

## HOME GUARD

*Derek Barnard has provided the following light-hearted look at the Home Guard with a promise of more to come.*

I was recently given a book which had been published in 1945 as a tribute to the men who, during the Second World War, served in the Home Guard. Never before had an unpaid army of two million men stood to arms for four and a half years, guarding every corner of the country; each man having to do his soldiering after long, hard working hours and other wartime duties. It was an army which, in the author's words 'was never called on to fight but helped to win one of the most decisive battles of world history'.

Because of the Home Guard, Britain was able to release men to all the other theatres of war and to initially train young men who went on to join the regular army when old enough. It came into being as the Local Defence Volunteers in May 1940 in an attempt to combat the new mobile method of warfare that the Germans had introduced. They were there; they were told, to fight the parachutists and Fifth Columnists of Hitler's war strategy.

In the early days, weapons were scarce, just a few shotguns, old rifles and 'Molotov Cocktails'; there were not even enough armbands to wear. Over half of the one million who enrolled on the first six weeks were ex-servicemen of the First War, all over forty years old. By the late summer of 1940 America had sent 800,000 rifles and by the end of 1941 the arrival of the cheap, unattractive but effective British sten-gun made the, by then trained soldiers, a force to be reckoned with.

Enclosed in the book was a booklet, costing 1s/6d, called 'Home Guard Humour'. We are used to laughing at this force because they laughed at themselves. Every member had tales to tell of inefficiency and mistakes - these are the funny stories and my father told a few. He was based at Beacon Hill above Upnor where they had a rocket launcher which fired sixteen rockets. It was surrounded by a cinder track and a chestnut fence. Having on numerous occasions fallen-in ready to fire and been stood down, the night it was actually fired was a shock to them all as the back blast cleared the cinders and soldiers alike. When they next paraded the whole launcher had been removed. They had caused more damage to Faversham than to enemy aircraft.

Perhaps the person who thought up the TV show, Dad's Army read this book first and used the cartoon 'First Parade' to pick a few characters.

