

Information Data Sheet

Category Anti-Invasion Defences

Description The rapid advance of German Troops into France, Holland and Belgium after the start of WWII prompted the War Office to review the vulnerability of the UK to invasion and a decision was taken to begin work on a national plan of anti-invasion defences. Static defences were built to interrupt and delay the progress of any invading force.

Coastal defences were strengthened (the 'Coastal Crust'). These defences included barbed wire entanglements and minefields, which were often combined to give defence in depth. Emergency coastal batteries were developed and fitted with guns to protect the most vulnerable ports and landing places. Admiralty scaffolding was constructed where a tank barrier was necessary. Anti-tank cubes of reinforced concrete were cast in several rows, and small islands and peninsulas were fortified to defend the inlets and other targets that were vulnerable to invasion.



Typical coastal anti-invasion defences in Suffolk

Inland, lines of defence structures ('Stop Lines') were constructed in order to impede enemy progress for long enough to allow mobile defending forces to counter-attack. This included the fortification of key 'centres of resistance', such as river crossings and important road or rail junctions. Bridges were mined for demolition, tank traps installed and often areas of well-drained land were flooded so that the ground was too soft to support vehicles. Stop Lines were further integrated into a network of fortified nodal points and 'Anti-Tank Islands'. Anti-tank ditches were dug and anti-tank barriers made of large reinforced concrete obstacles were deployed in rows to form barriers at beaches and inland and to block certain roads. Crossing points, such as tunnels and bridges, referred to as nodes or points of resistance, were fortified with removable road blocks, land mines and barbed wire entanglements.

Petroleum was also used as an anti-invasion device; flame fougasse mines (which used an explosive charge to project burning liquid onto an advancing target) were placed at strategic locations.

Hazard When concentrated in large numbers, defence structures were often targeted by enemy aircraft and therefore offer a potential source of UXB in some cases.

Anti-invasion defences are also associated with small caches of UXO in the form of small arms and close combat munitions, which were used by the troops manning the emplacement. These were typically removed at the end of WWII, although some munitions caches were buried in the vicinity of the defence structures and may remain.