

The search for Churchill's secret army in East Devon continues

The search for evidence of the Auxiliary Units, Churchill's secret army, continues in East Devon. The popular narrative of an unorganised, weak and chaotic country, almost on its knees after the German army rampaged through the Continent, certainly does not reflect the level preparation in Devon and throughout the country in 1940.

The length of the UK, small patrols of 6-8 men were being put together. Men who knew their local surroundings intimately, were in reserved occupations, trained to extraordinarily high standards, all of whom were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country if the German's had invaded. All signed the Official Secrets Act, with most going to their grave without telling even their closest family and friends. They would have destroyed transport, railways, airfields, ammunition and food dumps, and anything that would have disrupted the German advance

There is evidence of a number of patrols in East Devon, and since their last appeal for information, the Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team (CART) have found out more details, adding to their knowledge of the patrols in the area.

Research has pointed to the patrols in the area being organised in the following ways.

- Farringdon
- Newton Poppleford
- Sidbury
- Branscombe
- Bovey/Beer
- Colyton
- Musbury/Whitford
- Axminster
- Uplyme

Each of these patrols would have had some form of secret underground base (known as operational bases), hidden somewhere in the countryside surrounding the towns and villages where the patrol members lived. CART has recorded the locations of operational bases for the Farringdon, Newton Poppleford, Branscombe and Musbury/Whitford patrols, but are continuing to look for the others. In some cases, patrols may well have had more than one operational base, and recent evidence has pointed to the Colyton patrol's base being located in Morganhayes Covert area, but also having an operational base somewhere to the north of the town.

"We would love to hear from anyone with details on where the remaining operational bases might be located. They are often Nissen huts buried under the ground with a hatch, entrance shaft and 'escape tunnel' – increasingly they are found to have collapsed, so often are a hole in the ground with corrugated iron sticking out. We also

have the names of some of the men involved in these patrols. Although the only written records we have were taken later in the war and therefore might not reflect those who served in 1940," commented Nina Hannaford, CART researcher for Devon.

"We are particularly interested in a group of men who seem to be associated with Bovey House near Beer. If anyone knew any of these men or any of the men below that would be incredibly helpful," concluded Hannaford.

Anyone with any information should contact the CART team at cartpress@gmail.com further information can be found at www.staybehinds.com.

Names associated with the Bovey House/Beer patrol:

Leonard Pike – Bovey Barton
Eddie Pike – Bovey Barton
Harold Pike – Bovey Barton
Walter 'Jack' Denslow – Bovey Cottage
Charlie Denslow – Bovey Cottage
Fred Bastone – Gravel Cottage, Beer

Names associated with the Branscombe patrol:

Basil Tedbury
Morgan Selby – Bulstone
Philip Selway – Pit Farm
Frank Coles – Seaside Farm
Stanley Dunn – Wareny
Edward Collins – Hillside
Possibly Ronald Churchill – Little Farm
Possible Cecil Millman – Borcombe

Names associated with Musbury/Whitford patrol

Edgar Mitchell – Haye Cottage
Arthur Warren – Higher Buckland Farm
George Seaward
Leslie Rockett – Pasey Cottage, Whitford
H Baker – Council House Whitford
Tom White – Council House Whitford
Albert Wakley – The Stores Whitford

Names associated with Colyton patrol:

Geoffrey Gibbins – South Street
Lawrence Littlely – Coly Vale
William Quick – Colcombe Cottage

Robert Summers – Road Green Farm
Arthur Hallett – Cadhaye Farm
Reginald Littlely – C/O Mrs Passmore Fore Street
Richard Isles – Stockham Farm
Herbert Digg – Harepath Farm
Edward Sexton – Post Office Cottage Colyford

Names associated with possible Axminster patrol:

Sam Quick – Cuthayes Farm
Frank Strawbridge – Paynes Place
Richard Banfield – Hawkchurch
John Trott – Wyld Coirt