

KENT'S SECRET ARMY

Pitchforks swapped for machine guns

RON MARTIN was part of a band of five clandestine fighters.

All were from the farming community of Wye, Bilting and Hastingleigh.

During training they swapped their pitchforks and tractors for a deadly arsenal of Thompson machine guns, Sten guns, rifles, Smith & Wesson revolvers, grenades and daggers.

He said: "Everybody had a revolver or automatic pistol and a commando dagger, sharp as a razor and strapped to your leg.

"I had wanted to join the RAF but we couldn't be in the regular forces because we were in reserved occupations so this was our way of doing our bit.

"There was no formal recruitment. It was done by who you knew and who trusted you.

"People were also picked because of their detailed knowledge of their area."

CART (Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team) has substantial archive documentation on patrols in Romney Marsh.

That area had four patrols codenamed Mushroom (Snargate and Brenzett), Truffle (New Romney area), Toadstool (Eastbridge near Dymchurch) and Fungus (Court at Street near Port Lympne).

CART is awaiting further documentation on patrols in areas such as Bethersden, Challock, Hothfield and Rolvenden.

My secret war against the Nazis

A secret army of resistance fighters was formed to take on the Nazis if they invaded Britain. Ron Martin, one volunteer, realised his mission meant almost certain death if he faced the enemy. **Sam Lennon** reports

RON MARTIN knew that he could be dead within a couple of weeks of going into action against ruthless Nazis invading Kent.

But he shrugged off the risk, accepting that life was constantly under threat during the Second World War.

He said: "There was danger all the time. I was in Ashford in the middle of a bombing raid and saw a house had been blown to pieces.

"Nobody knew what was going to happen next day with all those flying bombs and doodlebugs we had to put up with.

"Even being in this special unit we were as safe as anyone else while there was no invasion."

Mr Martin, now 95, of Wye, was in one of countless Kent Auxiliary Units, made up of civilian volunteers ready to inflict guerrilla warfare if the Germans invaded our shores. Their average life expectancy was just a fortnight after invasion.

He joined the 203 Hastingleigh Auxiliary Unit in 1942, known as the Haricot Patrol.

To villagers he was just another farmworker but he secretly trained every Sunday with four other comrades.

The regional training centre for Sussex and Kent was in fact at The Garth, a farm at Bilting near Wye.

He said: "We learnt to blow up bridges, make booby traps and to kill with unarmed combat. I was a trained killer, but as there was never an invasion I'm glad I never had to kill."

Mr Martin's patrol was based at the ruins of a nearby mansion,

Factfile



■ The Auxiliary Units were part of an overall British Resistance formed under the orders of Winston Churchill in 1940 during a heightened threat of invasion.

■ As many as 3,500 men were recruited, all in the countryside and hand-picked for their detailed local knowledge and ability to live off the land.

■ The secrecy was such that even the Home Guard was not told of their work.

■ The units were disbanded in November 1944 when the defeat of Germany became increasingly inevitable.

■ The Kent and Sussex training centre was organised by Peter Fleming, a Grenadier Guards Captain and brother of Bond author Ian Fleming.

Evington Manor, Hastingleigh.

Units like theirs were so secretive that even members' families and close friends were kept in the dark.

He said: "I lived with two brothers at the time and



Ron Martin was in an Auxiliary Unit during the Second World War

Picture: Wayne McCabe PD1956281

they didn't know but I think they suspected I was up to something.

"But then there was so much going on with the war that people just didn't take much interest in what we might be up to.

"We used to do explosives training outside Bilting but then so did the regular forces so when there were the sounds of explosions nobody took any notice.

"We even made sure we didn't get to know the other auxiliary patrols too well in case we were captured and tortured."

Several former auxiliaries have kept their roles a secret for decades since. Mr Martin married his wife Joyce, now 80, in 1955 and has only begun telling her his secret past in the last 10 years.

Mrs Martin said: "I just accepted it. I knew people did what they had to do during the war."

Auxiliaries can now tell their story

SURVIVING auxiliaries can now break their silence and tell the world of their exploits.

The volunteers had at the time signed the Official Secrets Act so they received no official recognition from the government.

They took the oath of silence so seriously that many have since gone to the grave without telling their story.

But now a research team says they are free to tell all and wants to hear from remaining members.

■ If you were a member of the Auxiliary Units in Kent and want to tell your and your comrades' stories contact Phil Evans, of the Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team (CART) on 0872 045 9940 or cartkent@gmail.com