Stanton Parish History Recording Project

Personal Reminiscence File:- PR006d

Home Guard - Tale 4 by Tom Gollins

When I was appointed Platoon Commander of the Hazles Platoon, (No 5 Platoon), we were meeting on the dark evenings in a building known as the Keepers Hut. This was a rough timber framed building clad in corrugated iron. It was situated at the corner of the Hazles Wood near the Hazles cottages. It had a fireplace and had been used on shooting days for lunch. Someone had installed a dart board which we used before and after 'official' business.

Occasionally we went to the Village Hall in Stanton upon Hine Heath where we joined with the Stanton Platoon. I recall one parade when Capt. Mackenzie had decided to announce that people would be catagorised as riflemen, bombers and machine gunners. Jack Roberts, a young farmworker was appointed a bomber. His disappointment showed for he was quite a good shot and mills bombs did not appeal to him. "Don't you want to be a bomber Roberts?" said Capt "No I dunna" said Jack. "If a Jerry was after me I'd rather have a rifle. " A smile flitted across the Capt's face. "You wouldn't be running away from him, would you, Roberts?" "Yes I would," said Jack, "If I hadna got a rifle." However things stood and it did not seem to make much difference to the way we trained.

In the spring we had a diversion by receiving instructions in catch as catch can wrestling. The instructor was working in the Maintenance Unit (MU for short) on the Drome. He had been Olympic Champion at Light Weight, I believe. It was thought we should benefit in unarmed combat. He was a pleasant chap and often used me as a subject for demonstration. As a result of his return to wrestling he began to practise. As a further result his shirt collars became too tight! I n his prime he had taken size 17. He was engaged to give a demo in the Wem Town Hall. His 'opponent' was a large policeman from Birmingham who was supposed to comply with whatever Mr Edwards wished to demonstrate. When Mr Edwards had explained how to do a Cross-buttock fall he proceeded to demonstrate on the policeman. Instead of being pliant and falling, the larger man went rigid with resistance and 'crack' - his leg was broken. End of demonstration.

In May 1942 we were taking part in an exercise testing the Wem Home Guard's defences. Our platoon assembled at Bridleway Gate and proceeded across country towards Palm Hill. The scouts Geof Ward and Tom Vaughan led the way along a woodside and came to a gateway. In the riding was a 'defender'. Down dropped Geof Ward in the correct way and fired at the standing defender. As he was so vulnerable I adjudged he had been eliminated, so I called "Advance No. 5." A little later the exercise was ended and we returned home. Next day Capt. was on the phone. "Did your men engage anyone near the wood at Palm Hill?" "Yes" I said, "Geof Ward fired blank at a Home Guard standing in a drive." "I thought something like that must have happened" said the Capt, "When Geof Ward fired, the cap or wadding in the blank cartridge hit the man on the forehead. Had it hit him in the eye it could have been very serious. They heard you call "advance No 5" so I knew it was your platoon. In future instruct your men never to aim directly at anyone, but above them."

When I reported this to the platoon they took the point but young Geof was rather pleased his aim was so good. The others agreed with him.