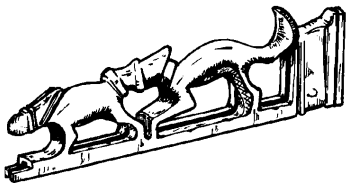
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

The Battle of Flitwick & Ampthill

16th August 1942

A Home Guard Exercise

Alec Swain

www.adalhs.org.uk

Chairman's Foreword

The late Alec Swain was an enthusiastic member of the this Society and also the Flitwick Local History Society. He had many interests including building up a large collection of post cards. Before he left his home in Flitwick he deposited the post cards with BLARS, a very important collection.

He researched the activities of the local Home Guard in WW 2 and produced a special edition of a News Letter on behalf of Flitwick History to coincide with the "Bedfordshire in World War 2 Exhibition" held in the Parkside Hall, Ampthill on 16th August 2000 staged by the Bedfordshire Local History Association.

Anne Slack who virtually ran the Flitwick group for its entire existence agreed to me reproducing this and I am sure Alec would have approved.

Kevan Fadden FSA.

16th August 2019



Alec at the Exhibition, courtesy Anne Slack

THE BATTLE OF FLITWICK AND AMPTHILL 16th August 1942.

Brief

By this period of the Second World War, after a seaborne invasion of The Wash and the East Anglian coast, the advancing German armies moving westwards had reached a line Sandy - Baldock and were evidently intent on cutting-off London from the North. It was anticipated that their advance would take them through Ampthill and the cross roads were to be strongly defended by the Home Guard. Other attacks had shown that airborne troops were liable to be used in advance of the ground forces, thus the Home Guard, Civil Defence and other organisations were at a state of alert.

Just after 0500 hrs on the 16th August reports were received of enemy air activity, as by this time they had established temporary air supremacy, and it became clear that the objectives were Maulden - to obliterate the defences with heavy H. E. (High Explosive) bombs; Ampthill and Flitwick to be attacked with H. E. bombs and incendiaries plus the use of gas - to be non-persistent at Ampthill (to allow the advancing forces to pass through later) but persistent at Flitwick to render the defenders helpless.

Then followed the landing of parachutists at Marston Mortaine, Millbrook, Lidlington and Steppingley with the object of attacking Ampthill from the west in support of the advance from the east. Thus this was the situation faced by "A"Company of the 3rd Battalion of the Bedfordshire Home Guard early that morning, under command of Major W.W. Inskip at Company H.Q. at the New Drill Hall, Ampthill. The resources at his disposal were:

Platoon	Village	Offrs	Oth Rs.	Rifles	Lewis G	Tommy G	Northover Projectors	Flame Throwers
No 1	Ampthill	5	69	59	4	1	4	
No 2	Maulden	2	88	95	2	1		
No 3	Haynes Houghton Conquest	3 1	39 27	38 28	2 1	1		
No 4	Clophill	3	93	90	2			8
No 5	Silsoe Pulloxhill Greenfield & Flitton	1 1 1	27 22 39	30 22 40	1 1 1			
No 6	Barton	2	46	43	1	1		
No 7	Flitwick	7	80	72	2	1		
No 8	Wrest Park	2	57	60	2			
Totals		28	587	577	19	5	4	8

No. 1 Pl. and No. 4 Pl. included 15 and 9 Medical Section respectively.

Commanding 3rd Battalion: Lt. Col. C. C. Foss, V.C., C.B., D.S.0.

Second-in-Command: Major D.C. Part, O.B.E.

Bn. Adjutant: Capt. R.S. Patten, 99 Dunstable Street Ampthill.
Bn. Transport Officer and Chief Guide: Capt. C. Dickson, "Uplands" The Avenue, Ampthill.
Bn. Medical Officer: Major C.H. Macklin, L.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., 23, Church Street, Ampthill.

Bn. Liaison Officer: 2nd Lt. G.E. Fowler, D.C.M., 54, King's Road, Flitwick.
Bn. Ammunition Officer: Lieut. R.J. Henham, "Dengarth" Steppingly Road, Flitwick.
Second-in-Command: Capt. E.C. Allen, 29 Ampthill Road, Flitwick.
Machine Gun Officer: Lieut. C. Lewington, Church End, Haynes.
Medical Officer: Capt. J.L. Maxwell, C.B.E., M.D. 28, The Avenue Flitwick.
Quarter-Master: Q.M.SGT. J.T. Saunders, 1, Grange Road, Ampthill.
Clerk: Sgt. J. Foyster, 52, King's Road, Flitwick.

No. 1 Platoon **Ampthill**
Commander: Lieut. W. S. Mieville, M.C., 32, Grange Road, Ampthill.

Second-in-Command: 2nd Lieut. H. Sharp, 21, Woburn Street, Ampthill.

No. 2 Platoon **Maulden**
Commander: Lieut. G. Hailstone, Badger Hill, Maulden.

Second-in-Command: 2nd Lieut. H. Price, M.M., 85, Ampthill Road, Maulden

No. 3 Platoon **Haynes**
Commander: Lieut. E.J. Howard, O.B.E., Standalone Warren, Haynes.

Second-in-Command: 2nd Lieut. G.R. Thorogood, Hill Farm, Haynes.
Houghton Conquest Section.
2nd Lieut. J.W. Dunham, "Royal Oak", Houghton Conquest.

No. 4 Platoon **Clophill**
Commander: Lieut. G. Chisholm, Speeds Farm, Beadlow, Shefford.

Second-in-Command: 2nd Lieut. L.B. Northwood, "Woodlands", Clophill Road, Maulden.

No. 5 Platoon **Silsoe**
Commander and **Greenfield** and **Flitton** Section: Lieut. G.R. Elliott, 2, High Street, Greenfield.

Second-in-Command and **Silsoe** Section: 2nd Lieut. B.J. Burton, Home Farm, Silsoe.

Pulloxhill 2nd Lieut. H.C.B. Phillips, "Wendy House" Pulloxhill.

No. 6 Platoon **Barton**
Commander: Lieut. H. Peck, Wagon & Horses" Bedford Road, Barton.

Second-in-Command: 2nd Lieut. W. Evans, 36, Manor Road, Barton.

No. 7 Platoon **Flitwick**
Commander: Lieut. S. Lamb,15, The Avenue, Flitwick.
Second-in-Command: 2nd Lieut. H. Dix, 67, Station Road, Flitwick.

No. 8 Platoon **Wrest Park, Silsoe**
Commander: Lieut. J.A. Miller, D.S.O., Wrest Park, Silsoe.

In fact this "Battle", code named **SPEED**, was one of the many exercises staged by the Home Guard, the Defending Force consisting of Nos. 1, 2 & 7 Platoons of 'A' Company under the command of Lieut. W.S. Mieville, M.C., whilst the Attacking Force under Lieut. J. A. Miller, D. S. O. consisted of Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6 & 8 Platoons of "A" Company as the' seaborne enemy' and No. 19 Platoon "C" Coy. and Nos. 37 & 38 Platoons' G' Coy. as the' airborne enemy' - all from the 3rd Battalion.

The exercise, scheduled from 0515 to 1200 hours that day, was judged by 20 Officer Umpires wearing white armbands and the accompanying instructions made it clear that "they must be entirely impartial; and their decision must be final". It was also stated that "neither side may make use of Fifth Columnists" whilst "Barricades will be erected as ordered, leaving a gap for passage of vehicles not connected with the exercise". The Umpires carried labels to be attached to casualties, who "will retire from the Exercise for such period as laid down by the Umpire".

Unfortunately no Report on the r e s u l t of this exercise has survived, but there is one from the Officer Commanding No. 3 Platoon (Haynes) concerning Exercise **LOCALI-TY** on May 3rd l942, when he was called upon to defend The Keep, Haynes. Some extracts now follow, chosen to show the extensive use made of Runners/Messengers.
"Upon receiving report of Parachutists descent at Deadman's Cross a Mobile Party of three and two runners was immediately dispatched to keep observation on the enemy, to harass them if possible, but not to make close contact with them but to gradually withdraw to the Keep, sending back all information possible to Battle Headquarters.
The remainder of the Section available (20 men) were placed in advantageous positions on the perimeter of the Keep.
This disposition comprised :-
One Lewis Gun in concealed position in centre of keep commanding all the roads which converge at that point. One Lewis Gun on right flank commanding rather open country in that position. Remainder of men were split into sections of four and placed in positions where practically every approach to the perimeter of the Keep was covered.

A call for assistance was telephoned to No. 4 Platoon Clophill, the position of the enemy given them at the time of message and a suggestion made that if they were able to move quickly by road transport they could get into Church End Haynes, take the

drive up to Hawnes School at which point I would have a Messenger to meet them and pilot them round Home Farm and they could then proceed under cover, still in the transport down the drive from Hawnes School to the centre of the Keep. How far they proceeded down this drive would depend upon enemy movement. This was agreed to with a result that the Officer Commanding the Patrol reported to me in the Keep at 10.40 hours.
Messages were also sent to No. 17 Platoon No. 2 Battalion Shefford who agreed to send a Mobile Patrol towards Deadman's Cross and converge on the Keep from that position. Another message was sent to Wilstead Platoon of No. 1 Battalion who agreed to send forward two Patrols, one in practically a direct line from Wilstead to the Keep, the other working to the east of Wilstead via Hammer Hill Farm.
All Home Guard Cadets were used as Runners and in addition the A. R. P. placed some of their Runners at our disposal. A. R. P. Wardens who had previously volunteered for service with the Home Guard were at their Headquarters and upon receipt of enemy activity came over to the Home Guard and operated with them in the defence of the Keep."

In fact their orders that August day in 1942 were

"to fight to the end to deny Ampthill cross roads to the enemy."

Many thanks are due to Ann Cowel1 who kindly loaned the documents which belonged to her father 2nd. Lieut. L. B. Northwood of the Clophill Platoon, and which enabled this brief account to be put together as a tribute to the men of the Home Guard who were prepared to give their lives in defence of their Country.