MILITARY TRAINING AREAS

World War One (WWI) military training was overwhelmingly focused on trench warfare. Practice trenches were dug across Britain to teach troops about trench construction, and how to defend and attack them.

As WWI progressed, trench systems expanded to include machine-gun, mortar, and bomb throwing pits. Field guns and howitzers were heavily used on the Western Front and training schools were established to train troops in the use of artillery. The establishment of the Tank Corps also necessitated dedicated training areas, where the newly developed armoured vehicles could be tested and trained with.

During World War Two (WWII), more than 9,500,000 acres of land was requisitioned for military training across Britain. Defence Regulations allowed for quick acquisition of large areas of land to establish camps and allow training to quickly begin. Whilst most training areas had delineated limits, it was not unusual for training to take place beyond the official boundaries. Training in areas of open field or woodland requisitioned under Defence Regulation 52 was often not subject to official rules or regulations and detailed records were rarely kept.

Trench warfare demonstration at Shorncliffe, 1917

Tanks on an anti-invasion exercise, 1942

Battle training exercise on Salisbury Plain, 1944

Battle training was a key focus in WWII, aiming to prepare troops for the harsh realities of war under simulated conditions. WWII training areas could contain firing ranges, dedicated impact areas, armoured vehicle tracks, and defined areas where 'dry' and 'live' training was permitted. Infantry, artillery, and armoured fighting vehicles would train at their own dedicated training areas, but also together in large-scale exercises.

Hazard

The types of Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) that could be present at former military training areas depends on the operational history. Ordnance used during training exercises could range from Small Arms Ammunition (SAA) and Land Service Ammunitions (LSA), such as grenades and mortars, to defensive mines and artillery shells.

Whilst 'dry' training areas will have primarily used blank ammunition and training munitions, the possibility of live munitions being used in these areas at some stage cannot be discounted.

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