

# MYNYDD Y GARREG

# HOME GUARD

## IN WORLD WAR II



## **Kidwelly's Hidden Role in D-Day:**

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### **The Welsh Crucible for Operation Overlord**

Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire – As the world marked the anniversary of D-Day, the pivotal Allied invasion of Normandy, it is vital to spotlight the quiet Welsh communities that served as crucial preparation grounds. The small town of Kidwelly, largely untouched by the direct conflict, suddenly found itself at the heart of the military effort, hosting thousands of American troops who were gearing up for Operation Overlord.

### **The American Arrival and Local Impact**

In the months leading up to June 6, 1944, Kidwelly and its surrounding areas became a vast, secret training camp. American forces, part of the extensive build-up for the liberation of Nazi-occupied Europe, were billeted across the community. Broomhill House, in particular, became a key temporary headquarters and accommodation for the GIs.

The arrival of the American forces brought a unique dynamic. Local fields, barns, and community halls were transformed into makeshift barracks. The presence of these troops was a constant, tangible reminder of the impending invasion and the critical role the area would play in its success, creating a bond of camaraderie and mutual respect between the Welsh community and the American servicemen.

### **Rigorous Training for Normandy**

The preparations in and around Kidwelly were comprehensive and intense. The diverse terrain of the Welsh countryside provided an ideal setting for the rigorous training that would prove crucial during the landings.

\* Tactical and Amphibious Operations: Soldiers honed their skills in marksmanship, tactics, and specialized training, utilizing the landscape to simulate the challenges they would face on the beaches of France.

\* Logistical Hub: Beyond physical training, the area was a key logistical base. Supplies were stored, equipment was maintained, and communication lines were established, all supported by the local population.

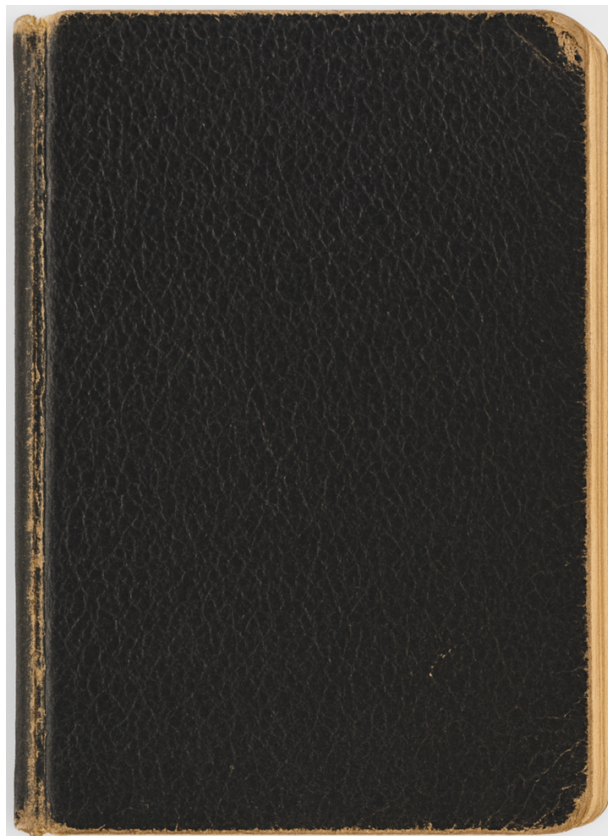
## *The Crucial Role of the Home Guard*

The success of the American training was significantly enhanced by collaboration with local defence units, notably the Kidwelly Home Guard Battalion, which included a key unit from nearby Mynydd y Garreg. These local volunteers provided invaluable expertise and assistance.

### **A Hidden War Within a War.**

While the Home Guard was the official face of local defence, their activities hint at a deeper, more secretive layer of Britain's invasion preparations. Across the UK, a parallel and utterly clandestine organization known as the **Auxiliary Units** or, in later rumours, a 'Secret Army' was being formed.

Recruited from men with intimate knowledge of the land (like gamekeepers, farmers, and poachers), these "stay-behind" guerrillas were trained in sabotage and silent killing, to operate from hidden bunkers if the Nazis invaded. Their existence was so secret that many took it to their graves, only revealed decades later by discoveries like **Edwin Lewis's "sabotage notebook"** in Cornwall—a handwritten manual of explosive devices and assassination techniques.



The Home Guard, including our men in Mynydd y Garreg, formed the visible part of a defensive iceberg, beneath which lay this far more shadowy structure.

## **The Unit: "F" Company 6th Battalion, Carmarthenshire Home Guard**

The Home Guard was organised into counties, then battalions, and then local companies. The unit based in Mynydd y Garreg was:

- **Unit: "F" Company**
- **Battalion: 6th Battalion, Carmarthenshire Home Guard**
- **Area of Responsibility:** This company would have covered Mynydd y Garreg, the surrounding rural areas, and the strategically vital coastline from Kidwelly Ferry eastwards towards Pembrey.

### **Key Locations and Structures**

Several physical reminders of the Home Guard's presence still exist in the area:

1. **The Home Guard Hut on Mynydd y Garreg:** The most direct piece of evidence is the former Home Guard hut itself, located on the common land of Mynydd y Garreg. This would have been their base for drills, storage, and meetings. After the war, this hut was famously converted into the "**Welcome to Town**" pub, and later became a private residence. Its origins are well-known in local memory.
2. **Pillboxes and Defence Posts:** The area around Kidwelly and Mynydd y Garreg was part of a defensive "stop line" intended to halt an enemy advance should they have landed on the nearby Pembrey Coast.
  - **Kidwelly Stop Line:** This line followed natural and man-made features, including the River Gwendraeth Fach and the Kidwelly Canal.
  - **Pillboxes:** Several Type 24 pillboxes were constructed along this line. One still exists very close to Mynydd y Garreg, **situated on the north bank of the Kidwelly Canal, near Heol Las**. This would have been a key defensive position manned by the local Home Guard.
  - **Anti-Tank Cubes:** Large concrete anti-tank cubes can still be found in the fields between Mynydd y Garreg and the coast, another part of the inland defence scheme they would have patrolled.

### **What Their Role Would Have Been**

The men of "F" Company were likely a mix of local farmers, miners from the nearby pits, and other workers ineligible for regular military service due to age or occupation. Their duties would have included:

- **Manning the fixed defences** like the pillbox on the canal.
- **Patrolling the coastline and the vital infrastructure** such as the Kidwelly viaduct and the canal bridges.
- **Guarding key local points** against sabotage or paratrooper attack.
- **Training** with outdated rifles, Molotov cocktails, and other improvised weapons.
- Acting as a source of local knowledge and manpower for the regular army.

## *Training in the Local Quarry*

The Mynydd y Garreg Home Guard utilized the rugged local landscape for essential training:



\* **Safe Firing Range:** A local quarry, such as Smarts Quarry, served as a perfect, natural, and safe firing range. The high walls acted as backstops, allowing the men to practice with their limited arsenal, which included British Lee-Enfields and US-supplied P17 rifles and Sten guns.

\* **Fieldcraft:** The rough terrain of the quarry and surrounding areas was used to drill essential fieldcraft, including Observation Post (OP) duties and simulated Village Defence tactics.

## *The Firearms of a Local Defence Volunteer*

### 1. The Standard Rifle: SMLE No.1 Mk III\*

By mid to late war, the **Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) No.1 Mk III\*** became the standard and most common rifle for the Home Guard.

- **What it was:** The iconic rifle of the British Army in WWI and the first half of WWII. It was a reliable, bolt-action rifle known for its rapid-fire capability and a 10-round magazine.

- **When they got it:** Initially, the regular army had priority. After the threat of invasion receded from late 1941 onwards, and as the newer No.4 Lee-Enfield rifle entered army service, large numbers of SMLEs were passed down to the Home Guard. The men of "F" Company in Mynydd y Garreg would have drilled and stood guard with these for the majority of the war.

## 2. The American Stop-Gap: P17 and P14 Rifles

Before enough SMLEs were available, the Home Guard was equipped with American rifles supplied under the Lend-Lease program.

- **The P17:** Officially the "**U.S. Rifle, cal .30, Model of 1917**". This was a robust, bolt-action rifle very similar in function to the Lee-Enfield. It fired the American .30-06 cartridge, which was different from the British .303.
- **The P14:** The "**Pattern 1914 Enfield**" was a British rifle designed before WWI but mass-produced in the US. It was highly accurate but slower to operate than the SMLE.
- **Use in Mynydd y Garreg:** It is highly probable that the local unit used these American rifles in 1941 and 1942. Ammunition would have been a specific supply chain, and they might have even been painted with a red band around the stock to signify they used non-standard ammunition.

## 3. The Canadian Cousin: The Ross Rifle

Some Home Guard units, particularly in 1940, received the Canadian **Ross Rifle**.

- **What it was:** A Canadian bolt-action rifle used in WWI. It had a reputation for being accurate but was notoriously prone to jamming in muddy conditions, which led to its withdrawal from frontline service.
- **Likelihood:** While possible, it was less common than the American P17 and P14. It may have been issued if there were shortages of other types.

## The "Miscellaneous" Collection (Especially in 1940)

During the desperate early days following the Dunkirk evacuation (Summer 1940), the Home Guard was armed with a wild assortment of weapons, often privately owned. It's plausible that in Mynydd y Garreg, before proper military rifles arrived, you might have seen:

- **Hunting Rifles and Shotguns:** Brought from home by farmers and gamekeepers.
- **Drill Purpose Rifles:** Wooden or deactivated rifles used only for marching practice.
- **Improvised Weapons:** This was the era of pikes, Molotov cocktails, and petrol bombs, famously satirised by the TV show *Dad's Army*.

## Summary Timeline for the Mynydd y Garreg Home Guard:

- **1940 (Formation):** A desperate mix of privately owned shotguns, hunting rifles, and very few military firearms. Training might have been with dummy rifles.
- **1941-1942:** Likely issuance of **American P17** and **P14** rifles, and possibly the Canadian **Ross Rifle**.
- **1942 onwards:** Standardisation on the British **SMLE No.1 Mk III\*** rifle, which would have been their primary weapon until stand-down in December 1944.

### *A Relic of the Home Guard Returns to the Light*



For decades, whispers circulated in Mynydd y Garreg of the local Home Guard using the old quarry for target practice. It was an oral tradition, passed down through generations but never substantiated by physical evidence. That changed when local detectorist Dave Gower meticulously scanned the quarry floor and uncovered a remarkable find: a Bren Mk1 Light Machine Gun, dated 1942.

Heavily corroded by decades of Welsh weather, the weapon is more than just a relic it is a tangible link to the wartime experiences of "F" Company. Rather than being lost or casually discarded, the Bren was likely deliberately decommissioned. As the threat of invasion faded after 1944, the Home Guard was stood down and its weapons collected. This particular gun, possibly worn out or obsolete, appears to have been rendered inoperable and left behind at the very site where the men had trained with it.

When restored for display, one detail stood out: the rifle butt is not original. A new one was carefully crafted to replace the missing piece, ensuring the weapon could be presented in its full form. This subtle restoration highlights both the passage of time and the care taken to preserve the artifact for public memory.

Now brought back into the light, the Bren stands as both confirmation of local memory and a powerful artifact of national history. Its discovery bridges oral tradition with physical proof, ensuring that the story of the quarry and the men who defended their community will endure not just in recollection, but in display.

### *From Quarry to Hall: A Journey of Preservation*

Recognising the artifact's significance, local detectorist Dave Grower undertook the careful restoration of the Bren Mk1, stabilising the relic to halt further decay. Rather than keeping the weapon in private hands, he chose to donate it to Mynydd y Garreg Hall, ensuring it remained within the very community whose wartime story it embodies.

Accompanying the display is a simple but powerful plaque that tells the tale:

DISCOVERED on the MYNYDD

RESTORED and DONATED

by Detectorist Dave Grower

1942

BREN MK1

HOME GUARD: MYNYDDYGARREG & KIDWELLY: WW2

This act of preservation transforms local folklore into tangible history. What was once only whispered in memory now stands in plain sight, a centrepiece for understanding the area's wartime experience. The Bren gun symbolises the serious firepower entrusted to part-time soldiers of the Home Guard—ordinary men who volunteered to defend their homes, their families, and their community.

### *Weapon Specification: The Bren Mk1 Light Machine Gun*

The discovery of a Bren Gun specifically is highly significant. It was not a personal rifle but a **section-support weapon**, indicating the level of equipment eventually issued to the Home Guard.

- **Designation:** Bren Mk1. (Named after Brno, Czechoslovakia, where the design originated, and Enfield, UK, where it was manufactured).
- **Calibre:** .303 British (The standard British rifle and machine gun cartridge of the era).
- **Operation:** Gas-operated, air-cooled, magazine-fed light machine gun.
- **Magazine:** Distinctive curved top-mounted box magazine holding **30 rounds**. (It was typically loaded with 28-29 rounds for reliable feeding).
- **Rate of Fire:** ~ 500 rounds per minute (cyclic).
- **Effective Range:** ~ 600 yards (approx. 550 metres) against area targets.

- **Crew:** Ideally a two-man team—a gunner and a loader who carried extra magazines and spotted targets.
- **Role:** To provide suppressing fire for the infantry section. Its accuracy and reliability made it the backbone of British and Commonwealth infantry squads.

### Why This Fits the Mynydd y Garreg Home Guard:

1. **Standard Issue:** By mid-war, Home Guard battalions were issued Bren guns to give them credible defensive firepower. The 6th Carmarthenshire Battalion would have had an allocation, with likely one or two assigned to "F" Company covering Kidwelly and Mynydd y Garreg.
2. **Training Necessity:** A complex weapon like the Bren required regular training. The secluded quarry provided a perfect, safe location for the local Home Guard to practice loading, firing drills, and clearing jams without alarming the wider community.
3. **Defensive Logic:** In the event of an invasion, this Bren would have been deployed to a key position—likely one of the **pillboxes on the Kidwelly Stop Line**—to cover the canal or a road junction with lethal, sustained fire.

### Conclusion

The "Mynydd Quarry Bren" is more than just a rusted gun. It is direct archaeological evidence of the Home Guard's presence and their level of preparedness. Dave Grower's discovery and donation have secured a powerful symbol of local defiance for posterity. It now stands in Mynydd y Garreg Hall as a permanent tribute to the volunteers who trained with it, ready to defend their corner of Carmarthenshire against an enemy that never came.

### *Collaboration with the GIs*

The value of the Mynydd y Garreg Home Guard extended far beyond local defence. For the American GIs billeted at Broomhill House, these local volunteers became indispensable force multipliers. Their intimate, granular knowledge of the area's terrain, roads, and waterways proved invaluable, turning the Welsh countryside into a more effective training ground for the challenges of Normandy. This collaboration took the form of guided reconnaissance, joint field exercises, and shared security duties, creating a unique fusion of local expertise and Allied military might.

## *Broomhill House*

The arrival of the American forces brought a unique dynamic to Kidwelly. The town, which had been relatively untouched by the direct impacts of the war, suddenly found itself at the heart of a crucial military effort. The presence of the soldiers was a constant reminder of the impending invasion and the critical role that Kidwelly would play in its success.



The preparations in Kidwelly were comprehensive and intense. Soldiers engaged in rigorous physical training, honing their skills in marksmanship, tactics, and amphibious operations.

The surrounding countryside, with its diverse terrain, provided an ideal setting for the kind of exercises that would be crucial during the landings in Normandy. Training also included the use of mock-ups and simulations to prepare troops for the specific challenges they would face on the beaches of France.

Beyond the physical preparations, the presence of American forces in Kidwelly also required extensive logistical support. Supplies had to be stored and transported, equipment maintained, and communication lines established. The local population played a crucial role in supporting these efforts, often interacting with the soldiers, and providing hospitality.

The bond between the American troops and the people of Kidwelly grew strong, creating a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect. Despite the secrecy surrounding the specifics of Operation Overlord, the townspeople were aware that something monumental was underway.

The increased military activity, combined with the presence of high-ranking officers and the visible build-up of men and material, left little doubt that a significant operation was imminent.

On the eve of D-Day, the tension in Kidwelly was palpable. Soldiers wrote letters home, polished their gear, and steeled themselves for the daunting task ahead. The local community, too, felt the weight of the moment, understanding that the success of the invasion could hinge on the readiness of the troops that had been among them.

As the American forces departed Kidwelly for the south coast of England and then across the English Channel to Normandy, the town's role in the grander scheme of the war became clear.

The rigorous training and preparation conducted in Kidwelly contributed to the success of the D-Day landings, a pivotal moment in the fight against Nazi tyranny. Today, as we reflect on the bravery and sacrifice of those who stormed the beaches of Normandy, we also remember the critical contributions of places like Kidwelly. The town's support and the training it facilitated were integral to the success of Operation Overlord.

The legacy of this period remains a proud part of Kidwelly's history, a testament to the town's role in one of the most significant military campaigns of the 20th century.

\* **Local Intelligence:** The men of Mynydd y Garreg acted as guides and liaisons, helping the GIs familiarise themselves with the surrounding roads, terrain, and obstacles—sharpening the troops' field training before they faced the unfamiliar landscape of France.

\* **Joint Exercises:** It is highly likely the Home Guard participated in joint exercises with the GIs, often acting as 'enemy' forces for mock ambushes and defence scenarios. This boosted morale and improved interoperability, with the Americans providing access to more advanced equipment and training methods.

\* **Security and Support:** The Home Guard also assisted in managing the civilian impact of large troop movements, guarding American camps, and aiding local policing efforts.

## **Family Memories of the Mynydd y Garreg Home Guard**

Shared by **Angela Morgan**, based on her father's memories (b. 1930, turning 95 next Monday)

Angela's father recalled several men who served in the Mynydd y Garreg Home Guard during the war:

- **William David Gravelle**, known locally as *William Davy*, a coal man from 4 Newtown.
- **Walter Owen**, known as *Watt Llyn Fach* (after the place he was born), a later of Mount Pleasant who worked for the Council.
- <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/230481933/walter-thomas-owen>
- **David John** (surname unknown), a retired officer from *Pen-y-back Farm*, who acted as their main trainer.

He remembered that when his brother **John** came home on leave from the regular army, the Home Guard would ask him to help train them.

Training took place near a small bridge opposite where Richard Bebb now lives, cutting through what is today, Ray Gravelle Road. That path led to the quarry, where they practiced firing.

Angela's father recalled that **before rifles were issued, the men carried pitchforks, brushes, or whatever they had to hand** to simulate weapons during drill. It was a vivid reminder of the resourcefulness and determination of ordinary volunteers in those uncertain times.

The men would march down from the mountain, past the area where the hall now stands (then just a field), across to Penygroes, and up to the Prince of Wales pub. He didn't think they went as far as Four Roads.

In the early days, before proper equipment arrived, they trained with **brushes, brush legs, and pitchforks** — anything they could use to simulate rifles.

He doesn't recall the Home Guard hut, but he does remember a **brick building** up on the mountain track, which may have served as a base.

Angela's mother also shared a memory: she lived briefly at **Broomhill House** after the American GIs had left. From a photo, she was able to point out the rooms they had occupied the top right front windows and around to the right.

## **Family Memories: Friendships Made Out of Adversity**

In 1939, **Fay Morgan** moved with her family to the Isle of Man, where her father was serving in the army. He was assigned to guard "enemy aliens" at the **Sefton Internment Camp** on Douglas promenade. The camp housed German and Austrian men, later joined by Italians and Finns — a total of 307 internees. Fay remembered

the promenade being sectioned off with barriers and soldiers on guard, the internees sitting outside or dangling their feet from the upper windows as they read.

One day, while Fay's mother had taken her and her siblings to the beach, two internees attempted to escape down the sands. Warning shots were fired, and they were swiftly returned to the hotels. Despite the seriousness of the times, Fay remembered her childhood years on the Isle of Man fondly.

The family returned to **Kidwelly in 1944/45**, where they were temporarily housed at **Broomhill** along with ten other families. Broomhill had earlier been used to billet American troops, and on VE Day the children celebrated with a party in one of the huts left behind. Fay's first job, at just 14, was making camouflage nets in a building next to HSBC in Llanelli.

Her husband, **Vernon Morgan**, born and raised in Mynydd y Garreg, carried his own vivid wartime memories. Around 1940/41, he and his friends discovered a long length of silk material in a field near the limekiln. They hauled it back to Mynydd y Garreg School, where it was identified as a target used by trainee Spitfire pilots — trailed behind aircraft for live-fire practice. A teacher contacted the RAF at Pembrey, and an officer came to collect it, expressing his gratitude.

At the same time, four young brothers were evacuated from London to the area. Two stayed at Four Roads, one on Meinciau Road, and another — **Pat Driscoll** — lodged with two elderly sisters at The Croft in Mynydd y Garreg. Pat, however, preferred the lively company of Vernon and his many siblings, often sneaking into their farmhouse until he was eventually allowed to move in. At 15, Pat had to return home to work, but he remained close to the family, visiting often. He and his relatives attended Vernon's mother's funeral and his sister's wedding. More recently, contact has even been made with Pat's grandson, continuing the bond across generations.

### **Linking to the Home Guard**

These recollections echo the spirit of the Home Guard. Fay's memories of soldiers guarding internees, Vernon's story of improvised vigilance, and the children's celebrations at Broomhill all reflect the same resilience shown by the volunteers of Mynydd y Garreg.

Like the Home Guard, families improvised with what they had — pitchforks, brushes, or even silk targets stumbled upon in fields — and stood watch over their communities in uncertain times. The friendships forged with evacuees, such as Pat Driscoll, remind us that wartime service was not only about defence, but also about compassion and solidarity.

**Together, these memories remind us that the spirit of the Home Guard was not only found in uniformed patrols, but in the everyday resilience of families and communities. The Bren Mk1 now displayed in Mynydd y Garreg Hall stands as a symbol of that spirit: ordinary people, extraordinary duty, and a legacy of courage that endures.**

## *The Departure and Legacy*

On the eve of D-Day, the tension in Kidwelly was palpable. The soldiers departed for the ports of Southern England, leaving behind a community that understood the immensity of the task ahead. The rigorous training and preparation conducted in the fields, roads, and quarries around Kidwelly contributed directly to the combat readiness of the troops who stormed the beaches of Normandy.



Today, as we commemorate the bravery and sacrifice of D-Day, we also honour the critical and often overlooked contributions of places like Kidwelly and its dedicated Home Guard, whose support and local expertise were integral to the ultimate success of Operation Overlord. The legacy of the Mynydd y Garreg Home Guard Unit transcends mere military history; it is a profound testament to local duty.

These were our fathers, grandfathers, and neighbours' men who guarded the bridges, drilled in the quarry, and shared their unparalleled knowledge of the land with the American GIs at Broomhill House. They were the ultimate expression of community resilience. As we walk our lanes and view the hills around us, let us always remember that our quiet corner of Wales was once a crucial staging post for freedom, and the contribution of the Mynydd y Garreg volunteers remains an indelible, proud chapter in the history of our village.

# A TRIBUTE TO THE HOME GUARD



The men of "F" Company Home Guard  
were not called to the front. They  
were the front line of their community.

Mynydd y Garreg and Kidwelly lay in  
their charge, protected by  
vigilance and courage.

1942  
BREN MK1  
MYNYDD Y GARREG & KIDWELLY

*In Honour of the Mynydd y Garreg Home Guard 1940 – 1944*

Ordinary men, farmers and workers, stood watch over their community. Armed with rifles, improvised weapons, and the Bren, they guarded bridges, quarries, and coastlines.

Not on the front line abroad, but the front line at home. Their vigilance and duty kept Carmarthenshire safe.



<https://tinyurl.com/MYG-Home-Guard-WW2>



*Graham T Emmanuel 2025*