ANTI-INVASION DEFENCES

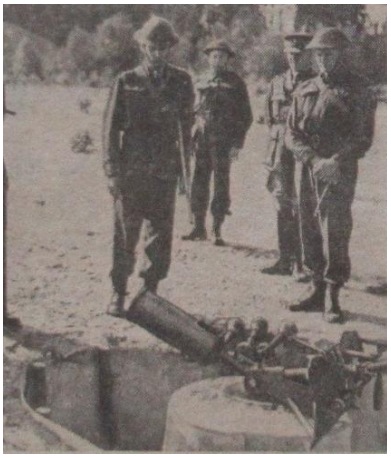
At the start of World War Two (WWII), the War Office reviewed the vulnerability of the UK to invasion, and it was determined that a national plan of anti-invasion defences was required. Large scale defence schemes were enacted across the country to interrupt and delay the progress of an invading force.

The first line of defence was established along the coast. Extensive minefields were laid at beaches and inlets. Scaffolding, ditches, and blocks were built as Anti-Tank (AT) measures. Coastal batteries were developed and fitted with guns to protect the most vulnerable ports and landing points. Flame fougasse traps were placed at strategic locations to project burning liquid onto an invading force.

Further lines of defence were established inland, known as 'Stop Lines', which were intended to impede enemy progress for long enough to allow mobile defending forces to counter-attack. Vulnerable points, such as river crossings and important road and rail junctions, were heavily fortified. Bridges were mined for demolition, road and rail blocks established, and AT obstacles erected.

Defences were also concentrated around industrial areas and important military targets, such as airfields. Invasion by air was also prepared for, with the establishment of anti-landing obstacles and trenches on open fields vulnerable to enemy aircraft landings.

Anti-invasion defence plan



Home Guard inspecting a Northover projector

AT blocks

Anti-invasion defences were manned by a combination of regular Army and local Home Guard units. Whilst the Army was generally well-equipped, the Home Guard often lacked necessary resources. They were armed with various ad-hoc AT or infantry support weapons, such as spigot mortars, Northover Projectors, and Smith Guns.

Hazard

Anti-invasion defences typically had associated munitions caches to store Small Arms Ammunition (SAA) and Land Service Ammunition (LSA) for use by the troops manning the defences. These were typically removed at the end of WWII, although it is known that some munitions were disposed of locally and could potentially remain.

To ensure the effectiveness of the defences and maintain operational readiness of the troops, regular training exercises "attacking" the defences were held. This typically involved the use of 'dry' training munitions, although live munitions may also have been used.

Anti-invasion defences, particularly along the coast, may also have been targeted by enemy aircraft and could potentially present an Unexploded Bomb (UXB) hazard.

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