



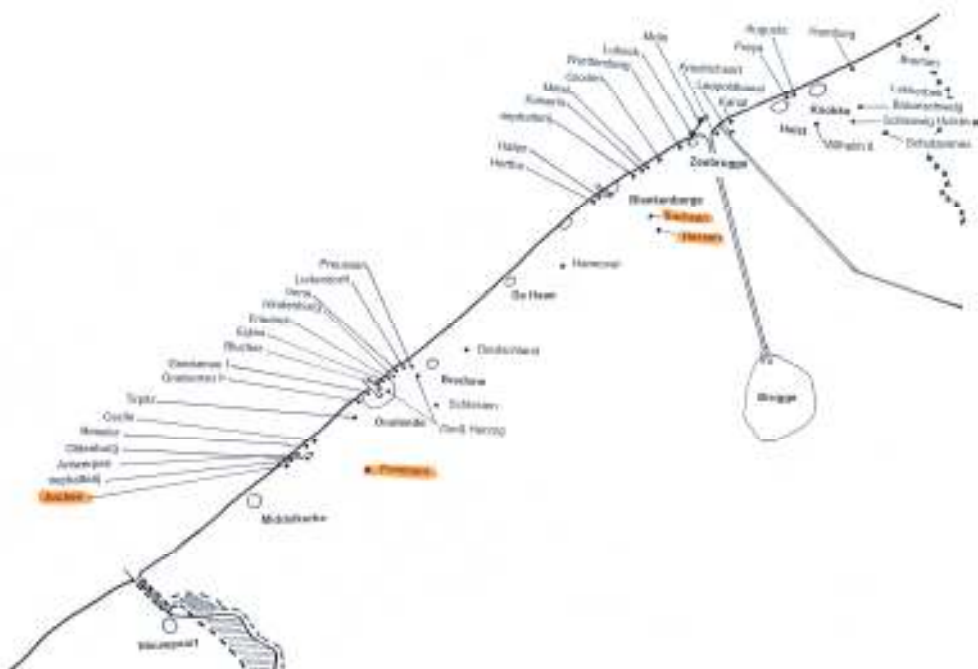
Remains of the German coastal batteries

This year we couldn't get around. 100 years ago the First World war started in August 1914. Lots of activities, commemorations and exhibitions have taken place and will take place within the next months / years. The forts of Antwerp and Liège and the Ypres Salient have been highlighted, but what about the German coastal batteries?

38 batteries were built on the Belgian coast over a distance of 58 Km to defend the coast. That means that there was a battery per 1.5 Km!

Did you know that there are three other remaining batteries next to the well known Raversyde site?

How did it start?



The “Marine Korps”

By the start of the war on August the 4th, it was clear to the German Naval High Command that there was no function for a big number of reserves because there was no place on the ships. Moreover the coastal batteries on the North Sea and the East Sea were not threatened. The idea



was put forward to send in the troops on the Western Front with the aim of occupying the Belgian coast.

Such a mobile Navy Division was created on August 23rd 1914 under the command of Admiral Ludwig von Schröder. It consisted of the 1st "Marine Infanterie Brigade" with two regiments and the "Matrozen Brigade" with two regiments.

The quality of the troops was superior because they had experience with coastal defense and artillery.

To the division were added :

- Landwehr squadron Mackensen
- The half of Landwehr squadron Schwindt
- 1st Landwehr Feldartillerie Abteilung of the Xth Army Corps.
- Landwehr Pionier Kompanie
- Radfahrer Kompanie (bicycle company)

A coastal artillerist in "Feldgrau" (Raversyde)

The division was sent to the front on August 31st. Initially it was intended for siege and occupying purposes, but the threat that the British troop would attack the supply lines

led them to take a position between the rivers Dijle and Grimbergen.

On September 9th the first confrontation took place with Belgian troops near Epegem.

The Marine Division took also part in the assault on Fort Walem on September 27.

The Division entered Antwerp on October 11th and stayed there till the 20th. The next day they moved to the coast. The coast is split up into two parts, the east coast, being "Rechter Abschnitt" with the command post in Zeebrugge and the other part, the "Linker Abschnitt" with a command post in Ostend.

Halfway through November a 2nd division was stationed in Flanders and from then on one spoke about the Marine Korps, still under the command of von Schröder. The quality of these troops was less because this division was composed of sailors who had never served on land. This division was deployed on the land front between Nieuwpoort and Diksmuide. The 1st Division had an assignment for the defense of the coast between Middelkerke and the Dutch border. This division stood under the command of Vice-Admiral Jacobsen from 1914 till 1917. From then on it was Vice-Admiral Karl Schultz.



A coastal artillerist in "Drillich" uniform (Raversyde)



The 1st Marine Division was composed of

- Marine Infanterie Brigade with Marine Infanterie Regiment 1 and 2.
- 1st Marine Brigade with Matrozen Regiment 1 and Matrozen Artillerie Regiment 1.
- 2nd Marine Brigade with Matrozen Regiment 2 and Matrozen Artillerie Regiment 2.
- Marine Feldartillerie Regiment
- 1st Landwehr squadron
- 2nd Landwehr Feldartillerie Abteilung
- 1st Marine Sanitätskompanie
- Three coast battalions

On 3 June 1917, the 3rd Marine Division was created for service on the land front.

At the end of 1918 the Marine Korps counted 60 – 70000 men and was composed of :

3 naval infantry regiments, 7 sailors regiments, 2 sailors artillery regiments (coastal), 2 corps artillery regiments (land front) and 1 anti-aircraft artillery regiment.

An officer of a coastal battery (Raversyde)

The coastal artillery was divided over the “Ost Abschnitt” with 21 batteries and the “West Abschnitt” with 19 batteries.

The end of the Marine Korps

The allied liberation offensive started on September 28th 1918.

The Marine Korps was not directly threatened because the inundations avoided a direct assault. Nevertheless it was the intention of the allies to get hold of the coast via an outflanking movement via Klerken and Houthulst. The German batteries were continuously bombarded by British monitors.

On September 29th the Imperial headquarters in Spa sent a message to take the evacuation of the Belgian coast in consideration.

On October 16, von Schröder gave his last order, being the liquidation of the coastal batteries. The guns were destroyed on the 16th in the region to the east of Ostend and on the 17th between Ostend and Zeebrugge. The batteries fired a last time on the 18th to the east of Zeebrugge. After that they were destroyed as well.

The Marine Korps retreated via Eeklo and St Niklaas. On November 11 they surrendered in the region of Lokeren and withdrew to Germany.



The typical white sailor's uniform (Raversyde)

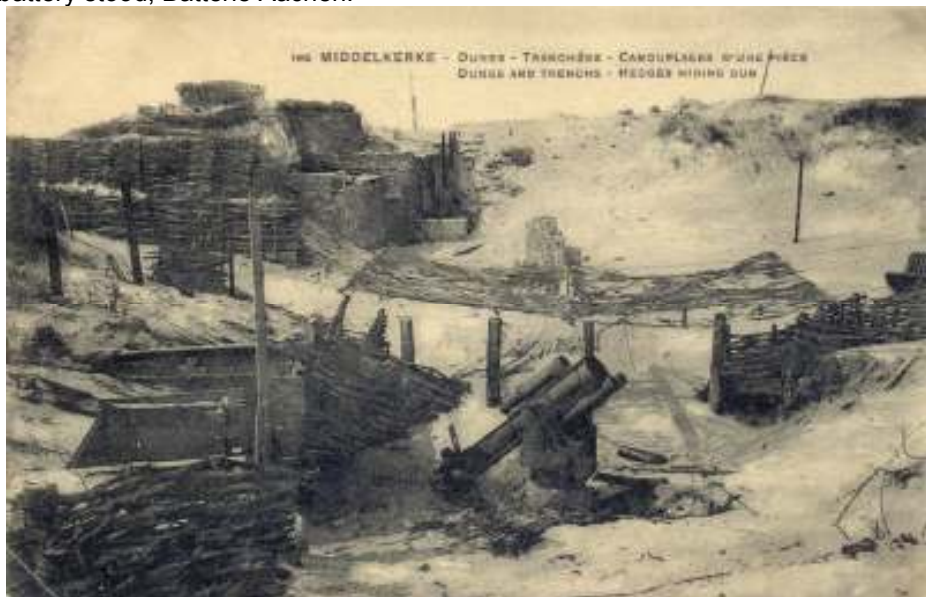


The dune front



Trenches and barbed wire against an allied invasion

Between the first battery and the Yzer there was the front of the dunes. It was the prolongation of the land front between the Yzer estuary and Middelkerke. The area was a chain of dune hollows and summits crowned with numerous barb wire entanglements. Every hollow and summit got a name like the Affenberg or Hexenkessel. The hollows were reconstructed with crew bunkers while the summits were observation posts. The guns in the dune area were mainly 17 cm guns and in Westende-Bad stood two 28 cm howitzers. Armored turrets with a 5 cm rapid fire gun were installed on the dike of Middelkerke. The dune front ended at Raversijde where the first coastal battery stood, Batterie Aachen.



The dune front at Middelkerke



The coastal batteries

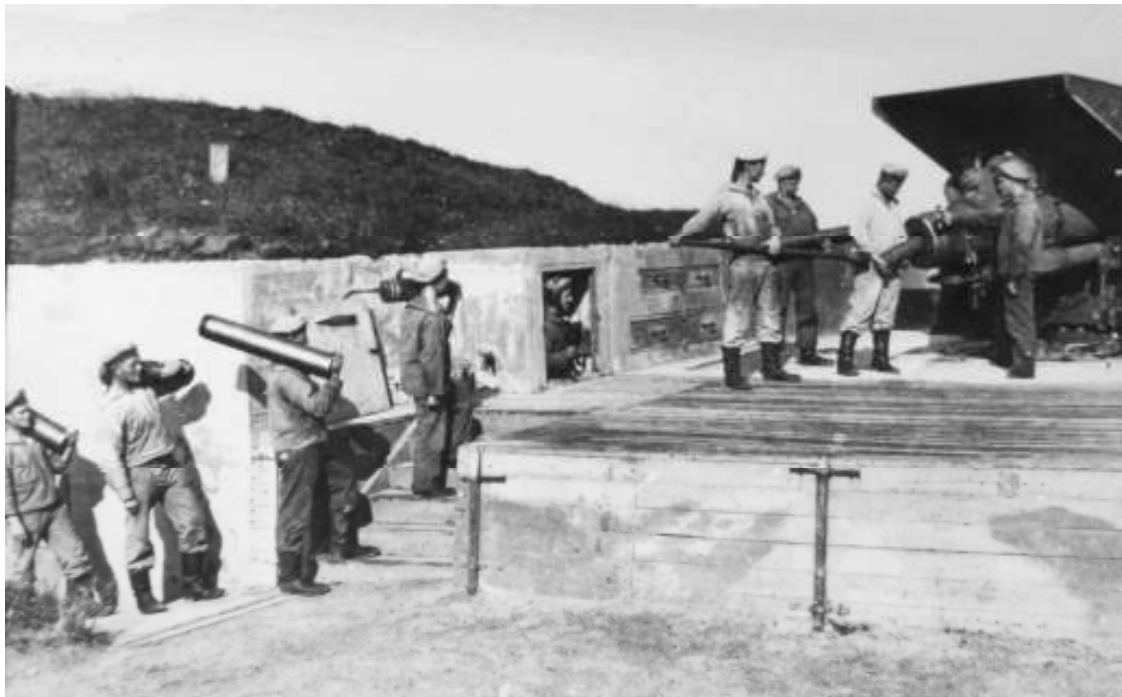
They had two purposes, namely the defense against allied landings and the protection of the U-Boot bases.

The construction of the batteries can be divided into four periods.

The first was the quick construction during the first months after the occupation of the coast.

The second one was the construction of the larger batteries.

The construction of additional protection for the larger batteries during 1917 and 1918 was the third part and the last part was an increased construction activity after the Vindictive raid.



One of the 15 cm SK L/45 guns of the Cecilie battery

The first batteries were ready on December 28th 1914 including the Batterie Beseler with four 15 cm guns. The next batteries were ready on January 18th 1915. Between 1915 and 1916 the heavy inland batteries were installed : the Batterie Deutschland in Bredene with 4 x 38 cm, the Batterie Kaiser Willem II in Knokke with 4 x 30.5 cm and the Batterie Tirpitz in Ostend with 4 x 28 cm guns.

Between 1917 and 1918 additional batteries were installed near the heavy ones because the Germans feared that they would have a short lifetime due to intensive use.

Initially the occupied coast was divided into two areas, Artillery "Abschnitt Ost" with Matrozen Artillery Regiment 1 and Artillery "Abschnitt Ost" with Matrozen Artillery Regiment 2.

This partition was not really practical and the Germans divided the batteries according their role : Fernkampfgruppe (long distance batteries), Nahkampfgruppe (against landings), Hafenschutzgruppe (protection of the ports)

Four batteries of 38 remained more or less.



Batterie Pommern



This battery was situated inland and was also known under the name Leugenboom or Predikboom, called after the nearby tavern. The battery has got also another nickname, Lange Max battery and this had for sure to do with the length of the barrel.

The battery was built in the Stokerijbos near Moere (Koekelare).

It had only one **38 cm SK L/45** gun, built by Krupp. It was intended for the Bayern class battleships. The barrel was 17 m long and it weighted 77600 Kg. The breach had a weight of 1000 Kg. The range of the gun was 48 Km.

The huge gun bombarded Dunkirk and it was also intended to shoot at Ypres.

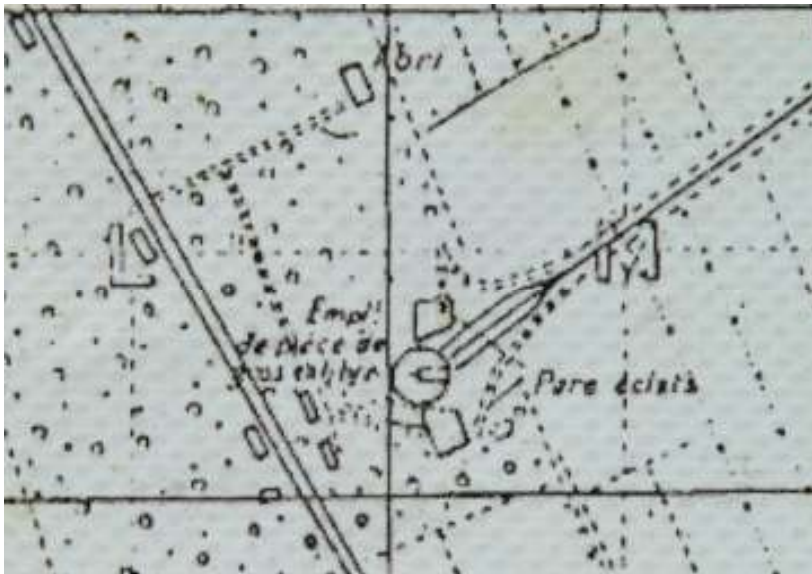
The wharf started in October 1916 and the gun was ready on May 15 1917.

On June 27th 1917 the battery fired the first time together with the Deutschland battery at Veurne and Adinkerke. The same day the Pommern battery fired at Dunkirk. A shell fell on the British headquarters of the XVth Corps and killed 11 men injured 13 others.

In July 1917 the battery bombarded Veurne, Koksijde, Forthem and Alveringen.

On September 4th, 23rd and 25th the target was

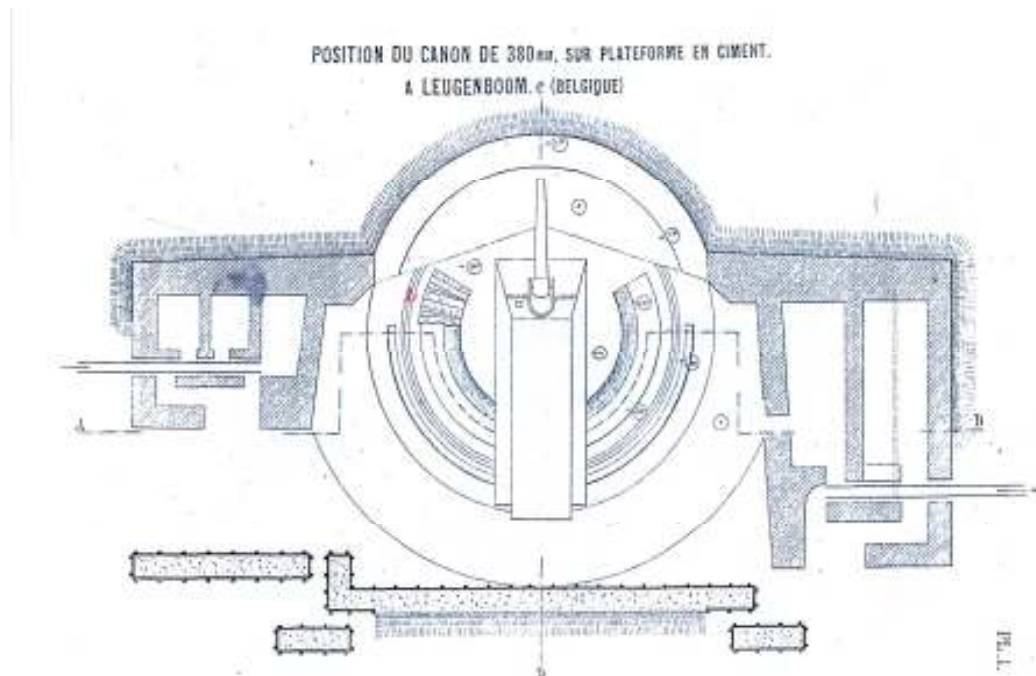
again Dunkirk.



In 1918 the gun fired daily.

The battery was bombarded by allied gun fire but didn't get damaged.

The Germans also created a fake battery nearby, even with a railroad.



The plan of the gun site with crew and ammunition bunkers.

On October 16th 1918 the Germans withdrew and then happened one of the most curious incidents of the war. They fired the gun in a horizontal position on the wall around the emplacement with the intention that the explosion would destroy the gun. The velocity of the shell was that high that it penetrated the wall and exploded even 800 m further. The gun wasn't damaged at all!

The gun had an armored turret with a thickness of 6 cm and stood in a deep open emplacement with a diameter of 22,4 m. Its range was on 157° and the gun had a maximum elevation of 45°. On the left and right of the open emplacement there was an ammunition and a crew bunker.

A shell was 2 m high and weighed 750 Kg.

Initially the crew consisted of 1 captain, 2 Lieutenants, 10 NCO's and 120 soldiers. When the electric system was installed to turn the gun, the number of soldiers decreased to 6 NCO's and 70 men.

The battery had a few commanders : Kapitän-Leutnant der Reserve Preuss, Kapitän-Leutnant der Reserve Riefstahl, Oberleutnant der Reserve Balhsen en Leutnant der Reserve Christian.





WMF News

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Edition 3 of 2014

Composed by Frank PHILIPPART

Today

The entire emplacement has been demolished except for the major part of the open emplacement. Today you can still see this enormous emplacement. A replica of the gun in the armored turret stands next to it.



You can reach the site via the N33 (Oostendsesteenweg). At the crossroads at Halve Barreel you turn to the west; this is the Leugenboomstraat. Next, turn the first to the right, this is still the Leugenboomstraat and then the first to the left, this is the Clevenstraat.

A brand new museum will open during October 2014.

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

Lange Max Museum, Clevenstraat 2, 8680 Koekelare

The museum is open every day from 1400 hr to 1800 Hr during July and August. During the other months, from Wednesday to Sunday from 1400 hr to 1800 Hr.

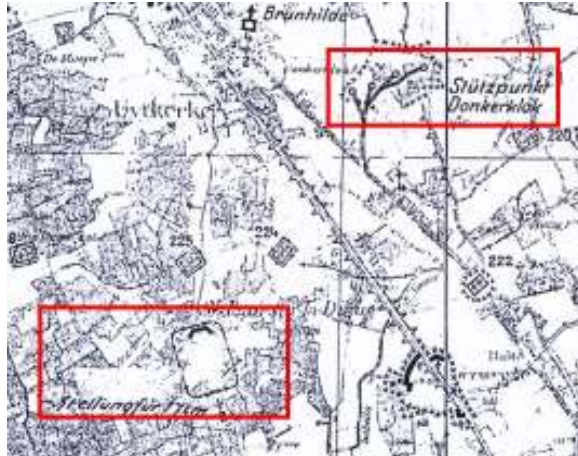
The open emplacement is always open!

You have also the possibility to drink something here.





Batterie Sachsen



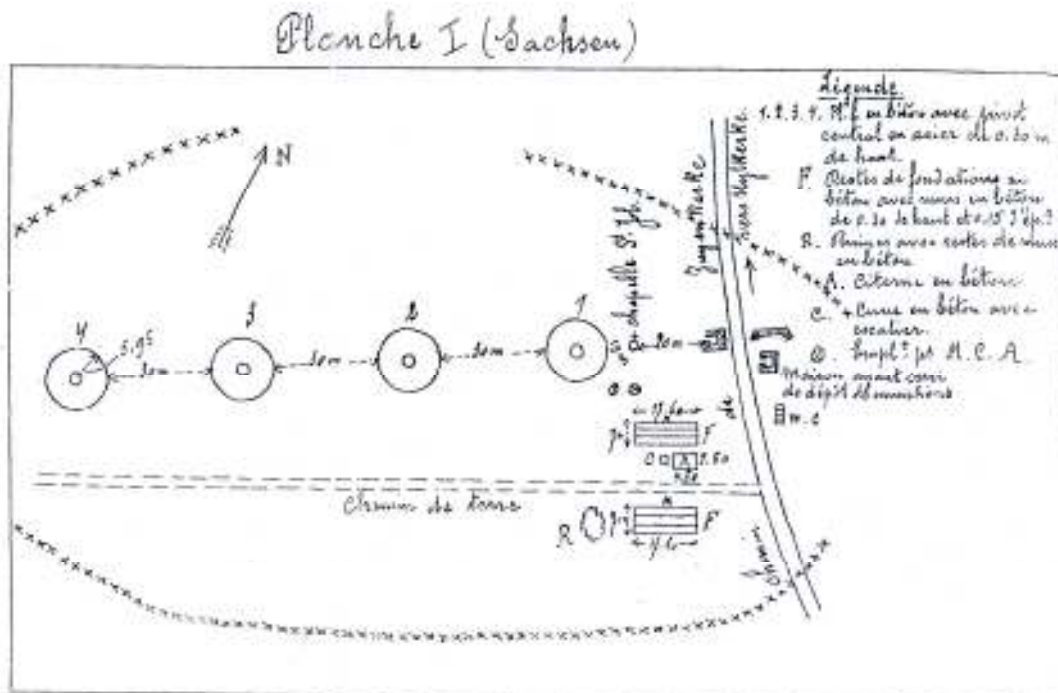
Left the location of the Sachsen battery and right the Hessen battery.

The open emplacement lies next to the Blankenbergse Dijk near house number 93, a few meters to the west of the chapel St Jan. This is the inland of Blankenberge.

The battery consisted of four **17 cm SK L/40** guns and a range of 24 Km. But there were never more than two guns because the two other guns were installed in one of the other "Sonderbatterien". These were special batteries that often had to fulfil other tasks on the front on command of the high command of the IV. Armee. These batteries were composed with guns and troops from the batteries Schlesien, Sachsen Schleswig-Holstein and Gneisenau.

The commander of the Sachsen battery was Lt. der Reserve Stüwe Verdre and he had a

sub-lieutenant and about fifty men under his command.



The guns were placed on concrete open emplacements at 30 m from each other and they had a field of fire of 360°. The concrete emplacements had a dodecagonal shape and each side was 3.05m long and the diameter was 12 m.



The ammunition was stored in the nearby houses and it was brought to the guns by a horse cart. The crew stayed in three barracks where under one for the officers.

A barbed wire barricade surrounded the battery at 150 m from the guns. No infantry defence works were registered, but two anti-aircraft machine guns were installed on the right flank of the battery.

The fire control post was installed in one of the barracks (according to the residents). It has been said that a telephone switchboard existed in one of the houses which was also used as an ammunition storage. Various units were connected by an over ground telephone wire. There was no observation post here, but it was probably installed on the dike or in the dunes.

The wharf was started in January 1918 and it took about 5 months to build the battery. About fifty labourers worked on the wharf during six days a week under the supervision of two German supervisors.

In May 1918 the battery received the guns. It was indicated on the German maps as "Ausweichstellung".

The battery has shot 35 to 40 times in the direction of the sea. It was not fired upon by artillery, but one single bomb was dropped by an airplane in the neighbourhood without causing damage. The battery was dismantled and destroyed on 16th October 1918. The carriages with a total weight of 23 tons were sold in public in 1923 and the barracks were destroyed by the local residents.

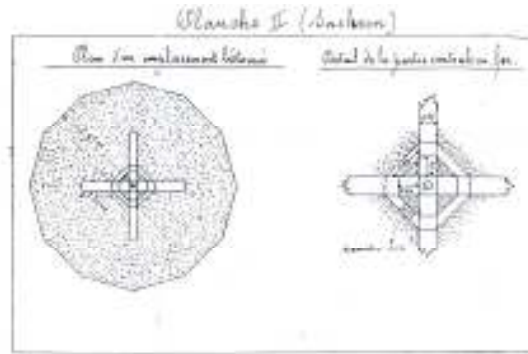
Today

Actually one open emplacement remains, or better said, is visible. It's the one close to the chapel. The emplacement has a large rim of 1.05 m. The centre is a pit where the gun stood. Now it's a huge flower box. According to the resident of the house next to it, the three other emplacements should be still there as well but under the ground level. The vegetation is





there more reddish during dry periods in summer.
No other buildings of the battery remains there.



Batterie Hessen

The battery Hessen had four **28 cm SK L/40** guns and a range of 27.5 Km. The guns came from the old cruiser Hessen. The battery was identical to the battery Preussen in Bredene. The guns had to be transported by rail due to their weight. When the guns were installed the railroad carriages and wagons stayed in the neighbourhood. The first commander was Kapt-Lt der Reserve Barde and afterwards Kapt-Lt Rotzbach.





The Germans placed shields of braided woodwork around the guns. Against these shield they've put dune sand, all to hide the guns from interested eyes. Around the entire battery the Germans installed a barrier of barbed wire.

There was only one concrete bunker on the battery which was unfortunately destroyed a few years ago. Other constructions were made from bricks or from wood. The primary observation post stood on the roof of the Grand Hotel in Blankenberge.

The anti-aircraft defence consisted of three anti-aircraft guns of 8.8 cm.

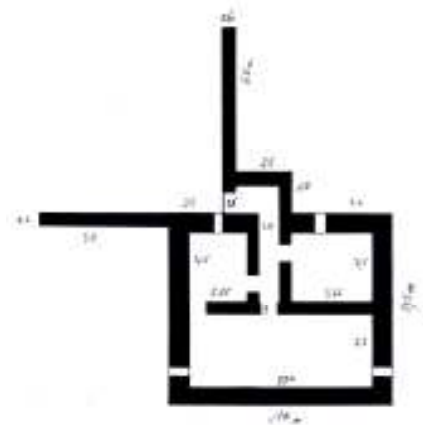
The battery was built during the spring of 1917 and the guns were delivered by an extra railroad track of the line Brugge-Blankenberge in the beginning of March 1918.

A British aerial photograph taken on 14th May 1918 showed the four railroad guns on their open emplacement. The allies called the battery Battery Donkerklok to the name of the nearby farm. The Germans withdrew one piece to serve in a "Sonderbatterie" in the beginning of the autumn of 1918. In October 1918 the battery had disappeared.

The battery was barely used and there is a supposition that the battery would have fired a few times during the liberation offensive of 1918.

The concrete open emplacements have an octagonal shape and each side is 7 m long.

The four emplacements lay in 1/3rd circle around the bunker and for each emplacement there were three ammunition bays.



Plan of the destroyed commando bunker.

The four open emplacements lay to the south of the Lissewegestraat and to the east of the Bosstraat. They are situated behind the farm Donkerklok.

Today



Actually there's one open emplacement which is free from earth, namely the one the most to the west. The emplacement has a large rim of 3.6 m. The middle is a pit in which the carriage has stood. Vegetation grows in the pit now. The other three can be located but overgrown with vegetation. No other buildings remain.



Batterie Aachen

The battery was the westernmost battery of the Germans during the First World War. The battery was armed with four **15 cm SK L/40** guns with a range of 18.7 Km.



The wharf was started on 8th Jan 1915 and the guns were delivered on 18th Jan 1915. Initially it was called Batterie Ludendorf. The battery has counted several commanders : Kapltt z S Rossbach, Kapltt d R Preuss, Kapltt d R Vogt and finally Lt d R Broistedt.

On 5th May 1915 the first shots were fired on the French batteries near Nieuwpoort. This battery

was not only used as a coastal battery but it fired also at the allied positions along the Yzer. The battery was also fired upon by a British monitor armed with 38 cm guns on 19 Sep 1915. This bombardment caused heavy damage whereby a crew bunker was turned upside down by an explosion. On 6th Oct 1916 the battery was heavily damaged again by an allied bombardment. This has led to the constructions of the battery being reinforced. During the German offensive called "Strandfest" on 10th Jul 1917 the battery participated by supporting the infantry. They succeeded in conquering the allied bridgehead of Lombardsijde. But during the allied liberation offensive the allies bombarded the batteries on the coast including the battery Aachen. The Germans left the battery and destroyed the guns on 16 Oct 1918.





Each gun had a steel turret and stood in a concrete emplacement that looked like a tub. The turrets were 2.1 m high and had a circumference of 9.9 m. The maximum thickness of the armour was 10 cm and each turret with the gun weighed 40 tons. The ammunition stores were under the emplacement with an entrance on the left and on the right. The fire control posts stood on the left and on the right of the four guns. The left one was used

as fire control post West for the battery Deutschland from 1917 onwards. For this purpose and to protect the valuable rangefinder a second layer of concrete was poured on the first layer, but between the two layers there was a layer of sand to absorb shocks. A third observation post stood in Lombardsijde.



The fire control bunker with the second layer of concrete.

The crew was housed in wooden barracks, but the building of the officers was built sturdier to resist impacts of 21 cm shells. But due to the increased allied shellings of 1916 each battery was obliged to build a concrete shelter for the crew.

The battery was surrounded by two circles of barbed wire. These were defended by machine guns. The anti-aircraft defence consisted of three machine guns posts on the dike.



WMF News

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Edition 3 of 2014

Composed by Frank PHILIPPART

Today

Thanks to the fact the area belonged to the royal family, all the bunkers are still there. That means, the two fire control posts, the concrete crew bunker, the well of the Barbara Brunnen and



The tub shape of one of the emplacements and the outside view with the entrances to the ammunition storages.

the four gun emplacements. They've cleared one of them from the sand so that you can have a clear view of its size. The bunkers are largely illustrated with dummies in original uniforms and with equipment.



A concrete crew bunker was constructed as protection against allied shellings.

Inside and outside view.



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info@raversyde.be

The museum is usually
open from the end of
March.

the Atlantikwall site of the
museum is open on
weekdays from 1030 till
1700 Hr (Last access at
1600 Hr). During the
weekends, holidays and
school holidays from 1030

till 1800 Hr (last access at 1700 Hr).

The site is closed during the Christmas and spring holidays.

url :

<http://www.west-vlaanderen.be/kwaliteit/Leefomgeving/raversijde/openluchtmuseumAtlantikwall/Pages/default.aspx>

Sources

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- "Marinekorps Flandern". Johan Ryheul.
- Archief Simon Stevin : Moskou Fonds 185. Doos 4007. 08 Apr 1919
- Archief Kristof Jacobs
- Archief Frank Philippart

Frank Philippart

Thanks to Yvonne Mayo for the spell check.

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