

D-Day German Defense Complex Uncovered in Normandy

The German bunker was discovered in Grandcamp-Maisy, western France

A British history buff went in search of buried treasure and stumbled upon a forgotten German bunker believed to be responsible for American losses on D-Day.



A British World War II enthusiast has uncovered a vast German defensive position overlooking the Normandy beaches, which, he says, was largely responsible for heavy American losses on D-Day.

Abandoned after the Allied victory, the complex of tunnels, gun emplacements and living quarters was gradually overtaken by nature, and it was only thanks to dogged detective work that Gary Sterne -- editor of a British military journal -- was able to locate it.

"It was totally forgotten. Local farmers never reclaimed the land, so gradually the bushes and thickets took it over. Only if you looked could you see a rough outline of the fortifications," said local deputy Jean-Marc Lefranc.

Traces of history

After extensive research in European archives, Sterne found contemporary maps that pinpointed the site of the complex, on high ground above Omaha beach at the western end of the D-Day frontline. He then set about buying the land plot by plot from local owners.

After several months of clearing work, a dozen buildings in stone and concrete have been discovered linked by 1,500 meters of tunnels. Different areas have been identified as a sick bay, officers' quarters, radio room and kitchens.

The position appeared to have been looted after it was abandoned by the Germans, and even the floor tiles had disappeared. But Sterne found some personal belongings including boots, spectacles and small bottles of medicine.



On one wall was the inscription: "Bill Fornia - Ohio".

A trap for the Allies

According to Sterne, "discovery of the Maisy battery answers some of the questions surrounding the high mortality rate among Americans on Omaha beach."

Omaha saw the worst casualties of June 6, 1944, as American soldiers found themselves trapped on the narrow beach beneath high cliffs of sand and stone. In a renowned operation US Rangers stormed a German position at the Pointe du Hoc, only to find that the guns they were looking for were not there.

"The big cannons supposedly installed at the Pointe du Hoc were a German war ruse aimed at drawing Allied fire. But all the time this neighboring battery was totally invisible and continued pounding the beaches till June 9," said Sterne.

A future tourist attraction

The complex is believed to have contained four batteries of 155 millimeter cannon, with two others positioned in nearby fields, as well as four 105 millimeter guns. Twelve 88 millimeter guns ensured anti-aircraft defense, and there were several machine-gun nests and two Renault tanks.

Some local historians, however, are more cautious.

"The discovery of the site is interesting but not vitally important. It is not one of the biggest complexes along the Atlantic wall," said Marc Pottier, a historian at the War Memorial at the Norman city of Caen.

The site will be opened to the public in March.

from: <http://europeanhistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.dw%2Dworld.de/dw/article/0%2C2144%2C1891355%2C00.html>

