

CIRENCESTER HOME GUARD –
"STAND DOWN" PARADE OF 'C' COMPANY

"THE BATTLE THAT NEVER WAS FOUGHT"

The 3rd Gloucestershire (Cirencester) Battalion of the Home Guard held its Stand-down Parade at the Abbey, Cirencester, last Sunday morning. From Fairford to Tetbury were drawn the companies which comprised the large muster seen in the photograph above. Present with Lieut. - Colonel B.W. Robinson, M.C. commanding the Battalion, were Major J.G. Dugdale, M.V.O., D.S.O., M.C. former commander, Colonel C.E. Turner, D.S.O., O.C. Gloucestershire H.G., Colonel K. Dunn, Vice-Admiral Sir Francis Marten, C.B., C.M.G., C.V.O., and other officers and county officers.

The parade was formed in a large hollow square on the lawn, and proceedings opened with a short service, taken by Canon R.H. Stitch, vicar of Cirencester. The Band of a Royal Air Force station accompanied the hymns. The service commenced with the hymn, "O God our help in ages past," and closed with "Stand up for Jesus," and the Blessing.

In the course of the service an address was given by Canon Sutch, based on Nehemiah iv 13.

"SADNESS AND GLADNESS"

Canon Stitch said: This, I think, is a unique day in our History - the day when the order to Stand Down comes to the greatest voluntary citizen army which our country has ever known. Tonight His Majesty the King will express the appreciation not only of himself but of the whole nation for all that the Home Guard has been able to do, and what is more, for what the Home Guard has been prepared to do and still is prepared to do in the case of necessity.

It is really proper then that you should begin this short parade with a religious service in which we can thank Almighty God for bringing us to this state of things. You will remember that many times during the past five years the nation has offered its thanks to Almighty God for its deliverance, and, later on, for many successes. We have thanked God for the deliverance Dunkirk, due very largely to our seafaring men. We have thanked Him for the deliverance and the victories of the Battle of Britain, due almost completely to our airmen. Since then we have thanked Him for many victories won on land and sea by the Navy, Army and Air Force.

But today, I think, we are thanking Him for the battle that never was fought - the battle which, if it had been fought, would have been waged with violent ferocity in the streets and lanes of our towns – a battle which we hope would have been won, if the enemy had taken his chance - if he had dared invade our shores. I did hear - maybe it was only rumour, though there may be some truth in it - that he actually did set sail, but was stayed by our sea and air power. We all know the alarms were sounded and it was thought that he actually set foot on our shores. However that may be, we can thank God today for the fact that we have been saved from invasion; that we are one of the few countries in Europe - indeed the only belligerent country - which has escaped being a battlefield. So you can obey this Stand Down order today with honour, knowing that you haven't failed your country in time of need,

I expect there are in the hearts of most of you sadness and gladness as you obey this Stand Down order. Sadness, in the first place perhaps because - like the twelfth man in the cricket team or the spare man in the boat crew - you have gone through all the gruelling training and have not been allowed to have a crack at the enemy. I expect there is sadness too in the fact that there has been a useful diversion and a discipline and, best of all, a bit of good comradeship that has come to an end. But there is gladness too. Many of you will be thankful that what has been to a very large extent a great physical strain - for all of you have done overtime and some of you double time - worked at your civilian jobs in the day and exercised and been prepared to spend the whole night in military duties - has been relaxed and that a little like the farmer's boy in the song, the rest of the day is your own, and that you have free weekends and free Sundays.

But you will be glad most of all that our country has not been invaded, that blood has not flown in the streets and lanes of our cities and towns, that our homes have been preserved for the most part inviolate. And our thanks-giving together will be all the greater if we realise from what we have been

saved. We have but to remember what has happened in the invaded countries to realise from what tremendous horrors we have been spared.

Yet of course, the war is not finished, and when the shooting war is over the war of ideas will still have to be won. The principles of Nazi-ism have to be given their deathblow, and that is going to take a long time and be a difficult job. It is much easier to blow people's brains out than to put good ideas into them. I was listening a week ago last night to one who had been head of the American Embassy at Berlin twelve years before the war. He told us - and we had plenty of opportunity for observation - how the Nazi children and the Nazi youth were imbued with fanatical ideas of devotion and allegiance to Hitler, whom they regarded as a god, and were all ready, to lay down their lives for him. He said at the same time that it would be almost impossible to get out these Nazi ideas from the minds of those young children who had been imbued with them for the past few years and we should have to start with a new generation.

But besides the work to be done on Germany there is work still to be done in England. Our homes in England still need to be guarded and, most of all we at home need to show the world, and especially Germany, that, given that freedom for which we are fighting and for which you have been prepared to die, we can build upon a national life in which happiness and security may be had for all, and that means that we have got to build on righteousness and on justice -we have to build on a Christian foundation.

So may I suggest to you in conclusion that this Stand Down order which goes out to you and thousands of you today is not the final order. The final order is, I think, Stand Up - stand up for what is right, for fair dealing, for the sanctity of the English home: in other words "Stand up for Jesus," the words of the hymn we are now going to sing. If the thousands of the Home Guards will follow that advice and stand up for what is right, I am sure there are brighter prospects both for England and for the world.

"WE SHALL MEET AGAIN"

After the Blessing, Colonel Robinson, addressing the parade said: We are all very thankful that we have never been invaded in this country. On the other hand I should have liked to see you take on the Germans, especially during the last six months, when you have become so efficient I should have liked you to whet your appetite on the German home guard. I like to think of them now putting up road blocks one day and being told to pull them down the next, like we had to do. However I don't think now it is to be that we shall take on the German home guard or the Germans.

Thank you for the hard work put in during the past four and a half years. Particularly I thank the Company Commanders, Section Leaders, and last but not least those Sergeant- Instructors and Warrant Officers who have worked night after night, in every kind of weather, going out instructing. They have done a grand job of work. Thank you all for all you have done. This is not Good-bye. We shall meet again through the Home Guard Association.

General Sir Reginald Stevens was to have been here this morning: He was our original commander and raised all the Home Guard in Gloucestershire, but owing to ill health he is not able to be here. But we are all glad to see Colonel Turner and Colonel Dunn, and I am going to ask Colonel Turner to present the cup for the inter battalion rifle competition which took place at Sneedham's Green a month ago. Nobody can ever take that cup away from us, for two reasons: nobody has a good enough team to do it, and there will not be any more competitions.

PRESENTATION OF MUSKETRY CUP

Colonel Turner said: I have never had any greater honour than to command twenty thousand men of Gloucestershire in their Home Guard. It has been a great pride to me, and it has always been a great pleasure to go round. I thank you for the support you have given me, and wish you all the very best of luck in the future.

In presenting this cup I do so with the very greatest pleasure because I know jolly well how much you have put into you musketry. I am only sorry that I was not able to beat you myself, though I tried very hard, but I am quite prepared to get up a veterans team to challenge Colonel Robinson and his team any time he likes to take it on.

Colonel Robinson announced that Colonel Dugdale, who commanded the Battalion for the first two years would like to say a few words of farewell.

EARLY DAYS RECALLED

Colonel Dugdale said : Having given up the command two and a half years ago to Colonel Robinson it is a great pleasure to be here today to join in welcoming Colonel Turner and Colonel Dunn. I join, too in the regret at the absence of General Sir Reginald Stevens. I know how anxious he was to be here and I feel you wish to join with me in wishing our old commander a speedy return to health.

I well remember how General Stevens came here one Sunday evening in May 1940 and entrusted me with the task of raising a company of Local Defence Volunteers between Westonbirt and Chipping Campden. Men rushed to join and in three days we had a strength of 3,000 men, and what was one company of Local Defence Volunteers very soon became two battalions of Home Guard. I would like to thank everybody in this and the Campden Battalion who by their ready help, made things so easy for me in those strenuous days.

Many of my old comrades are still serving – I see a lot here today – and I would specially like to congratulate you on the way you have seen it through from the start. At times it must have been very irksome and difficult to carry on with all your other occupations. How fed up you were with the paucity of our ammunition and weapons. We had a few shotguns, not many cartridges and a brassard apiece – not a very great armament with which to take on the enemy, armed and equipped as the Germans were. Anyhow, we had keenness and determination, and very gradually the weapons came along. I remember what excitement there was when we got a few self-igniting bombs which didn't always live up to their name. Then we got some rifles, though most of them got taken away when we had only had time to get them cleaned. Then we got a denim suit and a change of name. Still the keenness and determination were there, and now from that very primitive beginning has been evolved this magnificent force. Now you are to stand down and I hope and sincerely trust you will never again be called on to turn invaders from our shores, though if the occasion should arise I know the Home Guard will do this duty.

My old comrades again my sincere thanks, and to every member of the Battalion my hearty congratulations and best wishes.

MARCH PAST

After the national Anthem Colonel Robinson took up a position at a saluting base beside the drive leading to Grove Lane, and here took the Battalion's last salute as Major R. Hamilton Stubber led the parade in a March Past, the men disappearing from sight through the hospital gate.