

WMF News

WMF is a section of the Simon Stevinstichting
Edition 1 of 2003

Composed by Frank PHILIPPART

Dear Reader,

All the best for 2003 and success with bunker- and fort hunting. In this edition you will find articles about Australia, the last casemate of the Atlantic wall, the Calais area and about field batteries in the Le Tréport area in France.

AUSTRALIA

The Darwin East Point guns

If you thought that large gun casemates were only built by the Germans you would be wrong! The Australians also have built on their continent a number of respectable sized casemates. This article describes two such typical heavy gun casemates located at the East Point Military Museum of Darwin.



Two present day views of the large casemates. (photo's Johan Verhas)

The photos come from Mr Johan Verhas and the information from Mr Chris Benton of the East Point Military Museum (AUS).

The battery had two 9.2 inch (23.36 cm guns) each in a separate casemate, each having the same interior plan but with slight differences. Next to the gunroom there were crew compartments, an engine room and ammunition rooms. Unfortunately there is no drawing available.

The thickness of the walls varies from 1 m to 3 m.

The weight of the 9.2 inch gun was 150 ton. The length of the barrel was 39 feet (11.9 m) and the weight was 38 ton. The weight of the shell was 370 lbs (196 Kg). The maximum time in flight of the shell was 74 seconds and the range was 27 Km.

The guns were ordered in 1937.

The construction of the casemates started in 1939, number 1 was ready in 1944, number 2 in 1945. The guns were tested during the period 1944 - 45.

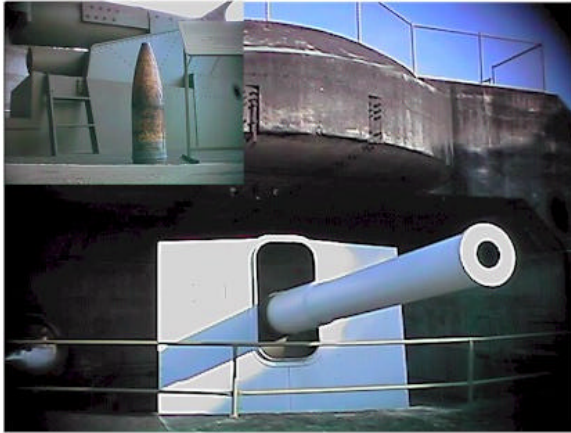
The construction of the 9.2 inch guns cost 280000 Australian pounds. The irony is that a Japanese scrap-merchant bought them in 1959 for 550 Australian pounds...



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9.2 inch Gun showing 172kg projectile



Location of the battery.

The gun and shell of the casemate.
(Photo : internet site of the Darwin Museum)

As well as this one, there was another battery on East Point with 2 x 6 inch guns (15.23 cm). On West Point stood a similar battery with 2 x 6 inch guns. An anti-aircraft battery stood on Lee Point with 3 x 3.7 inch guns (9.4 cm). Approximately 30 fixed and mobile batteries encircled Darwin during the whole of the war.

To better understand the location of the battery it would be interesting to get an overall picture of the war situation as it affected Darwin.

At the end of 1941, as the war approached the Northern Territory, the military presence increased in the north. The navy envisaged a floating dock and several ships, the army 3 infantry battalions a pioneer battalion and MG battalion. This force was reinforced with an artillery regiment and engineers. The air defence consisted of 2 squadrons of *Hudson* medium bombers and a squadron of *Wirraways*. The USAAF stationed 14 *B17 Flying Fortresses* at Batchelor.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour on the 7th of Dec 1941 several units were sent to the islands of Ambon and Timor and to Signapore.

The Japanese advance tragically wiped out the majority of these units in spite of their fierce resistance. Only the troops on Timor were able to hide out in the mountains. Everything pointed to Darwin being the next target.

At the turn of the year, Darwin was reinforced with 2 infantry and 1 MG battalions. The Americans sent in 2 field artillery regiments.

The first combat actions took place around the harbour. Japanese submarines laid mines and on 20th of January 1942 they attempted but failed to torpedo an oil-tanker. Later that day the Japanese submarine I-124 went to the bottom.

At the beginning of February more reinforcements arrived : an American engineer battalion for the construction of the airstrip at the Batchelor airfield and two other Australian infantry battalions. In the area that was known as the 7th *Military District*, were stationed more than 14000 Australians and 3000 Americans.



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Meanwhile beaches were festooned with barbed wire and MG pillboxes were built on the cliffs.

On the 19th Feb 1942, it seemed that the attack on Australia was about to start. From the Japanese carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Soryu* and *Hiryu* 188 aircraft took off for an assault on Darwin. At 1000 Hr they reached the harbour. At least 252 people died, 10 ships went to the bottom, 3 PBY's (*Catalina* flying boat) were destroyed and the city and the harbour were heavily damaged. Almost all defending aircraft (*Kittyhawks*) were shot down. The Japanese lost only 14 aircraft. Nearly 115 tons of bombs were dropped. (146 tons were dropped on Pearl Harbour !!) Two hours later another raid of 54 land-based bombers harassed the airfield again.

On the 3rd of March another air raid struck the RAAF (Royal Australian Airforce) base at Darwin. The next day Wyndham and Broome were the target, destroying 17 flying boats.

On the 17th of March 1942 General MacArthur landed at Batchelor Airfield on his return from the Philippines.

On the 22nd of March an air strike took place on Katherine. Invasion was in the air.

At the end of March 1942, Major General Edmund Herring was appointed commander of the *Northern Territory Force*. His philosophy changed the role of the base from that of defence to offense. Ammunition dumps, vehicle stores and fuel depots were built in the bush.

During May 1942, the *Northern Territory Force* was reinforced with an Australian brigade. The US forces grew to over 5000 men.

Meanwhile the remaining troops on Timor were supplied under difficult conditions. Patrols were undertaken along the coast by the *Northern Territory Reconnaissance Unit*. A unit mainly composed of Aborigines.

The assault on Australia remained an air war. Land-based radar units warned of approaching air raids. The counter-attack was carried out with Hudson bombers without fighter escort against convoys and land-targets. One of the most successful allied actions took place on 23rd Aug 1942 whereby the Japanese lost 7 of their 27 *Betty* bombers and 8 of their 15 *Zero* fighters. The allies lost only 1 aircraft.

In January 1943, *Spitfires* replaced the *Kittyhawks*. *The Spitfires* gained air supremacy. The heavy bombers were complemented by USAAF and RAAF units with B24 *Liberators*. During the same year, RAAF PBY *Catalina*'s were based there. They flew reconnaissance-, bombing- and minelaying missions to distant targets in the north.

Around this time, more and more troops and equipment left to the north because the tide had turned to the allies advantage. In total 64 raids were flown between 19 Feb 1942 and 12 Nov 1943.

The museum has an internet site : <http://www.epmm.com.au/>

Source : "Defence in the Northern Territory. World War II", Lt Tom Lewis RAN.
Info of Mr Chris Benton



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ATLANTIKWALL

The Atlanticwall's last casemate.

This article is about the last concrete casemate on the Atlantic Wall if going south or the first going north, depending on which way you are facing! It is a Regelbau 612 and it is situated inland at Behobie, 3.5 Km from the ocean and Hendaye-Plage.

The 612 is located just in front of Spain and fires at the bridge over the river Bidassoa that forms the border at Béhobie. One can imagine that its task was to prevent infiltration from the allies landing on the Spanish coast.

The concrete camouflage is an imitation of a regional "Basque" type house, (the roof).

The 612 at Béhobie is well visible from outside, but is located on the private property of a Spanish family. The neighbours say that the municipality has forbidden them any transformation works to the casemate. Only the use as storage is allowed.

An identical 612 stood at the estuary of the river Bidassoa at Hendaye-Plage. Unfortunately it has been destroyed for the construction of a yacht haven.



The 612 at Béhobie.



The 612 at Hendaye in 1945. The camouflage is still present and in 1980 . Today it has been destroyed.

Source : Jory Sormail



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The two field batteries of the Le Tréport area

St Quentin-la-Motte-Croix-au-Bailly lies to the south of Ault and to the east of Le Tréport in the region of Haute-Normandie (France). Nearby the Germans set up two artillery positions with some interesting resemblances. It regards small pill-box of a unique design for nearby observation and a concrete stable for the horses of the horse-driven batteries.

Both batteries are strongpoints with the identification nos "Tre 011" and "Tre 012" (Tre = area of Le Tréport)

Tre 011 : St Quentin-le-Motte

The 3rd battery of 1148 HAA with 4 x 10 cm leFH 14/19 (t) guns was located here.

This site has only two gun-casemates, Regelbau 669. The other two were never finished. Next to the road stands what appears to be a little, non-German, observation tower. You get in via a staircase. Inside there is a small square room and a steel ladder leading upwards to the copula in which is just place for one man. There are three observation slits. On the roof is a small aluminium dome in the concrete. The scope is a mystery. Probably a tile of a aircraft that has been added for fun, because there is no room for equipment and there is no entrance to it.

On the IGN map 2107 OT you will see in the area of the crossing next to the football field the mention of an "Ancien abri allemand". Actually there is a huge bush. More by accident than design we found the entrance among the brambles. Inside we noticed that this was a very large stable for eight horses. The roof was 1.5 m thick and the ventilation openings in the roof are foreseen of a concrete lid. An adjacent room has a white-red painting and a blurred drawing on the wall. There are two entrances in chicane to this bunker.



Tre 012 : Plateau de la Crois-au-Bailly / Val de Gloire / Fond d'Oust

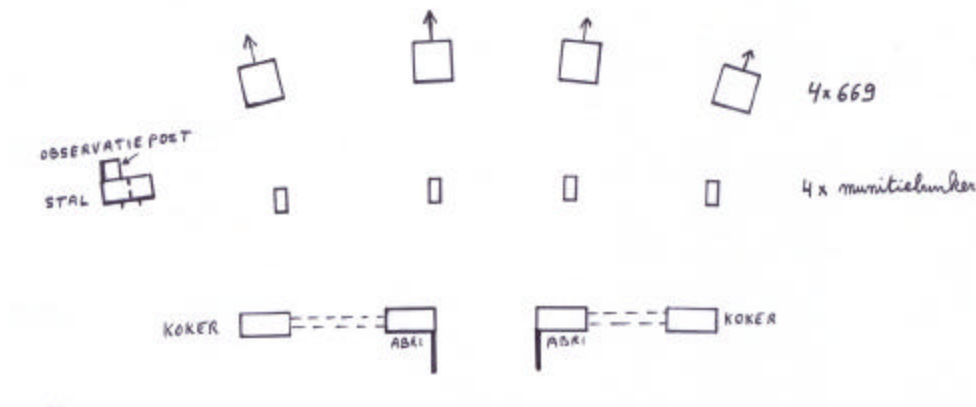
This strongpoint was manned by the 1st battery of 1148.HAA with 4 x 10 cm leFH 14/19 (t) guns. A Regelbau 669 was built for each gun. One of them has an impressive earth cover. It is remarkable that this site has a complete set of crew shelters, ammunition stores and a stable with a connection to an observation post. All these building are built on a natural slope behind the 669's. When you take the dirt road coming from de D925, you think you are going to see a classic battery with four 669's. On your right you see the top of the observation post. You are not a little surprised when you discover all the constructions starting from there. They are all



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accessible since the "Champ de tir" (exercise area for artillery) is not used anymore.



Each 669 has a square ammunition bunker that lies a bit lower down the slope. Somewhat lower still there are four personal shelters built on one line. Each exit has a vertical pipe for ventilation and/or emergency exit. Some of them are painted in red AND -white. On both sidewalls of the central entrance are steel handles, probably to tether the horses.

There should be some basements in the neighbourhood, along the D258, mentioned on the IGN map. We looked for it, but everything was overgrown and we could not find any entrance.
Question : Does anybody knows more about these?



The observation post and the 669's.

Source : Paul Thibaut



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Bunkers in the Calais area CLOSED !

Mr Marliot noticed that the bunkers of the battery Oldenburg have recently been closed by "les Services Maritimes de Boulogne et Calais (SMBC)". This operation was ordered by the prefect to avoid illegal immigrants using them as a shelter before trying to get to England. Only the gun room remains accessible. The hospital / "Leitstand" and the other bunkers were closed too. Mr Marliot was the last one to visit the bunkers, accompanied by... the police. After this job they will be going to

Blériot-Plage and Sangatte to close more bunkers. (the MarKO is already closed).



Source : Nicolas Marliot

(Editorial comment) Churchill said : 'Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few'.

Looking back over history it would be better to change the "so few" to "the Channel".

Thanks to Yvonne Mayo for spell checking.

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