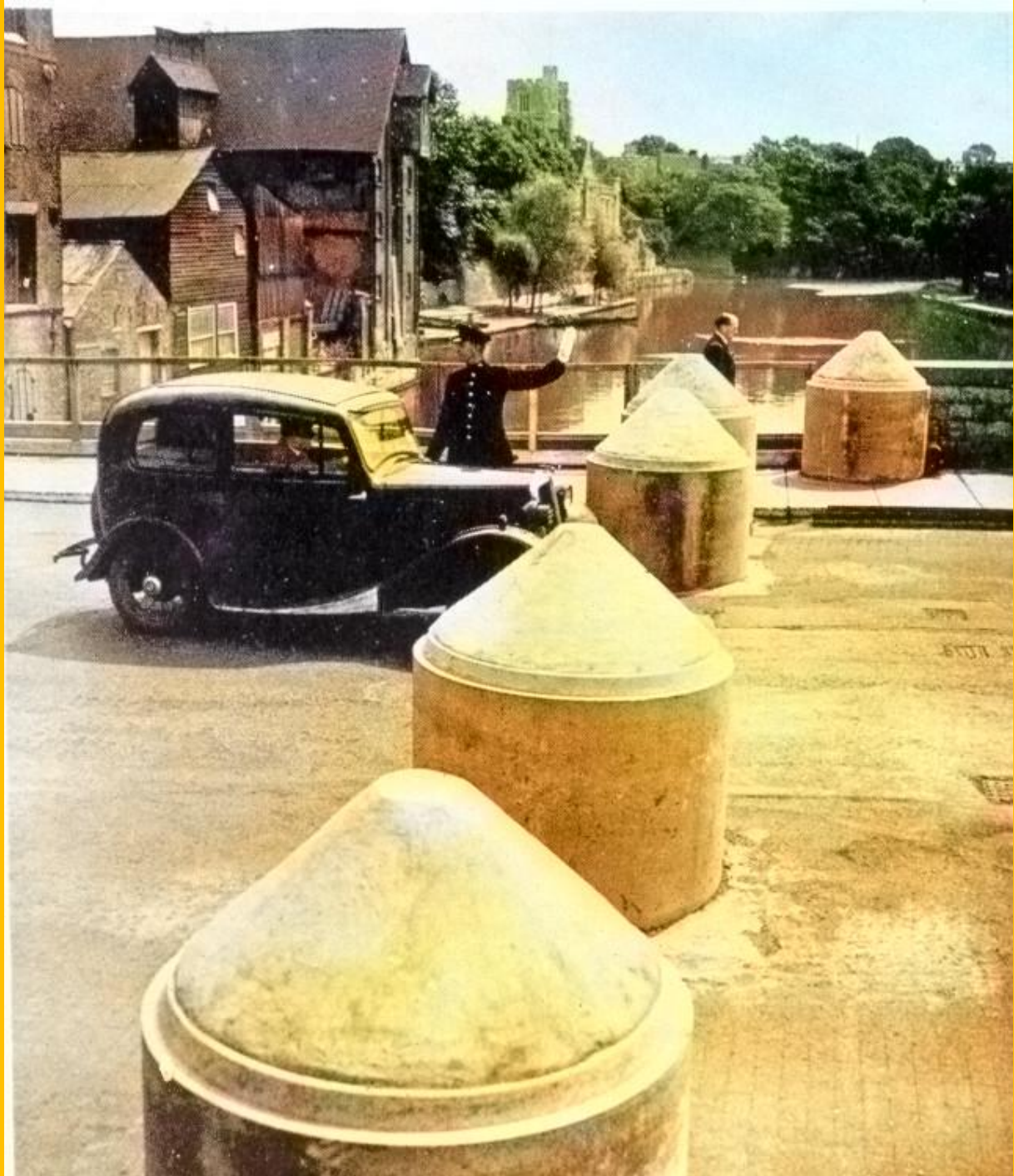


Fortress Maidstone

By Clive Holden



Fortress Maidstone

Preface

When I took early retirement in 2016, I was looking forward to developing further my long-time interest in local military history.

I had read about the Historic Defences Committee of the Kent Archaeological Society and they seemed to be engaged on work that appealed to my interests so, in early 2017, I contacted its Chairman, Victor Smith, and offered to help with their projects. Victor suggested I might like to do some work on the Second World War Maidstone 'Nodal Point'. We met up to discuss the project over a coffee and Victor kindly gave me some very welcome research tips.

Most of that research has come from various War Diaries lodged at the National Archives at Kew. Many hours were spent visiting the Archives, going through the diaries and photographing thousands of pages. Many more hours then spent at home poring over the photos, making notes and trying to understand all the military abbreviations and the interminable changes in command structures.

Other information was gleaned from the internet as well as several books. In 1948, Captain G.C. Wynne of the Historical Section of the Cabinet Office was tasked with producing the official account of the various plans that were drawn up for Home Defence between 1939 and 1945. This account was reproduced in book form in 2017 by Frontline Books under the title *Stopping Hitler* and has been a great help with my research. Colin Alexander's *Ironside's Line* is the definitive guide to the GHQ Line defences built between 1940 and 1942 and proved to be another valuable source of information on those earlier years of anti-invasion preparations.

After much time considering how to bring all these various strands of information together to form a coherent and, hopefully interesting report, I chose to produce it in the form of a chronology from the outbreak of the War in September 1939 to December 1943, by which time the threat of a German invasion of the UK had all but vanished.

Although the main subject of the report was originally to be the Maidstone Nodal Point, I have expanded it to cover some military activity in the wider Maidstone area which I have taken to include the route of the GHQ Line from Aylesford to Teston and the airfields at West Malling and Detling.

Information on military activity within Maidstone itself during the earlier years of the war I found, to my frustration, to be very limited. Fortunately, there were War Diaries for the Royal West Kent's 13th Infantry Training Centre for September to December 1939, which included the first defence plan for the town, but no such diaries seem to exist for following years. I did contact the RWK museum in Maidstone to ask if they had any records for 13 I.T.C. but

they were unable to help. The War Diaries for Home Counties Area H.Q. 1939-1940 helped to fill in some gaps, but they too proved a frustration as the vital months of April, May and June 1940 are missing (coincidentally the same months are missing from the Chatham Area's War Diaries from the same period).

Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. War Diaries provided a more localised source of information on activity from June 1941 onwards and when the town itself was created a 'Fortress' in 1942 the local garrison began producing its own War Diaries which detailed much of the work involved in the construction works for the Fortress and its various defence plans.

The upper echelons of the command structure produced their own War Diaries which I have also drawn on as they obviously had a great influence on what happened in Maidstone. These included the diaries of Kent Area, Eastern Command, South-Eastern Command and XII Corps.

Trying to make sense of the ever-changing chains of command over the period was a difficult task but I hope I have managed to illustrate them correctly in the appendices to the report.

I certainly do not claim this report to be a definitive account, but I do hope I have managed to bring to attention many previously unknown aspects of Maidstone's military history during the Second World War.

Clive Holden
East Malling
November 2019

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my thanks to Victor Smith for all his help, advice, and encouragement with this project. Thanks too to Paul Tritton for his help and encouragement. Also, my thanks to Roy Moore, owner of the Kent Photo Archive website, for his help; to Stuart Carley for allowing me to use images from the Frederick Carley Collection; and to Rex Cadman and Roger Smoothy for allowing me to use images from the 'War & Peace' Collection.

Introduction

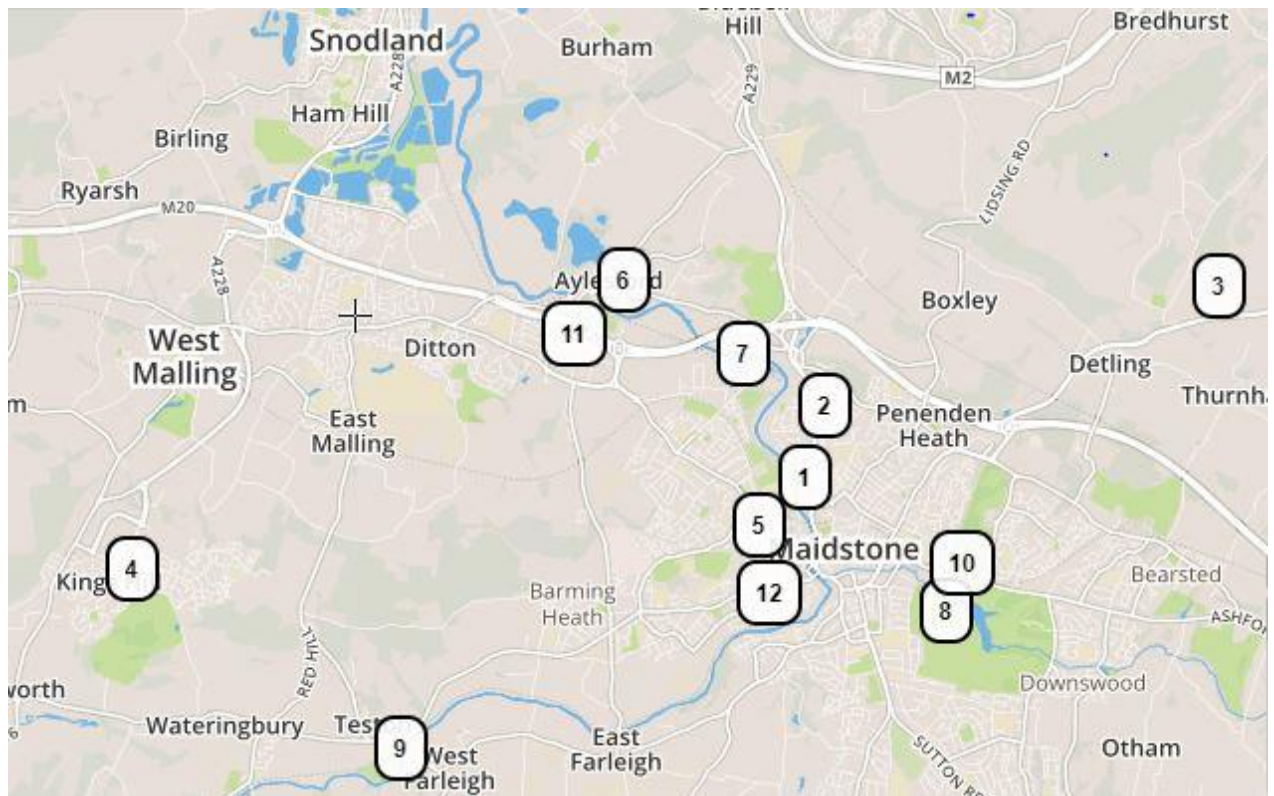
When Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939, it came as no surprise to most people in this country. Such a conflict had been predicted, feared and expected ever since Hitler came to power in 1933. Following the military re-occupation of the Rhineland in 1936, the British Chiefs-of-Staff began planning for a war with Germany which they assumed might break-out in the latter part of 1939. The risks of a seaborne invasion of Great Britain were regarded to be negligible but the danger was that the country could be defeated by air attack alone.

When hostilities did eventually break out, the Government still believed that the United Kingdom would remain a secure base. However, by October 1939 German submarine activity off the North and West coasts resulted in the reduction of Royal Navy forces in the North Sea to provide escorts and trade protection in those areas under threat from the U-Boats, thus leaving the East Coast vulnerable to a surprise large-scale raid. The Chiefs-of Staff were asked to take the necessary steps to prevent such a raid. Plans were drawn up to counter a strike by up to 15,000 seaborne supported by 10,000 airborne troops on targets in the East of England.

Following the German invasion and occupation of France and the Low Countries and the seizure of the Channel ports in the early summer of 1940, an invasion across the Channel into the southern counties of England became a real possibility. Due to its proximity to France, Kent was under particular threat. Defence plans were hastily revised to combat any invasion. These plans included the construction of the 'GHQ Line' a series of defence works to defend London and the industrial heartlands of the Midlands. Along these lines many towns and villages were designated as 'anti-tank islands' also known as Nodal Points, heavily defended localities with pillboxes, roadblocks and anti-tank obstacles designed to slow-up a German advance. Because of its importance as a vital communications hub with its road, rail and river links and being the centre of county administration, Maidstone was designated as a Nodal Point and became an integral part of the GHQ Line defences. Further revisions of anti-invasion plans in 1941 and 1942 saw Maidstone upgraded to a 'Fortress' with enhanced anti-tank defences and a dedicated garrison.

The following report is the culmination of two years research into the military history of Maidstone in the Second World War and the plans that were put in place for its defence.

Maps (1)



Key:

- 1) Maidstone Barracks
- 2) Invicta Lines
- 3) Detling Airfield
- 4) West Malling Airfield
- 5) Kent Home Guard H.Q. (74 London Rd)
- 6) Aylesford Bridge
- 7) Allington Lock
- 8) Mote Park
- 9) Teston Bridge
- 10) Vinters Park
- 11) Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. (Preston Hall Farm)
- 12) Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. (Bower Terrace)

Map (2)



Key:

- A) Union Street Drill Hall
- B) Maidstone Bridge
- C) County Hall / Sessions House
- D) Archbishop's Palace
- E) Police Station
- F) Tilling Stevens Factory
- G) Fortress Battle H.Q. (Bank Street)
- H) Fortress Battle H.Q. (Town Hall)
- I) Maidstone Home Guard H.Q. (Brewer Street)

Prelude

Evidence of settlement in Maidstone can be found dating back to prehistoric times with Maidstone Museum holding many locally found Mesolithic and Neolithic artefacts. The Romans and Normans established settlements here and developed its economy, aided by its position on the River Medway which allowed for the easy transportation of goods upriver into the heart of the county and downriver to Rochester and the Thames Estuary.

The town has a long military history: the 'Battle of Maidstone' in 1648 during the Civil War was an important victory for the Parliamentary forces under the command of Lord Fairfax, overcoming the town's Royalist garrison.

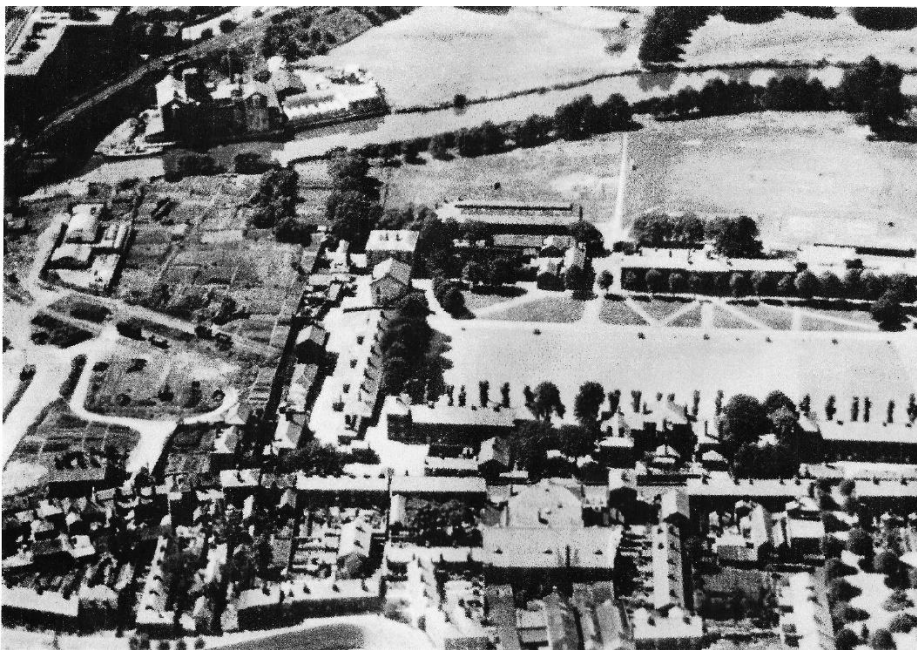


Battle of Maidstone Memorial in Brenchley Gardens

The first of Maidstone's two army barracks was built in 1797 as the threat of Napoleon loomed from across the Channel, and King George III visited Mote Park to inspect 3,000 of the local militia assembled from across Kent in anticipation of an invasion. The barracks were situated just off, what became, the Sandling Road. They were originally built to serve the West Kent Militia and then, in the 19th century, they became one of the Army's major Cavalry Depots. In 1835 the barracks were home to the Army Riding School then in 1873 they became the depot for the 50th (West Kent) Regiment of Foot and the 97th (Earl of Ulster's) Regiment of Foot. These two regiments amalgamated in 1881 to become the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment with Maidstone Barracks as its Regimental Depot.



The 18th C. former Maidstone Barracks Officers' Mess in 2016



Aerial view of Maidstone Barracks

In the First World War Maidstone was the headquarters of the Home Counties Division and on August 14th, 1914 the local newspapers reported that there were 2,000 Territorials in Maidstone waiting to be sent to their war stations. The regimental depot for the West Kent Yeomanry was in Union Street and men were encouraged to enlist directly there. It would be a common sight to see the troops marching along the High Street, on their way to the depot.

In 1920 the Royal East Kent Yeomanry and West Kent (Queen's Own) Yeomanry were amalgamated to form the Kent Yeomanry and simultaneously re-rolled as field artillery to form the 97th (Kent Yeomanry) Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. The new regiment consisted of four artillery batteries one of

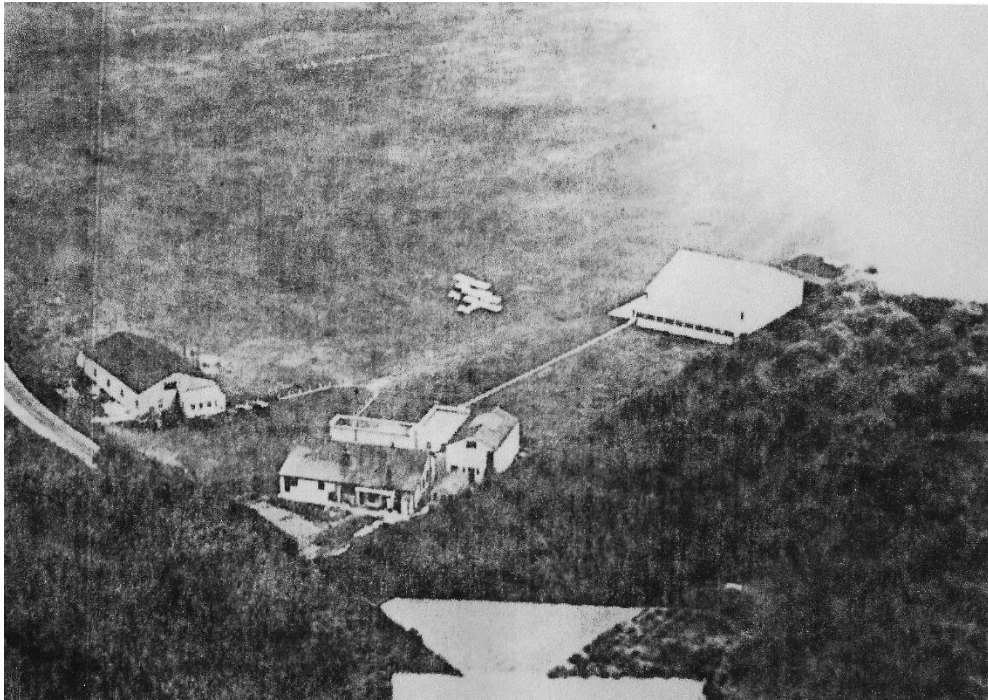
which, the 388th, was based at Maidstone. The Regimental H.Q. was also established in Maidstone at the Drill Hall in Union Street.



388 Battery, 97th (Kent Yeomanry) Brigade, R.A. at the Drill Hall, Union Street in 1936

To the north of the town a Royal Naval Air Station was established at Detling in 1915 which was later taken over by the Royal Flying Corps. However, the airfield was often subjected to low hill fog, so an emergency landing strip was established at Kings Hills, West Malling which could be used whenever weather conditions rendered Detling unavailable.

Following the end of the First World War the airfield at Detling was abandoned and the emergency landing strip at West Malling was left to become overgrown and all but forgotten. However, with the rekindled interest in private aviation in the late 1920's the hunt was on for new potential flying sites. In June 1930, a private company, Kent Aeronautical Services, completed their purchase of the former landing strip site at Kings Hill and founded the West Kent Aero Club there. In 1932, the aviation pioneer Sir Alan Cobham brought his National Aviation Day Display, more commonly known as 'Cobham's Flying Circus', to West Malling. Within a few years the airfield was sold again and re-named Maidstone Airport. In 1938 the new owner, Walter Laidlaw, was encouraged by the Air Ministry to set up a Civil Air Guard Scheme at West Malling. This was a mainly civilian organisation but was financed by the Air Ministry and run as a military organisation to train possible future pilots for the RAF.



Maidstone Airport, West Malling 1938

In the late 1930's the threat from Nazi Germany saw the expansion of the Royal Air Force and the need for more airfields. Detling was re-opened as an RAF Station in 1938 and, in early 1939, West Malling was finally requisitioned by the Directorate of Public Works for use by the RAF. Both airfields were destined to play major roles in the forthcoming conflict.

Maidstone's 18th century wooden army barracks were now falling into disrepair and were fast becoming unsuitable for the demands of a 20th century army.



Royal West Kent Regt. Reunion Parade at Maidstone Barracks 1935 (Carley Collection)



R.W.K.'s on parade at Maidstone Barracks in 1936 (Carley Collection)

In 1936 the Government purchased a site from the Lushington family a few hundred yards to the north of the Sandling Road barracks and proceeded to build a new hutted camp on it for the Army. When it was completed it became the home of the Infantry Training Centre of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment (13 I.T.C.) and became known as the 'Invicta Lines'. The Army retained the Sandling Road Barracks and they continued in use until their demolition in the 1990s.



Unarmed combat training at 13 I.T.C. (War & Peace Collection)

September 1939- April 1940 – The Phoney War

At the time of the outbreak of the Second World War on the 3rd September 1939, Maidstone's Invicta Lines Barracks was home to the Regimental Depot and Headquarters of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment (R.W.K.) and the regiment's 13 Infantry Training Centre (13 I.T.C.) which provided the main garrison for the town. The total establishment of the Depot and 13 I.T.C was 13 Officers and 272 Other Ranks, under the Command of Major E.S. Kerr. Within 24 hours of the declaration of war 600 reservists had reported to the Depot and been clothed and equipped. Hundreds more reservists and recruits continued to arrive throughout September, and many were soon on their way to join their battalions with the British Expeditionary Force in France.

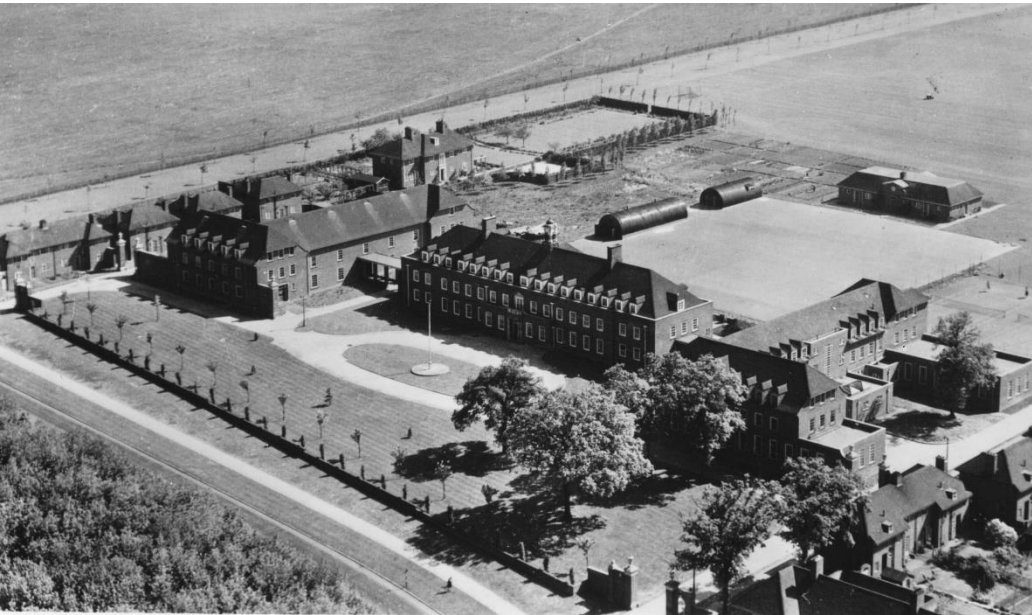


New recruits arrive at Maidstone Barracks. (War & Peace Collection)

The 6th Cavalry Training Regiment was also based in the town and following the declaration of war it was detailed to provide protection for the Kent County Police H.Q. and barracks on the Sutton Road. The Regiment moved to Shorncliffe in November 1939 and 13 I.T.C. took over its protection duties.



Troopers of the 6th Cavalry Training Regiment (War & Peace Collection)



Kent Police H.Q. & Barracks, Sutton Road, Maidstone

The town and surrounding villages were designated ‘Maidstone Sector’, part of British Army Eastern Command’s Home Counties Area which was a combined command with the 44th (Home Counties) Infantry Division (TA). [See Appendix I] The combined Command was administered with a shared staff from a joint H.Q. at *Shenden*, a large requisitioned house on the Weald Road in Sevenoaks. Brigadier A.I. Macdougall D,S.O., M.C. had joined the Staff in July 1939 as Area Commander in anticipation of the splitting of the Area and Divisional Commands. However, for the interim period and on instruction from Eastern Command H.Q., he was now acting as Brigadier i/c [in charge]

Administration to the Area and Divisional Commander Major-General E.A. Osbourne C.B., D.S.O. Brig. Macdougall eventually assumed the Command of Home Counties Area on the 25th October.



Brig. A I Macdougall as a Major in 1918 © IWM (HU 117428)

Among the forces at Brig. Macdougall's disposal were troops from the National Defence Companies. Established in 1936 as part of the Territorial Army Reserve, the companies were formed on a county or city basis, each being linked to their local Territorial battalion. Enlistment began on 1st September 1936 and was open to 'ex-members of His Majesty's Forces, normally between the ages of 45 and 60 years'. Their role was stated to be 'to protect important points in Great Britain when war is threatening or has actually broken out, but members of the force will not be called up until these conditions arise, nor will they be called up on account of civil disturbance'. In November 1939 the N.D.C. were formed into Home Defence battalions attached to their local regiments. The 8th (HD) Bn. Royal West Kent Regt. was based at Maidstone. Their duties included the guarding of Vulnerable Points and Prisoner-of-War camps.

As the result of the increased tensions following the German take-over of Czechoslovakia in the Spring of 1939, the British Government had ordered the doubling in size of the Territorial Army. Each T.A. Division was itself doubled in size until it was able to 'throw-off' a duplicate Division. In the case of the 44th Division its duplicate was to become the 12th Infantry Division. On the 7th October the 44th and 12th Divisions became separate formations and the Command of Home Counties Area was passed to the G.O.C. [General Officer Commanding] 12th Division.

One brigade of the 44th Division was 132 Infantry Brigade part of which moved to Linton, near Maidstone at the outbreak of the war where it was then

re-designated as 36th Infantry Brigade and became part of the newly formed 12th Infantry Division.

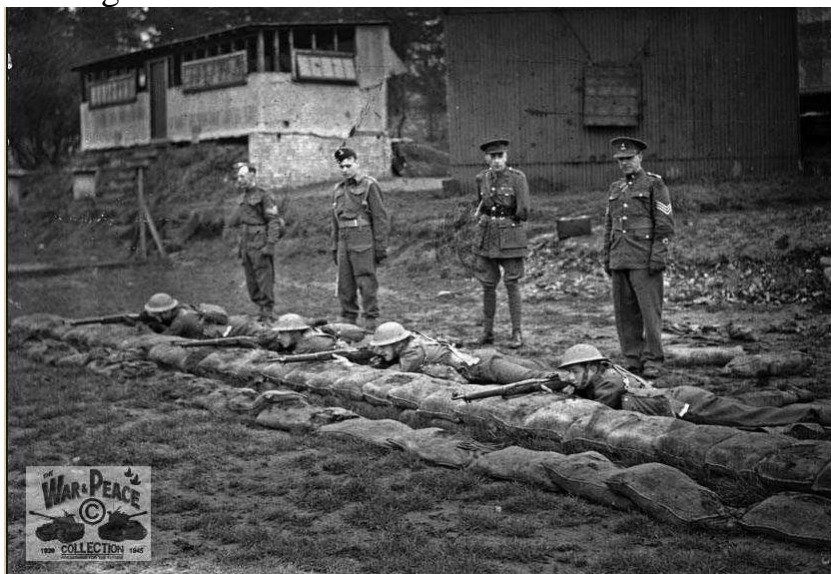
The Commander of Maidstone Sector and the R.W.K. Depot in October 1939 was, the recently promoted, Lt. Col. E.S. Kerr of the Royal West Kent Regiment with his H.Q. on the Invicta Lines.



Lt. Col. E.S. Kerr

Lt. Col. Kerr was also responsible for 13 I.T.C. and oversaw the rigorous training schedules for the recently called-up reservists and new recruits

The 9th October saw some important visitors to 13 I.T.C. The first to arrive was the acting Colonel of the Royal West Kent Regiment, Brigadier N.I. Whitty D.S.O. He was followed shortly after by the G.O.C. Eastern Command, Lt. General Sir Guy Williams K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., who was on his first official visit to Maidstone. Finally, the Commander Home Counties Area, Brig. A I Macdougall D.S.O., M.C. arrived in the late afternoon to see the troops in training.



Rifle firing drill at 13 I.T.C. (War & Peace Collection)

On the 27th October 1939, the Commander-in-Chief Home Forces General Sir Walter Kirke identified aerodrome or aerodromes on which further troop-carrying aircraft could land. Germany was known to have about 4,000 trained parachutists that could be used in such an operation and over 1,000 civilian aircraft with the necessary range each capable of carrying at least 15 'air landing' troops that could be used in follow-up on the seized airfields. Immediate action would be taken by the nearest formations to repel the invaders and the General Officers Commanding-in-Chief of the Command or Commands involved would be responsible for the conduct of the battle in their area.

The code word *JULIUS* would be employed to signify that there were indications that an enemy attack was being contemplated and the code word *CAESAR* that an invasion was imminent.

The 1939 Maidstone Defence Scheme

In an order issued by the Commander Home Counties Area, Brigadier A.I. Macdougall, dated 1st November it was directed that, in the event of enemy airborne landings, the responsibility for dealing with such landings would rest with the Territorial Army troops in the area. However, the officers commanding the I.T.C.s at Maidstone and Canterbury would be responsible for the close and immediate defence of their respective towns. 13 I.T.C. at Maidstone would be detailed to provide 300 men formed into two companies for the defence of the major roads leading into Maidstone: the A20, A229 and the A249. They were to be issued with all available Bren guns, 1,000 rounds of ammunition per Bren gun, 100 rounds per rifle and 12 rounds per revolver. Transport for these troops was to be provided by the R.A.S.C. Depot at Southill Barracks, Chatham. Maidstone Sector H.Q. was instructed to prepare a detailed defence scheme based around these orders following which all officers and N.C.O.s would carry out a T.E.W.T. [Tactical Exercise Without Troops] to test the scheme

In accordance with Brig. Macdougall's orders, the 'Maidstone Defence Scheme' was produced and on the 6th November all officers from 13 I.T.C. took part in the resultant T.E.W.T. after which they were all said to be 'fully acquainted with positions for the defence of Maidstone'.

While it was considered unlikely that Maidstone itself would be the original objective of any raid, it had to be borne in mind that conditions prevailing at the time may force a change of plan on the enemy.

The Maidstone Defence Scheme envisaged an airborne attack by no more than one hundred 'first class' parachute troops armed with rifles and light machine-guns. It was expected for the enemy aircraft to approach at night for a dawn troop landing, allowing the landing party a full day for its initial operations. Time being of the essence, it was thought that the landing party would attempt to capture motor vehicles to help speed them on their way to their objective. It was therefore considered essential to close all roads leading to the danger area

to civilian traffic. Similar consideration should be given to any railway and river traffic.

The close defence of Maidstone was to be considered as a series of 'stops', the object being to turn the enemy away from the town, if possible, toward the guns of the defenders' mobile reserve. Two companies from 13 I.T.C., each of four platoons, were available for the defence of the town. One platoon would be available at one hour's notice and another at two hours' notice. The other six platoons would need six hours' notice although, in an emergency, this could be cut to two hours. These troops, however, would be mainly young and only partially trained. With only eleven motor cars immediately available to 13 I.T.C. it would be necessary to commandeer civilian vehicles to provide sufficient transport for the troops. Ten buses (five for each company), a further twelve cars, two motorcycles and two 30 cwt lorries or similar vehicles would need to be 'Impressed', by force if necessary.

It would be difficult to predict the effects of an enemy airborne landing on the civilian population. Numerous false reports and rumours of enemy activity could be expected and so any early accurate information was unlikely to come from the civilian authorities. However, receiving such information was considered essential so the defence scheme would need to provide for officers' mobile patrols in cars, the object of which would be to locate and keep in touch with the enemy. If accurate information regarding the location of the enemy was lacking then it would be desirable to keep as small a force as necessary in fixed positions and maintain a large, mobile reserve.

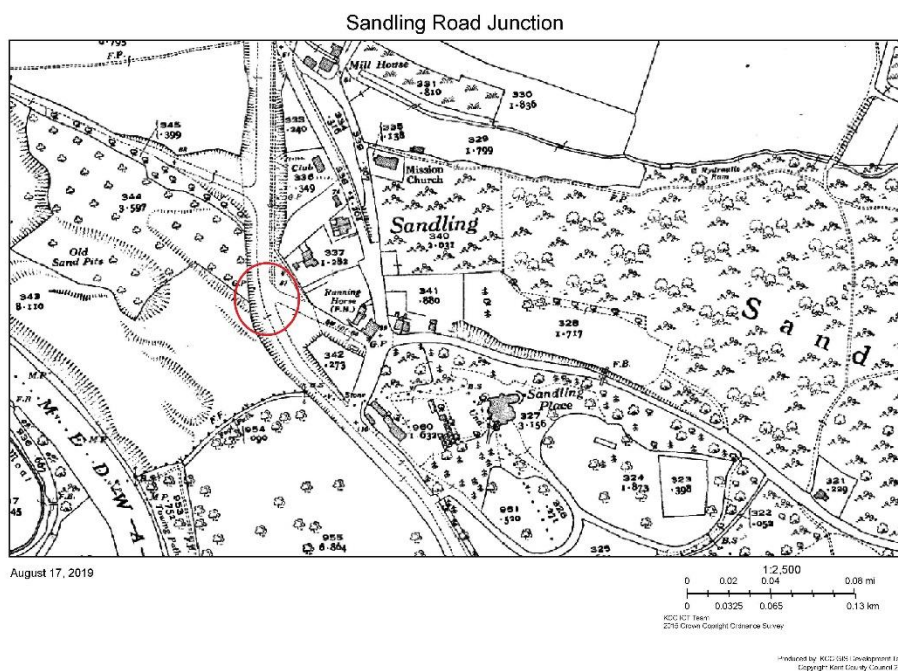
It was assumed that Maidstone would not be in danger from every direction at once so if, for example, the enemy raiding party were at the east of the town then the roads entering the town from the west could be left unguarded. If it was deemed necessary to 'stop' all roads, then this could only be done by reducing the strength of their guard posts.

The defence scheme went on to detail 'The immediate and close defence of Maidstone' with special reference to the roads Maidstone – Sittingbourne (A249), Maidstone – Charing (A20) and Maidstone – Loose (A229). In all there were six main roads and two minor roads leading into the town. Of these, two came from the west (A26 and A20). The River Medway, to the north of the town, formed a natural obstacle to an enemy raiding party moving east to west and could only be crossed at Allington Lock or Maidstone Bridge.



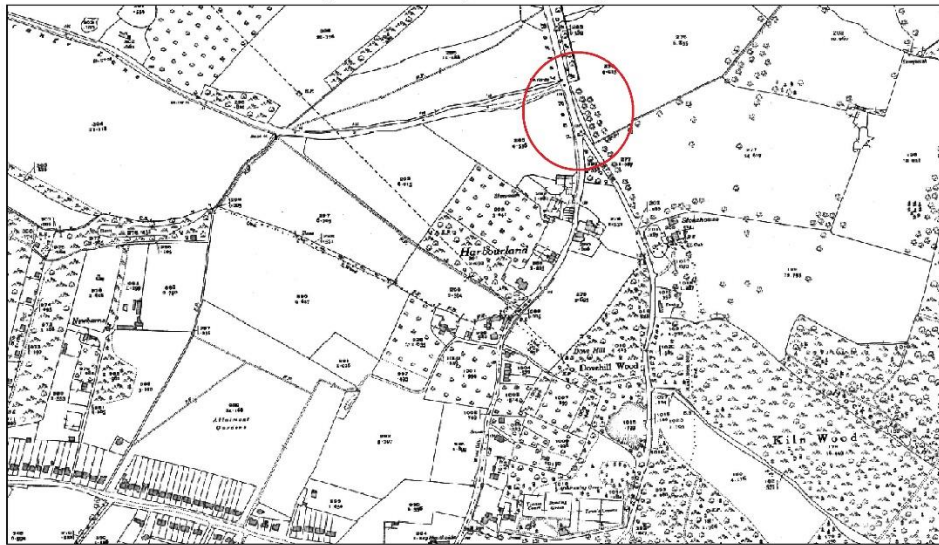
Maidstone Bridge

With ribbon development and housing estates extending the perimeter of the town to the north and north-east, the temptation would be to move on and confront the enemy in open country and villages outside the town. However, this was to be resisted as such a course of action could lead to the defenders becoming isolated and dispersed. Instead troops should be concentrated at ‘stop’ positions on roads into the town. The Maidstone – Chatham road (A229) offered a strong platoon position at the Sandling Lane junction.

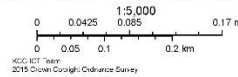


Another ‘stop’ could be established on the Boxley Road in the area of its junctions with Grange Lane and Sandy Lane.

Boxley Road / Sandy Lane / Grange Lane



August 17, 2019

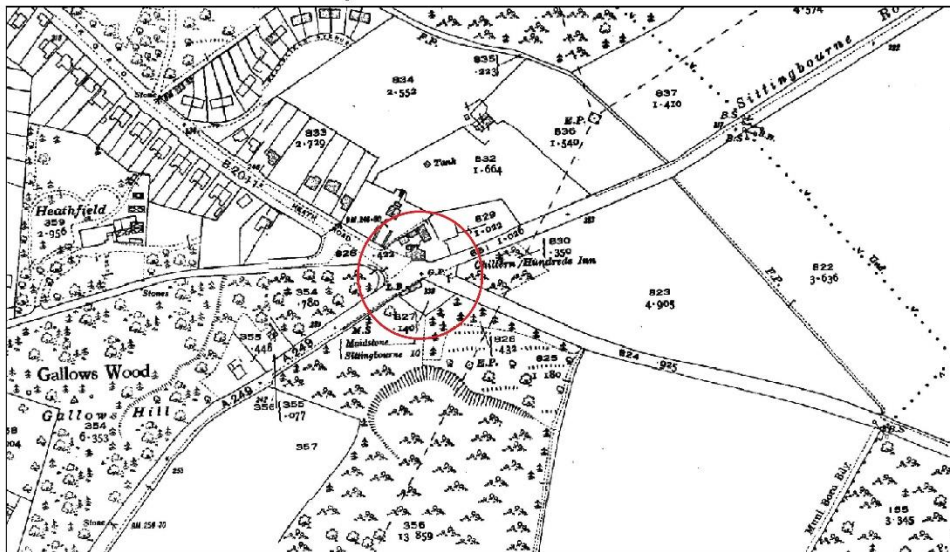


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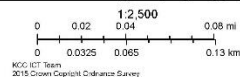
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Another good platoon position existed on the Maidstone – Sittingbourne road (A249) at the crossroads near Penenden Heath.

Sittingbourne Road / Penenden Heath



August 17, 2019

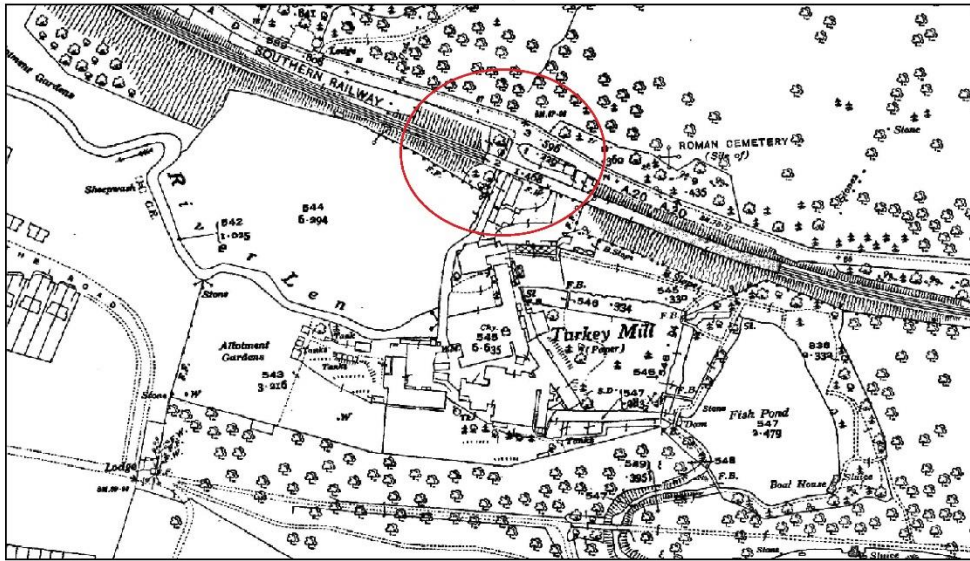


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From the east the Maidstone - Charing road (A20) offered little in the way of suitable 'stop' positions due to ribbon development and the large number of trees along the road. The only reasonable position being astride the road and railway near Turkey Mill.

A20 Turkey Mill



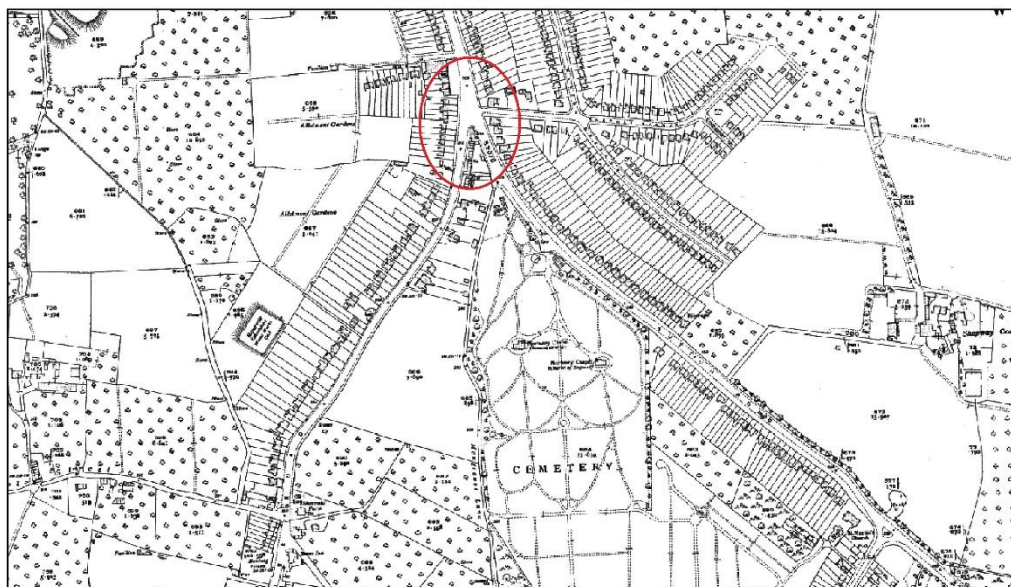
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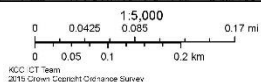
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In the south, on the Loose Road (A229), housing extended without a break to Loose. On the Sutton Road (A274), buildings extended a mile beyond its junction with Loose Road. These were both main roads so the solution here was to concentrate a force at the junction of the two roads which would be ready to move down one road to Loose or the other to the Police Barracks, dependent on information received from the mobile patrols.

Sutton Road / Loose Road

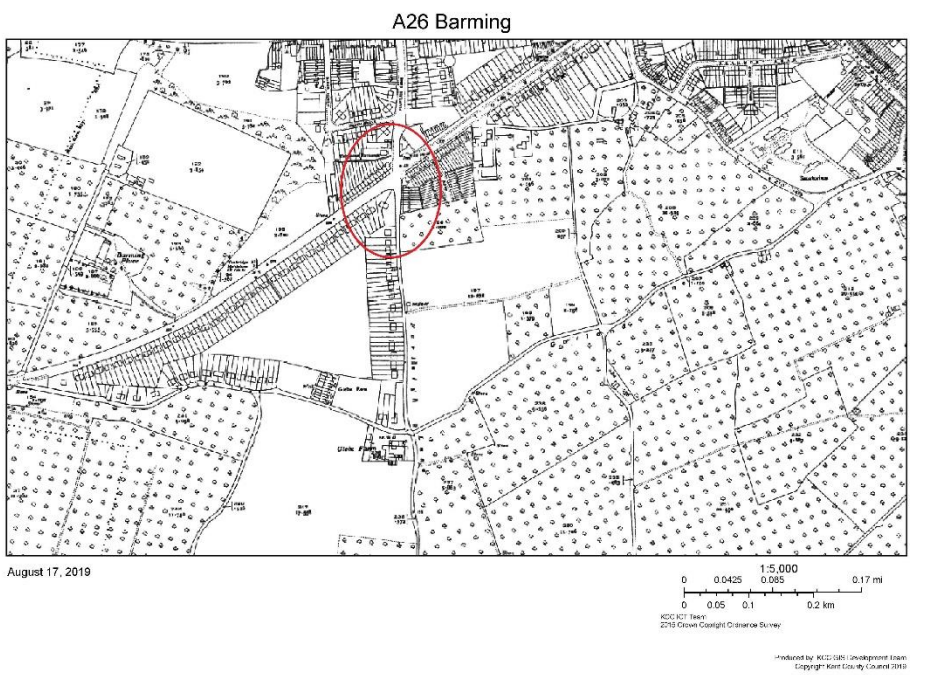
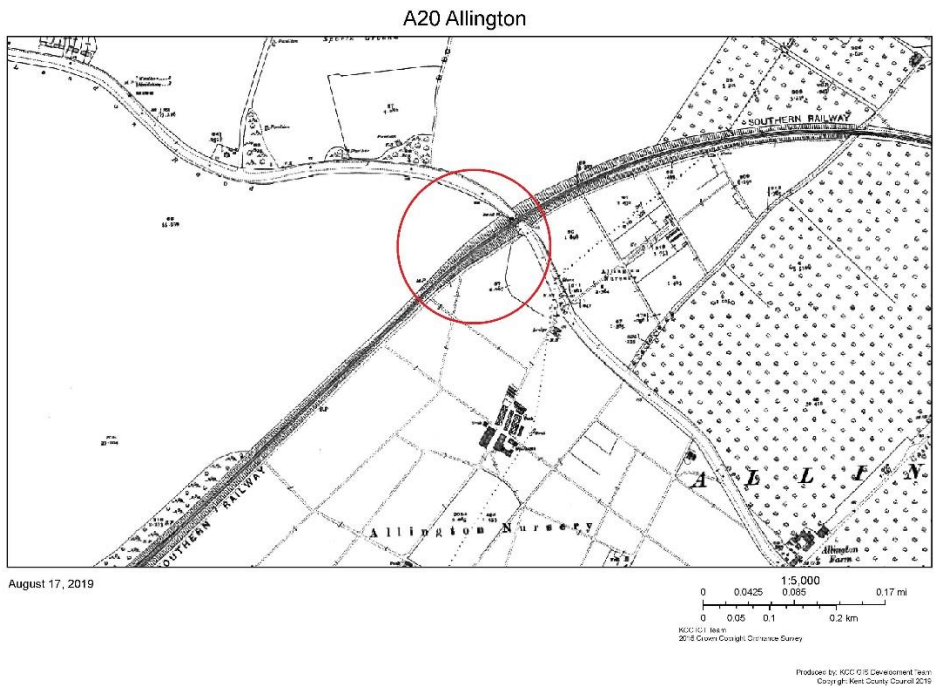


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The main western approaches to the town were the London Road (A20) and the Tonbridge Road (A26). Suitable defence positions were identified near the railway bridge over the A20 between Allington and Barming Station and on the A26 at Barming at its junction with Fountain Lane and Farleigh Lane.



- The initial steps to be taken if a suspected enemy landing was reported were:
- (a) Request the Chief Constable to close to civilian traffic all roads leading towards to the area of the suspected landing.
 - (b) Despatch Officers' Patrols in cars to that area.
 - (c) To collect or impress immediately vehicles to convey the force available.

- (d) To 'stop' all roads in the direction of the suspected landing area immediately using just one Company for this purpose.
- (e) Roadblocks to be made by troops on all roads leading into Unit positions.

In addition to the above steps, the following authorities were to be informed immediately by telephone:

- 1) Headquarters Home Counties Area – Sevenoaks
- 2) Headquarters 36th Infantry Brigade – Linton
- 3) Headquarters 143 Field Regiment Royal Artillery
- 4) Kent County Police Headquarters
- 5) Chief Constable – Maidstone
- 6) 6th RAF Observer Corps - Maidstone

The force detailed to counter the raid would comprise:

Headquarters: 5 Officers; 7 N.C.O.s; 24 Other Ranks

No.1 Company: 5 Officers; 150 Other Ranks (inc. N.C.O.s)

No.2 Company: 5 Officers; 120 Other Ranks (inc. N.C.O.s)

Each Company would comprise a H.Q. (to include a Company Sergeant-Major, a Clerk and runners) and four infantry Platoons, plus Drivers, Signallers and Stretcher-Bearers.

Each Infantry Section (24 in all) would be issued with a Bren light machine-gun. Ammunition at the rate of 100 rounds per rifle, 1,000 rounds per Bren gun and 300 filled Bren gun magazines would be held by the Guard Commander ready for immediate issue.

All personnel would be fully armed and equipped, including gas capes and field dressings, and would draw all their ammunition, Bren guns etc. from the Guard Commander.

Each man would be supplied with a knife, fork and mess tin. These items were to be packed in a haversack and water bottles filled. A greatcoat and two blankets for each man would be packed in folded bundles, tied, labelled and then stacked in the Guard Room ready for despatch.

The Messing Officer would supply 300 steel plates and basins. The Quartermaster and Messing Officer would supply 40 camp kettles and arrange for a supply of tea, sugar, milk and other non-perishable items to make up a full day's ration for each man. All these items were to be made available in the Guard Room together with a quantity of fuel. Water for tea-making would have to be obtained from local residents.

Tools, wiring materials and hurricane lamps would be made available in the Guard Room and yard.

The Medical Officer would arrange for an ambulance, R.A.P. [Regimental Aid Post] and first aid box to be ready to move at 30 minutes notice.

The P.A.D. [Passive Air Defence] Officer would arrange for a supply of bleach powder and bleach ointment to be made available in the Guard Room.

Before moving off, each Platoon Post would detail one man to remain at the Guard Room to take responsibility for his Platoon's greatcoats, rations, cooking utensils tools etc. When in position the Platoon Post Commander would send another man back to the Guard Room to guide the stores to the position. The Quartermaster would then supervise the loading and despatch of the stores onto the motor vehicles that had been impressed for that purpose.

On the sounding of the alarm the Messing Officer would immediately arrange for 300 'substantial' haversack rations to be prepared and held ready for issue as required.

One vehicle would be held in readiness at the disposal of the Quartermaster for the replenishment of ammunition etc. to any Post and each Post Commander would ensure that an 'intelligent representative' would be sent back to the Guard Room, when additional supplies were required, to guide the vehicle to the Post.

Pre-empting possible casualties from enemy raids, the following month on the 16th December, a military hospital was opened at Sandling Park on the Invicta Lines.



Sandling Park

The anticipated German airborne raids did not materialise, and the Western Front remained quiet during these first months of the war, continuing so into the early months of 1940 with the whole period, notwithstanding the many actions at sea, becoming known as 'The Phoney War'.

The Home Counties Area remained on alert for possible invasion attempts but increased emphasis was now being put on training. On the 1st February 'Home

Counties Area Training Instruction No.2' was issued detailing the objectives of training with special regard to physical fitness, weapons training, P.A.D. [Passive Air Defence] practices and security duties. The Instruction was particularly relevant to Maidstone as the home of 13 I.T.C.



Weapons inspection at Maidstone Barracks in 1940 (War & Peace Collection)

On the 5th February 1940, Brigadier Macdougall relinquished command of Home Counties Area to take up his new appointment as Major-General, General Staff. The command of the Area passed to the G.O.C. 12th Infantry Division, Major-General R.L. Petre until the 5th March when Brigadier J.S. Davenport M.C. of the Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Regiment was appointed as the new Area Commander.

In April both 12th and 44th Infantry Divisions moved to France to join the British Expeditionary Force leaving the 1st (London) Infantry Division to take over responsibility for the defence of Kent.

May – December 1940, Britain at Bay

The period of the ‘Phoney War’ ended abruptly on the 9th April 1940 when German troops invaded Denmark and Norway. Following a disastrous military and naval campaign in Norway, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was forced to resign and was replaced on the 10th May by Winston Churchill. The same day Germany launched its main campaign in the West with invasions of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. A few days later German tanks were thrusting into France through the Ardennes and were soon threatening to cut off the British Expeditionary Force which had moved up into Belgium to counter German advances there. The B.E.F. were forced to withdraw to Dunkirk and await evacuation.

In response to the escalation in hostilities, Kent County Council immediately decided to establish a County Civil Defence Mobile Reserve ultimately to consist of three companies, each of two hundred men comprising first aid parties, ambulances and combined rescue and decontamination squads. One company was to be formed at once and established at a convenient point ready to move to reinforce local resources in areas damaged by enemy action.

Following the German invasion of France, a part-time military force, the Local Defence Volunteers (L.D.V.), was formed from men aged between 17 and 65 who were exempt from or who had not yet been called up for full time military service. The L.D.V. were organised into ‘Zones’. The Kent Zone established its H.Q. at the Territorial Army’s Headquarters at 67, College Road in Maidstone, although they later moved to their own H.Q. building at 74, London Road.



67, College Road – T.A. H.Q. & L.D.V. Kent Zone H.Q. in 1940



74, London Road – Kent LDV / Home Guard H.Q. 1940-44

After the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk and the subsequent fall of France the country faced the very real danger of an invasion for which it was ill-prepared. With most of the Army's heavy equipment abandoned in France its immediate ability to prevent any major German assault was severely curtailed. An additional concern was that the nation's existing static defences were outdated and woefully inadequate to deal with a seaborne invasion. Although XII Corps had been formed in June under the command of Lt. Gen Andrew Thorne to provide troops for the defence of Kent and Sussex, its main formations comprised of just two infantry divisions and three artillery regiments. It was obvious that this critical overall situation had now to be addressed with some urgency.

General Sir William Edmund Ironside, Commander-in-Chief, General Headquarters (GHQ), Home Forces had the un-enviable task of preparing Britain's anti-invasion defences. To aid his task he was given additional powers and made Chairman of the Home Defence Executive which enabled him to communicate directly with Government departments.



General Sir Edmund Ironside

Ironside drew up a plan of defence which was submitted to the War Cabinet on the 25th June 1940. Amongst the plan's proposals were for the inland areas to be divided into zones consisting of a series of 'stop' lines. Despite their name the purpose of these lines was to delay rather than stop German forces allowing time for reinforcements to arrive in sufficient strength to engage the enemy with some reasonable chance of success. The most important of these zones was to be the one that encompassed London. The 'stop' lines were to be selected by the General HQ Home Forces were designated GHQ Lines or more familiarly as the 'Ironside Line'. The lines consisted of observation posts [O.P.s], anti-tank obstacles, pillboxes, barbed wire entanglements, static anti-tank gun emplacements and, where suitable, mines. It was also deemed necessary that the fullest use be made of natural obstacles such as waterways. Their bridge crossings were to be heavily defended and prepared with demolition charges to prevent their use by the enemy.

The pace of construction of these defence works was impressive. By July 1940 Eastern Command were reporting the completion of 463 large shell proof pillboxes, 1,788 small bullet-proof pillboxes, 50 miles of concrete anti-tank obstacles and 43 miles of anti-tank ditches. Another 1,840 pillboxes were still under construction with a further 2,000 – 2,200 projected.

Part of the Newhaven to Hoo G.H.Q. Line ran through Maidstone Sector which was responsible for manning the 55 O.P.s and 115 pillboxes within its boundaries. The personnel to man these would be drawn largely from the Maidstone and Malling battalions of the Kent Home Guard. Home Counties H.Q. suggested the minimum manning requirements to be eight men per Observation Post and five men per pillbox. Anti-tank gun pillboxes were manned by regular units of the Royal Artillery.

In addition to the stop-lines many villages and towns were designated as anti-tank 'islands' also known as 'Nodal Points', designed for all-round defence to protect key points such as road junctions and centres of communications. They fell into two categories: Category 'A' Nodal Points' which were generally to be found near the coast and, in the event of invasion, were at risk of being isolated for up to six days before relief. Category 'B' Nodal Points were further inland and were unlikely to become isolated for more than three days. Nodal Point defences included a ring of anti-tank obstacles, roadblocks and defended buildings. Nodal Points also received an increased scale of Civil Defence Services. These services covered:

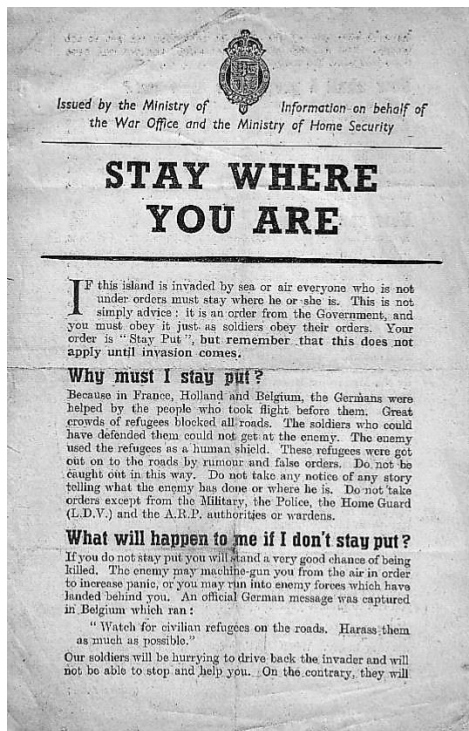
- (1) The supply of water for drinking and fire-fighting
- (2) Fire-fighting apparatus and personnel
- (3) ARP personnel and parties
- (4) Shelter or trenches for the whole population
- (5) The supply of petrol for the fire-fighting appliances
- (6) Food supply.

To obtain satisfactory liaison between the Civil and Military authorities in an emergency in these Nodal Points, it was decided that a small body to be called a 'Triumvirate' should be appointed. Each Triumvirate consisted of a local military commander, a police representative and a civilian representative of the Local Authority, usually the Mayor or the Chairman of the District Council, or Chairman of the Emergency Committee.

It was recognised that so long as Civil Defence Committees and Emergency Committees could function, they should continue to do so and that the Triumvirates, as such, would have no executive powers. Likewise, Local Authorities would continue to function so long as their administration could do so.

When an area came under the sole control of a military commander, he was to issue orders on matters affecting the civilian population to the Local Authority or to its Civil Defence or Emergency Committee. Using the Civil Representative of the Triumvirate as his channel of command.

The view taken by the military authorities was that there was to be no question of the evacuation of the civil population in any event. Pamphlets were issued to civilians emphasising the necessity to 'stay put' should they find themselves in the middle of a battle and to treat the situation as though it were an air-raid and retire to their shelters or basements.



“Stay Where You Are” pamphlet issued by the Ministry of Information in 1940

In 1940 Maidstone was designated as a Category ‘B’ Nodal Point due to its strategic position on the Newhaven to Hoo GHQ Line. The town stood on the mainline railway from London to Ashford and the Medway Valley railway line from Strood to Paddock Wood. It also had several major trunk roads running through the town centre and was an important crossing point over the River Medway.

The Medway formed an integral part of the GHQ line. As well as Maidstone Bridge itself there were also important crossings at Teston and Aylesford, either side of the town. These were both designated as ‘Defended Localities’. Teston Bridge was defended by several pillboxes of various types designed for infantry and anti-tank gun use. If the Germans managed to cross the river here their way was almost clear to capture the RAF fighter airfield at nearby West Malling.



A shell-proofed machine-gun pillbox overlooking the Medway at Teston

Aylesford Bridge was defended by an anti-tank gun pillbox, a small infantry pillbox which also doubled as a light anti-aircraft gun emplacement, and the loop-holed wall of a garden backing onto the river which covered the approach to the bridge. The bridge was also prepared for demolition. On the 26th August 1940, at the height of the invasion scare, orders were given that on receipt of the codeword for the invasion, *Cromwell*, a demolition party from the School of Military Engineering at Brompton would be dispatched to Aylesford to complete the demolition. The demolition party would also be tasked with cratering all the approach roads to the village with explosives.



Aylesford Bridge at low tide

Between the bridge and the railway at Aylesford there was bulk petroleum storage depot. Plans were made, in an emergency, to either contaminate the fuel or destroy the installation completely to prevent the stocks falling into the hands of the enemy.

Between Aylesford and Allington the river was lined with more pillboxes along its left bank. Most of the locks along the non-tidal stretch of the river were also well defended with pillboxes. Allington Lock and its sluices were considered to be of particular importance. A Type 28A 6-pounder anti-tank gun pillbox with a side chamber for a light machine-gun defended the lock itself, whilst two Type 24 infantry pillboxes were sited a few hundred yards upstream in the grounds of Allington Castle and another a short distance downstream near the railway line. The lock was also prepared for demolition, a task that would be carried out by the same R.E. party that was charged with the demolition work at Aylesford.



Allington Castle (Carley Collection)



Type 28A pillbox at Allington Lock

On the 22nd July 1940 the L.D.V. was re-named the Home Guard and organised into battalions. The Kent battalions were numbered consecutively throughout the county with the Maidstone battalion being designated 11th (Maidstone) Battalion, Kent Home Guard (11 K.H.G.). The Maidstone Battalion H.Q. was established at Kreemy Hall in Brewer Street. On the 30th July 1940, the Commander, Home Counties Area declared in a letter addressed to all Home Guard Battalion Commanding Officers in his Area:

..that the Home Guard responsibility is, in order of importance:- (a) OBSERVATION (b) GUERRILLA TACTICS (c) MANNING ROAD BLOCKS (d) DEFENCE OF CENTRES OF RESISTANCE

In July, the 'Operational Area' of Home Counties Area was divided into two 'Sub-Areas': Sevenoaks Sub-Area and Dorking Sub-Area. Maidstone Sector became part of Sevenoaks Sub-Area along with Tonbridge Sector and Biggin Hill Sector. Colonel R. Papworth was appointed Commander of the Dorking Sub-Area while command of the Sevenoaks Sub-Area remained under the direct control of the Commander Home Counties Area, Brigadier J.S. Davenport. Lt. Col. Kerr remained as Officer Commanding Troops, Maidstone and Military Commander, Maidstone Sector with responsibility for the 'Maidstone Centre of Resistance'.

On the 21st July 1940, General Ironside was replaced as C-in-C Home Forces by General Sir Alan Brooke who had his own views on how the ground defence of the United Kingdom should be conducted. He was completely opposed to the concept of static stop-lines situated far inland and placed far more importance on building up strong reserves for mobile operations.



General Sir Alan Brooke © IWM (TR 149)

These views were reinforced by the fact that the urgency with which many of the stop-lines had been constructed and the use of civilian contractors lacking any military experience meant that many of the pillboxes were sited incorrectly or where they could serve no purpose. Within weeks of his appointment Brooke discarded Ironside's conventional approach of a linear defence in depth in favour of swift offence with mobile reserves placed well forward near the coast. However, fully implementing these new plans would take considerable time. Not least of the problems facing Brooke was the shortage of high standard

motor transport necessary to carry the 'mobile' reserves to where they would be needed. Therefore, Brooke had to work with what was already in place, at least in the short-term. Brooke's problems were exasperated by the extra calls on his troops for many diverse activities which took them away from the effective training they desperately needed. On the 5th September 1940, an order was issued by Home Counties Area H.Q. to the Maidstone I.T.C. to send out detachments of troops to assist local farmers with hop-picking. Ironically, just two days later the code-word, *Cromwell*, indicating that an enemy invasion was imminent was passed on from the same H.Q. bringing Home Defence forces in the Home Counties Area to the highest state of readiness. Thankfully this proved to be a false alarm and the troops were soon stood down.

All the hectic activity on the ground preparing defences against land attack in the late summer of 1940 was more than matched in the skies above Maidstone where the 'Battle of Britain' was raging between the RAF and the German Luftwaffe. Brick and concrete surface shelters were built along the High Street in Maidstone to provide protection for people using the town centre. Most local schools and factories also had at least one shelter, some underground such as those at the town's two grammar schools. Maidstone suffered its first daylight bombing raid of the war on the 8th August. The air-raid sirens sounded at 11.40 a.m. and those in the factories and schools filed in an orderly manner into their respective shelters just as they had practised many times before.

August 13th had seen a devastating German attack on the RAF Station at Detling in which sixty-seven RAF and civilian personnel were killed and another ninety-four injured. As a result of this raid, just four days later, on the 17th August, XII Corps HQ ordered four Bofors light anti-aircraft guns and their crews from 55 LAA Reg. to move to Detling to strengthen the airfield's defences. Then on September 27th Maidstone itself suffered its worst bombing raid of the war with eighteen dead and eighty injured. On the 31st October a single German bomber appeared over Mill Street. Its bombs killed six people in the immediate area. During the months of the 'Battle of Britain', between July and October, a total of 53 people were killed on the ground in air-raids over Maidstone.



Bomb damage in Charlton Street, Maidstone. September 1940



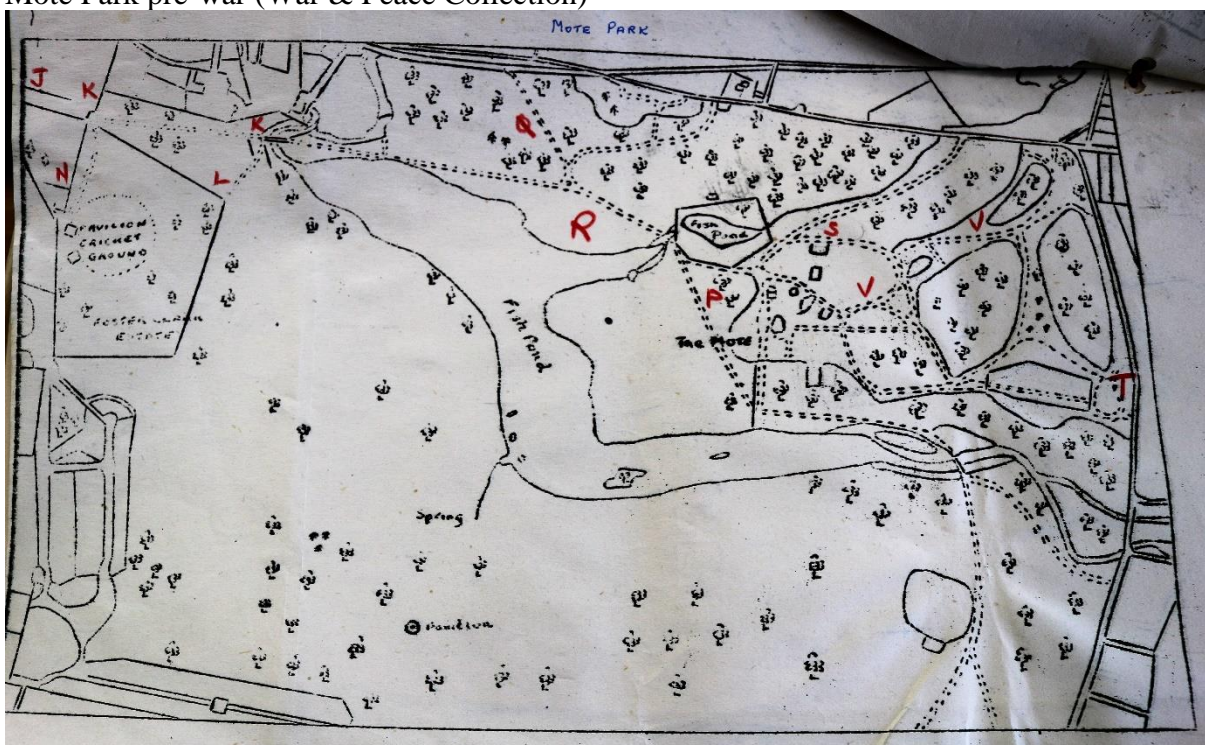
Damage inflicted by a delayed-fuse bomb in Knightrider Street on 27th September 1940 (War & Peace Collection)

Maidstone's Mote Park had been taken over by the Army early in the war for use as a training ground and it also became an important staging camp for the movement of XII Corps formations throughout Kent. During September 1940 elements of the 1st New Zealand Division were based at the park including its 4th Infantry Brigade which was given responsibility for dealing with any enemy airborne landings in the Maidstone – Sittingbourne -Faversham – Charing area.

In November the park was one of two major staging camps (the other being at Knole Park in Sevenoaks) for the 43rd (Wessex) Division on its move into East Kent to relieve 1st (London) Division.



Mote Park pre-war (War & Peace Collection)



Royal Engineers sketch map of Mote Park denoting the Staging Camp tent sites for units of the 43rd Division during their stay on their move to their final East Kent positions in September 1940. (TNA WO 166/3729)

In September 1940, the younger soldiers of 8th (HD) Bn. R.W.K. Regt were formed into their own 'Young Soldiers Battalion' designated 70th Royal West Kent (70 R.W.K.). On the 9th October 1940 Home Counties H.Q. instructed the

C.O. of 70 R.W.K. to provide a Company of 180 men for the defence of West Malling Aerodrome. Prior to deployment to West Malling they would be accommodated at 13 I.T.C. Maidstone for further training.



The Control Tower at RAF West Malling

Just two weeks later, Maidstone Sector were instructed to send detachments of the 70th R.W.K. Company then in training at 13.I.T.C. to Fort Halstead and Dunton Green in the west of the county to relieve detachments of 7th Bn. Dorset Regiment. This extra strain on Maidstone's garrison prompted a memo to be issued from Home Counties Area HQ to XII Corps HQ in Tunbridge Wells stating that, due to having to find a large draft of trained personnel for other duties, from the 9th November it would be impossible for 13 I.T.C. to continue providing immediate assistance columns for West Malling or Detling Aerodromes.

On the 4th October the newly formed 920 Defence Battery R.A. arrived in Maidstone and established its base at the Drill Hall in Union Street. The Battery was due to take-over the manning of eight anti-tank gun pillboxes on the G.H.Q. Line along the River Medway in the Maidstone area from 5 Medium Regiment Royal Artillery. The new unit's strength on the 4th October was three Officers, a Battery Sergeant-Major, three sergeants, two bombardiers and 90 new recruits, plus 17 'Other Ranks' attached from 5 Medium Regiment R.A.

Before 920 Battery could assume its role, it had to be brought up to full strength and undertake four weeks of intensive training. Also, extra billeting space was needed, and this was found in houses in Station Road, Albion Place and the 'Rifle Volunteer' public house.

By the 22nd November the Battery was at full strength and divided into two Troops ('A' Troop and 'B' Troop). Having completed its initial training, the Battery was ready to take-over the manning of the following A/T Posts:

No. 9 and 10 MAIDSTONE ('A' Troop)
No.11 TOVIL ('A' Troop)
No.12 EAST FARLEIGH ('A' Troop)
No.13 BARMING BRIDGE ('A' Troop)
No.14 TESTON ('B' Troop)
No.15 NETTLESTEAD' ('B' Troop)
No.16 YALDING ('B' Troop)



A-T Post No.10 by the railway line off Lower Fant Road.

However, within just one day Posts 14, 15 and 16 had to be abandoned owing to flooding. Their guns were dismantled and brought back into barracks and the detachments were transferred to man three A/T Posts in Tonbridge.

With the onset of winter, the threat of invasion diminished and from the 23rd December A/T Gun Posts 9 – 13 were also reduced to being manned on a 'care and maintenance' basis.

On the 27th November, following earlier discussions with senior staff officers from XII Corps, Brig. Davenport issued new instructions regarding Nodal Points:

1. Nodal Points in Home Counties Area must be prepared to resist for 48 hours.
2. The defences will consist of field works, or windows of houses, to cover the Nodal Point with an all round defence. Special attention being paid to the roads.
3. Windows of houses being required for defence will be requisitioned and if necessary the floors strengthened. Sandbags will be filled and stored on the premises but not placed in position.
4. Complete houses will not be requisitioned. Those that have already been taken over and fortified may be retained, if required.
5. All roads entering the Nodal Point will be blocked with "buoy" type blocks.
6. Public buildings such as Post Offices – Town Halls – Schools may be earmarked for Keeps. No preliminary work to be done on these.
7. A.T. minefields to be sited but not prepared.
8. R.E. [Royal Engineers] for these defences will be available at the end of December 1940.

A few days later Brig. Davenport went on to clarify that XII Corps Command had decided that Nodal Points in the Home Counties (Operational) Area, including Maidstone, should not come under the heading of those which were required to resist for periods of more than 48 hours. In view of this it was not considered necessary to take special measures for the safety of the civilian population and the safeguarding of essential services.

January – December 1941 - Consolidation

January 1941 saw a major re-organisation of the Army's Commands. The structure of Aldershot Command was expanded to form South Eastern Command (SECO). As a result, Eastern Command was relieved of Kent, Surrey and Sussex which were transferred to SECO. For administrative purposes, Chatham Area and the Kent parts of Home Counties Area were re-organised into Kent Area under the command of Brigadier J.S. Davenport M.C. with its Headquarters in Chatham. On the 15th January Maidstone Sub-Area was created incorporating Sheppey Sector, Chatham Sector, Maidstone Sector and Tonbridge Sector. The Maidstone Sub-Area temporarily remained under the direct command of Kent Area H.Q. pending the appointment of its own commander. Kent Area would also now be responsible for defensive measures in the rear of XII Corps forward divisions and would have under its command three independent infantry battalions in addition to its Home Defence and Young Soldier battalions. Overall operational and administrative command of the Kent Area became the responsibility of XII Corps H.Q. in Tunbridge Wells.

In February the Young Soldiers of 70 R.W.K., once again, took over the defence of West Malling and Detling airfields. 'A' Company were deployed to West Malling with their H.Q. at 'Barn Jet' in East Barming, while 'B' Company were deployed to Detling. However by March, in a memo written on behalf of the C-in-C South Eastern Command to G.H.Q. Home Forces, the position of the seventy men of 'A' Company at West Malling was described as 'unsatisfactory' as they were being employed, for much of the day, on work for the construction of the airfield's defences leaving only one hour per day for training. A request was made that G.H.Q. Home Forces make representations to the Air Ministry so that the RAF Works Department provide the labour for the defence works to allow the Young Soldiers sufficient time for their training.

During February and March various units of XII Corps Reserve arrived in Maidstone. 1st Army Tank Brigade H.Q. and Signal Section was established at Mote Park and 5th Light Field Ambulance at Vinters. The H.Q. of the 44th Infantry Division moved to Linton, just outside the town, and 133 Infantry Brigade Group were based in hutted camps along the A20 Maidstone – Charing road. The latter were detailed to deal with any attempted enemy airborne landings in the area.

On the 7th February, the policy on the defence of the crossing point over the Medway at Aylesford was called into question by Brigadier J.S. Davenport, Commander Kent Area. He pointed out in a memo to XII Corps H.Q. that although the bridge's defences were now complete, with pillboxes, roadblocks, defended houses and fieldworks, it was impossible for him to provide the fully equipped company of troops required to man them.



One of the 'Defended Buildings' at Aylesford. The embrasure on the far right was for a 2-pdr A-T gun

He added that the Commander of Maidstone Sector would be prepared to send three platoons from the Royal West Kent's Infantry Training Centre (13 I.T.C.) to man the Aylesford defences on the order to 'Stand To'. However, these troops would be neither fully trained nor fully equipped and their deployment would leave the defences of Maidstone itself 'correspondingly weakened'. Meanwhile a pre-fabricated 'Callender-Hamilton'-type bridge had been installed over the Medway at Aylesford to accommodate military traffic and relieve pressure on the original narrow medieval bridge. This new bridge would also need to be defended in the event of an enemy attack and with no further regular troops available, a platoon of the Malling Home Guard was assigned for this purpose.



The Callender-Hamilton bridge under construction at Aylesford (War & Peace Collection)

On the 2nd May 1941 it was directed that the 55 Officers and 1,061 Other Ranks of Maidstone I.T.C were assigned to the defence of the Maidstone Nodal Point. less the company allocated to the defence of Aylesford Bridge. It was also hoped to form a small force of A.F.V.'s (Armoured Fighting Vehicles) from the I.T.C to act as a mobile reserve for the Maidstone Sub-Area.

On the 1st May Kent Area H.Q. came under the direct command of South Eastern Command. A few days later, on the 5th May, Headquarters Maidstone Sub-Area moved from Chatham to its new home at Preston Hall Farm, Aylesford. Then, on the 13th May, the Kent Area Commander and all staff officers of Area HQ were present at the *Granada* cinema in Maidstone for an address by XII Corps Commander, Lt-Gen B.L. Montgomery.



The *Granada* cinema, Maidstone

In June a proposal was put forward by the Zone Commander, Kent Home Guard to Kent Area HQ to split the 11th (Maidstone) Bn. into two separate battalions; Urban and Rural. The reasons given were that with a strength of almost 2,400 men the battalion was too large to be dealt with by just one part-time officer; the area from which the men were drawn fell naturally into an urban and a rural district; and as the Battalion Commander Lt. Col. Baker lived in Maidstone and was, in the time available to him, able to supervise the training and administration of his men in and around Maidstone, he was however unable to deal with the rural districts which included the Nodal Points of Harrietsham and Headcorn as well as numerous other defended localities the

importance of which required their own high-level of supervision. The proposal went forward with the full support of the Maidstone Sub-Area Commander.

On Friday 13th June Maidstone was honoured with a visit by His Majesty the King. Having lunched at XII Corps H.Q., in Tunbridge Wells, he arrived mid-afternoon in Maidstone where he observed 43rd Division's Royal Engineers training in Mote Park. He then travelled on to East Sutton Park where he saw 94 Field Regiment Royal Artillery at training and stayed for tea.



King George VI with Lt. General Montgomery at XII Corps H.Q. at Broadwater Down in Tunbridge Wells (War & Peace Collection)

Also, in June South-Eastern Command issued the following information and instructions regarding co-operation with the Civil Authorities in each Nodal Point in the event of active operations:

- a) Unified Civil Command. The civil authorities are arranging for a unified civil command in each Nodal Point which will come into effect in active operations.
- b) Chief Civil Officer. A chief civil officer will be appointed for each Nodal Point. In Boroughs this will be the Mayor, in Urban Districts the Chairman of the Council, and in Rural Districts a representative appointed by the Council.
- c) Senior Police Officer. The Senior Police Officer in the Nodal Point will be associated with the Chief Civil Officer. When the Nodal Point Commander assumes command, the senior Police Officer will act as his civil Staff Officer.
- d) Chain of Civil Command. When the Nodal Point Commander assumes command, he will issue his orders through the senior Police Officer
- e) Assumption of Command by Nodal Point Commander. The Nodal Point Commander will assume command under any of the following circumstances: -
 - 1) When the Nodal Point is cut off.
 - 2) When fighting breaks out in the vicinity
 - 3) When he is ordered to do so by a superior military Authority.

4) When the local authority is ordered by the Regional Commissioner to place itself under his orders.

f) Liaison. It is essential that when the Nodal Point Commander assumes command his attention shall not be diverted from his operational responsibilities. Close contact will therefore be established now between the Nodal Point Commander, the Chief Civil Officer and the senior Police Officer, so that civil and military defence plans are co-ordinated and smooth working in an emergency ensues.

g) Instructions to Local Authorities. An instruction on the above lines is being issued by the Regional Commissioner to the local authorities in each Nodal Point, copies of which will be forwarded later.

The Commander of the Maidstone Nodal Point was Major C.E.P. Craven of 13 I.T.C., who was also the Commander of Maidstone Sector. The forces at his disposal for the defence of the Nodal Point comprised 985 men with just 860 rifles, two Bren machine-guns, twenty-four Boys anti-tank rifles and five Northover Projectors (a makeshift anti-tank weapon).



Members of the Home Guard using a Northover Projector in 1941 © IWM (H11843)

Since the Spring of 1941, the distraction of their operations in the Balkans had made the German invasion of the United Kingdom in the near future less likely and with the start of Operation *Barbarossa*, the offensive against the Soviet Union, on the 22nd June the likelihood of invasion was reduced even more. The Chiefs-of-Staff and the Joint Intelligence Committee (J.I.C.) both agreed that the Germans would be unable to break off their offensive until they had achieved a major objective, either the capitulation of the Soviet forces or the gaining of sufficient territory to preclude a possible successful counter-attack by the Red Army. It was considered that the Germans would be unable to

disengage the large land and air forces required for the invasion of the U.K. before the 1st September at the earliest. With an estimated 6-8 weeks required to transport, re-equip and embark these forces to the West, an invasion could not start before the middle or end of October, by which time winter would be setting in and so the probability was that any invasion would be postponed until the Spring of 1942.

Whatever the change in the general war situation, in Kent anti-invasion preparations continued regardless throughout July. On the 5th, XII Corps H.Q. issued its Operational Instruction No.28 on the subject of 'Defence Works'. This document set out the policy for the construction and maintenance of defence works in XII Corps Divisional Areas and Kent Area. In addition to field works constructed by Field Army troops, authority was given for two types of new works that could be undertaken by local commands in Nodal Points, approved Defended Villages and sites along the line of the River Medway (Maidstone Sub-Area contained all three). These works were: the strengthening of existing pillboxes and the provision of temporary roadblocks (for which, concrete cylinders would be supplied in bulk by South Eastern Command). The construction of new concrete pillboxes, permanent roadblocks and tank ditches or similar obstacles in these areas would, in future, only be executed as part of a plan approved by SECO.

The on-going maintenance 'in effective condition' of all existing tank ditches, natural anti-tank obstacles (riverbanks etc.), pillboxes, roadblocks and field works in Maidstone Sub-Area would be the responsibility of the Commander, Kent Area.

Construction of new pillboxes would now be confined to those that were proof against the German 37mm anti-tank gun; that is with a wall of reinforced concrete not less than 3.5 feet in thickness. They should also be sunk into the ground to give the lowest possible profile and camouflaged to blend into their surroundings. Correctly sited existing pillboxes were to be strengthened by increasing the thickness of their walls to not less than 3.5 feet in thickness. If they were found to be only vulnerable on one side, then a 3.5 feet wall could be built outside the pillbox on the vulnerable side. In all cases loopholes in excess of two should be blocked-up.

New 'permanent' roadblocks would consist of removable steel rails set in sockets in the road flanked on the verges by fixed concrete blocks. 'Temporary' roadblocks would consist of movable obstacles such as railway wheels, concrete cylinders and concrete buoys. Anti-tank mines could be used in conjunction with roadblocks but should not be laid until required after 'ACTION STATIONS'.

On the 11th July 1941, Maidstone Sector Operation Order No.1 was issued. Covering 13 I.T.C. R.W.K., 11 (Maidstone) Bn. Home Guard and 24 (Malling) Bn. Home Guard, the intention was expressed that in the event of enemy action the Sector was to be defended to the last man and to kill every German who had

succeeded in entering it. That same night 11 (Maidstone) Bn. carried out an exercise to practise members of the Home Guard in their duties as guides to the Regular forces in the Sector.



'H' Company, 11 (Maidstone) Bn. Kent Home Guard

On the 19th July, XII Corps assumed the direct operational command of Maidstone Sub-Area with Colonel Sir Edward Warner DSO MC as Sub-Area Commander. Following a conference at Maidstone on the 29th July it was decided that operational command of 13 I.T.C and the troops defending Detling Airfield would also pass to XII Corps.



Parade at RAF Detling

On the 3rd August Exercise *CANNON* was held in Maidstone. The object of which was to exercise the Home Guard in co-operation with units of the Regular Army and Civil Defence in the defence of the Nodal Point against low-flying enemy attack and parachute troops.

The exercise exposed the weaknesses of the Home Guard in the eyes of the Sub-Area Commander, Colonel Warner. In his overview of the exercise he states:

All must agree, that if the Maidstone Nodal Point is to resist successfully an attack by airborne tps, the defences leave much room for improvement. ... Despite the demands of

their civil avocations, the Home Guard must be prepared to provide themselves with fighting quarters and protect themselves with fighting obstacles.

Colonel Warner was also critical of the speed of the Home Guard's deployment:

We are still very slow. It took some 2½ hours for the Home Guard to complete their muster for the defence of Maidstone last Sunday. It took attacking parties 2 hours on the average, to cover two miles.

He further questioned the Home Guards' organisation of their supplies:

Are you satisfied that on Sunday 3 Aug.⁴¹ your ammunition and your bombs were distributed so that they could be used against the enemy? Were you certain that your men had food and water, if not beer to carry them through, at any rate until darkness permitted you to replenish in comparative safety? Can you see the battle proceeding according to plan if your communications are cut; your transport bombed and your medical services disorganised?

In conclusion Colonel Warner wrote:

Our object is to kill every German who may land in Kent. For this purpose we must have adequate defences, intelligent commanders with reserves under our hands, and individual soldiers who will use their spades, their weapons and their intelligence to deal with the enemy wherever and however he may be met.

Possibly as a result of Exercise *CANNON*, and following a recce by Colonel Warner of Maidstone Nodal Point and its defences, there was yet another re-organisation of the Maidstone Sub-Area Command on the 20th August when Sub-Area Instruction No.6 directed that as from the 24th August, Tonbridge Sector, Maidstone Sector and Goudhurst Sub-Sector would be abolished and that Sub-Area H.Q. would deal with the Nodal Points, Defended Localities and Villages within those Sectors through their respective battalions. Three days later, it was confirmed that sanction had been received from South-Eastern Command for the division of 11 (Maidstone) Bn. Home Guard into two battalions to be known as 11 (Maidstone) Bn. and 29 (Mid-Kent) Bn. 11 Bn. would cover the Borough of Maidstone, the Parish of Loose and the villages of Boxley and Detling. The battalion would remain under the command of Lt. Col. W.A.N. Baker M.C. Then, on the 30th August, XII Corps H.Q. directed that Class 'B' Nodal Point of Maidstone was to be re-classified as a Class 'A' to ensure the provision of Civil Defence Services on the maximum scale. A paper issued by the War Office in 1941 seeks to clarify the position regarding Class 'A' Nodal Points:

A considerable amount of time, labour, materials and expense has been spent making them as far as possible 'anti-tank obstacles', the object being that they should act as a 'strong point' or 'centres of resistance'. ... it is hoped that they will be capable of resisting for seven days.

In the event of an attack the closest co-operation with the civil authorities was deemed essential. As such, special consideration was to be given to the provision of food, shelter, water, fire-fighting and medical necessities. An order

issued by G.H.Q. Home Forces on 28th September 1940 recommended provision for Category 'A' Nodal points for up to ten days of food and water for the civil population and a higher scale of firefighting and protection than that provided for other areas.

The garrison of the Maidstone Nodal Point was reported to be comprised of: 'A' Company 28th (S.R.) Bn. Kent Home Guard [raised from local workers from the Southern Railway]; 26th (Kent Bus) Bn. Kent Home Guard [raised from workers from the Maidstone & District and other local bus companies]; 11th (Maidstone) Bn. Kent Home Guard and the regular troops of 13 I.T.C., all under the command of the Nodal Point Commander Lt. Col. A.A. Eason of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment.



Men of 28th (S.R.) Home Guard drilling at Maidstone West Station

In September, Lt. Col. Eason was succeeded as 13 I.T.C. and Maidstone Nodal Point Commander by Lt. Col. D.C.G. Dickinson of the Queen's Royal Regiment. Lt. Col. Dickinson had been the commander of Guildford I.T.C. until its amalgamation with Maidstone I.T.C. in August.

On the 3rd September a meeting arranged by the South-Eastern Regional Commissioner, Viscount Monsell of Evesham, was held in Maidstone attended by military and civil representatives to enable Regional Representatives of the various Government Ministries and Departments to get in direct touch with the Local Authority in dealing with the various matters arising from the re-classification of Maidstone as a Class 'A' Nodal Point. Two weeks later the Deputy Regional Commissioner, Mr. Arthur Bottomley, paid a visit to Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. to discuss matters connected with the Maidstone Nodal Point.



Deputy Regional Commissioner Arthur Bottomley

It was around this time that XII Corps H.Q. had become sceptical about the whole concept of Nodal Points and, in a paper issued on the 17th September, had pressed for their abolition in its area which included Maidstone. However, Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. argued strongly for the retention of all its Class 'A' Nodal Points but agreed to the abolition of all Class 'B' with the exception of Tonbridge and Goudhurst recommending both being upgraded to Class 'A'.

On the 13th October, the C-in-C of South-Eastern Command, Lt-Gen Bernard Paget issued his 'Appreciation for the Spring Of 1942' in which he directed the development of selected Nodal Points in his Command into 'fully tank-proof localities'. These were to include the Nodal Points of Maidstone and Tonbridge.

Just a few days later, on the 17th October, information began to be received by M.S.A. H.Q. that Maidstone was to be strengthened into a 'Fortress' with extra hardened defences and an officially designated Garrison

On the 27th October, Lt. Colonel L.D. Bennett of the Gordon Highlanders was attached to Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. pending his appointment as Commander replacing Col. Warner. He took up his appointment on the 1st November and was promoted to full Colonel. Over the following weeks he toured his command visiting both Home Guard and Regular units, inspecting defences and witnessing various training exercises.

The new Commander of XII Corps, Lt. General James Gammel, visited Maidstone on the 6th November when he inspected and approved the proposed inner and outer perimeters of the Fortress. This was followed two days later by a visit to Maidstone by the Brigadier General Staff (B.G.S) and Chief Engineer (C.E.) of XII Corps to consider the work involved in converting the Maidstone Nodal Point into a Fortress (Designation F1). They made a tour of the proposed defences accompanied by Col. Bennett, Commander M.S.A. and Major Fraser, Second-in-Command 13 I.T.C. Following this visit Col. Bennett held meetings with the Maidstone 'Triumvirate' which consisted of representatives of the

army, police and civil authorities who would become responsible for the administration of the Fortress in the event of an invasion. Further meetings were held with the Chief Constable and the Maidstone Borough Surveyor to discuss the civil aspects of the fortress conversion.

On the 1st December, Col. Bennett inspected the proposed perimeters of the Maidstone Fortress with the Chief Engineer of XII Corps, Brigadier B.T. Godfrey Faussett OBE, MC, and Major Stewart the Officer Commanding 260 Field Company, Royal Engineers, the unit who were to undertake the proposed defensive works. These proposals were for an 'Outer Perimeter' consisting of the terraced streets west of Bower Mount road up to Oakwood park, the streets north of Buckland Hill, then following the railway line down to the river. On the east of the river the perimeter was more northerly, extending east before curving down to cross the Sittingbourne and Ashford Roads. To the South the perimeter swung down from the A20 to the river and then down to the streets below Sheal's Crescent, over Loose road, and then around Hastings road in the direction of Mote Park before swinging up to the Ashford road. Within this outer perimeter an inner perimeter or 'Keep' was to be established on the eastern side of the Medway, protecting the bridge across the river. This inner perimeter stretched northwards up to the prison; east to Church Street; across the Ashford Road and then south to Mote Road and then along Knightrider Street back to the river. Strongpoints were to be established in various buildings including the prison, Holy Trinity Church, the former Archbishop's Palace and the Rootes car factory. On the 6th December, Commander XII Corps again visited Maidstone and gave his final approval to the proposed defences.



Archbishop's Palace (War & Peace Collection)

Fortress Maidstone – January 1942 – December 1943

On the 21st January 1942, the War Office Establishment (W.E. V/554/1) was authorised for the Maidstone Garrison with Lt. Col. Dickinson as its Commander and Capt. Gale as Garrison Adjutant, and work on the Fortress defences commenced.

From the 21st January to the 8th February Requisitions were sent out and details of the defence works were given to those chiefly concerned. When work began constant liaison was maintained with the Borough Surveyor, Mr. Hughes, regarding the ownership of the properties and land involved. The defences included an anti-tank ditch which ran along most of the open ground of the outer perimeter. The ditch was dug by the mechanical excavators of 135 Mechanical Equipment Company, Royal Engineers and was augmented by rows of concrete anti-tank obstacles, and barbed wire. Part of the ditch-line ran around the boundary of Maidstone Boys Grammar School and its playing fields. One of the classrooms overlooking the ditch was strengthened to provide a firing position.



1946 aerial view of the Grammar School with some A-T obstacles visible between the A-T ditch and the school building

Weapons pits were dug, and pillboxes built to provide other firing positions along the defence lines.



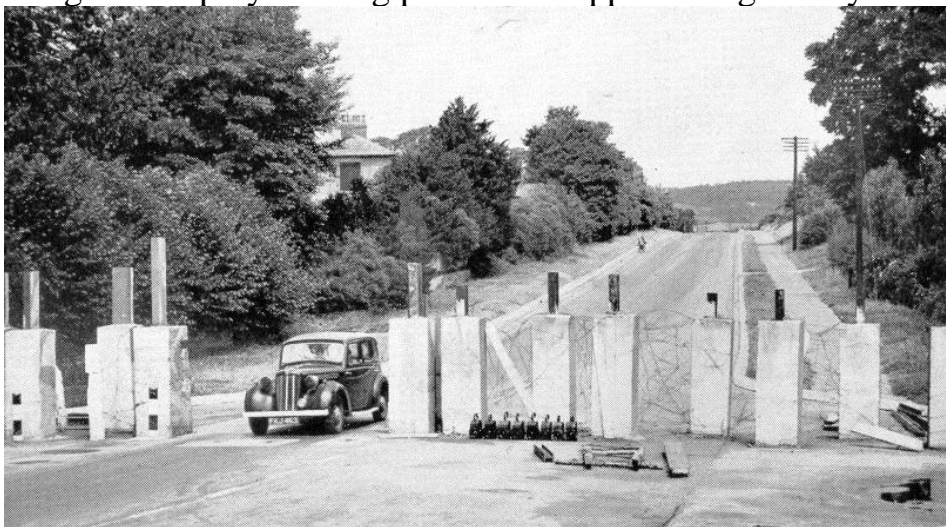
Pillbox at the Style & Winch Brewery in St Peter's Street photographed during its demolition in 1997 (ADS Defence of Britain Database)

Roadblocks were established on the access roads into the Fortress. Some of these blocks consisted of metal rails, usually sections of railway track cut to length, installed into sockets cut into the roadway. The rails could be removed to allow the passage of legitimate traffic. Concrete cylinders were set into the verges flanking the carriageway preventing enemy vehicles by-passing the roadblocks. The roadblocks would be manned by the Home Guard who would check vehicles in and out of the Fortress. The major roads required more substantial roadblocks. These consisted of very large concrete cylinders and cubes with gaps wide enough between them to allow for the passage of cars and trucks, but which would seriously impede large armoured vehicles such as tanks. A number of these large obstacles were installed on Maidstone Bridge which carried the main A20 Tonbridge Road over the River Medway into the town centre.



Roadblock on Maidstone Bridge

Another major roadblock was set up on the northern outer perimeter at the junction of the A229 Chatham Road with Forstal Road. The roadblock was reinforced with a flame fougasse, a type of improvised explosive device designed to spray burning petrol over approaching enemy vehicles.



A229 / Forstal Road junction roadblock

During February, contract work on anti-tank obstacles and pillboxes was held up due to severe frost but the digging of the anti-tank trench, weapons pits and the erection of wire obstacles proceeded normally. The Requisitioning of land, construction of the defence works and visits to all the sectors of the Fortress by the Garrison Adjutant continued throughout March. The spoil on the perimeter

of the anti-tank ditches was levelled and work proceeded on road- blocks and barbed wire obstacles. Interestingly some of this work was now being undertaken by 70 CW (Chemical Warfare) Company, Royal Engineers. The 5th March saw a visit to the Fortress by XII Corps Camouflage Officer, Captain Harold Good. He made a tour of the Fortress defences imparting his advice on aspects of their concealment.



The anti-tank ditch and obstacle line running across Allotment Gardens from the A229 Chatham Road

On the 26th March 1942 the Commander of XII Corps, Lieutenant-General Gammell, issued his 'Plan to Defeat Invasion'. Acting under South-Eastern Command, XII Corps were responsible for defeating any invasion attempt in Kent. A previous plan had been issued in 1941 but that had concentrated on defeating enemy forces on the invasion beaches or failing that holding them off at the Nodal Points of Dover, Folkestone on the coast and no further inland than the Nodal Points at Canterbury and Ashford. The garrisons of these Nodal Points were to hold out until XII Corps reserve division troops could manoeuvre into position to engage and destroy the enemy forces.



Lt. Gen. James Harcourt Gammell, G.O.C. XII Corps

The 1942 Plan upgraded these four strategic Nodal Points to ‘Fortresses’ and added those at Maidstone and Tonbridge thus envisaging halting the German advance further inland. The main invasion battle would be fought in the coastal belt by the two forward Divisions of XII Corps with one Independent Infantry Brigade from each holding the Dover and Folkestone fortresses. Maidstone Sub-Area HQ would assume responsibility that part of XII Corps area to the rear of the forward divisions. Of the Corps Reserve Division forces: one Infantry Brigade Group would be located north of Canterbury. The remainder of the Division would be concentrated in areas to the west and south of Canterbury. However, two Reserve Division infantry battalions would be held back and allocated, one each, to assist in the defence of West Malling and Detling aerodromes. The Home Guard would play a vital part in the plan by defending its towns and villages, thereby restricting enemy movements; providing observation posts and scouting parties to report on enemy air landings and troop movements; and by providing the Regular Army with local guides and information. Pools of guides would be maintained at every village Post Office.

The whole battle would be directed from XII Corps H.Q. at Broadwater Down, near Tunbridge Wells with a mobile Advance H.Q. based at Harrietsham. Gammell ordered all his commanders to prepare their own plans in accordance with his orders and that these plans were not to be referred to as ‘Defence Schemes’ so as not to ‘induce a defensive mentality. Instead, he directed, they should be called ‘Plans to Defeat Invasion’.

Just one day later, on the 27th March, XII Corps Chief Engineer, Brigadier Bryan Godfrey-Faussett, issued 'Engineer Operation Instruction No.3' which was to be read in conjunction with Gammell's plan. The Instruction concerned the implementation of essential road repairs in the XII Corps area during active operations. In it the Chief Engineer stated that the maintenance and repair of roads and bridges during operations would be the combined responsibility of the Civil and Military authorities. The civil authorities were represented by the County Surveyor, Mr. F.W. Greig who was based at County Hall in Maidstone. He would exercise control of repairs through his team of County Divisional Surveyors with their local civil road gangs. Each road gang would have its own transport and hand tools and possibly a road roller. Military units would provide most heavy mechanical equipment where required. In theory, the civil authorities would carry out minor repairs whilst more extensive work would require the assistance of the military. In practice, close liaison would be maintained between the County Surveyor and the local R.E. commanders so that any repairs of essential routes that could not be undertaken quickly by the civilian workers, could be tackled at once by military units.

To assist with more extensive repairs, mechanical angle dozers would be supplied by South-Eastern Command, one of which together with two dumper trucks was allocated to 263 Field Coy, Royal Engineers, based at Maidstone's Mote Park where there was also a R.E. 'Dump' containing tools, road materials and other stores.



Royal Engineers angle dozer at work © IWM (B 6177)

One Pioneer Corps Salvage Team, comprising one Officer and 41 Other Ranks, was assigned to the Maidstone Fortress to come under command of the Garrison Commander. Their primary task was to keep the routes through the town clear for traffic. During operations military requirements would have priority over all others.

Paragraph 10 of the Instructions dealt with the repair to services in roads damaged by enemy action. Where the rapid repair of roads was deemed essential, and no alternative route was available, no attempt would be made to repair services. However, local R.E. commanders would obtain maps of the services from the civil authorities together with stop-cock keys to turn off gas and water mains where necessary. The maintenance and rapid repair of buried telephone cables during operations was deemed 'of great importance'. Their repair would be undertaken by either Post Office engineers or Royal Signals personnel only. During any essential road repairs care was to be taken not to bury any broken ends of telephone cables leaving them to be repaired and buried by the Royal Signals or Post Office teams later.

Early April saw the removal of the 44th Division from XII Corps so they could prepare for service overseas. They were replaced by the 53rd (Welsh) Division who moved into Mote Park on the 23rd April. Their R.E. contingent proceeded to undertake the duties of their 44th Division predecessors which included the defence works for the Maidstone Fortress. Meanwhile, the command of the Garrison troops was reviewed by XII Corps HQ with the decision taken that the Commander of 13 I.T.C., Lt. Col. Dickinson would not be given command of the Garrison until the order to STAND TO had been issued. Until then command of the Fortress and the preparation of its defences would remain with the Commander of Maidstone Sub-Area, Col. Bennett. Following this decision Col. Bennett, held meetings with Borough Council officials and the Home Guard to discuss the Fortress defences

A new Garrison Adjutant was appointed on the 7th April with 2nd Lieutenant D.M. Backhouse replacing Captain Gale. One of his first duties was to meet with the local authority's Medical Officer of Health (M.O.H.), Dr. Gaffikim, to discuss the setting-up of Civil Aid Posts. The M.O.H. was responsible for Casualty Services (CS) which included all the various medical services such as Casualty Receiving Hospitals (for serious injuries), permanent First Aid Posts (FAP - for lightly wounded), First Aid Points (to alleviate pressure on hospitals), Ambulances, Mobile Units (MU - to assist at major incidents), Gas Cleansing Stations (to deal with injuries from chemical and poison weapons) and Mortuaries (both existing and temporary).

The new Garrison Adjutant was a busy man throughout April. On the 11th he made a survey of all the craft on the River Medway between East Farleigh and Allington Locks; on the 13th he met with the ARP Controller, Colonel Campbell, at County Hall; on the 16th he had a meeting with the Borough

Surveyor to discuss drainage arrangements in the Fortress 'Keep' area; on the 18th he made a complete tour of the Fortress defences; on the 25th he had a meeting at Maidstone Borough Police Station to discuss a forthcoming police exercise in the Fortress area; on the 27th he attended a meeting at Maidstone Waterworks and on the 30th he held a meeting with the Garrison Medical Officer, Captain Severn, to discuss medical arrangements within the Fortress. In addition to these duties, the Garrison Adjutant also kept in close liaison with the C.O. of 13 I.T.C., providing him with weekly reports to keep him updated on the progress of the Fortress defence plans.



Maidstone Police Special Constables on parade in 1941 (War & Peace Collection)

On the 8th April, The South-Eastern Regional Commissioner, Viscount Monsell, issued his 'Direction No.56' which, for the first time included the Borough of Maidstone as one of the districts subjected to a 'Visitor Ban'. Issued under Regulation 16a of the Defence (General) Regulations 1939, it directed that no person who 'is not normally resident' in the area shall not enter or, having entered it, remain there. To qualify as a 'Resident' a person must have been living in the area for at least six months between the 1st January 1939 and 14th November 1941. Anyone who had taken up residence after 14th November 1941 was not allowed to remain. Exceptions were made for business and employment purposes, some leasehold tenants, people who had been evacuated to the area to live with their family or friends who qualified as residents, patients in convalescent homes and TB patients in sanatoriums.

Also, on the 8th April, Maidstone Sub-Area HQ moved from Preston Hall Farm at Aylesford to its new home at 3/4 Bower Terrace, Maidstone which was within the outer perimeter of the Fortress.



3/4 Bower Place 2019 (known as Bower Terrace in 1942)

From here, on the 13th April, it issued its own 'Plan to Defeat Invasion'. Spread over seventy-three pages divided into twenty-six sections, this extensive document covers subjects such as troop dispositions, aerodrome defence, road blocks, defence works, demolitions, minefields, communications, co-operation with the civil authorities and the immobilisation of: railways, factories, fuel stocks, river craft and telephone exchanges.

The first section of the plan covered general anti-invasion principles concluding with the following points regarding the conduct of any battle:

- The role of all tps [troops] in M.S.A. [Maidstone Sub-Area] is the offensive defence. All ranks must be imbued with the offensive spirit and training to regard the defence as:-
- a) A means for inflicting heavy losses upon the enemy in his first rush
 - b) A means of denying to the enemy avenues of approach through which he must NOT pass
 - c) As pivots round which reserves can manoeuvre to exploit enemy failures and temporary dis-organisation

The underlying principle will be that every German who sets foot in M.S.A. will be destroyed.

There will be NO WITHDRAWAL AND NO SURRENDER

In Section III of the plan, which dealt with 'Dispositions', Fortresses are described as: ... well held strongholds at important strategic points on which Field Force units can pivot. These Fortresses are manned by Regular and H.G. [Home Guard] units. (The strength of the Maidstone Home Guard battalion at this time was reported as being 2,231 men)

This section also dealt with the operation of Triumvirates:

In all Fortresses and Nodal Points when the threat of invasion approaches the town or village, the affairs will be directed by a Triumvirate composed of the Military Comd, the Civil Head and the Police Authority.

This Triumvirate has complete authority for commandeering premises or services as the situation requires.

This authority will, if necessary, be enforced by the military power.

The military authority in each Fortress or Nodal Point will be the Fortress or Nodal Point Comd.

The Triumvirate should meet from time to time to ensure that all arrangements are completed up to date for the essential services such as feeding, water supply, fuel, light, sanitation and A.R.P. services.

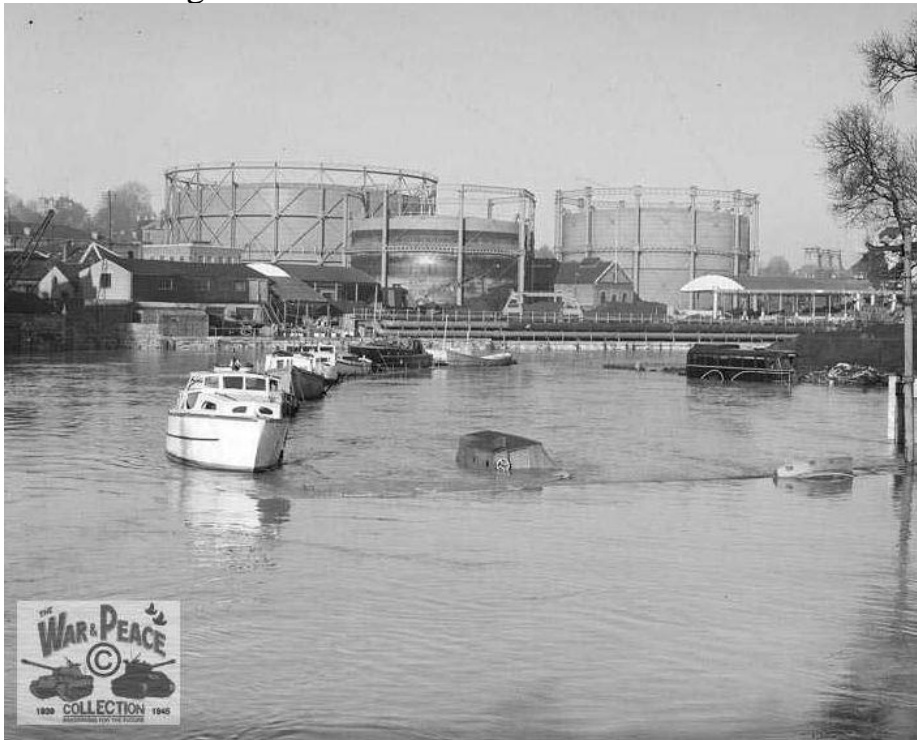
Section IV identified a number of 'Vulnerable Points' (VP's) within the town. These were buildings considered to be '... essential to the National War Effort'. These included the River Bridge, the Southern Electric Building, the Corporation Electric Works, the Gas Works and the Tilling Stevens engineering factories. The buildings were to be protected by the police or Home Guard from the threat of sabotage, land or airborne attack.



The Tilling Stevens factory (Note the wartime camouflage paintwork)

Section VII (Immobilisation of Oil and Petrol) included instructions for denying the stocks of gas oil at Maidstone Gasworks to the enemy. Stocks stored above ground were to be burned in their tanks whilst those in underground tanks were to be destroyed with explosives by Royal Engineers from the Maidstone Garrison. The Garrison's engineers were also to be

responsible for destroying fuel stocks of the Kent Rivers Catchment Board at College Wharf but only when the officer responsible considered that the plant could no longer serve the civilian population or when it had ceased to operate due to damage.



The River Medway in flood with Maidstone Gasworks in the background (War & Peace Collection)

Section VIII dealt with the ‘Immobilisation of Factories’. Where there was an imminent danger of capture by the enemy, ‘essential’ factories were to be immobilised by the removal or concealment of vital parts of the machinery. The main object of this policy was to prevent the destruction of these vital parts by the enemy so that when the factory was recaptured it could rapidly return to normal production. Denial of the use of the factory to the enemy was deemed only a secondary objective. The factories within the Maidstone Fortress area covered by this section included Springfield Mill, Turkey Mill, Rootes Engineering Works and the Tilling Stevens Engineering Works.



Springfield Mill



Rootes Engineering Works

Section XI detailed the action to be taken against enemy parachutists and airborne troops. If the enemy were to land in the daytime, then they should be located and destroyed before they had time to become an organised force. If they landed at night they should be located, contained and then destroyed at first light. To assist in locating the enemy Observation Posts (OP's) would be manned as soon as 'ACTION STATIONS' was signalled. There were several OP's sited in the Maidstone area including those at Leeds Castle, Bearsted Golf Club, Linton Hill, Sutton Valence, Chart Sutton and Headcorn. In addition to

these OP's all Royal Observer Corps (R.O.C.) posts in the area would also report any enemy landings. The primary role of the R.O.C. was the visual detection, identification, tracking and reporting of enemy aircraft. They had observation posts in Lenham, Headcorn and Bearsted.

Section XIII concerned roadblocks. These were divided into two 'Types': Primary and Secondary. Primary roadblocks consisted of concrete cylinders, rolled steel joists (RSJs) and sockets (into which the RSJs would be inserted) and would be sited as part of the defences of Fortresses, Nodal Points and some defended localities. Secondary roadblocks consisted of concrete cylinders or buoys only and would be sited in less important defended localities and as part of village defences. Each roadblock would be manned by not less than one N.C.O and four men. On the signalling of 'ACTION STATIONS' all roadblocks would be permanently manned.

Section XIV gave some brief instructions on the maintenance of defence works, wire fencing, weapon slits and flame fougasse installations. Of the latter, at least two were installed in the Maidstone Borough area: one at the junction of Forstal Road and the A229 at Sandling and another on the Loose Road. These flame 'traps' would have consisted of a barrel of fuel attached to an explosive device and would have been detonated to destroy approaching enemy vehicles.

Section XIX concerned the re-deployment of anti-aircraft guns in the event of an invasion. This re-deployment was known as the *ATTIC* Scheme and would take about ten days to complete. The scheme involved the movement of 4 x 3.7-inch mobile AA guns and 4 light anti-aircraft (LAA) guns to Detling Airfield and 16 x 3.7-inch mobile AA guns distributed to four sites around the outskirts of Maidstone at Boxley, Shepway, Thurnham and East Barming. Although all the guns would remain under the Army's AA Command it was considered that they would have a secondary role – that of ground defence, in which the guns could be used in direct-fire role against targets on the ground such as enemy tanks and armoured vehicles.

Section XXII set out the forces allocated to each sector in the Maidstone Sub-Area. Maidstone Fortress itself would be defended by 'C' Company of the G.P.O [Post Office] Home Guard Battalion, 'A' Company, 29 (1st Southern Railways) KHG, the 26th (Bus) Battalion, KHG, the 11th (Maidstone) Battalion, KHG and regular troops from 13 I.T.C.

The outlying defended villages, defended localities and Nodal Points to the south of the town would be defended by the 29th (Mid-Kent) Battalion, KHG

Section XXIII of the Plan set out the procedure for the 'Ringling of Church Bells' as a warning in the event of airborne invasion:

1. Bells will only be rung in the case of landings by air-borne tps (including parachutists) in the neighbourhood of the Church in which the bells are rung.
2. The order to ring Church bells will only be given on receipt of reliable first hand inf of such landings.

3. The warning will not be passed on by ringing other Church bells nor are they to be rung merely because bells in an adjoining parish are heard
4. Bells will only be rung on the order of a commissioned Officer of H.M. Forces, including H.G., or a chief officer of Police. If the H.G. Officer normally giving the order is not available, he may direct his senior N.C.O. whose name will be specified in writing.
5. Local arrangements will be made to ensure that written instructions are in possession of those who ring the bells, so that they may understand at all times from whom they will receive the order.

Section XXV, 'Co-operation with the Civil Authorities', emphasised the need to formulate plans with the authorities to ensure that military operations would not be hampered if civil administration were to break down. Once military operations had commenced all control by central Government would become impossible within the 'battle area' and so the implementation of the plans would become a matter for the military and local authorities. It was therefore important that the closest liaison be maintained with the local civil authorities. The main body responsible for Civil Defence administration in Kent was No.12 South Eastern Region with its H.Q. at Bredbury House in Tunbridge Wells under the direction of the Regional Commissioner, Viscount Monsell. The duty of the Regional Commissioner was to act for the Government in the event of communications being cut. The Regional H.Q. contained branches of all the main Government Departments and were responsible for Air Raid Precautions (ARP) within the Region. Below Regional level civil administration was carried by means of the local authorities.



Bredbury House, Tunbridge Wells - No.12 Region H.Q.

During active military operations direct liaison would be maintained with the civil authorities responsible for the area or locality most closely corresponding with the military unit's or formation's operational locality or boundary. Thus, Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. would liaise with South Eastern Regional H.Q. below

county level on ARP Control, the Police, the National Fire Service and the Ministries of Transport and Food whilst Maidstone Fortress Garrison would liaise with its local Triumvirate on these matters.

The final section of the M.S.A Plan, Section XXVI, dealt with 'Home Guard Duties':

1. MUSTERING

The H.G. will only be mustered on orders of the Army Comd.

On "STAND TO" such members of the H.G. as is considered necessary will be called out.

On "ACTION STATIONS", all members of the H.G. will be called out.

2. The following will be carried out by the H.G.:-

"STAND TO"

- (a) All telephones are manned day and night.
- (b) Defences where H.G. have been mustered, 30% by day, 100% by night.
- (c) Make all final preparations for mustering if not already done, and check up all plans to defeat invasion.

"ACTION STATIONS"

- (a) Defences will be manned day and night.
- (b) Rd blocks permanently manned.
- (c) Rail-block manning parties at one hrs notice.
- (d) Not less than two guides per locality report to Post Offices.
- (e) One Lieut. liaison per Bn will report to M.S.A. H.Q.
- (f) O.Ps are manned.
- (g) V.Ps are manned.
- (h) All defences not completed are duly camouflaged and wired where possible.

Work on the Fortress defences continued throughout May. More ground was requisitioned for the siting and construction of concrete anti-tank 'Cubes', infantry defence positions, wire obstacles and spigot mortar emplacements. By the end of the month XII Corps Chief Engineer, Brigadier Bryan Godfrey-Faussett, was able to report work on the defences to be '95% complete'.

With the Maidstone Fortress defence works almost complete, the month of June saw the publication of its draft 'Garrison Defence Plan No.1' (so named contrary to Lt. Gen Gammel's instructions!). The plan superseded all previous plans and instructions related to Maidstone Nodal Point. It assumed that an enemy invasion by sea and air was 'likely' with its probable objectives being an advance on London through Maidstone and the seizure of neighbouring aerodromes.

The Defence Plan was based on three 'States of Readiness' which would determine various actions to be taken:

NORMAL: State of Readiness which exists when invasion is considered unlikely, but raids are to be expected.

‘STAND TO’: Ordered where conditions are particularly favourable for invasion. It is a complete state of readiness for all Regular troops and such H.G. as the Army Command may decide.

‘ACTION STATIONS’: Ordered when there is an immediate threat of invasion. A complete state of readiness with the Home Guard mustered.

All messages ordering or cancelling any of these states of readiness were to be checked back before action was taken on any of them.

On ‘STAND TO’, all Regular troops would be at thirty minute’s notice and all members of the Home Guard that were deemed necessary would be called out. All Headquarters would be manned with a 24-hour watch maintained on all their telephones. All road-blocks on the Outer Perimeter would be ‘garrisoned’ by parties of, not less than, one N.C.O. and six Other Ranks, and all Cylinders [movable, cylindrical, concrete obstacles] in the Spurs would be placed into position. Spigot mortars and their ammunition would be moved into position with guards placed on them day and night. Sector Commanders would draw any extra weapons they required from the Garrison Armoury. They would also establish ammunition dumps and become responsible for the defence of all previously identified ‘Vulnerable Points’ (V.P.s) in their respective Sectors. All secret documents and letters would be collected by Company Commanders and delivered to the Orderly Room in the case of 13 I.T.C. or their Battalion H.Q. in the case of the Home Guard. Additional tasks to be carried out included the clearing of fields of fire, establishing barbed-wire obstacles and camouflaging positions. Finally, all Sector Commanders and the Commander of the Reserve would review all their arrangements in preparation for ‘ACTION STATIONS’.

On ‘ACTION STATIONS’: all defended positions were to be manned day and night; all members of the Home Guard not already mustered would be mustered; the Invicta Lines and Sandling Road Barracks would be evacuated by 13 I.T.C; road-blocks would not to be set in position unless ordered by Fortress H.Q.. or in the face of the enemy; military and civilian ‘stragglers’ would be collected at road-blocks and their identity established. They would then be distributed according to instructions received from the Garrison Commander; rail-block manning parties would be at one-hours’ notice

The troops available for the defence of Maidstone Fortress were:

No.13 I.T.C. [RWK Infantry Training Centre]

11th (Maidstone) Bn K.H.G [Maidstone Home Guard]

‘C’ Company 25th (P.O.) Bn K.H.G. [Post Office Home Guard]

‘A’ Company 28th (S.R.) Bn K.H.G. [Southern Railway Home Guard]

In addition, the following troops were to come under Garrison command on receipt of the signal to 'STAND TO':

Area Salvage Officer and No.4 Salvage Unit, Pioneer Corps

R.E. Demolition Party from C.R.E. [Commander Royal Engineers] XII Corps

Troops who were based in Mote Park

'A' Company, 224 Field Ambulance R.A.M.C.

Two sections No.20 Bomb Disposal Unit R.E. (when not required by the Regional Commissioner)

D.C.R.E. [Deputy Commander Royal Engineers] Maidstone and his Staff

In support of the above would be the sixteen mobile 3.7-inch heavy anti-aircraft guns and their crews as allocated to Maidstone under the *ATTIC* Scheme. These guns could also be used in ground defence.

The stated intention of the Defence Plan was to hold Maidstone Fortress and Allington Lock 'to the last man and the last round'.

The defence of Maidstone Fortress was organised into six Sectors and a 'Keep' as follows:

No.1 Sector with its right boundary from the Junction of Curzon Road and Park Avenue; along the east side of Wheeler Street to a point where it meets Union Street. Its left boundary ran from a point where the Outer Perimeter meets the River Medway at Springfield; along the towpath on the east side of the river to a point where St Faith's Street meets the Medway at Riverside Brewery. This Sector was to be defended by the six platoons of 'A' & 'D' Coys 11th (Maidstone) Bn K.H.G. The Sector H.Q. would be at Kreemy Hall in Brewer Street.

No.2 Sector had its right boundary where the Outer Perimeter crossed the River Len; along the river to the junction of Padsle Lane with Water Lane. The left boundary adjoined No.1 Sector's right boundary. This Sector would be defended by the seven platoons of 'C' Coy 13 I.T.C. The Sector H.Q. would be at Virginia House in Vinters Road.

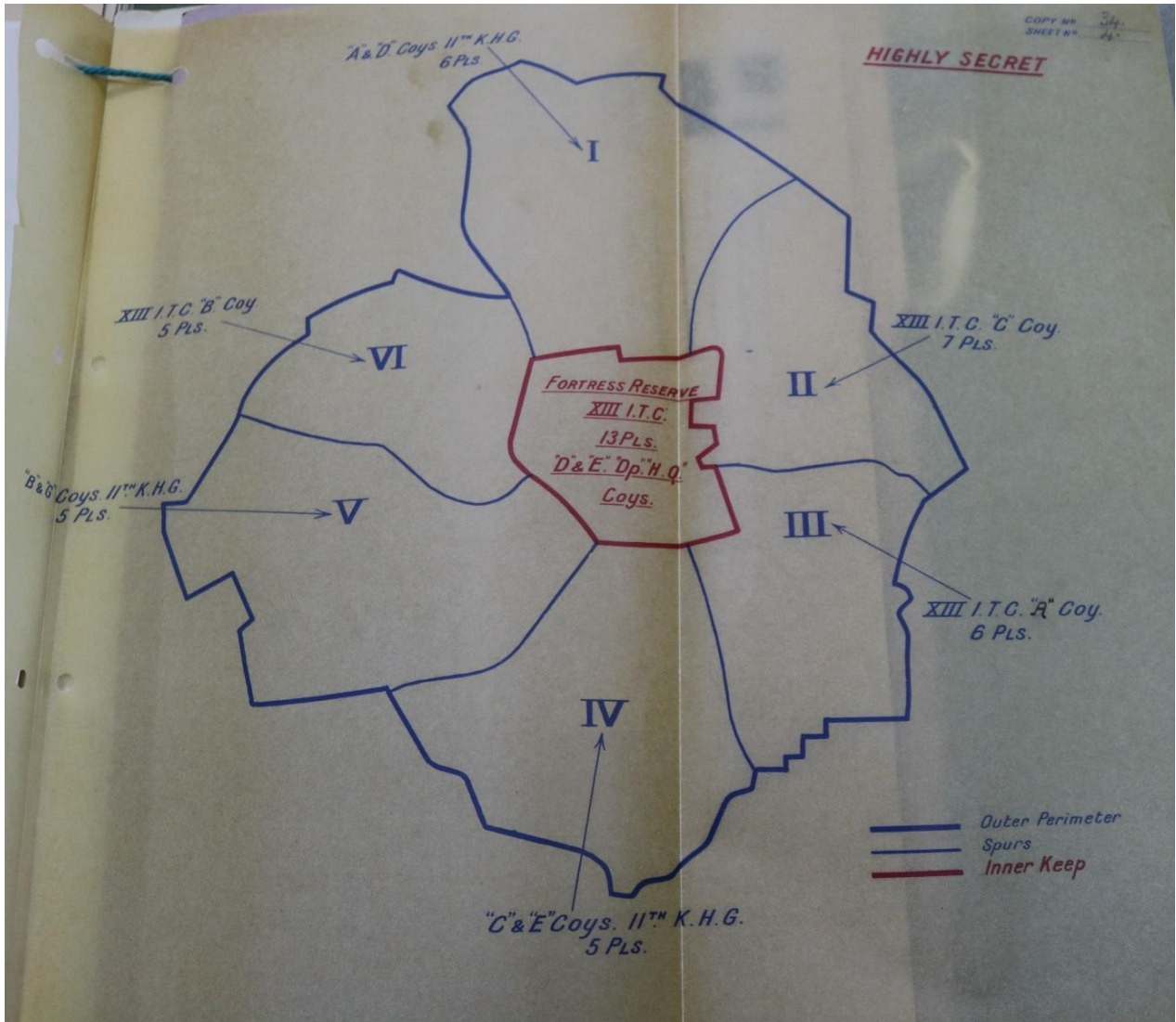
No.3 Sector right boundary ran from where the Outer Perimeter met the Loose Road; along the east side of Loose Road and Upper Stone Street to the point where Upper Stone Street meets Mote Road at Wrens Cross. The left boundary adjoined No.2 Sector's right boundary. This Sector would be defended by the six platoons of 'A' Coy 13 I.T.C. The Sector H.Q. would be at 92, Hastings Road.

No.4 Sector right boundary ran from where the point the Outer Perimeter met the east side of the River Medway at Tovil; along the river to the old Archbishop's Palace. The left boundary adjoined No.3 Sector's right boundary. This Sector would be defended by the five platoons of 'C' & 'E' Coys 11th (Maidstone) Bn K.H.G. The Sector H.Q. would be at the rear of 76/78 College Road.

No.5 Sector right boundary ran from the point where Scrubbs Lane met the Outer Perimeter at Oakwood Park; along Scrubbs Lane to its junction with London Road; along the east side of London Road to Rocky Hill and on to the Broadway; on to the river bridge leading to the High Street. Its left boundary adjoined No.4 Sector's right boundary. This Sector was to be defended by the five platoons of 'B' & 'G' Coys 11th (Maidstone) Bn K.H.G. The Sector H.Q. would be at Alexandra Hall, Tonbridge Road.

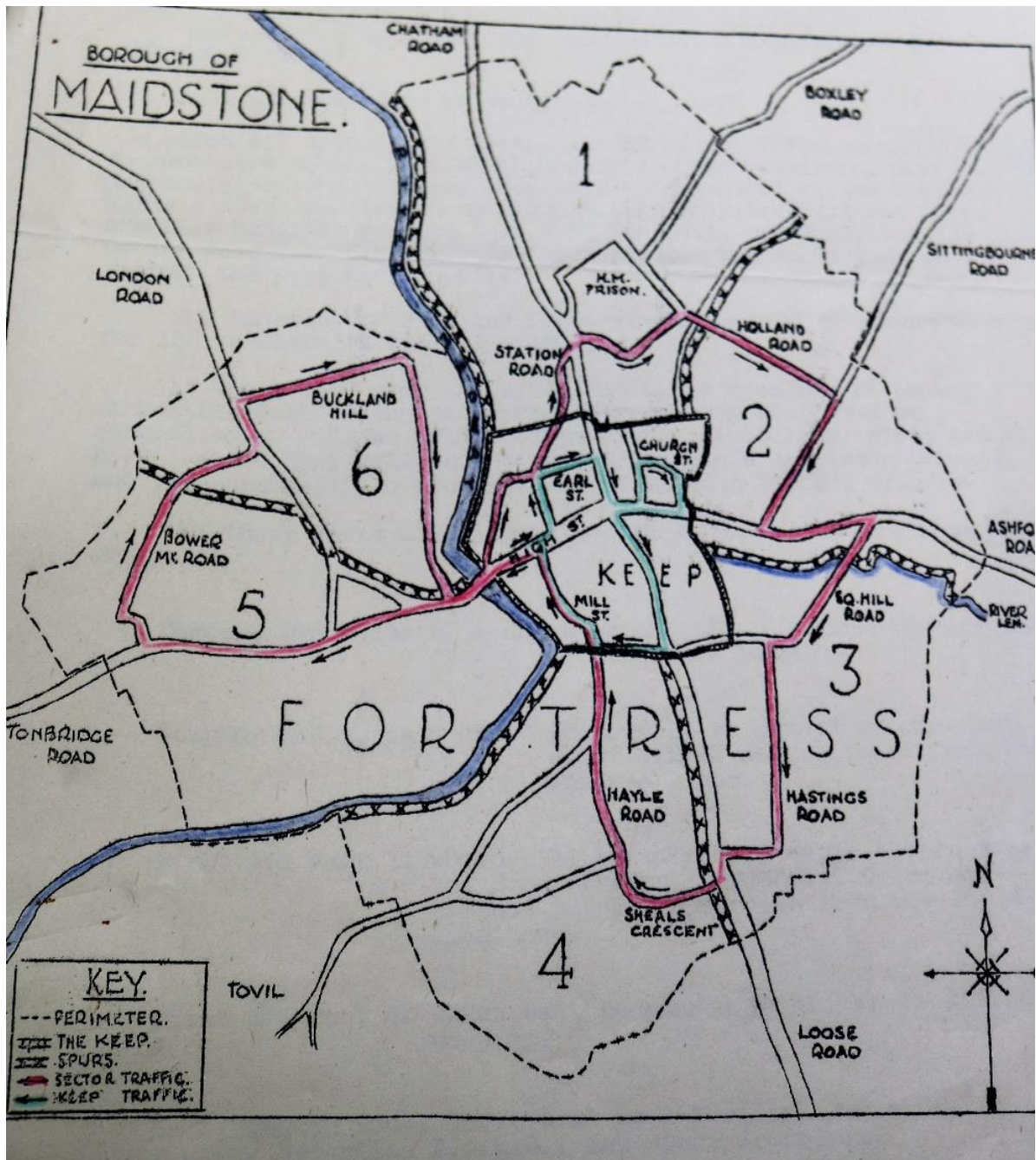
No.6 Sector right boundary ran from the point where the Outer Perimeter met the London to Maidstone Southern Railway line; along the railway embankment to the point where the high-level railway bridge crosses the River Medway. Its left boundary adjoined No.5 Sector's right boundary. This Sector would be defended by the five platoons of 'B' Coy 13 I.T.C. The Sector H.Q. would be at 53, Buckland Road.

The 'Keep' boundaries ran from the junction of Week Street with Union Street; along the south side of Union Street to its junction with Wyatt Street; right, along Wyatt Street to its junction with Marsham Street; right, along Marsham Street to Church Street; left, along Church Street to King Street; left, along King Street to Padssole Lane; right, along Padssole Lane to Water Lane; left, along Water Lane back onto Padssole Lane; along Padssole Lane to Mote Road; right, along Mote Road to its junction with Stone Street; over the road to Knightrider Street; along Knightrider Street to College Road then through the Refectory Gardens to the River Medway; along the east bank of the river to the junction of Waterside with St Faith's Street; right, along St Faith's Street to the Museum; across the road to the Almshouses then turn left along St Faith's Street to its junction with Week Street; right, along Week Street to its junction with Union Street. The 'Keep' would hold the Fortress Reserve consisting of thirteen platoons from 'D' & 'E' Depot and H.Q Coys 13 I.T.C. (less M.T. drivers and personnel required for Signals Operations) The Fortress Reserve H.Q. would be at the old Archbishop's Palace. The Reserve would primarily be involved in the role of counter-attack.



Fortress Sectors & Keep

As soon as the Outer Perimeter of the Fortress was closed all movement in and out would come under the control of the military and police. Within the Fortress traffic movement between Sector to Sector and from Sector to the 'Keep' would be via a 'one-way' traffic scheme so as to avoid congestion and confusion.



The Fortress traffic scheme

Allington Lock on the River Medway was considered vital to the defence of the Fortress. In order that the river continued to provide an effective anti-tank obstacle to those Fortress Sectors through which it ran, it was essential that the sluice gates at the lock were held 'at all costs'.



The sluice gates at Allington Lock

Defence of the lock was to be provided by 'F' Coy. 11th (Maidstone) Bn K.H.G. An H.Q. would be established at the Lock Keeper's House and Lockwood House.

The Garrison was also responsible for providing protection, in the form of one platoon from 11th (Maidstone) Bn K.H.G, to the Police H.Q. at Wren's Cross.



Maidstone Police H.Q. at Wren's Cross

Another Garrison commitment detailed in the Plan was to provide a mobile column from the Fortress Reserve for the defence of the three top secret 'Y' wireless intercept stations at Sutton Valence. The 'Y' stations were an important link in the chain which led to the Government Code and Cipher School at

Bletchley Park where German military wireless transmissions were de-coded. The 'Y' Stations at Sutton Valence were Direction Finding (D/F) Station, tasked with taking bearings on German wireless transmissions so that the locations of the transmitters could be plotted. They were manned by personnel from the Army, RAF and Royal Marines, each service responsible for its own station. There was also a 'twin' Army station at nearby Chart Sutton which would act as a 'back-up' or reserve to the Army station at Sutton Valence. They were cryptically referred to in official correspondence as AMES (Air Ministry Experimental Stations).

The mobile column, consisting of one Officer and 28 Other Ranks transported in four 15 cwt trucks, plus two armoured cars with their crews and a motor-cycle despatch rider, would be employed on the orders of Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. in the event of a threat to the security of the 'Y' Stations. The six drivers detailed to the column were ordered to ensure that were familiar with the route to Sutton Valence and other roads in the area by day and by night. When not required in this role, the mobile column would form part of the Garrison Reserve.

On receipt of the signal to 'STAND TO' command of the Fortress would be transferred from M.S.A. H.Q. to the C.O. of 13 I.T.C. Lt. Col. Dickinson, with his H.Q. established in the Sandling Road Barracks. On receipt of the signal 'ACTION STATIONS' Dickinson would move his H.Q. to the basement of the General Accident Assurance Company building in Bank Street, and it would be from here that he would conduct the battle for Maidstone.



The former General Accident Assurance Company building in Bank Street

The Garrison Defence Plan set out detailed instructions for procedures to be undertaken following an enemy invasion., particularly as regards the distribution of ammunition, weapons, rations and stores. The '1st Line' supply of ammunition would be held with troops in their forward positions while their '2nd Line' would be held in their Sector Reserve. A '3rd Line' plus a further

estimated 14-days' supply was to be held with the Fortress Reserve in the Old Palace Gardens.

On 'STAND TO' the Quartermaster of 13 I.T.C., in conjunction with the Quartermaster of 11th (Maidstone) Bn K.H.G, would arrange for the transfer of the necessary weapons and ammunition passing between the two units.

Transport to be handled by 13 I.T.C.

13 I.T.C.'s Sector Commanders and the Commander of the Fortress Reserve would collect from the Invicta Lines sufficient rations to sustain them for 48 hours. These rations would be held in reserve in their respective Sector stores. At the same time, they would collect their petrol cookers and cooking utensils for use in the field. On 'ACTION STATIONS' Messing Officer 13 I.T.C. would detail cooks to each I.T.C. Sector H.Q. The Messing Officer would also transfer the remaining five day's rations reserve from the Invicta Lines to the 'Keep'.

Meanwhile, all Home Guard members on 'STAND TO' would continue to feed themselves at their own homes for as long as their duties permitted. Those that could not be fed from home would be fed from Home Guard Catering Establishments. Home Guard Sector Commanders would collect their emergency 48-hour reserve ration packs from their Battalion H.Q. and distribute them to their respective Sectors. On 'ACTION STATIONS' the Home Guard would continue to be fed from the Home Guard Catering Establishments. The 48-hour ration packs would be distributed on to Company Areas but would not be consumed until authorised by the Garrison Commander.

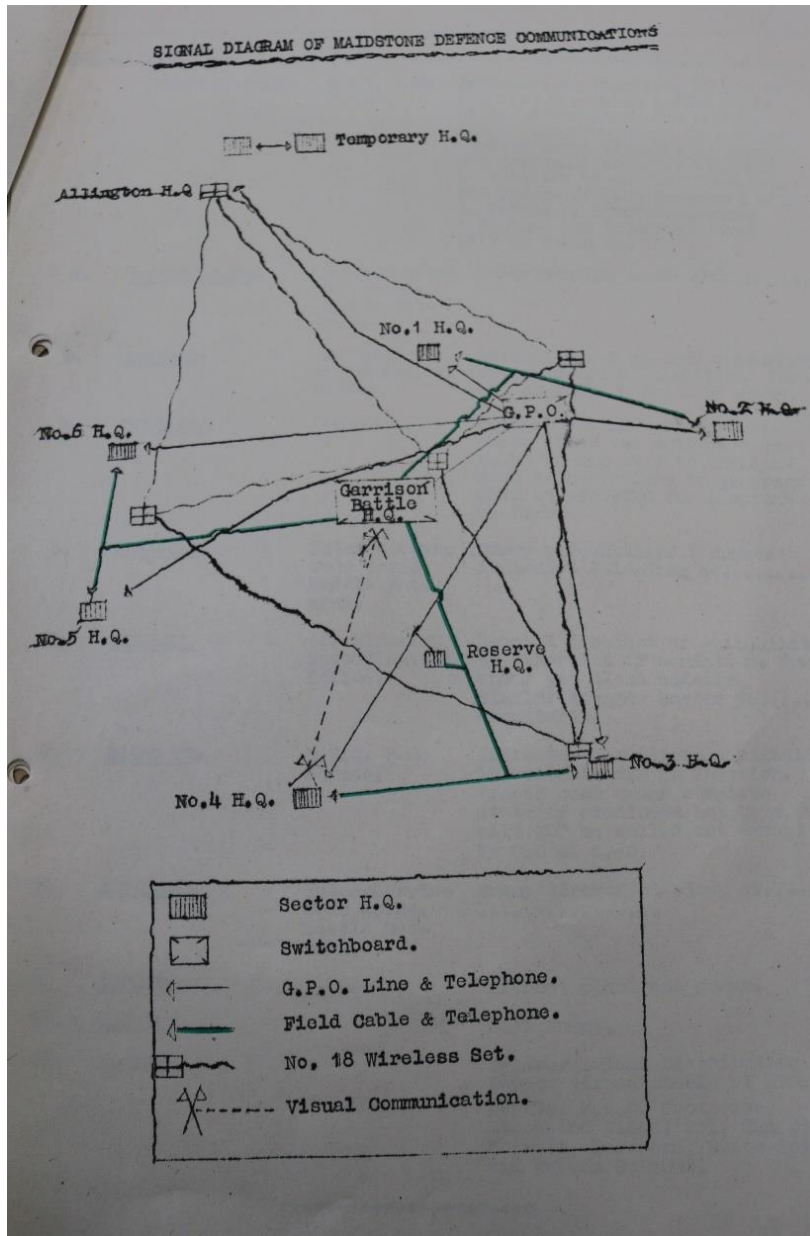
On 'ACTION STATIONS', the Quartermaster 13 I.T.C. would arrange to move all essential stores from the Invicta Lines to the Sandling Road Barracks site. The Q.M., in conjunction with the Officer Commanding Reserve would then arrange for a rear-party to remain at the Invicta Lines. The Q.M. would also arrange with P.A.D. Officer [Passive Air Defence Officer] 13 I.T.C. for anti-gas and reserve clothing to be available in store at the Old Palace.

Effective communication would be of the utmost importance. 13 I.T.C. would establish signals communications between the Fortress H.Q. and all Sector H.Q.s as well as with the Reserve H.Q., Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. and Lockwood House at Allington Lock. Liaison Officers from 13 I.T.C. would be detailed to Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. and to the Civil Defence Services H.Q. at Palace Avenue. 11th (Maidstone) Bn K.H.G. would detail Liaison Officers to Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. and Maidstone Garrison H.Q.

The primary means of communications would be by the G.P.O. telephone network. Should this network be disrupted through enemy action then there was an alternative telephone circuit in place using field cable operating to a 6-line switchboard at Garrison H.Q. In addition, a 'Wireless Net' had been set-up with its Control Centre at the Fortress Battle H.Q. in Bank Street. This 'Net' could serve all the Sector H.Q.s with the exception of No.4 Sector which would have to rely on 'visual telegraph' communications operating between a station on the

roof of the Sector H.Q. at 76/78 College Road and one on the roof of 71a Bank Street, near the Fortress Battle H.Q.

If all the above means of communication were to fail, then 'Runners' would be used and a Runners' Depot set-up in the alleyway between the High Street and Bank Street.



Fortress communications 'Net'

Other points dealt with under the Garrison Plan included the immobilisation of oil & petrol stocks, the immobilisation of factories and the defence of 'Vulnerable Points' (V.P.s). These points had already been well covered in Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q.'s 'Plan to Defeat Invasion' but were re-affirmed in the Garrison Defence Plan with some modifications:

- a) Immobilisation of oil and petrol: The Commander Maidstone Fortress was responsible for ordering the denial to the enemy of petrol pumps, road tankers and the gas oil stocks at Maidstone Gasworks. Commander Maidstone Sub-Area was to retain responsibility for all other diesel and gas oil stocks, white spirit and distillate stocks, benzole stocks and any fuel stocks at the Kent Rivers Catchment Board.
- b) Immobilisation of factories: On 'ACTION STATIONS' the following factories would be notified and then immobilised by the removal or concealment of vital parts of their machinery: Lower Tovil Mills, Springfield Mills, Medway Mill, Hayle Mill, Turkey Mill, Bridge Mills, Tovil Mills, Rootes Len Engineering Works, Tilling Stevens Romney Works and Tilling Stevens Victoria Works.



Bridge Mill, Tovil

- c) Vulnerable Sites: As in the M.S.A. H.Q. Plan, these were defined as being:
 ... an establishment, the destruction of which will materially affect the National War Effort.

The V.P.s Maidstone Garrison had responsibility for were : the three 'AMES' sites at Sutton Valence, Maidstone Post Office, Maidstone River Bridge, Maidstone Southern Electric Bridge, Maidstone Corporation Electricity Works, Maidstone Gas Works, the Rediffusion wireless relay services sites at Cobtree Hall and Mill Street, Tilling Stevens Victoria and Romney Works, Maidstone Waterworks and Rootes Engineering Works.

The Defence Plan considered the immediate reporting of any crashed aircraft to Fortress H.Q. to be of vital importance. The reports were to include information on:

- a) Whether BRITISH, ALLIED, or ENEMY aircraft.
- b) TYPE of aircraft.
- c) LOCATION of aircraft with Map References.
- d) DATE and TIME of crash.
- e) LOCATION of crew.

It was deemed essential that a guard was mounted on any crashed aircraft as soon as possible.

Enemy parachutists and airborne troops were an obvious threat and to be dealt with in accordance with the instructions in the M.S.A H.Q. 'Plan to Defeat Invasion': in the event of enemy daylight landings, they were to be located and destroyed quickly, before they had time to become an organized force; at night they should be located, contained and destroyed at first light.

To assist in locating the enemy generally, Observation Posts [O.P.s] in each Fortress Sector were to be manned on 'ACTION STATIONS' and if the enemy were spotted then each Sector Commander was to undertake 'offensive action' even, if need be outside the Fortress Perimeter, by employing such forces considered necessary to deal with the local situation.

The final Appendix to the Garrison Defence Plan dealt with 'Medical Arrangements'. 'A' Company, 224 Field Ambulance R.A.M.C, was allocated to the Fortress and, on 'ACTION STATIONS', the Field Ambulance Commander would maintain liaison between the Fortress Commander and the Civil Medical Authorities.

Several First Aid Posts and Company Aid Posts would be set-up and manned on 'ACTION STATIONS'. From these Posts battle casualties would be evacuated to the West Kent General Hospital in Marsham Street.



West Kent General Hospital

Once they had received the necessary treatment they would then be evacuated to the basement of the 'Marks & Spencer' store in Week Street. The Kent County Ophthalmic Hospital in Church Street would act as an overflow hospital for the West Kent General and would replace it if the Fortress Perimeter had to be reduced to exclude it.



The 'Marks & Spencer' store in Week Street (War & Peace Collection)



The former Kent County Ophthalmic Hospital in Church Street

The basement of Fremlins Brewery in Earl Street would be used as an overflow for the basement of 'Marks & Spencer'.



Fremlins Brewery in Earl Street (Carley Collection)

If the bridge over the River Medway at the Broadway was blown then any casualties west of the river requiring further treatment would be evacuated to First Aid Post No.4 at the Grants Distillery in Hart Street for treatment and then evacuated to the basement of the Style & Winch Brewery in St Peter's Street.



The Style & Winch Brewery in St Peter's Street

The effects of active operations on the civilian population were addressed by South Eastern Command whose stated policy was that wholesale evacuation of the entire civilian population from areas where fighting may take place was 'impractical'. Pre-arranged schemes existed for the compulsory evacuation of the civilian population in the event of invasion from towns and villages in the 'Coastal' area (which ranged inland as far as Ashford and Canterbury), but for those living in Nodal Points, Fortresses and in the vicinity of airfields further inland only partial evacuation schemes were considered practical.

In category 'A' Nodal Points (and Fortresses) a 'belt' 200 to 500 yards deep around the defended perimeter would be cleared of civilians. The exact area would be determined by the local military commander and preliminary arrangements for evacuation would be made by the civil authorities in coordination with the Senior Military Liaison Officer, 12 Region. The evacuated civilians would be accommodated in other parts of the town. Evacuations would be carried out by the Local Authority on the orders of the Sub-Area Commander or, if communications are cut, the Nodal Point (or Fortress) Commander at any time after ACTION STATIONS.

Civilians that had been rendered homeless by enemy bombing or shelling were to be guided by the civilian police to the nearest Rest Centre approved by the military command for such a purpose. Following their reception at the Rest Centre, homeless civilians were to be billeted in homes within the town vicinity. The object being to hold homeless civilians on the ground by providing the necessities of life and prevent them from getting on to the roads and becoming refugees. Under no circumstances were local arrangements to be made for the evacuation of refugees or for the provision of 'refugee routes'.

In the event of an emergency, local military commanders would hold extensive powers over the civilian population under both the Common Law and Military Law.

The Common Law powers conferred on military commanders or members of the armed forces were based on the principle that, in an emergency where the safety of the state was under threat, the preservation of that safety was the supreme consideration for all citizens whether they were soldiers or civilians, and any acts properly committed in furtherance of that aim would be considered justifiable. No issue of regulations or any proclamation was considered necessary to bring these powers into force. All would depend entirely on the circumstances at the time, the priority being the success of operations against the enemy. Each individual officer and soldier would act on his own responsibility, doing whatever was best in his own judgement, having regard to the existing facts and bearing in mind that no unnecessary loss or hardship to the civilian population was to be involved.

In a declared 'War Zone' Military Law would prevail. Under the Defence Regulations any area could be declared a War Zone by the Minister for Home

Security and within it civilian offenders could be brought before a War Zone Court. It was anticipated that, in the event of an invasion, the whole of South Eastern Command would be declared a War Zone. In order to expedite the hearing of any case against a civilian offender an Officer of Field Ranks or above would have the right to direct that proceedings against the offender be initiated in a War Zone Court thus avoiding the necessity of a preliminary hearing by Justices.

Where, due to the military situation, it was not possible to bring an offender before a War Zone Court, Military Commanders would have the power to administer summary justice on their own responsibility. This would only be done under extreme circumstances, and it would be the Military Commander's personal responsibility if he ordered a civilian offender to be held in military custody or executed. Where possible, a civilian offender would only be held in military custody until such time that normal communications were restored. However, if this was not possible then the Commander would endeavour to arrange for suitable independent officers to hear the evidence and recommend the action to be taken under the same procedure as a Field General Court Martial.

Provision was also made for the Regional Commissioner, on the request of the South Eastern Army Commander, to impose a curfew on the civilian population in any part of No.12 Region where it was considered operationally necessary.

Under the Defence Regulations, in operational areas and on request of authorised Military Commanders, parties of civilians could be mobilised for compulsory labour duties. The provision of such parties would be the responsibility of local officials of the Ministry of Labour.

In the event of air raids, the civil authorities would be able to call on the assistance of the military. This assistance could take one of three forms:

- a) Assistance by a specially organised force of engineers, signals, Military Police and infantry to large towns which were considered liable to such heavy raids that the Civil ARP services would be inadequate to deal with the damage.
- b) Assistance by one company of infantry, or equivalent, to towns where the Civil ARP services were considered adequate to deal with the damage but where help may be required with traffic control, prevention of looting or rioting, fire-fighting and rescue work.
- c) Assistance by local military units to save life and prevent damage to property during or immediately after a raid.

Maidstone was considered to be one of the towns for which only the second and third forms of assistance might be required. Such assistance would be by a request from Headquarters No.12 Region to Headquarters XII Corps. Only in the event of communications breaking down would requests be made direct with the local Military Commander.

Maidstone was increasing in importance to the Army as it prepared for its future offensive operations against Hitler's 'Atlantic Wall'. Mote Park was now an important training ground and home to several units from XII Corps.



Royal Engineers ferrying a 25-pounder field gun across the lake at Mote Park (War & Peace Collection)

Reflecting this growing importance, the H.Q. of XII Corps Troops, Royal Engineers moved from Tunbridge Wells to Maidstone in June 1942, occupying three properties in the town: 'Greystones' and No.1 Nine Elms Estate in London Road and No.29 Buckland Hill. On the 29th June the Chief Engineer sent Bills of Quantities to contractors to tender for the erection of a new hutted camp at Vinters Park to accommodate a further 1,000 men. The estimated cost of the new camp was put at £65,000.



The Vinters Park hutted camp post-war when it was used to house 'bombed-out' families (War & Peace Collection)

Preparations for the defence of the Maidstone Fortress continued through June 1942. On the 1st, the Maidstone Sub-Area and Garrison Commander, Colonel Bennett, attended a meeting with the Chief Constable, Henry Vann, at Maidstone Police Station and the following day held a meeting at Bower Terrace to discuss medical arrangements within the Fortress. On the 17th he received a visit from XII Corps Commander, Lt. Gen Gammell. Meanwhile, the Garrison Adjutant Capt. Backhouse conducted an inspection of the Outer Perimeter defences; attended a meeting at Tilling Stevens to discuss defence arrangements; held a meeting with Maidstone's Town Clerk, Graham Wilson, to discuss details of the defence of the 'Keep'; visited the School of Military Engineering at Brompton to arrange for the printing of maps for the Garrison Defence Plan; met with the National Fire Service Area Fire Officer, George Robinson, to discuss closer liaison arrangements within the Fortress; and attended a lecture by Brigadier Lewis, the Director of Chemical Warfare, at the 'Ritz' cinema.



The 'Ritz' cinema in Pudding Lane

As a consequence of Brigadier Lewis's lecture on Chemical Warfare, M.S.A. H.Q. added a section on the subject to its 'Plan to Defeat Invasion'. Designated 'Section XXXV', it detailed the procedures for dealing with the confirmed or suspected use of poison gas by the enemy. It placed particular emphasis of prompt, accurate and concise reporting of chemical incidents including the time and place of the attack, type of weapon used, type of gas, casualty details and medical reports.

Other additions to the M.S.A. Plan included sections on the authority to immobilise non-essential civilian motor vehicles; the immobilisation of wireless relay stations; the destruction of currency held in local banks; and the immobilisation of B.B.C. wireless stations and G.P.O. telephone exchanges and telegraph offices.

Fortress defence preparations continued through July and August. A manning exercise was held for No.2 Sector on the 4th July and this was followed by Exercise 'FERRET', on the 6th, for all personnel at 13 I.T.C. A 'paper' exercise, designated 'BASTILLE', was also held to test procedures at Garrison H.Q. Tours of the Fortress were made to recce suitable positions for 3-inch mortars and flame fougasse installations, and to arrange telephone facilities in Sector H.Q.s.

Senior officers from M.S.A. and Garrison H.Q.s also inspected the defences of Allington Lock and made a tour of the three A.M.E. Stations at Sutton Valence. Following these visits, exercises were held to test the defences at Allington and the emergency deployment of a mobile column to Sutton Valence.

The work on the Fortress defences was still awaiting completion. On the 10th August, the Garrison Adjutant, Captain Backhouse and the officer in command R.E. Works Maidstone Fortress, Lt. Wright, met with Col. Bennett at M.S.A. H.Q. to discuss the priority of the work still to be finished. Following this meeting, XII Corps Chief Engineer assigned one Section of 10 Group Pioneer Corps to 263 Field Coy. R.E. for a week to assist with the Fortress works and the construction of the new army camp at Vinters. Further help came in the form of a working party from 13 I.T.C. which assisted with the revetting of the anti-tank ditch that ran around the Outer Perimeter.

The conduct of civilian affairs within the Fortress in the event of it becoming a 'battle zone' was considered of high importance. The Garrison Adjutant, Capt. Backhouse, held a meeting with Maidstone's Chief Police Inspector to discuss the question of Civil Rest Centres. These would be set up to provide relief to civilians forced to evacuate their homes during the battle. They would generally be manned by teams from the Women's Voluntary Service (W.V.S.), church workers, school staff and others normally associated with the premises in which the Centres were set up. They would prepare food and ensure there were adequate washing facilities and provide fresh clothing where necessary. Many of the teams held weekly training meetings in order to keep the Centres and equipment in readiness for possible use.

The distribution of food stores within the Fortress was another concern and led to Captain Backhouse meeting with Maidstone's Food Controller, Mr. Honey at his office in the Corn Exchange to discuss food distribution problems in the town. A meeting was also held with the Civil Defence Deputy Sub-Controller, Captain Cornish, at the Civil Defence Control H.Q. based in the Sessions House [County Hall] to discuss A.R.P matters within the Fortress.



County Hall (War & Peace Collection)

The proposed siting of the Fortress Battle H.Q. in the basement of the General Accident office building in Bank Street came under review in July when Garrison Adjutant, Capt. Backhouse was detailed to look for alternative sites. Following a recce of nearby premises, he suggested Maidstone Town Hall as a suitable alternative. His choice was approved by M.S.A. Commander, Col. Bennett and Garrison Commander Designate Lt. Col. Dickinson. On the 11th August, Capt. Backhouse met with Maidstone's Town Clerk, Graham Wilson, to discuss the establishment of the Battle H.Q. in the Town Hall and, on the 28th, he held a meeting with the Borough Surveyor, Mr Hughes, to discuss the layout plan of the Town Hall and the public air-raid shelter below.



The Town Hall

In October, one company of the 9th Battalion, Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Regiment was moved from Sheppey Sector to Maidstone to assist with the on-

going Fortress defence works. They were accommodated at the Sandling Road Barracks and set to work on the anti-tank ditch. They were still there in November when Commander M.S.A., Lt. Col. Bennett, made an 'Admin' inspection of the unit.

Following an order from South-Eastern Command H.Q, administration was now a 'hot topic' in Maidstone Sub-Area. M.S.A. Administration Instruction No.6 had been issued at the end of October to all units in the Area. Instructions included the necessity to account for and make economies in the use of rations, clothing, stores, fuel and power. Even the use of paint was to be strictly controlled. Any buildings that were considered in need of re-painting would be subject to inspection by a representative of the Deputy-Commander, Royal Engineers. If he approved the work, then he would inform the unit Quartermaster concerned of how much paint was to be used and how it was to be applied to ensure there was no waste.

Every effort was to be made to locate and collect wood to burn for heating fuel instead of coal during the winter months. Any large amounts of wood considered suitable for collection were to be reported to M.S.A. H.Q. so that arrangements could be made to purchase them from their owners. Another result of this 'economy drive' was the consolidation of some of the various unit headquarters in Maidstone. By the end of November No.2 Group, Kent Home Guard H.Q. and Maidstone Garrison H.Q. had both been moved into 3/4, Bower Terrace to share with M.S.A. H.Q.

An important visitor arrived in Maidstone on the 20th November when Prime Minister, Winston Churchill came to Mote Park to see the 53rd (Welsh) Division in training. He watched various exercises and demonstrations including mine-detection and boat assaults and, before he left, he delivered a rousing speech to the assembled troops.



Prime Minister Winston Churchill in Mote Park on 20th November 1942 (War & Peace Collection)

As the year 1942 entered its final month, Maidstone Garrison suffered a grievous loss when the Commander of 13 I.T.C., Lt. Colonel D.C.G. Dickinson,

died suddenly on the 11th December at Sandling Park Military Hospital following an operation for acute appendicitis. A highly respected and popular officer, he was also a very accomplished musician; a brilliant pianist who could also play practically any brass or woodwind instrument. He had served in France in the Great War and went on to serve in China and Malta. Lt. Colonel Dickinson had been in command of 13 I.T.C. since September 1941 and, in the event of an attack by German forces on Maidstone, he was designated to take command of the Fortress defences. He was just 43 years old and left a widow and daughter. The funeral took place, with full military honours, at Maidstone Cemetery on the 15th December. Among the attendees at the funeral were the Colonel of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, General Sir Charles Bonham-Carter; Major W.A. Salmon, Brigade-Major Maidstone-Sub Area; Captain D.M. Backhouse, Garrison Adjutant; Deputy Mayor of Maidstone, Coun. C. Gordon Larking; Major R. L. Surtees, Acting Chief Constable, Kent County Constabulary; and Captain F. Cornish, Chief Controller Civil Defence, Maidstone.



Lt. Colonel Dickinson's grave in Sutton Road Cemetery, Maidstone

Lt. Colonel Dickinson's replacement as Commander of No. 13 I.T.C. was Lt. Colonel C.E.P. Craven of the Q.O.R.W.K. Regt. He assumed his new command on the 22nd December.

The early months of 1943 finally saw the finishing touches being made to the defences of Maidstone Fortress. In January, a working party from the Royal Sussex Regt. was drafted in to help complete the anti-tank ditch and, on the 26th February, a tour of inspection was made of all the defences by the Commander

of Maidstone-Sub Area, Col. Bennett; the Commanding Officer 11th (Maidstone) Bn. K.H.G., Lt. Col. Baker; and the Garrison Adjutant, Capt. Backhouse. Capt. Backhouse continued to make regular inspections of all the Fortress Sectors and their defence works, ensuring they were being kept well-maintained. He also continued to hold meetings with the civil authorities and attended various roadblock demonstrations throughout the Fortress.

Meanwhile, XII Corps H.Q. had updated its 'Plan to Defeat Invasion'. Although the possibility of a German invasion would always remain, the chances of such an invasion being attempted in 1943 it now considered to be 'remote'. Limited but large-scale raids were considered a more likely danger. The policy for XII Corps would now be to maintain in the highest state of readiness such anti-invasion measures as were also required to defeat raids. Other defensive measures and dispositions necessary to defeat an invasion should be kept ready for deployment at two months' notice.

The XII Corps Plan went on to state that the period from 29th March to the 12th April should be devoted to the maintenance and repair of existing defence works; the main tasks being to put infantry and artillery positions into 'good order'. In addition, minefields would be reviewed and a note of the number of mines required to complete them sent to XII Corps H.Q.; demolition preparations and the storage of explosives would be reviewed and fougasses and flame traps examined.

On the 1st February a conference was held at M.S.A. H.Q. to consider Military aid to the Civil Power in the event of heavy air-raids on Maidstone. This aid would include the provision of military support to the police in the maintenance of law, order and public safety. The town had already suffered considerable damage and loss of life from enemy bombing during the Autumn of 1940 and the German bombers had returned to Kent during the 'Baedeker Raids' campaign of 1942. As a result of these raids a bombing decoy site had been built in open fields south of the town at Broomfield, to deflect enemy bombing from Maidstone. Known as a 'Starfish' decoy, it operated by lighting a series of controlled fires during an air raid to replicate an urban area targeted by bombs. Another Maidstone 'Starfish' decoy was built at Lenham where an earlier decoy (QF Type) had been in operation since 1941 deflecting enemy bombing from RAF Detling.



One of the two extant buildings from the Lenham 'Starfish' decoy site

The Spring of 1943 saw some important visitors to Maidstone. On the 21st March, the Director-General of the Home Guard, Major-General the Viscount Bridgeman D.S.O., M.C. paid a visit to Home Guard battalions in the Maidstone Sub-Area. Then, on the 4th April, it was the turn of the Army's Inspector of Infantry, Major-General Dudley Johnson V.C., D.S.O. & Bar, M.C. to visit various Home Guard battalions in the area. The following day, Maidstone Sub-Area H.Q. was honoured by a visit from the Princess Royal in her capacity as Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Signals and the Royal Scots. Also in attendance were the Commander XII Corps, Lt. Gen. M.G.N. Stopford and the Senior Controller of the A.T.S, the Countess of Carlisle.



The Princess Royal at Maidstone Barracks (War & Peace Collection)

The following week another royal visitor came to the town in the person of the Duchess of Kent whose husband, the Duke of Kent, had been killed in a plane crash the previous August whilst serving with the RAF. The duchess visited County Hall and then went onto the Kent County Ophthalmic Hospital in Church Street where she toured the wards and spoke to patients and staff. At the outbreak of the war, the duchess had trained as a nurse for three months under the pseudonym ‘Sister Kay,’ rendering service as a civil nurse reserve.



The Duchess of Kent at Kent County Ophthalmic Hospital (Carley Collection)

In May there was another re-organisation of Military Commands. Kent Area was disbanded and replaced by two ‘Districts’: West Kent District and East Kent District. Maidstone Sub-Area was re-designated ‘Maidstone Sub-District’, reporting to the Commander of East Kent District, Major-General William Fox-Pitt D.S.O., M.V.O., M.C. Maj-Gen Fox-Pitt paid his first visit to M.S.D. H.Q. on the 24th May. On the 4th June H.Q. East Kent District was established at Coles Dane House, Harrietsham and three days later it officially took over command of the District from XII Corps. Col. Bennett remained as Commander of Maidstone Sub-District and some of his senior officers were assigned new roles and titles in-line with the current emphasis on more effective administration.

Some final amendments to Maidstone Garrison Defence Plan No.1 were published in June. Most of the amendments were purely administrative but also included important additions to 13 I.T.C.’s Mobile Column responsibilities. Two Air Ministry Petrol, Oil & Lubricants (POL) depots near Charing were

now added to the three AME Stations at Sutton Valence to which the Mobile Column would be deployed in the event of a threat to their security. The strength of the Mobile Column was also enhanced to reflect its additional responsibilities. It would now consist of:

- (a) PERSONNEL
 - (i) One Carrier Platoon
 - (ii) Two 3” Mortar Detachments
 - (iii) One Infantry Platoon
 - (iv) Six Signallers
 - (v) Two m/c D/Rs [motorcycle Dispatch Riders]
 - (vi) Fitters i/c as available

- (b) TRANSPORT
 - (i) Ten Carriers universal
 - (ii) Two Carriers 3” Mortar
 - (iii) Six Trucks 15 cwt.
 - (iv) Three Trucks 8 cwt or equivalent
 - (v) Five M/Cs

Details of the Fortress signals personnel to be employed at peak times during operations were also now included in the Garrison Defence Plan:

| | |
|--|----|
| <u>Fortress H.Q.</u> | |
| Signal Superintendent (Sergeant) | 1. |
| “In” Clerks | 1. |
| “Out” and “Through” Clerks | 2. |
| D.R. “In” Clerks | 1. |
| Telephone Orderlies | 2. |
| Internal Orderlies (checks) | 2. |
| M/c Orderlies | 2. |
| Cycle Orderlies | 2. |
| Wireless Orderlies | 1. |
| Wireless Operators (No.18 Set) | 1. |
| Wireless Operators (No.21 Set) | 1. |
| Wireless Operators (No.36 Set) | 1. |
| | — |
| | 17 |
| <u>Sectors and Fortress Reserve H.Q.</u> | |
| N.C.O. i/c Signals | 1. |
| Telephone Orderly | 1. |
| Wireless Operator | 1. |
| M/c or Cycle Orderly | 1. |
| | — |
| | 4 |
| <u>Allington Lock</u> | |
| N.C.O. i/c Signals | 1. |
| Telephone Operator | 1. |
| Wireless Operator | 1. |

M/c or Cycle Orderly

2.

—
5

—

The total number of men required at any one time for Fortress H.Q., - Fortress Reserve H.Q., - 6 Sector H.Q.'s, and Allington Lock H.Q., = 50.

On a basis of four hour shifts the total of Signal Personnel required in Maidstone Fortress will be 100.

It seems ironic that, as the preparations for the defence of Maidstone Fortress were being completed, the threat of a German invasion was perceived sufficiently diminished to allow for the lifting of the Residence Ban that had been imposed on the town the previous year; this being officially announced by the Regional Commissioner on the 14th July. However, the restrictions on casual visitors remained in place.

Although the threat of a full-scale invasion had receded, there was still a danger that the enemy could still mount smaller raids, either from the sea or, more likely by airborne commando forces, on certain 'Vulnerable Points' [V.P.s]. It would seem likely that this was a topic for discussion during the visit of Lt. General John Swayne, G.O.C. South Eastern Command, to Maidstone on the 9th July. The following day, Maidstone Sub-District H.Q. issued its Operational Instruction No.15 'Defeat of Raids'. The Instruction considered that there were no V.P.s in Maidstone Sub-District that would warrant such a raid. However, there were suitable objectives within East Kent District in locations that bordered on M.S.D. As any enemy raids on these could have serious effects on M.S.D., preparations were to be made for necessary action against the raiders; the policy being that any enemy landing force was to be attacked, and completely destroyed or captured.

Instructions were issued to local Civil Defence authorities and the police that the presence of any enemy troops should be reported immediately to the nearest Regular Army or Home Guard command. In the event of a raid, or the receipt of a raid warning, all headquarters and command posts would be manned and a Liaison Officer from 13 I.T.C. would report to M.S.D. H.Q. All available regular troops under M.S.D.'s operational command would be ordered to 'STAND TO' and all Home Guard units would report to their respective Alarm Posts. In an airborne raid, the Home Guard would probably be the nearest troops to the scene of the landing. They were to keep the raiders under constant observation, harassing them continuously and supply all possible information to the nearest Regular Army command who would direct reinforcements to the area.

These last points were supplemented in an Operational Instruction issued by East Kent District H.Q. which noted that the training and equipment of Home Guard units was not suitable for the support of an attack on the type of highly-

trained enemy troops that were likely to carry out raids in the U.K. As such, in the event of a raid, Home Guard offensive actions should be confined to attacks on parachute troops who have not been able to collect their weapons and organise themselves, and immediate counter-attacks to restore the situation in their own local defences.

The rest of the Summer was a quiet period for Maidstone Fortress. 13 I.T.C held a sports day and a swimming gala; officers from M.S.D. H.Q. attended various training courses and visited Cadet camps. In September M.S.D. Commander, Col. Bennett and Garrison Adjutant, Capt. Backhouse attended a luncheon at 13 I.T.C. in honour of the Colonel of the R.W.K. Regiment, General Sir Charles Bonham-Carter and then, a few days later, both officers met with the Military Liaison Officer of No.12 Region, Captain Ewart-Biggs.



General Sir Charles Bonham-Carter, Colonel of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment

On the 27th September Col. Bennett was posted as Garrison Commander, North Africa. He was replaced as M.S.D. Commander and Maidstone Garrison Commander by Lt. Col. J.N. Lamont M.C., T.D. who assumed his new commands on the 10th October. Two days later the new District C.O. presided over a conference of Home Guard Battalion Commanders at M.S.D. H.Q.

In October, M.S.D. H.Q.'s 'Defeat of Raids' Operational Instruction was updated. The Instruction stated that an invasion was now 'improbable' but the risks of raids or sabotage still remained and would increase as soon as land operations commenced in North-West Europe, with petroleum depots and centres of communication, such as Maidstone and Tonbridge, being regarded a possible targets.

To counter any raid M.S.D. H.Q. would be able to call upon the assistance of XII Corps Field Force units based in the Sub-District but not normally under its command. These would include the 53rd (Welsh) Infantry Division at Mote Park, and No.3 Army Group Royal Artillery [3 AGRA].



Troops of the 53rd (Welsh) Division parading along the Ashford Road, Maidstone in 1943 (War & Peace Collection)

In the event of a surprise raid, the Field Force would play the major role in attacking and destroying the enemy. If warning of a raid was received, then the Field Force would withdraw forward units and use them in a counter-attack role. The Field Force would supplement those Regular troops and Home Guard units already under the direct command of M.S.D. H.Q. Within in the Maidstone Fortress area these included 13 I.T.C. and 11th (Maidstone) Bn. K.H.G.

All Royal Observer Corps posts within the Sub District were to be put on notice to look out for airborne raiders. If a post spotted any raiders they would fire-off red star warning rockets and report back to the R.O.C. No.1 Group H.Q. in London Road, Maidstone who would then pass all relevant information to M.S.D. H.Q.

On the 21st October M.S.D. H.Q. issued Operational Instruction No.18 – ‘Denial of Oil and Petrol Resources to the Enemy’. It instructed that all usable stocks of petrol (motor and aviation fuel), benzole and kerosene should be prevented from falling into the enemy’s hands. The methods to be employed included the sealing of all petrol and oil pumps; the destruction of storage tanks and the running to waste of road and rail tankers. Benzole stocks were to be contaminated with tar. Producers were deemed responsible for maintaining stocks of tar which had to be connected to the benzole in such a way that it could be run in by gravity or pumped. Means to mix the tar with the benzole also had to be provided. It was the duty of the local army commander to make periodic checks to ensure that these precautions had been taken by the producers.

On the 1st December, Colonel F.L.W. Wright assumed the commands of Maidstone Sub-District and Maidstone Garrison. Col. Wright spent much of December acquainting himself with his new command, visiting military bases and meeting senior civilian officials. On the 11th December he was in Maidstone visiting Kent County Council Headquarters and meeting with the Mayor of Maidstone and the Chief Constable of Kent Joint Police Force. A few days later he held a conference of all Home Guard Battalion Commanders at M.S.D. H.Q. He also visited the Regional Commissioner 12 Region at Tunbridge Wells and attended a conference of Sub-District Commander at East Kent District H.Q. in Harrietsham.

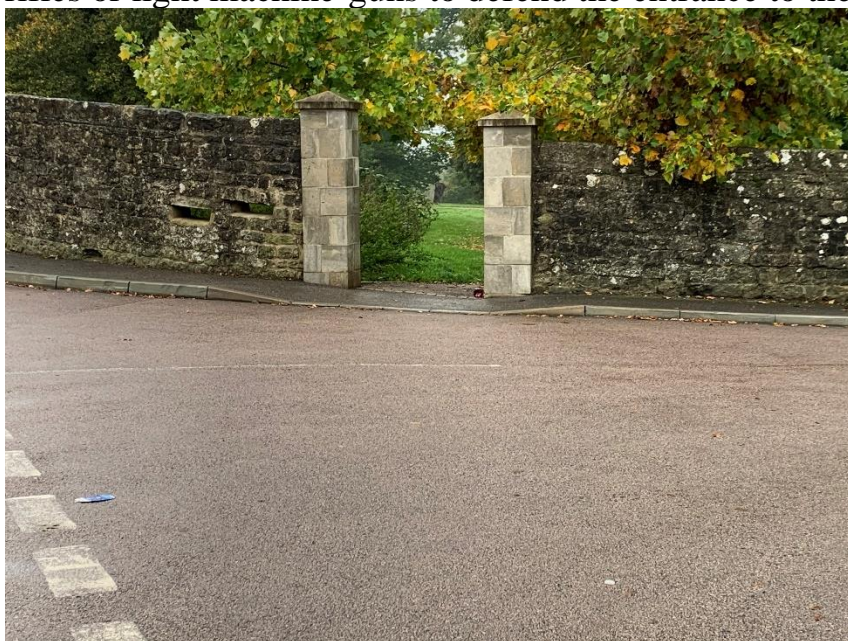
1943 ended with the tide of war now turned in the Allies favour. German forces in Europe were on the retreat on the Eastern Front and in Italy and were now under threat from an Allied cross-channel invasion in the West. The danger of a German invasion of the United Kingdom now deemed by the Chiefs-of-Staff as 'negligible'.

The defences of 'Fortress Maidstone' which had yet to be tested in action, from now on were never likely to be and nor were they. The 'what-ifs' will forever be discussed. If there had been an invasion, could Maidstone have held out 'to the last man and last bullet' under a German onslaught as planned? In 1940-41 the answer would probably be 'not for long', but as a Fortress, as it existed in 1942-43, it would have presented a far more formidable obstacle to a German advance on London and it would certainly been able to deal effectively with the type of smaller-scale enemy raids that were being envisaged by late 1943.

Maidstone's Defences Today

Most of the Second World War defence works in and around Maidstone were demolished soon after the end of the war. There was little interest in preserving any physical memories of, what had been, a difficult and traumatic six years for the town's population. Understandably, people just wanted to get back to normality as soon as possible. However, some traces of those defences do remain.

At the School Lane entrance to Mote Park there are two 'loopholes' that have been cut into the stone wall which would have provided firing positions for rifles or light machine-guns to defend the entrance to the army camp.



Loopholed wall at the School Lane entrance to Mote Park

On the A229 Loose Road, heading south out of the town between Sheal's Crescent and Heather Drive, a footbridge crosses the road. By the footbridge on the right you can see nine huge concrete 'Cubes' used as anti-tank obstacles. These are some of the few survivors of the hundreds that supplemented the anti-tank ditch, excavated in 1942-43, to cover open ground around the perimeter of the Fortress. Another group of these can be found by the Millennium Bridge which crosses the Medway near Springfield.



Two anti-tank 'Cubes' can just be seen under the bridge on the Loose Road (Photo Paul Tritton)

Several pillboxes, of various 'Types' remain in the area, mostly along the route of the 1940 GHQ Line on the River Medway. At first glance it would seem remarkable that so many of these iconic structures have survived for almost 75 years, given that so many other military structures were removed or demolished so quickly after the war. The answer is a testament to their construction. Most pillboxes were built on private farmland and after the war the Government did not want to go to the time and expense of demolishing them, so they offered the landowners £5 for each pillbox they demolished themselves. However, pillboxes could not be demolished easily, after all they were designed to stand up to bullet and shellfire. Most landowners decided that £5 would not make up for the time, effort and labour it would take to demolish them. I can remember as recently as the 1990's, driving along the Tonbridge Road and seeing a farmer and some of his employees trying to demolish a pillbox with sledgehammers and a tractor. A few days later I drove past again and saw a demolition company's lorry parked up in the field and they were using a bulldozer to demolish it. I wondered for a long time how much that had cost the farmer!

If you walk along the banks of the Medway from Aylesford to Teston you will see several pillboxes. Most of them are infantry pillboxes of an irregular hexagonal design officially designated 'FW3/24 Type'. Two were recently 'uncovered' during work on a new footpath along the river near East Farleigh. You may also be fortunate to see some of the far more substantial 'FW3/28A Type' which housed an anti-tank gun.



Recently exposed Type 24 pillbox by the Medway at East Farleigh



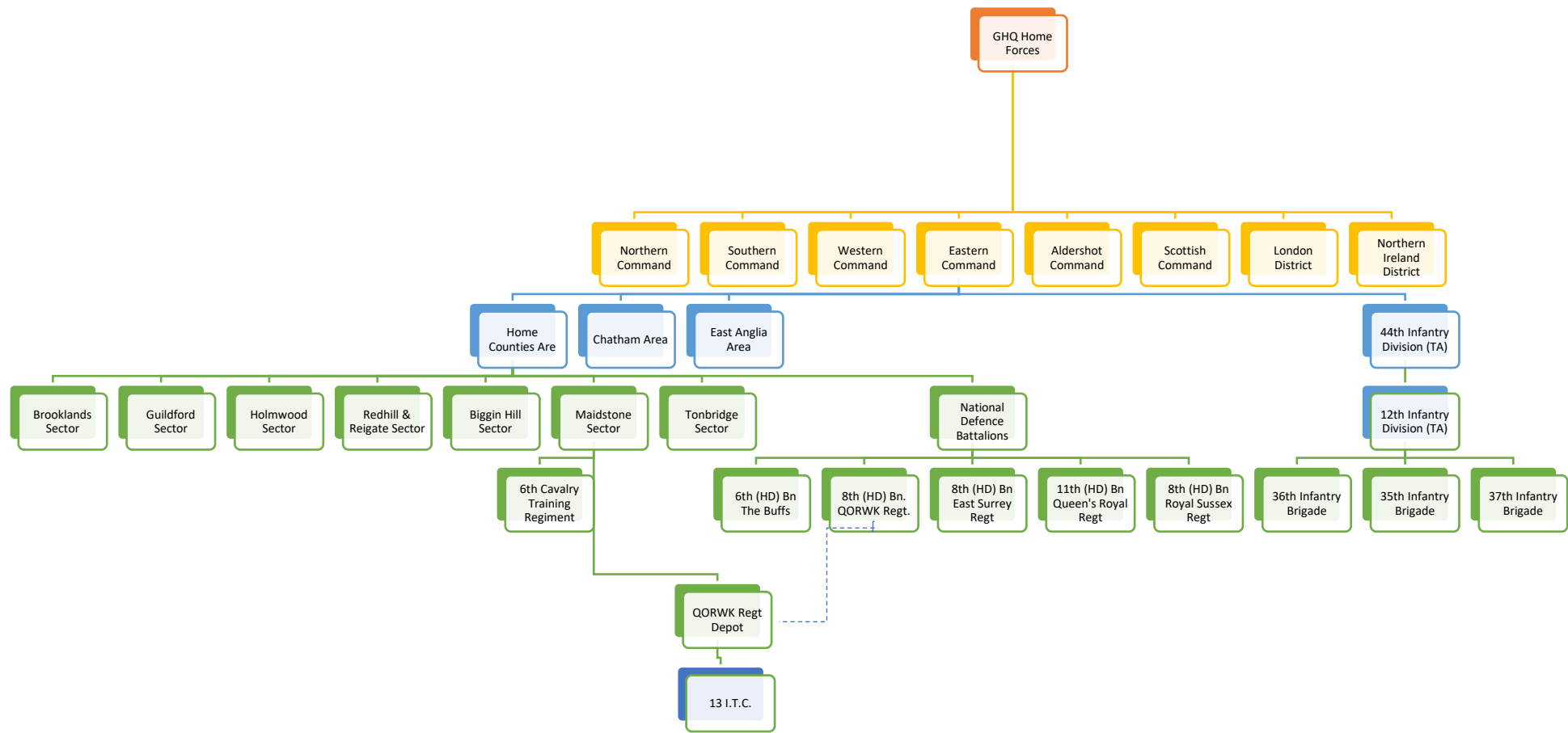
Type 28A pillbox near Teston Bridge

Fortunately, there is now far more interest in protecting these surviving wartime structures. Most of them have been documented on the Kent County Council's Historic Environment Record and some even have 'Listed' status so, hopefully, they will continue to stand as reminders to future generations of the dangers that Maidstone, as with other towns and villages around the country, were prepared to face in the darkest days of the Second World War.

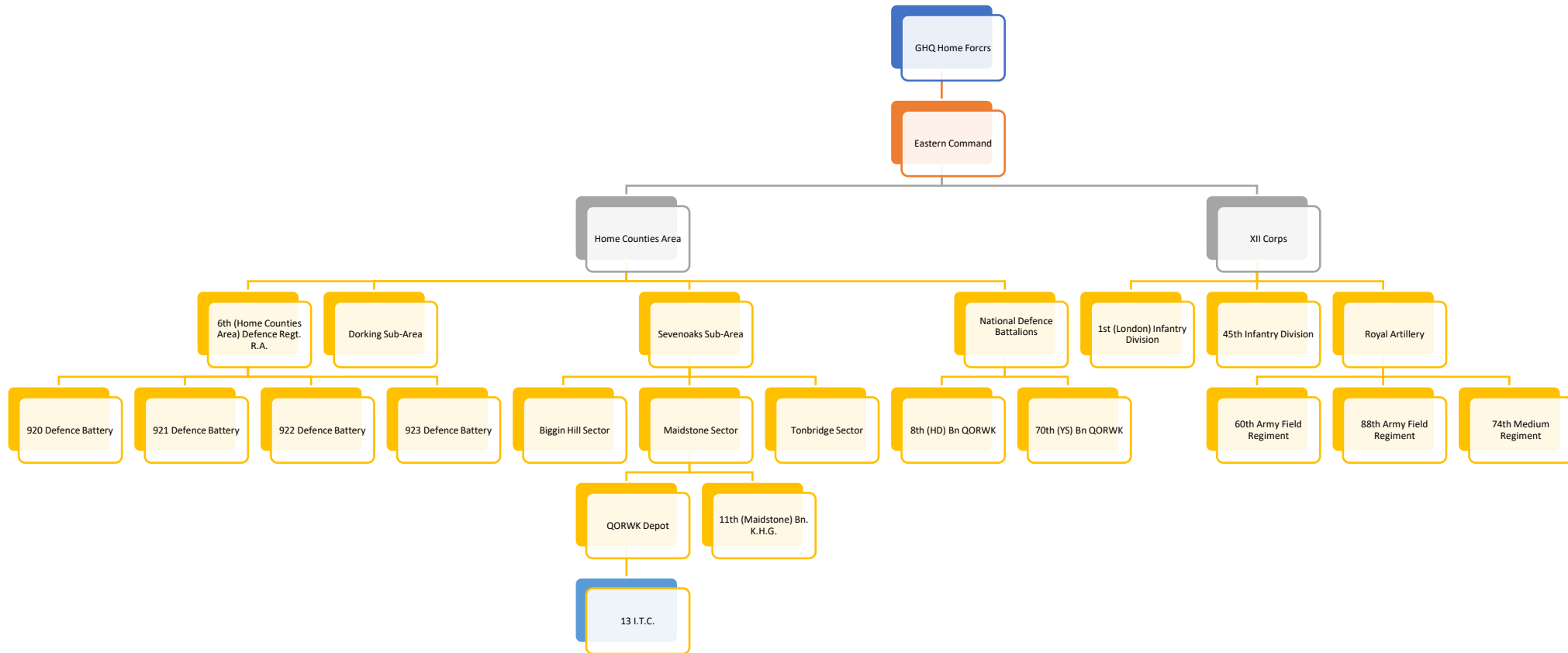
List of Appendices

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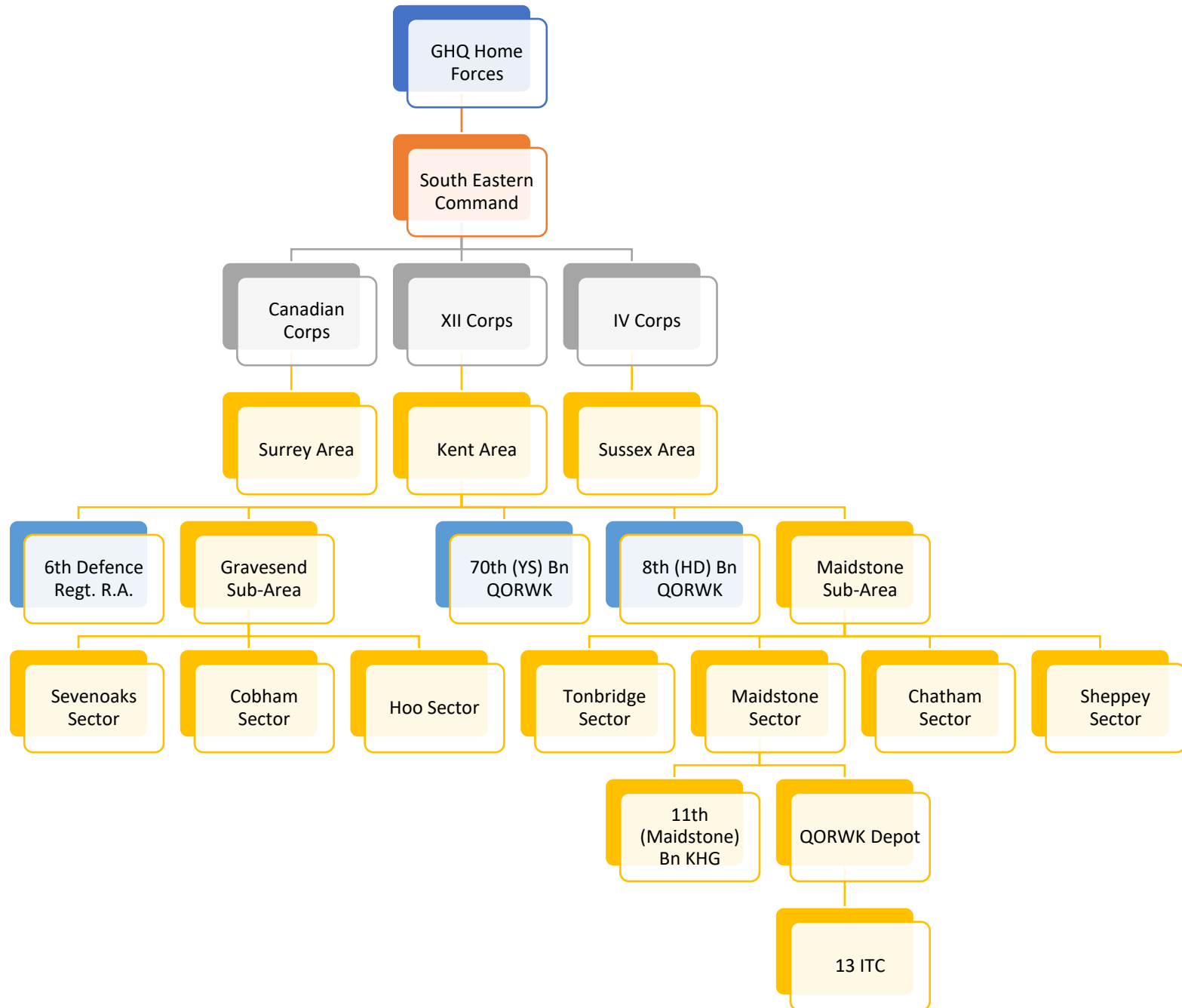
Appendix I – Command Structure September – November 1939



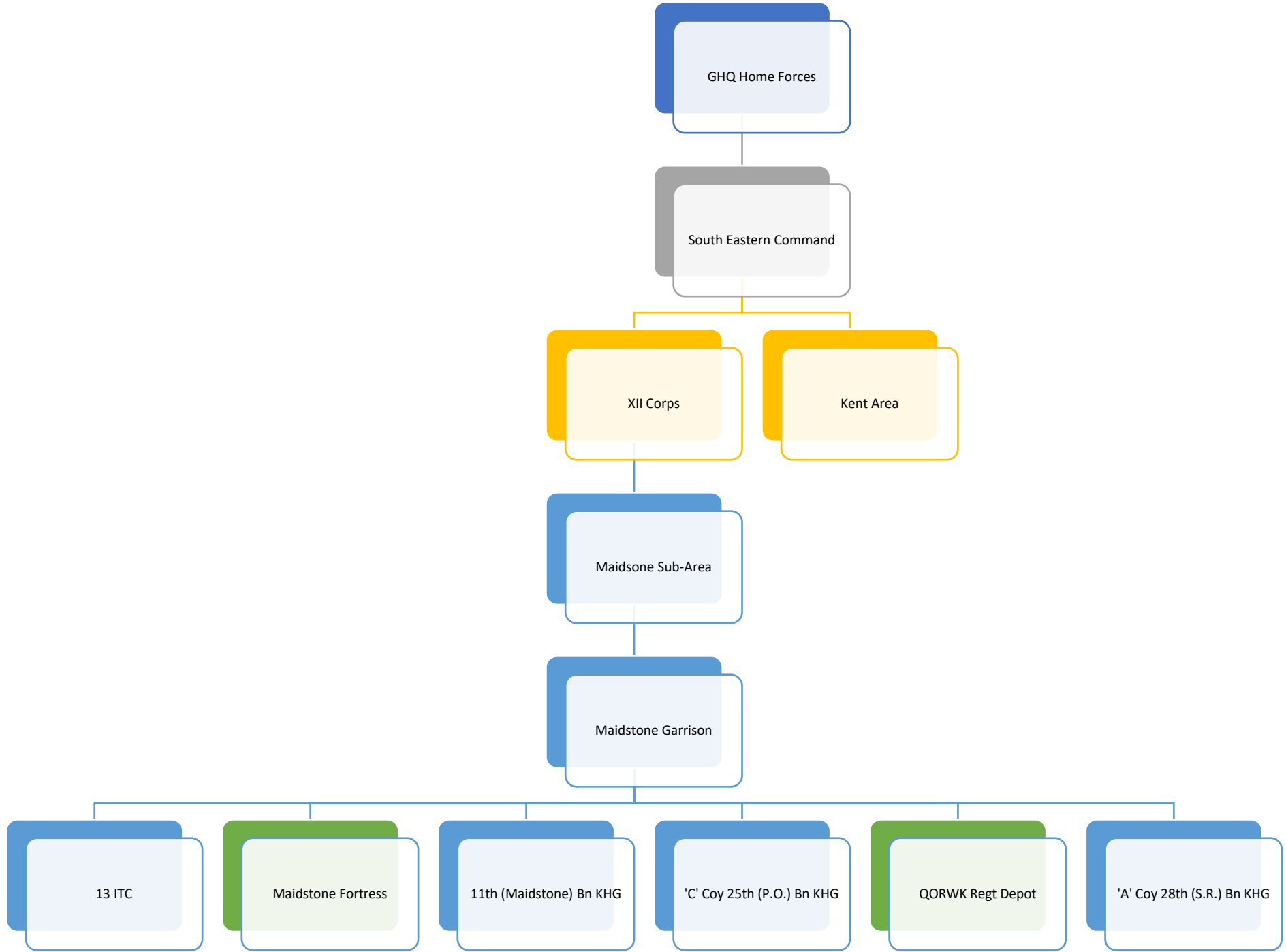
Appendix II – Command Structure September 1940



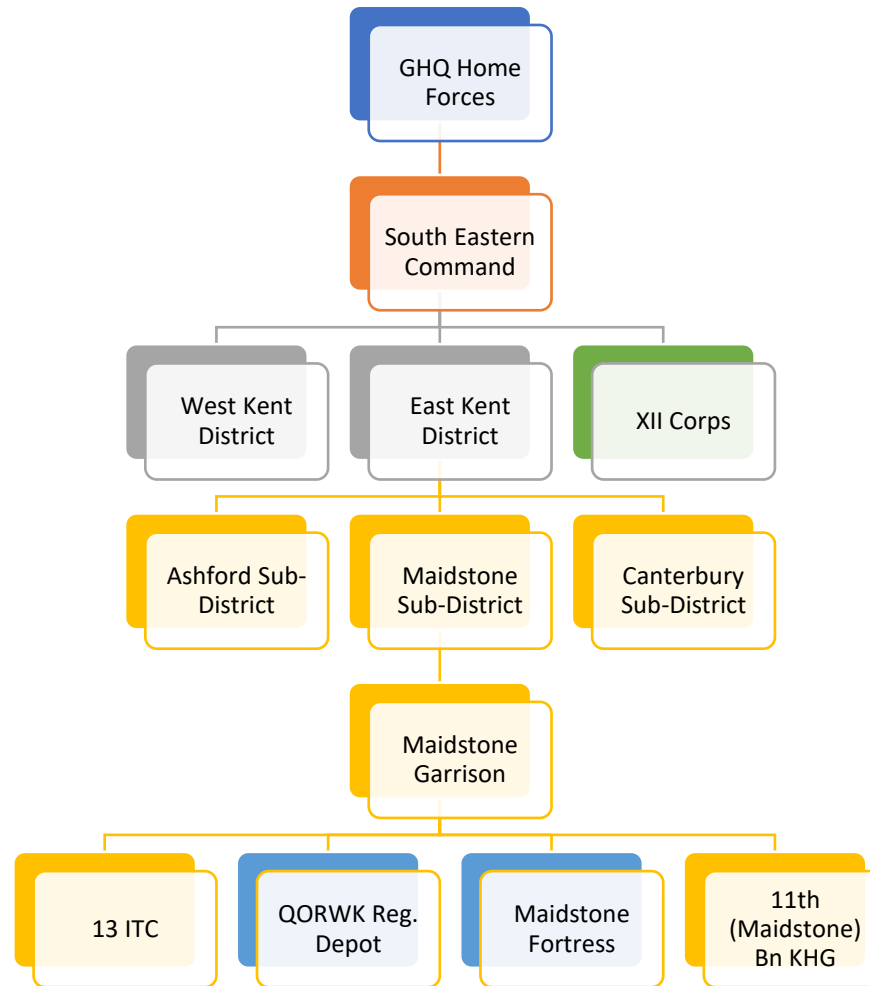
Appendix III – Command Structure February 1941



Appendix IV – Command Structure June 1942



Appendix V – Command Structure June 1943



VI : Pillboxes

Pillboxes are concrete dug-in guard posts, normally equipped with loopholes or embrasures through which to fire weapons. The originally jocular name arose from their perceived similarity to the cylindrical and hexagonal boxes in which medical pills were once sold. They are in effect a trench firing step hardened to protect against small-arms fire and grenades and raised to improve the field of fire.

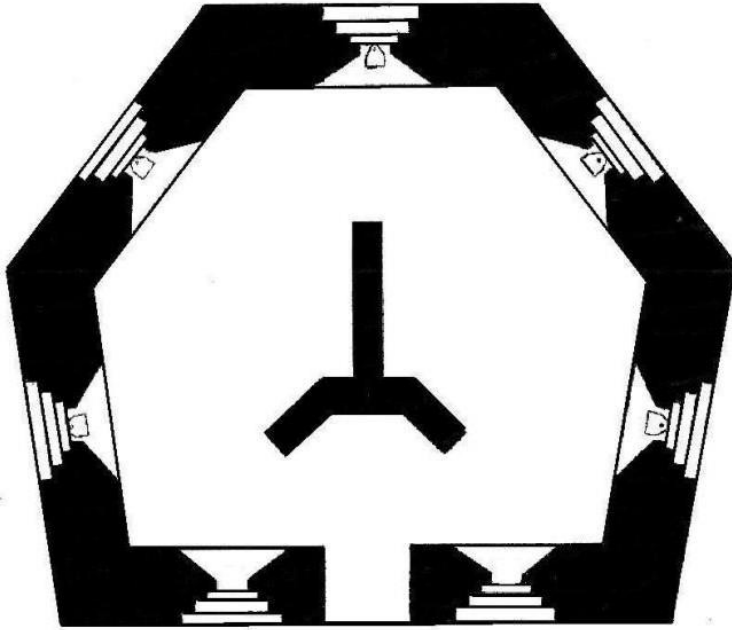
Hardened defensive structures had been built around the world for hundreds of years, but it was during the Boer War in the late 19th / early 20th century that the first masonry 'blockhouses' began to appear on the battlefield. Mostly built to a standard pattern designed by the British Army's Chief Engineer in South Africa, Major-General Elliot Wood, they consisted of a three-storey, mortared stone tower. The ground and first floors were loopholed to provide firing positions and the second floor was covered by a corrugated iron pyramid roof. Later examples were built of concrete instead of stone and were of a large hexagonal design which could accommodate up to forty men.

The modern style of pillbox first appeared on the Western Front during the early years of the First World War when defensive 'stop-lines' were also being built around London which would eventually incorporate the first pillboxes to be seen on British soil.

In the Second World War, following the evacuation of the B.E.F. from Dunkirk, a rash of pillbox-building broke out, mostly centred on the south of England along General Ironside's GHQ Line.

In June 1940, Branch FW3 (Fortress Works Department 3) of the War Office's Directorate of Fortifications and Works issued a series of standard designs of pillboxes for Home Defence known as 'Types'. As well as these standard Types, many other 'variants' were built to house different weapons or to suit local conditions.

The most common Type built along the GHQ Line was the FW3/24, an infantry pillbox of irregular hexagonal design, usually built to just bullet-proof standards with 12-inch thick concrete walls, usually with brick-shuttering. The side wall faces varied in length from 6ft to 8ft with a much longer 12ft rear wall which also housed the entrance. They were built with embrasures in each face and an internal anti-ricochet wall. They could house a garrison of eight men.



Type FW3/24 design



A Type FW3/24 hidden amongst the vegetation in Whatman Park, Maidstone



Front view of a Type FW3/24 overlooking the railway line near Barming

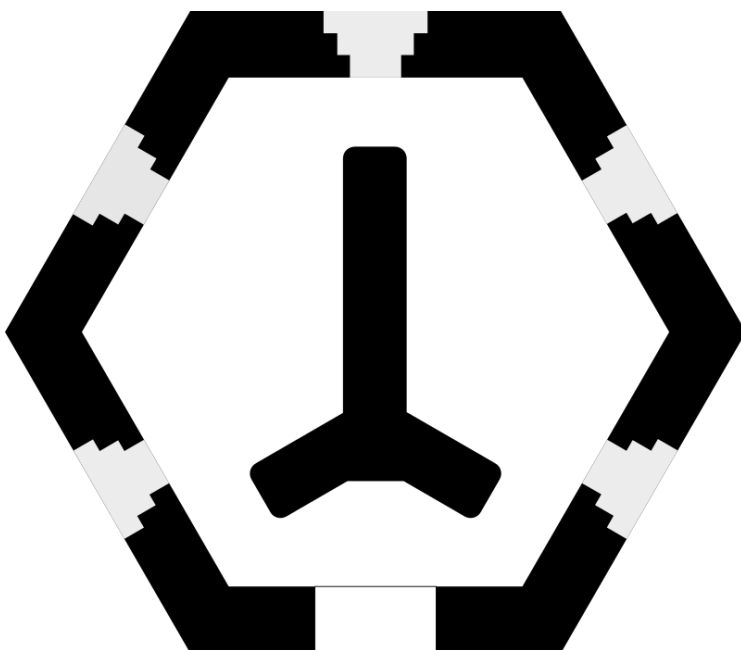


The rear wall of a Type FW3/24 at Teston showing the entrance



Internal view of one of the embrasures of the FW3/24 at Teston. Note the supports for a Bren gun bipod

The Type FW3/22 was another infantry pillbox, of a regular hexagonal design, slightly smaller than the Type 24, built to a bullet-proof standard and could house a garrison of six men. The Type FW3/22 was the most common type of pillbox built in England but very few seem to have been constructed in the Maidstone area. The only local examples I have come across are on the site of the former West Malling Airfield at Kings Hill.

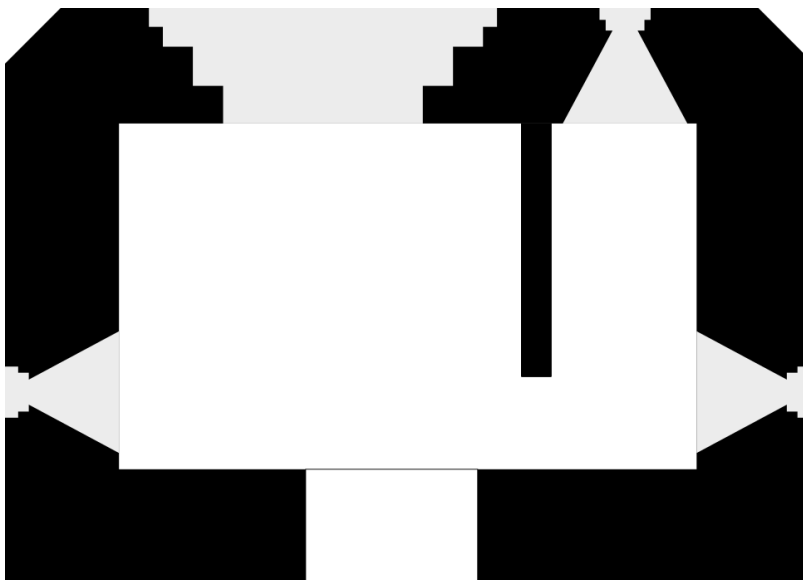


Type FW3/22 design



Type FW3/22 at the former RAF West Malling

The Type FW3/28A is an anti-tank gun pillbox with an infantry side chamber. Rectangular in design, it is the largest form of pillbox to be found on the GHQ Line in the Maidstone area with dimensions of 27ft x 19ft and a wall thickness of 42 inches. It would house a 2-pounder or 6-pounder anti-tank gun, either on a fixed on a holdfast or mobile mounted on wheels and trails. It would contain a garrison of ten men plus another two armed with Bren light machine guns in the side chamber. A fine example can be seen by the A26 Tonbridge Road at Teston.



Type FW3/28A design



Type FW3/28A at Teston



Internal view of the Type FW3/28A at Teston showing the A/T gun embrasure



Infantry side chamber in the FW3/28A at Teston

VII: Anti-Tank Obstacles & Roadblocks

A major element in the fixed defences of Maidstone was the roadblock. The roadblocks of the original 1940 Nodal Point defences became an integral part of the 1941-42 Fortress plans.

Roadblocks took many forms, but most consisted of concrete anti-tank blocks, both the 5ft by 5ft solid 'Cubes' and large 'Cylinders' made from in-filled concrete pipe sections. These were placed permanently to funnel traffic into a narrow carriageway where they could be examined at a manned checkpoint. In some cases, these checkpoints would be covered either from a hardened, loopholed guardhouse, similar to a small pillbox, or from a nearby 'defended building'.

Some roads were not suitable for such permanent obstructions, particularly if they were going to be used for our own heavy military traffic, in which cases some form of temporary roadblocks were required. If it was a narrow road then the roadblock would consist of fixed concrete cubes placed each side of the carriageway. The cubes would have a stepped slot cut into one face into which a metal RSJ could be dropped to block the road gap when required.

Some roadblocks on minor roads would only consist of 'movable' concrete obstacles such as 2ft 6in x 1ft 9in cylinders or 2ft 9in high conical 'Buoys'. Both types of these small obstacles could easily be rolled in and out of position. They also had holes drilled through their length to enable metal poles to be inserted to assist with their movement. The poles could be left inserted to increase the obstacle's effectiveness.

Obviously when faced with a roadblock the enemy could always attempt to 'outflank' it if there was suitable space to do so. To prevent this, concrete 'Pimples' were set into the softer ground either side of the carriageway to obstruct movement.

General Brooke took over as C-in-C Home Forces in July 1940. When he was with the B.E.F. in France during the German invasion, he witnessed French roadblocks causing great hinderance to the movements of his troops. These experiences led him to order the dismantling of many of the large 'permanent' roadblocks on the Home Front and their replacement with rail socket and mobile cylinder obstacles. The rail socket obstacles consisted of vertical sections of old railway track which were placed into sockets cut into the road surface. These would normally be kept removed and the sockets covered with square metal plated to allow for the passage of legitimate traffic and only put in place to deny passage of enemy vehicles. Concrete cylinders would then be placed in front of the rails to provide extra layers of obstructions. It was estimated that twelve men could close a 13ft road gap with eleven rails and twenty-one cylinders in thirty minutes. A later version of the type of roadblock

saw the vertical rails replaced with ‘bent’ rail sections which made them more effective against heavier tanks.

Although tanks could travel faster on hard, metalled road surfaces they were primarily designed to be able to move across open country in any conditions.

The Maidstone Fortress defence works included the digging of anti-tank ditches around the fortress perimeter. The two most common type of ditch were the ‘V’-shaped, designed to trap tanks nose down, and the square profile type, designed so a tank would fall in and be trapped. Both types were dug to a depth of about 11ft and were about 18ft wide.

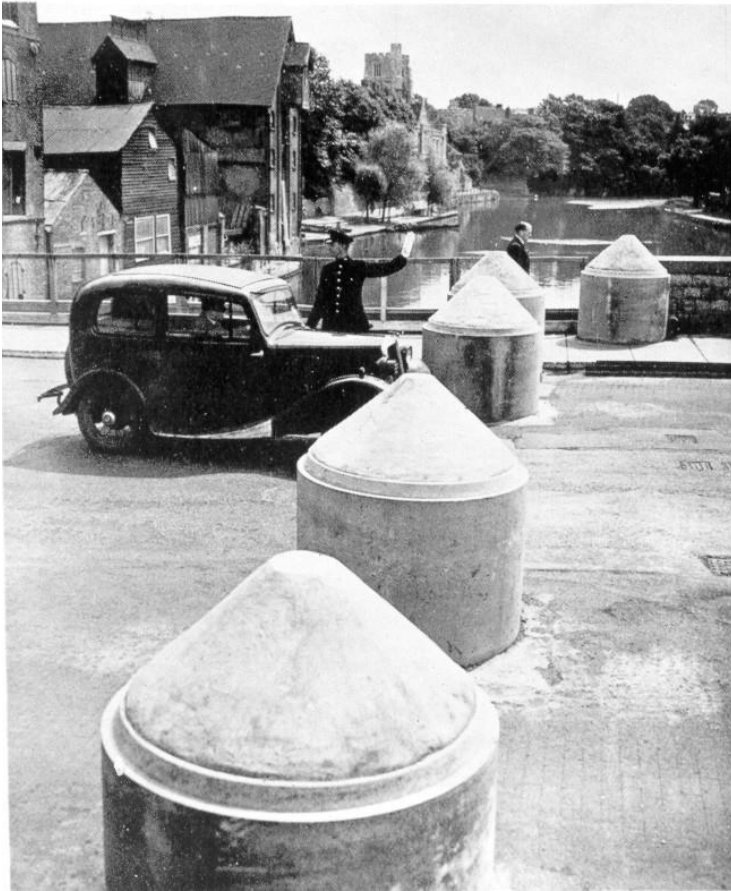
The anti-tank ditches around Maidstone were supplemented with rows of concrete ‘Cubes’, up to four or five deep in places, and possibly minefields.

Measures were also taken to prevent tanks using railway lines circumvent the fieldworks. These were similar to roadblocks with large slotted concrete blocks either side of the railway tracks with steel girders placed into the slots to block access across the tracks.

Although deemed vital to Maidstone’s defence in wartime, all these obstacles would cause obvious problems if they remained in place for long after hostilities ceased. The anti-tank ditches took up valuable agricultural land and were soon filled-in and their concrete defences removed. The roadblocks were a major hinderance to the free movement of traffic, so they too were demolished. Except for a few A/T blocks on the Loose Road and by the Medway at Springfield no other evidence remains of these important Maidstone Fortress defences.



Home Guards erecting a road barrier during an exercise held in the north of Scotland. © IWM (H 7330)



Concrete pipe 'Cylinders' roadblock on Maidstone Bridge



Movable 'Cylinder' obstacles at Fort Amherst, Chatham



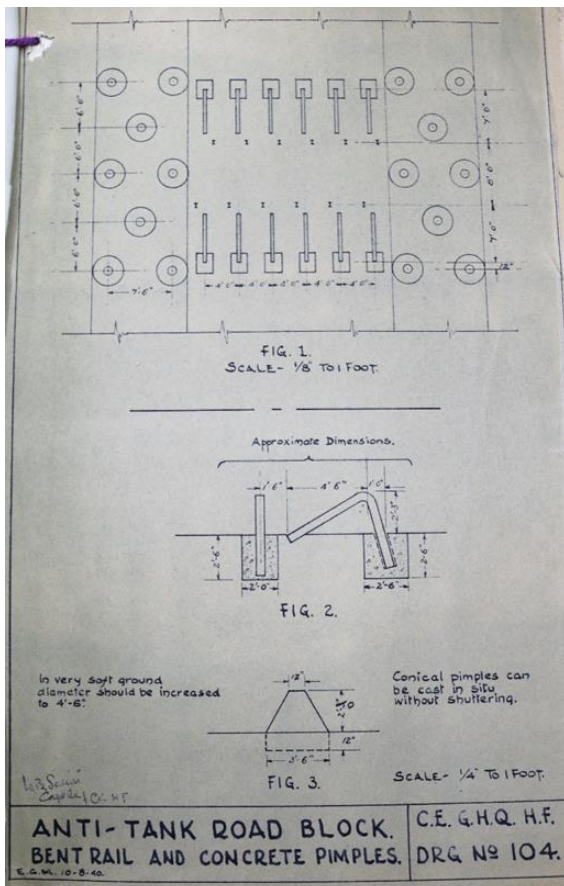
Concrete 'Buoy' type obstacles at Hoo St Werburgh



'Pimple' type obstacles on display at Fort Amherst, Chatham



Home Guard soldiers in York prepare a vertical roadblock © IWM (H 15191)



Plan of a 'Bent Rail & Pimple' roadblock (TNA WO 199/54)



Anti-tank ditch running along open ground to the railway line west of Turkey Mill on the Ashford Road in Maidstone



Eastern Command A-T Ditch (© IWM H 29060)



Anti-tank 'Cubes' by the River Medway at Springfield



An impressive line of A-T obstacles running along open ground to the banks of the River Medway at Tovil

VIII: Flame Fougasses & Spigot Mortars

Mention is made in the main text of two important weapons systems that were made available to the defenders of Maidstone Fortress – the Flame Fougasse and the Spigot Mortar.

Flame Fougasse

Following the Dunkirk evacuation in 1940, Britain faced a critical shortage of weapons. In particular, there was a severe scarcity of anti-tank weapons, many of which had to be left behind in France. Nevertheless, one of the few resources not in short supply was petroleum oil since supplies intended for Europe were filling British storage facilities.

Lord Hankey, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and a member of the Ministerial Committee on Civil Defence, promoted the idea of the burning of oil for defensive purposes, believing that oil should not just be denied to the invader, but used to impede him. Hankey brought his ideas up in a meeting of the Oil Control Board and produced a paper on the subject for the C-in-C Home Forces, General Ironside.

Hankey's ideas soon came to the attention of Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, who authorised Geoffrey Lloyd, the Secretary for Petroleum to press ahead with experiments, with Hankey taking the matter under his general supervision. To this end, the Petroleum Warfare Department (PWD) was created and was made responsible for developing weapons and tactics.

The PWD carried out tests out in July 1940 which concluded that, in suitable conditions, the use of burning petrol and oil as a weapon against armoured vehicles would prove 'most effective'. The report on the tests was sent to the Army Council at the War Office recommending that the weapon would be best deployed in defiles on roads, in villages or built-up areas and, for best effect, be used in conjunction with other anti-tank weapons and obstacles.

The method of employment for the weapon would be by gravity or trailer pump from a hidden reservoir. The fuel would be fed to the defile through 3-inch pipes and then discharged through jets or sprays and ignited electronically. The recommended composition of the fuel was 25% petrol and 75% gas oil. An added advantage of such a mixture was that it could not be used to power motor vehicles and so would be useless to the enemy if stocks were to fall into their hands. The fuel mixture would be stored in standard 40-gallon oil drums in a pre-prepared emplacement or pumped from a mobile tanker.

Within a year the weapon was deployed in all Army Commands around the country. It was now known as the 'Flame Fougasse'. The name derived from a weapon used in the late medieval period called a fougasse: 'a hollow in which was placed a barrel of gunpowder covered by rocks, the explosives to be detonated by a fuse at an opportune moment.'

The most basic form of the flame fougasse consisted of the 40-gallon barrels of fuel installed in emplacements excavated on each side of the road or in specially constructed concrete blocks forming part of a roadblock. Alternatively, they could be placed in the open at the side of the road where they could easily be mistaken as barrels of tar for road repair. When fired from an emplacement a 5lb propelling charge of gunpowder was placed at the rear of the horizontally placed barrel and the opening and firing charge in the centre of the front end of the barrel which would be facing the target. The charges were detonated by fuses connected to a 100-120 volt wireless battery. On detonation the opening and firing charge would rupture the end of the barrel and ignite the fuel which would be fired at the target by the propellant charge. All that was needed to fire the fougasse was to connect the fuse wires to the batteries.

It was recommended that the fougasses should be employed in batteries of not less than ten to achieve maximum effect and to guard against the risk of any ignition failures.

Although the fougasses would have to be prepared by Royal Engineers they could be fired by any troops. The simplicity of its operation made the flame fougasse particularly suitable for Home Guard use. The Chief Engineer Home Forces noted that 'These flame traps do at least give the Home Guard a sporting chance of frying a few Germans.'

In August 1941, Fred Hilton was serving with 260 Field Company Royal Engineers based at Mote Park in Maidstone. He later recalled:

During this time we went on a lot of exercises, mostly de-fencing, laying make-believe minefields, blowing make-believe craters etc. On one occasion digging in and actually blowing a set of Fougasse — these were 50 gallon oil drums filled with petrol and oil, buried in the side of a defile with a small charge of explosives behind or underneath. The idea was that when a column of enemy tanks [approached] the spot the Fougasse were blown. I don't know if they were ever used in action but, at the demonstration we did, the flame covered an area of about 50 sq yds and nothing could have lived in it. I think this would have stopped some of the tanks, of course, this was the whole point of the exercise!

Only two flame fougasse are recorded on the Heritage Environment Record (HER) in the Maidstone Borough area: one at the junction of the A229 with Forstal Road (as mentioned in the main text) and the other on the Loose Road. There may well have been others but no physical evidence of any remain today. However, on the Lydd Road in Camber, East Sussex there are two extant fougasse structures, which possibly housed pumping equipment for a beach fougasse. I found these last year and took photographs.



Flame Barrage demonstration at Mid Calder, Scotland. November 1940 © IWM (H 5772)



Flame Fougasse demonstration somewhere in England c.1941 © IWM (D 24854)



One of the Fougasse structures at Camber (rear view)



The other Fougasse structure at Camber

Spigot Mortars

The Spigot Mortar, or Blacker Bombard to give its correct name, was a light anti-tank weapon developed by Lt. Col. Stewart Blacker O.B.E. in response to the British Army's shortage of anti-tank guns following the B.E.F.'s evacuation from Dunkirk. Blacker had served in the Indian Army and then in the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War when he was shot down and severely

wounded. After the war he decided to concentrate on developing special weapons at his own expense without help from the services; it was his proud boast to be the country's sole private inventor of armaments.

The Second World War found Blacker with the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the Territorial Army, but obviously unfit for further service overseas. He therefore concentrated on his projects for developing weapons. His first interest had been in trying to devise an anti-tank weapon for use by the infantry. During the early part of the 1930s, Blacker became interested in the concept of the spigot mortar. Unlike conventional mortars the spigot mortar did not possess a barrel, and instead there was a steel rod known as a 'spigot' fixed to a baseplate; the bomb itself had a propellant charge inside its tail. When the mortar was to be fired, the bomb was pushed down onto the spigot, which exploded the propellant charge and blew the bomb into the air.

Before the war neither the anti-tank Blacker Bombard, as he called it, nor any of his other weapons had been adopted by the army. However, when the war had started Blacker approached everybody he knew at the War Office to do something about them but without success.

In 1939, a new section of military intelligence research (MIRc) had been formed to develop special weapons for 'irregular' warfare. At its head was a Royal Engineer, Major Millis Jefferis. When Winston Churchill became Prime Minister, he also took the role of Minister of Defence and took MIRc under his wing as part of his Ministry and changed its name to MD1

Blacker was eventually referred to Jefferis who took a great interest in his 'Bombard' weapon and brought it to the attention of Churchill who attended a demonstration of the weapon on 18th August 1940 and was suitably impressed.

By October 1940, Blacker and Jefferis considered that they had brought the mortar up to a point that a decision was required on its future. Professor Frederick Lindemann, Churchill's Scientific Adviser who worked closely with MD1, wrote to the Prime Minister, recommending it for its simplicity, which would enable it to be produced in large numbers; its small size and light weight; and the fact that it could fire various sizes of ammunition and its effectiveness against armoured vehicles. Lindemann summarised the claims made for the new weapon which included a rate of fire of 10 rounds per minute and a cost of production (after the first 1,000) of £40 per gun and £3 per bomb. Two types of bomb had been developed: an anti-tank bomb which weighed 33lbs, with a maximum range of 580 yards, which could penetrate almost 2½ inches of armour; and an anti-personnel bomb which weighed 16½ lbs with a maximum range of 1100 yards. Lindemann told the Prime Minister that Blacker and Jefferis now wanted to demonstrate the mortar against a stationary or approaching tank in order to establish its merits. Churchill passed the letter onto his military Chief-of Staff, General Ismay, requesting him to arrange a demonstration.

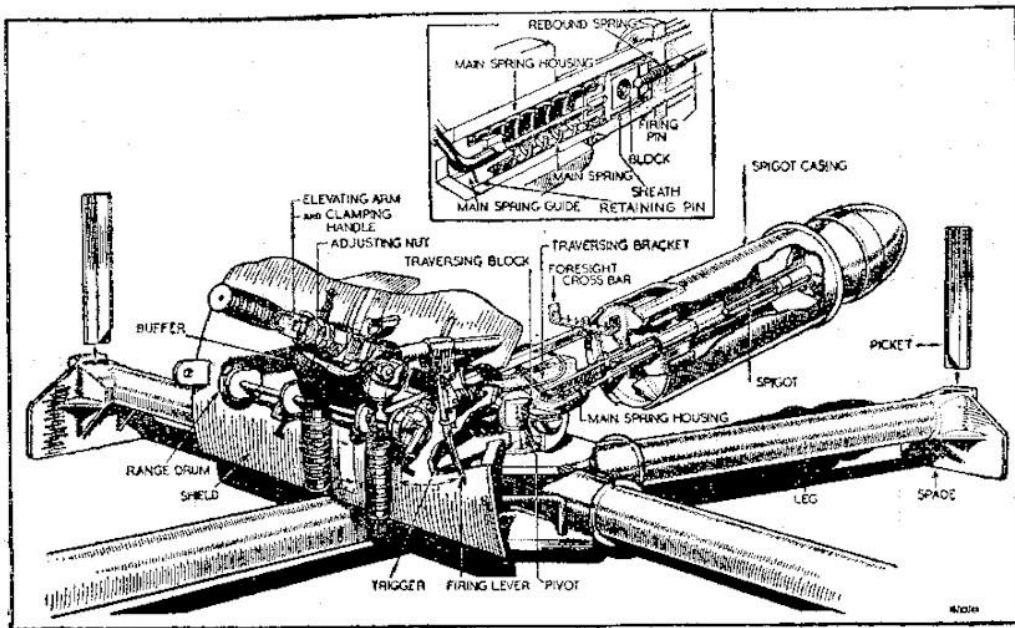
Trials of the prototype were undertaken by the Ordnance Board at Shoeburyness in February and March 1941. The Board's report described the mortar as having an 'excellent effect' with a 20½ lb bomb against armour plate. However, the results of the trials showed that it would not be suitable for use as an anti-tank gun in active operations due to its poor chances of hitting a moving tank at more than 100 yards. Its most promising role was considered to be as a short-range anti-tank weapon to reinforce static and semi-static defences. It could be sited and suitably camouflaged in close proximity to roadblocks, defiles and tank traps.

Following the trials, 2,000 mortars were ordered for use by the Home Guard together with 300,000 rounds of heavy anti-tank ammunition and 600,000 rounds of the lighter anti-personnel ammunition. In use, the mortar was to be either affixed to a large cruciform platform, or an immobile concrete pedestal.

The first Bombards appeared in late 1941 and were issued to both regular and Home Guard units. By July 1942, approximately 22,000 of the Bombards had been produced and issued to forces throughout the country. However as early as November 1941, concerns were being aired about the suitability of the weapon and it was unpopular with several units; the anti-tank rounds were found to possess several problems. They had insensitive fuses, which meant that they would often pass through an unarmoured target without detonating, and when they did explode fragments were often thrown back at the crew. Some units attempted to trade their Bombards for Thompson submachine guns or refused to use them at all.

Large numbers of fixed concrete pedestals for Bombards were installed and a significant number survive in their original positions in many parts of the United Kingdom. Unfortunately none seem to have survived within the boundaries of the former Maidstone Fortress but some can still be seen in other parts of Kent and a very well-restored emplacement can be found at Limpsfield Chart in Surrey.

29-MM. SPIGOT MORTAR



Cut-away drawing of a Blacker Bombard from a War Office pamphlet



Men of the Saxmundham Home Guard prepare to fire a Blacker Bombard during training with War Office instructors, 30 July 1941. © IWM (H12299)



Home Guard soldiers training with a Bombard on a fixed concrete mounting © IWM (H30181)



A surviving spigot mortar concrete pedestal at the Citadel Battery, Dover



A restored spigot mortar emplacement at Limpsfield Chart, Surrey

IX: RAF Detling Defences

When the airfield at Detling closed in 1959 the site reverted to farmland. Kent County Council purchased some of the land for use as the Kent County Showground and a small industrial estate was developed on the old airfield Technical Site leaving just a handful of original buildings. However, much of the defensive infrastructure remains and can easily be viewed from public footpaths.

Type FW3/22 Pillboxes (Light Anti-Aircraft Gun Variant)

There are more extant pillboxes at Detling airfield than any other single Second World War site in Kent. Sixteen have been documented on the Extended Defence of Britain Database of which I have identified twelve so far. They are all the same basic design for use in airfield defence: a much modified and enlarged Type FW3/22 variant. As with the standard Type 22 they were built in the form of a regular hexagon but with much longer walls (14ft 6ins) to allow for the inclusion of a central LAA (light anti-aircraft) open gun well which contained a mount for either a Bren or Lewis LMG (light machine-gun). There are four rifle-firing loopholes, much longer but narrower than on a standard Type 22 and a square loophole with a shelf for either a Bren or Lewis LMG.

They all have a very low entrance, some protected by an equally low ‘blast’ wall, which the crew would have needed to crawl through on their hands and knees to gain access.

Of the twelve I have been able to find, just three have been strengthened to shellproof standard. The loopholes on the shellproof pillboxes are of a shorter but broader design.



Bullet-proof version. Note the vegetation growing out of the central LAA gun well



Shell-proof version. Note the very low entrance



Central LAA gun well



Internal view of the LAA gun well showing the gun mounting



Internal view showing the entrance and LMG loophole

Airfield Battle Headquarters

The Battle H.Q. at Detling was built to an Air Ministry design (Drawing No. 11008/41) which was the most common pattern found on RAF airfields in the Second World War. It comprises a 28-foot-long by 9 foot wide underground box divided into two rooms (Messengers & Runners Room and Defence Officer's Room), a short passageway and a WC with an extra room to one side (PBX Room) this room measures 6 foot by 8 foot. The PBX (Public Branch Exchange) Room housed the telephone equipment. Four concrete steps led up into the surface Observation Room. A short metal ladder gave access to the emergency escape hatch, but it has been removed. Access to the Battle H.Q. from the surface was by a concrete stairway which has long been demolished.

Due to the demolished entrance and the removal of the escape ladder access into the interior of the Battle H.Q. was not possible. However, a B.H.Q. of an identical design exists on the site of the former RAF Lympne airfield which I was able gain access to some years ago.



Detling B.H.Q. Observation Room and escape hatch



Detling B.H.Q. view into the escape hatch showing the steps up to the Observation Room



Lympne B.H.Q. view from PBX Room



Lympne B.H.Q. Observation Room

‘Seagull’ Trench

Seagull trenches were a defensive structure unique to airfields. They derived their name from the shape of their roofs which resembled the wings of a seagull. They comprised a brick or concrete lined trench protected by a concrete roof on raised brick supports which provided firing bays. The example at Detling is a rare survivor albeit only the roof and supports are visible, the rest of the trench having been infilled some years ago. I was fortunate to find it as it was very well hidden amongst the vegetation on the sloping side of the earth motte of the medieval Binbury Castle. It is small in size compared to others I have seen elsewhere, but it may have been just one of several on the airfield.



View through the vegetation



Side view



The distinctive 'seagull wing' shape of the roof



Frontal view showing the firing bays

Pickett-Hamilton Fort

In July 1940, proposals were being circulated for the consideration of a 'disappearing pillbox' for use in airfield defence. The pillbox would normally be flush with the ground when not in use but had a concrete 'lifting turret' which could be raised quickly into a firing position. The turret would be raised by means of a hydraulic pump or, if that failed, by a hand jack. The time

required to raise the turret by hand was three minutes. The cost for each pillbox was put at £45.

Its main advantage was deemed to be that it could be sited in the middle of an aerodrome without causing obstruction during normal operations. The C-in-C Home Forces (General Ironside), attached considerable importance to this device which he considered would result in the economy of troops required on the static defence of airfields.

The proposals were not greeted with universal approval by Army Commands. The C-in-C Eastern Command, Lt. Gen. Williams, was ‘... unable to agree that this design comes up to the necessary specification for general army purposes ... It is top-heavy, and the slightest blow or rough treatment would throw the machinery out of gear.’

In December 1940 drawings for an improved version of the pillbox were being circulated. The internal diameter had been increased to 6ft allowing a two- or three-man crew ample room to work in. It would be operated manually by the crew inside the fort pushing upwards on the roof to raise the turret with the aid of a counterbalance weight. Tests showed that it could be raised and brought into action by four men in about four seconds and lowered in twelve seconds. The cost of the improved fort was put at £230 - £250.

Officially named the Pickett-Hamilton Counterbalance Fort, it was designed by Francis Pickett, an agricultural engineer, and Donald Hamilton, a London architect. It consisted of a cylindrical, concrete, loopholed drum which sat inside a concentric concrete sleeve that was sunk below ground level. Access into the fort was through a hinged hatch in the roof. The manual counterbalance lift was soon replaced with a pneumatic pump and later with more efficient hydraulic machinery.

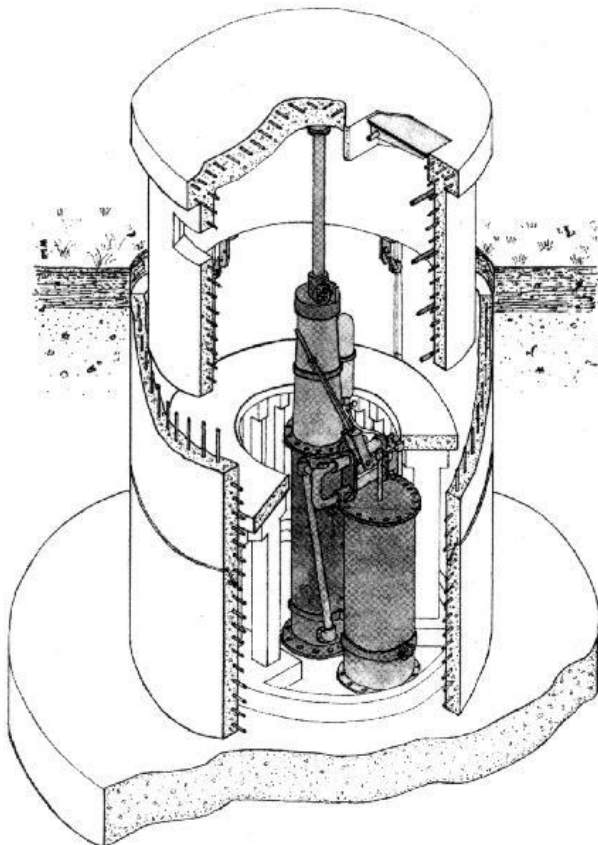
Installation of the forts on airfields around the country commenced in January 1941, with three forts per airfield deemed to be the minimum requirement. The manufacturers specified eight days for the erection and testing of each fort.

Present-day aerial views of the airfield site at Detling show two of the forts extant of which I have visited one. All that is visible is the roof flush with the ground surface. I lacked any tools to lift the access hatch so internal viewing was no possible.

A working example of a Pickett-Hamilton Fort can be seen outside the Lashenden Air Warfare Museum at Headcorn Airfield. The fort was one originally installed at Manston in 1941. It was excavated by the Royal Engineers in 2006 and moved to Headcorn.



A fully retracted Pickett-Hamilton Fort at Detling, The access hatch off-centre to the right



Cut-away drawing showing the hydraulic lifting mechanism



The working example at Headcorn

X: RAF West Malling Defences

The RAF continued to use West Malling Airfield until 1960 when it was handed over to the US Navy. They left in 1963 and the site was eventually taken over by Kent County Council. Flying continued in various forms until 1992 when it was sold for development into housing and commercial offices.

The site is now the parish of Kings Hill. Most of the airfield Domestic Site buildings remain but almost all the Technical Site infrastructure was demolished. Thankfully some important defensive structures survived the redevelopment.

The ‘Bofors Tower’

The surviving landmark defensive structure at the site of the former airfield at Kings Hill is the pair of light anti-aircraft gun towers colloquially known as ‘the Bofors Tower’. Located in a wooded clearing east of the Teston Road junction with the A228, the structure consists of two four-legged, three-storey, reinforced concrete frames of similar dimensions each encased in brick. Each tower is about 35 feet in height and topped with a concrete gun platform. The two platforms are separated by a three-inch ‘expansion gap’. The northernmost platform would have supported a 40 mm Bofors light anti-aircraft, whilst the other supported a predictor sight for the Bofors and possibly a Lewis gun. Internally the Bofors gun tower has floors at all levels. The other tower is open full height to the second floor and functions as a stairwell with landings at every half-level and has pairs of high level, two-light windows on the east and west elevations. Internal access from one tower to the other is by way of the floors cantilevering out from their respective towers to almost meet in the middle with just a two-inch gap.

Access to the gun platforms is by an entrance hatch on the 2nd floor of the predictor tower. The Bofors platform is cantilevered on all four sides with an ammunition locker on each corner.

Long after the war someone had the rather bizarre idea of affixing plant boxes to the east elevations of both towers. The obvious problem of how the plants were going to be watered was answered by installing an automatic irrigation system. The pipework for the irrigation pump is still in place in a room on the ground floor of the predictor tower.



West elevation



East elevation



Landing connecting the two towers. Note the gap between the cantilevered floors.



Stairwell in the predictor tower



Bofors gun platform. Note the ammunition lockers. The void in the photo was for an external ladder.

Type FW3/24 Pillbox

One of the few surviving airfield pillboxes can be found in a small nature conservation area off Bancroft Drive: a Type FW3/24 infantry pillbox. It was heavily modified by the Air Ministry in 1941 following a recommendation by the G.O.C. South Eastern Command that airfield pillboxes should have their walls strengthened to a concrete thickness of 3 ft 6 inches. This it was hoped would make them proof against a 20cm anti-tank gun that the Germans were believed to be developing at the time. To achieve this extra thickness concrete panels were added to the existing walls. It was also recommended that the number of loopholes be reduced to two but in this example only the one forward-facing loophole has been left exposed which would have probably mounted a Bren or Lewis light machine-gun.



The added concrete strengthening panels can clearly be seen here



The single remaining loophole / embrasure

Airfield Battle Headquarters

In the event of an enemy attack, the defence of the airfield would have been co-ordinated from the Airfield Battle Headquarters which still stands in Flite

Wood, which is in the middle of Kings Hill golf course. This structure would provide a hardened and secure structure from which the Airfield Defence Officer could conduct the battle. It was built to an Air Ministry design (Drawing Number 11012/41) and consists of a stairway down to four underground rooms (Messengers, PBX, Defence Officer's and a Storeroom) and a WC, linked by a short corridor. A metal ladder gives access to a small, square observation room with two embrasures in each face and one in each corner which would originally have provided a good view across the airfield. Another short metal ladder gives access to the emergency escape hatch which emerges at the side of the observation room.



Observation room and emergency escape hatch



Access stairwell



View from messengers room through the hatch into the PBX room



Emergency escape hatch



Observation room

Pickett-Hamilton Fort

By 1942 335 Pickett-Hamilton Forts had been installed in airfields across the country but they were still far from popular with military commanders. The Commander of XII Corps, Lt. Gen. Thorne, considered them unsuitable for

airfield defence because of the limited accommodation inside the fort itself, the four-inch concrete walls offering little protection against enemy fire, inadequate drainage, and the high cost.

The Commander of IV Corps, Lt. Gen. Nosworthy, felt, in addition to technical and maintenance difficulties, that they would have a 'pernicious, psychological influence' on the garrisons of Young Soldier battalions who had to protect aerodromes, who may be greatly tempted to 'close down' instead of carrying out their duties in an attack.

The Commander of II Corps, Lt. Gen. Anderson, canvassed the opinion of RAF Station Commanders in his area and reported that '... the Fort is in the nature of a white elephant'. The few that had been installed in his area were either incomplete or did not work.

The C-in-C Southern Command, Lt. Gen. Sir Harold Alexander, was more positive. He thought the forts had value '... particularly on dome shaped aerodromes' where they may provide the only means to bear fire over the whole surface of the landing ground'. But even he expressed concerns over the tendency of the raising and lowering mechanism to jam when in operation.

By March 1942 all the faults with the fort had been noted, one of them being their inability to withstand the weight of a fully loaded four-engined bomber when they taxied over them. With Bomber Command now deeming them 'useless', no more Pickett-Hamilton Forts were built.

In common with other airfields where they were installed, there were three forts at West Malling. Unfortunately, one was lost during the re-development of the airfield, but another was recovered and is now on display at the Imperial War Museum at Duxford. The third fort remained in-situ and has been protected behind a 'Heras'-style fence for the last seven years. It is now due to become the centrepiece of the new Kings Hill Park amphitheatre.



The turret of a Pickett-Hamilton Retractable Fort, fully raised and manned by a bren-gun team of the Coldstream Guards, taken on a fighter airfield in Southern England. © IWM (CH 17890)



One of the West Malling forts now on display at IWM Duxford



The surviving in-situ fort safe behind a security fence in 2012

XI: School Air-Raid Shelters

Despite the conditions of war, children's education was considered as important as ever. Disruption to lessons, although at times inevitable, was to be kept to a minimum. Schoolchildren had to become accustomed to carrying gas masks at all times and gas mask drills at schools became routine. Kent Education Committee issued a directive that pupils should be trained to work and play in their masks.

At the outbreak of the War, cloakrooms were reinforced to provide relatively safe refuges while more substantial surface or underground shelters were being constructed in school grounds.

Maidstone's two Grammar Schools were eventually provided with enough underground shelter space to house all their pupils and staff. During air-raids pupils and staff would move into the shelters where school lessons would continue.

After the War, the shelters were either backfilled or used for storage. Fortunately, some of the shelter networks still survive and I have been fortunate to be allowed to visit those at both schools.

Maidstone Grammar School

During the War Maidstone Grammar School (MGS) in Barton Road provided education for over 300 boys. The excavation of shelters had begun during the Munich Crisis of 1938 and the work accelerated after the Declaration of War in 1939. The shelters extended from the School Court and continued under the playing fields.

Post-war most of the shelter entrances were backfilled and the ground above built on to accommodate the increasing numbers attending the school. However, one entrance was kept open to allow for some of the tunnels to be used for storage. Dampness within the tunnels eventually made them unsuitable for storage and they fell into disuse. The tunnel entrance was fenced off and soon covered in vegetation.

During 1942-43, an anti-tank ditch was excavated, and concrete obstacles constructed around the perimeter of the school and some of the playing field as an integral part of the defence works for Maidstone Fortress. It was with a hope of finding some evidence of these works, that I approached the school in March 2018 requesting a visit which was granted. I was made very welcome and during an initial meeting the Headmaster, School Bursar and School Archivist the subject of the air-raid shelters came up. Although it was previously thought that the shelters were completely inaccessible, the Bursar, mentioned that she had been down into them. The Headmaster immediately agreed that we should all go and take a look. The caretaker was summoned to unlock the gate to the

shelter entrance. The steps down were completely buried under years of composted dead leaves but we managed to get down them into the tunnels.

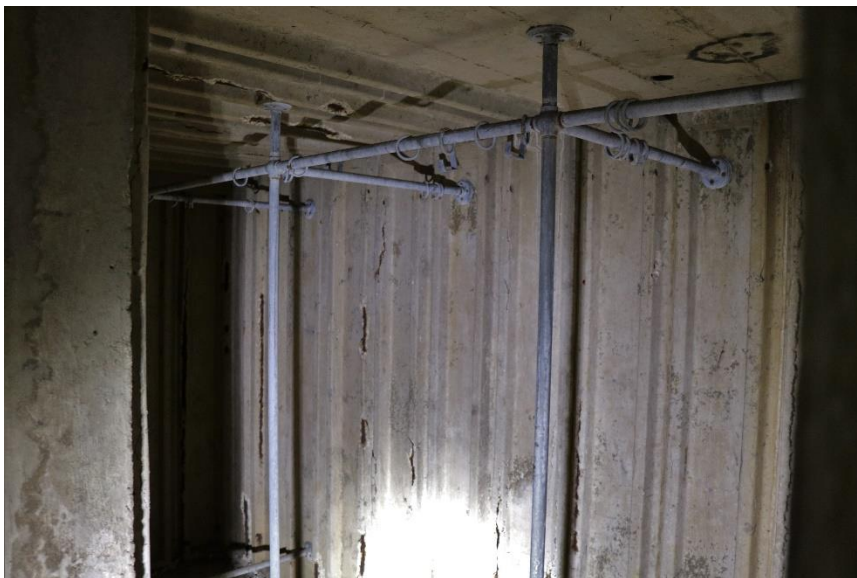
After a brief look around, I suggested I make an approach to the Kent Underground Research Group (KURG) for them to clear the entrance and survey the tunnels. This work was undertaken in October 2018. The steps and overhanging vegetation were cleared, a survey made of the tunnels and graffiti recorded.



The entrance steps to the MGS shelter after clearance in October 2018



Internal view of the MGS shelter



WC cubicles in the MGS shelter

Maidstone Girls Grammar School

At the start of term in September 1939, Maidstone Girls Grammar School (MGGS), in Buckland Road, had over 500 pupils. Its numbers had been swollen by the arrival of 240 evacuee pupils from King's Warren School in Plumstead. Many of the MGGS pupils had King's Warren evacuees billeted with them in their homes. Families had no choice in this, if they had rooms to spare.

Three shelters were excavated in the school grounds, each consisting of six tunnels. Each shelter could accommodate up to 180 pupils and staff. Each tunnel served as a classroom with the girls sitting on benches with their backs to the wall. In each shelter there was a small room divided into two curtained

chemical toilet cubicles. Lighting for the shelters was initially provided by oil lamps but these were superseded by electrical lighting later in the war.

The shelters continued in use until the end of the 'V' rocket weapons campaign in the early Spring of 1945. With the end of the war the shelters were abandoned and, in 1948, the two in the grounds at the front of the school had their entrances demolished and backfilled. The remaining shelter at the rear of the school was used as a storeroom for many years before falling into disuse. One entrance was demolished and the other was locked-up and remained so until about 2012 when it was re-opened. The shelter was then cleared, and a new secondary entrance built, enabling it to be used for educational purposes which included visits from groups from other local schools.



The original entrance to the MGGS shelter



Internal view of the MGS shelter



Original fire blanket container in the MGS shelter

In 2019 KURG were approached by MGS with a view to locating and re-opening one of the two shelters at the front of the school whose entrances had been demolished, backfilled, capped with concrete and buried in 1948.

On one of the hottest days of the year in July, I found myself of the KURG team digging out the entrance. The approximate position of the shelter itself had already been determined by a magnetometer survey the previous day and the possible locations of the three original entrances identified with the help of an aerial photograph of the site from 1946. Work was begun on one of the entrances which was, thankfully, under the shade of some trees that had not been there in 1946. The downside of this was that the tree roots made the excavations much more difficult. We eventually struck the concrete cap, but this proved a formidable obstacle which could only be cut through with the aid of a

heavy-duty electric breaker which we had to go out and purchase on the day. Having broken through the cap we then came across several sections of reinforced concrete fence posts which had been used as a base for the cap. These too had to be broken-up and the reinforcing rods cut through. It was then that I noticed a gap appearing and, shining my torch into it, a large void appeared which proved to be the entrance tunnel. We cleared some of the rubble from the stairs and, after testing the air quality made our way into the shelter, the first people to have done so in over seventy years. Having ensured the shelters safety, we invited the school's headteacher and some members of her staff in to look around.

The shelter was in remarkably good condition but had been left empty with no interesting artefacts to be found. We did find some wartime graffiti on the walls but not as much as was evident in the other shelter.

At the end of the afternoon the entrance was secured and the following day another KURG team undertook a detailed survey which included recording the graffiti and constructional details. The entrance was then backfilled but its understood that the school plan to restore this and another of the entrances to allow the shelter to be used for educational purposes.



Some of the KURG team digging out the MGGS shelter entrance



The electric breaker gradually exposing the entrance tunnel



Inside view of the exposed entrance



Internal view of one of the shelter's 'classrooms'



Pencil drawing of a glamorous looking lady found on one of the walls

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