On 2 July 1940 Winston Churchill stated that:-

“The regular defences require suppling with guerrilla type troops, who will allow themselves to be overrun and who thereafter will be responsible for hitting the enemy in the comparatively soft spots behind zones of concentrated attack”

Winston Churchill to Anthony Eden, 25th September 1940 stated:

“I have been following with much interest the growth and development of the new Guerrilla formations ...... known as 'Auxiliary Units'. From what I hear these units are being organised with thoroughness and imagination and should, in the event of invasion, prove a useful addition to the regular forces”.

Following the evacuation of British Army (BEF) land troops from Dunkirk, it became obvious that Britain had been rendered almost defenceless. Given the rapid advances of the Germans through France, it became abundantly clear that Great Britain was under great threat of invasion. Hasty plans were therefore drawn up to resist any such attack.

The British High Command quickly analysed the enemy’s tactics, appreciating that the only way to overcome them was to deny mobility of the attacker and to disrupt his vital supply lines.

The guerrilla type troops Churchill described became known as the GHQ Auxiliary Units or British Resistance Organisation. Colonel Colin McVean Gubbins (Commanding Officer Royal Artillery), was selected to establish a network of civilian saboteurs to attack invading German forces from behind their lines.

The Auxiliary Units were the first such organisation of its kind in existence in Europe. The formation of the units was executed using utmost secrecy. This secrecy would be fiercely protected during the existence of the Units and after stand down in 1944.

The high command HQ was located at Coleshill House near Swindon and this is where intensive training was undertaken.

The Auxiliary Units were specially trained highly secret units created with the aim of resisting the expected invasion of the British Isles by Nazi Germany during World War II.

Operational Patrols consisted of between 4 and 8 men, often farmers or landowners and usually recruited from the most able members of the Home Guard, who also needed an excellent local knowledge and the ability to live off the land. As cover, the men were allocated to “Home Guard” battalions 201 (Scotland), 202 (northern England), or 203 (southern England) and provided with Home Guard uniforms, though they were not actually Home Guard units.

Around 3,500 such men were trained on weekend courses at Coleshill.

The mission of the units was to attack invading forces from behind their own lines while conventional forces fell back to the last-ditch GHQ Line. Aircraft, fuel dumps, railway lines, and depots were high on the list of targets, as were senior German officers.

The Auxiliary Units were kept in being long after any immediate Nazi threat had passed and were only stood down in 1944. Several of the members were released to join the Special Air Service Regiments, which were recruiting hard, in readiness for their role during the forthcoming invasion. Many men saw action in the vicious campaign in France in late 1944.

The units’ existence did not generally become known by the public until the 1990s, though a book on the subject was published in 1968.

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FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE FORMATION OF THE UNITS CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.STAYBEHINDS.COM