremony at the Cenotaph. I did get a 202 badge and two letters, one from Churchill and one from the King, regrettably these were lost in the early 1950's when family moved from the Brickgarth and I was away singing.

I am sure that I have never been issued with a Defence Medal for the period of one year spent in the Home Guard.

11/ Other info

Before I was in the Home Guard, I was a firewatcher along with most of my friends at the Lyons Boys Club.

As far as I was aware all the Unit were former NCO's in the Home Guard prior to joining the Auxiliary Unit where rank was lost except the Sgt, cannot recall a Corporal rank. I was a former L/Corporal in the Home Guard, Easington Lane section.

- Only in the OB once whilst in service.
- Sniper rifle used for killing rabbits.
- Sometimes quizzed by others as to why I was not in the local Home Guard, did wear home guard tunic over my 202 tunic.
- When detailed for guard duty at the large Finchale ammunition store it was sometimes noted that I was wearing a revolver, whilst members of the Home Guard were often without a rifle each never mind a revolver.
- Once service completed I was offered the Smith & Wesson revolver for £5, offer not taken up!
- I did have Sten ammunition in the house for a few years, handed in the late 1960's during an amnesty for arms & ammo.