



Dear Reader,

2010 is a special year. 70 years ago World War 2 began in Europe. The Phoney War / "Drôle de Guerre" was over. To commemorate this WMF-News will publish this year articles related to the May/June period of 1940. Two readers found also some interesting movies on Youtube and there are a few book reviews.

Enjoy.

## BELGIUM

### The Belgian coast defences on the eve of World War 2

In the second part of the Thirties the situation in Europe became tense. Some of Belgium's neighbours were potential enemies : Germany and France. Its other neighbours, Luxemburg and the Netherlands, were neutral. Its privileged allied country was Great-Britain, although, we had to take in account that this could be different too. Moreover our neutrality obliged a defence of our territory in all directions. Also, Belgium had to remain in contact with its colony : "The Belgium Congo".

This caused the establishment of the "Base Maritime" charged with the organisation and the defence of the coast. Its responsible zone is limited from the Dutch border, near Knokke to the IJzer estuary at Nieuwpoort. The remaining coast from Nieuwpoort to the French border was the responsibility of the troops depending of the TPG (*Tête de Pont de Gand* = bridge head Gent). The Base Maritime was commanded by General Glorie and resorted initially under the command of the TPG which was the chief of the IV CA (Army Corps). In 1940 it became autonomous with the headquarters at Ostend.

The Base Maritime was composed of a variety of components : marines, fixed and mobile artillery, infantry, engineers, transmissions, anti-aircraft guns, etc.

#### I Artillery

Our interest focuses especially on the artillery.

Belgium had amassed quite some artillery since the end of World War I. Some were from the German arsenal, others were ceded by its allies. Among them there were one British howitzer of 30,5 cm, 5 German railroad guns of 28 cm (ALVF = Artillerie Lourde sur Voie Ferrée), 6 German railroad guns of 17 cm and several other German and French guns of 17 and 12 cm. All these pieces were designated for coastal defence and grouped in the 5<sup>th</sup> RAA (*Regiment d'Artillerie d'Armée* = Artillery Regiment of the Army) under the command of Lt Col Van Cutsem. The 5 RAA was created on 13 Oct 1939 to group the first installed batteries at Knokke and Bredene. The other batteries would follow and in April 1940 the deployment of the 5 RAA was complete.

The 5 RAA was composed as follows :

#### I<sup>st</sup> Group (Coastal group)

- 1<sup>st</sup> Battery : 4 x 17 cm Krupp at Bredene  
4 x 12 cm Bange M1869 at Fort Wellington at Ostend
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Battery : 4 x 17 cm Krupp at Knokke
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Battery : 4 x 12 cm Marine at Zeebrugge
- 11<sup>th</sup> Battery : 13 x 4,7 cm anti-tankguns along the coast

#### II<sup>nd</sup> Group (railroad guns (ALVF))

- 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> Battery : 2 x 17 cm Krupp
- 7<sup>th</sup> Battery : 1 x 28 cm Krupp at Zwankendamme
- 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> Battery : 2 x 28 cm Krupp Kurze Bruno
- 10<sup>th</sup> Battery : 1 x 12" (30.5 cm) Vickers



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Concerning the constructions for these batteries, the Belgian army reused some of the German World War I constructions and built also news one which were later integrated in the Atlantikwall. Interesting to know that some of these guns were reused by the Germans. They formed two batteries of the six 17 cm railroad guns : railroadbattery E718 with 3 guns at Blankenberge and E717 with three guns at Knokke. The 28 cm's were also reused in railroad battery E721 at Le Verdon with two guns.

## II APX2B turrets

The 11<sup>th</sup> Battery attracts our attention because these 13 anti-tank guns should be installed on a small concrete bunker.



The only remaining turret comes from Zeebrugge and is in the Army Museum in Brussels



They were called "Abri tourelle APX". The turret is an APX-2B. To understand why, we have to go back to 1935. Then the Belgian high-command decided to motorize the cavalry. Each of the six cavalry regiments would be equipped with a squadron of twelve tanks. Eight of them would receive a heavy machine-gun and are model T15. Four received a turret with a gun and are called AMC = Auto-Mitrailleuses de Combat Renault Modèle 1934 type YR. The type of the turret was a APX1 equipped with a 25 mm gun. Later on the APX1 turret was replaced

by model APX2 which was equipped with a 47 mm Mod 36 anti-tank gun and a machine gun. The maximum range of the gun was 6400 m. It could fire 20 shots per minute and its total length is 3.175 m. An armour piercing shell weights 1.55 Kg.

The government wants to get hold of 25 vehicles in France at Renault and 25 turrets at Ateliers de Puteaux. The tests with the vehicles in France were not satisfactory and France stopped the production after 12 vehicles. The Belgian command was cancelled, but not the one for the turrets. These were delivered in 1936. New credits to buy other frames for them are not available and the turrets stayed in the depots. (this kind of turret was also used on our tanks Renault AMC 1935 type AGC1)

The turret exists of a poured frame where plates of 25 mm thick are welded. Its weight without the gun is 1650 Kg.

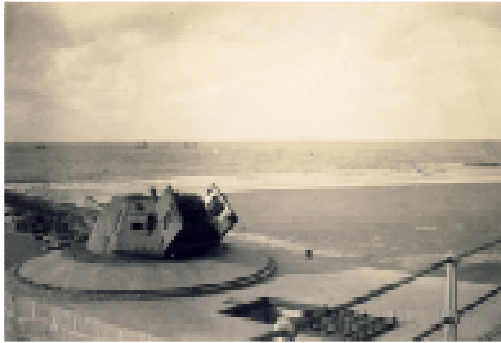
The crew of the fighting-unit counts five men. In the turret are an NCO who's the turret commander and also the gunner and his assistant, the charger. Under the turret is a man who prepared the shells. Finally there were two man for the ventilation.



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Two of these bunkers are constructed in the Ardens at Remouchamps and in its neighbourhood, at Heid des Gattes. 13 others at the coast at Knokke-Zoute (Lekkerbek), Knokke-Duinbergen, Heist (locks), Zeebrugge-mole, Blankenberge, Wenduine, Den Haan, Bredene, Ostend Halve-Maan, Ostend Kursaal, Mariakerke, Middelkerke and Lombardzijde.

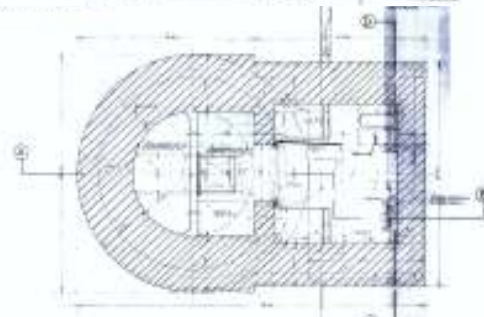
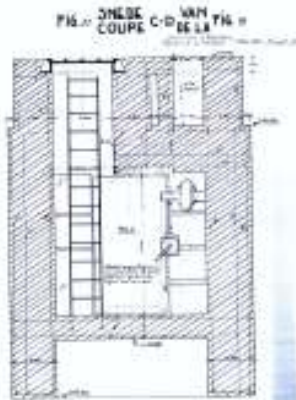
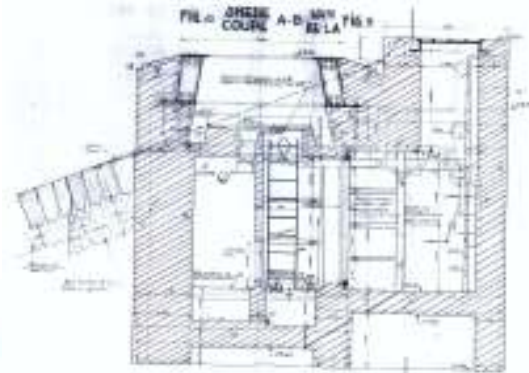
To have an idea when they were built, in the Moskou files we found the specifications made by the Ministry of Defence and they are dated in November, December 1939 and in January 1940.

The construction of the bunkers is divided in four parts : company A for Knokke-Zoute, Duinbergen, Heist and Zeebrugge mole. Company B for Ostend Halve-Maan, Ostend-Kursaal and Mariakerke, Company C for Blankenberge mole, Wenduine, De Haan and Bredene and finally company D for Middelkerke and Lombardzijde.

Source photos : Andreas Schröder

During the war these turrets were integrated in the Atlantikwall.

Knokke-Zoute in Stp Tobruk without a gun, Knokke-Duinbergen in Stp Duinresidence with a concrete turret, Zeebrugge-Mole in Stp Zeebrugge-Mole, Blankenberge in WN23, Wenduine in Stp Gneisenau, Ostend Halve-Maan in Stp Hundius, Ostend Kursaal in Stp Kursaal, Middelkerke in Stp Middelkerke and Lombardzijde in MKB Ramien.





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What remains today? Two basements exist at Duinbergen and in Ostend in front of the casino. The two bunkers in Ardens remain too with their turret, but without the gun! A complete example of the APX2B turret is in the Army Museum of Belgium. The last time I saw it, was in the depot at Kapellen near Antwerp.



The APX2B turret in from the casino of Ostend and its state in 2006 during a renovation of the dike.



The concrete turret in Duinbergen and its actual state.

### III Bunkers

On the eve of the war there were also plans to build a defence line with bunkers between Ostend and Brugge. Specifications for these were found in the Moskou archive. They were made on 10 Feb 1938 and signed by Lt Gen Van Den Bergen, chief of staff. The specifications are for the repair of four former German batteries, the "ouvrage" (fortress) Oudenburg, bunkers and the preparation of destructions and inundations. (What the fortress Oudenburg mean is actually absolutely not clear)

The bunkers are divided in several regions.

- Region Ostend

- A first line at Stene with 5 bunkers. (OB1-OB5)

This is line under continuous fire with a flanking function with machine guns in casemate of on open positions. Each bunker has two machine guns

- A main line with 6 bunkers. (OB6-OB11)

This line has the same principles as the first line, but there where the line is traversed by roads the weapons for frontal action must be 4.7 cm anti-tank guns on open positions.

These bunkers have one to two machine guns. One bunker, OB6 at the cross-roads of



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the road to Torhout and the Elisabethlaan has three 4.7 cm AT guns. Location known as "Petit Paris".

- Interval Ostend-Brugge
  - The Oudenburg passage. To be determined after the fortress Oudenburg project.
  - The Jabbeke, Nieuweghe passages, Spijen lock and the defence of the canal. (OB12-OB20).

These bunkers have two machine guns.

- Region Brugge (OB21-OB31, OB28<sup>bis</sup>, OB31<sup>bis</sup>)

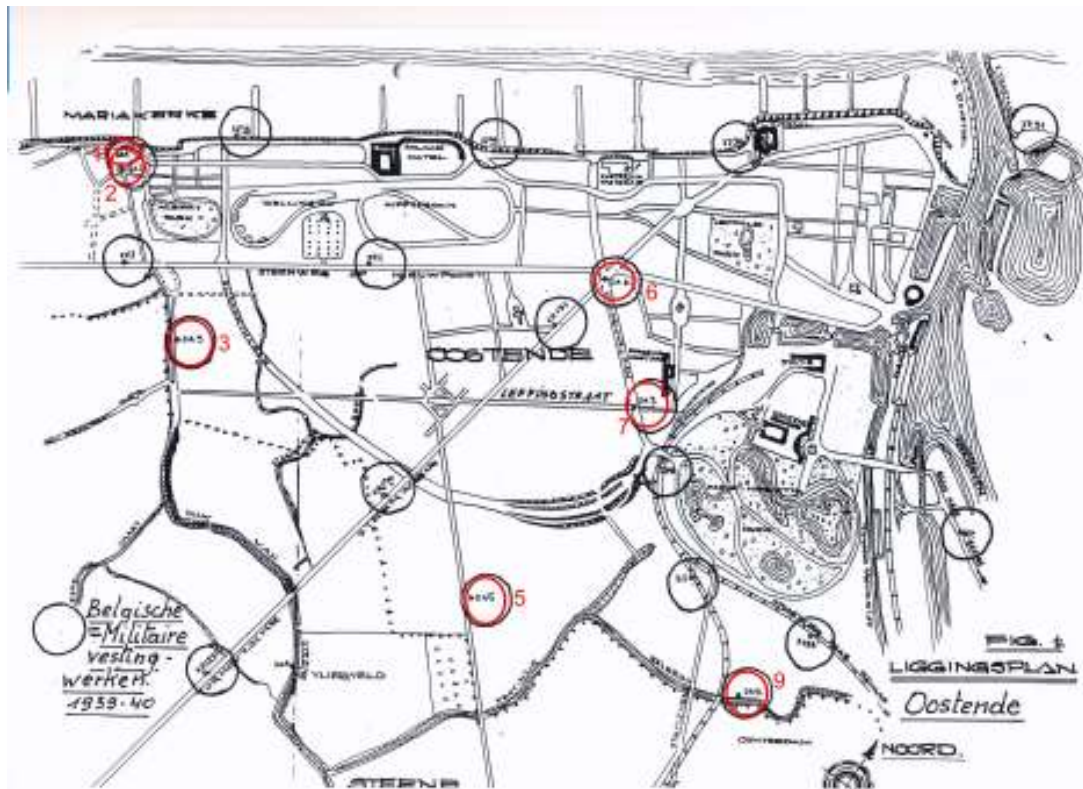
This line should go from the diversion canal, via the western borders of the city between the canal and the Leege Weg, via the moat of the city walls to the canal Gent-Brugge.

In this line there is a dike for the railroad that forms an anti-tank barrier. This dike will be held under fire by machine guns in casemate. Anti-tank guns will keep the passages through the dike under fire.

These bunkers have one to two machine guns and two of them have a 4.7 cm AT gun.

These specifications mention also the desired way of camouflage for each bunker. Depending where the bunkers stand, an appropriate camouflage will be applied : kiosk, shed, small house, vegetation, shed of the railroad services.

Actually no traces of these bunkers are found of this line.



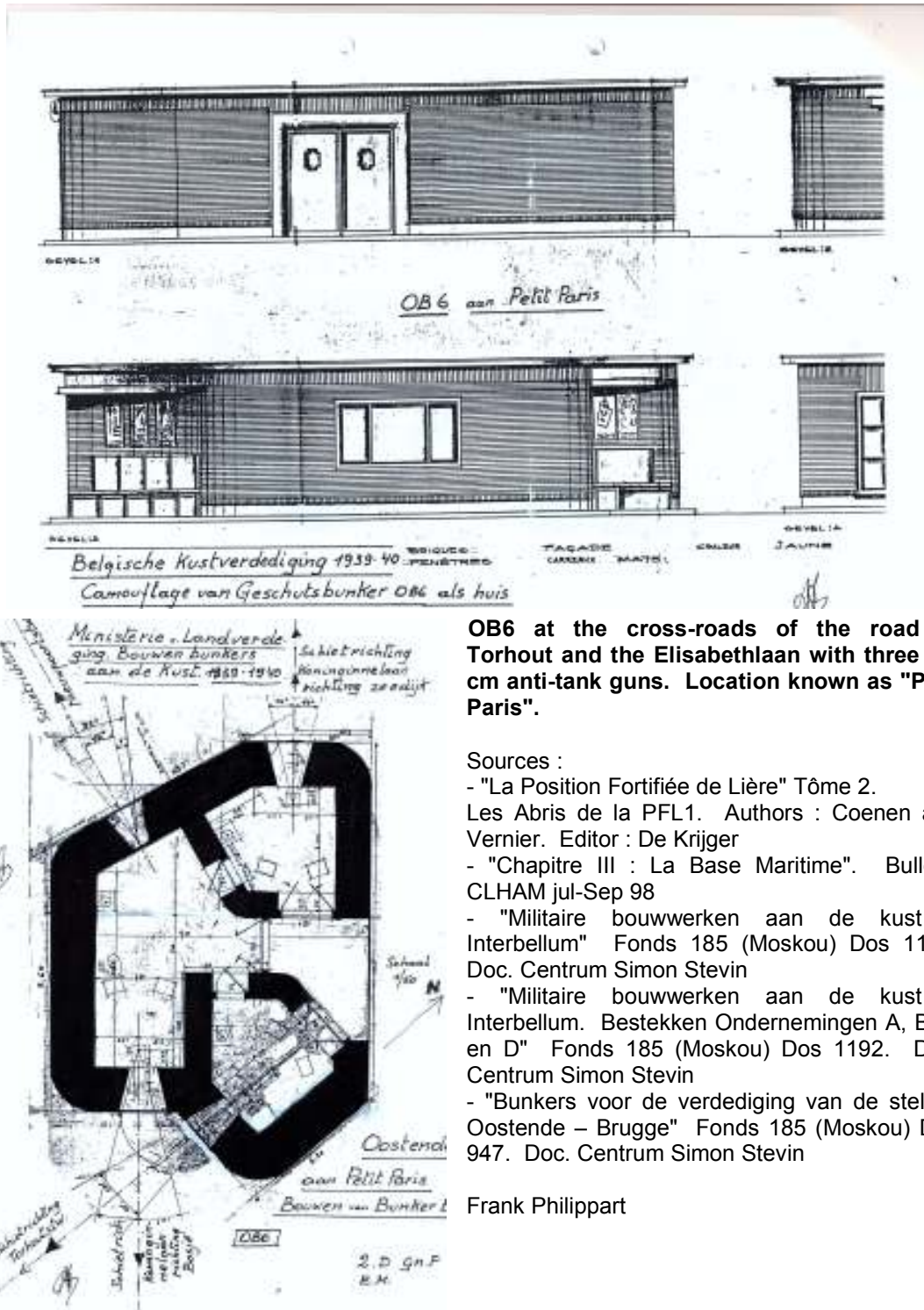
The defence of the region of Ostende.



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OB6 at the cross-roads of the road to Torhout and the Elisabethlaan with three 4.7 cm anti-tank guns. Location known as "Petit Paris".



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## BERLIN

### Bunkers in Berlin today

One of our young bunker enthusiasts, Xavier Van Acker, sent me these movies on Youtube about the underground tunnels and the remaining FlaK tower in Berlin.

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTA3zFUjDNE>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tunGcWhgX6g>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3QZ4humXho>
- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc\\_7BtGNu8k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oc_7BtGNu8k)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYvxE7Z4s3Q>

## FORTRESS SWITZERLAND

### Masters in camouflage

Maybe the best preserved secret in Europe. This is probably just the tip of the iceberg. Have a look : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEOLonBfaD8>

Source : Hugo Tant

## BOOKS

### \* Militairen aan Zee

In the framework of the renovation of the eastern bank in Ostend Buitengoed cvba published a book about the military history of Ostend started from 1265 to now with the demining school Eguermin. All aspects are touched : the fortified city, Fort Napoleon, WW-I, U-boats, HMS Vindictive, the Atlantikwall, ship wrecks, the Cold War and the Belgian Navy. The book reads easily and has many pictures and photo's. Language : dutch. Pages : 65. Format : A4. Editor : Buitengoed cvba. Authors : Bart Slabbinck and Frank Philippart. ISBN : D/2009/121.068/1. Actually it's for sale by the Simon Stevin VV Centrum for 10 € (without port costs). It's also for sale in Fort Napoleon and in several bookshops in Ostend.



### \* La Ligne Maginot – Tôme 5

The fifth and last part about the Maginot Line in the Alps appeared in December 2009.

The authors present In their well known style each work of the line and explain the battles of 1940. The Maginot line at Corsica is also commented upon, just like the lesser known Marrethline in Tunisia.

The authors are : Jean-Yves Mary, Alain Hohnadel en Jacques Sicard. ISBN : 978-2-35250-127-5.

Language : French. 1892 pages, 450 photographs and 250 schema's.

Price : 39.95 €,

<http://livres.histoireetcollections.com/publication/2384/la-ligne-maginot-tome-5.html>



Thanks to Yvonne Mayo for the spell check.

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