

Churchill's secret army in Midsomer Norton

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 Shetlands 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 fuel 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 is interested in hearing from anyone who might know more information about the patrol in Midsomer Norton, or elsewhere in Somerset. The Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team (CART), have some names that are associated with the Midsomer Norton patrol and may have the location of the operational base, but any further information would really help build a fuller picture.

The names associated with the patrols in the Midsomer Norton area are listed below:

Midsomer Norton:

Sgt K Hartry from Street
Cpl Charlie Lanning from Picket Mead
Len Bailey
Tom Bush
Dennis A Chard, Temple Inn, Temple cloud
Arthur Parsons
Mervyn Powney

Arthur Walton
Edward 'Ted' Clare

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

You can see a full list of patrols CART believes to be in Somerset here – please do get in contact if you know any information that might be of interest.

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