

ANDERSON - WILLIAM - STONEHOUSE
CHESHAM AVENUE
Stonehouse Home Guard.

The Stonehouse Home Guard Unit was formed probably in the summer of 1940 when Nazi Germany invaded the Low Countries and France. Initially this unit was called the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV), irreverently translated as "Look, Dook and Vanish".

All men were volunteers. First World War veterans assumed Officer and Non-commission positions.

The Commanding Officer became "Bunny" Anderson, the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages based in Well Road, Stonehouse.

There were sufficient volunteers to form 6 platoons. N.C.O.s with the rank of Sergeant took charge of the platoons. Of these I can recall Nathaniel ("Nat") Thomson

residing in Vicars Road and running a butchers business in
 Salkhall, George Guesley, King Street, a painter to trade,
 Matthew (Matt) Steele, a miner, and Robert (Bob) Whitelaw,
 who later assumed control as Commanding Officer

At first, the Headquarters were in the premises of
 Summers, coal merchants, a large garage next door to the
 Miners' Welfare

Later HQ was transferred to the Stonehouse Cricket
 Football club ~~but~~, with the use of the football pitch
 and ground around it for training. Incidentally, during
 the blackout said, the bombing could be heard from
 the football ground, the glare from the devastation
 observed clearly, and the drone from the enemy
 bombers heard clearly each night as they returned to
 Germany

At first the L D V were dispatched to various strategic points - the "Broo", the old Bander Bridge, Banderside Toll. - to spend a night on guard duty. Weapons of defence were anything handy, - clubs, brush shanks, gaips etc

Later, as strategies were revised, and the significance of the A71 Edinburgh to Styr road was evaluated, the old Bander Bridge was selected as a defence point to be defended from trenches overlooking the bridge, and also by concrete blocks. Consequently, part of Banderside Farm cottage was used as a guard house each night for about 6-8 men, 2 of whom mounted guard on the road for approximately 2 hours each. Duties commenced at dusk in summer, and about 7pm in winter when men finished work.

about this time, the LDV was renamed the Home Guard, and the men were issued with "Home Guard" identification stripes to sew on their uniforms.

Within a year of its foundation the Home Guard was also issued with rifles. The Government had managed to acquire from the U.S. at First World War - 303 rifles with suitable ammunition but in limited quantities. Eventually each man was equipped; he kept his rifle at home. As time elapsed, Sten Guns, Hand Grenades, "Molotov Cocktails," and other "modern" weapons were issued, mainly to ensure that officers and men became accustomed to handling them without expending too much ammunition. In general these weapons were too scarce for ordinary platoons to stock them.

Training of the men involved care of equipment,

weapon handling, route marching, occasional rifle practice dependant on availability of live ammunition, map reading and knowledge of 6-figure references

Route marches were held regularly. The surrounding countryside lent itself to sweep and search exercises, eg in the forested part of Blackwood Estate and in the deep valleys of the Tron and Bander Water. One weekend was spent under ~~the~~ canvas at Broom's Brig, all organised by the Stonehouse Home Guard itself. On another occasion the entire Lanarkshire Home Guard participated in a large-scale parade.

Selected Home Guardsmen, who could afford time off work, took part in courses with Regular Army units.

While the Durham Light Infantry were based in Hemilton

Barracloughs, I spent some days absorbing their methods and practices, and taking an active part in their manoeuvres. In contrast, Capt James Menzies, who was in charge of the Intelligence Platoon of the Home Guard in Hamilton, spent some time with a mountain corps in the Cairngorms.

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I was seconded to Capt Menzies' unit where my training included Despatch Riding which involved learning to ride a motor cycle over the ruins of an ancient village, requiring an accurate knowledge of enemy uniforms, badges of rank, weapons, etc. My duties involved bringing up-to-date the large scale maps of our area, and to train other units in map reading and particularly in the use of Six-figure References.

As the War began to turn in our favour after the African campaign and Germany's offensive on the Soviet Union, Home Guard duties around Stonehouse and elsewhere remote from pressure points such as the English Channel, were gradually relaxed

W. V. Anderson

24 November 1997

To be appended:

The first Commanding Officer, "Barry" Anderson, suffered a disability in that he wore an artificial leg, (possibly acquired in World War I) When a lengthy route march was planned, he surmounted any obvious difficulty by borrowing one of "San" Reid's horses.

On one memorable occasion the six platoons of the Stonehouse Home Guards led by the Commanding Officer mounted on a fine horse made an admirable sight as they departed from the Brass, marched up King Street and Townhead Street, along Strathaven Road and past Stonehouse Hospital. When clear of the Hospital, the horse chose its moment to "backfire" loudly, and emit an aroma which stung the nostrils of the troops following on.

The Sergeant Major was heard to mutter in a loud gasp, "Don Gas attacks"!

