

# Mystery of secret bunker at Castle

GERMAN spies or English resistance fighters? . . . Who were the men who lived and worked in the secret underground bunker buried deep in the rhododendron bushes at Avon Castle, Ringwood?

The bunker, eight feet beneath the surface, was uncovered two weeks ago when workmen were clearing the site for housing development—a woodman stripping the dense vegetation fell through the ground.

A nearby resident, Major Leon Talbot, of Greensleaves, went down the hole with a torch and what he found inside made him ask the builders to delay demolition until he had brought in cameramen to record the find.

Our pictures were taken by John Sennett, Jacqueline Rogers and Christopher Nicholls, all students at the Salisbury College of Art Photographic Department.

## DEMOLISHED

After Major Talbot had explored the bunker and the pictures had been taken, the builders completely demolished the bunker and flattened the site for ever.

"I was lowered down the hole on a rope," said Major Talbot, "and by torchlight I found a room about 8ft. square. Attached to it was a small galley with cooking utensils, pans and knives and forks still littered around.

"In the main room I saw the

remains of two truckle beds, a box of smoke canisters and signal lights, some provisions and empty beer bottles.

"The roof, which on the surface appeared to be earth, was supported by strong beams and the walls were well constructed from asbestos and plaster.

## ESCAPE HATCH

"The entrance was very well designed. The door was made from wire-netting covered with earth and at the rear of the room was an escape hatch in the wall which led out into a gravel quarry. The exit was covered with earth but could be pushed out from the inside."

Major Talbot said he believed that the occupants, whoever they were, had the smoke canisters for emergency. "If the bunker was discovered the men tossed canisters into the gravel pit and escaped through the bolt hole amid the smoke.

"The amazing thing was," he said, "that apart from fungi on the roof-beams the entire place was as dry as a bone and almost as it had been left.

"I cannot believe that it was

occupied by German spies because the bunker was so well made. Such expert construction could not have escaped observation.

## RESISTANCE

"I think it was probably occupied by local resistance fighters who were set up in anticipation of an invasion."

But the spy theory cannot be ruled out . . . Dr. R. H. Little, the expert on local history, recalled that during the war, at a time when the German bombers were trying to exterminate the big cities in the Midlands, it was noted by some of his patients on Crow Hill that a signalling light could be seen flashing in the region of Avon Castle when the night bombers were going over.

"As my family were 'evacuated' to this house at the time I had a chance to observe this light myself and took some amateur bearings on it.

"The police were informed but I fear probably treated the whole matter as one of the frequent 'spy scares' they often received, as they took no action.

## BEARINGS

"I notified the C.O. of locally based troops—I think they were a unit of the Green Howards—and they sent a pair of signallers up to this house at Crow Hill for several nights and they took accurate bearings on the light.

"At the request of the C.O. I took an officer and a 'girl friend' on my rounds with me one day and dropped them off in Avon Castle just at the spot where we thought the light originated and they sauntered as a 'loving couple' into the laurels.

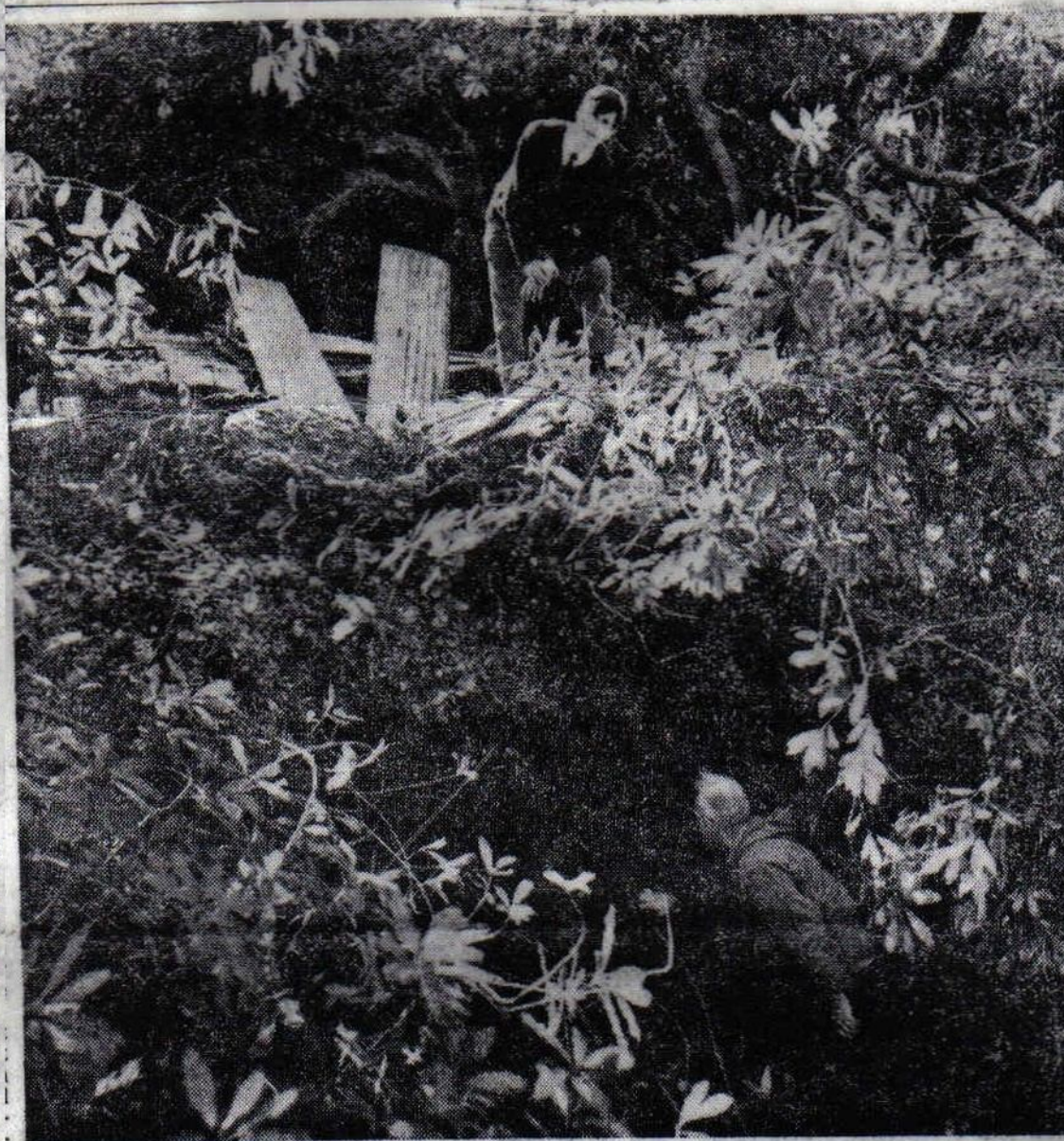
"I picked them up later and they told me they had definitely located the signalling area as there were cigarette ends showing there had been recent occupation down towards the river bank in an alcove in the thick bushes.

## SURROUNDED

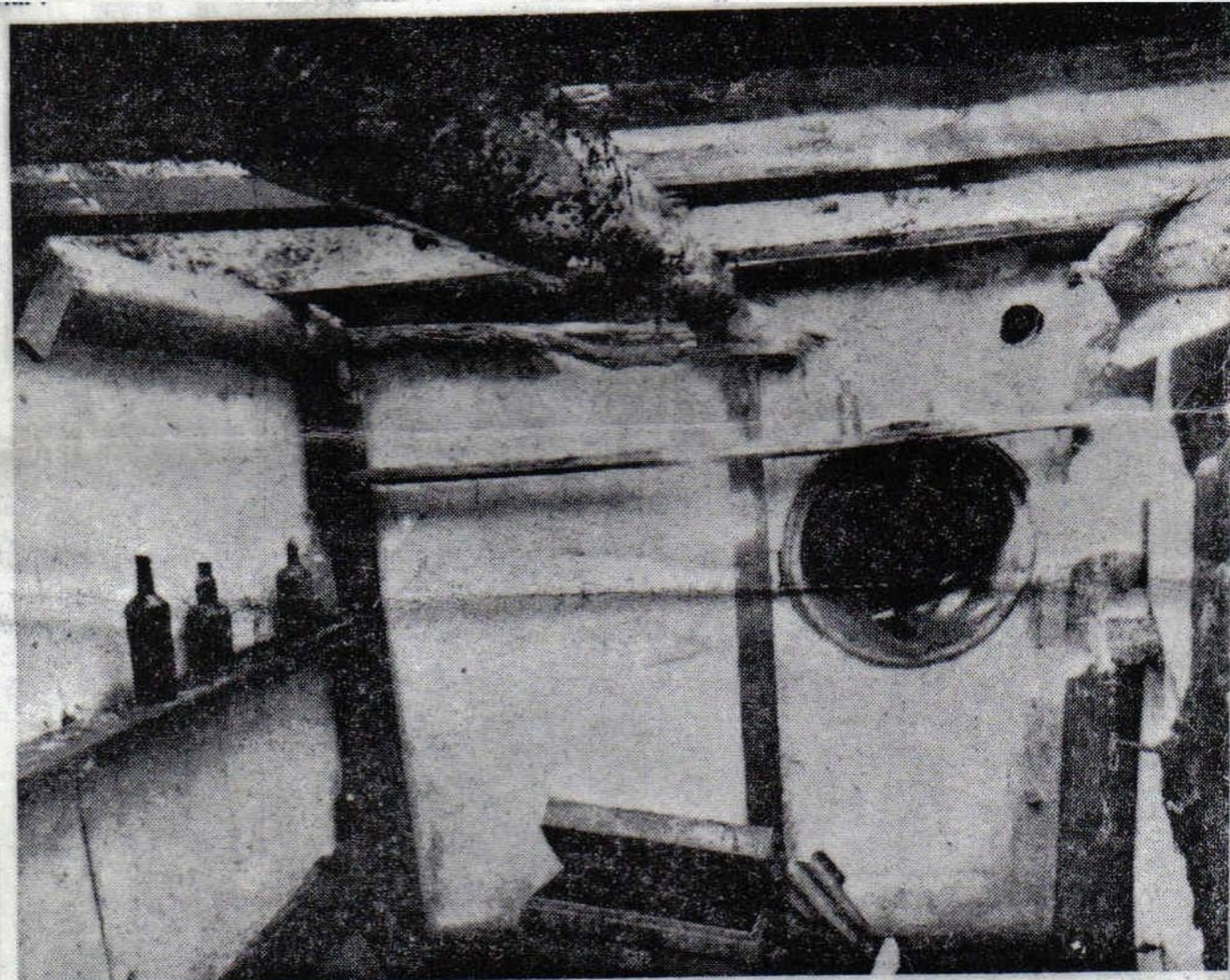
"Some nights later the troops surrounded the area and I saw their movements from Crow Hill.

"Ultimately, I was told that the light would not be seen again and nor was it. But they would not tell me who was in the bunker and what was done during the raid there.

"This fact I never found out and the discovery of this hide-out must be closely connected with this incident. It was also found out later that there was a veritable 'marked line to the Midlands' of lights, one being further on above Fordingbridge which I understood was also 'dealt with'."



Christopher Nicholls stands on top of the secret bunker deep in the bushes . . . Beneath, Major Leon Talbot peers in through the escape hatch.



Inside the main room of the bunker . . . The "bolt hole" into the gravel pit can be seen set in the far wall. On the trunk that contained smoke canisters and signal lights and beneath the beer bottles on the shelf can be seen the