



Dear Reader,

The famous Cointet obstacle is the subject of this newsletter. I try to analyse the history of this hindrance and I start a search to find out where there are others. Finally you'll read about the fortification fair at Dendermonde in October. Enjoy.

## THE COINETET ELEMENT



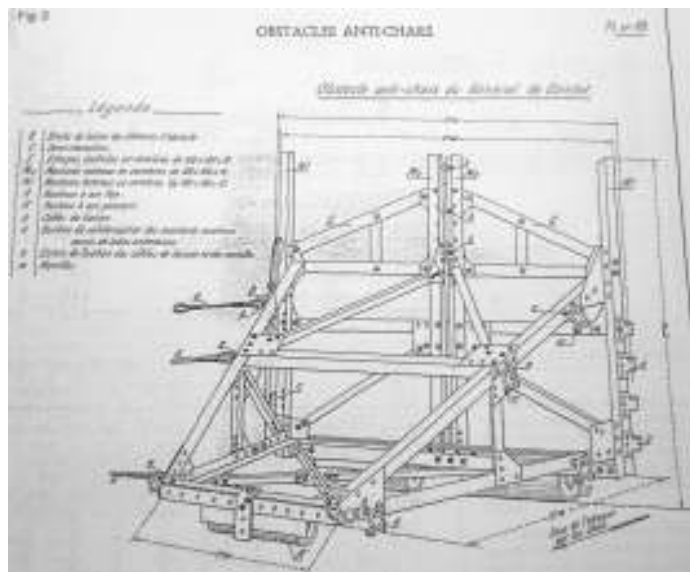
This thing, you surely have seen it already in some photos. During its 11 years service it had several names : "Cointet grille", Cointet element, C-element, Maginot gate, Belgian gate, Rolling goat and "Rollgitter". Moreover it served in four armies: France, Belgium and Germany.

**St Laurant sur Mer  
(Normandie) near the  
Omaha Beach Museum.**

### France

The C-element is an anti-tank obstacle that was designed by the French Colonel, Léon Edmond de Cointet de Fillain (later became a general) in 1933.

It looks like a steel gate with a height of 2,5 m and a width of 3 m. The gate is mounted on a frame with a length of 3,28 m. The frame has the shape of a trapezium. The smallest side is 1,2 m. The gate and the frame are reinforced with slope frame. Under the gate there are two concrete rolls and there is one at the end of the frame that could rotate 90°. The total weight is 1400 Kg.



The initial French design (source : Tankmuseum Nieuws. Mar1998)



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**The role at the end of the frame.**



**The four hinges on the side of the gate.**

The "gate" is the side of the enemy and several Cointets have to be connected to each-other to complete the anti-tank obstacle. Connecting was done by hinges on the sides of the gate and by four steel cables. The other Cointets were connected by steel cables to concrete poles in the ground beside the road. 60 cm of the pole was above the ground and 180 cm was in the ground. Finally tree trunks have to be laid on the road in front of the Cointets.

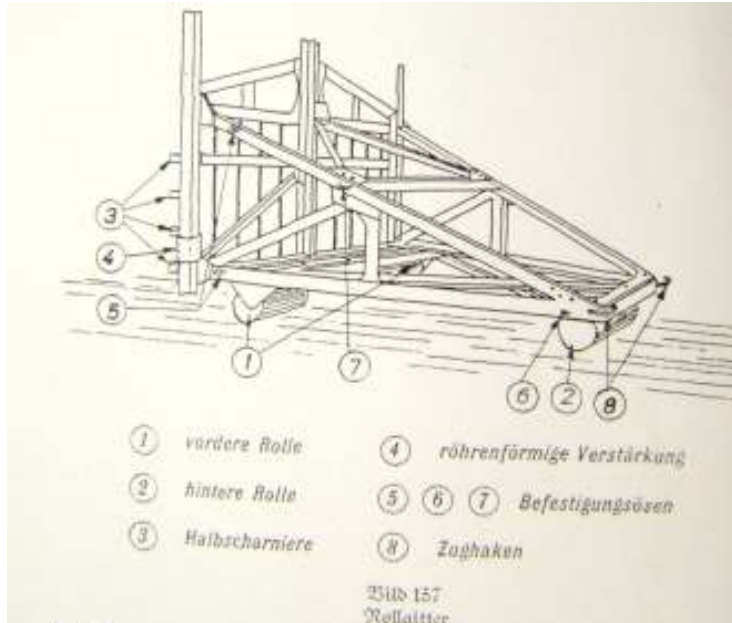
The trick was that the kinetic energy of the tank hitting the obstacle, was broken by the elasticity of the connected Cointets. The Cointets were pushed back and meanwhile they broke the power of the tank. This kind of obstacle could stop every tank in that period! (At that period we didn't talk about Tigers yet) The cables on the poles had a resistance of 37 tons and the cables between the Cointets had a resistance of 21 tons. The use of the Cointet elements in the Maginot line was described in note number 4164-2/4S of 30 April 1937. It has to block streets or passages through mine fields and was situated behind the barriers.

**The French  
used it as road  
block.**





## Belgium



**The Belgian version with the 8 vertical beams in the gate. (Denkschrift über die französische Landesbefestigung)**

barriers like in France, but stretched cables. Ex. Vroenhoven. Finally the obstacle could be protected by a casemate, equipped with a machinegun and/or a 47 mm anti-tank gun. Next to the PFL (Position Fortifié de Liège) the Cointets were used as anti-tank obstacles at Namur, the Brussels Circle and at Antwerpen.



**The famous iron wall of the KW-Line.**

The price of one Cointet was 2800 BEF in 1939 and following the Germans it was 3000 BEF (or 250 Reichsmark) in 1941.

The Belgian army accepted the device after making some tests in 1936. The design was slightly altered by the addition of eight vertical beams in the gate to avoid penetration by infantry.

On 22 September 1938 Lieutenant-General Van Den Bergen decided to call the anti tank obstacle and the pole officially "Elément C et sa borne de fixation Borne C". In Belgium we see that it's used to block the entrances of forts, bridges and roads. Especially in the valleys of the Ardennes at the smallest locations. Ex. The Vesdre valley. In some cases shelters "Garage C" are

built while they are "on standby". These are at the place where they have to block the road. Ex. Chaufontaine. In front of the Cointets there are no

But the application that attracted the most was the Iron Wall of the KW-Line. The KW-Line was the main defence line straight through Belgium from Koninkshooikt to Wavre because the French and British troops would not advance further than the line Antwerpen – Namur (Koninkshooikt – Wavre is a part of it), the Dijle Line. Thousands of Cointets were connected to each other and formed one long iron wall. On 13 February 1939 and 24 July 1939 the first tenders were asked for ten groups of each 500 Cointets. Eventually 77000 were ordered from 28 suppliers and 73600 were delivered.



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The Cointets in the KW-Line formed a line in a tenaille shape (zigzag shape). Machineguns were placed in the edges of the tenailles for close defence. Behind the Cointets there were bunkers with machine guns to defend the flanks of the tenailles. Two machine guns in pits were installed at about 100 m from the bunker to protect it. Behind the first line there was a second, with machine gun bunkers to defend the dangerous directions in the first.

The Belgians used their 47 mm anti-tank gun installed behind the Cointet elements to fire through them to keep tanks at distance.

Finally it's written in an official document that the Cointets stopped about 40 % of the bullets fired on them, but this is only the case when they do not fire perpendicular to them.

From Wavre to Namur there was only a barrier of Cointets and no bunkers because the Belgian Army ran out of time to construct them before the war broke out.



**Winter 1939-40. Belgian soldiers are building the Cointets.  
The tractor is a Carden Lloyd. (CDH)**

The German engineers blew them up to create passage for their tanks. Later on a group of engineers made a study of the Belgian fortifications, like they did in other countries too, and their conclusion was that connected Cointets hampered

red observations and obstructed the guns behind the obstacles.



## The Atlantikwall



The Germans reused them on the beaches as obstacles on the Atlantikwall. (Source SHM)

During the construction of the Atlantikwall Field Marshall Erwin Rommel decided that the enemy has to be stopped on the beaches and ordered a wide variety of beach obstacles. The Cointet was one of them. But instead of connecting them, the Germans used them singly next to other items, especially at the low tide line. They were also put on the dikes next to bunkers. See Etretat.

A note of 1 July 1944 mentioned that 23408 Cointets were placed over 4340 Km of coastline in the area's of the following Armies : 19, 1, 7, 15 and the Netherlands.



## Cointets on the beach at Knokke in Belgium.

In the period of the D-Day preparations, British divers measured a Cointet element and they built some in Britain. They tested them with their tanks and the Cointet still proved its value because it stopped the tanks!

### Sources :

- "Hommes et ouvrages de la ligne Maginot. Tôme 2" Jean-Yves Mary
- "La Muraille de France ou la ligne Maginot" Philippe Truttman
- "La position fortifiée de Liège. Tôme 2. Les abris de la PFL1" Coenen & Vernier
- "La position fortifiée de Liège. Tôme 3. Les abris de la PFL2" Coenen & Vernier
- "Vesting Antwerpen. Deel IV. Bunkers en bunkerstellingen" Robert Gils
- "Album mémorial. Atlantikwall. Le Mur de l'Atlantique en France" A Chazette, A Destouches, B Paich



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- "De KW-lijn", article from "Vesting 1992/3" J Cannaerts
- "Sonderheft 13. Panzersperren und andere Hindernisse" IBA H Lippmann
- "Tankmuseum nieuws Mar 1998"
- "Denkschrift über die französische Landesbefestigung"
- "Notice sur la position KW" Approuvé par l'ordre GQG – EM – 1<sup>ère</sup> Section N° 115/55<sup>bis</sup> du 24/4/1940

## WHERE ARE THE REMAINING COINTETS?

73.600 Cointets were delivered in Belgium and 23.408 were moved to the coast, others were melted for the steel industry, but what remains nowadays of them?

-> **This is a question for you all!**

Reply to me ([fphilippart@be.safmarine.com](mailto:fphilippart@be.safmarine.com)) with the number of Cointets, the location and some photos.

With your assistance we will try to make an inventory.

Here are the first ones that I know of.



The Atlantikwall museum at Raversijde (be)



The Army Museum in Brussels (be)



Near the London bridge next to the dock in Antwerp (be). The gate of about 43 were put upside down in the ground during the war. It's been said that a German officer was drowned after his car drove into the dock.



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7 Cointets still stand between Fort 7 and the Schoonselhof cemetery. They look nice from far, but they are far from nice. Bit by bit they are rotting away. The concrete rolls were removed and they are put in concrete blocks.



On the ground of the Big Red One Museum at Colleville at Omaha Beach.

## **FORTIFICATION FAIR AT DENDERMONDE**

On **Saturday October the 4<sup>th</sup>**, the city of Dendermonde organises the "**Day of the Fortified Heritage**". On this occasion you can visit the remains of a fortified city from the period of the Wellington Barrier or to listen to a few speakers about the history of Dendermonde during the First World War. This event will take place at the Abdijschool. The Simon Stevin VV Centrum collaborates with the organisation of a fortification fair at the Abdijschool (1400 1800 Hr). A nice occasion to find out about other forts and to meet the board members of the Simon Stevin VV Centrum

Thanks to Yvonne Mayo for the spell check.

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