



BELGIUM

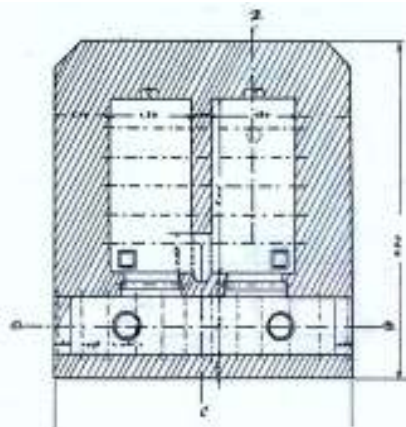
Historical bunker 126 of the German Turnhoutkanalstellung of 1917 has been demolished

The Dutch association Stichting Menno Van Coehoorn warned the Simon Stevin Vlaams Vestingbouwkundig Centrum in the beginning of 2011 that there was a request for the expansion of the existing service station. A small inquiry learned that the request came from Kuwait Petroleum (Belgium) N.V. They wanted to build a car wash unit and a shop, but it included also the demolition of a bunker in the centre of Turnhout. The location is commercially interesting at the cross road of the Noord-Brabantlaan and the Parklaan (ring of Turnhout) and the Steenweg Op Mol.



foto Louis Verbraeken

The bunker concerned forms part of the German "Turnhoutkanalstellung" from 1917. This a bunker line that follows the direction of the Dessel - Schoten canal to the "Oude Kom" in Turnhout. From there the bunker line forms a half circle to the east of Turnhout. It ends in the direction of the Abbey of Corsendonck.



The bunker concerned is a crew bunker of **type 1** according to an inventory of the Belgian engineers in the twenties. The bunker has two crew rooms which exits to a corridor with two entrances. The crew manned a machine gun on the roof. The entrances exited to a trench to other machine gun pits. The bunker was of course surrounded with earth so that it wasn't visible from far. That meant also that the machine gun was at ground level. The wall towards the enemy was 1 m and to the friend side were 50 cm. The thickness of the roof varied between 60 and 80 cm. The entrances were closed with a wooden door in two parts to avoid that the crew could be locked due to debris in front of the door.



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The threatened bunker was unique because there was a kind of a firing edge at the roof. This served to put sand bags against it to protect the crew of a Maxim or a Schwarzlose machine gun. This firing edge has not yet been found on any another bunker. From this position they could keep the centre of Oud-Turnhout under fire.



The Simon Stevin Vlaams Vestingbouwkundig Centrum and several members have sent an objection against the demolition during the public investigation.

The agreement to demolish the bunker was granted despite of various negative decisions. The argument was that all criteria were fulfilled and that the bunker wasn't protected as a monument of history.

Simon Stevin has finally tried in vain to stop this decision by a commission called "Raad voor Vergunningsbetwistingen".

After the final arrests Kuwait Petroleum (Belgium) NV announced that they wanted to pass the bunker to Simon Stevin to solve the problem on condition that the dead lines of the planned constructions could be met. After an investigation it was clear that there wasn't a realistic possibility to keep the bunker on the ground of Kuwait Petroleum or on one of the other grounds. The city of Turnhout offered an adjacent area to move the bunker to it to keep it as a monument of World War I. The plan to move the bunker was discussed with specialised engineers and a cost to move the 225 tons heavy bunkers would be more than 90.000 €. This was a financial goal that not could be met, neither the timing. Finally the projected move didn't continue. This meant that the bunker had to be demolished, something that is regretted by all the concerned parties.

Simon Stevin want to mention that Kuwait Petroleum (Belgium) NV were always available for a constructive dialogue and that they wanted to cooperate any realistic solution.

Simon Stevin thanks also the city of Turnhout for their positive initiatives for the preservation of this piece of heritage.

Source : George Melis

SPOTLIGHT ON A MUSEUM

Museum : "Musée de l'armée" in Paris

I had high expectations when I went to this museum. I know how high the level of the army museum in Brussels is and I expected at least the same. You have also to know that the exhibition space was renovated about six years ago.





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Turret of a German Mark II tank, equipped with a 2 cm gun and a MG.

They have a very large collection of pre Franco-Prussian War but my focus went especially to WW-I and WW-II.

To visit these rooms you have to go first through the room of the Franco-Prussian war and I must admit that they have a large collection of uniforms.

When I came in the rooms of WW-I and WW-II I was rather disappointed. You see some uniforms and that's all. There are almost no weapons or equipment, certainly no heavy equipment, not even a diorama. If you really don't know anything about the wars then you would be happy with the content. There's quite a lot of reading stuff and several documentaries.

What's absolutely disappointing is the lighting of the dummies. They placed very small spots above the uniforms so that they remain in the dark, certainly not suitable to take a picture. The room of D-Day was that dark that you almost needed a torch.

full tariff : 9.5 €

A ticket called "Billet unique" gives access to the "Musée de l'Armée", the dom-church (grave of Napoléon 1st), to the monument "A l'Historial de Gaulle" (closed on Mondays), to the "Musée des Plans-Reliefs" and to the "Musée de l'Ordre de la Libération."

<http://www.invalides.org/>

Overloon MUSEUM

The museum at Overloon near the Dutch-German border has already been in existence for more than 22 years.

Initially it was an open air museum that focussed on heavy equipment like guns and tanks.

German Panther tank with a 75 mm gun





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The 80 shell of Dora



Nowadays they have moved their collection inside and renovated them one by one creating marvels.

When you enter the museum you bump into the highlight of the museum, a beautiful renovated Panther tank. You'll see next a huge collection of tanks and guns of WW-II and recent conflicts like Shermans, a Cromwell, a Churchill, an Archer, T34, Patton tank, amphibious vehicles, a German 88 mm gun etc... Next to that they have several rooms in which they explain the German occupation of the Netherlands and they have a room dedicated to the German paratrooper which contain some very interesting items and uniforms. In a lone corner of the museum you'll see an extreme huge grenade of the 80 cm railroad gun Dora. Plan a whole day for this museum if you want to see everything without rushing.

The museum is always open except on 24, 25, 31 Dec and on 1 Jan.
Open from Monday to Friday from 1000 Hr – 1700 Hr.
Open during the weekends and on holidays from 1100 Hr – 1700 Hr.
Price adults 14 €, children from 4 – 12 year : 9 €
For other details : www.libertypark.nl

THE LIBERATION IN 1944

The Cromwell tank at the Boomsesteenweg Wilrijk-Antwerpen



Ok, ok, I agree, it has nothing to do with fortification, but consider it as local information of the city where the author of WMF-News lives.

People who live in Antwerp of those who enter Antwerp via the Boomsesteenweg know for sure the bronze green tank at the Boomsesteenweg almost near the cross road with the Jan van Rijswijklaan. This tank is a Cruiser Cromwell tank with the



insignia of the 11th Armoured Division that liberated Antwerp on September the 4th.
This tank entered Antwerp, ... or not?

The source of information is Hugo Cassauwers. 26 March 2013.

A wrong monument

The British Cromwell tank at the Boomsesteenweg in Antwerp is not an authentic tank that liberated Antwerp in 1944 because this happened with Sherman tanks. This happened because there wasn't a Sherman tank available in 1946, and that the British offered as a monument to Antwerp. (Luckily for us because there are already lots of Shermans, but not Cromwells!)

Mysteriously, it's not known exactly who's the owner of the Cromwell tank. Under pressure from The Royal British Legion, a British organisation that keeps the remembrance of war acts alive, the service Protocol of the city of Antwerp took possession of the tank. The British army should have offered the tank as a present to the city in 1971 but there doesn't exist some official documents. So it might be possible that the Canadian army could be the owner.

Since a few years the wharf of the extension of tram line 6 at the General Roberts Square threatened the tank again.



Future vision

A letter to the customer team Maintenance of the inheritance of the city of Antwerp at 23 August 1012 shed more light on the future of this typical liberation monument.

The city of Antwerp plans the restoration of the Cromwell tank. They work together with the Ministry of Defence because they have

the experience for this kind of work. The exact planning for the restoration is not known yet. The tank has been removed from its current location to avoid damage during the wharf.

The tank will appear in the city after the restoration. The original location at the General Roberts Square has changed drastically and therefore the city looked for a more appropriate location along the historical routes of the liberation.

The tank will be re-located to the square at the Jan Van Rijswijcklan near the AXA-building (about 2 km to the north of the actual location) at the entrance of the city. An exact timing is not known yet. (But when it happens there will be quite some publicity about it!)

Sources :



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- Summaries of various press reports
- A letter to the customer team Maintenance of the inheritance of the city of Antwerp at 23 August 1012

What do we need to know about the Cromwell tank?

The official name is Cruiser Tank Mark VIII Cromwell. The indication Cruiser comes from the idea to combine the fire power of the slow medium tanks and the speed of the light, but light armed tanks.

A various number of Cruiser tanks passed before this model, the Cromwell. It saw service in 1943.

It has a crew of 5, a weight of 27.5 tons, the maximum speed was 52 Km/h. and the range was 278 Km. Initially the Cromwell wasn't popular because the British tank fought a fierce and barely moving battle in the hedges of Normandy. But from the moment the war became more mobile it's speed was its advantage.

The tank was armed with a 75 mm OQF gun (OQF = Ordnance Quick-Firing) and with two 7.92 mm Besa machine guns. The maximum armour was 76 mm and it has a Rolls Royce Meteor V12 petrol engine. It was the fastest and the most used cruiser tank of the war.

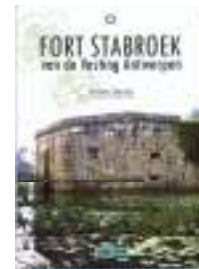
The tank has a inner turret was added armoured plates that were fixed with bolts which it gives the tank its specific character.

The main battle tanks of the 11th Armoured Division were Shermans but the reconnaissance troops had Cromwells. First the 15/19th Kings Royal Hussars which was succeeded by the 2nd Northants Yeomanry.

BOOKS

Fort Stabroek van de Vesting Antwerpen

This book gives a nice description of the armoured fort of Stabroek that makes part of the outer defence line around Antwerp. The author starts with the structure and construction. Next he describes the different parts and armament of the fort with drawings and schema's. He describes also the events around the fort during the German assault in 1914. The modifications at the eve of World War two are also documented. The author describes also the German bunker line of 1917 that was built around the fort. Finally he looks at the Belgian anti-tank moat that connected all the fort in the north of Antwerp.



Pages : 93, Language : Dutch, Author : Simon Devos, Publisher : Simon Stevin

Price 15 € (temporarily 13 €). Order the book at : <http://www.simonstevin.org/publicaties.html>

WEBSITES

<http://www.antitankgracht.be/>

This is a very interesting site about the bunkers of the anti-tank moat and the interval bunkers above Antwerp.

Thanks to Yvonne Mayo for the spell check.

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