

## **D Company, 1st Wilts Battalion, Home Guard (Comprised Box and Colerne Platoons)**

Compiled by Major J Morley (courtesy Philip Martin)

### **Historical Narrative**

1. Foreword by Major J Morley
2. Narrative of Box Platoon up to 1942 (the time of the reorganisation into three Platoons)
3. Narrative of No 1 Platoon by Lieut DW Taylor, 1942-45
4. Narrative of No 2 Platoon by Lieut C McEwan, 1942-45
5. Narrative of No 3 Platoon by Lieut GR Cope, 1942-45
6. Narrative of Colerne Platoon by Major J Morley
7. Narrative of HQ Section by 2nd Lieut CH Fildes

### **1. Foreword by Major J Morley**

In writing this foreword to the history of the Company, I do not propose to go into much detail as the Platoon histories cover most of the ground.

From the first days of the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers) when Major Wade and I were trying to get things started, at a time when it was believed that great events might be expected at any moment, to the time when the Home Guard was stood down, is to me a period full of HG (Home Guard) memories:

- All of the various localities in our Company area from the Ford end of the Colerne ground to Kingsdown Golf Course, from Wadswick to Ditteridge, from Box Station to Quarry Hill; each having such obvious claims as being both vulnerable and vital
- How each section (as they then were) looked on their own particular area as the one and obvious place to expect the enemy, and of what a healthy and desirable frame of mind this was
- How large a piece of country Colerne Platoon was responsible for
- How impatiently we waited for arms and equipment, and of how little we started with, and of how much we seemed to accumulate
- The various schemes for denying the main roads through Box to the enemy
- The first instructors we had from the West Kents, who had only just arrived back from France, and who always gave us double the help we asked for, whether in instructors or in staging a battle for us, the latter being the as near the real thing as their keenness could make it
- The Bath Admiralty HG Commando Section's night attacks, particularly one in Colerne when nine of their own men crawled in at the back of a house and out at the front without the knowledge of the inmates; the house dog knew but was beguiled by one of the party who apparently had added dog-charming as an extra subject to his Commando training
- How one of the same Commandos, in an effort to learn the password allowed a sentry to stand for some minutes on his knuckles, much to the detriment of the knuckles, but no doubt remembering the story of the Spartan boy and the fox, without disclosing his presence
- Weekend camps in Box, where local ingenuity produced great results

- Lower Lease, with its camouflage training course and concrete gun emplacement, which latter will probably greatly puzzle archaeologists of the future
- The Company HQ at Clock House where 2nd Lieut Fildes, supported by his willing staff, coped with much paper and a multitude of records so efficiently that the whole machine worked so smoothly that I was relieved of much worry which I should otherwise have had; and
- The Intelligence Section, who put in so much work behind the scenes and produced by their own efforts maps worthy of an Army Topographical Unit
- All of the training, courses, lectures and training films
- The time when the Company was responsible for guarding Middle Hill Tunnel, and how our hut, luckily when empty, was blown down on to the Great Western line and was met by an express train; and
- CSM Lancaster and his unfailing cheerfulness.

### **Thanks**

My thanks are due for the great support I always received from Captain Skrine when he was second in command, and from Captain Souter when he succeeded Captain Skrine. Perhaps no one knows as I do the amount of work they both put in, and they were largely responsible for the efficiency of the Company, and were loyally backed up by the Platoon Officers.

There is one memory which I mention last as it stands out far above all the others; the memory of the good spirit and tone throughout the Company. Without this, nothing which we may have achieved could have been accomplished, and all our training would have been in vain. Also, apart from anything accomplished, I feel that the HG brought us all together in a common cause and created friendships and a spirit of unity which I hope will long continue.

I wish to thank all ranks for the work they put in, often under difficult conditions, and for the support I invariably had which I shall always remember.

J Morley, Major

Commanding D Company, 1 Battalion, Wilts, Home Guard

### **2. Narrative of Box Platoon**

The LDV Unit which became known later as D Company, 1st Wilts Battalion, HG came into being following a meeting held at Alcombe Manor, Box, within a few days of Mr Eden's wireless appeal and when the following were present:

Mr J Morley, JP - Alcombe Manor

Major CB Northey - Ditteridge House

Mr Wm Martin - Crossways

Mr BW Gibbon - Wormwood Farm

Mr ND Ancell - Kingsdown

Mr CN Fildes - Mount Pleasant

Mr F Bedford - Colerne

Mr W Thompson - Colerne

At this meeting it was decided to form a Unit, combining Box and Colerne, with Mr J Morley in command. Almost immediately, Major C Wade joined Mr Morley and assisted him in the organisation of the Unit until Major Wade left to serve with the RAF.

Owing to the scattered nature of the parish, Box was divided into four sections to which the following Section Commanders were appointed:

Box Village - Mr Wm Martin

Kingsdown - Mr HD Ancell

Ditteridge - Major C Northey

Wadswick - Mr BW Gibbon

Colerne - Mr F Bedford, assisted by Mr W Thompson

Almost immediately after this meeting Mr W Martin resigned as Commander of Box Village Section in favour of Mr WVD Skrine of Kingsmoor, Box. Mr Martin continued for some time to take an active interest in the organisation and many other helpers came forward as time went on.

### **Box Platoon, 1940**

Box Platoon comprised Box Village, Ditteridge, Kingsdown and Wadswick Sections. A number of volunteers registered with the Police following the Government wireless appeal on 14 May 1940 and many others reported direct to the various Section Commanders.

Within a few days, dawn patrols were organised and did duty on the high ground around the village at Box Hill, Kingsdown and Wadswick. After a week of dawn patrolling, working parties were detailed to prepare barricades with farm carts, knife-rest entanglements and other obstacles which were used forthwith to form road blocks at various strategic points on the main roads. These barriers were manned from dusk to dawn with eight men at each barrier doing duty in fours for 3½ hours each. All traffic and pedestrians were stopped and documents examined.

Towards the end of May 1940, meetings were called by Mr J Morley for the purpose of enrolling volunteers and appointing Section (or Squad) Leaders; those selected being:

Box Section No 1 - Mr JH Milsom

Box Section No 2 - Mr W Hemmings (shortly succeeded by Mr U Rogers)

Box Section No 3 - Mr F Richards

Box Section No 4 - Mr JW Browning (shortly succeeded by Mr C Lambert)

Ditteridge Section - Mr F Goulstone

Kingsdown Section - Mr HD Ancell, assisted by Mr J Butler

Wadswick Section - Mr BW Gibbon, assisted by Mr Maxted.

At this time, the combined total strength of these seven Sections was approximately 120 men, of whom 25 to 30 were on duty every night, armed only

with shotguns, a few .22 rifles, a couple of revolvers and a variety of home-made weapons.

### **Patrols and Communications**

On 20 June, when Mr Skrine issued his first official LDV order as Box Commander, a system of *Alarm Call up* was introduced: two Boy Scouts to be on duty every night at Kingsmoor, one being detailed to call out the village LDV by bugle and the other to arrange for the ringing of the church bells. Outlying Sections to be called out by telephone, cyclists and runners.

In July 1940 .300 rifles began to arrive and many will remember the cleaning fatigues which resulted; also 10 rounds of ammunition were issued to those with rifles. This led to intensified training and it should be recorded that all men detailed for night duty on road blocks reported to their respective Section HQ for one hour's rifle and squad drill by NCOs of the West Kents, who were then stationed in the neighbourhood, before going on duty.

Strong points and OPs (Observation Posts) were also built, many evenings and Sundays being devoted to this work. At the end of July, road blocks and the stopping of traffic gave place to night patrolling and OP duty, cyclists being used as a means of communication.

In August 1940 came the first rifle shooting practice on the open range (a red letter event) and a little later the first Lewis Guns were received on which a course of instruction was given by Mr GRC Soutar. Nightly patrols were carried out through the winter of 1940-41, giving place to OP dawn duty during the spring and summer of 1941.

### **Ranks Organised 1941**

When ranks were authorised in March 1941 the position in the Unit was as follows:

Company Commander - Major J Morley

Second-in-Command and Box Platoon Commander - Capt WVD Skrine

Box No 1 Section Commander - Sergt JH Milsom

Box No 2 Section Commander - Sergt U Rogers

Box No 3 Section Commander - Sergt F Richards

Box No 4 Section Commander - Sergt C Lambert

Ditteridge Section Commander - Sergt F Goulstone

Wadswick Section Commander - Sergt B Gibbon (shortly succeeded by Sergt GM Cope)

Kingsdown Section Commander - Sergt HD Ancell (shortly succeeded by Sergt J Butler)

Company Quartermaster - Sergt CH Fildes.

During March 1941, Sergt JH Milsom became Platoon Sergeant and Cpl J Browning became No 1 Section Commander. A little later Cpl GRC Soutar was commissioned and appointed second-in-command to Capt Skrine.

Signalling instruction under L/Cpl C Lancaster was now a feature of the training and it was not long before all Sections had their own Signallers efficient in Semaphore and Morse. L/Cpl Lancaster did a good job here and it may also be mentioned that he was responsible for coaching the cadets when the corps was first formed.

A Social Branch was formed and successfully organised by a committee appointed by various sections, with Sergt JH Milsom as honorary secretary.

### **The Year 1942**

Night duty during the winter of 1941-42 was similar to that of the previous winter with OP dawn duty commencing again in the spring of 1942 and continuing up to the cessation of night duties in August of the same year.

Early in 1942 there was a reorganisation, when Box, Ditteridge, Wadswick and Kingsdown Sections were merged into No 1 Platoon under Capt Skrine with Lieut Soutar second-in-command and the following senior NCOs:

Platoon Sergeant - Sergt J Browning

No 1 Section - Sergt DW Taylor

No 2 Section - Sergt H Hulbert

No 3 Section - Sergt C McEwan

No 4 Section (Ditteridge) - Sergt P Ody (shortly succeeded by Sergt C Lancaster)

No 5 Section (Kingsdown) - Sergt J Butler

No 6 Section (Wadswick) - Sergt GN Cope

In May 1942, Platoon Sergt J Browning was appointed SSM (Squadron Sergeant Major), Sergt Cope becoming Platoon Sergt, with Sergt N Toghill taking his place as No 6 Section Commander.

Two successful camps were held during the summer of 1942 when L/Cpl Chapman Webb contributed largely to the successful results through his efforts as caterer and camp cook. By now the Unit was fully armed with a great variety of weapons including Northover Projectors, Spiget Mortars and Smith Gun with automatic arms and many types of grenades which called for a good deal of specialist training, frequently with live ammunition and grenades.

In August 1942, Sergt C McEwan was commissioned and left the Unit to become Battalion Camouflage Officer, his place in No 3 being filled by Sergt A Rickson. Then in October, L/Cpl J Sanby-Thomas was appointed Company MO with the rank of Captain and almost immediately commenced an extensive series of lectures and demonstrations in the art of First Aid. The Battalion FSI's also assisted with further lectures and courses and, in addition, a number of instructional films were shown.

Firing practice was regularly carried out on both open and indoor ranges and this was generally accepted as the most enjoyable part of the training. A number of

men attended specialist courses and a good deal of time was devoted to battle drill and tactical exercises.

In March 1943, Capt Skrine left the village immediately after a further reorganisation, when Box Platoon was divided into three separate Platoons, the position then being:

Major J Morley - Company Commander

Capt GRC Soutar - Second-in-Command

Sergt CH Fildes - QM

Sergt C Lancaster - CSM

No 1 Platoon - 2nd Lieut J Browning

Sergts DW Taylor and CR Field

No 2 Platoon - 2nd Lieut C McEwan

Sergts H Hulbert and A Rickson

No 3 Platoon - 2nd Lieut GE Cope

Sergts J Butler and C Toghil

### **3. Narrative of No 1 Platoon, 1942-45**

This Platoon was commanded by 2nd Lieut Browning until July 1944, when he was succeeded by Lieut Taylor. Sergt Field became Platoon Sergt, the Section Commanders being Sergt Hillman, Cpl Hinton and Cpl Perkins. Later an Intelligence Section was formed under Cpl Lambert who was eventually succeeded by Cpl Martin.

The Platoon Headquarters was at Lower Leaze. Work was soon in progress to strengthen this post and a considerable number of Sundays were occupied with pick, shovel and concrete mixer, in making an emplacement for the Spigot Mortar. Sites were also found for two Northover Projectors and several alternative positions for the LMG (Light Machine Gun). The Fougasse (explosive mine) was dug in and both sides of the road connected by Field Telephone, altogether making a formidable strong point.

To ensure that all was in readiness for any eventuality, a weekend camp was held at the post under active conditions. During the early hours of Sunday morning an incident was staged which brought the Platoon to Action Stations. Wives and friends were invited to tea and entertained with demonstrations of Battle Drill, Arms Drill and Spigot Mortar Drill and First Aid. This concluded a very instructive and enjoyable weekend.

Training was carried on unceasingly in Field Craft, Patrolling, Camouflage, Map Reading etc. and the never-ending weapon training, with firing practice both on the open and miniature ranges. A call came for volunteers to clean and stack shells at a local Ordnance Depot and this met with a ready response.

Continued efforts were made by the Platoon Commander and NCOs to maintain a high state of efficiency and at last a real Duty Order came, to guard Middle Hill Railway Tunnel. The thought of every Home Guard was that D-Day was near and all

were full of enthusiasm to do duty, with still a hope of having a shot at the enemy. It is noteworthy to record that Sergt Field was the recipient of a Certificate of Good Service.

The Stand Down Order was received with a feeling of relief and yet, at the same time, with a feeling of regret, and when the Platoon attended the last parade of the Battalion at Chippenham, all realised they formed part of a very large and efficient army.

DWF Taylor

Lieut No 1 Platoon

#### **4. Narrative of No 2 Platoon, 1942-45**

On taking command of this Platoon, the first thing I did was to arrange my battle sections. Following this, I had a set idea of how my men were to be trained and immediately started putting this training into being, my one idea being to get men trained in all they should know commencing with arms drill and squad drill all over again as I found men are inclined to get slack if they are not kept up to these two items.

Having got a standard of efficiency which I considered fairly good, I carried my training still further in the training of bombers, Lewis Gunners, Northover and Spigot Mortar teams, also Field-craft and camouflage, in which the men became very interested and efficient. Exercises, night training and raids were arranged on other Platoons and this gave the men a chance to bring out their training and we, as a Platoon, were proud of our achievements.

We had a spirit of comradeship which made every man proud of his Platoon - each man picked his own pal and I demanded of all that each man stuck to his pal in and out of any tight corner they might find themselves in. This created a fine brotherly spirit which stuck to the platoon throughout its being and still stands today as the platoon has a monthly outing in Bath to a show and a few drinks.

I wish to mention the worthy award of a Certificate of Merit, granted by the GGC Southern Command to Platoon Sergt FE Hulbert, and to give credit to the following: NCOs Sergt Rickson; Cpls Hayden, Tatchell, Fairbank; L/Cpls Ettles, Henderson, Dorley, Hill - not forgetting L/Cpl Sawyer, now with the BLA (British Liberation Army). I found them keen chaps, always ready to give their time in arranging exercises and always ready to give of their time in arranging exercises and raids. They used to meet at my house and spend many hours discussing plans so we always knew exactly what we were going to do and were prepared for any snags we might run up against.

Our HQ was a static defence post at Hill Farm and we had a defence which was never pierced by any Section or Platoon. This defence the NCOs and myself worked out on a large scale map (which one of my junior NCOs spent a great deal of time to produce) and a box of tacks which represented the defence.

My platoon was always self-supporting. I gave my men to understand that it was no use expecting the QMS (Quartermaster Stores) to be round the corner with the rations and we had many places earmarked for a source of supplies (which the QMS didn't know about) and on this footing we produced some of the finest scroungers the British Army has ever seen. I remember one instance when we had to *stand to* all day with no source of rations from HQ but every man partook of a good stew. This was only made possible by the platoon scroungers. On this particular occasion the cook was busy getting the dinner ready with one or two NCOs acting as cook's fatigue, when we received the order to move off and I shall never forget the cook's face as he looked at me and said, *Whatever am I going to do with all this, Sir? It's no use now.* I said, *You carry on, I will arrange to come back for you and the stew,* which I did. The fire was re-kindled at a new position and the stew brewed merrily on, every man enjoying a good dinner, including myself. We had many other instances which could be recorded but space is required for other Platoons, so we, as No 2 Platoon, will say *Adieu*.

It is with regret we stand down as it brought a fine body of men together and I am proud to have commanded such men and to have instilled the spirit of comradeship which was so needed in the time we served. We are also happy that the part we played as Home Guards was no small matter in hastening the downfall of Prussianism and all that it stood for.

C McEwan

Lieut No 2 Platoon

### **5. Narrative of No 3 Platoon, 1942-45**

Upon the reorganisation of D Company, Box Home Guard in March 1943, I was given the command of No 3 Platoon, comprising mainly of Wadswick and Kingsdown sections with a few men from Box, Sgt Butler being Platoon Sgt. It was a very scattered Platoon, reaching as far afield as Wormwood and Lower and Upper Wadswick on one side, and Kingsdown and Ashley on the other. The men were very keen which, no doubt, accounted for the high percentage attending parades.

We were given our post at the Lye, which lies on the south side of Lower Leaze. Our role then being static, it was necessary to plan a system of defence. There was very little natural defence and, as the fields were being used as grazing for cattle, we could only have plans of trenches etc. drawn on paper and in the event of Action Stations we should have had to set to, to get the necessary trenches dug.

Our armaments consisted of 1 Smith Gun, manned by Cpl Reed, L/Cpl Earl, Ptes Cole and Moules; 1 Spigot, manned by Sgt Razey, Ptes Dean, Jenkins and Osbourne; 1 LMG (Light Machine Gun), those capable of using the same being L/Cpl Gingell, Ptes Ford and Beer; and a number of Rifles and Stens. We also had a Fougass dug in on the Devizes Road.

The O Group and Sections were formed. O Group consisted of Platoon Sgt Butler, 2nd in command, Cpl Head and Pte Vaudin, intelligence. No 1 Section was under Sgt Toghill until he was transferred to Melksham soon after the Section was formed; it



was then put in the charge of Cpl Reed. No 2 Section was under Sgt Razy and No 3 under Cpl Bayliss. Each Section comprised a Section Leader and 8 men. Camps and Courses were very well attended. The Platoon under my command was found to be the most unfortunate of the three in that the nearest buildings in which we could sleep were a matter of 300 to 400 yards away, which I considered was too far away from the post. But, at the practice weekend *Stand-to* I was able to acquire the use of two army tents, this being possible through Pte Jenkins' mentioning the need for same to a certain army officer. The weather for this camp was anything but good. The rain must have had an encouraging effect on personnel for they turned out in grand style. This made it necessary to go scrounging for food from a Platoon which turned out fewer men than expected. Some housewives also, I'm afraid, were left short of cakes for Sunday afternoon tea. In spite of the weather, everyone voted the weekend a great success and, working under such conditions, our cook was a marvel. I don't think it wise to mention his name or I'm sure Mrs Nicholson will find him something to do to pass his Sunday mornings away.

Various courses were generally represented by someone from my Platoon. I myself attended Bulford and Colerne for weekend Bombing, Chippenham for Gas, and Lanhill twice. Toghill (when Cpl) attended Bulford for a Bombing Course; he was complimented there on being the best thrower who had so far thrown at the school. Sgt Butler and Cpl Reed attended Corston for a weekend course for NCOs, L/Cpl Gingell attended Lanhill for a weekend course on Bombing.

We must not forget Battle Drill in which great keenness was shown. I think we were second to none in this, so keen in fact that on one occasion, when a wall was the obstacle, one member took it with him! The remainder of the Sunday morning was spent dry-walling. I must mention that the culprit carried on the movement as though nothing unusual had happened. Bruised limbs perhaps, but spirit - no; nothing could have bruised that; he was one of the keenest.

When the order for *Stand-down* came, I think most ranks felt a little disappointed in not being able to carry on till the end of the war. Also I think they would have liked to have tried our weapons out on real targets. We had in mind to approach our esteemed CC (Col Carrington) for permission to allow our FSIs, CSMs Larcombe and Ruty, to pass our Fourgasse in the truck and let us have a go at them, but thinking that permission *may* have been given, we dropped the matter as we may have injured our friends. That would not have been *Goodenough*.

I should like to thank all the members of the Platoon for their support. When volunteers were called for, for extra duty or fatigues, I invariably got them, even when it meant extra turns on duty.

GR Cope

Lieut No. 3 Platoon

## **6. Narrative of Colerne Platoon**

Within a few days of Mr Eden's broadcast, calling for volunteers for the LDV, a meeting was held in Colerne Schools at which Colonel Hore Ruthven explained the

role of the LDV and how it would be administered. Mr F Bedford was appointed as Platoon Commander.

After a time, the Platoon was taken over by Lieut Henderson, who was succeeded by Lieut W Thompson, who commanded the Platoon with great success from April 1942, until his death in December 1944, when 2nd Lieut WJ Philpott took over the Platoon. Other officers were 2nd/Lieut HC Russell and 2nd/Lieut W Cameron Mackintosh.

Many names had been received before the above-mentioned meeting, and it was possible to start dawn and dusk patrols and OPs at once. The building of road blocks, at Hunters Hall and Lucknam (Bath) Lodge, was immediately started, at which all traffic was stopped and examined. The Hunters Hall Blockhouse was of no small size, if later found to be of questionable strategic value, and was completed by the Platoon in such a short time as to suggest that it was the forerunner of the pre-fabricated buildings of today. In these very early days, weapons and equipment were very anxiously awaited, and the Platoon had only twelve rifles, but were firing with .22 rifles in a field near Lucknam Lodge. On the arrival of the Suffolks at Ashwicke, the Platoon was very fortunate in having the advantage of regular instruction, and this was continued by the Wiltshires when they succeeded the Suffolks.

On the departure of troops from Ashwicke, the Platoon came under the RAF for operational orders, becoming part of the defence scheme of the aerodrome, and having RAF instructors and the use of the Range at Duncombe Bottom available to them. Among the many night exercises in which the Platoon took part on their own ground, perhaps the most successful were those in which the Bath Admiralty Home Guard (Commando Section) were the attackers.

The administration work of the Platoon, ie the keeping of records, stores and equipment, for the greater part of the life of the Unit was carried out by Sergeant TWB Ward with great efficiency, he being awarded a Certificate of Good Service. The COs carried out their duties with great keenness which, combined with the spirit of all members of the Unit, resulted in a well-trained and keen Platoon.

J Morley

Major

## **7. Narrative of Headquarters Section**

As a result of the first meeting at Alcombe Manor in May 1940, CH Fildes formed the records and laid the basis of Company Offices. In the early days, no special office accommodation was provided, records being kept at Alcombe Manor and by CH Fildes at his home. For a time Mr AW Northey gave valuable assistance.

It was arranged that Battle Headquarters should be the Platoon HQ at Kingsmoor. This arrangement functioned until early in 1942 when premises were obtained at the Clock House, Box.

In March 1941 CH Fildes was appointed CQMS (company quartermaster sergeant) and when the Clock House was taken over, Headquarters Staff was formed by the addition of Pte W Dermott, who assisted in clerical work, and later by Pte Fincham, who acted as DR. Both these were later promoted Corporal to control storemen etc and Pte Sumner was appointed DR. Sgt J Browning was promoted CSM in May 1942.

Up to this time, Capt Skrine had been in command of Box Platoon and also 2nd in command of the Company. When he left the district in February 1943, Box was formed into three Platoons and Lieut GRC Soutar was appointed Captain and 2nd in command of Company. The Platoon's Office and records were taken over by Company Office and Cpl Clothier and Pte Chaffey (afterwards Corporal), taken on Company HQ Staff. Sgt Lancaster was promoted CSM in March 1943, in place of CSM Browning, who had been appointed 2nd Lieut in command of No 1 Platoon. In addition to his duties as 2nd in command, Captain Soutar carried out the duties of Training Officer and Ammunition Officer, and was assisted in the latter by Cpl Dermott and later by Pte Richards, Cpl Dermott's office work being taken over by Cpl Chaffey. CQMS Fildes was appointed 2nd/Lieut in November 1943, remaining in charge of Company Office.

An Intelligence Section had been gradually built up under Sgt Hogbin and, later, when an Intelligence Officer was appointed, he being unable to take on the responsibility owing to pressure of business, Cpl Lambert was appointed 2nd Lieut.

The Company Office functioned throughout in complete harmony, and the whole staff worked unselfishly.

CH Fildes  
2nd/Lieut