

# Who do you think you are kidding Mr Hitler.....?

**THE photograph in last week's Post of East Meon Home Guard members believed to be taken in 1940 certainly proves the old adage, a picture is worth a thousand words!**

Taken outside East Meon vicarage, not as thought outside Bereleigh House, it touched a nerve with descendants of those ready to lay down their lives if the German army, poised across the Channel in France, had invaded.

Standing in the back row were friends George Dean, sixth from left, and one of the Blackman family of East Meon, identified by George's daughter, Pam Miles.

Of the extended Blackman family, Charles, a Royal Artillery Corps corporal, was accidentally killed while training.

After surviving four years of war lance corporal Ernest Blackman and his close friend Charles Bishop fell at the battle of Arnhem in 1944, made famous in the film *A Bridge Too Far*. Leonard Blackman ended the war a lieutenant.

The youngest of the Home Guard squad has been identified as Morris Hillman, evacuated from Portsmouth and aged just 21 at the time of the



snap in 1940. As an aircraft engineer he was exempt from active military service.

After joining the Home Guard he became friends with comrades Albert Cook, and Les Hacker. Sadly Morris died 18 months ago aged 91. They were identified by Gary Hillman, son of Morris, who was born on Christmas Day, 1943.

Gary said: "They stayed

great friends all their lives, and dad would have enjoyed seeing the picture in the paper."

But East Meon's war effort wasn't restricted to its Home Guard, based at Langrish House were elements of the top secret XII Corps Observation Unit. Researched by local author Fredrick Standfield for his book, *A History of East Me-*

on, some unit members may also have been in the Home Guard.

Twenty eight local men, such as gamekeepers and farmers, with an intimate knowledge of the local countryside were recruited to the unit. In the event of an invasion, they would disappear to bolt holes at East Meon, Buriton, Froxfield and Steep, and

carry out sabotage and intelligence gathering operations.

When recruited by Edward Fitzroy Talbot-Ponsonby, of Langrish House, whose cover role was a Home Guard lieutenant, members were sworn to utmost secrecy, not even allowed to tell their wives.

They were also warned if they had to fight a guerrilla war from their well stocked hideaways—the East Meon one was in Rookham Copse – they were unlikely to survive.

Finally, Tony and Mary Crockford believe they have identified virtually everyone one in the snap; from left back, standing: Bill Blackman, G Blackman, A Rutter, F Newbury, G. Gille, G Dean, W Budd, J Appleby, unknown, L Newbury, W Gredden, unknown, J Blackman, E Swain, A Swain, P Swain, (gamekeeper) A Pullinger. Sitting left to right; Jock Ward, Cliff Kille, H Wynne, F Collyer, Reverend Milne, J Chitty, Mr Haskett, E Gilbert, unknown. Sitting on ground left to right; S Blackman, P H Berry, J. Lanham.

Mary and Tony lived in East Meon throughout the war and say: "We knew most of these men, and think we have remembered them correctly."