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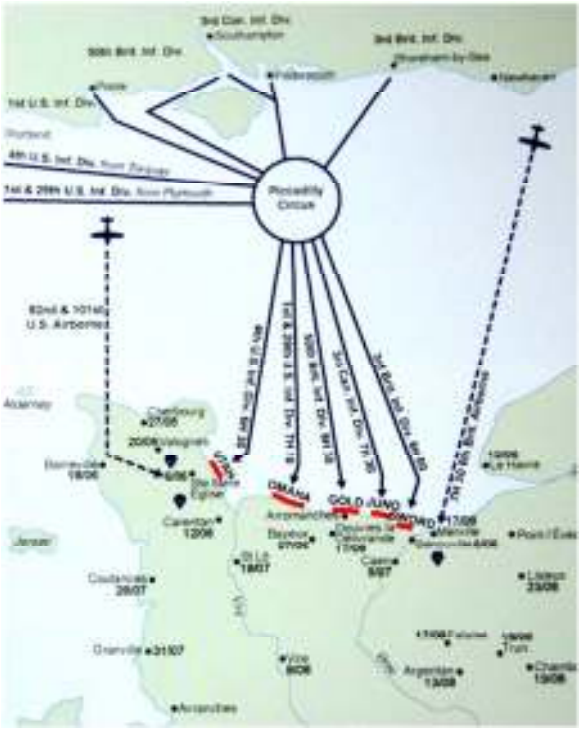
Edition 1 of 2015 **Composed by Frank PHILIPPART**

ATLANTIKWALL

D-Day 1944 - 2014

David Maes



2014 was full of events commemorating 100 years since the beginning of the *"Great War". Our fortresses around Luik, Namen and Antwerpen played a short, but nevertheless important role in the battles of 1914. However there were some other interesting anniversaries which claimed our attention in 2014. For example on June 6th it was 70 years ago (D-Day) the allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy to liberate Europe from the German occupiers. In December we remembered the Battle of the Bulge in the Ardennes, which came as a surprise to the allies. It is our goal to elaborate on the Normandy coast and the Atlantikwall batteries which were built to protect Europe from an allied invasion. One of these batteries is the battery of Longues-sur-Mer. This battery still has its original guns. Moreover, it is situated on top of a cliff with a great view on the surroundings and the neighboring Arromanches, still with remains of the artificially built harbour.*

The landing beaches in Normandy. The battery of Longues-sur-Mer is situated north of Bayeux. (Source: Marriott & Forty: page 14)

The German coastal battery of Longues-sur-Mer (WN 48)

The battery of Longues-sur-Mer is situated north of Bayeux, at a distance of six kilometers from Arromanches and was built on a cliff, 60 meters above the sea. It was equipped with four Krupp KC36 152mm guns with in front of the guns, right above the cliff an observation and command post. The guns were protected in type M272 gun shelters. The guns were cast in 1928, had a range of more or less 20 kilometers

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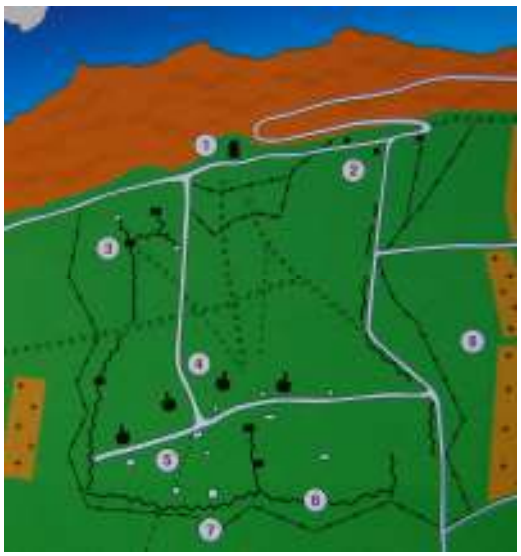
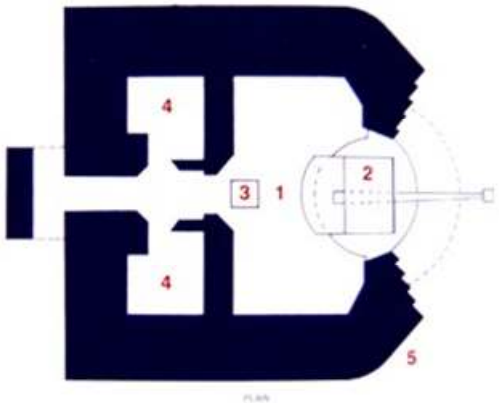
and could fire 6 rounds per minute.
Because the battery was situated in the allied landing area, it was frequently over flown by reconnaissance airplanes equipped with telelenses. Photographs taken on May 22nd 1944 show works have been well progressed, in spite of the applied camouflage. At first Longues sur Mer battery was a Kriegsmarine battery, but not long before the landing it was transferred to the Heer.



Ground plan of WN 48 with 1) the fire control, observation and command post, 2) a Tobruk, 3) store for ammunition, 4) the combat bunkers, 5) store for ammunition, 6) trenches, 7) barbed wire and 8) minefields (Source: Desquesnes page 22)

The battery's guns were protected in four combat bunkers, because protection against air raids was necessary. An M272 combat bunker has a length of approximately 15m, a width of 10m and more than 6m high. To build such a combat bunker approximately 600m³ of concrete and almost four tons of steel was needed. Walls and roof were approximately two meters thick. Behind the actual combat room where the gun was placed and protected there were two small rooms in which ammunition was stored. The walls were covered by a layer of earth to protect them. Iron hooks were foreseen to attach camouflage nets.



Top view of one of the four M272 combat bunkers with 1) the combat room, 2) a 152mm gun, 3) the cartridge store, 4) the store for ammunition and 5) the wall to cover the access (Sources: Desquesnes page 22)

The guns were headed straight out to sea and had a range of approximately 100 degrees horizontal and 40 degrees vertical. On both sides in the walls there were small gaps to increase the shooting range with some degrees, both in direction east and west. The battery was equipped with personnel bunkers and ammunition bunkers.

Moreover there were machine guns and Tobruks, minefields and barbed wire.

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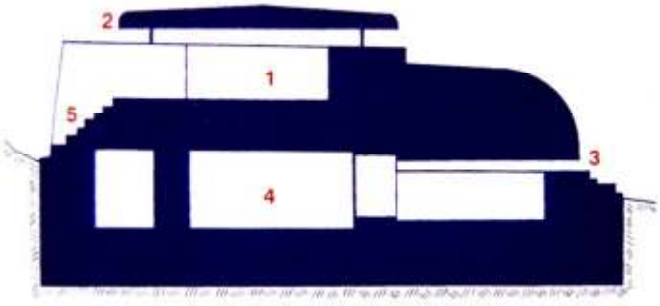
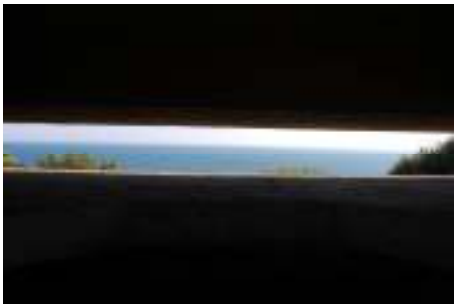
300m in front of the combat bunkers an M262 observation and command post was built on the edge of the cliff. On the ground floor there was the observation post with observation notch through which one could see 180 degrees. On the ground floor there was a phone central, tactical command and sleeping places for the personnel. The top floor was equipped with distance measuring equipment. A concrete roof of 70 centimeters was applied for protection. As soon as a target was determined, the necessary information was transferred by phone to the equipment of the guns. The command post of Longues-sur-Mer could be seen in the movie "The Longest Day".

Front view of the fire control bunker



Side view of the M-262 command post with 1) the room for distance measuring, 2) the concrete roof, 3) the observation notch, 4) the room for command and communication and 5) the access stairs to the room for distance measuring (Source: Desquesnes page 24)



Rear view of the fire control bunker and view from inside.

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Air raids on the Longues sur Mer battery

The Longues sur Mer battery was as capable of firing on both the British landing beaches of Gold Beach as on the American landing beaches of Omaha Beach. This is why it was so important for the allies that the battery was taken out of action before the landing. To attain this goal air raids were done in the weeks before D-Day, especially on May 23rd and June 3rd. The damages were however limited. But communication lines between the observation post and the gun casemates were damaged. During the night of June 5 to June 6 most important batteries were again attacked by enemy aircraft but results were limited as a result of the clouds and lack of precision.

On June 6th in the morning the Longues sur Mer battery's guns were still able to open fire. But the morale of the German troops was heavily impacted by the heavy bombing.

The German battery of Longues-sur-Mer in action

Front view of one of the four combat bunkers with clearly visible the openings to give the gun some more range in both directions.

According to the allied strategy air strikes would be followed by artillery shelling from sea to take the German guns out of action. This is why 34 cruisers and around ten destroyers had taken position in front of the Normandy coast on the morning of June 6th 1944. But the guns of Longues-sur-Mer opened fire at 5h37. This was the invasion and not a usual attack as there had been before. Ten grenades fell in the neighborhood of destroyer US Emmons, although they had an important disadvantage because connections with the command post were damaged and they had to fire blind because they didn't receive any information about the distance. The cruiser Arkansas, which supported the Omaha Beach area was shot at. But the Arkansas replied with 110 grenades of 127mm and with 20 grenades of 305mm. In the meanwhile the British were about to begin with their landing and command ship Bulolo had dropped its anchor at 12 kilometers from Longues. This ship was equipped with the full staff of the assault troops for Gold Beach. At 5h57 Longues-sur-Mer opened fire on the ship and as a result of this it was covered with water fountains and the ship had to retreat. Cruiser Ajax opened fire from 11km and fired 114 grenades of 150mm. At 6h20 Longues-sur-Mer no longer responded to the fire, but when troops landed on Omaha Beach they were shot at and the fire from Longues sur Mer was effective although not all guns could reach that area. The Ajax was assisted by cruiser Argonaute to stop the German guns from firing as soon as possible. The two cruisers fired 36 grenades of 150mm and 29 grenades of 130 mm in

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the direction of the battery to take it out of action at 8h45, but this was only temporarily. Assisted by radar the fire from the Ajax had been very accurate and three from the four guns had been taken out of action. Other sources however mention French cruisers Georges Leygues and Montcalm were involved in the shelling of the battery. Georges Leygues would have been the first to fire a 152 mm grenade at Longues-sur-Mer at 5h37.
At noon the battery was able to reopen fire and at that moment HMS Ajax joined the battle. Around 17h the French ships opened fire, but HMS Ajax asked them to cease fire because HMS Ajax was appointed to destroy the battery. Georges Leygues still fired and around 19h the battery was hit twice. British as well as French claimed the victory on the Longues sur Mer battery.

The surrender of Longues-sur-Mer

On June 7th 1944 second battalion of the British Devonshire Regiment reached the battery from the east. The previous evening this unit was landed on Gold Beach. Without any resistance the German garrison surrendered to the English. In total the German battery's garrison numbered 184 artillery soldiers of 40 to 45 years of age. 64 of them hadn't survived the fights and morale was very low. They wanted to be taken prisoner of war and to be sent to America.

One of the combat bunkers was heavily damaged as a result of shelling from sea according to one version. According to another version an accident caused the damage.

After the Germans surrendered, the battery was used by the engineers of the British Royal Air Force. They used the plain to build B11 airfield with a runway of 1.200 meters. Between June 26th and September 4th this airfield came in action. On top of one of the bunkers anti aircraft artillery should be installed to protect this airfield. Inside the bunker ammunition was stored. Some unknown reason caused this ammunition to explode. As a result of this explosion the bunker and its gun was heavily damaged. According to another version these damages were caused by shelling from sea. Both English and French claim to have hit the damaged bunker.
The guns remained in place and still are today, which is very special. The battery is free to visit and there is a small visit center with sanitary installations, a bookshop and something to eat and drink. Guided visits are possible as well. Sometimes there are temporary exhibitions.

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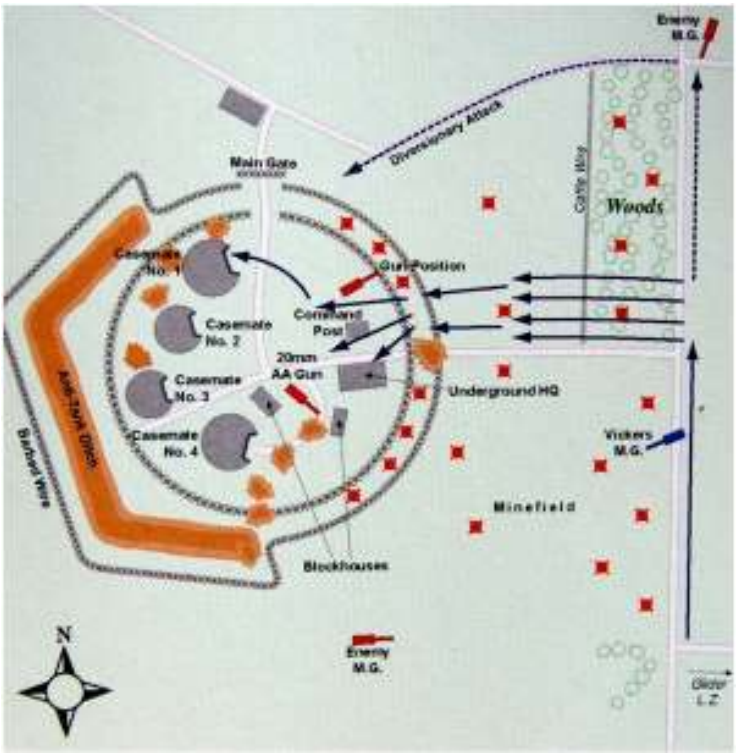
The German coastal battery of Merville

David Maes

Who wants to visit German bunkers from the Second World War has a lot of choice at the Atlantic coast line. Who wants to know what really happened in the field has less choice, because often nothing worth mentioning happened. This statement is not really fair for those who were forced to help in building the batteries. It is not our goal to ignore this, but these are stories that are difficult to bring into relation to a concrete spot you can visit today. If you really want to relate the story of what happened to the spot where it happened, the Normandy coast is a paradise because the stories about the battles are kept alive. The battery of Merville is an excellent example of such a preserved battery, that can be visited and where actual fighting took place.

The site of the battery

The battery of Merville is situated on the east of the actual landing beaches, but is nearby and was able to harass the assault troops. The battery of Merville on the right bank of the Orne consisted of four open emplacements in which four old Skoda guns of 100 mm were placed, aiming in all directions. Later the battery of 3 hectares was equipped with newer and more powerful guns of 150mm. The garrison consisted of 80 soldiers of the 716th Artillery Regiment and 50 soldiers of the engineers. A lot of these soldiers were Russians. The battery’s command post was built on the beach. The commands were transferred to the battery by phone.



Map of the Merville battery with indicated where the British paratroopers attacked the battery only with some of the 750 foreseen troops (Source: Marriott & Forty: pag. 75).

In 1944 the batteries near the coast and the ones more inland were often the target of air raids. The battery of Merville was one of these targets. This is why it was decided to reinforce the battery, with guns protected by bunkers instead of the open emplacements.

On the eastern side in front of the casemates an anti tank ditch was dug. Machineguns were placed in Tobruks and the whole battery was surrounded by a double line of barbed wire. Between both lines a minefield was laid. Fieldmarshall Erwin Rommel visited the battery twice in February and in May 1944.

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In May 1944 he came to inspect the damage after an enemy air raid. The most important casemate was directly hit by a 500 pound bomb, but only sustained minor damage. The commander of the battery, Captain Karl-Heinrich Wolter however, hadn't survived this attack. He was sleeping together with his mistress in a building near the battery when a bomb fell in the bedroom. The young Austrian lieutenant Raimund Steiner replaced the captain and became commander of the battery. As a result of a bombing on April 30st a small Flak-bunker was destroyed, but all other casemates remained undamaged.

The command bunker was an adapted Regelbau 502. This is where Sergeant-Major Buskotte would receive his orders from Lieutenant Steiner by phone. From the command bunker there was also a phone connection with the four combat casemates. The largest of them is a Regelbau 611. To build such a combat casemate 1.330m³ of concrete and 80 tons of steel was needed. In 1986 when Steiner and Buskotte visited the battery they noticed the bunker was sunk to a large extent. Combat casemates 3 and 4 are Regelbauten 612 while combat casemate 3 is a Regelbau 669 with the particularity to have a cellar. These 3 casemates were built urgently between February and May 1944.

The battery's command post where Sergeant-Major Buskotte received his orders from Lieutenant Steiner and transferred them to the combat casemates.

The Regelbau 611 is by far the largest combat casemate of the Merville battery.

For each of these casemates only 495m³ of concrete and 30 tons of steel was needed. There were two ammunition stores of the Vf 7b type. On top of the kitchen Flak was installed in May 1944, but in June 1944 this was replaced by one on top of the water bunker.

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Front view of one of the other three smaller artillery casemates, Regelbau 669.

In 1998 four large initially built concrete open emplacements were found, one behind each combat casemate, built to replace the open emplacements. The Germans would have covered them permanently after building the casemates between April and June 1944 because they could be observed too easily from the air by hostile aircraft.

An open emplacement in front of casemate 4, that was found in 1998.

The battery of Merville on D-Day

According to the allied plans for the landing on D-Day it was the 6th British Airborne Division's task to conquer some bridges, to destroy some others and to destroy or to take the battery of Merville out of action. The paratroopers of 9th Battalion of the 3rd Brigade under command of 29 year old Lieutenant-Colonel Terence Otway had to take care off the battery of Merville. This battalion consisted of approximately 650 soldiers. Medical troops, artillery troops, engineers and communication troops from the Royal Navy were added. All together they were 750.

A 10 cm Skoda gun in the 611 casemate.

The allied had aerial pictures showing works on the battery had progressed very fast. According to the French resistance, guns of 150mm were put in place. These guns were able to threaten the beach of Ouistreham with codename Sword, were the British would land. Because of this the conquest of the Merville battery was very important.

At 0h30 some hundred Lancaster bombers would execute a raid against the battery. Some minutes before the raid, ten soldiers commanded by Major Allen Parry would be dropped in the surroundings to have a closer look and target the battery for the aircraft.

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From 0h50 paratroopers would be dropped and after that they could gather to proceed to the battery. At 4h30 three Horsa gliders with 20 soldiers would land near the battery to confuse the German soldiers. In the meantime the battery would be attacked by the paratroopers. The communication troops of the Royal Navy would contact cruiser HMS Arethusa after the fighting. When no contact would be made, HMS Arethusa would start shelling the battery from 5h30 on.

Troop bunker, Regelbau 501.

The paratroopers did jump according to plans between 0h50 and 01h17, but as a result of the strong wind they landed very scattered, some in the moors. Erwin Rommel had ordered to have the surroudings flooded. Lieutenant-Colonel Otway landed in a garden of a house that was occupied by German troops.

The kitchen on which an anti-aircraftgun was placed. This was later replaced.

Picture 9: He would arrive at the gathering point and would remain in place until 02h15. At that moment only 150 of the 750 troops had gathered. Due to lack of equipment and sufficient troops, the attack plans had to be revised. They only had 10 Bangalore tubes instead of the planned 60 to make openings in the barbed wire.

With the available men four assault groups were formed, one assault group four each combat casemate. The casemates had to be attacked with groups, only disposing of approximately one third of the number of men with which they had been practicing in England. Around 4h30 two of the three Horsa gliders came into action. The wire with which the third glider had been towed, was broken which forced the glider to land in England. The first glider flew above the battery and landed three kilometers away from its target. The second glider was hit by German anti aircraft artillery, but was able to land in a neighboring field. At that moment the attack started. Mines were exploding between the attacking soldiers, running towards the combat casemates to throw grenades in the ventilation, to open the access doors and to enter the casemates and take the guns out of action. A lot of paratroopers were wounded. They discovered only Czech 105mm 1916 Skoda FH14/19 guns were installed.

That moment German bombs fell on the battery. The German lieutenant Steiner was in his command post on the beach and was still in contact with his battery by phone. As soon as he heard this battery was under attack, he asked for support from the artillery in Cabourg to attack his own battery. At first he had called general Richter, but the general had answered that the landing of a glider didn't mean that an invasion was taking place. As a result of the artillery attack, the British retreated, together with 22 German prisoners of war. Around 6h the British were still with 69. 75 others were left dead or wounded. A German doctor had promised to take care of the wounded. The machine gun that had hit one of the gliders, was still in use to fire at the British. But when the German prisoners of war were forced on their feet by the British, the soldier using the machine gun surrendered. The British battalion was gradually reinforced with arriving paratroopers. Later they were involved in battles with the German 346th Infantry Division and more of them were taken out of action. Their unit wouldn't count more than 270 soldiers until when they were sent to England in September 1944.

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Casemate 3 and 4 with still visible the initial open emplacement.

The German Sergeant-Major Johannes Buskotte left his bunker and found bodies of both German and British soldiers around the casemates. He had them buried at the site. He saw the damage done to the guns could be repaired. The assaulting paratroopers didn't dispose of the necessary equipment to destroy the guns. They had to do their job with anti tank bombs and these weren't able to destroy the barrels. Lieutenant Steiner and some survivors succeeded in repairing some guns and making them ready to fire. Only six of the 130 German soldiers would still have been combat ready at that time. Fifty Germans hadn't survived the combats, sixty were wounded and 22 were taken prisoner of war.

On the 6th of June in the afternoon some grenades fell on the beach of Ouistreham, most probably shot from the Merville battery. Two of the four guns were again capable of firing, but only at a rate of one shot every ten minutes instead of six shots each minute. Another unit was sent to the battery. On June 7th in the afternoon there was another assault of the battery but no explosives were available to destroy the guns. There were casualties, both Germans and British. One of them was the British commanding officer, Major John Pooley, who when commanding the assault was hit by a sniper on the roof of casemate 1. The British retreated and the battery would remain in German hands until August 18th 1944. That day the battery was conquered by the Belgian Piron brigade.

The statue of lieutenant-colonel Terence Otway, commanding officer of the allied paratroopers who had to conquer the battery or at least take it out of action. He was present on the site when the statue was inaugurated in 1997.

The battery of Merville today

Today the battery of Merville can be visited during visiting hours. A Douglas C-47 Dakota can also be visited on the site. This transport aircraft was built in large amounts by the allies and used in lots of transport flights, some of them to bring paratroopers to their landing sites. After the war these reputed aircraft were still in use, for example by the Belgian Air Force. In Belgium they were replaced by the C-119 Flying Boxcar. In the largest casemate a diorama was installed to give an idea of how it was when such a casemate was attacked and when their own guns opened fire. The commanding officer of the British paratroopers lieutenant-colonel has a statue on the site of the battery. With panels all over the site the story about the battery and its place in the larger story is explained.

In 1993 a meeting between Lieutenant-Colonel Otway and Oberleutnant Steiner, commanding officer of

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the battery in 1944, took place in Merville. Otway didn't refuse to shake hands with Steiner, but he wasn't amused at all seeing tourists eating and drinking on a site where "his men fought and perished.."

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WESTWALL

Excavation of the Höcker Linie

Thomas Altena

In September and October 2014 the dragon's teeth at Aachen-Vaalserquartier were unearthed for the first time after 70 years. Remains of the former Westwall are protected as monuments in Germany, so the tank obstacle had to be documented archaeologically before its demolition.
This part of the Westwall belonged to the forward position 'Vorstellung Aachen', called by the allies Schill Line. It was built by Hitler's order of autumn 1938, who wanted Aachen and Saarbrücken to be protected, because both cities up to then lay before the Westwall. West of Aachen was just a thin line of weak pillboxes for defending Germany's western border.
The northernmost section of this new position was the 12 kilometers long regimental sector A, which contained 30 pillboxes of the former Grenzwachtstellung and 87 newly built bunkers with

walls from 2 to 3,5 meters thick. It stretched in a bow from north of Aachen to its west, where the terrain was mostly flat, without woods and therefore provided good conditions for enemy tank attacks.
From as soon as autumn 1938, following Hitler's order, the erecting of the Westwall west of Aachen began by building dragon's teeth of the old type with four rows of 'Höcker'. In January 1939 a stronger type was ordered to be constructed, and from then on a nearly 14 meters wide 'Höckerhindernis aus Stahlbeton', consisting of five rows of teeth with a 'Schlagleiste', was built in front of the position. In the southern part of regimental section A, the slopes of the Schneeberg and the Wachtelkopf were

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converted to tank obstacles by building concrete walls at their feet; just north of Vaalserquartier a 160 metres long anti-tank ditch with concrete walls denied an enemy tank attack.
Today little of these once ever-present fortifications is visible; most of them are demolished, but some remain underground – until they are excavated, as in the case of the dragon's teeth at Vaalserquartier.

Excavation, documentation and demolition of the Dragon's Teeth at Vaalserquartier

The 'Höckerhindernis aus Stahlbeton des Baujahres 1939' – which is the correct nomenclature – was developed to stop tanks of up to 36 tons and was exclusively built in the Westwall. Until May 1940 76,18 kilometers were erected, consuming 5450 m³ of concrete and 193 tons steel per kilometer.
The location of the dragon's teeth at Vaalserquartier was not exactly known until it's recovery, because wartime maps hardly match today's ones, and so the appearance of the obstacle was a surprise to Aachen's municipal archaeologist, Andreas Schaub.
Unearthing of the dragon's teeth began on September 19th and continued until October 6th.
It could be carried out only step by step, because lorries and excavators had to be brought to the building site over a dirt road which ran above the teeth. Total length of the excavated obstacle was about 57 metres, according to 19 rows of Höcker stretching north of the Vaalser Straße. In the north-western corner of the site further five rows could be seen; they bent westwards in an angle of 52 degrees.
The dragon's teeth at Vaalserquartier were built at the bottom of a ditch, as the earth profiles of the northern and southern walls of the excavation showed. The ditch was filled with material much darker than the surrounding ground, so its profile was visible. The main reason for this measure was to not hinder the German troops' field of fire by the teeth, raising up to 1,5 meters above ground level, but it also was thought to protect the obstacle from enemy ground reconnaissance. It could not be camouflaged against air reconnaissance. After the war it was easier to cover the Höcker than to demolish them, because people only had to fill in the ditch. Doing this they got rid of rubble from their destroyed houses and also of some derelict military equipment – and so they forgot about the war and it remains for the following 70 years.

After the excavation was completed, archaeologists roughly cleaned the teeth for taking pictures and survey by tachymeter. Some interesting details

could be watched when cleaning them: there still were remnants of steel poles which once were connected with barbed wire and thus served as an obstacle against infantry; many of the Höcker were still camouflaged in green colour. Beneath the foundations there was a layer of concrete, which served as working basement for the constructing workers; some boards of the shuttering were still preserved.
After completion of the archaeologists' work permission was given by the monuments' office of the Rhineland, the Landesverband Rheinland / Bodendenkmalpflege to demolish the dragon's teeth to make place for an underground parking place. Some people tried to interest museums in purchasing parts of the obstacle for their expositions, and two of them considered this seriously – but their requests came weeks after demolishing works had been executed. Now there is at least one row of Höcker left between the southern wall of the excavation and the Vaalser Straße, the rest has been converted to rubble. It now serves as road building material instead of decorating a tank museum in Germany.

I wish to thank Mrs. Kyritz, Mr. Schwellnus and Mr. Düntzer of SK ArcheoConsult, who gave me the opportunity to take part in the documentation works and supported me with interesting and important information.

Thanks to Yvonne Mayo for the spell check.

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