

## THE REAL STORY BEHIND 'DAD'S ARMY'

### *An Illustrated History of the* **HOME GUARD** **From the LDV of 1940** **to Stand Down in 1944**

Arthur Cook

It was a sunny September Sunday in 1939 when the news that Britain had declared war on Germany was broadcast. Where possible people had either stayed in to listen to this momentous news on their wireless sets, or had gone to their neighbours to listen to the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain's, fateful speech to the nation. The peacetime establishment of the Territorial Army had already been doubled in size and some of these men were already fighting the German invader in France and Belgium.

At home, as early as October 1939, Winston Churchill had proposed that a second line of defence should be put in place. This force was to be made up of men over the age of 40 and not already serving in the armed forces. The role of this volunteer army of a proposed five million men was to guard vulnerable points such as ports, railways and tunnels, key road junctions, possible sites for amphibious invasion, moorland and areas which could be attacked by gliders and paratroops.

This force was to become the Home Guard (initially the Local Defence Volunteers or LDV, known by some as 'Look-Duck-Vanish'), a defence organisation within the British Army. Operational from 1940 until 1944, the Home Guard, comprising 1.5 million local volunteers otherwise ineligible for military service, usually owing to age, was given the nickname 'Dad's Army'. This highly illustrated book tells their fascinating story.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

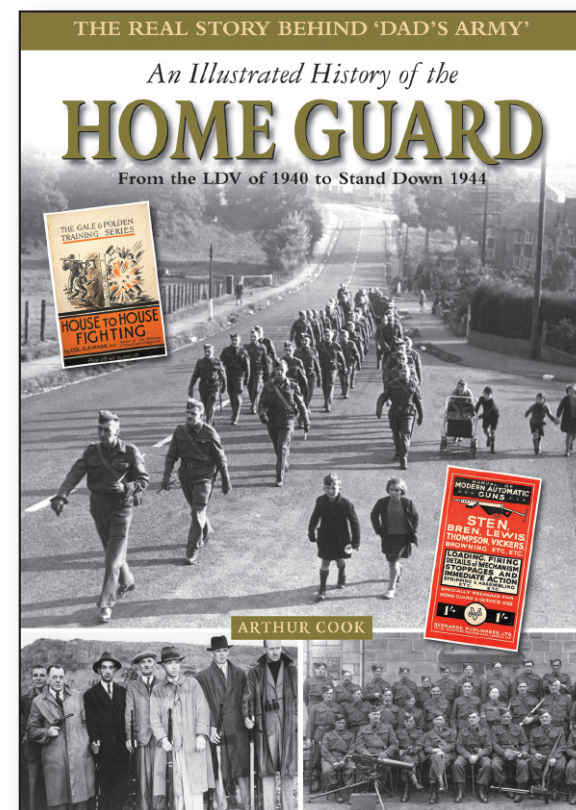
**Arthur Cook** lives in Exmouth and has spent much of his recent life recording and collecting memories of wartime from local people. His interest in this period of history started when he was a small boy when most of the toys he played with, including comics that he read and the films that he watched, were about the war. His interest in music also centred on the 1930s and 40s, and when he met his wife in 2004, they decided to combine their interests and formed 'Blitz and Peaces', a live World War Two music show with which they now tour Britain, performing at Living History events, museums, schools and preserved steam railways. *Exmouth at War*, his first book, was published by Halsgrove in 2010.

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# AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE HOME GUARD



Above: A section of Wiltton Home Guard shows the wide variation in uniform and equipment

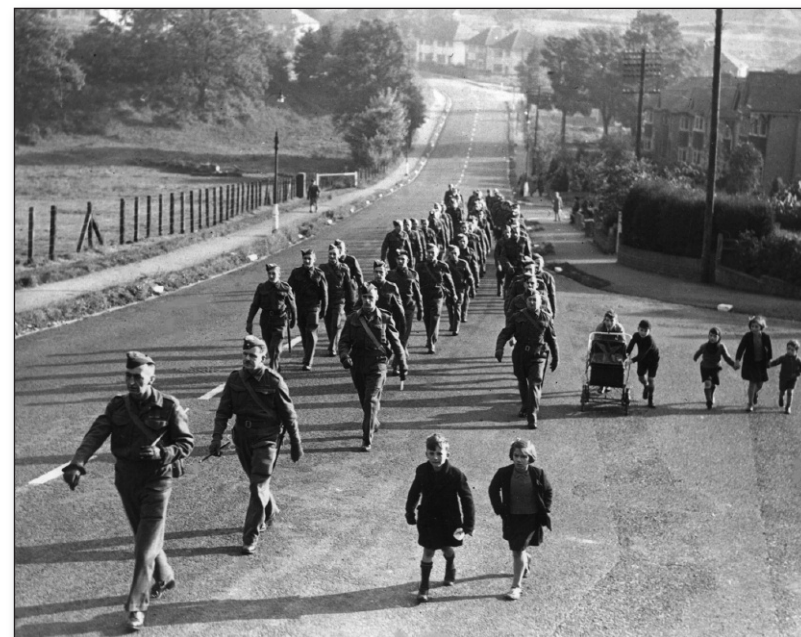
Top left: Vickers water-cooled heavy machine gun with dial sight and case, .303 ball round ammunition boxes, cleaning kit, tool kit, oil bottles, puncture repair outfit, spring balance and plotter

Left: A tent serves as a guard post at Exmouth, Devon, in 1941

Below: Example of a double-page spread.



'B' Company 60th 'Woodside' Battalion Surrey Home Guard, route marching smartly to Godstone



Bitterne Company (Southampton) marching on church parade

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE HOME GUARD

Harry Simons Ernest Doring Jack Robbins

Ernest Doring from Haughey Platoon is wearing Battledress and his Field Service Cap, he also has an Enfield P.17 Rifle.

**The Field Service Cap**  
A.k.a. the side cap or forage cap, it was introduced around late June 1940, it was the same pattern as the regular Army's Cap. It was made usually, though not always, from rough serge material and appeared in varying shades of khaki. From 3 August 1940 it could be worn with the County Regiment cap badge and later, as the Home Guard operated artillery and defend bombs, Army Corps cap badges.

**Cap Badges**  
The Home Guard was granted 'County Association Status' on 3 August 1940 and County Regiment badges were allowed to be worn on the field service cap.

Once again, supplies were difficult to get hold of at first and men who had been in the local county regiments in WW I, who had retained their badges,

Examples of Home Guard field service caps, second Devonshire Regiment and third Somerset Light Infantry

HOME GUARD UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT

were then with a great deal of pride. Badges were scrounged, purchased and bartered from wherever they could be found. Gradually supplies of cap badges increased and a lot of new type 'working' badge and a permanently 'full sized' one for parades and special occasions.

The Home Guard were also allowed to march with the County Regiments on parades after government legislation in June 1941, but this did not meet with approval in some quarters and caused some friction between the professional soldiers and Home Guard units for a short while.

**Dennis Davey**  
'After D-Day our role became redundant and we were stood down later in 1944. We handed in all our weapons and equipment. I kept my cap badge as a souvenir of my wartime activities, and that was that!'

Complete 1938 pattern denim L.D./F Home Guard uniform

**The Serge Cape**  
**Mike Head**  
'The cold weather cape was a big baggy thing! We sometimes used them to keep out the rain on really wet nights, but we were told not to!'

**6 November 1940**  
In a speech in the House of Commons Sir Edward Gagg announced '...equipping the Home Guard was otherwise going well. Battledress and before long be available for the whole force and although great coats cannot be supplied in adequate numbers, before the winter comes on... we have arranged for a large issue of trench-coats, a warm and serviceable garment made of waterproofed service-wool.'

The great coats didn't arrive in time for the winter of 1940 for most Home Guard battalions. So the stop-gap measure of the serge, shower proof cape was distributed to the men. It was serviceable in that it gave added protection from the cold, but it was weathered extremely quickly which made it heavy and cumbersome. It was generally disliked by the men.

**1938 Pattern Denims**  
Blouses and trousers in the 1938 pattern were manufactured initially in a robust brown colour and later on in green. Although always referred to as 'denims', both colours were manufactured in denim or cotton drill materials, depending on what was available at the time. These were issued as early as 18th May 1940 to some units.

The men of the Exmouth 477 Coastal Artillery Home Guard R.A. were never issued with denim, as it was formed after the issue of battledress, but denim could be impromptu issued for dirty jobs though and were obtainable from the Quartermasters stores at the Imperial Road Drill Hall.

**The Devonshire Regiment cap badge**