

The Parish of Edderton during 1940 and World War II.

After the retreat from Dunkirk in June 1940, the British Army and its allies regrouped rapidly to take up defensive positions throughout the United Kingdom. In the North of Scotland the Army High Command was faced with the problem of preventing an effective German landing in the Highlands. Such a landing would have the objectives of isolating the naval bases in the Northern Isles and driving southwards to gain control of the many naval and air force bases around the Moray Firth.

The key area in such a strategy was the Dornoch Firth which effectively cuts off Caithness and Sutherland from the rest of Scotland. The crossing of the firth itself was very difficult with its fast tides and shelving mudflats. The road bridge at Bonar and the railway bridge at Culrain were the only ways across that waterway unless the crossing was to be made in the difficult hill country away to the west. If the bridge at Bonar - and to a lesser extent the railway bridge at Invershin - could be held or destroyed, there was then no efficient way by which the tanks and vehicles of an attacking force could drive south out of Sutherland. The Dornoch Firth must have presented the same pattern of problems to the attacking Vikings and the defending Picts twelve hundred years earlier.

In July 1940 the Army moved the Norwegian Brigade north to the Tain/Edderton area. They were supported by Royal Engineers and a battalion of the Pioneer Corps. The Engineers set to and prepared sites for demolition charges in both bridges and built concrete pill boxes that would command the approaches to the bridge. One pill box remains below the Manse at Ardgay. Meanwhile the Pioneers erected poles, I think, around the flats at the headwaters of the firth below Ardgay and certainly in the fields beside the firth on Edderton Farm. I believe poles were also erected on the Dornoch links. These were critical sites for glider landings. The object of the poles was to smash any glider which attempted to land but also to discourage any such attempts as these obstructions would show up well on any aerial reconnaissance photographs. The poles were Scots Pine tree trunks about twenty feet long which were delivered by a train that stopped on the line alongside the fields. I can remember seeing the Pioneers unloading those logs and then carrying them on their shoulders across to where others were digging the holes in which to erect them. They were set out in an irregular pattern about twenty yards apart. There were cattle in the field and these later scratched themselves on the poles knocking some of them down. The Pioneers returned to get them back up, this time digging deeper holes to make sure they stayed erect. This they did for they were still standing six years later when I returned from service in the Royal Navy. I had to buy them from the War Department and then dig them out and cut them up for firewood.

The Edderton Home Guard - originally called the Local Defence Volunteers (L.D.V.) - had been formed in June 1940 and a most effective force they became. By the middle of that month the Muster Roll lists twenty eight men, who had immediately volunteered for service and a further four joined later. There were several trained non-commissioned officers who had served with the Seaforths in the first World War and the rest of us were used to handling a gun and knew our countryside well. We were determined to make the Germans pay dear should they ever land in our country and threaten our homes.

All through that summer, two of us would climb up the Hill of Edderton every morning before dawn and from there keep a look-out over the parish. Our orders were that, should we see any Germans being dropped by parachute, one of us was to watch where they went while the other was to run to the nearest telephone at Edderton Farm and contact headquarters in Tain to inform them of this attack. The threat was very real. The Norwegians warned us that they had never believed that the Germans would land in Norway until one morning the German army just arrived. We must not be caught out. These same Norwegians dug weapon pits on east side of the Hill of Edderton, overlooking the outer reaches of the Dornoch Firth, and there established picquets who kept watch and ward through day and night. The traces of those weapon pits are still to be seen at the present time - sixty eight years later.

The Edderton Home Guard records show that there were four Emergency Posts in the parish which would be manned by named Home Guard members in the event of a call out. Of these, one was on Edderton Hill, two were road blocks - one at Dounie Farmhouse and one at Balacharn Bridge - and the fourth was the central command post at the Edderton Port Office. There is no doubt that the Edderton Home Guard - No. 2 Platoon, A Company, 1st Battalion, The Ross-shire Home Guard - would have given a good account of themselves had the Germans ever landed. The Germans might not have been stopped but they would certainly have been delayed. The Ross-shire Home Guard was a well organised and well trained unit, armed with American .300 rifles and some automatic weapons, equipped with battledress and Balmoral bonnets bearing the badge of the Seaforth Highlanders.

Enclosed is a copy of the Disposition Map of the Home Guard platoons in Easter Ross for that fateful summer and autumn of 1940. By the late autumn the urgent need for such a ready defence had passed for Hitler had abandoned his plans to invade the United Kingdom and had turned his attention eastward to the invasion of Russia which was launched in June 1941. Here in Ross-shire, the Home Guard continued to train and took over many guard and look out duties from the army and the Royal Air Force.

Let the record stand. While the Royal Engineers prepared the bridges at Bonar and Culrain for demolition and while the Pioneers erected the poles in the fields and on the beaches, the Home Guard was formed by the men of the parishes around the Dornoch Firth. They had answered the call to arms and stood ready to defend their homes and their land should invading forces ever come their way.

Enclosed.

Disposition Map

Edderton Home Guard Muster Roll

Note on the Norwegian Forces in the Edderton/Tain area.

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Supplied by Reay Clarke in February 2008. Original spelling.