

# Invasion 1940 Britain's Defence Line near Radley

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# INVASION 194



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Hanney History group would like to acknowledge the generous help given by Radley College Archive and Kennington History Society in making this publication available as part of our commemoration of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of World War 2.

# INVASION 1940

## Britain's Defence Line near Radley

Leslie Smith (KENNINGTON) and Tony Money (ARCHIVIST, RADLEY COLLEGE)

We shall defend our island,  
whatever the cost may be, we  
shall fight on the beaches, we  
shall fight on the landing  
grounds, we shall fight in the  
fields and in the streets, we shall  
fight in the hills;  
we shall never surrender.

Winston Churchill 4 June 1940

(This article first appeared in the *Old Radleian Magazine* 1999)

It is noteworthy that in the Second World War had German invasion taken place, Radley might have found itself very close to an important defence line where battle could have been joined. A view from the top of the Mansion shows open country spreading to the Berkshire Downs, and hidden beyond is more open country, ideal for enemy tank penetration that could have followed successful landing operations on the south coast. An important defence line at a point close to Radley is the subject of this article.

Successful German attack against Holland, Belgium and France, approximately nine months after the outbreak of the Second World War so breached allied defences that defeat in Europe loomed. By May 27, 1940 Operation Dynamo, the evacuation of British forces from Dunkirk, had been implemented and invasion of Britain was now feared. On May 24 the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden, broadcast a nationwide appeal for men between the ages of 17 and 65 years of age to volunteer for a citizen army known as the LDV (Local Defence Volunteers), later at the behest of Winston Churchill re-named the Home Guard. Response was immense throughout the land, though at that time neither uniforms nor rifles were available to them, for even the evacuated soldiery were now in great deficit of arms and supplies, much material having been abandoned in France.

Radley cadets enrolled into the Home Guard would, of course, have been better equipped from their own armoury. Eventually rifles, machine guns, other defensive weapons and uniforms filtered through to the Home Guard, which eventually became a well-trained, well-armed force, growing in confidence to meet expected invasion.

Expectancy of invasion was reinforced on July 6, 1940 in a speech by Hitler: 'Since England, in spite of the hopelessness of her military situation, shows no sign of being ready to come to an understanding, I have decided to prepare a landing operation against England and, if necessary, to carry it out.' This was followed by the build-up of invasion barge fleets in German occupied Channel ports, these being the subject of frequent attack by the Royal Air Force. At the same time the Luftwaffe commenced severe bombing attacks on RAF airfields and the aircraft industry

factories, with RAF pilots making heroic efforts to stem the attacks.

With coastal regions now at risk from invasion Eastbourne College boys had enrolled in the Home Guard: 'Across the Channel rockets soared, gunfire flickered, and there was a steady rumble of the cannonade on the French coast. German aeroplanes flew in over Beachy Head, cruised around and went home over Bexhill. Sometimes a searchlight stabbed at them. We began to feel that perhaps we might see some fun after all, and we kept an inlying picket of about twenty boys and five or six masters ready for immediate action to reinforce whatever part of the beaches needed help. On June 20 we were evacuated to Radley.'

Likewise fifty Radleians were serving in the Home Guard, being eligible to join on the first day of the term in which they reached their seventeenth birthday. The arrival of Eastbourne greatly lowered the risk that Radley too would have to relocate. Indeed their coming may have just prevented this. Nine days after they had arrived Warden Wilkes received a telegram from the War Office: 'Please cancel instruction to move your school to Pitlochry next week'. No such instruction had ever been received. It was The Leys School, Cambridge who were to suffer this fate. The casualties among the 330,000 troops successfully evacuated from Dunkirk and the potential casualties following an enemy invasion attempt made the acquisition of suitable premises near existing hospitals a high War Office priority. In August, after order and counter-order, The Leys were finally told to move out as quickly as possible so that their buildings could be converted into an annexe of Addenbrooke's Hospital. The

▼ Anti-tank pillbox at Frilford showing 2-pounder gun embrasures (432976).



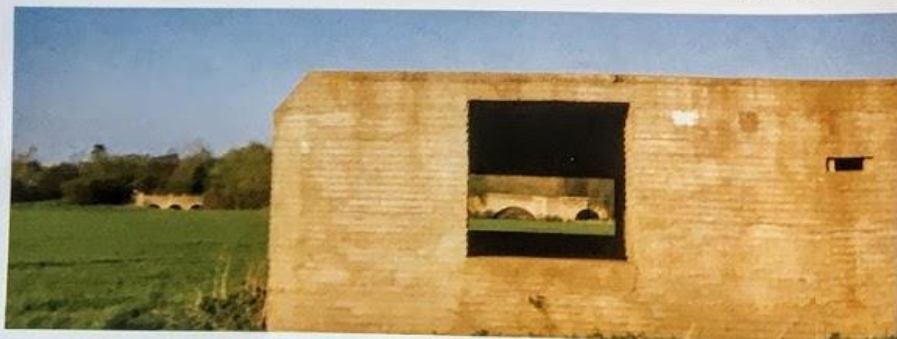
school found accommodation at the Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry, where they were to stay for the rest of the war, returning to Cambridge in January 1946.

### G.H.Q. Line

General Sir Edmund Ironside was Commander-in-Chief of Home Forces. His strategy in face of expected and possibly immediate invasion was to construct a 300 mile long anti-tank defence line on the eastern and southern flanks of England, parallel to the coast and some 20 to 60 miles inland. The purpose of the line was to protect London and the Midlands' armaments and aircraft factories, as well as giving him some control over the movement of enemy mobile columns. Outside this line, which was known as G.H.Q. Line, there were many local defence lines and strong points. Five of these defence lines ran across the Eastern Counties to cover the vulnerable beaches around Lowestoft. A thin screen of infantry lined the coast; their task was to hold up invaders long enough for mobile reinforcements to arrive and repel them. Within the G.H.Q. Line mobile reserves, including Canadian and New Zealand units, were ready to launch counter-attacks through the line against motorised columns halted by the defences.

G.H.Q. Line was surveyed by Royal Engineers and built by 150,000 civilians, organised by contracted construction companies, with Army assistance. The line was largely finished within two months. It relied on natural features – rivers and high ground, and man-made obstacles – canals and railway embankments. Where there were gaps, a total of 112 miles of anti-tank ditch was dug. The line was defended along its length by strongly

▼ View through the loading port of Culham anti-tank pillbox showing river bridge in line with gun embrasure (506946).



constructed, steel-reinforced pillboxes – 1,448 were planned, often in pairs and at roughly half-mile intervals. This form of defence was first used by the Russians in the 1904–5 Russo-Japanese War. Whilst lacking the mobility of tanks a pillbox could defensively act somewhat like a hull-down tank. About 1,200 of them housed infantry small arms – rifles, light machine guns and anti-tank rifles. The rest were anti-tank gun pillboxes, nearly all with 2 pounders, but also some with reconditioned World War I Hotchkiss naval 6 pounder guns. However, these 6 pounders were mostly used, not in pillboxes, but in open gun-pits with 360 degrees field of fire. They had the advantage of firing both high explosive and armour-piercing shells. (G.H.Q. Line had no monopoly of pillboxes. 'More than 18,000 pillboxes were built during 1940. The majority were associated with beach defences, stop-lines and nodal points, though some were sited to defend coastal batteries, airfields, radar stations and factories' – *20th Century Defences in Britain*: Council for British Archaeology, York, YO1 2UA – 1995).

G.H.Q. Line ran south from the low-lying Fens, making defensive use of the Ouse, Cam and Chelmer rivers, past Cambridge and Chelmsford to the Thames estuary at Canvey Island. Then via Chatham and the River Medway to Maidstone, turning west along the North Downs and waterways to Farnham and Reading, and via the Kennet-Avon Canal to join the Bristol Channel at Highbridge, south of Bristol. A branch line joined the Thames estuary to the English Channel at Newhaven via the Rivers Medway and Sussex Ouse, cutting off the threatened south-east invasion beaches from the rest of the kingdom.



In Southern Command (west of Reading) there was a section of G.H.Q. Line round the important seaport of Bristol, named Green Line; the Kennet-Avon Canal was Blue Line; and the third section ran from Theale north to Pangbourne, then along the Thames via Wallingford and Abingdon, a formidable tank barrier, to Cricklade, then south from the river to meet Bristol's Green Line at Great Somerford. This was Red Line or G.H.Q. Line Rear, the most strongly defended part of the whole line. An enemy breakout from a southern beachhead was likely to swing west, south of London, and then north between the Chilterns and Cotswolds through the plain south of Oxford, where all main roads led to the Midlands and its arms and aircraft factories. The Thames was the only natural barrier. Out of the 236 2 pounder anti-tank pillboxes planned for the whole G.H.Q. Line, 137 were to go to Red Line and 72 to Blue Line. In his definitive work *Ironside's Line* (Historic Military Press, Storrington, June 1999), Colin Alexander remarks that this was the third time in 2000 years that the River Thames had acted as a line of defence against invaders, after the Briton, Cassivellaunus faced Julius Caesar in

54 B.C., and King Alfred defended Wessex against Danish attacks in the 870s.

Here it must be noted that the Thames curves in a steep loop to the north between Newbridge and Culham. Departing from the river between these two points in order to straighten the defence line, a heavily defended anti-tank ditch was dug as replacement for the river barrier, though downstream from Culham and upstream to Lechlade the course of the Thames remained the defence line. Twenty-six pillboxes were sited on this section between Culham and Newbridge along the anti-tank ditch. At its nearest point the defence line was less than three miles from Radley.

As well as straightening the defence line this anti-tank ditch which was 20 ft. wide and 8 ft. deep, would have had the advantage of being more protective to the riverside towns of Abingdon and Oxford, than if the river line had been slavishly followed. The ditch also protected Abingdon Aerodrome. (On 12 March 1941 a raider dropped sixteen bombs putting Abingdon Aerodrome out of action. Five nights later bombs wrecked seven administrative buildings 'in one of the few

▲ Map of southern England showing G.H.Q. Line.



Enlarged map showing all planned stop lines



▲ R.A.F. aerial photograph, 1946, showing the line of the anti-tank ditch, now filled in.

successful attacks on any H.Q. organisation during the war'. — *Action Stations: Military Airfields in Oxfordshire*. M.J.F.Bowyer 1988.)

The pillboxes along the defence line are mostly of two types – the hexagonal model featuring up to seven embrasures for Bren light machine-gun deployment, and the much larger rectangular shaped pillbox designed with a large embrasure to give wide field of fire for the 2-pounder anti-tank gun, with a larger aperture to the rear for entry of the gun into the pillbox. The flooring within includes three depressions moulded into the concrete to take the splayed out legs of the 2-pounder gun after its road wheels have been detached. The smaller pillbox had a garrison of 6, five armed with Brens and a sixth to pass up ammunition. The Bren gun has a magazine with a double row of cartridges and can be fired from the shoulder or from a stand. The larger pillbox for the 2-pounder anti-tank gun also had smaller embrasures for Bren gun deployment. The garrison was 10 men and included 3 Brens.

In the summer of 1940 when these pillboxes were constructed, pre-mix lorries were not available. Thus construction was quite labour intensive with much hand shovelling needed. It must have been difficult to get the sand, gravel and cement on to some of the more remote sites. The cement mix was poured into double wooden shuttering with added steel rod reinforcement to give the whole maximum possible strength. There was a shortage of wooden boarding at that time as so much was needed for the construction of army camps to meet the growing numbers of men being called up for service. Hence at some places corrugated-iron sheeting was employed for shuttering in place of wooden planks, leading to corrugated moulding on the face of the cement walling of some of the pillboxes. Considerable skill was used in concealment, such as constructing within hedgerows or disguise as hay-stacks, whilst one near Shillingford was camouflaged to resemble a summer-house. It was much rarer for brick

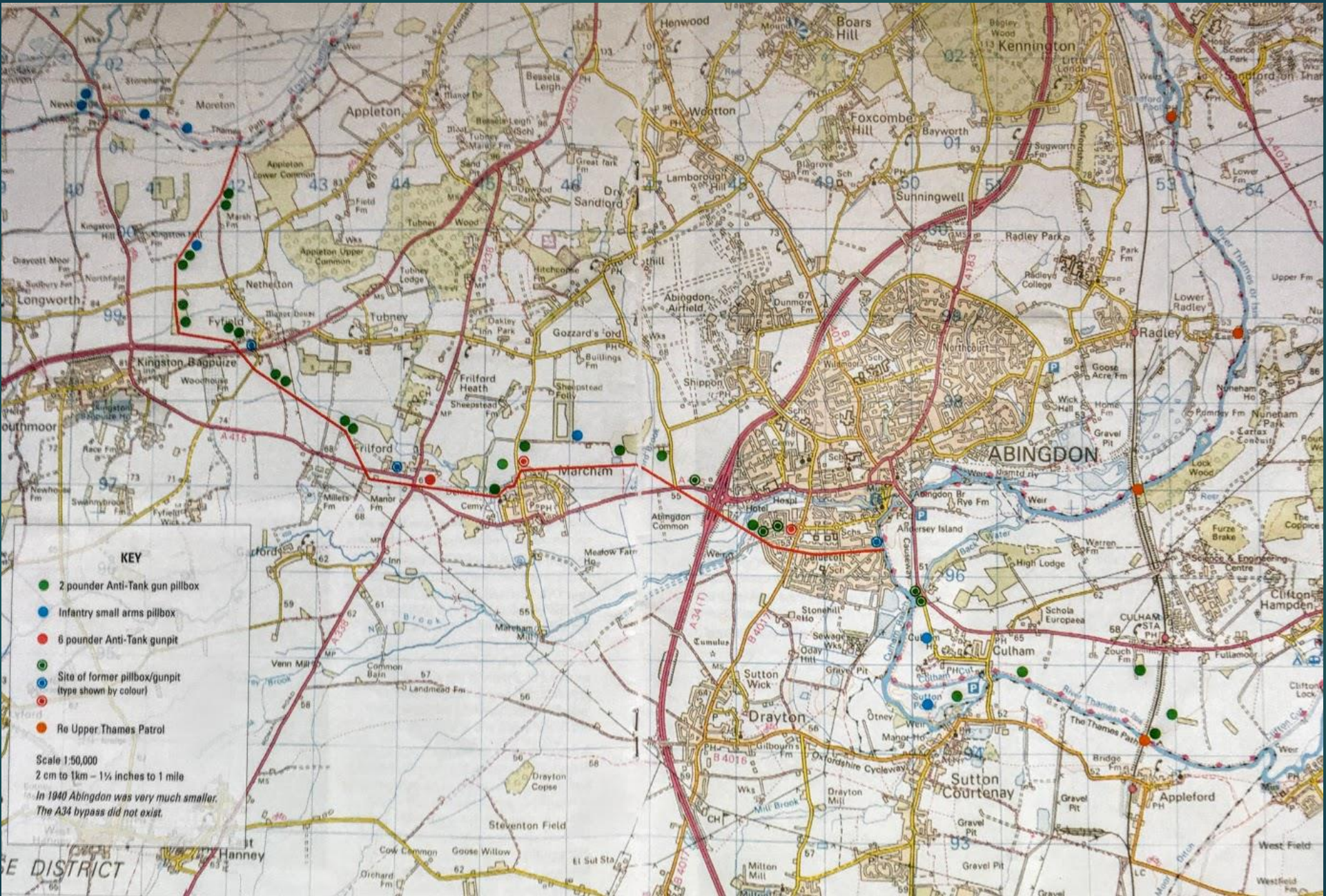
to be used in pillbox construction. There are two east of the Culham-Appleford railway line.

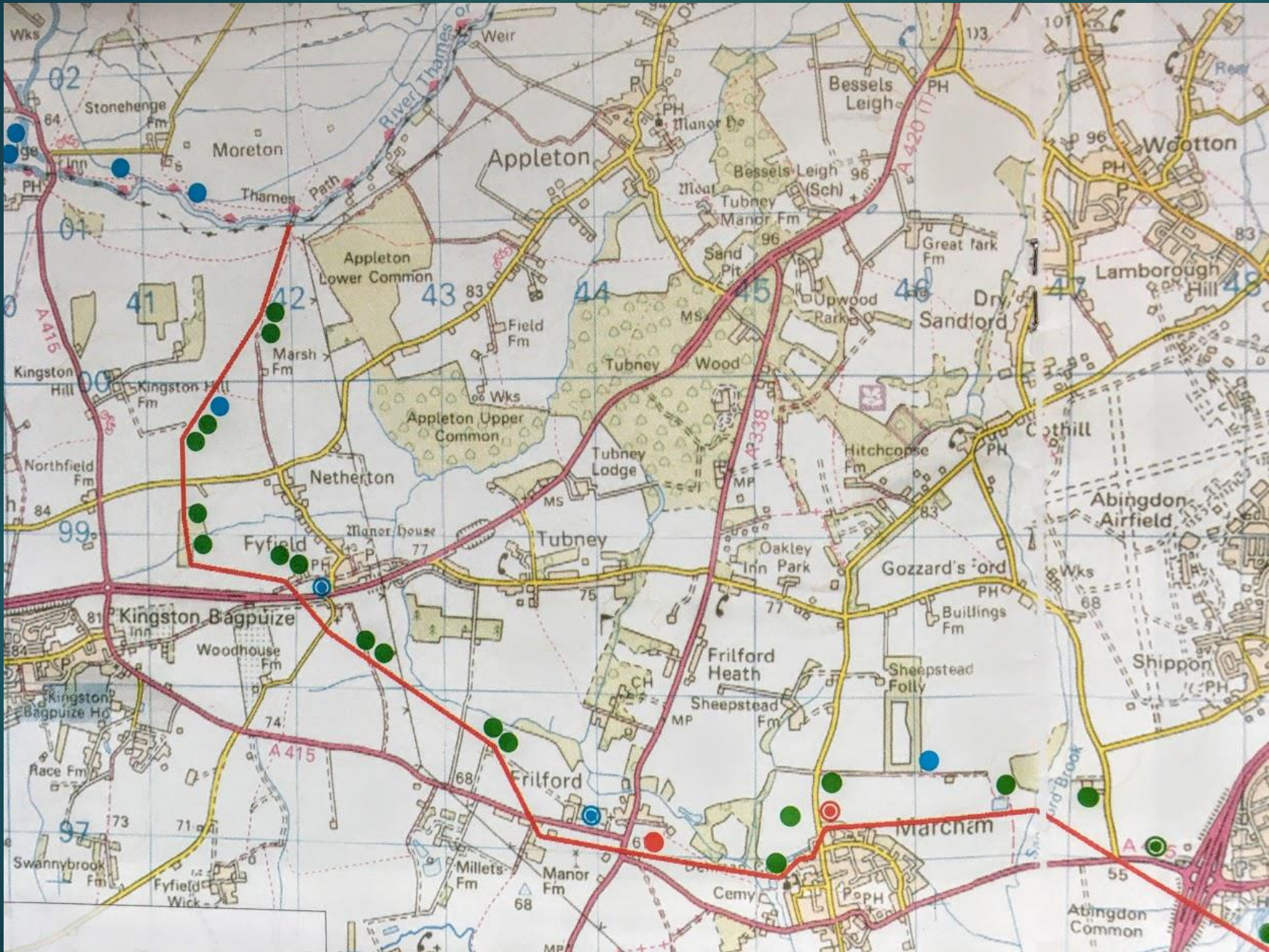
The anti-tank ditch which ran from Abingdon to Appleton Common needed to intersect the river Ock. Obviously the trench could not be cut into the bank of the Ock itself for then that stream would drain causing flooding to lower lying land. Hence there was a slight gap between the river and the trench with the gap protected by a series of still existing anti-tank pyramid type concrete 'dragon's teeth' or 'pimples'. These were also present at either end of the trench where it met the Thames.

A 6-pounder gun-pit still exists close to the strategically important Marcham/Frilford cross road in the middle of the plain, and it remains in remarkably good condition with central pillar gun mounting and ammunition 'lockers' moulded into the concrete gunpit surround. Also existing is a set of huge anti-tank cubic blocks in a now almost hidden bridle path leading from the Abingdon/Marcham road.



▲ 6-pounder Gun pit showing central pillar gun mounting and moulded ammunition 'lockers'. On Marcham-Frilford crossroads (442971).





Detail of the Stop Line B map showing the area immediately to the north of the Hanneys - for key details see previous map



Along the trench there were twenty-one of the anti-tank large rectangular 2-pounder gun pillboxes and five of the smaller hexagonal type – one of the anti-tank pillboxes was unique in having twelve inches of turfed soil on top of the roofing (natural camouflage) but this pillbox disappeared four years ago under a huge mound of soil to be part of an exercise run for horses. Others were to disappear shortly after the war when land owners could repossess the sites and dismantle such structures. The outline of two anti-tank pillboxes can be seen on the old bridge (1416) over the Back Water at its junction with the main river near Culham. They were removed in 1948.

On 20th July General Ironside was replaced as C-in-C. Home Forces, and promoted to Field Marshal. He was succeeded by General Alan Brooke, G.O.C. Southern Command. At the same time Auchinleck (V Corps) took over Southern Command and Montgomery V

Corps, with operational control of Red and Blue Lines. The War Cabinet considered Ironside's strategy too static and too reliant on linear defences. Brooke had first hand experience of the false sense of security given by the strong Maginot Line in France and the collapse of the French Army when the German blitzkrieg through Belgium outflanked that line. Hence in England the main anti-invasion defences were now switched to the coastal area. More men and more armour were now available, and the beaches had been much strengthened by mining, barbed wire and scaffolding. But G.H.Q. Line had had priority in concreting and in weapons. On August 8th Brooke ordered a halt to construction on G.H.Q. Line just six weeks after it had been begun, allowing only the completion of work still in progress. The planned extension of the line as far north as Stirling and Loch Tay had been surveyed and work had begun in places, but it was now abandoned. All the 6 pounder anti-tank guns on G.H.Q. Line were ordered to the coastal defences. Mobile infantry divisions guarded the more vulnerable coastal areas, with weaker beach defence divisions in between. Behind the coast strong armoured and infantry formations were poised to counter-attack where needed. Churchill was insistent that it was not desirable to maintain excessive troop concentration along the hundreds of miles of coastline that lay within reach of enemy seaborne attack. On August 5 he sent a minute on 'Defence against invasion' to the Chiefs of Staff Committee:

'The defence of any part of the coast must be measured, not by the forces on the coast, but by the number of hours within which strong

counter-attacks by mobile troops can be brought to bear upon the landing places. Such attacks should be hurled with the utmost speed and fury upon the enemy at his weakest moment.'

Churchill was concerned that some German troops might be landed dressed in British uniforms, and this was discussed by the Chiefs of Staff. They reported back to him that immediately following actual invasion British troops would have a patch of yellow cloth attached to their gasmask holders (everyone, civilians and military had to carry a gas-mask at all times when out of doors), and that British tanks would have a white circle painted on their upperworks for recognition against attack by friendly British aircraft. As a last resort Churchill was prepared to use mustard gas, sprayed on the beaches from low-flying aircraft, if all else failed. Although the wind might have blown towards the defenders, they were in possession of gas-

masks, whereas those of the invaders were carried in bulk.

Although its importance had been greatly reduced, G.H.Q. Line remained operational as the final defence line. However, defence was concentrated on the main crossing places on the line. These became anti-tank islands or local centres of resistance, not to endure a long siege but to delay enemy vehicles using a particular route long enough for reinforcements to arrive. There were three categories of these nodal points, each with sufficient supplies to last for 7, 2 or 1 day. Among Category A were Cambridge, Chelmsford, Chatham and Lewes, in B Devizes, Newbury, Reading and Tonbridge, in C Hungerford, Chippenham, Lechlade and Abingdon. Local Home Guard Battalions manning road blocks were engaged in these centres of resistance along with local HQ troops. Early in 1941 the concept of linear defence was completely abandoned.

▼ (Anti-clockwise from top) Hexagonal Bren Light Machine Gun pillbox end of farm track Marcham (463976). Anti-tank cubic concrete blocks on bridle path off Abingdon-Marcham road where it crosses the trench. (466973). Dragon's teeth on bank of R. Ock (Near Tesco store) (481965).



▲ U.S.A.A.F. photograph 1943. The trench south of Abingdon. Two pillboxes astride the Berks-Wilts canal where it crosses the trench and a third just round the bend. Another at the river immediately south of the road. There was an American bomber airfield at Kingston Bagpuize.

### Operation See Löwe (Sea Lion)

At the same time that anti-invasion measures were proceeding in these islands, Germany was scouring occupied Europe for any type of craft which could be used to carry out a sea-borne invasion of Britain. These began to assemble in the Channel ports. Among them were specially designed invasion barges of sophisticated construction having deck-mounted aircraft engines with four blade propellers to give them air-pressure propulsion, but most of them were river barges towed by tugs. In his book *Night Raider of the Atlantic* (1981) Terence Robertson quotes Admiral Doenitz at the conference with his U-boat commanders at Lorient on August 28:

'Gentlemen you are here to receive your orders for Operation Sea Lion. The day for invasion has been set ... September 15. Those of you on patrol in the Atlantic will receive orders telling you to proceed to Cherbourg to refuel and reload with torpedoes. Your task will be to bar entry to the Channel through the Western entrance. No warship of the Royal Navy is to get through to interfere with our cross-Channel supply lines. I must stress this point. No British ship must enter the Channel.'

The date set for invasion in mid-September was when expectancy in Britain reached its peak, for it was on September 7 with favourable sea and tide conditions and with the enhanced activity noted amongst the assembled invasion fleet that a warning was signalled to all defence units to take up battle

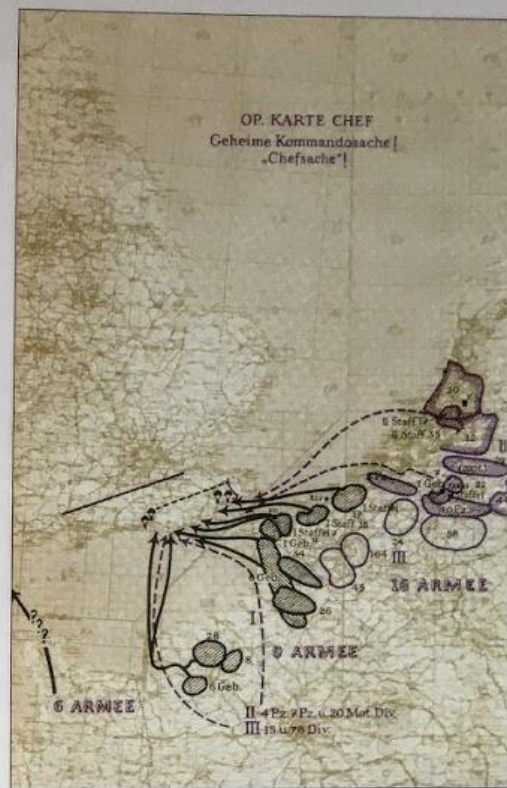
stations and be available at a half hour's notice, a signal that was misunderstood in a few places when church bells were rung as if to warn that invasion was actually taking place. A church bell at Headington, Oxford mistakenly rang out that warning. Radley Home Guard would have received the warning signal to stand-to in readiness until the stand-down order came through.

(The map showing the plan for Operation Sea Lion was redrawn by K.C. Jordan from the map issued by Field Marshal von Rundstedt's Army Group A in September 1940. It appears in Peter Fleming's *Invasion 1940*, pub. Rupert Hart-Davis 1957, on which much of what immediately follows is based). The map shows a projected invasion front of roughly 200 miles. This compares with about 40 miles for the Normandy invasion four years later. The plan included an embarkation from the Cherbourg Peninsula to gain a bridgehead in Lyme Bay. Admiral Raeder, commander of the Kriegsmarine, persuaded Hitler that there were insufficient naval and shipping resources for so wide a front, and the Lyme Bay landing was abandoned. Raeder also had the D-Day (S-Tag) postponed to September 21 when the tides would be more favourable.

The initial wave (marked I - continuous black line) consisted of elements (staffel) of nine divisions, each 6,700 strong, a total of 60,300 men landing at dawn to gain three bridgeheads: Four divisions embarking at Rotterdam, Antwerp, Ostend, Dunkirk and Calais to land in the Folkestone-St. Leonards

area; two divisions embarking at Boulogne to land in the Bexhill-Eastbourne area; and three divisions embarking at Le Havre to land between Beachy Head and Brighton. One of the infantry divisions was a Mountain (Gebirgsjäger) Division of Bavarians and Austrians to climb the white cliffs. There were also 250 light and medium amphibious tanks. Two airborne divisions were to be dropped to capture the high ground behind Folkestone and Brighton. In addition 4,200 horses were to be landed in the first wave (and 7,000 in the second). German artillery was drawn by horses, so it was utterly dependent on them. Eleven days were needed to land the whole of the first wave. The bridgeheads were to be expanded to join up along the line Canterbury-Ashford-Tenterden-Etchingham-Uckfield-Lewes. The first objective was the line Portsmouth-Petersfield-Guildford-Reigate-Gravesend. The second wave (II - broken line) of ten divisions included four Panzer and two Motorised divisions. The third wave (III - non-shaded) had six infantry divisions, bringing the total invasion force to about 250,000 men. The second objective (not shown on map) was the line Maldon (Essex)-St.Albans-Oxford-Gloucester, encircling London.

By the start of September commandeered transports, barges, tugs and other craft began creeping down the coast or through the rivers and canals of Europe to the invasion ports of Holland, Belgium and France. Bomber Command concentrated their night attacks on them. Over a period the following were sunk: 21 out of 170 transports, 214 out of 1,918 barges, 5 out of 386 tugs, 3 out of 1,020 motor boats. Not a great tally, but destruction and disruption in the ports, and especially the threat to an orderly embarkation of men, horses and equipment under continued heavy bombardment must have been of great concern to Hitler. His strategy of threatening Britain with massive forces in position along the Channel Coast to cow it into surrender had failed. Moreover, in August and September Goering's Luftwaffe had suffered the first and probably the most significant German defeat of the entire war. The loss of pilots was unsustainable. Without control of the air over the Channel invasion was impossible. Consideration of the global consequences had Hitler Command lost the Battle of Britain proves Churchill's 'Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed



▲ Detailed plans for invasion in September 1940.

▼ Appleford Railway Bridge.

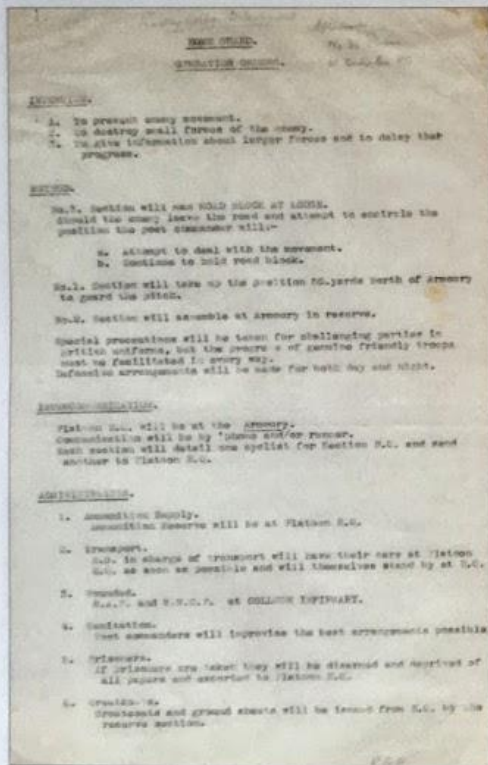


GB 8, BB 28, Nr. 35: Appleford-Eisenbahnbrücke bei Oxford (Oxfordshire).  
Eiserne Bogenbrücke der Great Western Railw. zwischen Didcot und Oxford über die Themse.  
Aufgehobener Horizontalschub, 3 vollwandige Parabelträger, gleichbleibende Bogenstärke, waagerechte Auflager,  
beiderseits Sparbögen in gemauerten Widerlagern; Zugsbahn zugleich Fahrbahn (unterliegend).

## The Home Guard

It is appropriate at this point to return to the Home Guard. The 1st Berkshire Home Guard Battalion consisted of forty platoons. No. 35 Platoon was Radley College and No. 36 Eastbourne College. There were many tasks and duties undertaken by the Home Guards. Although the immediate locality did not suffer from enemy bombs, they acted as fire watchers and at the same time plotted bombs observed to fall in the wider district, that duty being undertaken from the roof of the Mansion.\* They also patrolled the Park after dark. There were two patrols each night in the College grounds. Duty came round every seventh night for Other Ranks and every third or fourth night for Officers. Another duty carried out by some Eastbourne boys was to cycle out

▼ 1st Berkshire Battalion Home Guard, No. 35 Platoon (Radley) H.Q. at Ammory, No. 36 Platoon (Eastbourne) H.Q. at Pavilion. No. 1 Section to guard the pitch which would be an obvious air landing ground behind Red Line.



to the Concrete works on the Radley Road into Abingdon. Here they were provided with sledgehammers to break up rejected concrete casts for the pillbox embrasures in order to recover their valuable steel reinforcement. 'Very hard work it was.'

Part of the Radley force was incorporated into the Home Guard Upper Thames Patrol from Lechlade to Teddington, utilising the slipper-sterned motor launch 'LUSIMUS' to patrol their appointed section of the Thames between Sandford Lock and Black Bridge. Upstream the river was guarded by the Sandford and Wolvercote sections and downstream by Abingdon section. Patrolling was primarily to guard the bridges including 'Black Bridge', the railway bridge which crosses the river downstream from Radley's boathouse, which itself was used as accommodation for relief crews on night rota duties. Bridges were deemed vulnerable points that could be subject to sabotage, and if invasion had taken place were critical to the unrestricted movement of troops and weaponry to reinforce defence where needed. On Red Line the bridges such as Appleford rail bridge and Shillingford road bridge were defended by earthworks, infantry slit trenches, mortars and prepared roadblocks. One concrete block still remains in place on Shillingford bridge. Again, for the 1944 Allied invasion preparation bridges were vulnerable targets on routes leading to assembly points. The German intelligence photograph of Appleford railway bridge underlines their importance; as does the following from the Normandy D-Day booklet produced by the D-Day Museum, Southsea: 'Two months before D-Day preparations were well advanced. More than 20,000 special trains brought troops and equipment from the Midlands to the South Coast, where a series of 24 embarkation points with marshalling areas had been prepared.'

The U.T.P. also guarded against sabotage of locks and weirs that would have caused widespread flooding. Such Upper Thames installations were twice the target of Luftwaffe

\*In the winter of 1941 German bombers passed over almost nightly to bomb Coventry and the Midlands. One night Lloyd-George, the grandson of the prime minister, stopped in the middle of his speech to the Eastbourne Debating Society. He looked at his watch: 'In precisely thirty seconds the Air Raid sirens will go off.' There was silence. Everyone thought he was mad. Then the eerie wail of the sirens began exactly as he had foretold. He had noticed that the German bombers flew over to the Midlands at exactly the same time each night.'

bombing attacks. Shore patrols did valuable duty in guarding essential services such as Eynsham pumping station. Sabotage of main pumping stations would, of course, have denied major towns, such as Oxford, their water supply; doubly disastrous if an incendiary bomb air-raid were timed to coincide with sabotage of the water supply. (Unlikely in Oxford's case, if the rumour was true that it was to be Hitler's new capital.) The U.T.P. stood down in 1944, as was the Home Guard.

To end on a humorous note: In the early days before the LDV had become the Home Guard, an Eastbourne College duty was to maintain a night patrol on the Oxford-Abingdon road at the top end of Chestnut Avenue, with instructions to stop all vehicles for checks. (Much less than one car a minute at night.) One night HQ in the 1st XI Pavilion was manned by the Commanding Officer 'who in his appearance and demeanour bore more than a passing resemblance to Captain Mainwaring of Dad's Army', another officer, and a cadet on the field telephone. The patrol commander, 18 year old Hector Mackenzie, remembers: 'We had to wear LDV armbands on our corps uniforms. Without these we were unable to exert any authority. These were drawn by the NCO in charge as we drew our weapons [rifles and 10 rounds of ammunition] in the armory. That evening I forgot the armbands, got my patrol 'fell in' and marched the two miles to the scene of operations. Well after dark I remembered the omission, used the field telephone and spoke to the Major. I was surprised that instead of ticking me off he replied, 'Right, I'll come out immediately.'

More than half an hour later Hector Mackenzie heard loud rustling in the undergrowth, which caused him some apprehension, then eventually a loud whisper 'Hst! Is that you, Mackenzie? Where are the enemy?' 'What enemy sir? Have you got our armbands?' 'You blithering idiot! I thought you said you were under attack by an armed band and I've stalked all the way out here!'

Yet 'Captain Mainwaring's' training was effective. Another Eastbournian, later to win the Military Cross with the 14th Army, wrote from Burma to say that the Home Guard night patrols in Radley Park were the best night training he had had before he met the Japanese.

Few now living remember GHQ Line. Few, probably, will have heard of it. It was built very quickly and incompletely, under wartime



▲ No. 1 Section digging their section post. (The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News photo 1940.)

security restrictions – even the Home Guard were not told of it or its importance. Its useful life was very short and it was never tested in battle. After the war the ditches were filled in and hundreds of road blocks were removed. What is left are the concrete pillboxes. Some have been knocked down, but most remain, camouflaged from sight in hedgerows or standing in open fields, too difficult and expensive to get rid of. In the heat of summer some of the large 2 pounder pillboxes are a cool resort for cattle, half a dozen at a time. Not all pillboxes planned were built. Of the 137 2 pounder anti-tank pillboxes intended for Red Line 37 were abandoned, mostly in Wiltshire, leaving a possible 100 still standing. 88 out of the 131 planned shell proof infantry pillboxes, and 11 out of 18 6 pounder gunpits remain. No shot was fired in anger from them, but in their own way they are as much a part of the nation's heritage as Norman castles or the offshore Martello towers of the Napoleonic era, a reminder of a time when Britain stood alone in Europe at the moment of greatest peril in her long history.

### Acknowledgments

R.C. Storrs (master), H.C.B. Mackenzie and G.G. Brown of Eastbourne College for their wartime memories collected for the 40 years and 50 years on Eastbourne reunions at Radley. Any Radleian memories of LDV/Home Guard/UTP would be gratefully received.

G.E. Jennings for his assistance to Leslie Smith in tracking down the pillboxes.

Murray Maclean of Collins Farm for information on the ditch and pillboxes in the Frilford area. Also John Lay of Manor Farm, Fyfield, Poul and David Christensen of Kingston Hill Farm, Kingston Bagpuize, and Robert Wallis of Zouch Farm, Culham.

D.H. Chambres of British Railways for information on the Leys School move to Pitlochry in 1940.

Dr. J. Michael H. Brooks (1937) for information on the Upper Thames Patrol.

Peter Fleming's *Invasion 1940* (Rupert Hart-Davis 1957).

Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, Oxford Library; National Monuments Record, Swindon; and the Ministry of Defence.

Colin Alexander, especially, for the use of his *Ironside's Line* (pub. Historic Military Press, Storrington, West Sussex, June 1999). He was born in Radley and 'discovered' the GHQ Line as a boy. He has walked the length of the Line. His book contains 6 figure map references for every pillbox, gunpit etc. on the line. Many of the pillboxes are on private farmland, so please contact the farmer before visiting them.

Pillbox photos by Leslie Smith. Aerial photos on pages 6 and 7 are **R.A.F. Photographs** 1946 and on page 11 is a **U.S.A.A.F. Photograph** 1943.

The map shown on pages 8-9 is from the Ordnance Survey Landranger series. The map shown on page 5 has been recreated from maps published by George Philip and Son Limited, 1962.

Regrettably the two authors of this report, Leslie Smith and Tony Money, have both passed on. Hanney History Group would however like to acknowledge the quality of their research in completing this fine summary of an easily overlooked achievement from the days following Dunkirk.