

The wall deep in the Scottish countryside that helped bring down the Nazis

By Alison Campsie : The Scotsman : Wednesday 1 July 2020



It runs around 86 metres long and was built in top secret during World War Two to train troops to defeat Hitler's ambitious defence system that wrapped itself around the coasts of mainland Europe. The remains of the Atlantic Wall at Sheriffmuir near Dunblane, where a top secret training mission was launched in preparation of the D-Day Landings. PIC: Robert Perry/TSPL. The replica Atlantic Wall can be found on Sheriffmuir near Dunblane and became a key training ground for Scottish troops in the run up to D-Day landings in June 1944.

Dr Murray Cook, archaeologist at Stirling Council, described the wall as Scotland's 'most important archaeological site' and one that remains largely unknown. He said: "While there's still more to learn we do know an awful lot about it. I think its the most important site, as its the main surviving evidence for Scotland's role in D-Day which I think is the most important event in world history, certainly its up there with space travel."

Sheriffmuir was one of a number of sites chosen by the British Government to build a replica Atlantic Wall which was originally constructed by Germany from concrete between 1942 and 1944 and extended from the northern tip of Norway down to Spain to prevent invasion from British forces. With the D-Day landings in planning, it became clear that some sort of training in breaching this mighty defence, designed to repel tank attack, would be necessary with the Anti-Concrete Committee then formed.

"The locations were top secret: the men who were contracted to build the structures were taken to the sites in covered vans and had no idea where they were working," according to a publication by Stirling Council.

Troops arrived to trained at the Sheriffmuir section - the biggest and best preserved - by the early summer of 1943. Tank assaults followed as well as heavy shelling of the structure. Shortly afterwards, tragedy struck in early May 1943 when James Miller, 16, a farm servant from Blairlogie, was killed by a unexploded shell while out for a day bird nesting with friends on Sheriffmuir. While residents were meant to be informed by the War Ministry of operations at Atlantic Wall, this was not always the case.

Correspondence held in Stirling Council archives shows that a taxi that routinely took children from their homes at Sheriffmuir and Lairhill to their school at Dunblane was narrowly missed by a flying shell on May 21, 1943. After some negotiation, the military authorities agreed to suspend shelling between 9 o'clock and 9.30 and 12.30 and 1 o'clock so children could get to school safely. The wall, which is around three metres high and three metres thick, is a scheduled monument Dr Cook added: "I think its properly protected but I certainly don't think enough people know about it."