

This booklet is to give some idea of how the Second World War affected the lives of those living in Castletown and surrounding area. The information has been gathered from a variety of sources including personal recollections and official records.

Preparing for Castletown aerodrome

By John B Swanson

"In the early summer of 1939 two officials called at our home at West End, Castletown asking for information regarding the Upper Quarries. My father invited them in and over cups of tea suggested that they contact D.C. Murray, father of Brigadier Keith Murray of Borgie House (proprietor of the Post Office). The visitors then left and headed for the local Post Office with myself as guide. My first run in a private car.

The following day our visitors were seen surveying the quarry area and this exercise lasted two days when they then turned their attention to the quarries on the north side of Castletown Main Street.

The above actions caused a lot of speculation in the village. In late September Wimpey's transport arrived at the Upper Quarries loaded with all parts for a stone crushing machine and a tar plant. Both units were erected in record time and soon lorries were carrying the tarry mix to pour onto the surface of the aerodrome. The concrete bases are still visible in the quarry.

Machines and men also arrived at the farm of Thurdistoft with the intention of building an airfield. They started with the removal of all soil from the proposed runways also demolishing any building which would prove a hazard for aeroplanes taking off or landing. At that time there was a large, manually operated sluice and dam situated within a hundred yards of the house known as the Chimneys. There was also a road that ran straight on to the farm at Tain. In no time the dam was filled in and that, together with the road, was covered by the aerodrome.

Excavations of runways were completed and approximately forty to fifty lorries were parked around the quarry. The carting of hard-core to Thurdistoft for bottoming went on day and night for many months. In due course the required amount of crushed stone had been delivered to Thurdistoft and stage two then started.

The tar plant got going and the transporting of tar was again a round the clock effort. There were many drivers from outwith the county and they were all accommodated in and around the village of Castletown.

To enter or leave the quarries the lorries had to turn very near to our home and scraped wall and bent mud wings were regular occurrences. Owing to the amount of transport on site a garage was built for the maintenance and the pit for working on the underside of lorries is still there."

A brief history of RAF Castletown

By Andrew Guttridge

Why Castletown?

It is perhaps odd to think that at one time this remote little Caithness village had as its name-sake a fully fledged fighter aerodrome right in its midst, home from home to hundreds of servicemen and dozens of aircraft that were the last word in cutting edge aeronautical technology of the day.

Why did this come about and how?

The remoteness of Castletown belies its one-time strategic importance for the defence of Scapa Flow and the coastal waters round Northern Britain. From the outbreak of war Caithness found itself in the front line, not only with Scapa Flow just 20 or so miles away, but with the threat of German occupation of Norway, the government was fearful of an invasion here in Caithness, to deny the fleets safe anchorage in Scapa and to hinder our ability to patrol the North sea. The need for a fighter aerodrome in the far north was realised.

Setting up and settling in

The area was surveyed in late 1939 a site was chosen at Thurdistoft and purchased under the new emergency powers act. Several families were moved out of their homes as they were bulldozed to make way for the new aerodrome. Construction began in early 1940 and on the morning of the 28th May, as the evacuation of



Dunkirk was just beginning, the station was officially opened with a compliment of 1 officer and 10 airmen. Initially there was the work of settling in and setting up the complex organisation of men and material that goes to make up an active aerodrome. Over the next few weeks personnel, stores and equipment continued to arrive until on June 7th 1940, just one day before the fall of Norway, RAF Castletown became an operational fighter station of No 13 Group Fighter Command. The following day its first commanding officer Wing Commander David Atcherley (pictured on left) arrived and assumed command of the station. David, then a young man of 36, and his twin brother Richard were already well known and respected figures within the service.

Big Bertha

Both brothers were highly individual and somewhat unorthodox characters. While David was in Castletown, Richard was commanding RAF Drem near Edinburgh, and a keen sense of competition developed between them regarding station defence. David won the day when he managed to "recover" a 47" deck gun from an abandoned navy sloop. The gun was inevitably named Big Bertha and was mounted on a concrete platform at the west end of Dunnet Beach. The mount is still there if you look with the ring of bolts for mounting the gun and the letters RAF picked out in pebbles at one side. By some means he managed to obtain 130 rounds of ammunition for this gun from the Royal Navy depot at Chatham

Fair exchange

Firing Big Bertha was in the charge of a corporal of the Pioneer Corps who had been left behind by a Pioneer Company in exchange for a bacon slicer from the airmen's mess. Incidentally this company of Pioneer Corps had arrived by train at Wick and were unsure where they should report to. David heard about their predicament and, never one to let an opportunity go pass by, he shanghaied the lot of them and brought them to Castletown. They carried out many odd tasks about the station until someone discovered they should have been in Hackney Wick in London.

The corporal performed his firing job well and there were a number of successful practice shoots at a target on Dunnet Head.

Early arrangements

At this time RAF Castletown was little more than three grass runways and a centralised collection of wooden and nissen huts. There were no hangars and maintenance had to be done in special aircraft tents, which only covered the engine, cockpit and wings. Imagine servicing an aircraft in a raging winter blizzard with nothing more than a bit of canvas for protection. To supplement this lack of accommodation a number of buildings in the village were requisitioned for use.

Castlehill House by the harbour became Station HQ and HQ officers mess for five officers. The new school building, old school building, infants school, Drill Hall, Free Church hall, ex-servicemen's club and the Masonic Lodge were taken over as sleeping accommodation for airmen. Part of the Headmasters house became the sick quarters for a while. The Church of Scotland canteen took over the Traill Hall. The building opposite the hotel was used as Barrack stores. The old Mill housed the army defence unit for the defence of Dunnet Bay. Dunnet Hotel was the squadron officers mess. The Established church was converted to become first the airmen's mess, then for ground forces RAF.

There were some portraits on the walls of various RAF characters, and an amusing mural of an aircraft flying low over a cottage and causing all sorts of mayhem for the people below. Sadly time and vandals have all but destroyed them.



The bare walls were adorned with portraits of some of the WAAFS and Airmen who were stationed in the village during the war (left)

First arrivals

Two days after David Atcherley's arrival, Castletown received its first squadron. These were the Hurricanes of 504 squadron sent here to rest after some hard fighting in France. Their stay was uneventful and by November they had been replaced by No 3 squadron.



A Hawker Hurricane Mk 1 in 504 Squadron markings

Harsh winter

Despite continuing construction work, the station was unprepared for the winter of 1940-41, which was one of the worst that Britain had experienced for many years.

RAF Castletown was still somewhat primitive - draughty steel nissen huts with concrete floors and only one single stove for warmth in the middle. The ration of half a bucket of coal a day was hardly enough to provide heat in normal conditions, let alone severe winter ones.

The coal ration, in the form of large bituminous blocks, was delivered by an unfortunate airman - usually as a punishment for some minor misdemeanour. He regularly did the rounds of the huts to replenish the stoves, breaking the big lumps down to stove door size with a large coal hammer which he carried with him. He would do this inside the hut, often waking the occupants at 4 o'clock in the morning as bits of debris pinged off the metal walls.

The situation improved when permission was given to cut peats from Dunnet Head to supplement the scarce coal supply. It was at this time that David Atcherley instigated the issue of a tot of rum twice a day to every man to keep the chill away.

In mid January of '41, the snow became so heavy that all main roads and the railway in the county were blocked. At Castletown every available transport vehicle was rounded up and by running them up and down the runways all day to compact the snow the station was kept operational. Which was just as well for the personnel of the RAF radar station at Sango near Durness, who were completely cut off and without food for days. Regular flights by Harrow aircraft were made from Castletown to supply Sango with food parcels dropped from home-made parachutes.

A far cry from rationing

Station life was not all bad. In fact when 610 squadron arrived with the Battle of Britain air ace Sqn Ldr Johnnie Johnson DSO, DFC (below in an article from the Press & Journal) the officers spent their off duty hours shooting deer at Berriedale and dining on the venison at the Dunnet Hotel. They shot mallard and widgeon at Loch Heilan and grouse from the moor. It was a far cry from rationing even by the RAF's standards. However their stay did get off to a damp start as four days after their arrival a spell of 30 hours of continuous rain reduced the aerodrome to a lake despite the heavy drainage systems installed during construction works.



Johnnie Johnson beside a Spitfire painted with his initials at Duxford Imperial A i r M u s e u m i n Cambridgeshire.

The text of this article shown ont eh next page.

UK's top wartime fighter ace dies

BRITAIN'S most successful fighter ace of World War II, Air Vice-Marshal Johnnie Johnson, has died at his home in Derbyshire. He was 85.

Johnson, who was stationed at RAF Castletown in Caithness for a few months in 1942, notched up a record 38 confirmed "kills" on his way to becoming the RAF's "Top Gun" in the

But he overcame an inauspicious start, having crashed his first Spitfire just four days after flying it for the first time.

The village bobby's son from Melton

Mowbray, Leicestershire, was called up by the RAF Volunteer Reserves, joining his first operational squadron in the summer of 1940.

His flying was initially hampered by a rugby injury and when he reported the injury he was suspected of having a lack of moral fibre.

But he had an operation to allow him to get back in the air and shot down his first Messerschmidt over France under the leadership of Sir Douglas Bader, with whom he became great friends.

In 1944, he famously hung beer bar-

rels from the wings of his plane and flew back to base with some vital liquid refreshments for his men.

His remarkable flying record included never being shot out of the sky during 1,000 sorties, although he said he was once hit when outnumbered by six Messerschmidts.

Last year he told of the mood he found in the RAF when he was a novice and the aerial melées of the Battle of Britain were unfolding over southern England. "They were dark days for the RAF,

but morale was very high," he said.

Text of Press & Journal Article accompanying picture on previous page

Caithness winds

Cold was not the only element to contend with at Castletown, the notorious Caithness winds gave just as much trouble to pilots and ground crews. During the winter months aircraft were routinely tied to the ground using huge screw pickets to prevent them being blown over.

Aircraft were not the only casualties of gales. In October 1940 the recently completed cook-house near the school building had most of its roof blown off in an overnight gale.

Kept busy with patrols

As the war progressed, the threat of invasion receded but attacks on Orkney and allied shipping were still a problem, and Castletown fighters were kept busy with patrol duties. At the beginning of May 1941 No 124 squadron was formed here at Castletown with an operational strength of 18 of the new Mk1 Spitfires. 124 squadron's offices are one of the few buildings still standing at Castletown, beside the Greenland road. Someone has inscribed 124 on the concrete path just beside the door. Its main duties were flying the usual coastal and convoy patrols, as well as post training flying experience for new pilots to introduce them to operational flying before being posted to units in the south.



VIP Visitors

On the 9th August, 124 squadron was asked to provide an escort for an "important personage" from Inverness to Hatston in Orkney. At ten minutes past nine in the morning a very impressive formation consisting of a Hudson aircraft accompanied by 36 fighters passed over Castletown aerodrome. It was later discovered that the important person had been none other than the H. M. King George VI on a flying visit to inspect Orkney defences.

During the summer of 1942 No 167 squadron was stationed here, flying the usual patrols. The Dutch pilots of 167 were surprised when Prince Bernhardt of the Netherlands flew in, in a Spitfire, to inspect the squadron. Unfortunately on landing he overshot the runway and ran into soft ground ending up with the aircraft on its nose but undamaged. The Prince escaped unscathed.

Pilot killed

Castletown had its share of danger and misfortune also. Perhaps one of the most poignant was the fate of Flt Sgt William C Keegan, only 20 years old, a young American pilot of the Royal Canadian Airforce. He was posted to join 167 squadron at Castletown on 15th June 1942.

As he arrived in his new Spitfire, he performed a low roll or Victory roll over the airfield. This was a practice expressly forbidden in the RAF but frequently indulged in by exuberant young pilots. On landing he was immediately reprimanded by his squadron commander for his irresponsible and dangerous conduct.

Unfortunately this did not have the desired effect, for just four days later as he was returning from convoy patrol, flying in low on his approach to land on the main runway, he performed another victory roll. This time he was unlucky. He misjudged his height, and ran through a wall beside Tansfield at the south end of the village. His aircraft hit the ground and disintegrated, wreckage littered right across the field. Sgt Keegan himself was found 30 yards away with severe internal bleeding. He was rushed to Dunbar Hospital but died of his injuries.



He was buried in Olrig cemetery with full military honours, alongside several other pilots who never returned home from their posting to RAF Castletown.

Christmas dinner 1941

Conditions and facilities continued to improve all the time. Groups of hutted camps appeared all around Castletown - at Castlehill House, in the Gill, in the village and dotted around the aerodrome. Life at RAF Castletown had its compensations as well.

For example Christmas Day dinner consisted of roast turkey, pork stuffing, vegetables, apple sauce, and Christmas pudding. Approximately 1000 airmen were served and each was given a bottle of beer, an apple and 10 cigarettes.

Other ranks were served during the day and officers dined at night and entertained their wives and friends. Rations were supplemented by the station "garden" which boasted 800 lettuces, and some 6000 onions and leeks. The Officers' Mess also kept lobster pots in the bay.

Social life

Further social improvements came with the opening of a station cinema at the beginning of March 1942 with two performances daily. By April Castletown boasted its own newly formed concert party and shows in the new cinema became a regular feature. A squash court was built close to station HQ for the officers.

Events and competitions with the other local services were popular as well. For example an aircraft recognition competition between Miss Stroma Sinclair's team of six lady Coastguard watchers and the RAF's resident Anti- Aircraft Artillery team. The coast watchers won 488 points to 486.

Sporting events also kept station personnel busy in their off duty hours. They boasted their own soccer, squash, hockey and especially cricket teams. The lads from the local Air Training Corps visited on a number of occasions to sample life on an active RAF station, and receive tuition from Air Force regulars.

However the extra hut accommodation was still not enough to cope with the influx of men to the station.

At Dunnet Hotel where officers of No 54 squadron were billetted, one girl was cooking all day for the 17 officers and 8 auxiliaries and daily threatened to walk out on Mr Wilson the hotel owner.

The predicament was further heightened on 19th March 1942 when permission was requested by the AM to requisition the Dunnet Hotel and Dunnet Manse to accommodate WAAFs for the new Navigation Station on Burifa Hill.

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Improvements to Station

Flying conditions were further improved with the laying of three asphalt runways and perimeter track. Aircraft pens were now in evidence so maintenance work could now be carried out in relative comfort. A Bellman type hangar was erected beside "the Chimneys" cottage. Flying control was handled from the new large two storey control tower which had a commanding view across the landing ground. In June of 42 the station HQ moved out of Castlehill House into purpose built offices on the aerodrome.

Gradual rundown

Squadron followed squadron at Castletown performing their allocated tasks, training, patrols and the occasional excitement when an enemy aircraft was encoutered. The routine was broken by numerous defence drills and exercises. After the end of 1943 things began to run down at Castletown, squadrons were fewer and did not stay as long. The last aerial visitor was a hoverfly helicopter from 771 Squadron, RNAS Twatt in Orkney on March 24th 1945. The personnel drifted away to other postings and the station soon reverted to a Care and Maintenance status.



Fleet Air Arm Sikorsky R-4 Hoverfly (HNS-1) MkI KL110 at the RAF Museum

Looking back

At its height the station strength was officially 1227 personnel, including 60 officers and 113 Senior NCOs. But added to this were the personnel of squadrons stationed here usually two at any time, Pioneer Corps carrying out maintenance and construction work, the engineers of the AMWD, civilian contractors for heavy construction work, the RAF regiment in charge of station defence and the WAAF's. An estimate of some two to two and a half thousand is probably nearer the mark.

RAF Castletown was perhaps not in the thick of the fighting as were its contemporaries such as Hornchurch or Biggin Hill, but it played its part in the overall strategy. Nor was a posting to RAF Castletown necessarily a "cushy number". It is easy now to look at the dozen or so buildings and a few strips of overgrown tarmac, all that remains of the station, and to forget that RAF Castletown was once, for the four or five short years of its life, a bustling hub of activity and a home from home for thousands of servicemen, intent on keeping the Nazi invader from our shores.

I hope that what you have read here has gone some way to reminding us of Castletown's contribution to the defence of our country in the last war, and has enriched our knowledge of a heritage of which the village of Castletown can be justly proud.

Squadrons who visited RAF Castletown

Sqn	Start date	End date	Sqn	Start date	End date
3	30/05/1940	13/09/1940	260	07/01/1941	10/02/1941
3	13/10/1940	06/01/1941	278	01/02/1944	01/04/1944
17	05/04/1941	15/06/1941	282	01/09/1943	22/11/1943
54	17/11/1941	01/06/1942	310	26/06/1943	20/09/1943
66	08/05/1944	13/05/1944	331	21/08/1941	21/09/1941
118	19/10/1943	19/01/1944	401	12/12/1940	01/02/1941
123	22/09/1941	11/04/1942	404	20/06/1941	27/07/1941
124	10/05/1941	17/11/1941	504	21/06/1940	01/09/1940
131	22/01/1943	25/06/1943	504	19/09/1943	18/10/1943
132	01/01/1944	19/03/1944	504	10/03/1944	10/07/1944
167	01/06/1942	13/10/1942	607	27/07/1941	20/08/1941
213	18/02/1941	11/05/1941	601	15/10/1942	19/01/1943
232	18/09/1940	12/10/1940	808	05/09/1940	01/10/1940

Other units serving at RAF Castletown and vicinity

In the early years of the war the defence of RAF stations was the responsibility of the army. However in 1942 the RAF took over this task themselves by creating the RAF Regiment. In 1942 No. 2816 Sqn. RAF Regiment arrived at Castletown to assume responsibility for its defence.

Companies of the Air Ministry Pioneer Corps were present at the station, they had responsibilities for defence and general construction work.

Not forgetting the women's contribution, there was a strong WAAF presence at Castletown after 1942.

Also associated with the RAF were the Royal Observer Corps, responsible for spotting and tracking enemy aircraft once they had passed over the coast.

During the course of the war a number of military units were stationed within the vicinity of Castletown. These units were mainly concerned either with defending the aerodrome against air and land attack, or defending the vulnerable coastal areas against the threat of invasion.

A Field battery of the 111 Army Field Regiment Royal Artillery was situated in the Olrig Hill area for invasion defence purposes.

Anti-Aircraft defence for the north of Scotland came under the command of No 3 Anti Aircraft Division Royal Artillery. A number of both Heavy and Light Anti Aircraft batteries for the airfield defence came and went at Castletown during the course of the war.

A number of regular army regiments were positioned around Castletown for either Station Defence of the aerodrome or Invasion Defence of Dunnet links. Companies from the following regiments came and went during the course of the war:-

- 10th Black Watch
- 8th Gordon Highlanders
- 17th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders
- 7th Cameron Highlanders
- 8th Seaforth Highlanders
- 5th Seaforth Highlanders
- Cameronians

Other military units were present in the area such as the Royal Engineers engaged in construction work on the aerodrome, defences and camp sites and The Corps of Military Police. As well as the regular military units, other official and semi-official services and organisations had a presence in and around the village at one time or another, all of which played their part in Castletown's wartime role and deserve mention

Home Guard, Coast Guard, Coast watchers, Civil Defence, Air Raid Precautions (ARP), Civil police, NAAFI, Salvation Army, Church of Scotland Comforts Committee and others.

Schooling

During the Second World War schooling for Castletown pupils was disrupted when the school was taken over by the military. Many of the children were transported by bus to Thurso and others were taught in the various halls around the village including the District Council Office which housed the Registrars Office, at the entrance to the school grounds.

Agnes Swanson and Anne Manson recall starting school at five and four respectively.

"We started school at the Infant School in Main Street, Castletown and Miss Murray was our teacher. She was an excellent teacher and everybody liked her.

In 1939 we were eagerly waiting to go to our new school but war broke out and the school was taken over by the R.A.F. and we had a long holiday. Then we went to school at various places, Church of Scotland hall, Free Church hall, the hut in the playground of the infant school and finally the qualifying class in the Traill Hall which was a canteen in the evening for the forces and run by the Church of Scotland. All during the war years we never went without our gas mask and had gas mask practice once a week.

The Military were billeted in the school which we should have moved into and also the old church over there was the dining hall and the building at the back was the cook house, and there was another building at the side which was used as a store. Then they built another building over there and that was a picture house for the forces. They were all very friendly and great with all the bairns, there was never any trouble.

We wore navy gymslips to school with a sash and a blazer any colour. We also wore leather shoes with laces, and ankle socks but knee socks in the winter. Sandals in the summer, leather type. Hand knitted jumpers and cardigans, everybody had hand knitted stuff. I wore hand-me-down clothes because there were seven of us. The only thing I got new were shoes because my feet were bigger than my sister's.

We travelled to Miller Academy on an ordinary Highland bus. It was free. We got the bus at the Traill Hall and then we picked up at the Hotel and at West End. We also picked up Cath Murray, the teacher at her house. When Willie Johnston was driving the bus he always went past the teacher's gate and then reversed back and she would say "I knew it was you that was driving Willie, you always go past!". It was all a game. There was no misbehaving, there was no wandering around the bus, everybody had to stay in their seats, or else!

At first we didn't integrate with the Thurso children except for music and gym, the boys going separately from the girls. Mr Gunn came in from Castletown for maths and Mr Dallas for French and Mr Green for science. In the second year we were all mixed in with the Thurso lot, it was only the first year that Castletown were on their own."

The War Effort at Home

Recycling

Within the village people especially children were willingly involved in collecting materials for reuse - recycling in its early form. Silver paper from cigarette packets and sweet wrappers was carefully preserved and collected. Jam jars were saved and collected for reuse. Newspapers were gathered and stored in Mrs MacIvor's shed under the high cairn. Iron railings round gardens were mostly sawn off and sent away to be used in the production of armaments. It was later discovered that the metal was not suitable but at least local people felt they were contributing to the war effort

The Red Cross and the church guild organised working parties for the knitting and darning of socks, scarves and "helmets" for servicemen.

Fund raising

Children went round the doors with baskets of heather on Heather Day to raise funds for the SSPCA.

Dances, bring and buy sales and auctions raised funds for treats for servicemen and prisoners of war, for example, sweets and cigarettes.

Mr James Anderson of Broynach, secretary of the local Home Guard, wrote for permission to hold a dance in Murkle school on 31st August 1942 to raise funds for charity. He undertook to ensure that the school would be properly blacked out for the occasion. "There has not been a dance in Murkle for some years", he wrote.

The late John Mackenzie of St Margrets, Castletown used to be called upon by the RAF dance bands to provide Scottish music at concerts and parties.

Our allies were not forgotten, large quantities of clothes and money being sent to the Russian Fund.

The protection of the village against attack

Alex Mackay, the policeman was responsible for alerting villagers to danger by blowing his police whistle. There was no air raid siren.

Leaflets issued in 1939 advised householders how to act in the event of an air-raid, how to use and maintain gas-masks, and minimise fire risk from incendiary bombs.

The first experience of possible attack came on 17th October 1939 when news of an incident in Bower reached the ears of Castletown folk.

Mrs Cormack of Nybster reported that her brother in law Alexander Cormack had been struck down with the effects of noxious gas fumes shortly after an unidentified plane had passed overhead. Later that same day Orkney suffered its first bombing. After this, the compulsory carrying of gas-masks seemed to have a distinct purpose.

When bombs were dropped on Birkle Hill near the village, in 1941, PC Mackay had to cycle there to check on possible casualties. There were no casualties as the bombs fell in a field, and the bomb craters can still be seen today.

All along the north coast of Caithness, people could witness aerial attacks on Scapa Flow, and it was often possible to identify enemy aircraft even without the help of binoculars.

The following two pages show a notice entitled "Beating the Invader" which was issued in March 1941.



and the Ministry of Home Security

Beating the INVADER

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

IF invasion comes, everyone—young or old, men and women—will be eager to play their part worthily. By far the greater part of the country will not be immediately involved. Even along our coasts, the greater part will remain unaffected. But where the enemy lands, or tries to land, there will be most violent fighting. Not only will there be the battles when the enemy tries to come ashore, but afterwards there will fall upon his lodgments very heavy British counter-attacks, and all the time the lodgments will be under the heaviest attack by British bombers. The fewer civilians or non-combatants in these areas, the better-apart from essential workers who must remain. So if you are advised by the authorities to leave the place where you live, it is your duty to go elsewhere when you are told to leave. When the attack begins, it will be too late to go; and, unless you receive definite instructions to move, your duty then will be to stay where you are. You will have to get into the safest place you can find, and stay there until the battle is over. For all of you then the order and the duty will be: "STAND FIRM ".

This also applies to people inland if any considerable number of parachutists or air-borne

troops are landed in their neighbourhood. Above all, they must not cumber the roads. Like their fellow-countrymen on the coasts, they must "STAND FIRM". The Home Guard, supported by strong mobile columns wherever the enemy's numbers require it, will immediately come to grips with the invaders, and there is little doubt will soon destroy them.

Throughout the rest of the country where there is no fighting going on and no close cannon fire or rifle fire can be heard, everyone will govern his conduct by the second great order and duty, namely, "CARRY ON". It may easily be some weeks before the invader has been totally destroyed, that is to say, killed or captured to the last man who has landed on our shores. Meanwhile, all work must be continued to the utmost, and no time lost.

The following notes have been prepared to tell everyone in rather more detail what to do, and they should be carefully studied. Each man and woman should think out a clear plan of personal action in accordance with the general scheme.

himmel. Chumbell

STAND FIRM

1. What do I do if fighting breaks out in my neighbourhood?

Keep indoors or in your shelter until the battle is over. If you can have a trench ready in your garden-or field, so much the better. You may want to use it for protection if your house is damaged. But if you are at work, or if you have special orders, carry on as long

as possible and only take cover when danger approaches. If you are on your way to work, finish your journey if you can.

If you see an enemy tank, or a few enemy soldiers, do not assume that the enemy are in control of the area. What you have seen may be a party sent on in advance, or stragglers from the main body who can easily be rounded up.

CARRY ON

2. What do I do in areas which are some way from the fighting?

Stay in your district and carry on. Go to worke whether in shop, field, factory or office. Do your shopping, send your children to school until you are told not to. Do not try to go and live somewhere else. Do not use the roads for any unnecessary journey; they must be left free for troop movements even a long way from the district where actual fighting is taking place.

3. Will certain roads and railways be reserved for the use of the Military, even in areas far from the scene of action?

Yes, certain roads will have to be reserved for important troop movements; but such reservations should be only temporary. As far as possible, bus companies and railways will try to maintain essential public services, though it may be necessary to cut these down. Bicyclists and pedestrians may use the roads for journeys to work, unless instructed not to

ADVICE AND ORDERS

4. Whom shall I ask for advice?

The police and A.R.P. wardens,

5. From whom shall I take orders?

In most cases from the police and A.R.P. wardens. But there may be times when you will have to take orders from the military and the Home Guard in uniform.

6. Is there any means by which I can tell that an order is a true order and not faked?

You will generally know your policeman and your A.R.P. wardens by sight, and can trust them. With a bit of common sense you can tell if a soldier is really British or only pretending to be so. If in doubt ask a policeman, or ask a soldier whom you know personally.

INSTRUCTIONS

7. What does it mean when the church bells are rung? It is a warning to the local garrison that troops have been seen landing from the air in the neighbourhood of the church in question. Church bells will not be rung all over the country as a general warning that invasion has taken place. The ringing of church bells in one place will not be taken up in neighbouring

churches.

8. Will instructions be given over the wireless?
Yes; so far as possible. But remember that the enemy can overhear any wireless message, so that the wireless cannot be used for instructions which might give him valuable information.

9. In what other ways will instructions be given?

Through the Press; by loudspeaker vans; and perhaps by leaflets and posters. But remember that genuine Government leaflets will be given to you only by the policeman, your A.R.P. warden or your postman; while genuine posters and instructions will be put up only on Ministry of Information notice boards and official sites, such as police stations, post offices, A.R.P. posts, town halls and schools,

FOOD

10. Should I try to lay in extra food?

No. If you have already laid in a stock of food, keep it for a real emergency; but do not add to it. The Government has made arrangements for food supplies.

NEWS

II. Will normal news services continue?

Yes. Careful plans have been made to enable newspapers and wireless broadcasts to carry on, and in case of need there are emergency measures which will bring you the news. But if there should be some temporary breakdown in news supply, it is very important that you should not listen to rumours nor pass them on, but should wait till real news comes through again. Do not use the telephones or send telegrams if you can possibly avoid it.

MOTOR-CARS

12. Should I put my car, lorry or motor-bicycle out of action?

Yes, when you are told to do so by the police, A.R.P. wardens or military; or when it is obvious that there is an immediate risk of its being seized by the enemy—then disable and hide your bicycle and destroy your maps.

13. How should it be put out of action?

Remove distributor head and leads and either empty the tank or remove the carburettor. If you don't know how to do this, find out now from your nearest garage. In the case of diesel engines remove the injection pump and connection. The parts removed must be hidden well away from the vehicle.

THE ENEMY

14. Should I defend myself against the enemy?

The enemy is not likely to turn aside to attack separate houses. If small parties are going about threatening persons and property in an area not under enemy control and come your way, you have the right of every man and woman to do what you can to protect yourself, your family and your home.

GIVE ALL THE HELP YOU CAN TO OUR TROOPS

Do not tell the enemy anything

Do not give him anything

Do not help him in any way

There were some dramatic moments, recalled by Colin Campbell, "I was standing watching her coming in to the Bay. Her engine cut out, a Blenheim, no petrol. I was first at her on the motorbike. She just dropped behind the sand dunes and ploughed into the dunes a fair way. Broken legs no-one really hurt." This was in 1940 and was the first crash in Castletown

Mr Campbell also remembers three Spitfires on a training exercise with one being chased by the others. "If you take a line between Castlehill and Dwarick pier she hit the water right in the centre. Still there, pilot dead of course." Another time, "Bert and myself were sitting on the old bridge at Waitside. I mind saving to Bert this doesn't sound like one of ours and it was German. I could see the black crosses and the pilot." Another time "there was a big raid on Orkney, two Spitfires came over. We were out at Dunnet watching the raid; it was like a fireworks display. Then we saw a Helcan Bomber being brought in by two Spitfires one on each wing, taken to Wick. Then there was the time the place was bombed. There was a bomber going round and round. I had an argument with Bert Hill. He said it wasn't German and I said it was. Suddenly he let a strip of bombs go up by Borgie and at least one landed on the Tinks at Birkle Hill. Missed the airfield. Next morning the Tinky wifie was down in Castletown selling bits of metal as souvenirs of the bomb. We laughed like anything when she said, "It was lucky we weren't all knocked into maternity." Next day old man tinker was building an air raid shelter and covering it with the horses midden."

The Air Raid Protection (ARP) services were established in Caithness in 1938, with the training of men and women of all ages as anti-gas instructors. James Meiklejohn, East Murkle was one of the local ARP wardens as was Mr Calder senior of The Clett, Castletown.

The Home Guard

Among the local men mentioned as being in the Home Guard were:-

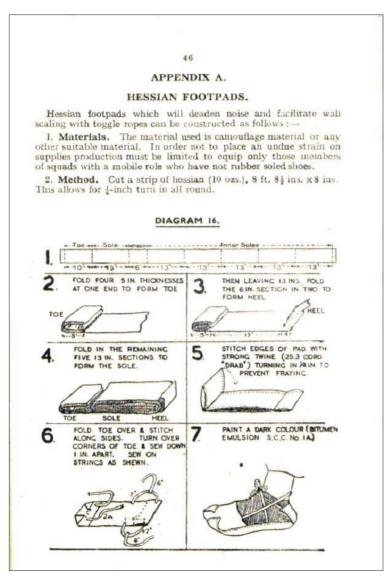
A. Gunn, Headteacher, Castletown; J. Lockie, Borgie Mains; G. Macleod, Westend, Castletown; J. G. Meiklejohn, Sibmister; J. Younger, Hoy; Wm. Budge, Tister; Geo. Baikie, Hilliclay; 2nd Lt Mathieson, Bower and 2nd Lt Sandison, Bower.

The Home Guard in Castletown were trained in security, traffic control, escorting prisoners of war, rifle shooting and maintenance, operating road blocks, recognition of the latest types of enemy bombs, recognition of foreign army uniforms and the method of dealing with the arrival of an enemy vessel.

Drills and exercises took place including trench craft, which was practiced in fields just outside the village up the Birkle Hill road.

The Home Guard were warned that any telephone conversation might be bugged by the enemy and to be wary of imparting information over the phone.

They were urged to return empty cartridges promptly to Stirling for refilling or delay in supplying ammunition would occur.



Part of a Home Guard Instruction Manual

At Castletown with its huge complement of regular servicemen, things were not always easy for the Home Guard. One report to HQ indicates that all was not well between the Airforce and the Home Guard "Home Guard in the vicinity of the aerodrome have no clear idea of what they are supposed to do" wrote a concerned correspondent. "No Home Guard has been held there since November and we have been turned out of the gymnasium which has not been requisitioned."

Home Guard units were taken to task over food wastage, especially of bread and bones. An order from HQ stated that "too much bread is being cut and the unused bread thrown away. All stale bread should be saved and used for rissoles, fishcakes bread pudding and fired bread"

A subsequent order contained a spelling correction - for "fired bread" read "fried bread". Bones were to be used for soup and gravy.

There must have been spells of inactivity while waiting for orders as added to the requests for rifles and ammunition, there were requests for the supply of dominoes (1off), darts (4off), chess (1off), lotto (3off), footballs (2off), ping-pong balls (24off), table tennis bats (4off), net(1off), 'shuvhapenny' boards (3off), extension speaker (2off).

Recruitment to the Home Guard in Caithness was reported to be very slow. Many potential members were reluctant to travel to training in the black-out.

"Auxiliary Units" was the innocuous codename given to a force of civilian volunteers intended to carry out sabotage, guerrilla warfare and spying from behind the enemy lines in the event of a successful German invasion of the British Isles during World War 2. These units were very secret and manned by the best of the local home guard. Between 4 and 8 people formed a unit, you were not allowed to tell anyone you were in it and you only knew the people in your own unit.



Secret underground bases were built where equipment, explosives and food for 2 weeks was stored until needed.

Not much is known about these units locally but they would have existed given the proximity of Thurdistoft and Dunnet Bay.

Auxiliary Unit Badge (left)

Land girls

The Women's Land Army (WLA) was first hastily created during World War One. At that time there was little mechanisation on farms and huge numbers of men were employed on the land. As more and more young men were called up for the armed services, the government appealed to women to do the men's work. This time, as the Second World War became more likely, the WLA was resurrected in the 30's in good time. It played a fundamental part in providing Britain with home produced food at a time when U-boats were destroying merchant ships bringing imported supplies to Britain from America.

The Castletown area had a few land girls. One, possibly called Sadie, worked for George Sinclair at West Murkle. Not far away, Dolores Dickson worked for Hamish Tait at Inkstack, Barrock. Mrs Fergus, now living in Castetown, recalls her days as a land army worker on Crantit Farm, Orkney.



WLA service dress

Coastal watchers

Miss Stroma Sinclair led a group of coast watchers including Vida Houston, Lizzie Junor and Dorothy Calder. They were all highly skilled in aircraft recognition. They operated from a small base on the top of Olrig Hill. Miss Sinclair was always accompanied while on duty by her dog Myski.

Transport

As petrol was strictly rationed for civilians, people of all ages used bicycles to get around for every occasion. It was not unusual to see ladies dressed in their best Sunday suit and hat cycling to church.

Travel to the area for locals returning home on leave was also difficult given that the Highlands North of Inverness were deemed to be a 'Restricted Area' and a special pass was required to enter.

A daily train service, that was started in the first world war and named after Admiral Jellicoe, was restarted from London Euston to transport servicemen to and from Thurso and for onward travel to Scapa Flow in Orkney and the Home Fleet. The journey took around 24 hours with only tea and basic meals provided by the WRVS at certain stations along the way, no lighting on board and cramped conditions with around 500 troops travelling on the 6 coach train.

Many local people travelled on this train to and from postings or leave and nicknamed it the Misery Express.

Clothes

On 1st June 1941 clothing was rationed. The import of raw materials had been severely hampered by the actions of enemy submarines against the merchant fleet, and also the first priority of textile factories now being the production of servicemen's uniforms and other commodities required for the war, like parachutes and canvas tents. The equitable sharing out of limited supplies was done by rationing. Each ration book contained 66 clothing coupons. 11 had to be surrendered to buy a dress, 16 for a man's coat, 8 for pyjamas and a half for a handkerchief.

People were encouraged in various campaigns to GO THROUGH YOUR WARDROBE, and MAKE DO AND MEND.

Here are a few ideas from the people of Castletown

 Any knitted jersey worn at the elbows or outgrown in the arm, was ripped back from the cuff and new sleeves knitted on, often in a different colour.

- Two old jerseys could be unravelled and re-knitted in contrasting stripes to make one new one.
- Summer curtains were turned into sun-dresses and shorts for children.
- Father's old jacket had the sleeves shortened and became a school blazer.
- Father's trousers worn at the knee were cut down to make short trousers for a boy.
- A woollen cot blanket was transformed into a warm baby's jacket.
- An outgrown summer skirt became an apron.
- Cold tea or gravy browning was used to dye legs brown in imitation of unobtainable stockings.
- A black pen and a steady hand could fake a stocking seam up the back of the leg.
- An outgrown cotton skirt became a romper suit for a toddler.
- A knitted tea-cosy made a warm winter hat.
- Just after the war some hard up families sent their children to school wearing their fathers battle dress tunic as a jacket.

Operations on Dunnet Head

Burifa Hill

A Navigational Radar was sited at Burifa Hill, half a mile to the south of Dunnet Head. Large scale maps of the area show there are still a number of buildings on the site.

This was a 'GEE' site with it's parabolic navigation system which was master of the northern chain together with a monitor.

A LORAN long wave navigation radar was also on site.

The station was still operational at the end of the war.

Dunnet Head Coast Defence U-Boat (CDU) Radar Station

OS Grid Ref: ND204766 [Source: Ian Brown]

In late 1939 a scheme was proposed by Vice-Admiral Sir James Somerville to set up radar stations to cover the Fair Isle Channel against U-boats passing through the channel to or from the Atlantic; Somerville was appointed Director of Anti-Submarine Weapons and Devices in January 1940. In the spring of 1940 this scheme was extended to the north of Shetland and to the Pentland Firth. The six stations, known as Admiralty Experimental Stations, in this scheme were located at Sumburgh, Fair Isle (two stations), Saxavord, South Ronaldsay and Dunnet Head and were operated by the Royal Navy.



Map of Dunnet Head showing existing buildings: 1 Operations Block 2 Power House 3 Stand-by Set House, 4 MT Shed, 5 IFF Cabin, 6 ROC Post

Dunnet Head, Admiralty Experimental Station No. 6, was the last to be constructed, work beginning in the summer of 1940 on high ground just to the south of the lighthouse. Like the others, Dunnet Head was a Coast Defence U-boat (C.D.U.) station, the naval version of the R.A.F.'s Chain Home Low (C.H.L.) radar which formed part of the early warning network round the coasts of Britain. The C.D.U. radar was able to track shipping and surfaced submarines to a distance of a few miles and could also detect aircraft at ranges of 100 miles or more, depending on the height of the aircraft.

When erected, the station at Dunnet Head consisted of two separate huts, one for the transmitter and one for the receiver, with the aerial arrays mounted on gantries which straddled each hut. The aerial arrays were of the 'bedstead' type, so called because of their resemblance to mattresses. These aerial arrays were turned by hand, using a purpose built crank and gearbox in the manner of a bicycle with a chain running up through the roof to the aerial frame above. Following several months of construction work, A.E.S. 6 at Dunnet Head became operational in December 1940.

With developments in radar technology it eventually became possible to transmit and receive using a single aerial array and this method of operation was carried out at Dunnet Head from May 1942. However, further improvements continued and a move into a single brick building with a single aerial array on a gantry and power-turned aerial took place in December 1942.





The station had three radars, an AMES Type 2, 10cm AMES Type 30 (A CD1 Mk3 issued only to Admiralty stations), and a Type 57 (AMES 14 Mk2 [T]).

During its operational lifetime, Dunnet Head plotted a number of enemy aircraft in the Orkney area as well as those over South Shetland and the Fair Isle passage, the latter generally meteorological reconnaissance of aircraft flying out into the North Atlantic.

In addition, tracks of some 35,000 friendly aircraft were plotted by the station during the three years it was operated by the Royal Navy.

The naval chapter in the story of Dunnet Head came to an end in October 1943 when the station transferred to the Royal Air Force when it was designated Station 49B under 70 Wing RAF, being operated by them until the station closed down. The radar station is described as 'caretaking' by the end of the war with its future also described as 'caretaking'. Source:-Subterranea Britannica

War Time Reminders Round The Village

<u>West end quarry</u> - first signs of war activity - lorry loads of aggregate taken from here for aerodrome at Thurdistoft.

<u>Church of Scotland manse</u> - Commanding officer stayed here.

Church of Scotland hall - school classes held here

"Co-op" shop opposite St Clair Hotel - Barracks stores for clothing, boots etc.

<u>Drill Hall</u> - in use by the Army with the garages that used to be along side being used as stores.

<u>Mackay's Garage</u> - most easterly building was made from the materials retrieved from the RAF Cook House.

Youth Club - hut in playground of Infants School was another classroom.

Norfrost - original factory used to be sergeants' mess

<u>Commercial Hotel</u> - now site of Betsy's cottages - Naafi shop and store.

<u>Traill Hall</u> - school classes held in day-time, Church of Scotland canteen for servicemen at night.

School - old school building and new extension used as accommodation for airmen. Cinema and gym for troops built in playground, later became school dining hall.

<u>Car-park next school</u> - the schoolmaster's house which stood here was used for a time as sick quarters in September 1940.

Established Church (now unused) - airmen's mess and later for ground forces RAF.

<u>Cook House</u> (built next door to church) - dismantled after war to become Mackay's garage.

(Return to garden centre and head for the sea)

Plantation

Opposite Stanergill Crescent - Naafi.

In trees opposite - Army hospital.

In trees down to sea - Army huts.

In trees at corner - Gun Base.

The Old Mill was used to house the Army Defence Unit for the defence of Dunnet Bay.

<u>Castlehill House</u> - RAF Castletown station HQ and HQ officers mess. Aviation fuel stored in outbuildings

War Time Reminders Out of The Village

<u>Masonic Lodge</u> at Garth - used as sleeping accommodation for airmen.

<u>Thurdistoft Airfield</u> - 124 squadron's offices stand half way between Greenland turn off and "the Chimneys" cottage.

Bellman type hangar for aircraft maintenance was built next to "the Chimneys".

Runways and the firing butts are still visible.

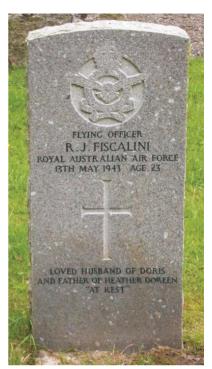
<u>Olrig Cemetery</u> - gravestones of airmen who died at RAF Castletown.

Olrig Hill - hut built near present day mast to house Coast Watchers.

<u>Dunnet Hotel</u> - became squadron officers' mess.

<u>Dunnet Head</u> - remnants of WAAFs base on Burifa Hill for GEE station navigation system. Dunnet Head was a 'CDU' (Coast Defence U-Boat) radar system.







Airmen Who Died While On Active Service At RAF Castletown





Information Sources

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CASTLETOWN HERITAGE SOCIETY

9 Castle Terrace, Thurso, Caithness KW14 8HS E-mail - castletown.heritage@talk21.com

Castletown Heritage Society (CHS) is a formally constituted community group which was established in 1986 to "preserve the character, history and traditions of the Village of Castletown and Parish of Olrig", reflecting prehistoric times to the present day.

CHS is a registered charity (SCO 27858)



504 SQUADRON FIRST TO ARRIVE LAST TO LEAVE