Stanton Parish History Recording Project

Personal Reminiscence File:- PR006f

Home Guard - Tale 6 by Tom Gollins

In January 1943, I was sent on a week's course of weapon training at Altcar - an army centre for training. Situated between Liverpool and Southport, near Formby, the site was wild with sand dunes giving a rugged terrain.

We received concentrated instructions on a variety of weapons now available to the Home Guard. .300 rifles, Sten guns which looked crude and cheap but were light to carry, Mills bombs and Lewis Guns were covered by the course, as was the best and quickest way to get into a firing position. The use of cover and concealment in stationary positions and battle drill formations for mobile attack were all covered by the course.

Returning home we began to put into practise what I had learned and the platoon began to be an efficient unit.

In Spring we began to practise the battle drill formation on Sunday mornings. We usually met in the Sandhole at the corner of Hazles Wood and used the grass field adjoining. This field was part of Stonehouse Ferm and I had put an electric fence around to prevent the cattle straying through the poor fences against the wood. We had used discarded, telephone wires which were not very conspicuous. Those who were on parade early were told how to get under or over the wire without getting a shock and we proceeded to get organised.

A late arrival named Wellings came to join us and shouts warned him of the wire. He placed his rifle across the wire and promptly got a shock. His piling swivel got caught on the wire so the shocks continued while he tried to untangle his rifle. He was a farm worker and knew about electric fences and after considerable merriment he got free.

Next came Jack Waddilope, a new recruit not yet in uniform and with no rifle. He advanced through the gap in the hedge to join us, hands in pocket, when he walked into the wire and immediately he got a shock. Out came his hands from his pockets and he struck at what he thought was a wasp sting or something like that. Again roars of laughter at his expense. Battle drill would always be remembered for those two incidents.

In June 1943 we were involved in a Demonstration by the Home Guard in North Shropshire at Wem Grammar School's playing field. This was a large field divided by a brook and with a considerable numbers of trees near the school buildings and around the hedge.

Our platoon was asked to give a display of camouflage and concealment. To do this we made use of sugar beet pulp bags which are large hessian sacks. One we coloured to match the brick wall, another a dull green grey to match a tree trunk.

A large crowd came to watch the manoeuvres and stood near the school buildings. To the left of the crowd 60 or 70 yards away was a brick wall in shadow at that time of afternoon. Against this was Reg Spencer in the brick coloured sack. There were some large trees not far away and in front of one of these was Tom Fletcher in the green-grey sack. On the far side of the field was a gully in which four men under Fred Brown were to lie hidden until they received the signal to look over the bank to observe the crowd In the large oak tree on the far side of the field, Geof Ward had climbed and lay along a large branch which came out at right angles to the trunk. He was to be still until given the signal to drop one leg.

When our turn came I was handed a megaphone and told the crowd they were being watched by a number of men who could be seen by them if they could spot them. "One is against the wall". There were mutterings in the crowd and speculation as to which tall etc. Then I asked Sgt. Spencer to walk out. As he came away from the wall there were 'ooo's all round. You could sense the surprise.

Next I said "One is in front of a tree not behind it". Again the mutterings, some pointing to where they thought they could see someone. "Sgt. Fletcher, step out".

Again the 'ooo's.

Next I said "There are four men somewhere in the field. I'm telling them to obs« you. Can you see them?" I knew where they were but I could not see them. Then the order to stand up, and a repeat of 'ooo's.

Next, "Can you see a man in a tree somewhere around the field". Again speculation pointing to different trees. At the given signal Geof Ward dropped a leg and immediately astonished exclamations. That ended our demonstration to loud applause.

When I saw Fred. Brown I said "I couldn't see anything of your helmets when you were to observe the crowd. How did you manage it?"

"We didna put our heads up. They wanna going to see us, I can tell you."

He was not receiving pay so he could hardly be cashiered for disobeying orders. Later the platoon was congratulated on what many thought the best part of the afternoon's demonstration.