

Honoured at last: Churchill's secret guerrillas who were poised for a Nazi invasion

UNSUNG HEROES: A wartime 'secret army' team relaxes. Below: The Auxiliary Unit badge



THEY were Britain's 'secret army', courageous volunteers prepared to sacrifice their lives to fight against a Nazi invasion of the UK.

Issued with top-secret orders, their role has remained unsung for decades. But now the undercover resistance units Churchill planned to activate in the event of a German invasion during the Second World War are at last to be honoured.

The Royal British Legion has agreed to officially recognise the 4,000 volunteers who once formed the secret guerrilla cells created to resist the Nazis. And for the first time, former members are to parade with other veterans at this year's Remembrance Day ceremonies at the Cenotaph.

If wartime church bells rang to warn of enemy invasion, the orders for the Auxiliary Unit volunteers were to disappear without telling anyone and to report to hidden bases in the countryside.

Each was issued with sealed orders giving a list of potential collaborators, some as senior as county chief constables, who might have to be executed if there was a risk of them helping the Germans.

Most of the volunteers worked in the countryside and were chosen for their knowledge of the local area and ability to use a weapon.

Trained at Coleshill, in Oxfordshire, they operated in tight groups and their role was to disrupt and destroy the enemy's supply chain, kill collaborators and take out strategic targets. Unable to tell anyone about their activities, they disguised their real mission by pretending to belong to the Home Guard. Tom Sykes, of the

'NO ONE KNEW': Trevor Miners in the 'Home Guard' in 1944 and today, aged 86



By Valerie Elliott

Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team, which has campaigned for the men to be honoured, is delighted by the RBL's decision. 'Many of these veterans were in reserved occupations and could not join the regular Forces,' he said. 'But when the call came, they did not hesitate to join what would have been a suicide mission to confront the enemy.'

'They were taught cutting-edge guerrilla warfare and even used Thompson sub-machine guns before they were given to the British Army.'

'But they were sworn to secrecy and sadly suffered taunts and were sent white feathers by people who thought they were cowards for not fighting.'

'Thankfully, the invasion never came and many who joined feel they

'They didn't hesitate to join a suicide mission'

did not contribute. Nothing could be further from the truth, as I'm sure the majority would agree. They signed the Official Secrets Act and many still believe their memories should be carried to the grave.'

Trevor Miners, 86, from Perranporth, Cornwall, joined an Auxiliary Unit at 16. He says: 'Our base was in an old mineshaft at a local farm. We learned to make booby traps and explosives, and how to blow up fuel dumps. We learned unarmed combat and we had all sorts of weapons. No one knew the secret army existed.'

Andy Gwynne, who is co-ordinating the Auxiliaries for the march, is anxious to trace former volunteers so the nation can recognise their bravery. He urged them to contact staybehinds.com or call 0872 045 9940.

He added: 'The march allows the public to learn about them and might also encourage the Government to honour them.'

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