

Churchill's secret army in Chew Stoke

Civilian volunteers that would have been part of the British Resistance in the event of a successful German invasion during WWII

In 1940 the prospect of a Nazi invasion was a very real one. Britain, having lost most of its military equipment in the Dunkirk evacuation, was to all pretence and purposes on its knees.

The Local Defence Volunteers (LDV), later renamed as the Home Guard had just been formed, famously armed with pitch forks and ancient weapons. However, a group of civilian volunteers were being gathered together to help resist the initial stages of any invasion.

The Auxiliary Units, were patrols of 6-8 men in reserved occupations or under or over the age to join the regular forces. They were formed into units the length of the country, from The Orkneys to Cornwall, along the east and south coasts, with the full support of Churchill. They were dug operational bases, underground bunkers where they would disappear to as soon as the invading forces entered their area. From there they would come out at night to cause as much chaos as possible. Destroying transport and transport routes, blowing up ammunition or food dumps, destroying airfields and causing as much disruption as possible to slow down the advance and give the regular forces time to recover and counter-attack. Their life expectancy was for just around a fortnight at most – essentially a suicide mission.

They were highly trained in sabotage and silent killing (some patrols had weapons to take out high ranking German officials and even British collaborators). Each man had to sign up the Official Secrets Act and told their nearest relatives and friends nothing of their role with most going to the grave without ever saying a word. They were usually men who knew the local countryside intimately, farmers, farm workers, gamekeepers and even poachers.

Now a group of volunteer researchers have found some evidence of such a group of civilian volunteers in the Chew Stoke area and rumours of their underground operational base somewhere in the Knowle Hill Tump area.

The names associated with the Chew Stoke patrol are listed below with some of their addresses:

Sgt T M Lowery – The Cottage, Bottom Cross, Chew Stoke (DoB – 25/5/1912)

Walter Charles Edward Hasell – Woodburn Farm, Denny Lane, Chew Magna (DoB - 01/06/1922)

LS Blandford – The Firs, Chew Magna (DoB – 22/04/1914)

WE Gilbert – 3, Council Houses Chew Stoke (DoB 25/10/1914)

E Thomas – Knowle Hill, Chew Blarney (DoB 21/01/1923)

And possibly **Ernest Holmes** although there is no direct evidence of his involvement at this stage.

The operational base is rumoured to be around the Knowle Hill Tump area. If anyone remembers playing in an underground structure as a child, was taken there by one of the patrol after the war, has seen corrugated iron in strange holes in the ground or heard rumours we would love to hear from you!

If you do have any information, memories or knew any of the men listed please contact cartpress@gmail.com.

You can see what we know of other possible patrols in the local area here: <http://www.coleshillhouse.com/somerset-auxiliary-units-and-obs.php> if you have any information of Auxiliary Units members or their operational bases in these please also get in touch.

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