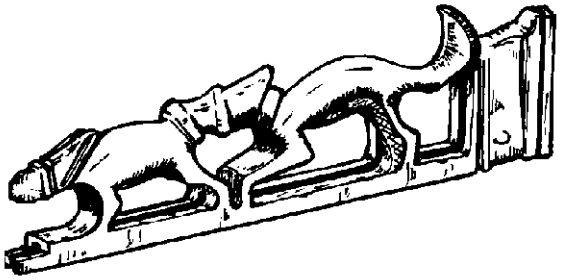
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

Development of “A” Coy 3rd Battalion Home Guard
Platoon 1
AMPTHILL

Kevan J. Fadden.

Development of the Ampthill Home Guard.

Set in context with the National and Local Groups.

On the 14th. May 1940 after a BBC News broadcast, Anthony Eden put out a "Call to Arms for Local Defence Volunteers." It was his first speech as Secretary of State for War. "There would be no pay but uniforms and arms would be provided".

No doubt spurred on by the evacuation of Dunkirk between 27th. May and 4th. June the response nationally was amazing. In Ampthill, by the 3rd. June a unit was organised to the point of starting a Muster roll with Edward O'Shea of Chandos Road shown as the first recruit. By the end of June, 26 men had volunteered with a further 22 signed up in July.

Overtaken by the number of volunteers nationally, the government responded by providing arm bands with LDV stenciled in large letters to be worn until denim uniforms and forage caps could be made. There were no arms available at this time. Improvisation was the order of the day, unofficially, shotguns, old cutlasses and muskets from museums were pressed into use together with homemade pikes and broom handles to practice drill.

An appeal was made on the 23rd. of May to anyone owning shotguns or sporting rifles to hand them to police stations for use by the LDV. Twelve bore shotgun cartridges were produced with a single shot ball. Most LDV volunteers privately hoped they would never be used as the gun barrels may not have taken the excessive load.

Under pressure from the public, the government issued some .303 SMLE rifles. (It is known that at least two were issued to the nearby Clophill unit only to be withdrawn to re-arm the troops evacuated from Dunkirk - personal recollection.)

In June Winston Churchill took a hand, he disliked the Anthony Eden inspired name L,DV so he pushed for a change to "Home Guard" which fitted in with his rhetoric and on 22nd. July the new name was launched.

By July, .300 Springfield, Remington and Ross rifles were brought in from America and issued, rather haphazardly to the recruits. By the end of August, however 483,924 had been issued, 63,440 were to replace the shotguns and sporting rifles previously collected. Even so many units were under armed with insufficient cartridges to allow target practice. On average 10 per rifle were available.

In July,the war office announced that volunteers would be entitled to steel helmets, service respirators, greatcoats, leather gaiters, boots, leather belts and haversacks.

Rapidly the original concept of the Home Guard's function was changed by the events of the war. The British Expeditionary Force retreat from Dunkirk and the overrunning of the Continent by the German forces made what had been a watching /reporting back brief into a guerilla mission to repel the expected invasion. The function was officially redefined to include *"delaying and obstructing the enemy advance by any means in their power."* New more aggressive tactical instructions from the War Office included instructions of how to deal with enemy armour "*From the moment the enemy tanks are located they must be harried, hunted, sniped, and ambushed without respite until they are destroyed"*.

A tall order for men armed with a few rifles and molotov cocktails. (bottles full of petrol with a rag fuse).

As we now know, the Invasion did not take place but it is fair to speculate that the very existence of the Home Guard, coupled with the propaganda value of such a force helped to persuade the Germans to stop at the channel. It certainly helped morale in the British people at the time.

Some photographs of the Ampthill unit, together with some memories of older residents help to show how the supply of "uniform" and arms fitted in with the pattern of the rest of the Country and give some idea of the development of these brave men into a fighting force.

Photo 1. Shows a platoon marching in Dunstable Street.

The street lamp was typical of the time with no bulb due to blackout regulations. At the head of the column the right marker was wearing medal ribbons from earlier service. Most were wearing khaki denims with no boots or gaiters, one was wearing mufti with a forage cap and one full mufti. Both could be recent

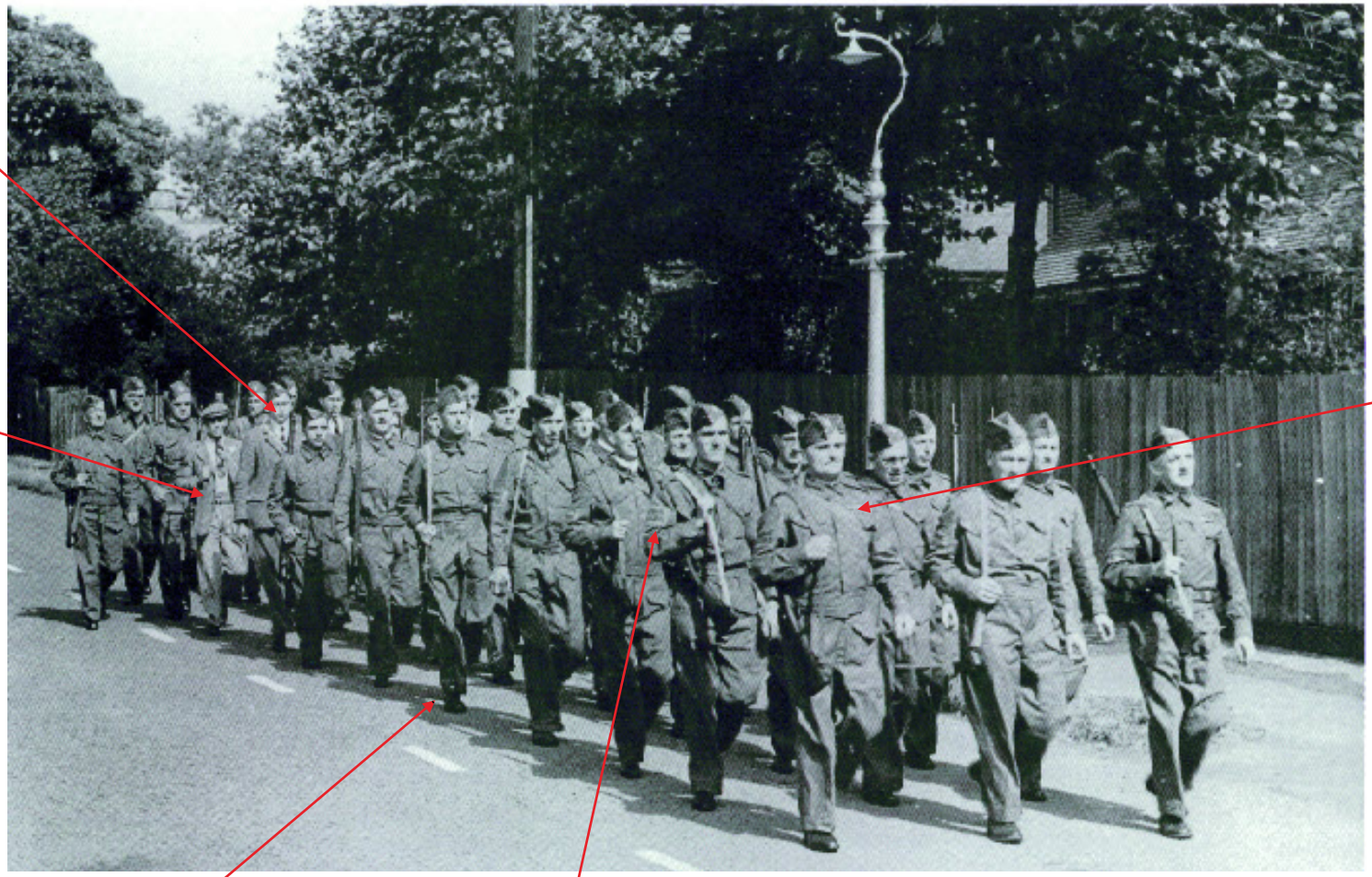


Photo 1. Marching towards the town in Dunstable Street.

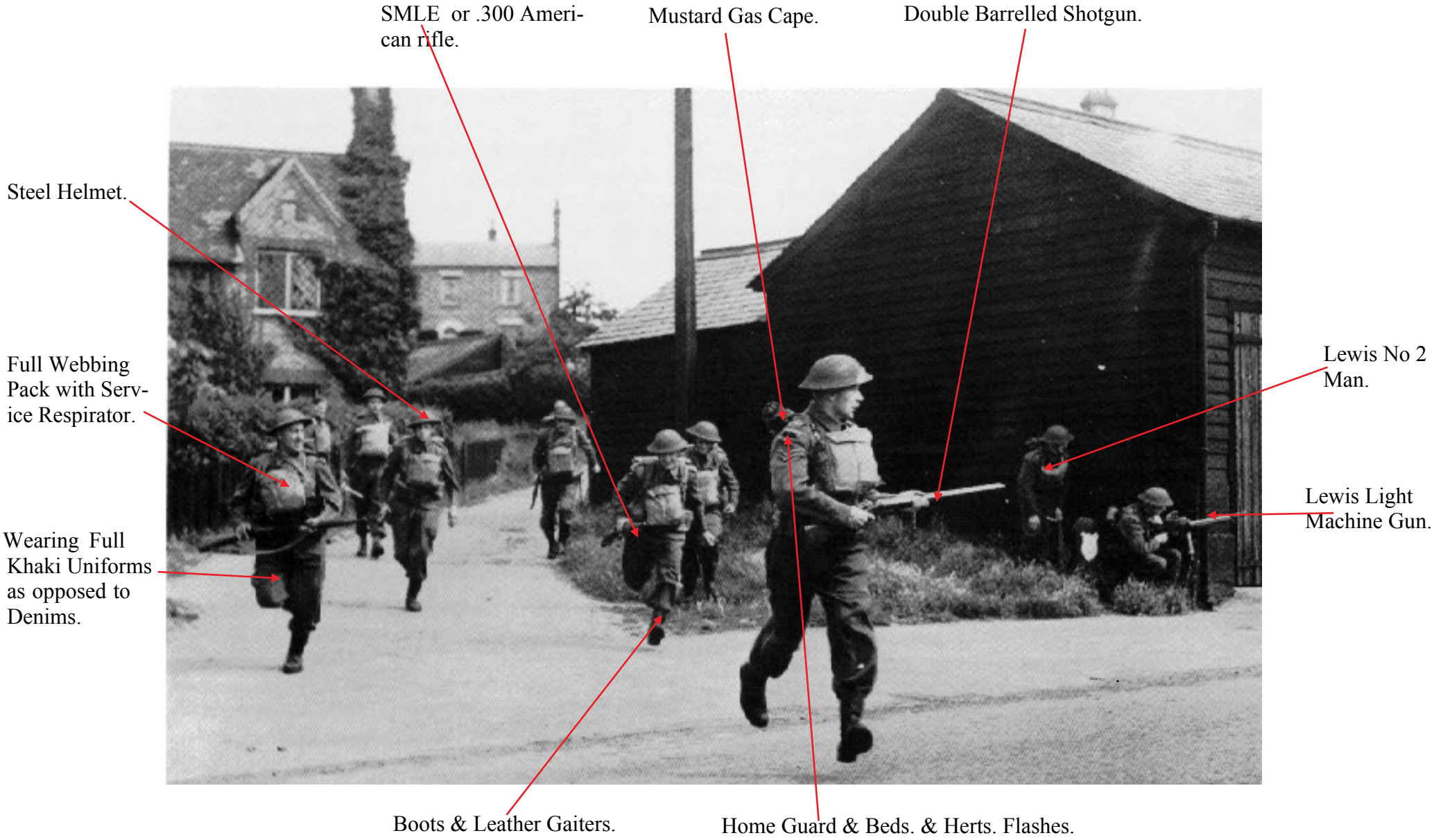


Photo 2. Exercise at bottom of Blacksmith's lane. Fairly well equipped but short of weapons. Corporal still carrying a shot gun.

recruits waiting for their denims to arrive or their size may not have been available.

The photograph 2. at the bottom of Blacksmith's Lane (now Park Hill) was obviously taken after photo 1, they were all wearing full khaki uniforms. By this time they had steel helmets with camouflage nets, full webbing packs, and service respirators. They were sporting Beds. & Herts. Flashes (Black and Yellow) together with Home Guard shoulder titles.
On the top of the back pack they were carrying rolled up mustard gas capes. (A cape of gas proofed material with a hump on the back to cover all the carried equipment).

The weapons are interesting as the corporal was carrying a 12 Bore Shotgun. Several had rifles, they could have been SMLE .303 or more likely American .300's from WW1. One man offering cover fire from behind the barn had a Lewis Light Machine Gun at the ready. His No 2 is standing behind ready to move forward. (Two and sometimes three men were allocated to a Lewis Gun due to the shortage of weapons generally).

Records held in the Flitwick Library, show that on 1st. February 1942 "A" Coy. 3rd Bedfordshire Battalion Home Guard the complement of Platoon No. 1 Ampthill was, Officers 5, other Ranks 69, Rifles 59, Lewis Guns 4, Tommy Guns 1, Northover Projectors (Spigot Mortars) 4*.

*This list included 15 Medical Section members.

In addition to Ampthill No. 1, the following platoons were reported.
No. 2 Maulden, No. 3 Haynes, No. 4 Clophill, No. 5 Silsoe which included Greenfield, Flitton and Pulloxhill. No. 6 Barton, No. 7 Flitwick, No. 8 Wrest Park Silsoe.

Total reported complement of the Battalion:

Platoons 8, Officers 28, Rifles 577, Lewis Guns 19, Tommy Guns 5, Northover Projectors 4, Flame Throwers 8.

A Tactical Exercise code named SPEED was held on the 16 th. August 1942 to practise the defence of Ampthill & Flitwick by the Home Guard in conjunction with all Civil Defence Services.

Detailed instructions were given for example:-
Dealing with parachutists (seen landing).

"If they drop close at hand, "Shoot them as they bounce". Probably everyone in the Village will have seen them drop from the air and will be trying to estimate the exact position where they landed, but men at nearest barricades will see much better and will be able to follow the enemy movements after landing, so they have the very important task of locating the enemy position exactly, and giving correct information to our own attacking party when it arrives.
To do this, the man nearest the enemy follows them up to keep them in sight, and his rear man follows far enough behind just to keep his front man in view. The rear man knows, (from his N.C.O.) exactly where our attacking party is to arrive, (according to the enemy landing), and this rear man must join them immediately on their arrival to give his information about the enemy, and guide them to his forward scout.
The success of the attack, in locating and engaging the enemy before they have time to arm themselves and organise, may depend entirely upon the speed and accurate work of these 2 men at the nearest barricade".

This was the situation that our parents and Grandparents had to endure on the Home Front, many families had their loved ones away split up fighting the enemy at sea, in the air, in the desert or even locked up in a prisoner of war camp. The Home Guard and the other Civil Defence units were usually made up of older men and young men waiting call up. The evidence from the Ampthill Roll is testament to the changing situation. (see next page)
The lasting effect on the Ampthill landscape can be seen in a survey carried out by this Society to celebrate the 50 year anniversary.

Ampthill Home Guard Muster Roll Complete

Forename	Surname	Road	Town	Date of birth	Enrolment	Discharge
William	Amiss	15 Woburn Street	Ampthill	17/12/1907	04/06/1941	01/08/1941
Ronald	Anderson	26 Flitwick Road	Ampthill	23/07/1910	11/09/1940	03/05/1944
Chales	Barnes	73 Dunstable St.	Ampthill	17/03/1908	25/07/1940	03/05/1944
Richard	Barton	27 Dunstable St.	Ampthill	02/03/1911	02/07/1940	19/12/1940
Bertie	Beck	25 Oliver St	Ampthill	11/10/1906	19/06/1940	
George	Billington	3 Meadow Way	Ampthill	07/10/1920	07/07/1941	16/07/1942
George	Brooke-Pike	Brandrith Ho Church	Ampthill	22/03/1899	26/11/1941	21/05/1942
Charles	Buckingham	33 Flitwick Road	Ampthill	10/04/1900	30/11/1940	
Horace	Bundy	26 Grange Road	Ampthill	05/04/1924	16/03/1941	06/02/1942
Victor	Bunting	Alameda Road	Ampthill	14/01/1913	14/07/1940	03/09/1942
Earnest	Burge	13 Arthur St.	Ampthill	17/12/1886	21/06/1940	18/11/1940
Jack	Burgess	29 Oliver Street	Ampthill	31/07/1920	11/11/1940	08/10/1942
R. G.	Burrows	1 Sand Road	Flitton	27/04/1916	19/08/1940	
Ronald	Butcher	26 Park St.	Ampthill	21/11/1912	14/08/1940	
Gordon	Cartwright	Wayside Alameda Rd	Ampthill	02/08/1896	19/06/1940	01/09/1942
Archie	Coleman	23 The Crescent	Ampthill	07/10/1885	25/11/1940	06/02/1942
Walter	Coles	Post Office Church S	Ampthill	17/12/1889		14/05/1941
John	Copperwheat	106 Dunstable St.	Ampthill	30/12/1885	22/07/1940	
Cyril	Copperwheat	Grange Stud Farm	Ampthill		19/06/1940	04/04/1941
Douglass	Corbin	Lansdown Flitwick Rd	Ampthill	30/09/1901	03/12/1940	
Albert	Dalley	27 Station Road	Ampthill	17/08/1884	21/06/1940	
Herbert	Daniels	39 Crescent	Ampthill	09/11/1900	16/07/1940	
Harry	Dawson	61 Station Road	Ampthill	21/07/1898	17/08/1940	07/11/1941
Stanley	Deller	7 Dunstable Street	Ampthill	17/11/1922	27/01/1941	15/06/1942
William	Deller	7 Dunstable Street	Ampthill	20/08/1915	20/02/1941	08/04/1941
Charles	Dickinson	Uplands The Ave.	Ampthill	25/09/1883	01/02/1941	
John	Dix	2 Park Hill	Ampthill	12/05/1911	08/07/1940	10/09/1941
William	Ellis	Hazlewood Lane	Ampthill	27/12/1903	10/07/1940	
Percy	Elmore	17 Oliver St	Ampthill	27/12/1903	10/07/1940	
Frederick	Fairey	12 Claridges Road	Ampthill	26/12/1915	25/06/1942	
Edward	Fairmaner	21 Grange Rd.	Ampthill	30/09/1903	22/06/1940	
Arthur	Fleet	10 Dunstable St.	Ampthill	31/01/1919	22/06/1940	31/01/1919
Harold	Foord	7 Flitwick Road	Ampthill	07/10/1907	26/11/1940	
Charles	Foss	14 Deparys Ave	Bedford			30/09/1943
Donald	Gamble	2 Crescent	Ampthill	18/01/1913	10/07/1940	12/06/1942
Bernard	Gamble	2 The Crescent	Ampthill	11/11/1914	31/03/1941	24/07/1942
Frederick	Gamble	2 The Crescent	Ampthill	28/06/1915	02/07/1941	07/11/1941
Donald	Gater	14 Woburn ST.	Ampthill	08/01/1913	22/06/1940	07/11/1941
Harold	Gater	14 WoburnStreet	Ampthill	18/01/1913	22/06/1940	07/11/1941
Ronald	Googe	36 Dunstable st.	Ampthill	09/12/1920	16/07/1940	21/12/1940
Kenneth	Googe	36 Dunstable St.	Ampthill	15/03/1923		
Thomas	Gower	53 Station Road	Ampthill	09/12/1909	29/08/1940	
William	Gregory	19 Saunders Piece	Ampthill	27/06/1913	21/11/1940	20/08/1942
Albert	Grimmer	7 Church St.	Ampthill	02/08/1877	05/08/1940	
Robert J	Hamilton	The Manse	Ampthill	13/11/1920		
Fredrick	Harris	23 Chandos Road	Ampthill	09/10/1904	29/06/1940	
W A C	Hooper	2 Park Hill	Ampthill	08/05/1924	30/07/1941	25/07/1942
George	Hopkins	26 Saunders Piece	Ampthill	05/11/1899	19/07/1940	16/03/1941
James P	Hoptroff	100 Dunstable St.	Ampthill	16/10/1884	25/06/1940	
James	Hoptroff	100 Dunstable Street	Ampthill	22/01/1921	09/06/1941	24/04/1942
John	Hoskins	1 The Avenue	Ampthill	22/04/1894	06/05/1941	09/07/1942
William S	Hudson	2 Park Hill	Ampthill	09/11/1915	20/06/1940	04/04/1941
John	Hudson	Houghton Park Farm	Ampthill	19/05/1891	22/12/1941	10/02/1942
Bert	Jellis	14 The Crescent	Ampthill	20/12/1910	30/07/1940	02/08/1943
Harry	Jiggins	20 Woburn Street	Ampthill	15/07/1889	22/06/1941	06/02/1942

Forename	Surname	Road	Town	Date of birth	Enrolment	Discharge
William	Knowles	27 Church Street	Ampthill	22/06/1912	07/11/1940	
John H J	Lewis	26 Flitwick Rd.	Ampthill	06/03/1889		19/10/1940
Christoph	Macklin	23 Church Str.	Ampthill	19/11/1894	17/06/1940	
George H	Major	109 Dunstable St.	Ampthill	01/06/1878	20/07/1940	04/04/1941
Frederick	Major	20 Arthur St.	Ampthill	02/03/1916	02/08/1940	04/04/1941
Reginald	Manyweather	70 Dunstable Street	Ampthill	30/06/1902	15/07/1940	15/07/1940
Fred	Massingham	15 Grange Road	Ampthill	30/03/1894	23/06/1940	31/12/1942
Jack	Mead	22 Park Hill	Ampthill	25/03/1902	09/08/1940	13/12/1943
Walter S	Mieville	32 Grange Road	Ampthill	24/04/1892	22/06/1940	
Edward	O'Shea	24 Chandos Road	Ampthill	22/12/1902	03/06/1940	
Oliver	Payne	9 Chandos Road	Ampthill	05/11/1903	20/02/1941	30/03/1942
Leslie	Pedley	5 Neotsbury Road	Ampthill	04/12/1918	10/11/1941	31/03/1942
Cyril	Penwright	Alameda Road	Ampthill	24/11/1922	12/07/1940	16/10/1941
Ernest	Pestell	20 Bedford Street	Ampthill	01/10/1914	04/07/1941	07/11/1941
Allan	Pickering	8 Grange Road	Ampthill	07/04/1916	08/11/1940	16/08/1944
Frank	Putman	24 Arthur Street	Ampthill	24/02/1921	02/08/1940	15/05/1941
George	Quartermaine	45 Bedford Street	Ampthill	30/06/1888	03/07/1940	28/11/1940
Colin	Robinson	9 Peaks End	Steppin	06/09/1924	11/05/1941	23/09/1941
Percy	Rogers	10 The Crescent	Ampthill	18/10/1910	22/06/1940	20/10/1941
Wilfred	Sanders	High Knoll The Ave.	Ampthill	20/08/1915	20/02/1941	20/07/1942
James	Saunders	1 Grange Road	Ampthill	24/08/1906	22/06/1940	08/06/1944
Arthur	Sharp	9 Bedford Street	Ampthill	11/11/1888	01/07/1940	21/12/1940
Norman	Sharpe	Hilltop	Ampthill	04/08/1890	08/06/1940	
Lawrence	Shearwood	100 Dunstable Street	Ampthill	05/08/1920	09/06/1941	07/11/1941
Jack	Shepherd	3 Brewery Hill	Ampthill	01/11/1913	31/08/1941	
Alec	Shipp	40 The Crescent	Ampthill	11/09/1916	18/09/1940	09/01/1942
Leonard	Simms	Baker Street	Ampthill	30/10/1905	22/06/1940	15/03/1942
Frederick	Sinfield	95 Dunstable Street	Ampthill	25/09/1871	21/06/1940	09/10/1940
Ernest	Smith	27 Grange Road	Ampthill	21/08/1923	16/03/1941	19/12/1941
Herbert	Spencer	30 The Crescent	Ampthill	26/05/1900	20/06/1940	
Kenneth	Stanbridge	59 Station Road	Ampthill	05/01/1921	20/06/1940	14/11/1940
Frank	Stanbridge	8 The Crescent	Ampthill	18/01/1894	20/06/1940	19/11/1940
James	Stevens	5 Saunders Piece	Ampthill	19/11/1875	19/06/1940	19/11/1940
George	Stonehouse	46 Saunders Piece	Ampthill	06/05/1896	22/06/1940	
Austin	Tansley	1 Alameda	Ampthill	19/09/1907	20/06/1940	
Smith	Thomas	17 Oliver Street	Ampthill	24/07/1895	25/10/1940	02/02/1941
Hector	Thompson	25 Dunstable Street	Ampthill	05/06/1908	12/09/1940	16/07/1942
John	Thompson	17 Saunders Piece	Ampthill	09/07/1901	03/03/1941	
Eric	Turner	34 Dunstable Street	Ampthill	20/12/1914	03/08/1940	16/10/1941
Cyril	Vass	67 Station Road	Ampthill	26/12/1913	08/10/1940	09/12/1942
Charles	Vintner	9 Bedford Street	Ampthill	28/03/1915	04/07/1941	07/11/1941
Douglas	Welch	61 Bedford Road	Ampthill	13/10/1921	30/08/1940	18/08/1941
John	Wheeler	46 Park Hill	Ampthill	25/11/1886	04/07/1940	07/12/1940
Arthur	Whittington	16 The Crescent	Ampthill	14/11/1899	05/08/1940	
James	Wicks	43 Station Road	Ampthill	01/08/1913	24/07/1940	04/11/1940
Alan	Williams	11 Flitwick Road	Ampthill	01/10/1911	03/07/1940	01/12/1940
Alan	Williams	11 Flitwick Road	Ampthill	01/10/1911	07/07/1941	29/09/1941
Henry	Wilmott	9 Church Street	Ampthill	25/03/1888	03/07/1940	09/04/1942
Horace	Wingfield	55 Dunstable Street	Ampthill	05/09/1902	03/07/1940	02/03/1943
Cyril	Woodcraft	31 Station Road	Ampthill	08/01/1922	24/09/1940	14/02/1942
Walter	Woodcraft	31 Station Road	Ampthill	12/07/1890	08/05/1941	08/07/1941

Ampthill Home Guard Data Summary: World War II

Total on roll:- 107

Oldest to apply in 1940 Frederick Sinfield born 25/09/1871, 69 years old. Retained for 3½ months.

Albert Grimmer born 2/8/1877 transferred to the Ambulance Service as was Albert Dalley, born 17/08/1884.

The eldest to be retained throughout the war was James Hoptroff who was 56 in 1940.

The youngest recruited was Colin Robinson of Steppingley, 17 in 1941 but not retained. Reason not given. The only recruit from an outside Parish.

42 moved to other organisations including the local doctor, who joined the Ambulance service.

Most joined the regular Services serving until call-up.
23 served continuously throughout.

In effect they were a bunch of men who were still in the prime of life, well capable of defending the town.

Dads Army? - Not Really.

References: *The Home Guard* S.P. Mackenzie ISBN 0-19-285331-1.

Ampthill in Old Picture Postcards. Andrew Underwood
ISBN 90 288 5914/CIP. - Photographs.

Flitwick Library.

Bedfordshire & Luton Archives and Records Office Service.

Thanks to members of ADALHS who can remember activities during WWII.