



SPOTLIGHT ON A MUSEUM

The "Rampart Museum" at Ypres



This small museum is hidden behind a pub next to the Gate to Rijsel and just behind the Ramparts Cemetery. The pub is kept original with lots of artifacts of World War I. The museum is constructed like a dugout; everything is covered with wooden shelves. You see many small scenes of the Western Front with Belgian, French and German soldiers and some interesting artifacts like a shortened Mauser rifle, probably used by the miners.

It's very good, but there is one major black point. The entire collection needs maintenance! I even saw mould on leather belts. Pity! The museum is daily accessible except on Wednesday and Thursday. It's open from 1030 Hr till 2000 Hr.

The address is Rijselsestraat 208, B 8900 Ieper.

Info at Phone 32 (0)57.20.02.36. Email : rampartsmuseum.ieper@pandora.be

Website : rampartswarmuseumypres.com



THE COLD WAR

The nuclear submarine base of Balaklava

Jan Cauwenberghs



Where are we?

Balaklava is a town in the Crimea, Ukraine which has an official status of a district of the city of Sevastopol.

10 km to the south of the center of Balaklava is the submarine base which is now protected.

During the cold war this was a secret base for submarines and also a repair shop.

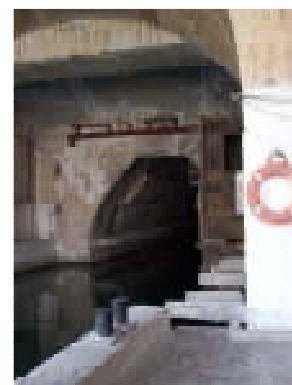
The base was cut out in the slope of the fill of Balaklava.

It was stated that the base was indestructable and that it could resist the direct impact of an atomic bomb with the power of the one of Hiroshima.



The plan of the submarine base.

One of the entrances of the underground naval base





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The Construction started in 1957 and was finished in 1961. In case of an attack the automatic doors weighing 120 tons were closed. 50000 man could survive in it for three years! The base had its own bakery, food storage and oil. There was also an hospital.



One of the automatic doors.



The base could station 7 submarines and if necessary there was a special dock for repairs. The depth of the canals was 8 m and the width varied between 8 and 12 meters.



Special dock for repairs.

Material was transported with a narrow-gauge railway.



The city of Balaklava was an hermetically closed military area. 50 soldiers were responsible for the security. There was also a special KGB department which screened all the labourers and visitors. There were 400 civil labourers of which only 4 had access to all the rooms of the base. The majority of the residents of Balaklava worked in the base.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 a procedure was started to decommission the base as a strategic, military base. The last Russian submarine left the base in 1996. Today you can



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visit the base. There are guided tours and there's a museum about the submarines and the Ukrainian navy.

<http://blog.ratestogo.com/balaklava-underground-russian-submarine-base/>

<http://travelua.blogspot.com/2008/04/balaklava-nuclear-submarine-base.html>

<http://englishrussia.com/2011/11/05/underground-submarine-base-of-balaklava/>

BOOKS

“De Hollandstelling”

Pocket format. 304 pages

Language : Dutch

Authors : Hans Sackers, Johan den Hollander, Ruud Murk

ISBN : 978-94-9038-236-0

Publisher : Witsand Uitgevers

The authors analyse the German bunker line along the Belgian-Dutch border. It was built in 1917 to avoid a possible allied counter attack in the German's rear. You find in it information about why they built it, the difference between the different kinds of naval and army bunkers and finally there is a travel guide.

Comments. It's a very interesting book; it reads easily but it's recommended that you buy the necessary regional maps otherwise it will be difficult to find the bunkers.



BELGIUM

The Antwerpen-Turnhout Stelling at Stabroek

The analysis of a World War I bunker line
Part 1

Frank Philippart

The area that is going to be discussed is situated to the north of Antwerp between the A12 highway and the Stabroek fort just to the north of the village with the same name. To be more precise, the bunkers lie on the left hand side when you drive from Stabroek to Berendrecht on the Abtsdreef.

When you passed the area of the fort you probably noticed the bunker line in the field, but





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also a lonely bunker far forward of that line. I still kept wondering about the purpose of that bunker until I came across an aerial photo of 1918.

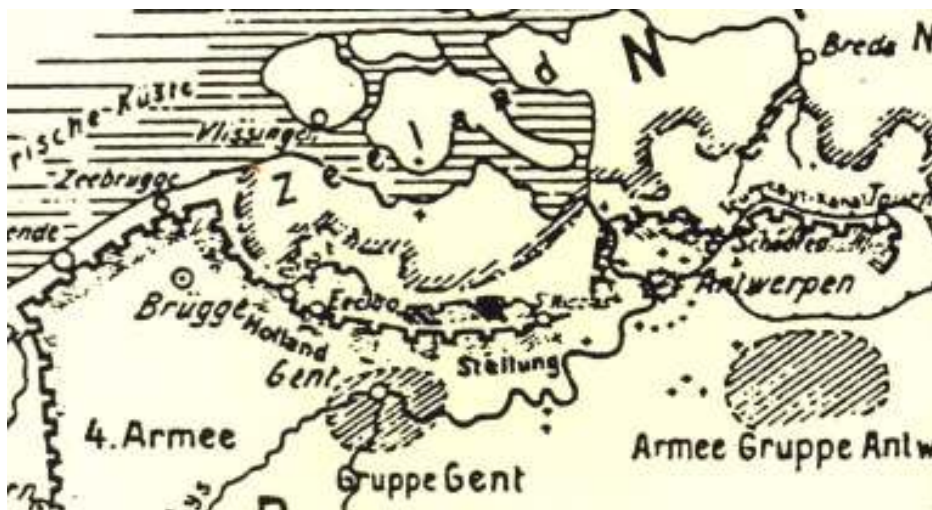
Overview of the bunker line

So where did it all start?

Three days after the fall of Antwerp on 13 October 1914, the German high command decided to bring Fortress Antwerp back into a state of defense. Only 13 forts and redoubts of the 33 were undamaged, but all the Belgian field fortifications were still there. The Germans had the forts repaired by German companies and with their own men. The reorganized Fortress Antwerp followed their own strategy. Antwerp had three missions. It was the strongpoint of the Antwerpen-Maas Stellung (A-M Stellung). It was the bridgehead to allow large amounts of troops to pass over the river. Covering the right flank of the army to avoid a surprise attack through the Netherlands. To fulfill these tasks, the Germans considered the following fronts as important : the northern front between the Scheldt and the canal of Turnhout, the southern front between the Zenne and the Scheldt and the front on the left bank.

From spring 1916 the German intelligence service considered an allied landing in the Netherlands. That would allow the allies to attack the German naval bases in the north-west of Germany and the Belgian coast (Brugge, Zeebrugge and Ostend), but they could also attack the Western Front in the back. During the autumn of 1916 they decided to create defence lines opposite the Dutch border :

- The Hollandstellung from the coast to Antwerp)
- The Stellung Antwerpen
- The Turnhoutkanalstellung along the canal from Antwerp to Turnhout



Source : Periodical "Scharpnel" of The Western Front Association Belgique.



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In the first half of 1917 the German engineers built the bunkers with forced labourers. From summer 1917 the Gruppe Gent was positioned with two infantry divisions and a cavalry division and the Armeegruppe Antwerpen with four infantry division and two mixed brigades. Everything was ready, but there came no invasion. On 4 November 1918; the German high command ordered to occupy the A-M Stellung, but the truce of 11 November prevented this.



One of the rare war time photo's of the Holland Stellung, here at Leestjesbrugge. You see camouflaged bunkers, machine gun pits and barbed wire obstacles.

The front to the north of Antwerp

The Germans built the defense line between the forts and the redoubts whereby their first trench lay most of the time at the height of the forts.

During the first world war the centre of gravity of the infantry defense lay on the machine gun emplacements and crew bunkers.

If you look at the positioning war, then we see an evolution from the only trench in 1914 to a system with three trenches over a depth from 150 m to 300 m. 40 m before the first trench there were hindrances of barbed wire each with a width from 5 to 10 m.

The first line existed most of the time of two trenches within an intermediary distance of 20 m. A minimum of troops were drawn up here to withhold a surprise attack. Machine guns were reduced to a minimum and were installed between the trenches to reduce the impact probability.



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If the enemy should get through the first line, a counter attack would follow from the second line where the majority of the troops were positioned. Here were also the majority of pillboxes. This line lay approximately 100 m behind the first line.

A very well preserved front line with trenches and bunkers in the Mastenbos at Kapellen.

The third line lay about 300 m behind the first.

Concrete command posts were built about 1 km behind the front line.

It was recommended that a second defense line exist and preferable a third. These lay at a distance of 4 to 10 Km from each other.

If you look at the northern front, it goes from Berendrecht via Stabroek, the fort Ertbrand, the fort of Brasschaat (Mishagen), Maria Ter Heide to fort of Schoten at the canal from Antwerp to Turnhout. You will notice a stable, continuous line of bunkers. At some locations there is a double line about 20 m of each other. At some places you'll find behind this line a concentration of bunkers that points to a command post.

Behind this position there are various, scattered bunkers that officially are described as storage bunkers. Their structure is very universal so that they also can be used as a bunker for personal or as command post.

In the bunker line you can recognise the logic behind the positioning of the bunkers. At some locations, especially at Maria Ter Heide it changes. Mainly small observation bunkers were built from this point. This could be due to another engineer commander, another topography or due to demographic reasons.

534 bunkers were built in the northern front of which 40 % disappeared already due to the expansion of the harbour and the residential areas.

After the First World War the Belgian army made an inventory of the bunker line. All the bunkers were grouped by clusters and received a number. About 20 different types were measured, but only 7 types return frequently. In this article I will refer to types and sequence numbers.

In 1943 the Germans closed all the bunkers because they feared that the resistance would reuse them.

(end of part 1)

Thanks to Yvonne Mayo for the spell check.

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