

Hadlow Down's Dads Army.

A retired Colonel resident of "Five Chimneys" was the "Captain Mainwaring" of the Hadlow Down Home Guard. The Colonel was a good sort but a slightly eccentric officer from the First World War.

The Hadlow Down platoon was a real force to be reckoned with. A few fit men were in the ranks, but most had gammy legs due to working on the land for years plus my father who although physically fit had no sight in one eye and only near sight in the other.

The Colonel had the platoon out training some week-ends, rifle practise when ammunition was available plus crackers to simulate rifle fire, and I believe dummy hand grenades were thrown. The two men with the most pronounced limp were made stretcher bearers; perhaps the idea was that any malingerers would find the ride was worse than the wound and soon get on to their feet again.

Fred, who was for many years Hadlow Downs local builder considered the Colonels demonstration of the machinegun a bigger threat to the platoon than the Hun, and evidently told him so in no uncertain terms.

Headquarters over night was a room with a telephone in the "Old Boot" cottage to the east of the village. On a rota one man would sit by the phone all night waiting for a call to arms. My dad after his stint would walk the mile and a half home and go down to the cow shed to milk the cows and get the churn or churns of milk out to the corner of the road for eight o'clock. I imagine others had similar work to get on with in the morning.

One night, so the story goes, the Colonel jumped out of bed, threw on his clothes, climbed out of the bedroom window and down a drain pipe, sprang onto his pushbike and pedalled up Curtains Hill, along through the village to the headquarters timing his journey.

With our boys in blue winning the "Battle of Britain" and Hadlow Down Home Guard on this side of the channel can you blame Adolph funkng the invasion of Britain.

When the Home Guard was being run down in 1944 my dad had a few of the rifle fire simulating crackers, these ended up being incorporated into some Christmas crackers that my mum had made. The party was a cracking success.

Richard Boswell tells me that he and his friend Graham Long, when they were boys played war games in the remnants of a slit trench that the platoon had dug on the side of the road half way down Wilderness Lane.

The Colonel was a sides-man and read the lessons at St Marks church, his studded army boots could be heard as he strode up and down the church isle on some pretext or other for some time after the war had finished. One hot Sunday during hay-making time my parents went to take Holy Communion. My father got up from kneeling to go to the alter

steps, came over dizzy and toppled over, he was up within a few seconds. The Colonel had wasted no time, he marched out of church and returned with the enamel jug that stood out side for churchyard flowers, this narrow necked jug he had filled with the dirty water from the out-side tank. "Put your head in this" the Colonel said, my dad who was by then back to his old self, dad commented that he couldn't possibly put his head in it even if he needed to. The Colonel wasn't going to be out done so he tipped the water over him, that was probably not the most successful visit to St Marks my folks ever made.