



HOMEGUARD

Was the Home Guard an effective fighting force?

Source 1

Birth of the
Home Guard
May 14, 1940

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It was on the evening of May 14th, 1940 that the Right Honorable Anthony Eden, M.C., the then Secretary of State for War, broadcast an address to the British people. He said in part, -

"I want to speak to you tonight about a form of warfare which the Germans have been employing so extensively against Holland and Belgium We are going to ask you to help in a manner which I know will be welcome to thousands of you. The Government has received inquiries from all over the Kingdom from men who wish to do something for the defense of the country. Now is your opportunity. We want large numbers of such men between the ages of 17 and 65 to come forward now and offer their services. The name of the new Force will be Local Defense Volunteers. In order to volunteer what you have to do is to give in your name at your local police station"

The result of the broadcast was electrifying.

By May 20th in a period of only six days, 250,000 volunteers had come forward.

By the middle of July in 1940 the Force had reached the figure of 1,300,000 volunteers.

By the middle of November, the Home Guard numbered 1,700,000.

Cabinet report on the forming of the British Home Guard.



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The Local
Defence
Volunteers.

(5) There had been a good deal of criticism both in the press and among Members of Parliament of the lack of organisation and discipline among the L.D.V.'s. It was no doubt difficult to reach a very high standard with men who gave part-time service only, on an unpaid basis. On the other hand, the L.D.V.'s. were now some 500,000 strong and most of them were very keen.

There was also a very widespread demand from men of all ages to be allowed to serve in the armed forces or at least to be given weapons in order to defend their homes. This demand could not be ignored.

The Secretary of State for War described certain steps which he was taking to meet this situation. The organisation of the L.D.V.'s. had now become too heavy a task to impose on the existing staffs of the Home Defence Forces. It was proposed to reorganise them under separate Central and Local Commanders of their own. The whole organisation would, however, remain under the orders of General Ironside. In order to assist in training, full-time permanent instructors would be taken on. Further assistance in training would be given by drawing on the Officers' Emergency Reserve. (This had originally consisted of 11,000 ex-Officers, of whom some 3,000 had not yet been found posts.)

Rifles from the
United States of
America.

(6) The Secretary of State said that the L.D.V.'s. were at the moment largely a "broomstick" Army. Rifles were being provided for them as quickly as possible. We had a supply of rifles which had been kept in store since the last war, and which were now being reconditioned. Another 500,000 rifles were ready to leave the United States. According to the original intention, these would have been divided equally between this country and France, but arrangements were now being made which would ensure that the whole consignment came to us.

The Prime Minister emphasised the importance of getting these rifles shipped at the earliest possible moment. Nothing must be left undone to get these rifles as quickly as possible.

Problems with supplying guns to the Home Guard.



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German reaction

The immediate reaction of the German authorities to the news of the formation of such a force was to announce that in the event of its members being captured by them with arms in their hands, they would be treated as "Franc-tireurs" and shot. Dr. Goebbels at first referred to the L.D.V. as a "rabble" and a "mob of amateurs armed with broom-sticks and darts", but it was not long after that, however, before he was obliged to revise his comments. He was able, apparently, to find out that this was not a group of "amateurs", that it was not armed with "broom-sticks and darts" but that it was a very vital force, playing an important part in the defence of its country. It was then that Dr. Goebbels referred to the L.D.V. as "gangsters and murderers - franc-tireurs".

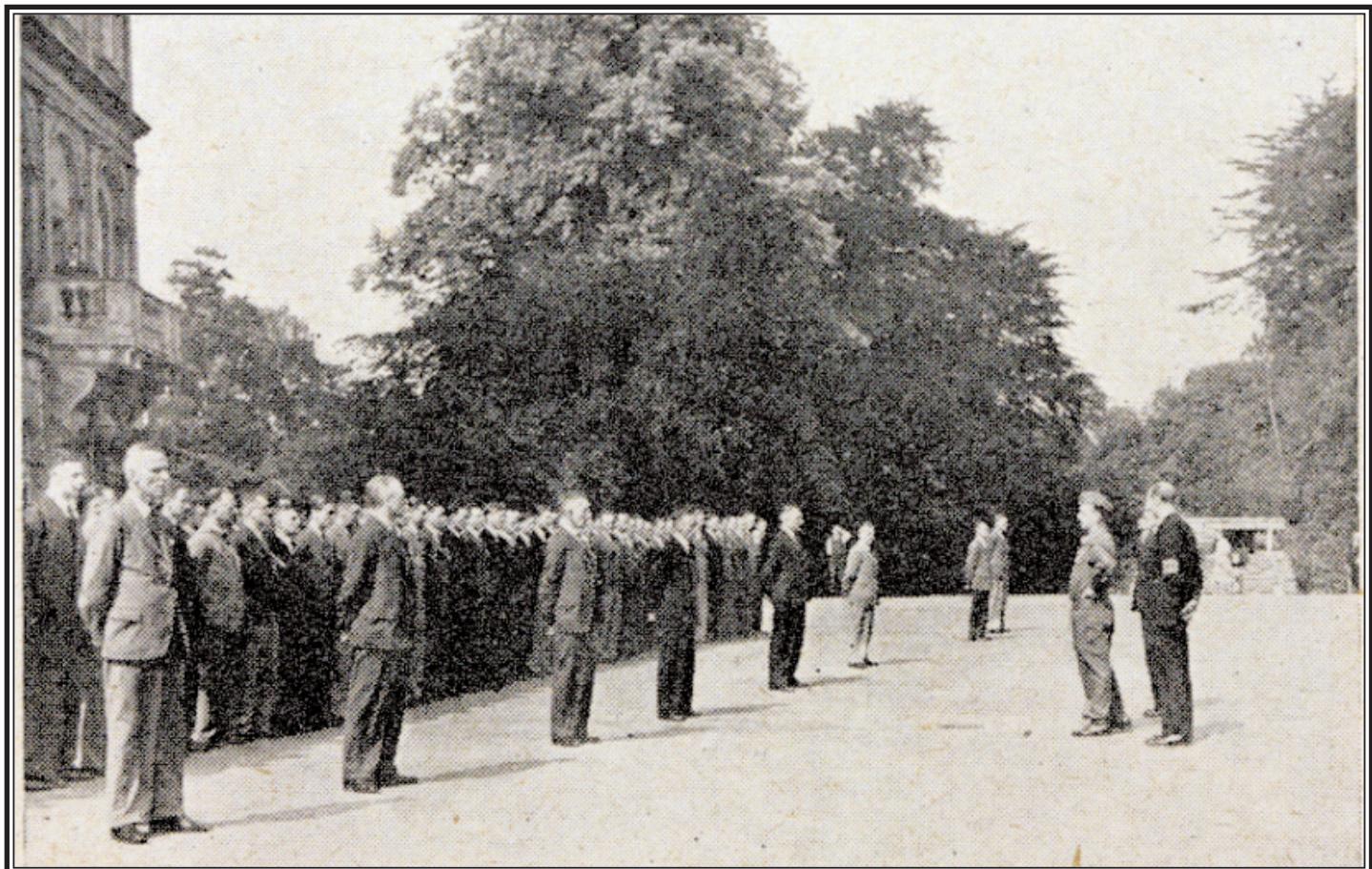
Cabinet report on the German reaction to the British Home Guard.



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Source 4



June 'before and after' Extract from the Southern Guard
Newspaper. June 1941.



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Source 5



READY FOR ANY EMERGENCY.

'Aircraft overhead' Extract from the Southern Guard Newspaper.
June 1941.



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Source 5 (pg 2)

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Thirty years of service with the Army is not a bad record, and Capt. W. I. Jones, M.C., who is now attached to the 5th Battalion as Capt. Adjt. Q.M., is still an efficient and hard-working officer.

He enlisted in the Welsh Regiment in 1912 and served overseas during the last war. He was commissioned in 1916, and awarded the M.C. at Delville Wood (Somme) in 1918, being wounded during the offensive. After serving with the Army of Occupation in Germany, he was demobilised in 1920.

In 1929 he re-enlisted in the Welsh Regiment and served as Regimental Q.M.Sgt. until 1939. He came to the 5th Battalion in June, 1941, and his happy manner has made him a host of friends throughout the Western area of the Southern.



Capt. W. I. Jones

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Cartoon + Descrip of Captain Extract from the Southern Guard
Newspaper. August- September 1941



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Source 5 (pg3)



a training camp of its own, but Sunday courses are arranged at Wolstonbury near Hassocks, in the Southdowns where there is a 300-yards rifle range. Manoeuvres of various sorts are carried out in ideal surroundings.

“—and I trust you men have benefited from your manœuvres!”

[By courtesy of “Lilliput”]

Cartoon + Descrip of Captain Extract from the Southern Guard
Newspaper. August- September 1941