

Trevor Miners

Member of Winston Churchill's secret wartime 'Resistance' force of trained saboteurs and assassins

TREVOR MINERS, who has died aged 89, was one of the last surviving members of Winston Churchill's Auxiliary Units, a 3,500-strong volunteer force trained to be the underground line of defence in the event of a German invasion.

It was shortly after British forces had beaten a desperate retreat from Dunkirk in 1940 that Churchill ordered a battle-hardened colonel called Colin Gubbins to form the new organisation. German forces were only 25 miles across the Channel and invasion seemed imminent. Unlike other freelance resistance movements that sprang up across Nazi-controlled Europe, Churchill was determined that the British version would be state-sponsored and meticulously planned in advance.

Gubbins selected a dozen regular Army intelligence officers to recruit local men, many from the Home Guard and many with an intimate knowledge of their local areas (gamekeepers and poachers were said to be particularly popular recruits), and turn them into ruthless killers. "They should be solid chaps who are not likely to lose their heads under the sort of pressures that occupation brings," one officer wrote of the character that was required, "quite ordinary types in normal, everyday jobs."

The recruits were issued with gelignite, oil bombs, magnesium incendiary bombs, pistols, revolvers and hunting knives. In the event of an invasion, they were to leave their homes and move to pre-prepared Operational Bases (OBs) underground. In what would almost inevitably have been a suicide mission, the Auxiliaries, as they were known, were to remain hidden during the invasion, come up behind the enemy lines and hinder the German advance by laying mines and booby traps, blowing up petrol and ammunition dumps, railway lines and occupied airfields. Each was issued with sealed orders giving a list of potential collaborators, including



Trevor Miners at GHQ Coleshill in 2015: 'It was very exciting, being such a young boy and to be armed with a .38 Smith and Wesson and firing a Sten gun'

some county chief constables, who might have to be executed if there was a risk of them helping the Germans.

Born on January 14 1927 at Bolingey, near Perranporth, Cornwall, and educated at Penwartha School, Bolingey, Miners was a 15-year-old trainee motor mechanic on 2s 6d a week in 1942 when he was asked to take the place of his older brother, who had been called up into the regular Army, in the Perranporth patrol. Sent to the Auxiliary Units' top secret HQ - Coleshill House, on the Oxfordshire/Wiltshire border - the following year, he recalled being "taught unarmed combat and how to throw grenades and phosphorus bombs. It was very exciting, being such a young boy and to be armed with a .38 Smith & Wesson and firing a Sten gun."

The first OB to which Miners was sent was an old Nobel explosives tunnel on Trevellas Airfield at Perranporth, which had to be abandoned when pilots and their WAAF girlfriends from the airfield

began using the entrance for romantic assignations. The unit then moved to an old mining area where an OB was constructed underground and camouflaged so well that its appearance was unknown, even to people living nearby.

"We did exercises once or twice a week and I well remember one raid on Perranporth airfield," Miners recalled. "We cut through the barbed wire under the guards' noses, then put stickers on some aircraft to prove we had been there... We also had garrotting wire and would have had no hesitation in using it if the guards had been Germans instead of British."

There was a deadly serious purpose behind the fun and Miners's unit was told that if anyone found their underground bunker, they were to be cautioned "in no uncertain terms" not to divulge its location. In the event of a German invasion, those that had been cautioned would have been the first to be shot. "We were especially careful," Miners recalled, "because we knew

the consequences might mean shooting dear friends. But this was wartime. And, unlike the Falklands or Bosnia, our very country was at stake. If I had been given the order, I would have carried it out."

After the Auxiliary Units were stood down in November 1944 Miners enlisted. However, it was at a time when the country was desperately short of mine-workers. As a result he was conscripted as a "Bevan Boy" and spent the next four and a half years working down a pit in South Wales. Later he became a long-distance lorry driver for JG Brewer (later British Road Services) and then a driver for the Royal Naval Air Station, Culdrose.

He continued to live in Perranporth, where he was a member of the Surf Lifesaving Club; served as treasurer of the local Scout group; ran the local youth club for a time; helped raise funds for a swimming pool at the local primary school and was a member of the local choir.

On joining the Auxiliaries, Miners had signed the Official Secrets Act. He did not even tell his parents what he was doing and, like other former members of the units, kept his silence for many decades after the war ended. Officially the units never existed and it was not until the Sixties that details began to leak out. Even then the government did not acknowledge the bravery of the recruits. It was only in 2013 that Miners took his place with other veterans from the 640 wartime patrols in the Remembrance Sunday parade past the Cenotaph.

In later years Miners was active in informing people about the work of the units and keeping the memory alive. In September last year he returned to Coleshill, 72 years after his training, to celebrate the opening of a replica OB by firing a sniper rifle and a Sten gun.

Trevor Miners is survived by his wife Muriel, whom he married in 1954, and by their three sons.

Trevor Miners, born January 14 1927, died April 4 2016