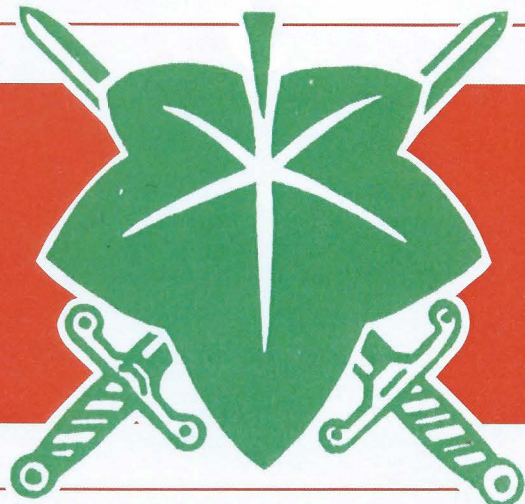


THE FORMATION SIGN

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If The Invader Comes...

As German troops poured into the Low Countries eighty years ago this May, Britain's military authorities began discussing raising a volunteer force for local defence against airborne attacks like those which captured Belgium's border forts at Eben Emael. Four days after Winston Churchill - who since October 1939 had been calling for formation of a defence force of men over forty - became Prime Minister on 10th May, Anthony Eden broadcast an appeal for Local Defence Volunteers. As those willing to serve - aged from 17 to 65 and capable of 'free movement' - rushed to register at local Police stations, discussions began on how to dress, identify and equip this new force.

Local Defence Volunteers, it was announced in the House of Commons on 22nd May, would reinforce Britain's home defence battalions, freeing them from local defence tasks by patrolling and protecting vulnerable spots. A second role, soon described by the popular nickname 'parashots', was to deal with enemy airborne troops as events in Europe had demonstrated that immediate local action against them was vital. LDV were to observe and provide early information on such landings, prevent movement with road blocks, deny access to transport and hem them in as soon as possible.



Although Mr Eden's broadcast promised uniforms, the War Office knew that the best then manageable was an armband stencilled 'LDV', an initial order for 250,000 of them placed with Northampton-based Brook Manufacturing Company, makers of Ladies' Skirts and Blouses. Although further orders increased the number to a million, by July the War Office had acknowledged that deliveries of what were referred to as armllets, armbands or brassards were haphazard and local improvisation and purchase had solved the problem. In Buckinghamshire 'Volunteers...attended their first parade wearing LDV armllets made from puttees worn in the last war...with sewn on tape letters', in Devon 'Various colours were at first donned until Captain Moore RN...obtained some fawn coloured cloth...which a Ladies Working Party made into brassards with white tape lettering'. These home-made efforts were soon replaced by semi-official versions provided by the County Territorial Army Associations which had taken charge of this new force; Greater Manchester units wore a crown above 'LDV' and letters indicating its Zones and Groups, others carrying the appointments of senior ranks, those of Post Office-raised units carrying the GPO logo. Because the material used for armbands was easy to find many authenticated them with official rubber stamps. Thanks to a Society member a selection of armbands - gradually replaced after the LDV became Home Guards in July 1940 - appears overleaf.

