

= Atlantic Wall =

The Atlantic Wall (German : Atlantikwall) was an extensive system of coastal defence and fortifications built by Nazi Germany between 1942 and 1944 along the coast of continental Europe and Scandinavia as a defence against an anticipated Allied invasion of Nazi @-@ occupied Europe from Great Britain during World War II .

Hitler ordered the construction of the fortifications in 1942 . Almost a million French workers were drafted to build it . The wall was frequently mentioned in Nazi propaganda , where its size and strength were usually exaggerated . The fortifications included colossal coastal guns , batteries , mortars , and artillery , and thousands of German troops were stationed in its defences . When the Allies eventually invaded the Normandy beaches in 1944 , most of the defences were stormed within hours . Today , ruins of the wall exist in all of the nations where the wall was built , although many structures have fallen into the ocean or have been demolished over the years .

= = Background = =

World War II in Europe began on 1 September 1939 , with Nazi Germany 's invasion of Poland . Two days later , Britain and France declared war on Germany . Poland 's geographical location , however , prevented the Allies from intervening directly . Four weeks into the attack , the Germans had successfully occupied Poland .

Less than a month after this victory , Adolf Hitler issued a directive stating that Germany must be ready for an offensive through France and the Low Countries . However , the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (German high command ; OKW) was convinced that preparations would take at least until the following year . After furious arguments , Hitler reluctantly agreed to wait . In May 1940 , three massive German army groups overran France and the Low Countries in little more than six weeks .

= = History = =

= = = Creation = = =

On 23 March 1942 , Hitler issued Führer Directive No. 40 , which called for the creation of an " Atlantic Wall " . He ordered naval and submarine bases to be heavily defended . Fortifications remained concentrated around ports until late in 1943 , when defences were increased in other areas . Nazi propaganda claimed that the wall stretched from the cape of Norway down to the Spanish border .

Organisation Todt , which had designed the Siegfried Line during the prewar years along the Franco @-@ German border , was the chief engineering group responsible for the design and construction of the wall 's major gun emplacements and fortifications . The Vichy regime imposed a compulsory labour system , drafting some 600 @,@ 000 French workers to construct these permanent fortifications along the Dutch , Belgian , and French coasts facing the English Channel .

= = = British attacks = = =

Throughout most of 1942 ? 43 , the Atlantic Wall remained a relaxed front for the Axis troops manning it , with only two large @-@ scale British attacks . Operation Chariot , launched near St Nazaire in March 1942 , was an attempt to destroy German pumping machinery and installations . The second attack was the Dieppe Raid , launched near the French port of Dieppe in August 1942 to test the German defences and provide combat experience for Canadian troops . The Germans were defeated at St. Nazaire , but had little difficulty in repulsing the attack at Dieppe , where they inflicted heavy casualties . Although the Dieppe raid was a disaster for the Allies , it alarmed Hitler , who was sure an Allied invasion in the West would shortly follow . Following Dieppe , Hitler gave

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt , the overall German Commander @-@ in @-@ Chief in the West , 15 further divisions to shore up the German positions .

= = = Reorganisation = = =

Early in 1944 , with an Allied invasion of Nazi @-@ occupied Europe becoming ever more likely , Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was assigned to improve the wall 's defences . Believing the existing coastal fortifications to be entirely inadequate , he immediately began strengthening them . Rommel 's main concern was Allied air power . He had seen it first @-@ hand when fighting the British and Americans in North Africa , and it had left a profound impression on him . He feared that any German counterattack would be broken up by Allied aircraft long before it could make a difference . Under his direction , hundreds of reinforced concrete pillboxes were built on the beaches , or sometimes slightly inland , to house machine guns , antitank guns , and light and heavy artillery . Land mines and antitank obstacles were planted on the beaches , and underwater obstacles and naval mines were placed in waters just offshore . The intent was to destroy the Allied landing craft before they could unload on the beaches .

= = = D @-@ Day = = =

By the time of the Allied invasion , the Germans had laid almost six million mines in Northern France . More gun emplacements and minefields extended inland along roads leading away from the beaches . In likely landing spots for gliders and parachutists , the Germans emplaced slanted poles with sharpened tops , which the troops called Rommelspargel (" Rommel 's Asparagus ") . Low @-@ lying river and estuarine areas were intentionally flooded . Rommel believed that Germany would inevitably be defeated unless the invasion could be stopped on the beach , declaring , " It is absolutely necessary that we push the British and Americans back from the beaches . Afterwards it will be too late ; the first 24 hours of the invasion will be decisive . "

The Channel Islands were heavily fortified , particularly the island of Alderney , which is closest to Britain . Hitler had decreed that one @-@ twelfth of the steel and concrete used in the Atlantic Wall should go to the Channel Islands , because of the propaganda value of controlling British territory . The islands were some of the most densely fortified areas in Europe , with a host of Hohlgangsanlage tunnels , casemates , and coastal artillery positions . Walcheren Island is considered to be the " strongest concentration of defences the Nazis had ever constructed . "

However , as the Channel Islands lacked strategic significance , the Allies bypassed them when they invaded Normandy . As a result , the German garrisons stationed on the islands did not surrender until 9 May 1945 ? one day after Victory in Europe Day . The garrison on Alderney did not surrender until 16 May . Because most of their garrisons surrendered peacefully , the Channel Islands are host to some of the best @-@ preserved Atlantic Wall sites .

= = Fortresses = =

Many major ports and positions were incorporated into the Atlantic Wall , receiving heavy fortifications . Hitler ordered all positions to fight to the end , and some of them remained in German hands until Germany 's unconditional surrender . Several of the port fortresses were resupplied by submarines after being surrounded by Allied Forces . The defenders of these positions included foreign volunteers and SS troops .

= = Preservation = =

= = = France = = =

Immediately after the war , there was little interest in preserving the wall due to the negative

memories associated with the Nazi occupation . One of the best preserved parts is the Todt Battery . In 2011 , renewed efforts to preserve the wall were spearheaded by organisations in Germany , the Netherlands , and the United Kingdom . Many of the beach fortifications have toppled or are underwater , while the ones further inland are still mainly extant due to their location .

== Elsewhere ==

Although the defensive wall was never fully completed , many bunkers still exist near Ostend , Channel Islands , Scheveningen , Den Haag , Katwijk , and in Scandinavia .

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The Atlantic Wall features in the novel Villa Normandie by Kevin Doherty .

The many constructions of the Wall still standing have been photographed by Jonathan Andrew .