

Sussex and Surrey Courier 16th January 1915 page 8

HOME DEFENCE.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING CORPS FORMED AT EAST GRINSTEAD.

The National Invasion Emergency Committee for the Petty Sessional Division of East Grinstead, having been entrusted to proceed with the formation of a Volunteer Training Corps for the town, a public meeting was held in the Queens Hall on Tuesday evening. Mr. E. P. WHITLEY HUGHES presided, and was supported on the platform by Sir R. Hanbury Brown, K.C.M.G., Mr. J. H. Burrell, Mr. W. B. Cannon, Mr. R. H. Du Boulay, Mr. F. S. White and Mr. F. Turner. There was a crowded attendance.

The CHAIRMAN, in the course of a few preliminary remarks, expressed delight at seeing so many present. He was sorry that Mr. E. C. Blount, who had been chairman of the Local Invasion Emergency Committee since it was formed, was not present to take the chair, but, as they were aware, his services had been accepted by the Foreign Office and he had been obliged to resign the chairmanship of that committee. He was glad to say they had been able to induce their neighbour to accept that office, and he had consented to come and explain Lord Desborough's scheme (applause), and also tell them the terms on which they could join the corps. He knew there were several people in the town who thought the meeting should have been called some time ago. The committee had not only received instructions to raise a corps in the town, but also to arrange units in the villages in the division. Sir Hanbury Brown had anticipated these instructions inasmuch as he had raised a corps in his own neighbourhood of Copthorne, which he called the Copthorne Borderers, under the command of Mr. Randall, and at West Hoathly a corps had been raised by Mr. Duckworth. Corps were also to be raised at Turners Hill, Three Bridges, Crawley Down, Hartfield, Groombridge and Withyham. It was suggested that these corps should be raised entirely independently of each other and should be self-supporting, and have their own commanders and their own headquarters and drill halls. It was not suggested that they should be in actual isolation, for if that was so they would be of no military value at all. It was suggested they should be associated and linked together to form a half battalion or a battalion for the whole Petty Sessional Division, to be under the command of a retired military officer, and he hoped they could prevail on their friend Sir Hanbury Brown to accept that position (loud applause).

It had been proposed to ask Mr. E. C. Blount to accept the presidency, and that Mr. C. H. Everard and Mr. J. W. Larnach should be asked to be the vice-presidents. The following had been nominated as a committee: Messrs. A. T. Burt, R. H. Du Boulay, W. B. Cannon, A. Davis, H. Fraser, W. H. Hills, R. Reid, P. E. Wallis, F. Turner and F. S. White. All these gentlemen had consented to act (applause). He (the speaker) had been asked to accept the honorary position of treasurer, and had great pleasure in doing so. They had had some difficulty with regard to the honorary secretaryship. It was essential that they should have a very keen and energetic man, and a man who would devote a lot of time to the welfare of the corps, otherwise it would not be a success. He had asked Mr. Burrell to accept that position and he had consented to do so (applause). He was sure he would make a most excellent secretary. Sergeant W. Copp, W. R. Grayling, Jeffs and L. Raven had consented to act as drill instructors. It was not proposed to appoint any officers at present. They had no headquarters, no drill hall, no rifle range, and, worse than all, they had not a brass farthing in their treasury (laughter). It was evident that the committee had a great deal of work before them. At the present time there were between a million and a half men in the country being instructed in the elementary principles of drill and the use of the rifle as members of similar volunteer corps (applause). Strange things had happened within the last seven months. They all thought invasion was impossible, and he for one did not expect the war. He did not think that Germany could have fought half Europe for a period of more than three months, and had no idea that they could possibly raid their coasts. The services of every able-bodied man might be required to assist in defending their shores. That being so it was the duty of every man to do one of two things, either enlist in the Army or join a Volunteer Training Corps if disqualified. The Chairman concluded his address by asking every man present to either join His Majesty's Forces or become an enthusiastic and keen member of the East Grinstead Volunteer Corps (applause).

SIR HANBURY BROWN proceeded to explain Lord Desborough's scheme. They were there to consider, he said, what they were going to do in the case of invasion. Invasion was not so likely to occur now as it was 12 months ago; in fact, the possibility was a great deal less. But still, they had learnt to realise it. Twelve months ago they had not gone to war. Germany had committed itself at a time that was not favourable for invasion. They would have thought that Germany would have waited until their fleet was engaged elsewhere and then make war on them. There was not much to fear from a raid if they kept their hair on (laughter). It had brought home to them, having a war over the Channel and having hostile ships bombarding Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby, the seriousness of this business and the need for preparing a scheme. They had to prepare for invasion before it came. There were three ways of dealing with an invasion. It was best done by sending all their young men across the water and letting them keep the Germans there. The next best way was to deal with it after it had started and before it reached their shores, and to do this they must send young men for the Navy who would doubtless give a good account of themselves. The third way was to prepare to meet the enemy when they arrived. They were sure to have a certain number of military left to defend the country, but if they were to be of assistance to the Regular Forces training would be very valuable. They had to make themselves fit and when the emergency came the Government would find them arms. All they had to do was to train themselves for when the time came. Sir Hanbury proceeded to read out the orders for special constables. Continuing, the speaker stated that it would be no good belonging to any organisation that was not recognised by the War Office. When they reached a state of efficiency their names would be put on a list and when the invasion began the officer commanding would ask for certain corps to be placed under his orders. If there were any corps that did not conform with the orders of the Government they would be no good whatever and would have their arms taken away from them. Anyone that wanted to have his own way would be no good at all and would only be bringing destruction upon his home and village. They could not defend their homes by standing on the doorstep. They had to do that which would keep the enemy five miles off and prevent him from dropping "Black Marias" down their chimneys (laughter). They in East Grinstead had already gone a certain distance, having had a committee formed, but, as Mr. Hughes had said, they had no money, no arms and no clothes, and no nothing (laughter). The first thing to do was for the men to come forward and put their names down and undertake to submit themselves to drill and training. This would be ordinary infantry drill according to the War Office manual, and later they would have to go through extended order drill and get into formation for fighting the enemy. They would have to learn to shoot and to entrench, because if it came to serious business they would want to know how to get themselves under cover as quickly as possible. These four things were about all it would be necessary for them to know. It was not a business of playing at soldiers, as the object was to make themselves as useful as possible if the emergency arose. Sir Hanbury next referred to a communication Lord Desborough had received from the Government, stating they were willing to recognise the Central Association and all bodies affiliated to that Association and conforming to their rules. It would not be necessary for them to have arms for the next three or four months, because during that time there would be enough troops in the country to resist invasion. When, in four or five months' time, it was required to send all their men across the water to give Germany her knock-out blow (applause), that was the time they would be wanted. Referring to the question of uniform, Sir Hanbury said that uniform would be provided for the men which would be distinguishable from that worn by the Regular and Territorial Forces. They would not need uniform for some little time, and when it was decided upon it was probable that one style would be fixed to be adhered to throughout the country.

Mr. C. H. EVERARD said that after two such businesslike addresses he would not say anything except that his whole heart was with the scheme.

In reply to a question, Sir HANBURY said there would be no age limit, but some test of endurance would be necessary.

The CHAIRMAN said there would probably be a subscription for members to pay, but that would be so adjusted so as not to be a burden, and if there was anyone who could not afford to pay someone would probably pay for him.

Mr. P. E. WALLIS stated that the Miniature Rifle Club had no range at present, but possessed a quantity of material, which he felt he could offer to the corps on behalf of all the members (applause).

Mr. RUSDEN called attention to the fact that some of the members of the committee were special constables, and asked what would be the position in the case of an emergency?

Sir HANBURY, in reply, pointed out that this did not matter at the present time, but three or four months hence it would have to be considered as to whether the special constables should remain members of the corps.

The CHAIRMAN mentioned that Dr. Fegan, of Forest Row, had organised a First Aid Detachment and would be prepared to consider an arrangement whereby this detachment could act as the ambulance section to the battalion (applause).

Mr. F. S. WHITE proposed a vote of thanks to Sir Hanbury Brown and the Chairman, and in doing so remarked that they used to think those above military age were safe in war time, but from what they had seen in Belgium they knew that if the Germans could manage to get a hold in this country men of his age would be brought out and put against the wall and shot. If they had to die they might as well die with a rifle in their hands (applause). That was the reason why these corps were being formed.

The vote was carried, and the National Anthem concluded the meeting, a large number giving in their names as willing to become members of the corps. Forms of application for enrolment can be obtained from Mr. J. H. Burrell. *