



What's Left.

by Nigel Dawe

I am sitting here trying to think how Judith Chalmers would start a feature on Guernsey for 'Wish you were here', and then make sure I do it completely differently ! So, Guernsey, in the Channel Islands. Actually, the most fortified island in the Channel Island group, sitting where it is to the west and jutting out into the Atlantic.

Is there much left ? You bet there is ! If you are into fortifications, it is awesome !

I don't intend to do the history book bit with dates and times etc., but put you in the picture of what is left to see. You all know it was occupied by those dastardly Germans, and you probably know of all the hardships the islanders went through, especially after 'D-Day' when the supplies from France were understandably cut off, and all on the islands were literally starving, and how, out of the eight thousand horses on Guernsey, owned by both the islanders and the Germans, only one survived to the capitulation, the rest being eaten ! Dogs, cats, they weren't fussy you know.

After the capture of the islands, the Germans pumped in enough resources to literally make the islands bristle with all kinds of defensive posts, and none more so than Guernsey.

I was fortunate enough to work with an ex. German prisoner of war some while back, who elected to stay in the U.K. after the war as his home was in the eastern part and he wasn't too keen on the Ruskies. It took a long time, but he finally told me of his experiences in the Wehrmacht, the German wartime army. He was based on Guernsey for almost three years, up to the surrender, and he had some amazing true stories, some of which I have never read in any books. He said it was a very boring existence, and as he was in an artillery regiment on an anti-aircraft gun, unless something flew over they did nothing, day in and day out, for months on end. However, he wriggled out of being posted to the Russian Front as he had a friend who he went to school with who

worked in the Army Headquarters in Berlin and who managed to get his buddy transferred to this artillery regiment stationed on Guernsey, much to our mans relief, of course.

With a little bit of prompting, I managed to get lots of information from him on the islands fortifications, his regiment and where they were situated, and quite a lot more. Ideal, as I wanted to visit Guernsey in the near future.

Gunther Porsch (or Fred as we called him) was in the Third Battalion of the 319th Artillery Regiment, whose headquarters was at Les Vardes, St. Peter Port, a short distance from the town and harbour. Fred was billeted in a private house a short walk from St Peter Port, whose owners had fled to the U.K.



This large house called 'Oberlands' was the 319th Infantry Regiment Headquarters. There was also a German military hospital in the grounds.



The 319th Divisional H.Q. bunker, near St.Peter Port. It is quite a bit bigger than it looks from this angle, but was the best shot I could get without entering private land.

Airport ! Be near the airport ? Of course, I love all aircraft, but it is only a very small airport, we aint talking Heathrow, ya know ! Anyway, being near the airport had one excellent advantage.

The Manor Hotel was taken over in late 1940 as the headquarters of the 'Ace Of Spades' Geschwader, JG53 equipped with Messerschmitt Me.109's based at the nearby airfield. Mentioned it to the wife, eventually ! And very nice it was too.



In the same field next to the road is this large bunker, the H.Q. of the 319th Artillery Regiment. Originally all in the grounds of 'Oberlands' house. All seen from the road



The 319th Communications H.Q. bunker, just over the road from the other two in a street named Les Quatre Vents. It now makes an excellent thief proof store !



This is a German barracks block in the grounds of the old Headquarters. Now used by the hospital on the site.

All these photographs were taken in one small area and are all centred around what is now the Princess Elizabeth Hospital. Ironical that the Germans used the grounds of 'Oberlands' house as a military hospital during their occupation of the islands.

Verona and I had decided to visit Guernsey and we sat at home with the brochures deciding on where we would stay. Naturally, out of the bookshelf came 'War in the Channel Islands-Then and Now', and from this we (I) picked our hotel. It was to be the very picturesque Manor Hotel at a lovely spot called Petit Bot Bay, not far from the airport.



What more could you want on holiday ? Lovely pre-war built hotel in a beautiful setting, and an Me. 109 flying Luftwaffe Headquarters near an airport. Perfect.

We arrived quite early in the morning, had breakfast and looked at some brochures as to what was on offer with regards to tours around the sights of local interest. Candle factory ! Smallest chapel ! Get a grip Guernsey. Hired a car so we could see the 'proper' sights, candle factory indeed !

Our first stop was to Richard Heaume's Occupation Museum, which turns out was a two minute walk from our hotel (well, we hadn't got to grips with the local geography yet) and drove up the lane towards it. Good job nothing was behind because I slammed on the brakes and screeched to a halt. Why ? Pointing at us over a low stone wall about a hundred yards away was the business end of an '88', yes a proper 88 mm anti-aircraft / anti-tank gun, enough to make the blood run cold, and also make it rush to our "Dinger" Bells nether regions, I have no doubt ! We continued on after my shock, and turned into the yard where the 88 was sitting. What a beast. I spent twenty minutes inspecting and photographing it from every angle. As there was no one to ask as we were a bit out of season, I cannot be sure whether it was a recent import or an actual island gun, but whatever, it



You certainly don't see one of these everyday ! With a fantastic range and very hard hitting, these 88mm guns were the scourge of the allies during WWII. If they spotted you first, you were out of the game in most cases.

impressed me! In the area behind the museum were several larger items, like a Pak 38 anti-tank gun, an aircraft engine from a wreck and preserved beach obstacles known to the allies as 'hedgehogs'. Inside the museum was a comprehensive collection of German equipment from all over the island, and not just a few bits either. Everything the Germans used from the 88 mm gun outside to knives, forks and spoons, all stamped with the Nazi eagle. A display of particular interest was a tunic and cap of a German army officer apparently found neatly folded in a trunk after the occupation and stashed away in a loft by the owner of the house where the officer had been billeted.



With its provenance, this high ranking officers tunic and cap would be worth an absolute fortune to a collector.

Many other items were to be seen, like a complete horse drawn mobile field kitchen with a pair of stuffed horses. Naturally, the old swastika gets a good airing, plastered as it was on most things, but, all part of our history, as were the huge collection of guns used on the island by the occupying troops

in WWII. Also, civilian items had been collected and went a long way to showing the hardships everyone endured on the islands. It is a seriously fantastic museum and is a must if you are visiting the island.



Wartime German horse drawn Mobile Field Kitchen at the Occupation Museum, Guernsey. The horses are really lifelike models. At least they don't kick and bite !



Virtually every type of gun the Germans used in WWII.



In the back yard of Richard Heaume's Occupation Museum in the area known as 'Forest', don't ask me why, there are relatively few trees about, sits this beautifully restored / preserved German Pak 38 anti-tank gun alongside 'hedgehogs', anti-invasion devices designed to hole the bottom of any landing craft attempting to run onto the beach, they often had mines or shells attached and were very effective if submerged.

So, after a fascinating couple of hours at the museum we went in search of some bunkers and things. It was absolutely pouring with rain but it somehow made all the grey concrete look even more sinister when dripping wet, especially the large, unique to the islands, naval observation towers, none more so than the Saumarez tower sitting atop its huge bunker on the edge of the beach in the south west of the island. There is something fascinating about these towers and all the work that went in to building them all around the coastline, especially at Saumarez Fort.



The Saumarez tower, all glistening in the rain, with its massive command bunker and pillbox underneath.

Concrete bunkers abound, round every corner it is possible to see another, different type. It's pillbox heaven! As it was still raining heavily we headed off in search of the underground hospital, got to be dry in there, right? Well, at least it wasn't raining in there, but it was dark, dank and dripping wet, not half as well kept as the same thing on Jersey. We spent an hour and a half in there exploring the dismal but somehow fascinating tunnels. I know it was heated in WWII, but I reckon if you went in with a gunshot wound you would come out with pneumonia! Apparently, a large part of the hospital tunnel system was used for ammunition storage, which must have done wonders for patients recovery rates but not a lot for their moral. Considering it was a hospital, the emergency exits were interesting in as much as they were vertical shafts about ten foot square with a single ladder going straight up one of the side walls to a manhole sized exit point above your head, about seventy feet above. Just the job if you were covered from head to toe in a plaster cast! Not too good, in an emergency, to miss your footing either.

The rain had stopped by now so we did some more exploring along the coast. Saw a large bunker with an open door and stepped back in time. Gothic German writing everywhere, honest! Now I can't speak German but it looked like something about the gas tight door, which was missing but its massive steel frame was still there, and *Rauchen* was very definitely *Verboten*.



The inviting entrance to the Underground Hospital, but inside, dank and dismal but somehow fascinating.



We found this massive bunker at the side of the road, about four times the size of Murray's, the Boche obviously meant business, but once inside.....



...we found this German writing on the wall inside the entrance and elsewhere. Amazing it wasn't defaced!

Another super museum we went to was at La Vallette. This large underground site was built to house four large fuel tanks to refuel U-Boats in

Soldiers Bay nearby. Three of the four giant tanks were removed and the great cavern was converted into the museum in 1987. Excellent stuff, and all air conditioned keeping the artifacts in pristine condition.

We decided to walk out to Castle Cornet at the tip of the harbour mouth (almost) and passed a couple of big bunkers on the mole, one of them two storey. They certainly didn't mess about here.



One of the two bunkers along the mole on the way to Castle Cornet (I could have done with an ice-cream). I know they had more time than we did, some four years, but the finish on the concrete is excellent.



Typical of what is seen all over Guernsey, once again the workmanship is superb. I suppose it was motivation, do it right or get shot ! That would certainly motivate me.



This, though, is also typical. Any heavy metal was cut up for scrap after the war, the islands losing many occupation period treasures to the gas cutting torch.

Something I had read about that was unique to Guernsey was the *MIRUS* gun battery. Four 305mm (12 inch) guns captured from the WWI Russian dreadnought, the *Volya*. These were landed at St Peter Port and towed right across the island to the area of St Saviour, to the west, and quite a few road modifications had to be made to get them there, one at a time. The combined weight of each barrel and cradle was around 52 tons. Quite a feat of transport when you know how narrow and twisty the Guernsey roads are. Even now they have a 35 mph speed limit and it is plenty fast enough.

The four guns, and of course their infrastructure, were spread out all across the parish of St. Saviour, and there is still evidence of this everywhere, if you know what you are looking for. There was a Wuerzburg radar bunker, command bunker, three enormous ammunition stores, barracks, flak towers, defence bunkers, and at the time machine gun nests, fixed mortar posts, acres of barbed wire and minefields. Plus the huge camp for the construction workers, now a new housing estate.

I wanted to see the massive, and I do mean massive, emplacement at La Houquette Primary School, so big that where the No.3 gun once stood is now the school playground. Honest! I've seen it.



Now, THAT'S what you call a school playground ! Lucky kids or what ? The No 3 emplacement for MIRUS.

The kids were on holiday so I found the caretaker and he let me into the underground area, bless him. As you may well know I love underground concrete, and this was IT ! The photos in the centre spread do not do it justice, it was fantastic down there. I thought I had been down there about half an hour, but when I surfaced some two and a half hours had just vanished. The school uses part of the tunnel system as a store, naturally, but round

the back in the generator room, the ablutions and crew living area is not used for anything, and whilst the site has been drastically robbed of anything movable a whole lot is still to be seen, and of course, imagined.

Entry is down a slope between concrete walls to the tunnel entrance. The narrow guage railway lines are still in place. These were for loading the shells which weighed from 250kg. to 405kg, one shell at a time on a small truck, pushed by the gunners into the magazine area. An overhead gantry then lifted each shell onto the stockpile. The little four wheel trucks were used extensively underground for moving the very heavy shells about, right up to the breach of the gun itself.



How's this for a school store room entrance ? The only thing the school has done is to fit the entrance with a garage type up and over door. The rest is pure history.

As I walked down the slope I didn't quite realise what I was about to see. Naturally, the caretaker was somewhat blase' about the whole thing, having been down there hundreds of times before. I didn't know what to expect. What I saw was every military bunker enthusiasts dream come true. It was also a bit of a shock to the system.



One of the first things that grabs you is the enormity of it all. The curved wall on the right is the outside of the "playground", door leads to the bagged charge magazine



Continuing round the curve, the shell magazine is on the left. The curved wall on the right is six feet thick concrete



I couldn't actually read it but it was amazing to see.



The cross was red, so I guess I'm ok with this one.....



.....but this one's got me beat ! This is the kind of stuff I was finding all over the place, and there was lots more.

So, I hope you enjoyed your little look around the delights of Guernsey, it is well worth the trip. There are more photos in the centre spread which I hope gives you a feel for the place. Lots of photos, but only about ten percent of what I actually took. Did I get any souvenirs of Guernsey ? You bet I did. Especially from MIRUS. Candle factory my ar



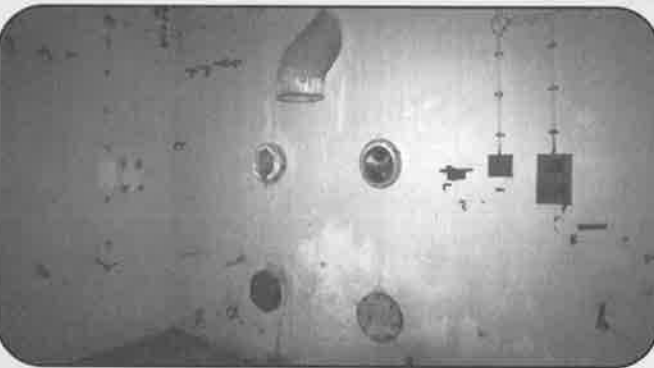
Shell magazine hoist rail above the school clutter



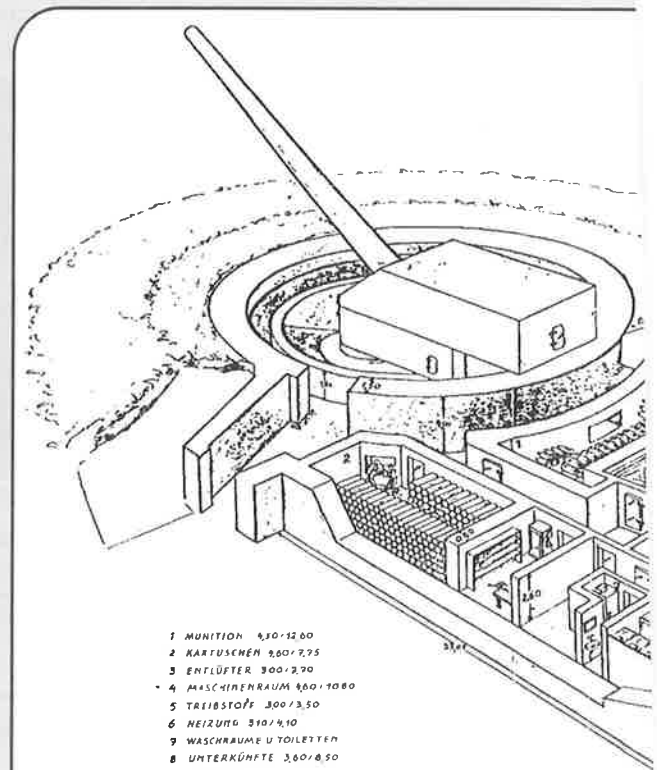
Passageway to the living quarters through gas lock



Crew's washroom and toilets, sinks and mirrors gone



Heating Room



GESCHÜTZ DER BATTERIE MIRUS

How's yer German ? This plan is of the MIR



Wuerzburg Radar site nearby



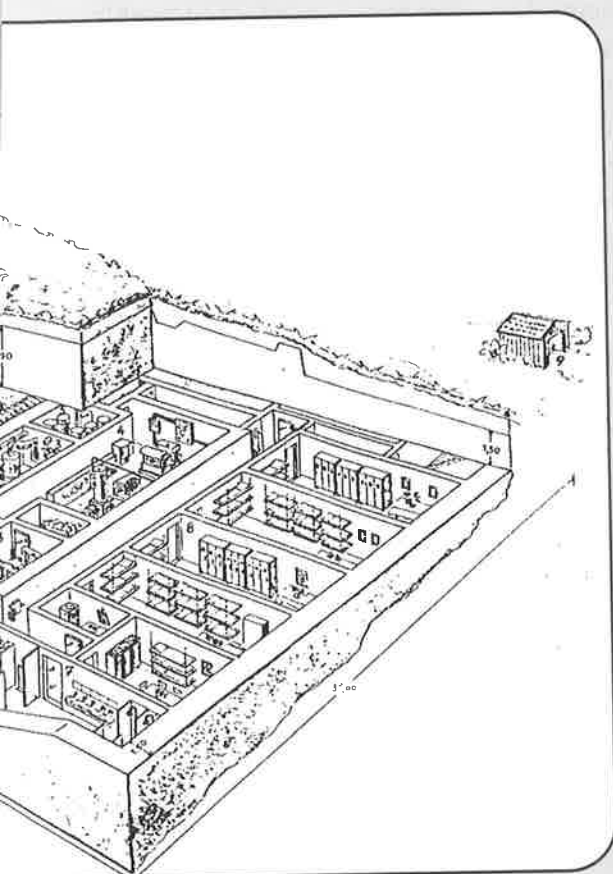
MIRUS battery command bunker is under this garden



Air conditioning compressors and fridge unit room



Machinery room for diesel engines and generators



S gun emplacement and underground area.



One of four crew sleeping quarters with three tier bunks



One of three Mirus ammunition bunkers in the vicinity



Pleinmont Naval Observation tower and bunker



Yet another big coastal defence pillbox