



WMF News

WMF is a section of the Simon Stevinstichting
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Composed by Frank PHILIPPART

Dear Reader,

This time the main article comes from the UK where Mme Yvonne Mayo and her husband open for us the secrets of the British tunnel systems. Secondly you read an amazing story about a Belgian bunker.

BRITISH DEFENCE

THE OTHER SIDE: HIDDEN SECRETS

Just like the Germans built up and strengthened the coastline along the Atlantic wall against invasion, so the English did much of the same to repel the expected visitors. Coastal Batteries, Sea defences and all the paraphernalia that goes with defending oneself was built.

To challenge the big guns at Linderman and Batterie Todt there were 4 railway guns like the K5 now sighted at Batterie Todt, called Boche Buster (18inch Howitzer). (Gladiator 13.5 inch) .(Sceneshifter 13.5 inch), and (Piecemaker 13.5inch).

Also two 14inch guns named Winnie and Pooh near St Margrets at Cliffe, Dover. And two 15inch guns at Wanstone Battery called Jane and Clem. These were not surrounded in concrete like the German side but hidden under camouflage netting and a few steel plates.

The Magazine After the Battle No 29 gives a good description of these batteries. In addition there were numerous small calibre batteries 9.2, 8inch, 6 inch and 4 inch. which were in some cases enclosed in concrete. For example St Martins 6 inch battery still intact today. Each individual Battery was self sufficient with store rooms and ammunition bunkers, generating plant, pill boxes and living quarters. Underground tunnels were dug, with work shops and shelters also an underground Hospital.

There are around 10 deep shelters that I know of in the Dover area, some were strictly for military personal and sited near gun batteries, others were for civilian use when air raid warnings were given. There is also an underground hospital but no entrance has yet been found.

Each battery had its own fire control point (FCP) which were concrete built and below ground level with a main entrance and escape shaft 8 meters to the surface.

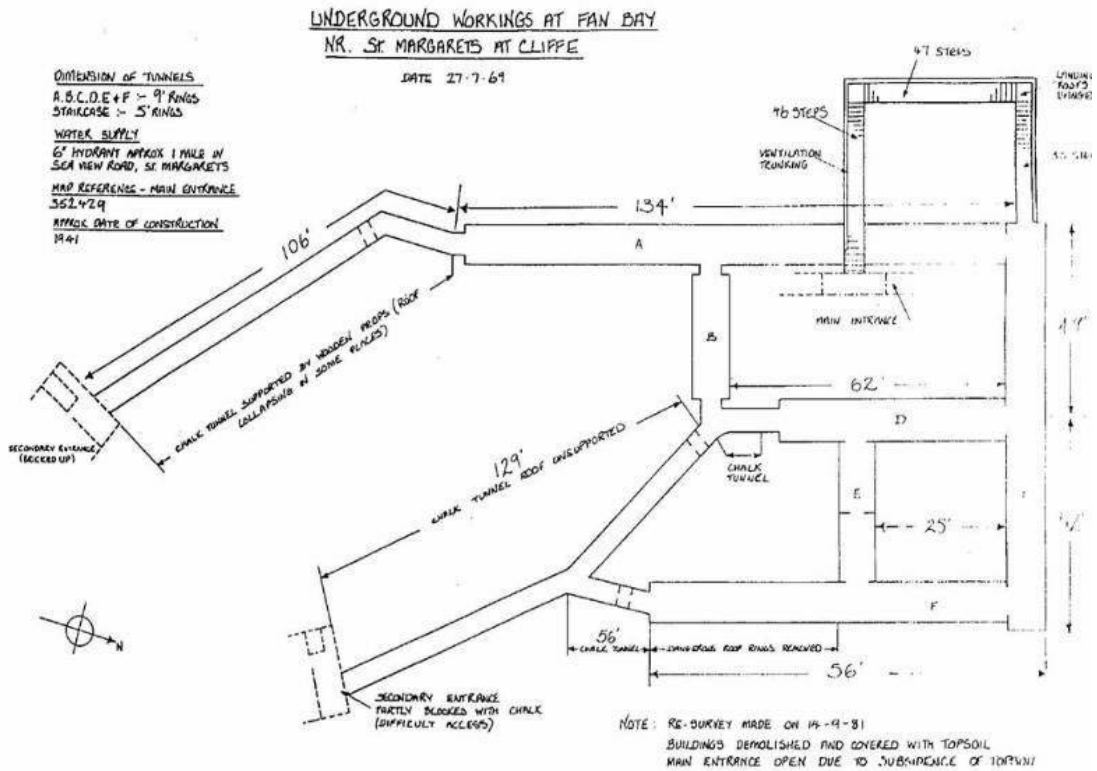
Around 1950-60 most of the defences were removed or covered with earth. Recently the escape hatch of a BCP (Lydden Spout Battery) was rediscovered and here are a few photographs of the BCP. Also a few shots of the Fan Bay tunnels .



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Here is a map of Fan Bay deep shelter. The measurements are in feet.
(1 foot=30cm). Just to give you an idea. (Map courtesy of Dover Underground website.)





Enjoy!

Source : Yvonne MAYO

BELGIAN BUNKERS

Moving the casemate of Vroenhoven

At the bridge over the Albert Canal at Vroenhoven stands a Belgian bunker. It is one of the larger ones equipped with a 4.7 cm anti-tank gun, a MG, a searchlight and a steel observation turret and a cellar level. The crew consisted of 1 sergeant, 2 corporals and 8 soldiers of the Border Cyclists. The bridge over the Canal, which is at this point a deep valley, was classified around 1955, but now it has to disappear because the canal has to be enlarged. A new bridge is to be built and the bunker is going to be moved a couple of meters backwards. Construction of the wharf will start during spring 2004.



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The bunker has a sad story, typical for the first hours of May the 10th 1940. 11 German gliders landed on both sides of the bridge with the intention to conquer it without damage. One of the gliders landed about 50 m to the north of the casemate. The paras poured out and ran firing towards the casemate. The Belgians together with some men of the 18th IR went inside and the sergeant decided to blow the bridge because they could not make contact with their superiors. They lighted fuse in the entrance of the bunker and went down to the lower level. Downstairs a discussion started between the corporal and the sergeant about whether to blow the bridge for "only three men". Meanwhile a German *Gefreiter* reached the bunker and extinguished the fuse. Then a hollow charge was detonated against the door at the same moment that the sergeant and two men reached the door..... Other charges were thrown inside until the bunker was an inferno. 9 men died and the others who tried to get out were shot down. Only three wounded men of the original crew survived, thanks to their gas-masks .



Then and now

The current situation in the region of Maastricht

Our correspondent Mr Wijnands gives us an update on the bunkers along the canals in the region of Maastricht.

All bunkers along the canal from Briegden to Neerharen are now closed with a steel door and the embrasures are also closed. This happened by order of the Service for Shipping. The BN4 is an exception and is still accessible because it does not stand on their territory.

Finally the situation along the Albert canal is unchanged.

MAGINOT LINE

The colour of the uniforms in the Maginot Line

Khaki or bleu horizon is the question.

Khaki uniforms started in 1917 with colonial troops and became more generalized with uniform issuance in 1922 and 1935. However, uniforms were replaced according to wear and tear of older uniforms. It is important to remember that the reserve stocks



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used by mobilized troops (fall 1939) were predominately blue horizon. Many of the troops in 1940 (artillery, fortifications) were still outfitted in blue horizon. So, when you see blue horizon uniforms on the postcards of the area, it is not an error.

Source : Blair Scott

ATLANTIC WALL

The bunkers of E690 in Belgium

The two remaining bunkers of the railroad battery E690 at Bredene (Belgium) have been closed. The entrance to the 636 has been closed by a brick wall and entrance to the 621 that lies under the surface is closed by a solid concrete plate. The good thing is, that the bunkers stay and that it is now impossible for vandals to make them dirty.

The Creche project at Boulogne (France)

The former French *Séré de Rivières* fort that was re-used by the Germans has been abandoned for years. The German Navy used the four 19.4 cm guns until mid September 1944. The ownership passed meanwhile from the French Navy to the *Conservatoire du Littoral*. Recently a new association took over the battery site to make a museum of it. Called the AFLC which stands for *l'Association Fort de La Creche*, their first objective is to open in May 2004 after having completely cleaned the entire fort. In the meantime they will close the non-visitable bunkers with a fence and there will be a decent fence around the battery.

Their second objective is to put a roof over the barracks square for exhibitions. There will be a permanent exhibition about Wimereux during WW-I, the battle of Boulogne, the rehearsals for an invasion of England (*Operation SeaLion*) and about the importance of the Pas-de-Calais. Next to that there will be also some temporary exhibitions.

This info is a summary of an article by their president Robert Dehon.

What I have noticed in June is that the tramps are gone but they didn't take their rubbish with them!

Thanks to Yvonne Mayo for the spell check.

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