



Dear reader,

This second number of WMF-News of 2004 contains two articles. One handles about Utah Beach and the other one about bunkers on the Greek islands of Chios and Lesbos. Enjoy it!

UTAH BEACH

Frank PHILIPPART

Last summer we could not ignore it !

June the 6th 2004, the 60th anniversary of the Normandy landings; D-Day.

We were flooded with documentaries and new books, some better than others. Now that things have calmed down and the focus has moved to other former theatres of war, it would be interesting to give some handy tips for a short excursion to a part of the coast where the defensive strong points have hardly changed : Utah Beach. Moreover this beach will always remain in the shadow of the infamous Omaha Beach.

You are already aware that Utah and the British and Canadian beaches, Gold, Juno and Sword had the advantage with regards to topography, but because the distance between both was too big, a landing was planned in an area where the topography was the least unsuitable : Omaha Beach between St Laurent and Vierville.

Utah Beach is a part of the coastline that leads from Isigny-sur-Mer to St Vaast-la-Hougue. It is flat with a narrow strip of dunes and low meadows. Behind the dunes lead some roads inland and some small rivers traverse the area and here was the weak link in the chain. The Germans had opened the locks and the meadows were flooded. If the Germans destroyed the bridges, the Americans would be pinned down on a small strip of land. Therefore two divisions of airborne troops were dropped above the area, namely the 101st en 82th Airborne Division with as task to keep the road to the interior open.

The US forces which were to land on the beaches Uncle Red and Tare Green were:

4th US Inf Div under General Raymond O Barton belonging to the 7th Corps, 1st Army of General Omar N. Bradley. This division consisted of three infantry regiments, the 8th, 12th and 22th Inf Reg, four artillery regiments, the 20st, 29th, 42nd and the 44th Art Reg, the 4^e Cie Transmissions, the 4^e unit reconnaissance, the 4^e battalion pioneers and the 4th battalion medical troops. In total 14523 men where under orders, 9354 GI's and approximately 5000 artillerists and other services. The division was supported by 32 DD Sherman tanks (DD = Duplex Drive, floating tanks by means of inflatable canvas) of the 70th Tank Battalion, the 801^e anti-tank battalion with mechanised artillery, the 87th battalion chemical mortars, the 1106th battalion combat pioneers, a battery of 155 mm of the 980th Artillery and a department of the 13th battalion artillery observation.

Opposite the Americans there was the German 709. Infantry Division (ID) of General Karl von Schlieben belonging to the LXXXIV Corps (AK) of General Erich Marks, 7th. Army (AOK) of General Oberst Friedrich Dollman. The division consisted of three infantry regiments, IR 919, 729 and 739, one artillery regiment AR 1709, Bn 649 and 795 Georgians and the I. Gruppe du



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Nebelwerferregiment 101. They were supported by the 6. Fallschirmjäger Regiment of Oberstleutnant Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte.

The invasion fleet appeared on June the 6th at 0545 Hr and somewhat later 276 Marauder bombers dropped 4404 tonnes of bombs above the coast between WN 3 near Beauguillot and WN 10 near Les Dunes de Varreville.

The first wave of GI's of the 2nd battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, supported by 32 DD Sherman tanks navigated to WN 8 and Stp 9 to land at 0630 Hr. With the first wave was also Gen Raymond O Barton's adjutant, 4th US Inf Div, Brigade-General Theodore Roosevelt Jr.

This wave should have been piloted by four pilot vessels but they lost three of them to mines. Due to dense smoke and a lack of orientation points, the officers made a mistake and sent the assault wave in the direction of WN 5 at La Madeleine. WN 5 which was under the command of an eastern front veteran Oberleutnant Jahnke had lost its main armament when under rocket attack by P47 Thunderbolt fighters at the tail end of their bombing run. Two 5 cm guns, type KwK, were hereby lost. The third 5 cm KwK in a casemate, type 667, was destroyed by a destroyer. Finally the French 4.7 cm gun that blocked the entrance to the beach was destroyed too. Only some Tobruks for machine guns, one for a mortar and one for a FT17 tank turret were left in use.

The troops of Fox company that came ashore were confronted with guided mini-tanks, loaded with explosives, Goliaths. Resistance was only symbolic until the turret was out of use. Brigade-General Theodore Roosevelt Jr who came ashore with the first wave noticed directly that they were landed on the wrong spot. Either they could embark again to the correct landing strip or continue from here. Reputedly he said "Let's start the war from here."

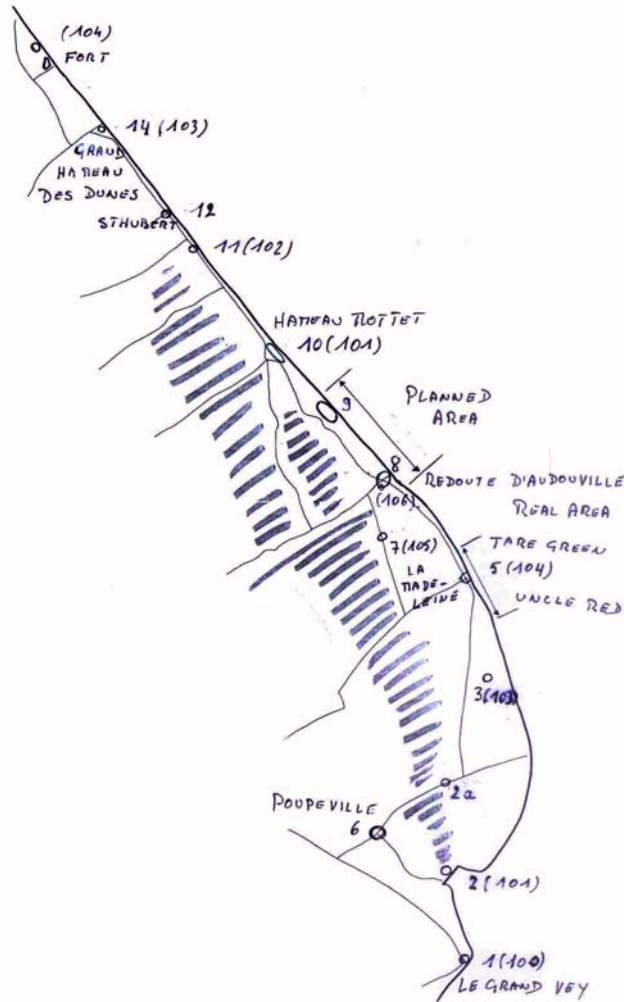
The pioneers opened breaches in the concrete wall to enable heavy material to pass to the interior. The advance could start and at 1110 Hr the first troops reached the 101st Airborne paratroopers at Poupeville..

In total the 8st and the 22nd regiment lost that day 118 men and the entire division 197 men where under 60 men of Battery B of the 29th Field Artillery Battalion.

The most interesting aspect for us is that the Germans built at regular distances resistance nests and strongpoints. Seeing that the coast is still unspoilt nature and gorgeous calm, all these bunker sites remain.

The strongpoints have numbers, but in the course of the war they were re-numbered or they were known under two different numbers. That is the reason that these strongpoints are mentioned in several documents with different numbers.

Together with Dirk Peeters we sifted them out and put them on a map.



WN 5, (ex WN104) of La Madeleine is rightly the centre of Utah Beach. The road that once led between the museum and the café, now bends round and instead of the road there is now a large esplanade. The museum recounts of course, the landing and houses some nice items like two amphibian vehicles DUKW and a German 7.5 cm anti-tank gun PAK 40. Outside the museum you can see a M4A1 Sherman with a T23 turret, a Buffalo amphibian vehicle and a landing craft. Do not forget to visit the café, that is a museum in itself. Contrary to what has always been written, there are no bunker types 702, but 2a's and 7b's. One of the monuments stands on a 2a with a 5 cm KwK L/60 on an open emplacement. The gun casemate, type 667, for the other 5 cm KwK got seriously bogged down. Behind the bunker there is an open emplacement on which they have laid the remains of the French 4.7 cm gun. On the other side of the road you can see a type 501 crew bunker with a built on Tobruk. Unfortunately everything lies behind barbed wire.

The next resistance nest is WN 8, (ex 106) near the Redoute d'Audouville. Two crew bunkers, types 501 and 622, lie next to the road and at the opposite side of the road is a Tobruk for a mortar. On the dunes lie a few open emplacements for a 5 cm KwK and some machine gun emplacements which become more and more buried by the sand. In the redoute are some Tobruks one of which is for a tank turret.

The next bunker site (Stp 9) is interesting and it lies at Le Clos Duval. Because it is not mentioned on an old map we consider it as a new resistance nest. The road leads a little away from the coast and goes over a small river. Best to leave the car here and enter the meadow via the bridge. In the middle of the terrain stands a bunker for a 5 cm M19 mortar, type 633, with a remarkable splinter wall. Unfortunately the steel turret has gone. Seawards you see a crew bunker, type 656. The resistance nest is defended on both sides by a gun casemate, type 680, integrated in the anti-tank wall. The northern casemate has a separated machine gun emplacement in the anti-tank wall. Between both 680's there is a Tobruk for a tank turret and



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next to the southern 680 you see a light construction for a searchlight. It was lucky that the officers of the pilot vessel had made that mistake otherwise it would not have looked good for the 4th Infantry Division because this had been the planned landing area.



The northern 680 of Stp 9.



**The 667 of WN 12 with the underneath
MG room.**

The next resistance nest is WN 10 (ex 101) where the monument of French general Leclerc stands. On this spot he came ashore. Next to the typical granite pillar and the M8 armored car and the M5 halftrack, now stands a Sherman M4A2 (Versions A2 and A4 were intended for export). WN 10 is certainly as interesting as the previous one. Left to the monument stands a Vf-casemate for a 4.7 cm PAK 36 (t) and next to this one stands a St-bunker almost buried by the sand, type 676, also for a 4.7 cm PAK 36 (t). Behind them lie three Tobruks next to each other. In the meadow lie two rare Tobruks, type 69. This construction has two holes, one for the mortar and one for a machine gun. On the dune ridge you see an open emplacement for a 5 cm KwK and a huge Tobruk for a tank turret. The northern side is defended by a flanking casemate, type 612. Noteworthy is that this one has a machine gun emplacement on the land side, covered by an armored plate but it has no ceiling.

The following resistance nest is WN 11 (ex 102) just beyond the hamlet Les Cruttes. It consists of a Vf crew bunker 2a, some storage constructions, an open emplacement for a 5 cm KwK, a Tobruk, type 69, and three Tobruks of which two of them are integrated in the anti-tank wall. One of them had a tank turret.

WN 12 lies in the hamlet St Hubert. This is also a new resistance nest because there is no other number. Small, but powerful. Only the foundations remain of the flanking casemate. During the war on this one stood a search light. In the meadow lies a bunker for a 6-embrasured turret (Sechsschartenturm). The turret has gone but notice the remarkable sloped splinter wall. But the real eye-catcher is certainly the casemate for a 5 cm KwK, type 667. Notice that this one has a lower floor for a machine gun. Finally WN 12 is completed by four Tobruk for a tank turret

WN 14 (ex 103) in Grand Hameau des Dunes disappoints, because the double embrasured casemate has been cut off to its foundations.

The next one is ex WN 104. (the new number is not know) It lies between the Hameau du Sud and the fort. Here you see two 2a's, an open emplacement for a 5 cm KwK, but the interesting part of it, is the casemate with an embrasure for a 5 cm KwK direction south and an embrasure for a 4.7 cm gun direction north.



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Drive to Les Gougins and turn inland here . Then you arrive at the navy battery St Marcouf, Stp 135, the 3rd battery of HKAA 1261. Due to the fact that the battery came too late at the coast and due to the fact that she was the only navy battery in the region, they assigned her to a army battalion. She was equipped with four 21 cm guns, type Skoda 39/40 L/52. Also you have to add a 15 cm Tbsk C/36 for star shells. The anti-aircraft defense consisted of two 2 cm FlaK Oerlikons and six French 7.5 cm guns. But initially a battery with six 15.5 cm stood here on open emplacements until the actual battery was built. Only two casemates were ready at the moment of the landing, type 683. The fire control post was a special construction (Sonderkonstruktion (SK)) with a FlaK pit on the roof and a steel observation turret (scrapped after the war).



The casemate, type 683, looks again like the picture they have taken in 1944.

The battery fought out a duel with the battleship USS Nevada and the cruisers USS Tuscaloosa and USS Quincy on the day of the landing and succeeded in destroying some torpedo boat hunters and some motor vessels. The next day she sunk another destroyer. On June the 8th the marines succeeded in making operational one gun and started shelling the supply ships in front of the coast. The Americans surrounded the battery on the 9th and during the night from 11 to 12 June the commander, Oberleutnant Ohmsen, was able to escape with the remains of his men. The battery has been recently renovated and turned into a museum site. The open emplacements and bunkers were excavated and some are equipped with furniture and models. The bunkers at the site are types 501, 622, 502SK and 134.

Continue to Azeville where the army coastal battery lies. It was HKB 2/1261 and Stp 133. This battery was equipped with four 10.5 cm K 331 (f) guns. The two extreme casemates have a FlaK pit on the roof for a 3.7 cm FlaK. The guns were installed in four casemates, type 650. This is contrary to what has been written in so many books. Here are no casemates, type 671!!! Some bunkers have still remains of camouflage paint. Behind the bunkers lie a basement that connects crew- and ammunition bunkers. Notice in one of the gun casemates a hole in the wall of the combat room, low to the ground. A heavy ships shell came down here, drilled through the wall, passed the crew room, penetrated the armored plate and exploded in the entrance. The reception is in the other 650 where guided tours start to the basement. The gun casemates are free to enter.

You are in the inland and from here you can go to St Mère Eglise to visit the Airborne museum. But this a separate story...



Some magazines came out about this beach and the paratroopers. They complement each other well (fortunately), namely : 39-45 Magazine Historica series nr 78 Jan-Feb-Mar, "Utah Beach" and Histoire de Guerre, nr 39 of September 2003, "Utah Beach".

Bunkers on the Greek islands of Chios and Lesbos

Some of my former articles talked about fortifications on Mallorca and Ibiza. They proved to be nice surprises for the amateur bunker lover, on locations where they are not evidently expected. This summer vacation I was on the Greek islands of Chios and Lesbos, both situated just in front of the Turkish coast. As with previously mentioned destinations I had no idea about 20th century fortifications here (except for some still fully operational military domains and shelters) and I already looked forward to a lazy holiday at the seaside, but I was to be proved wrong from the first day ...

Indeed, in the harbour of **Chios** , capital of the island with the same name, I discovered this nice bunker for a light canon (**Photo 1**). It protected the harbour entrance from the north, but since the building of a large new pier , it has become redundant. Strangely enough, the protective walls on the front as well as at the back, seem to be built on the wrong side of the orifices (to German standards that is). It has also a little concrete tower with two observation orifices or loop holes. It is still covered with earth and extra steel nets. There are also remains of camouflage paint.

The loop hole for a light canon is protected by a thin steel plate on the outside. The access at the rear is also closed with thin walled steel doors (**Photo 2**) . There was a narrow space between these doors and here we could enter the bunker (**Photo 3**). As it proved later, access possibility to the bunkers on both Chios and Lesbos is rather exceptional. Above the gun orifice fire direction instructions are painted. On the right we see ammunition niches as well as the access to the observation and machine gun turret by means of a small steel ladder. One of the two loop holes has a concrete support, probably for a heavier machine gun. The wooden casing around the loop hole is still in place. This is also observed in other contemporary bunkers and forts and serves to catch bullets and thus avoid ricochets inside the room.



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

For the rest, along the coastline of Chios, I found a dozen smaller bunkers, mostly some standard type for max. 2 men, situated near the water, mostly recently repainted (?) in brown and dark green , having what seems to me as some contemporary numbering , with a steel door carefully closed with a lock (**Photo 4 and 5**) . Some are very well hidden in a pier (**Foto 6**) or in the rocky slopes.

On **Lesbos**, the other island north of Chios, we found another dozen bunkers of completely different types, on the small northern part of this rather big island (second biggest Greek island after Crete) .



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Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6

Here also one gun bunker, at the entrance of the town of Petra (**Photo 7**), with protective walls and remains of camouflage. The bunker is completely closed. In the fields nearby lay five one-man observation bunkers disposed in an arc.

The bay of Molivos , a few km further, has at least ten bunkers , all different : one dome shaped with camouflage paint dots (**Photo 8**), simple bunkers with one or two loop holes (**Photos 9 en 10**), a gun bunker now serving as a garage, a small shelter with three accesses with light steel doors and a few observation posts for one man (**Photo 11**).



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9

About building dates of all these bunkers I have no information , but it is my guess that they were built between WW I and WW II and mainly against a possible Turkish invasion or at least for observation of the narrow passage between the islands and the Turkish coast . It is important to know that Chios and Lesbos were only liberated in 1912 after 450 years of occupation by the Turks who were Germany's allies during WW I.

PS.: in total I have about 80 pictures of bunkers on Chios en Lesbos. People who are interested or that could give me more information about this subject can mail me on paul.thibaut@pandora.be .

Author : **Paul Thibaut** – 28.08.2004



Photo 10



Photo 11

Thanks to Mrs Yvonne Mayo for spell check.

