



Cultural Heritage Agency
Ministry of Education, Culture and Science



Vision for the Atlantikwall

*A 360° view of a German coastal
defence system*

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Colophon

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A 360° view of a German coastal defence system

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Photo credits

Cover photo

Tourists climbing on the brick commander's quarters and complex used for the Mammut radar in the West Dunes of Scheveningen. Photograph by A. van Beveren / Creative Commons licence BY-NC-ND 4.0

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Summary and recommendations

The Atlantikwall, stretching along the coast of Western Europe, represented a crucial defensive line for Nazi Germany during the Second World War. The line covers over 5,000 kilometres and consists of various surviving remains. This German defensive line is in keeping with the tradition of protecting territory, including conquered land, against enemy attack from outside. The extent of the Atlantikwall and the ideology that inspired the construction of this colossal structure, is a permanent reminder of the scale and all-encompassing nature of occupation in Europe. For decades, the Atlantikwall embodied painful memories for a generation who endured the suffering of occupation and bore witness to forced changes to their city and country. There was, in contrast with today's concerns regarding heritage, no interest in preserving the remains. If anything, the opposite was the case: the bunkers and other traces of the Atlantikwall were largely erased, concealed or reused. These decisions were practical in nature, given that large parts of the Atlantikwall were an impediment to development in urban areas. At the same time, remains were left untouched: undisturbed and unnoticed across swathes of the dunes and on private plots, falling back into the grips of nature. Starting in the 1990s, however, there has been

an growing grass-roots interest in the surviving parts of the Atlantikwall. For many years, the site's heritage values commanded little to no attention in the chambers of government (although local bunker associations did receive sporadic support from municipalities). As the sentiment slowly changed, the Atlantikwall lost its reputation as contested heritage and began to be considered heritage with a memorial and other values, although its controversial nature ('never again') remained and is alive to this day. Among heritage conservationists, there is a growing interest in preserving the Atlantikwall and adopting appropriate heritage management. At the time of writing, several single properties and complexes have been designated as a national monument ('rijksmonument'), with some parts recently awarded the status of municipal monument ('gemeentelijk monument'). Regular appeals had been directed at the Dutch government to produce a vision for Atlantikwall heritage management. An internal document at the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands from 2010¹ never materialised into a formal vision document. The Dutch

¹ Atlantikwall van MIP tot MoMo, Visie op voortgang, RCE (B. Giesen-Geurts), final draft, 26 October 2010, Amersfoort (internal memo) (in Dutch only).



Fig. 1 Walzkörpersperre in National Park De Kennemerduinen

Minister of Education, Culture and Science commissioned the drafting of a vision only in April 2019, resulting in this document. This Vision recommends careful, holistic management of the surviving parts, which should be considered as a system and preserved as a matter of principle. This should be underpinned by a mutually coordinated, cross-governmental policy for heritage and the environment. Ongoing knowledge development regarding the operation of the Atlantikwall both during and after the Second World War is also necessary. The Atlas, presented in concert with this Vision for the Atlantikwall, aspires to contribute to that knowledge development and serve as a source of inspiration for further research.

This main recommendation from this Vision is that:

- The Atlantikwall and its remains form a cohesive landscape structure of an historical and military character, and embody a unique and multilayered narrative. Possessing high heritage value, this structure – still standing 80 years after the end of the Second World War – deserves considered management that is ‘heritage inclusive’. This management should focus on the Atlantikwall’s unique story, the connection between its disparate parts and its less conspicuous traces in the landscape. Given that the Atlantikwall is by its very nature more than the sum of its parts, it requires a holistic view and approach. ‘Holistic’ implies that equal attention is given to the history of its use and management by public authorities and society in the post-war context.

A cohesive, multilayered system relies on the presence of cohesive, coordinated policy by all public authorities, focusing on spatial planning and social aspects in the Atlantikwall’s sphere of influence. It is therefore recommended that the various tiers of government and stakeholders, each within their remit, acknowledge the Atlantikwall’s eminent heritage value and embed it into their policy. Crucial to this recommendation is an awareness of the unique role played by the Atlantikwall in coastal communities before and after the war. The Dutch central government ought to consult with local public authorities to explore how they could establish a joint policy for the protection, preservation and development of the Atlantikwall’s integral values and structures, and which measures are needed (and are feasible) to produce this policy.

This Vision makes the following recommendations.

At European level:

- Being transnational by definition, the Atlantikwall presents opportunities at European level to foster ongoing forms of international cooperation and alignment regarding policy for this shared heritage. This could be achieved by utilising and strengthening the existing network.
- Explore whether the Atlantikwall could therefore qualify as international heritage, based on the understanding that national legal contexts could lead to different outcomes. Jointly formulating criteria for this heritage would facilitate partnership and policy alignment.
- Explore whether the Atlantikwall could be nominated as a new Cultural Route of the Council of Europe.

At national level

- As high-value cultural heritage, the Atlantikwall rightfully deserves a place in environmental policy. This ties in with the ‘heritage-inclusive’ approach of NOVI (National Environmental Vision)/NOVEX (Executive Agency of the National Environmental Vision) and the recently published Summary Draft of the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning. Central to this is an approach to the Atlantikwall as a cohesive system that was designed and constructed according to the state of the landscape at the time. The *Masterplan Kust en Erfgoed* (2014), focusing on the Dutch coast and heritage, provides tools for this. Regulations under the Environment and Planning Act (*Omgevingswet*), including the guidelines in the Decree on the Quality of the Living Environment (*Besluit kwaliteit leefomgeving*, BKL), provide an appropriate and usable legal framework.
- The new insights into the system (see below), provided by the Atlas and this Vision, can be used as tools for projects, plans and new challenges. This could take the form of general principles that could be applied in greater detail in multi-stakeholder spatial design plans. Rather making than ad-hoc decisions, planners could then use a set assessment framework to clearly evaluate each intended intervention at coastal locations that poses a threat to Atlantikwall remains. These assessment frameworks would be effective when produced in collaboration with local public authorities.
- An assessment framework should be produced by first identifying what principles, guidelines for heritage

management and corresponding strategies are required, such as :

- preservation and restoration,
 - preservation through development,
 - the importance of design and planning.
- Determine whether national monument status is needed to provide additional protection: at the time of writing, around 30 single properties and structures are designated as national monuments. Explore whether representative parts of the Atlantikwall could qualify as limited additions to the Dutch central government's protected heritage site list, in conjunction with the '*verbeterprogramma militair erfgoed*' (improvement programme for military heritage)².
 - Support the Atlantikwall's heritage community by offering a platform function, for instance as part of the existing *Platform Militair erfgoed* (platform for military heritage).
 - Reach out to parties on the ground (including the *Platform Militair erfgoed*) and local public authorities to explore which topics are relevant to safeguarding heritage and require further research. Knowledge development on heritage safeguarding would be particularly beneficial to environmental policy. The following subtopics can be identified (non-exhaustive list):
 - Insight into the multifaceted and multilayered history and significance of the Atlantikwall, including in the post-war period, starting with a list and summaries of the available sources.
 - Research the significance and impact of the Atlantikwall and its construction on local coastal communities both during and after the war. Which delayed effects can be identified?
 - Research the traces of the Atlantikwall in the landscape. The obvious focus on 'concrete' could be broadened to encompass a holistic view of the Atlantikwall by identifying and analysing alterations to the landscape as well as less conspicuous elements and structures. The Atlas provides a springboard for this research.
 - Attention should also be paid to multiple stakeholder involvement and to the social and cultural dimension of the construction and operation of the Atlantikwall as well as Atlantikwall management practices.
 - Recreation: explore the possible uses of the Atlantikwall's touristic and educational values and their potential place in recreational, touristic, economic and cultural policy. Parties should seek alignment in this regard.

- For each topic, explore which heritage communities are stakeholders in this theme and involve them in the approach, in line with the Faro Convention spirit.

Provinces and municipalities

- It is eminently important that the Atlantikwall be included in municipal and provincial environmental policies, especially in situations in which it is currently absent. Including the Atlantikwall in spatial planning policy at regional and local level could highlight both the heritage value and usage value of this heritage. One way of achieving this would be for provincial and municipal governments to make their environmental visions, environmental plans and regulations 'heritage-inclusive' in this regard, if they do not do this already.
- Considering the Atlantikwall's heritage value in planning challenges for the major transitions in climate & water, nature & agriculture and urban developments could unlock the heritage's potential to improve and structure the quality of the environment, as demonstrated by the award of 'Erfgoed Deal' (heritage deal) support in Zeeland at the end of 2024 (see p. 34). This effect would be particularly noticeable if the Atlantikwall were seen not as a series of disparate structures or a set of bunkers, but as a cohesive system in the landscape.
- The Atlantikwall provides provincial cultural heritage policy and management support institutes ('provinciale steunpunten erfgoed'), cultural heritage consultancy and information points ('erfgoedhuizen') and other bodies in the coastal provinces the opportunity to play a role in the implementation and support of spatial planning and heritage policy. Contact could be sought with municipal and provincial governments to conduct a joint exploration of current issues and explore the most effective way to organise this. If the municipal governments are requested to list policy pain points, a joint investigation with the central and provincial government could be initiated to establish which solutions or approaches work. Existing collaborative setups could be used to disseminate information about management of the Atlantikwall.
- Recreation: there are many opportunities for recreation and tourism that could be further developed, often by building on completed projects and existing initiatives. Modern technology such as podcasts and VR provide opportunities to deliver remote experiences of the Atlantikwall, should people be unable to visit physically. There are also opportunities to create routes, organise excursions and put on exhibitions.

² This Vision makes no further statement about this programme, as it is part of another project in the Cultural Heritage Agency's military heritage programme. See also the letter from the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Dutch House of Representatives, parliamentary session 2019-2020, 32 820, no. 351

However, good communication is key to avoiding offering the same experience at each site.

- Local knowledge development is crucial to enhancing the understanding of the Atlantikwall. It also supports policy, good management of the heritage site and the public presentation of the heritage site. Municipal governments can play an essential role by producing a detailed inventory of the Atlantikwall remains in their area and valuing them. Ideally, this should be coordinated with the provincial government. Inventories produced using a Geographic Information System (GIS) could be integrated with the *Atlas*, enabling municipal governments to reach a balanced decision regarding the preservation and development of remains present in their administrative area. As a GIS would be beneficial to all coastal municipalities, it is worth researching whether this could be done in a joint approach.
- Policy and rule enforcement: trespassers on non-publicly accessible properties and illegal treasure hunters are a growing problem. Municipal governments and site managers must communicate effectively to establish a working strategy.
- Private owners of constructions and plots of land belonging to the Atlantikwall are sometimes out of touch with the municipal government. Reaching out to owners, and being aware of their concerns, can contribute positively to heritage preservation.
- Broad support is key to successful heritage preservation. Heritage policy achieves greater success when it lets heritage communities and heritage organisations participate fully and explores how they could be supported in initiatives to preserve this heritage – without taking charge of those efforts – in line with the Faro Convention spirit.

Other parties / site managers

- Preserving Atlantikwall remains in nature areas of high ecological value, such as Natura 2000, comes with its own set of challenges. While extensive forms of preservation must not be ruled out, they must also not be an excuse to legitimise decay. Keep communicating about pain points regarding nature and heritage.
- Policy and rule enforcement: see above.
- Collaborate with provincial and municipal governments on recreation and public access. Develop existing or new routes to guide visitors through heritage sites and avoid excessive numbers of recreational visitors in fragile areas.
- Develop a ‘bunker vision’ so as to prevent ad hoc decisions and interventions regarding trespassers.

Be aware that excess demands to open bunkers may run counter to policies governing protected nature areas.

- Private owners: communicate with the municipality and discuss your needs. Be aware of your property’s heritage value.
- Heritage organisations: collaborate with public authorities in line with the Faro Convention spirit. The focus here is on participation in heritage based on equitable collaboration.
 - Specifically for public authorities in their dealings with heritage organisations: do not ‘take the reins’ – give space to local interest groups to take the initiative. Aim to create conditions for thriving heritage communities.

Next steps

The recommendations, opportunities and perspectives laid out above and described in this Vision require follow-up steps. One being that the Cultural Heritage Agency proposes that the Dutch central government enter into dialogue with representatives of all parties addressed, including government partners, in 2025. At European level, once this Vision has been translated, contact should be sought with other countries to establish possible avenues of collaboration. The Vision and recommendations could then be discussed in an open exchange, through which the recommendations can be developed into priorities and measures. This can be used to produce a Plan of Action in the second half of 2025, explicitly setting out the future role that parties can and wish to play in future Atlantikwall management. This Plan of Action can be further developed in 2026, subject to financial constraints and priorities at the time.

Why a vision for the Atlantikwall?

In 2019, the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands published four exploratory studies. One of them was *Op Verkenning 2.0, twee eeuwen militair erfgoed in het vizier*³, which, amongst other things, concluded that the Atlantikwall presented a challenge for military heritage in the Netherlands. While a number of major parts of the defensive line are protected as national monuments, the Atlantikwall is similar to other defensive lines in that its context and cohesion are of great importance. Although single properties enjoyed protection, there was no further vision for the development of the entire Atlantikwall defensive line landscape either nationally or in collaboration with neighbouring countries. This has nevertheless been the subject of several studies, such as the 2014 *Masterplan Kust en Erfgoed* (Masterplan Coast and Heritage)⁴ which explicitly concentrated on preservation and usage opportunities for Atlantikwall remains. The 2017 *Kustpact* (Pact for the Coast)⁵ also specified heritage, including the defensive lines, as one of the core qualities of the coast. The publication of the *Kustpact* was followed by an amendment to the government decree on general rules on spatial planning (*Besluit algemene regels ruimtelijke ordening*, BARRO) in 2020. This designated coastal heritage in the dunes and hinterland as a component of the core qualities and collective values of the Netherlands' protective coastal zone.⁶ The BARRO was subsequently succeeded by the Living Environment (Quality) Decree (*Besluit kwaliteit leefomgeving*, or *Omgevingswet*). This coastal heritage includes defensive lines and forts. Under the BARRO, provincial governments are tasked with setting rules for the provisions of zoning plans (including those at municipal level). These rules must reflect the importance of protecting and preserving the core qualities and collective values of the protective coastal zone. The BARRO was succeeded by the *Omgevingswet* (Environment and Planning Act), which took effect on 1 January 2024. Public authorities can therefore take action on these policy documents and regulations (indeed, some governments already have) to ensure the Atlantikwall is managed with care. This Vision builds on and adds to this. In light of the growing awareness of the importance of the Atlantikwall, the Minister of Education, Culture and Science pledged in the

House of Representatives in 2019⁷ that the Cultural Heritage Agency would produce a vision for the Atlantikwall: *The story of the Atlantikwall could be told more convincingly if the defensive line's importance both nationally and internationally enjoyed greater recognition. I ask the Cultural Heritage Agency to produce this Vision in collaboration with stakeholders.* This was confirmed by the minister in 2020⁸: *In my vision of Second World War heritage, I had previously announced that [I] would ask the Cultural Heritage Agency to work together with stakeholders and produce a vision for the international defensive line landscape of the Atlantikwall. Both steps have since been taken.* This document sets out that vision, in fulfilment of the pledge made to the House of Representatives. Prior to the publishing of this Vision, a number of internal memos had circulated at the Cultural Heritage Agency in connection with the 'Programma Militair erfgoed'. This Vision builds on that programme.

Atlas Atlantikwall in Nederland

De Atlantikwallatlas (Atlas Atlantikwall)⁹ produced by the Cultural Heritage Agency in collaboration with Atlantikwall expert and researcher Jeroen Rijpsma, was published at same time as this Vision. The Atlas discusses the Atlantikwall in an abstract sense, offering insights into the intended operation or effects of the various systems and the coherence of the defence structure. The Atlas consists of three parts: a general introduction to the Atlantikwall, an atlas section presenting a regional and European analysis of the system on the basis of maps and photographs, and a conclusion on the current state of the Atlantikwall in the Netherlands. While this Vision focuses on policy, the Atlas enriches our knowledge of the Atlantikwall by showing how various defence systems were incorporated into an organisational and physical structure to guard the Third Reich's western borders. Without knowledge and insights, it is impossible to develop a vision. Equally, the *Atlas* offers local public authorities, site managers and others an insight into what they are part of.

³ *Op Verkenning 2.0, Twee eeuwen militair erfgoed in het vizier*, military heritage report, Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, 2019 (in Dutch only)

⁴ <https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2014/01/01/masterplan-kust-en-erfgoed>

⁵ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/convenanten/2017/02/21/kustpact>

⁶ <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/stb-2020-204.html>

⁷ *Visie op erfgoed uit de Tweede oorlog* (in Dutch only), November 2019: House of Representatives, parliamentary session 2019–2020, 32 820, no. 321

⁸ Responses to exploratory studies in April 2020: House of Representatives, parliamentary year 2019–2020, 32 820, no. 351. (see also footnote 1)

⁹ Rijpsma, J., J.E. Abrahamse & M. Kosian (2024), *De Atlantikwallatlas, het Duitse verdedigingssysteem in Nederland 1940–1945*, Bussum. Thoth, ISBN 9789068688719. English translation in prep (2025).



Fig. 2 Regional meeting at the Atlantikwall Center (Den Helder, december 2022)

Purpose of the Vision

The Atlantikwall, a defensive line along the west coast of Europe down to the border with Spain, was built by German occupying forces during the Second World War. While many of the traces of the wall have vanished or been erased in the 80 years since the end of the war, just as many have been preserved and survive to this day. In the Dutch context, the remains consist of concrete structures such as bunkers and tank barriers, brick crew quarters and alterations to the landscape, such as anti-tank ditches. Social attitudes to this heritage have evolved over the decades. While people salvaged as many materials as possible from the Atlantikwall immediately after liberation, this morphed into a zeal to erase any and all traces of occupation. A mood of pragmatism emerged after some time: reusing where possible, demolishing encumbrances, and leaving or concealing any other remains (a fate that befell the trenches in particular), but generally avoiding any mention of it. Recent years have seen a burgeoning interest in the remains, with some traces of the Atlantikwall brought out into the light at various locations. The Dutch coast is home to several privately owned bunker museums that are run by enthusiastic volunteers and which are attracting a growing number of visitors. Authorities including municipal governments,

provincial governments and central government are also showing more interest in the Atlantikwall for its recreational and usage value as well as heritage management. Several buildings are now national or municipal protected monuments, but there is neither a vision for the Atlantikwall's overall structure nor any aligned government policy. This Vision wants to fill that gap in an attempt to change the state of affairs. The publication of this Vision is a first step towards producing a coherent narrative and advice, leading to a cohesive policy to protect the Atlantikwall's integral values and structures. What this Vision does not do is make any specific statements regarding expanding protection of parts of the Atlantikwall, as that falls within the remit of an independent project set up as part of an improvement programme within the Cultural Heritage Agency's 'Programma Militair erfgoed'.

Parties involved and links to other themes

This Vision is a product of consultations and collaborations with a large number of parties, including government partners. Various regional meetings with local public authorities, stakeholders and any other interested parties took place prior to the writing of this document. Anyone present at these meetings had the opportunity to state which areas the Vision should concentrate on (among various main themes), and which approach would be

appropriate. The meetings were attended by representatives of coastal municipalities, the five provinces of the Netherlands with a coastal border, regional heritage organisations such as provincial cultural heritage policy and management support agencies ('steunpunten cultureel erfgoed'), directors and volunteer members of bunker museums, site managers such as Natuurmonumenten, and knowledge institutions and interest groups such as Stichting Menno van Coehoorn. Their input informed this Vision. Following feedback and consultations between colleagues at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the draft texts were sent for inspection to the provincial governments and provincial heritage policy and management support agencies. Their input was incorporated into the text to produce this version of the document. The English translation will be sent to partner organisations in other European countries in which remains of the Atlantikwall are present (France, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, Germany and the Canary Islands), and their feedback will be requested. Any comments will be incorporated into the final version, and the international component in Part 3 will be supplemented in 2025. Appendix 3 provides a summary of the meetings held prior to the drafting of the Vision.

Inter-governmental partners and links with other Cultural Heritage Agency programmes

Local public authorities have shown great dedication to the Atlantikwall in the Netherlands in the past ten years. For instance, the provincial government of South Holland has created an 'Erfgoedlijn Atlantikwall' (Atlantikwall heritage trail)¹⁰ and <https://geschiedenisvanzuidholland.nl/thema-s/atlantikwall/verhalen/> (<https://geschiedenisvanzuidholland.nl/thema-s/atlantikwall/verhalen/>), leading to many collaborations across a range of areas. The provincial government also provides grants for projects focused on heritage preservation and experience. In the Dutch Wadden region, resources from the Waddenfonds fund were used to support a multiyear, cross-provincial project to open up several locations to tourists. Some municipalities have also designated Atlantikwall properties and structures as municipal monuments. This movement over the past years has been a powerful driver in raising awareness and support for the Atlantikwall and enabling visitors to experience

it. This document will explore several initiatives later on. The Dutch central government is exploring how links can be created to these initiatives. It is also investigating how it can collaborate with, and contribute to, the breadth of valuable developments taking place at provincial and local level. Specific heritage management measures will be discussed later.

Ties to current heritage themes

The Atlantikwall ties in to current heritage themes, reflecting a trend in the Dutch heritage sector that focuses on post-war reconstruction (1940-1965) and the more recent post-1965 period, which the Cultural Heritage Agency refers to as 'Post 65'. The Atlantikwall is part of Second World War heritage, which falls within the Cultural Heritage Agency's 'Programma Militair erfgoed'. The Cultural Heritage Agency has subdivided that programme into ten 'storytelling lines', as stated in the previously mentioned exploratory report on military heritage. The Second World War, and therefore the Atlantikwall, is one of those lines. Another is the Cold War, a subject of several publications to date, with a limited number of Cold War heritage sites due to be designated as monuments. The collaboration with the Post 65 programme merits an explanation. While the Atlantikwall was built earlier than the Cold War, parts of it, such as Rijksdorp and Vinetaduin, were used for national defence purposes during the Cold War.

The layered nature of this use should be a feature of policy and heritage management. An exploratory report was published about post-65 heritage in 2022.¹¹

The Faro programme is also important to mention¹², as it gives heritage communities the opportunity to propose their own topics of concern. The Atlantikwall in all its facets, both during and after the Second World War, is part of this. Further details follow in Part 3 of this Vision.

From sectoral to holistic

The new millennium has seen the heritage sector pivot from sectoral thinking to a greater focus on holistic, area-specific approaches. Cultural heritage should and can be a key part of environmental policy and contribute to spatial planning quality. Heritage can play a particularly

¹⁰ See <https://www.zuid-holland.nl/onderwerpen/natuur-landschap/erfgoed-cultuur/erfgoedlijnen/>; <https://geschiedenisvanzuidholland.nl/thema-s/atlantikwall/verhalen/>

¹¹ *Verkenning Post 65. Post 65 Nieuwe perspectieven tussen welvaart en weerstand* (in Dutch only), Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, 2019 / appendix to parliamentary proceedings, parliamentary session 2022- 2023, no. 1468

¹² <https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/erfgoedparticipatie-faro>

important role in the current transitions challenges we face (climate, sustainability, energy, housing), offering a source of inspiration and guidance in location selection and ensuring heritage regains its function during the transitions. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science is taking action by various means, including the 'Erfgoed voor de toekomst' (heritage for the future) programme in the 'Agenda Leefomgeving' (living environment agenda), as well as the 'Erfgoed Deal'. The latter is an incentive scheme coordinated by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science in collaboration with other ministries and partners, providing funding for projects at the intersection of the transitions and heritage. The importance of cultural heritage preservation

is also embedded in Dutch national spatial planning policy. The National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (*Nationale Omgevingsvisie*, NOVI, 2020) states that the preservation and development of cultural heritage, as well as qualities relative to landscape and nature of national and international importance, are a national priority. Following the introduction of the Environment and Planning Act (*Omgevingswet*), municipalities' environmental plans must consider the importance of cultural heritage preservation and establish rules aimed at protecting cultural heritage that is eligible for protection. Such requirements had existed in any case since 2012, by virtue of Article 3.6.1 of the Spatial Planning Decree (*Besluit Ruimtelijke Ordening*, BRO).



Many bunkers are present in the fields near the former Bergen Air Base (North Holland)



Part 1 – Background

What is the Atlantikwall?

The Atlantikwall is a German Second World War defensive line built to protect the Third Reich's western border from an Allied invasion. The Atlantikwall stretched over 5,000 kilometres from Norway via Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium down to the French border with Spain. The most famous parts of the line featured single concrete bunkers or bunker complexes. Contrary to its name, the Atlantikwall was not an unbroken line of fortifications. The defences were concentrated at strategic locations including ports and river estuaries, such as Hoek van Holland and IJmuiden, with defence posts built at a considerable distance from each other along the interjacent coast. As such, the Atlantikwall was a chain of coastal batteries, barriers and supporting bunkers. The Atlantikwall was equipped with coastal artillery, air defences and anti-tank guns. The areas on which the defences were constructed were ruthlessly cleared of all existing structures, leaving deep scars in the local communities. The anti-tank guns were usually also accompanied by tank barriers, such as anti-tank ditches, dragon's teeth, anti-tank walls and anti-tank obstacles.¹³ In total, almost 13,000 *ständige Ausbau* (the bunkers with reinforced concrete walls shown in table 1) are estimated to have been built, 2,000 of which in the Netherlands. Approximately 50% survive. The concrete remains are joined by countless other traces in the landscape, including anti-tank ditches, trenches (some now filled with sand) and brick crew quarters. The Atlantikwall had a complex command hierarchy.

The Atlantikwall in the Netherlands

The German occupiers did not consider the Dutch coast to be a likely entrance point for an Allied invasion. The coastal belt was easily defended, and the hinterland was believed to be largely ill-suited to support a large invading force and enable rapid headway toward Germany. Air defences were also well equipped with technology such as radar. In terms of sea defences, the 'Schnellbootbunkers' (E-boat bunkers) in IJmuiden were constructed to allow the German Navy to carry out attacks in the North Sea along the Dutch coast. These characteristics are visible in the structure and construction of the parts of the Atlantikwall in the Netherlands. *Appendix 1 contains a summary of the*

construction timeline, subsequent developments and command hierarchy of Atlantikwall.

Management of the Atlantikwall after 1945 in the Netherlands

1945-1990: pragmatism and little regard

Following the capitulation of Germany, the Netherlands – with the exception of the Wadden Islands, on which occupation continued for another month – emerged from five years of occupation to witness the devastation wreaked by war. Some parts of the country were affected more than others. It goes without saying that the entire coastal belt featured among the areas of greatest destruction, with the Zeeland coast, the area between Hoek van Holland and The Hague, IJmuiden, Bergen, Petten and Den Helder enduring huge suffering. The Wadden Islands had suffered disproportionately under occupation, as the extent of occupying forces greatly outstripped the number of islanders. This, undeniably, had particularly serious repercussions on the local population. While the Atlantikwall had now lost its purpose as a defensive line, it had nevertheless altered the face of the coastal landscape and an area of the hinterland. Dismantling the Atlantikwall presented a gargantuan task, made impossible by a lack of manpower, equipment, money and time. The decision was therefore made to leave the defences intact and clear the wall only where necessary. In practice, this materialised in:

- Clearing the foredune of all obstacles, such as 'Tetraeder' landing obstacles, Rommel's asparagus and barbed wire.
- Clearing all munition, including a large number of land mines. Many captive German soldiers were tasked with clean-up operations.¹⁴
- Demolishing bunkers and other buildings that formed an encumbrance. In urban areas, practically everything was demolished. In dunes, private gardens, country houses and nature areas, however, much of the Atlantikwall was left intact, or bunkers were concealed under a layer of sand. Again, captive German soldiers were tasked with this job.
- Sealing bunkers and other buildings.

¹³ See also https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantic_Wall

¹⁴ The 2015 Danish film *Under Sandet* (English title: *Land of Mine*) depicts how captive German soldiers, designated as 'surrendered enemy personnel', cleared the Danish coast.



Fig. 3 Overview of the Atlantikwall in the Netherlands



Fig. 4 German gun bunker in front of the Huis ten Duin hotel, Noordwijk, 1947

- Traces in or alterations to the landscape, such as trenches, were generally left untouched and left to decay, or filled with sand. Anti-tank ditches were filled or left untouched.

Given the acute material and supply shortages immediately after the end of the war, demolition waste from the Atlantikwall could be put to good use. This was even incentivised by the *Puinruimingsregeling* (debris clearance scheme) in 1946, which reimbursed 90% of the demolition costs if demolition contributed to the national rebuilding effort.¹⁵ The materials reused including concrete and wooden piles and gateposts. In the event of material shortages, bunkers would be repurposed as store rooms, cellars, schools, holiday accommodation and catering outlets. They were also used for military purposes, especially during the Cold War; for instance, so-called *tobruks* (small, circular bunkers) were moved to be used as guard posts. The desire to reuse and repurpose was joined by another impulse: to erase as many traces of the painful years of occupation as possible. This was conducted with particular vigour in urban areas and readily visible locations in the post-war period. All traces of German occupation were targeted – not just those of the Atlantikwall. As people began to return to the beach shortly after liberation (see fig. 4), the shoreline needed

to be thoroughly cleared for safety and accessibility reasons. This was undertaken with the same zeal as exhibited in the cities; it was imperative that the beaches were cleared as quickly as possible and remained that way. The idea that the beach ‘belonged to the people’ began to take root, triggering objections to mass building developments along the coast.¹⁶ Later, many beach access points were created along the coast, as were camping sites and holiday bungalow parks with amenities such as parking places and eateries. Any remains of the Atlantikwall were usually cleared or reused. Many newly built roads served as cycle routes.

¹⁵ Purmer, 2018, p.218

¹⁶ The signing of the *Kustpact* (pact for the coast) in 2017 is a pre-eminent example of this sea change.

It is also worth reminding ourselves that the construction of the Atlantikwall not only led to the demolition of many existing buildings, but also to the disappearance of a large number of archaeological traces in the dune landscape. Ongoing archaeological digs in the dune landscape regularly unearth artefacts that have been disturbed or lost due to the construction of the bunkers and other parts of the Atlantikwall, or indeed traces left by the very construction of the Atlantikwall. As first-hand accounts of the war become ever scarcer, battlefield archaeology becomes an ever more valuable source of knowledge. This is known as ‘conflict archaeology’, a new and growing sub-discipline that, in the Dutch context, entails archaeological fieldwork into traces of the Atlantikwall with the aid of metal detectors. This research must adhere to statutory regulations and is prohibited in certain places (including for safety reasons). Furthermore, field researchers must **always** request permission from the owner of the land that they wish to research. Regrettably, metal detector users often proceed to excavate their finds and, in so doing, disturb archaeological evidence. Any finds must also be reported to the local government authority.

occupiers had built during the war. The BRV produced as complete a picture as possible of construction activity and surviving buildings and structures after the war. The records produced by the BRV, nowadays known as the ‘Bunker Archive’ of the Dutch National Archives, represent an abundant and frequently consulted resource for research into Atlantikwall remains. While the BRV identified and recorded approximately 95% of surviving military structures at the time (oral statement by Atlantikwall expert and researcher Jeroen Rijpsma, 2023), its map resources lack the precision needed for local site studies. Outside urban areas, such as in the dunes and nature reserves or areas outside the scope of the debris clearance scheme, many remains lay undiscovered as silent witnesses of the years of occupation. Bunkers and other buildings situated on private land were, following minor legal battles, designated as the landowner’s property. Many landowners either left the buildings standing or repurposed them as storage rooms or horse stables. Bunkers were even used as party locations or meet-up points for adventurous youths. Perhaps the most conspicuous repurposing practices took place in the 1950s, when bunkers were used as holiday homes or emergency accommodation. Well-known examples could be found in the provinces of Zeeland and North Holland. Both practices have more or less fallen out of favour, with Park Kostverloren in Zandvoort constituting a noticeable exception. During the Cold War, some Atlantikwall bunker complexes were given a second life by the Dutch Ministry of Defence. The Rijksdorp bunker complex in Wassenaar, for example, functioned as a communications centre for the Royal Netherlands Air Force. In times of

The Office for the Registration of Defence Structures (‘Bureau Registratie Verdedigingswerken’, BRV), part of the Ministry of War at the time, was established shortly after liberation to establish precisely what the German



Fig. 5 Bunkers hidden under the sand in the Kennemerduinen



Fig. 6 A chipped-off dune or 'Steilhang' near IJmuiden

war, the 'Royal Netherlands Air Force war personnel' would commandeer all other available bunkers. A huge antenna setup called a 'troposcatter' was erected on a German bunker in the Vinetaduyn nature area, Hoek van Holland. This layered usage of heritage deserves more attention than it has received to date. Ownership of large parts of the dunes had been or was later transferred to nature conservators: Natuurmonumenten (natural heritage), Staatsbosbeheer (forest management), Zuid-Hollands Landschap, Landschap Noord-Holland and water suppliers Dunea and PWN. They inherited, often unwillingly, a large number of structures. The scope of ownership later grew, for instance after the establishment of Zuid-Kennemerland National Park. Eventually, a substantial portion of the bunkers and traces thereof were demolished or concealed under sand. Each owner adopted a different approach; for instance, Natuurmonumenten (Society for the Preservation of Nature Monuments in the Netherlands) was reluctant to take action for fear of disturbing the wildlife areas. The bunkers that remained were left untouched, or left to subside under the sand – as long as they caused no hindrance to anybody. After some time, the bunkers were 'rediscovered' by bats seeking a hibernation site. Species of lichen – some rare – began to grow over the concrete, while anti-tank walls became overgrown with roots and bushes. By today's standards, this would be considered '*preservation by neglect*'. Demolition also gradually fell out of favour due to its potential to disturb sites' natural values.

As has been made clear, the Atlantikwall consisted of many more structures than just bunkers. It was a system of buildings, landscape alterations and underlying and

supporting infrastructure, including hundreds of lighter constructions such as brick crew quarters and barracks, anti-tank ditches, anti-tank walls and concrete roads. Similarly to the bunkers, many of these structures and buildings fell into private ownership and were repurposed in many ways – frequently either demolished or neglected. As the buildings' structural quality was generally poor, neglect would naturally lead to collapse and, eventually, demolition after some years. Little to nothing was done with less conspicuous remains of the Atlantikwall, such as military roads, trenches and '*Steilhänge*' (artificially raised dunes). These 'discreet' traces formed a military landscape together with the bunker complexes, which themselves either faded away or decayed. The interior of many buildings suffered the same fate. Drawings made by bored soldiers are a fully-fledged part of the Atlantikwall narrative and have not weathered the test of time. Remains such as anti-tank ditches and walls have proven to be more robust. Having no practical use, the walls were left untouched – provided they did not form an obstacle – and over time became overgrown with vegetation. The same fate befell anti-tank ditches (although many were also filled). The protected dune areas, either in their artificially modified or natural state, were reclaimed by nature over time. Willem Marinus Dudok, an architect who played a key role in the Dutch government's rebuilding plan for the Atlantikwall zone, designed a parkway that loosely traced the course of the anti-tank trench. The other remaining elements of the Atlantikwall present there were cleared. The practice of demolishing or sand-filling Atlantikwall remains continued into the 1980s and sporadically thereafter. Decisions to clear Atlantikwall remains were mostly prompted by coastal management (starting in the 1950s)



Fig. 7 A tetrahedron head has been reused as a street sign in Castricum

and nature restoration (predominantly post-1980) concerns. Interest in the Atlantikwall's heritage values or recreational or touristic potential was absent, or at best faint, until the late 1990s.

This should not come as a surprise, given that the bunkers evoked the terror of occupation and were therefore contested heritage. Many people had first-hand experience of occupation or may even have been forced to abandon their homes to make way for the Atlantikwall. This aversion was made all the more acute by the fact that the defences had been constructed by local contractors, whose help was lent either willingly or under duress. Simply put, the Atlantikwall was something best ignored – any bunker enthusiasts pursued their hobby in secrecy.

A summary of 1945-1990

- Practicality was the order of the day in the first years following the end of the Second World War: using what was available and reusing demolition waste.
- The visible elements of the Atlantikwall that remained thereafter were a painful reminder of the years of occupation. Understandably, Atlantikwall remains sustained little to no interest. Instead, people continued to focus on demolishing or concealing traces of the past.
 - Private owners continued to repurpose structures and buildings in a variety of ways, including as party bunkers, mushroom-growing cellars and cement factories.
 - The remains were gradually reclaimed by nature in the nature areas.

Post 1990: Turning point and increased interest

The most painful memories of the Second World War began to fade from the 1990s onwards, leading to a change in how physical traces of the war were managed. The Atlantikwall was increasingly seen as a memorial of a harrowing chapter of European history, and there were calls to take it more seriously in the spirit of 'never again'. In France, the tourism trade focusing on the D-Day landing beaches in Normandy was already well established. While the storytelling there focuses predominantly on the victors, the physical traces of the Atlantikwall have a prominent role in those past events. At the same time, several groups in the Netherlands began to take an interest in the bunkers' heritage and memorial values. Key to this revival was the work of pioneers such as Rudi Rolf and organisations such as Stichting Menno van Coehoorn¹⁷ which was mostly preoccupied with studying different types of bunkers in its early days. Recent cultural heritage also began to receive greater attention more generally, partially as a result of the roll-out of the Monument Inventory Project (MIP) and its successor the Monument Selection Project (MSP) in the 1990s, both of which were set up to take stock and protect 'recent urban development and architecture' dating from 1850 to 1940. While post-war reconstruction (1940-1965) was quickly added to the list, any move to protect Atlantikwall remains was a political no-go. In the 1980s, the provincial government of North Holland rejected a proposal by officials to designate parts of the Atlantikwall as a provincial monument. In the 1990s, the then Monument Management Agency (Rijksdienst voor de Monumentenzorg) initiated a consultation with the provincial governments of Friesland, North Holland, South Holland, Zeeland, the municipal governments of The Hague and Rotterdam, and Stichting Menno van Coehoorn. However, due to a lack of overarching vision, targeted policy and appropriate policy instruments, this never went further than stocktaking, putting the subject on the agenda and reaching mutual agreements. This Vision partly aims to achieve what could not be achieved before. After some time, many bunkers were 'rediscovered' by bats seeking a safe hibernation or roosting site. In response, site managers redesigned many bunkers specifically for that purpose and closed them to the public (if that was not the case beforehand). This unanticipated, new use went hand in hand with a

¹⁷ Stichting Menno van Coehoorn, a volunteer organisation campaigning for the preservation of historical defences, See www.coehoorn.nl (<http://www.coehoorn.nl>)



Fig. 8 Bat bunker in Festung IJmuiden

growing interest in bunkers owned by site managers. While some private 'bunker clubs' were granted permission to enter the bunkers, just as many bunkers were entered illegally and, occasionally, were stripped of their contents. Site managers gradually became more aware of the heritage values of their Atlantikwall remains: an increasing number of bunkers were opened to the public at fixed times or redesigned as museums. In other words, the heritage value of the Atlantikwall remains became part of the discourse. Starting in the 1990s, the wider public also began to show an interest in military heritage. While Dutch military heritage such as the Defence Line of Amsterdam was initially popular, people gradually began to 'discover' individual bunkers. This increase in interest led to a growing awareness among owners of the heritage value of Atlantikwall remains. Some bunkers and complexes have since been designated as national monuments (see Part 3). This has driven increasing research into the Atlantikwall and resulted in a growing stream of publications, exhibitions and films and documents about the defences. Research was conducted at different scales, including bird's-eye views, detailed analyses and studies of bunker interiors. There was, however, little to no joint approach to managing the complexes, as well as little if any leadership from government. Initiatives were mostly organised at local level and were not clearly coordinated.

This limited focus on the concrete remains and complexes, neglecting the context and coherence of the defence system as a whole, has since become a point of concern. The same goes for the lack of interest in the layered use of Atlantikwall remains, in particular their use during the Cold War.

A summary of post-1990

- Increased interest in Atlantikwall heritage after 1990. 'Memorial heritage' took centre stage, in line with an emerging desire to raise the visibility of the remains, open them to the public and focus on telling the story of occupation. While the controversial nature of the Atlantikwall remained, it was less acutely felt.
- This increased interest had its drawbacks, attracting trespassers, vandals and treasure hunters to the bunkers.
- Varied reuse continued apace, but now included the establishment of museums. Bunker associations adopted bunker complexes, took over management and established a growing number of local bunker museums. Unsurprisingly, the post-war period is shunned in favour of the period 1940-1945.
- Bunkers in the nature areas were remodelled to cater to bats and opened to the public under strict conditions. Some museums were established, on the condition that they did not harm the natural values.

- Huge uptick in research into the Atlantikwall, but consideration of the system as a whole was still lacking. Knowledge of the layered use of the Atlantikwall was still underdeveloped.
- Some sites were designated as national monuments.

Part 2 – Where do we stand today?

Considered management of contested heritage

The increased interest in the Atlantikwall, coupled with a change in use of and attitude to this heritage, prompted the government to alter its stance, too. Until the 1990s, official policy was to demolish or conceal, with scant concern for any heritage values. This practice was predominantly motivated by the memories of the Second World War. As survivors of the war passed away, an urge grew among the post-war generation to look for tangible traces from that time. Hidden in the landscape, concealed or bricked up, the state of the bunkers at the time was an even more convincing reason to go out and explore, leading to the emergence of ‘bunker diggers’. Interest in the tangible traces of the Atlantikwall then surged from circa 1990. The heightened interest in and changing attitude towards the Atlantikwall was an autonomous grassroots development with little to no involvement from central government or other public authorities. Nevertheless, municipal governments throughout the country did lend support to local museums, but this was usually limited in scope and funding. There has been a huge increase in the number of bunkers opened to the public on the initiative of ‘bunker associations’, sometimes in collaboration with site managers. Bunker museums are now an attractive place to visit on a rainy day. While the Atlantikwall remains a charged topic, historical distance has led to a waning of painful memories and controversies, opening up avenues to embrace considered management of this heritage. The long-held fascination for the Second World War, which has traditionally focused on the story of the victors, has also branched out to other areas. There is now also an interest in daily life under occupation as well as the significance of the Atlantikwall for those living in coastal areas. Equally, there is an awareness of the ideology that led to the construction of the Atlantikwall and an openness about the terrors it embodies, such as genocide and the occupation of sovereign states across Europe. This Vision has been written at this very juncture, focusing our attention on the here and now. We will first consider current management of Atlantikwall remains in terms of heritage management and knowledge.

Monumental values

Between 1996 and 2019, a total of 29 Atlantikwall sites were designated ‘rijksmonument’ (national monument)¹⁸ under the Heritage Act (*Erfgoedwet*) or its predecessor, the Monuments and Historic Buildings Act 1988 (*Monumentenwet*). This was mainly in response to singular designation requests that were against policy at the time. The descriptions do not always provide information on how the single properties were used during the Cold War; the designation, however, does detail any wall paintings present. Since around the turn of the millennium, designations of new national monuments have been sporadic in nature, and then usually as a result of a protection programme. The Atlantikwall has no

¹⁸ There are 30 hits for the search term ‘Atlantikwall’ in the monument register. One relates to a Dutch-built fortification that the German occupiers incorporated into the Atlantikwall; the other 29 refer to a few complexes containing several single properties. For instance, complex number 529327 - Landfront Vlissingen is composed of 65 single properties in total. Other complexes are smaller (531155 – anti-tank ditch in Wassenaar -2 / complex 509364 – Katwijk 7 structures / complex 525976 – Clingendael, just 1: the commando bunker) Several complexes, designated as national monuments, built by occupying German forces between 1940 and 1945 are not listed, such as Deelen Air Base.

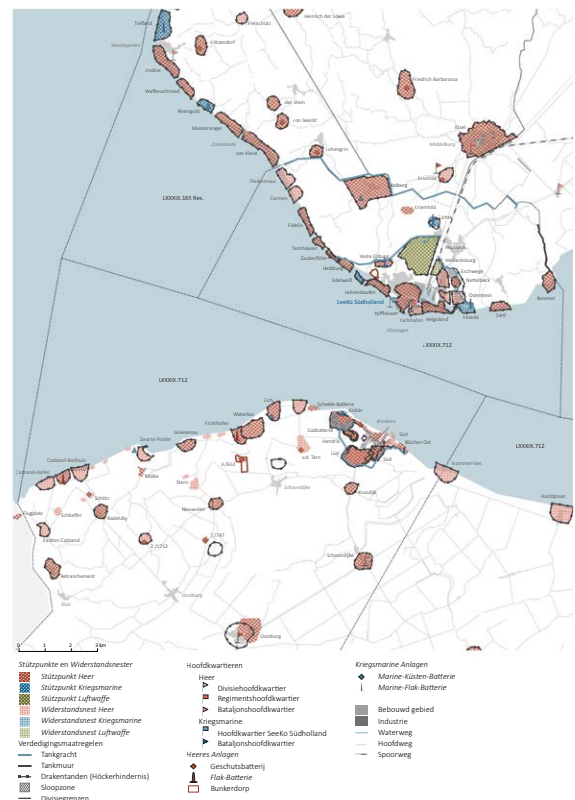


Fig. 9 Atlantikwall around the Western Scheldt

dedicated programme, and not all proposed properties have made it onto the list.¹⁹ The next page shows a map of the exact locations, including the site of the Clingendael commando bunker in Wassenaar. In 2015, the Dutch central government named the ‘Strook Atlantikwall’ (the Atlantikwall strip) in The Hague and Katwijk as ‘Wederopbouwgebied van Nationaal Belang’ (post-war rebuilding zones of national importance). Administrative agreements in this strip have supported efforts to preserve Atlantikwall heritage. These agreements were evaluated for their effectiveness and impact on policy at the end of 2024. The outcomes of this evaluation could inspire future management of the Atlantikwall. Some local public authorities are already taking a more active approach to the Atlantikwall, with the cities of Bloemendaal, The Hague and Rotterdam designating some complexes as a municipal monument. In 2022, Bloemendaal decided to protect fifteen areas, structures and one single property, and made the novel decision to also protect the ‘discreet’ traces. The Hague designated sixteen bunkers and six complexes as municipal monuments as early as 1996.²⁰ In Hoek van Holland (Municipality of Rotterdam), the planned demolition of Het Jagershuis along Badweg prompted a decision to grant the property preliminary protection, followed by a designation as a monument, in 2020. In this sense, municipal governments have begun to align themselves with central government protection efforts. However, at municipal level, there is still a lack of targeted heritage policy for the Atlantikwall. Municipal governments are also yet to produce a management vision for this type of monument, as signalled by the municipal government of Castricum during talks. The local remains of an anti-tank wall are characteristic, but not designated as a monument. Efforts are underway to find a solution, but the site is managed by several owners, each with their own ideas. We will discuss this challenge in greater detail in Part 3. The picture at provincial level is mixed. South Holland has established its own Atlantikwall heritage trail (*‘Erfgoedlijn Atlantikwall’*), which will be discussed in more detail later. Zeeland has spent the last years focusing on telling the story of the Battle of the Scheldt (1944). The Atlantikwall is gaining an increasing degree of attention in the other coastal provinces: North Holland’s ‘Leidraad Landschap & Cultuurhistorie’ (Guidelines for Landscape and Culture History), from 2018, explicitly mentions the utilisation of Atlantikwall remains as part of the

ambitions and development principles for the ‘provinciale structuur Noordzeekust’ (a provincial vision for land management along the North Sea coast).²¹ This means that the remains are given a greater weighting in municipal governments’ deliberations on spatial planning and development.

Current situation regarding knowledge

The subject of ‘knowledge sharing’, including in relation to municipal policy, was mentioned several times in the discussions held prior to the development of this Vision. Over the past years, several individuals and organisations have conducted a significant amount of new, good-quality research into the Atlantikwall’s construction and evolution. The previously mentioned ‘Bunker Archive’ proved to be a fruitful starting point for these investigations. Dutch researchers are increasingly looking to German and UK archives, which contain a treasure trove of information in the form of maps and other documentation. Archival research is fuelling a growing number of publications about the Atlantikwall, such as the *Atlas Atlantikwall*, which have a readership among interested members of the public. An English translation of the Atlas will be published in 2025. Essentially, the issue appears not to be a shortage of resources, but a lack of overview and connections. There is a risk that early-stage researchers and policymakers are unaware of the bigger picture. And if they are aware, the information they require at local level is not always complete or accessible. At the same time, we have observed how the focus is limited to the concrete remains and complexes: a deep knowledge of the context and spatial coherence of the defence system as a whole, which consisted of more elements than the striking bunkers, is lacking. The previously mentioned ‘discreet traces’, such as trenches, artificially raised dunes and brick crews quarters, are just as much part of the Atlantikwall. This has become a point of concern, which we will discuss in detail in Part 3.

Examples of Atlantikwall management

Over the past ten years, several successful, coordinated initiatives concerning the preservation and public accessibility of Atlantikwall remains have been set up and implemented. Some deserve recognition, without prejudice to the others, starting with the ‘Erfgoedlijnen’

¹⁹ The 2003 report ‘Zand Erover’, compiled by a large group of heritage organisations, features a list of single properties and complexes that could be designated as monuments. This list, as well as a similar one from 2010, led neither to new, additional designations nor to a new policy.

²⁰ <https://www.atlantikwallmuseum.nl/nl/atlantikwall/>

²¹ <https://leidraadlc.noord-holland.nl/structuren/noordzeekust/>



Fig. 11 Noarderleegh, one of the restored objects of the Atlantikwall Wadden project

(heritage trails) created by the provincial government of South Holland. Since 2013, area-specific approaches have led to the development of 'heritage trails'. These are seven geographic 'lines', one of which relates to the Atlantikwall, that tell a shared story of the history of South Holland. The participants in each heritage trail, being public authorities and non-governmental organisations, are working on a joint ambition to increase the visibility of the landscape's history and heritage and allow people to experience them more intimately. The heritage trail includes a grant programme. Many local initiatives have received grants over the years, including Bunker Days and the book *Atlantikwall in Kaart*. A dynamic community of enthusiasts has formed and meets several times a year to exchange experiences. The second is the 'Atlantikwall-Waddengebied' (Atlantikwall and Wadden region) project, conducted between 2012 and 2021 thanks to a grant from the Waddenfonds fund. Telling one story over ten locations, this project aimed to connect and restore the Wadden region's fragmented and neglected war heritage: six German bunkers from the Second World War were opened to the public, and a coherent tourist product was developed. The project also included the restoration of a former administrative building of the Atlantikwall in Den Helder dating from 1942, which now houses the Atlantikwall Centrum. Collaboration and alignment between parties were also largely successful.²² The third example is the research project 'Oorlog in Arcadië' (War in Arcadia) about castles, country estates and country houses during the Second World War. This research, which has a national scope, paints a detailed picture of the role of castles, country estates and

historic country houses in the Second World War and the war's impact on this heritage to date. It is based on an interdisciplinary approach and pays specific attention to the war's effects on buildings, residents, the landscape and local communities within a broader political and social context. Many country estates and country houses in the dunes and inland dune areas were seized by the occupying German forces and played a role in the Atlantikwall and its command hierarchy. Lastly, as mentioned before, the municipalities of Bloemendaal, The Hague and Rotterdam have decided to designate various Atlantikwall properties, areas and structure as municipal monuments.

Private owners, in particular site managers

Atlantikwall remains are owned by a patchwork of parties, including governments and private individuals. Among the latter group, many own one or more structures, varying from a small hut to a huge bunker in a person's back garden. Owners are, in principle, free to do whatever they please with their property, provided it has not been granted special status, e.g. municipal or national monument. As mentioned, buildings have been and continue to be used for all sorts of purposes. To the extent known, there is no clear-cut heritage management policy at municipal level. Bunkers continue to be demolished or extended, albeit increasingly rarely. We will return to this point in the Faro section. Site managers such as Natuurmonumenten (natural heritage), Staatsbosbeheer (forest management), the provincial water supply companies such as PWN and Dunea, and Provinciale Landschappen (non-governmental

²² See www.atlantikwall-wadden.nl (<http://www.atlantikwall-wadden.nl>)



Fig. 12 A free-drift basement of a searchlight in the dunes near Bloemendaal

nature area management organisations operating at provincial level) play a unique role in Atlantikwall management. Besides managing the majority of the Dutch dunes as Natura 2000 protected nature areas, they are also the largest owners of Atlantikwall properties and complexes: ranging from concrete gun emplacements and complexes to subtle traces in the landscape, such as trenches and beacons. They are increasingly aware of this unique position. What started as an unwanted addition to their property, briskly cleared or haphazardly concealed and best forgotten about – we have already discussed ‘*preservation by neglect*’ – changed over time. The fact that bunkers offer an excellent refuge for bats thanks to the constant temperature and absence of daylight was a particularly powerful driver in transforming negative views into positive approaches. Indeed, ‘*vleermuisbunker*’ (bat bunker) has become an established term in Dutch. Nevertheless, site managers continue to grapple with certain issues.

The bunkers’ unexpected ecological function is at odds with the increasing demand for bunker complexes to open up to the public. While nature and heritage experiences are often compatible, there are limits. As bats seek secluded environments for hibernation, the bunkers could only feasibly open to visitors in summer. A bunker-specific or, perhaps more ideal, locality-specific approach could be taken that considers

aspects such as zoning, recreational activities on offer, the bats’ breeding season and hibernation.

Rule enforcement and nature conservation legislation also present challenges. Visitors are not free to walk or cycle wherever they please in protected nature areas, but must keep to the paths and trails. Parts of nature areas are permanently closed to the public because they are home to vulnerable flora, for example. Nevertheless, given the size of certain areas and the limited human and other resources, there are effectively no rule enforcement measures in place. This then raises the question as to who is ultimately responsible for rule enforcement on a site: the site manager or the municipality? The situation is not always clear, but what is clear is that all sorts of activities that are incompatible with nature preservation take place in nature areas. Guards often find evidence of illegal excavations of bunkers or other Atlantikwall remains. Excavations are subject to strict rules and, bar a few exceptions, may not be performed by individuals. Metal detectors are often used prior to excavations – and again, not everyone is aware of the rules governing metal detector use. Viewing hidden Atlantikwall remains as archaeological heritage – which, as a matter of fact, they are – would protect them under laws and regulations governing archaeology. Nevertheless, illegal excavations were and continue to present an issue, to an extent due to the huge amount of information available online.



Fig. 13 After sod cutting, a trench in the Kennemerduinen that has become visible. Nowadays, it is covered with sand again

Besides that, Second World War memorabilia such as helmets and bullets are coveted collectors' items and are easily traded online, despite this being in contravention of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. It would be good if increased interest in the Atlantikwall's heritage value could translate into participation in heritage by raising public and media awareness of rules and regulations and fostering an understanding that such practices run counter to heritage preservation. Participation in heritage that combines both volunteer and expert input could contribute to this.

In spring 2023, MOOI Noord-Holland produced a list of surviving Atlantikwall remains in the municipalities of Velsen and Beverwijk by developing a GIS with the sites of the remains. If maps of the sites were to go into circulation, they would rapidly fall into the hands of illegal treasure hunters. That is why maps are not in the public domain. Nevertheless, municipalities can use this type of GIS to pursue active, targeted security. The *Atlantikwall Atlas*, published at the same time as this Vision, also does not contain this data.

Site managers who wish to open Atlantikwall remains to the public, and are consequently obliged to construct a walking trail, must adhere to certain rules. The Birds and Habitats Directives, which governs the management

of Natura 2000 sites, stipulate that any new path with length X for site A necessitates the closure of the same length of path elsewhere. While this is a case in which recreational values can clash with natural values, nature conservators always endeavour to find a balance between nature and culture.

The opposite can just as easily occur: the remains will decay if a site manager chooses to pursue a strategy of preservation by neglect. What happens then? Is the site manager obliged or allowed to take action? Consolidation and restoration are challenging enough, and – as far as is known – no consideration has been given to 'managed decline'. The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands has plans to run a targeted pilot project; Natuurmonumenten has said in talks that it is open to the idea. As its subjects of research, the project would focus on the structural integrity of properties as well as drawings made by troops.

A solution must be found; see Part 3 for more information.

Another aspect that has been flagged by site managers are the excessive (in their perception) demands by local heritage associations to open bunkers to the public. If policy guidelines were in place, the site managers could provide an unambiguous response to these demands instead of making ad hoc decisions as they do now. Landschap Noord-Holland has already produced its own 'vision for bunkers'. Such initiatives are valuable and worth pursuing.

Atlantikwall management in the European context²³

Having outlined Dutch management of the Atlantikwall, we will now focus on the situation of the Atlantikwall in other European countries. As ever, we are keen to exchange knowledge and experiences with our neighbours in a European context, so that we can learn from one another. The Atlantikwall was the first example of a defensive line constructed outside a country's national borders, in this case the Third Reich. This principle was followed after the war: during the Cold War, Dutch defences were located outside the Netherlands, with Dutch troops stationed in

²³ This section is a summary of the memo by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands *HET BEHEER VAN DE ATLANTIKWALL DOOR OVERHEDEN IN EUROPA* *Vergelijkend onderzoek naar de rol en betrokkenheid van diverse (rijks) overheden en beheerders van het erfgoed van de Atlantikwall in Europa* (in Dutch only) [Comparative research into the role and engagement of various central governments, public authorities and heritage site managers of the Atlantikwall in Europe], by Celine Meijer and Ben de Vries, February 2021

Germany for the most part. The Atlantikwall extends from the northernmost tip of Europe at the Norwegian-Russian border down to the southern tip of the French-Spanish border. This is a coastline of 6,200 kilometres as the crow flies, with the defensive line stretching over 5,000 kilometres. It was, and still is, the only west-facing coastal defence in Europe. While it was impossible for the Germans to build an unbroken Atlantic Wall, German propaganda gave the impression that it was. The Atlantikwall is an internationally significant defensive line landscape. Various public authorities in the Atlantikwall countries have shown different attitudes and approaches to the preservation and protection of Atlantikwall remains. This is evidenced most vividly by huge variations in the number of surviving properties and complexes in each country – an inheritance from the post-war demolition activities that took place over many years. Research by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands in 2021 focusing on management in seven countries resulted in five conclusions and one recommendation.

1. *Protected status*
About 1.5% of Atlantikwall remains are protected as a national monument and have been assigned an inventory number. Public authorities in the seven Atlantikwall countries appear to be reluctant to designate Atlantikwall remains as national monuments, commonly preferring to task local and regional institutions with heritage protection. These public authorities are often unclear about their role, as there is generally no central government policy in place.
2. *Role of central government*
Public authorities play different roles in the valuation and management of Atlantikwall remains on their administrative territory. This role can be active or passive, national or decentralised (i.e. regional or local). The situation regarding property rights is particularly complex on the Channel Islands, where Atlantikwall museums are often owned by local associations.
3. *Ownership*
In Belgium, the majority of remains are owned by the federal government or provincial governments. In France, a large part is privately owned, with *communes* tasked with implementing heritage policy. In Norway, a large part is managed by the Norwegian Ministry of Defence. The Channel Islands are characterised by a mix of ownership agreements. In Germany, the remains are owned by and fall under the responsibility of the federal states.

4. *Reuse*
Atlantikwall bunker complexes are most commonly repurposed as museums. There are 63 Atlantikwall-themed museums across the different countries, with 25 in France and 13 on the Channel Islands. These museums are generally privately owned. Additionally, the Atlantikwall sites' location in the heart of nature makes them highly suited to walking or cycling trips. The colossal bunkers are also frequently used as distribution centres, factories and even cultural centres.
5. *Visibility, general education, art education and knowledge acquisition*
The past decades have seen the appearance of many regional publications focused on bunkers in local contexts, as well as the establishment of local bunker museums. This has increased interest in the Atlantikwall among the public and public authorities. In 2018, the annual Bunker Day – organised by the European Atlantic Wall Heritage Foundation – culminated in the first European Bunker Day, an initiative by Atlantikwall Europe (AWE). Artists are also making themselves heard by trying to raise the visibility of the Atlantikwall. Additionally, while the Atlantikwall is gaining recognition throughout the Atlantikwall countries, this is often also in connection to war tourism and efforts to preserve memories of the Second World War. In terms of the latter, we can conclude that areas in which Atlantikwall remains can be found are gradually becoming 'memorial landscapes' and, crucially, must seek to strike a balance between remembrance and experience.

As the Atlantikwall represents such a large, international structure, the obvious recommendation is to pursue ongoing or new collaborations in relation to knowledge sharing, management, consideration of the Atlantikwall's layered use and, if applicable, its protection. In terms of the latter, national legal contexts may lead to different outcomes. Jointly formulating criteria for this heritage would therefore benefit policy alignment and facilitate the exchange of good practices and knowledge. As the Atlantikwall is shared heritage, this approach can only be beneficial. At the same time, it would guarantee the protection of 'foreign' military heritage in the Netherlands while safeguarding Dutch military heritage, such as from the Cold War, in other countries. Lastly, we have provided a table – again sourced from the memo by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands – detailing the number of surviving permanent and semi-permanent Atlantikwall buildings (known as 'ständige Bauten') in

Table 1 Number of Atlantikwall ‘ständige Bauten’ in each country, completed and surviving

	Number of completed ‘ständige Bau’ (St.) according to Rolf/ Sakkers, Smid, Neisingh (2021)	Anno 2020 present ständige Bau	% Ständige bau 2020
France	6.690	3.000	52
The Netherlands	2.020	1.000	17
Denmark	1.755	1.000	17
Belgium	718	80	2
Channel Islands (UK)	441	400	7
Norway	847	300	5
Germany	273	10	0
Total	12.744	5.790	100

each country. The number of permanent and semi-permanent buildings and bunkers (ständige Bauten, St) built is not always clear, is incoherent or is open to multiple interpretations, which occasionally complicates discussions on the matter. Numbers vary from over 12,000 to over 16,000, with 5,790 surviving to this day.

NB: This table does not include the thousands of brick buildings constructed in the vicinity of the ständige Bauten.

The table provides information only on the numbers. Insights into the quality of the single properties, the number of non-permanent buildings and the frequently mentioned ‘discreet’ traces in the landscape would be

beneficial. To the extent known, such lists do not exist. The Vision will be shared with neighbouring countries, who will be asked for feedback. Collaborative ties with these countries will be strengthened over time, both in terms of partnerships between public authorities and between private parties. Research could relate to the role of managing bodies, i.e. the European Commission, play in incentivising the commemoration and experience of this pan-European heritage, which is at the core of the EU’s founding. After all, the Second World War was the catalyst of European integration. In consideration of the conclusions above, the next part of this Vision will focus on the Dutch section of the Atlantikwall.



Fig. 14 Bunker converted into a play object in Groede

Part 3 – Vision

Introduction

Public authorities are now faced with new challenges in relation to the Atlantikwall. This part of the Vision will focus on the core question of managing Atlantikwall remains and the role of the central government therein. We will cover the following topics:

- Heritage policy: preservation issues and dilemmas regarding additional protection (Heritage Act/*Erfgoedwet*).
- Management and usage via environmental policy (Environment and Planning Act/*Omgevingswet*) and area-specific, participatory approaches.
- Knowledge and knowledge sharing

These topics are to be understood within an ever broader definition of the term ‘heritage’ and who decides what constitutes heritage. In line with the principles of the 2005 Faro Convention, every person has a right to participate in heritage; this right to participation is enshrined in the Dutch Heritage Act. This Part ends on the ‘Faro approach’.

Heritage policy and its relationship to the Atlantikwall

In its most extensive form, the Atlantikwall in the Netherlands was comprised of thousands of different parts that together form a coherent military system –

a landscape. A large part has since disappeared, as shown in table 1.²⁴ Yet many single properties have survived, and large parts of the system or complexes are still visible. Protecting all surviving parts as national or municipal monuments is as impracticable as it is undesirable. As previously mentioned, thirty or so single properties and complexes were awarded national monument status between 1996 and 2019, and some municipalities have proceeded to designate single properties as municipal monuments in recent years. While the publication of this Vision raises the question as to whether, by virtue of the Heritage Act, single properties and complexes should be added to the current list, the Vision itself refrains from comment. Why?

At its core, this Vision is an appeal for careful, holistic management of the surviving parts of this landscape, which should be considered as a system and preserved as a matter of principle. However, that does not mean that ‘preservation by monumental protection’ is the ultimate goal or strategy. Preservation and careful management could equally be achieved in other ways. This will be discussed in detail in the following section. The Vision for the Atlantikwall is one component of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands’ *Programma Militair erfgoed*, a product of the 2020 letter to Parliament (see footnote 2). This Vision focuses on how the Dutch central government intends to manage the Netherlands’

²⁴ Studies into what disappeared when, and what still remains, could be added to the list of research topics. The study by MOOI Noord-Holland has set the ball rolling in this regard.



Fig. 15 Schnellbootbunker in IJmuiden

Atlantikwall remains. It is clear, as recognised in the letter to Parliament, that this necessarily entails a focus on protection. A decision has been made to pursue a separate line of research on that topic. This research focuses on which parts could be added to the list of national monuments because they are key to better understanding the relationship between the separate elements. Moreover, these parts include structures and complexes that had previously been overlooked. This study, commissioned by the Cultural Heritage Agency²⁵ into these gaps in knowledge was conducted in 2023 and 2024. Eighteen Atlantikwall properties, complexes and systems appeared in this study, varying from the rare coastal battery at Zanddijk to the E-boat base at IJmuiden. This list will be used as the basis to develop an improvement programme for the existing list. The aforementioned letter to Parliament, which was also signed by the Minister of Defence, was unequivocal on this point (translation from Dutch): *'I am using this selection to initiate a limited military heritage improvement programme. Within the framework of this programme, both new monuments and new knowledge may be added to existing designations. Removal of existing designations is also an option. (p. 5)*

At the heart of this would be parts that improve our understanding of the cohesiveness and system of the Atlantikwall. Knowledge from this Vision for the Atlantikwall and the *Atlas van de Atlantikwall* can be used to inform choices. Another line of approach mentioned in the letter to Parliament concentrated on Cold War heritage, which is currently subject to a limited protection programme.²⁶ The Vision for the Atlantikwall does not coincide with this line and will not provide further details on it. The improvement programme can focus on the multilayered use of Atlantikwall remains during the Cold War; it could do so by adding to the descriptions in the monument register, for example.

Owners of eligible single properties will be consulted, should these single properties potentially be designated as monuments. Other ministries and municipal governments will also need to be consulted. Advice from the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment must be sought regarding environmental policy and *Kustpact* considerations; the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature regarding nature conservation legislation (Natura 2000); the Ministry of Climate Policy and Green Growth regarding the energy transition, and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (Rijkswaterstaat)

regarding water-related challenges. When appropriate, this also applies to the Ministry of Defence and the Central Government Real Estate Agency (RVB).

Designating new monuments has consequences for the Conservation of Monuments Subsidy Scheme (*Subsidie-regeling Instandhouding Monumenten*, SIM). In any case, the Dutch central government will seek the closest possible alignment with agreements in the 2017 *Kustpact* and the 2014 *Kustvisie* (vision for the coast). The *Kustpact* describes the core values of the coast that must be protected and preserved. The international context will also be considered. Lastly, once national monument status has been granted, the municipal government is responsible for ensuring the monument's security and for issuing permits. Most municipal governments are yet to produce a management vision for this type of monument, as discussed in Part 2. It is therefore logical that an improvement designation would address this aspect. The Dutch central government will investigate how this topic can be addressed, among other things because even bunkers designated as national monuments have been defiled with graffiti and municipal governments are unsure of the Cultural Heritage Agency's stance on this. This brings us to the subject of offenders and rule enforcement. While forest managers have 'special investigating officer' status in the



Fig. 16 Rows of so-called dragon's teeth at Schoorl

Netherlands and can intervene in the event of offence, most site managers are not in a position to act against those who defile property, illegally trespass on closed bunkers or use metal detectors on sites. Forest managers intervene only sporadically, mainly due to lack of capacity. Municipalities are also faced with a shortage of enforcement officers. A participatory approach could go some way in solving this issue, as raised awareness of a site's values may dissuade potential offenders. The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands will consult with all heritage partners and owners of the various surviving parts of the Atlantikwall to seek alignment. International collaboration and consultation on this topic is also relevant.

²⁵ R. Noorlander, 2023, *Lacunes in het rijksmonumentenbestand. Onderzoek naar de Belgische Opstand, Eerste Wereldoorlog en Tweede Wereldoorlog* (internal study commissioned by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands) (in Dutch only).

²⁶ See <https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/militair-erfgoed/erfgoed-koude-oorlog/onderzoek-en-aanpak>

The Dutch central government: what will it do?

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the core aim of this Vision is to facilitate careful management of Atlantikwall remains in a way that ensures their long-term preservation. The strategy best adapted to this aim is to give Atlantikwall remains a function where possible, ideally in line with the transition processes at play in Dutch spatial planning. Above all, good management can be achieved through knowledge development and sharing that raises awareness of the heritage's significance and value. The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands firmly believes that spatial planning policy instruments should first and foremost be used. This offers opportunities to grant a status to large structures and complexes in policy instruments such as municipal environmental plans. Provincial governments could also add rules to their planning regulations that protect the Atlantikwall in their environmental policy. The bigger picture of the Atlantikwall and its context could be taken as a starting point for design and development decisions. The next section will discuss this in greater detail.

As mentioned above, the invisible traces of the Atlantikwall, alongside landscape structures such as trenches, could be viewed as archaeological and landscape heritage. Archaeology can yield valuable information about the construction methods and operation of the Atlantikwall. Excavating for traces is subject to strict rules. Metal detectors are permitted to a limited extent and only after receiving the explicit consent from the owner. Archaeological finds must also be reported to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. Excavating buried remains of the Atlantikwall is forbidden. While treasure-hunting remains a threat, it can be stopped via awareness-raising campaigns and effective rule enforcement. In all cases, legislation and regulations governing archaeological research must be followed. Specific regulations may also be instated by municipal governments; the provincial heritage policy and management support agencies (*Steunpunten Cultureel Erfgoed*) can provide advice on this topic.

Environmental policy: relation to transition challenges and recreation

Introduction: Dutch central government efforts

The approach and attitude toward Atlantikwall remains have evolved over the past decades: from frenzied clear-ups and 'out of sight, out of mind', tolerance and repurpose to new meaning and public display. This approach was largely limited to the domain of nature and heritage. Whenever the Atlantikwall touched on spatial planning policy in the past, this was almost always in relation to obstacle clearance. Bunkers were relocated in one isolated case, permanently disturbing the site's context (such as in Maasdijk), or were repurposed in the Cold War, such as the relocation of bunkers in Rijksdorp. There was usually no attempt to integrate or adapt remains. This should change over the coming years, under the influence of holistic heritage management and modern environmental policy, and has already happened in a few cases. Three main strategies are possible: preserve, develop or leave remains untouched. Each strategy could in theory include protection, but this Vision will provide no further comment thereupon, as outlined above. We previously highlighted that heritage has become more closely associated with environmental policy over the past years. Part of this movement from sector silos to holistic approaches is the belief that heritage can be an important factor in area-specific policy. Heritage can even be a vector for spatial planning challenges and provide a source of inspiration. This goes beyond the preservation of existing intrinsic heritage values or incorporating heritage into new plans; it also includes searching for a new, appropriate function for heritage. In other words: in view of future spatial planning challenges, it is advisable to investigate whether the Atlantikwall could possess *usage values* (or '*accommodation values*', to quote a term used by the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency) alongside its heritage values. This means we must investigate the functional incorporation of heritage in light of the transition challenges over the coming decades, and how this would take shape in practice. 'Functional' in the sense of its use in current spatial planning challenges, with remains preservation and adaptation aligned with the new function as closely as possible. A form of very extensive preservation or 'managed decay' (which falls under the strategy of 'leave untouched' and is a result of what nature conservationists called 'dynamic dune management') could be practicable

in nature areas. Complete restoration and opening to the public as a Second World War memorial would be the exception.

The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands is an advocate of careful and meaningful management of Atlantikwall remains. Where possible, efforts must be made to ensure heritage is incorporated and utilised in the various transition challenges as far as possible. This Vision recommends careful, holistic management of the surviving parts, which should be considered as a system and preserved as a matter of principle. This should be underpinned by a mutually coordinated, cross-governmental policy for heritage and the environment. Ongoing knowledge development regarding the operation of the Atlantikwall both during and after the Second World War is also necessary. This means that the various tiers of government and stakeholders, each within their remit, acknowledge the Atlantikwall's eminent heritage value and embed it into their policy. Preservation and development (including further development), or a combination thereof, of Atlantikwall remains would in that case also constitute a design challenge. 'Meaningful' means that the story of the Second World War and Nazi ideology continues to be told and passed down to new generations with no first-hand experience of the Second World War, as well as to people unfamiliar with the Dutch context. The significance of a site must never be overlooked. This should lead to a situation, say 15 years from now, in which Atlantikwall remains are recognisable and possess an embedded function in the landscape, allowing the stories of the Second World War to be told and ensuring the lasting visibility of the Atlantikwall system (what was its military significance and purpose?).

Plans

The previously mentioned *Masterplan Kust en Erfgoed* (masterplan coast and heritage), published in 2014, is an example of how the heritage sector is willing and able to help find solutions to spatial challenges. This study examines the future design of the Dutch coast, which focuses heavily on the Atlantikwall. An excerpt (translation from Dutch): 'We discourage an overly cautious approach to the Atlantikwall. Many remains survive, some buried under the sand. The bunkers themselves are robust constructions that can withstand serious impacts. Thanks to their unique location in the landscape, offering sea views, they could accommodate unique functions such as hotels, restaurants, wellness spas or climbing walls.' (p. 78). The study also argues that clusters of single properties, such as those around the former *Festungen* (forts), should be made more visible. Studies on future use have not just looked at recreation and experience, but also future spatial planning challenges. The outlines in the masterplan are an example of the factor approach and vector approach in relation to heritage. In 2017, the *Kustpact* was drafted in response to increasing pressure on the Dutch coast. This is an agreement between public authorities, nature conservationists and businesses (including those in the recreation industry), aiming to avoid a frenzy of construction along the coast. Instead, it promotes long-term protection and sustainable development. The *Kustpact* sets out agreements to protect the coast's values and monitor the balance between protection and



Fig. 17 Interested people on a 'bunker excursion' in the dunes near IJmuiden

development. The sections of pristine coast are therefore considered valuable. As a result, care must be taken if new construction is planned or sites are to be opened up to the public, for instance as museums. The number of visitors to museum bunkers has shot up in the last ten years, and these museums are often open only at the weekend or by appointment. Natuurmonumenten reported that summer trips to the Atlantikwall remains in Zuid-Kennemerland National Park and the forest near Haamstede Castle continue to be extremely popular. Tours organised by water supply company PWN also regularly attract many participants; any increase in visitor numbers must be managed properly. Natuurmonumenten is considering an 'Atlantikwall route' that follows existing roads and paths in Zuid-Kennemerland National Park.

Spatial planning and environmental policy in relation to the Atlantikwall

Following the introduction of the Environment and Planning Act (*Omgevingswet*), municipalities' environmental plans²⁷ consider the importance of cultural heritage preservation. The Dutch term 'erfgoedinclusief' (heritage-inclusive) is increasingly used in this context nowadays, and this also applies to the management of Atlantikwall remains. It obliges municipal governments to take stock of and analyse the cultural heritage present (or expected to be present) on their administrative territory. The municipal government's environmental plan must subsequently include protection measures for cultural heritage that is eligible to benefit from this protection. It is evident that any municipalities that have Atlantikwall remains on their administrative territory must safeguard these remains in their environmental plan and, at a prior stage and in a more general sense, also in their environmental vision. The municipal and provincial governments interviewed stated that they expect the Dutch central government to provide guidelines and frameworks to help them develop their own management policy for Atlantikwall heritage. This requires further thought. There is a proposal to organise a large-scale consultation on this Vision with central government partners, municipal and provincial governments, and other parties in 2025. This would focus on the following steps:

- Develop demolition guidelines, or in any case guidelines on when erasing traces from the landscape could be a possibility.

- Ensure municipal governments in particular are able to identify harmful effects on the Atlantikwall structure and prevent them. It is essential that public authorities and owners know which traces of the Atlantikwall – including landscape heritage, built heritage and archaeological heritage – we want to use in which locations, and which stories we wish to continue to tell future generations. This also ties in with environmental policy.
- Develop knowledge about the Atlantikwall system, so that municipal and provincial governments can gain insights into their situation within that context. This could serve to support policy and other decisions. NB: *This will be discussed in detail in the section regarding knowledge.*
- A platform for knowledge exchange on what can and cannot be done in situ, as well as on the wider operation of the Atlantikwall, could be used to develop a set of guidelines that could be adopted by municipal and provincial governments. The Cultural Heritage Agency's 'Platform Militair erfgoed' could be used for this purpose.

As far as current challenges are concerned, today's spatial planning policy is wholly focused on the major transitions, including climate adaptation strategies for rising sea levels, nature improvement and the construction of hundreds of thousands of homes. This will certainly have some sort of impact on Atlantikwall remains. In keeping with the principles of the Environment and Planning Act and the belief in the heritage sector that a factor or vector approach has huge potential, there are plenty of opportunities for a holistic, area-specific approach that is sympathetic to a site's features and characteristics. The demand for more context and coherence (insight into the operation or effects of the Atlantikwall system) could also be met, facilitating an unambiguous consideration of the pros and cons of each intended intervention at coastal locations at which remains of the Atlantikwall are threatened. Knowledge of the system could render insights into the current structure of the Atlantikwall, which would in turn provide guidelines for design and new challenges. This could be achieved by producing a set of general principles that are then applied in greater detail in multi-stakeholder spatial design plans. Rather than making ad-hoc decisions, planners could then use an assessment framework – as has been done in MOOI Noord-Holland's pilot project at Festung IJmuiden. This is in line with the proposals set out in the Masterplan Kust en Erfgoed. We will touch on each of the transitions and outline how careful management of Atlantikwall remains could fit into environmental policy.

²⁷ The previous Dutch Spatial Planning Act (*Wet ruimtelijke ordening*, *Wro*) also stipulated that zoning plans had to consider culture and history.



Fig. 18 A bunker collapsed and fell on the beach at Voornes Duin 1966



Fig. 19 After the Flood of 1953, bunkers at Voornes Duin ended up in the sea

Coastal protection

Sea levels are expected to rise over the coming decades, although it is difficult to predict by exactly how much. The Dutch Delta Programme, which protects the Netherlands against high water and flooding, assumes a rise of 1 metre by 2100.²⁸ This predication is based on climate scenarios by the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute (KNMI) in 2014. Substantial measures must be taken in the coming decades to ensure that the Netherlands can withstand these water levels, even if they are only a rare occurrence. Hence the development of the Flood Protection Programme (HWBP), part of the Delta programme. There are many projects in the pipeline for the Wadden Sea coastline, with the most ambitious being the reinforcement of the Afsluitdijk flood defence (although this officially does not fall under the HWBP). These projects explicitly mention protected Dutch military heritage and the importance of careful management. This includes any German additions to Dutch casemates²⁹. The possibility cannot be ruled out that new projects, including those after the end of the HWBP, will necessitate interventions along the coast. In such cases, Atlantikwall remains should be given a place in some way, shape or form; it must not be presumed that projects may only begin once any Atlantikwall remains have been cleared. Local actors,

which will often include the Dutch central government, could first establish to what extent remains could be incorporated or, ideally, to what extent they could shape and guide the design. While this may not necessarily be a case of protection, it will become a design challenge.

Nature restoration

The implementation of the *Programma Natuur* (Nature Programme) is expected to have an impact on the Dutch coast. Almost all dunes in the Netherlands are protected Natura 2000 areas. Over the coming years, substantial sums will be invested in improving the state of Dutch nature in line with the Dutch central government's aim to ensure nature is robust and resilient. Greater efforts, divided into two tracks, will be needed, focusing on a mix of measures such as nature expansion, nature reconnection, design and improving groundwater security. If this occurs in the dunes, this may have an impact on Atlantikwall remains. This should be a consideration now, and heritage values should be highlighted in implementation processes, including an explicit consideration of the archaeological values and 'discreet' traces of the Atlantikwall. The spatial planning impact on groundwater abstraction areas that are also Natura 2000 sites is expected to be minor. This includes the following areas along the Dutch coast: Meijndel (The Hague-Wassenaar), the Amsterdam Water Dunes (Zandvoort), Zuid-Kennemerland National Park and the North Holland Dune Reserve PWN (Beverwijk-Heemskerk-Castricum). In relation to this, the Dutch farming industry is currently faced with the enormous task of reducing its nitrogen emissions in order to improve the state of the country's nature areas. The agriculture transition's impacts on spatial planning are not expected to have serious impact consequences for the Atlantikwall, as they are limited to farming areas in which the majority of remains have already been lost.

²⁸ Kennisprogramma Zeespiegelstijging (Sea Level Rise Knowledge Programme, in Dutch only), Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management and the Delta Programme Commissioner. January 2021. <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/klimaatverandering/documenten/rapporten/2019/08/01/kennisprogramma-zeespiegelstijging>. Current predications assume a rise of 1.20 metres (according to the Knowledge Programme's mid-term review, November 2023) (in Dutch only).

²⁹ In discussions about the protection of existing national monuments, a German addition to a Dutch military property can be included as part of the annotated description and protection. If the addition is on an existing property, it benefits from protection by default. If the addition is separate, additional protection effectively represents an expansion to the scope.



Fig. 20 Exploding a bunker at the Kurhaus in Scheveningen, 1955

Any surviving remains should be left untouched rather than demolished, as the latter process releases nitrogen emissions. Measures in connection with the *Programma Natuur*, which focuses on restoring nature areas, can occasionally run counter to efforts to develop Atlantikwall heritage. As outlined above³⁰, recreation and nature can sometimes be at odds. Modifications in the dunes can reveal previously buried ‘discreet’ traces of the Atlantikwall and expose them to the effects of erosion. It is in these situations that nature conservation legislation and heritage management have the potential to collide. The Dutch central government will endeavour to find solutions to these and other management bottlenecks by means of mutual agreement, based on the principle that any ecological values present must be respected to the fullest extent possible. As far as preserving surviving traces of the Atlantikwall, this entails that very extensive methods (bordering on a policy of neglect) could be acceptable. Municipal governments (and, in some cases, provincial governments) and site managers must, as an immediate priority, discuss who is responsible for what. This Vision appeals to site managers and public authorities to continue or initiate dialogue to demonstrate what they know about heritage and ecology and to discuss any reported bottlenecks. The outcomes of this dialogue can be used as a springboard to search for solutions that properly address both aspects (heritage and ecology). The question this poses regarding financial and human resources cannot be answered at this moment in time, however.

Urban development

Hundreds of thousands of homes will be built throughout the Netherlands over the next decades, including in coastal municipalities such as those around The Hague. For instance, there are plans for a large new-build development on the Valkenburg Naval Air Base, with the new neighbourhood incorporating Atlantikwall remains. Discussions are under way to re-excavate an anti-tank trench and incorporate it into a future area of greenery. In Vlissingen, a bunker discovered in the planning phase for a new-build development in 2021 around Hotel Britannia could not be incorporated into the design and was subsequently demolished. Nevertheless, the municipal governments of Vlissingen and the provincial government of Zeeland are aware of the unique character of Landfront Vlissingen and welcome the incorporation and usage plans for the Landfront in local urban developments. In September 2024, the provincial government of Zeeland and the municipal government of Veere were awarded support from an ‘Erfgoed Deal’ to use part of an anti-tank trench at Landfront Vlissingen as a water attenuation lagoon³¹. It is not clear to what extent incorporation and usage will occur more frequently in the future, or whether demolition will continue to be the prevailing strategy. Moving forward, it can be said that:

- Urban development is always an area and design challenge. Any surviving Atlantikwall remains should be given a prominent place in the design. Determine at the start of planning which traces of the Atlantikwall are threatened, if this has not already been adequately covered in the environmental vision or environmental plan. Investigate their place in the wider Atlantikwall system, and research the site’s context and defining features. Again, locally known stories could provide inspiration.
 - This research is supported by information from the *Atlas van de Atlantikwall* and other general publications or map resources, such as those in the *Atlas van de Atlantikwall* or the map viewer in the *Festung IJmuiden* pilot project.
- Research whether traces of the Atlantikwall could be a full or partial vector in the design. As previously mentioned, this is called ‘heritage-inclusive’ design and, by analogy with the experiences in the ‘Erfgoed Deal’ (www.erfgoed-deal.nl), can also include other heritage values alongside those related to military heritage. Values could be viewed cumulatively.

³⁰ Part 2 specifically focused on site managers and their approach to the Atlantikwall.

³¹ See <https://www.erfgoeddeal.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2024/10/26/uitvoeringsprogramma-erfgoed-deal-8e-ronde> (in Dutch only)



Fig. 21 Bunker day at the Schlei bunker on the island of Schiermonnikoog

- Research whether, and how, traces could be incorporated (by analogy with the coastal management challenge).
 - Establish factors such as the architectural integrity and value of the traces.
 - Same for landscape traces.
- Remember archaeological research in places in which there is no possibility of preservation in situ. This also applies to nature areas!

This research by design forms the basis of a plan that does justice to the history of the site while facilitating careful considerations. Following this preliminary approach can help to avoid nasty surprises during the process and set clear expectations as to the development costs, which are part of the whole process from design to realisation. The 2014 *Masterplan Kust en Erfgoed* demonstrates that this approach can work and enjoys support.

Recreation

While recreation may not be among the main transition challenges, it does represent a challenge that requires constant attention. The beach and dunes have been popular locations for day trips and overnight stays for decades. As people begin to return to the beach shortly

after liberation, the shoreline needed to be thoroughly cleared for safety and accessibility reasons. As explained above, these clearing activities were performed with gusto. The practice of reusing old bunkers as holiday homes has more or less stopped. Instead, many new camp sites and bungalow parks have sprung up along the coast, and the number of beach access points, designated car parking areas, and cafés and restaurants has sharply increased. The increasing pressure on the coast prompted the drafting of the aforementioned *Kustpact*. This is an agreement between public authorities, nature conservationists and businesses (including those in the recreation industry), aiming to avoid a frenzy of construction along the coast. Instead, it promotes long-term protection and sustainable development. An example in case is Hoek van Holland, with beach and recreational facilities in a very small area of the resort that are located directly adjacent to the Vinetaduin nature area, home to protected remains of Festung Hoek van Holland, a Cold War troposcatter and a handful of museums. The greenhouses of Westland and shipping traffic on Nieuwe Waterweg are also close by. This goes to show that making clear agreements on what can and cannot be done is an absolute necessity. In practice, this means that the Vinetaduin nature area is not accessible to the public, with the exception of a few prebooked excursions each year. While the bunkers are now under proper management, there are questions regarding the

approach to grazing on the site, which could damage traces of the trenches. In this case, the very extensive preservation method (mentioned above) could be applied. As explained above, the Atlantikwall is steeped in a thousand stories. If coordinated initiatives are set up and result in balanced storytelling lines – i.e. which do not skim over the murkier sides of war, such as fascism – these stories offer many opportunities to open up sites for recreational purposes. The Cultural Heritage Agency's report *Op Verkenning 2.0* introduces ten storytelling lines, one of which is assigned to the Second World War. This can be developed as a follow-up to the Vision for the Atlantikwall. The project in the Wadden region went in search of the site's community significance, focusing on events that happened in the area during the Second World War and, from there, developing themes that were explained in greater detail at ten locations. Lastly, a single-release information brochure was published to provide a useful source of general information. Coordinated collaboration between museums, tourist information centres and businesses along the coast – in a similar vein to what foundation Stichting Liniebreed Ondernemen does for the Dutch Water Lines – is recommended. A new Cultural Route of the Council of Europe could be themed around the Atlantikwall. The Cultural Heritage Agency is researching this possibility, under what conditions this could take shape, and what the consequences of that choice would be. The Dutch part of such an initiative could be managed in cooperation with the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC) and local communities. The Liberation Route Europe initiative could be used as an example of visitor experience. Nowadays, there are many ways to provide a visitor experience, and these methods could be applied to the Atlantikwall. Podcasts, VR tours, trails and exhibitions, to name a few, should be explored in greater depth. Based on the above, it can be said that a fruitful cooperation between public authorities and the recreation industry can yield benefits for heritage, the economy and education. Huge achievements have already been made at provincial level over the past years, for instance in the form of heritage policy support agencies or heritage information points and archives and repositories. This can be continued. Collaboration between provincial governments is encouraged, and existing partnerships can be stepped up where needed.

Environmental policy: a summary

- Embed the Atlantikwall in provincial environmental policy (environmental vision, environmental regulations)

and municipal environmental policy (environmental vision, environmental plan). Provincial and municipal governments could develop a more heritage-inclusive environmental policy. Policy incentives, such as the Heritage Trail in South Holland, are recommended.

- The Dutch central government should continue to make its policy 'heritage-inclusive', as demonstrated in the Summary Draft of the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning, published in June 2024, and the NOVI (National Environmental Vision)/NOVEX (Executive Agency of the National Environmental Vision). These also address the management of Atlantikwall heritage owned by the Dutch central government, such as single properties, complexes and traces in the landscape.
- Seek connections to the transition challenges: to what extent can Atlantikwall remains – in a structural, archaeological, landscape-related and narrative sense – be integrated into planning and implementation? This applies to tourism and recreation as much as to the transition challenges.
 - All national programmes focusing on the coast should promote careful management of surviving Atlantikwall remains' heritage values. This is in line with the *Kustpact*, and there are already examples of this in the previously mentioned masterplan, for instance. The Dutch central government has a unique responsibility in the national programmes.
- Specific example: how to approach additional and alternative landfall sites of offshore wind farms in relation to the Atlantikwall?³²

Knowledge – fostering greater unity in research

It follows from the above that the Atlantikwall has distinct types of heritage values. These are determined by a combination and selection of criteria present in the report by PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency *Erfgoed als leefomgevingswaarde (2022)*³³ PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (2022)³³ The distinct values are: representation, aesthetics, society, identity, discovery, accommodation, inheritance and collection. and the classic criteria for valuing architecture. Specifically, this relates to:³⁴

³² Talks with Tennes (S.J. Bootsma, director of supply chain management) revealed that the proposed landfall for offshore wind will not coincide with any Atlantikwall structures.

³³ *Erfgoed als leefomgevingswaarde. Een referentiekader voor de dialoog over de waarde van het bestaande bij ruimtelijke ingrepen*. The Hague. (in Dutch only)

³⁴ This summary is based on the project by MOOI Noord-Holland, commissioned by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, *Eindrappor tage Pilotproject Festung IJmuiden*, Alkmaar, 2024 (in Dutch only)



Fig. 23

surroundings or due to its land division, design or facilities. This also includes the concept of 'layers'.

- *Ecological*. This concerns the derived value of the bunker complexes, such as those which function as bat refuges, or anti-tank walls on which rare lichens grow.
- *Immaterial*. The construction and operation of the Atlantikwall are the subject of countless stories and memories of local residents and troops. One might consider research into the local community's experience of occupation, events in mine-clearing camps that were established after the war and housed prisoners of war, and the role of Dutch contractors in construction activities. This is not strictly defined in the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, but it is still an important consideration in this respect. Indeed, all post-war developments and narratives in relation to the Atlantikwall are just as relevant and must not be forgotten.
- *Memorial value*. The Atlantikwall symbolises a darker chapter of recent European history and the ramifications thereof.
- *Usage value (also known as 'accommodation value')*. Can it be used in the future? This topic was discussed in the section on environmental policy.
- *Collective value*. All of these values as a coherent whole.

As mentioned in Part 2, research into the Atlantikwall has come a long way in recent years. Many good-quality publications have been written, focusing predominantly on military and historical aspects. Over the past years, a huge number of maps have been discovered and made available, shedding light on the complexity of the Atlantikwall. These have been reprinted in several substantial books.³⁵ Research into the operation of the Atlantikwall's spatial planning system needed updating. The system can only be fully comprehended on the basis of insights into the state of the local landscape at the time of construction. Changes in the coastal area in the years after 1945 have been so great that we must return to the situation in the war years in order to understand why alterations and interventions occurred in which places. The Atlantikwall system, besides being founded on the knowledge of the landscape, also consisted of moveable property, thus creating a physical and figurative connection between the widespread parts. Talks with parties on the ground highlighted the belief that the Dutch central government should take on a coordinating and supporting role, particularly in terms of

systems thinking. Knowledge about the Atlantikwall can be gained and shared on four scales: knowledge of the system, of larger elements such as *Festungen*, of complexes within the larger element, and of single properties that together formed a complex.³⁶

The *Atlas van de Atlantikwall*, published at the same time as this Vision and produced in part by the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands, currently provides support at the highest level, i.e. the system. The GIS on Festung IJmuiden, developed by MOOI Noord-Holland, is an example of knowledge sharing at the lower three levels. A valuation at the lowest level (i.e. single properties) has been conducted as part of the GIS.³⁷

The *Atlantikwall Atlas* contains maps detailing the range of artillery pieces and the command hierarchy (fig. 22 and 23). These and other maps can be used by other parties, often operating at regional level, for further research or stock taking (such as in the pilot at Festung IJmuiden). The research can also be expanded in scope. In this sense, the *Atlas* serves as a toolkit that provides insight into the collective value of the Atlantikwall.

- The knowledge from the *Atlas* can therefore be useful for further research at municipal scale, for example. This has already been demonstrated by the research conducted by MOOI Noord-Holland, consisting of a detailed inventory and valuation of the Atlantikwall remains at Festung IJmuiden. The information was placed in a GIS (non-public domain) and valued. This valuation can then be compared with the system-level approach as described in the *Atlas*, enabling municipal governments to reach a balanced decision regarding the preservation and development of remains present in their area. All coastal municipalities could benefit from such a tool.
- The *Atlas* helps to fill the knowledge gap regarding the Atlantikwall system (highest scale). The *Atlas* can also provide a framework for the lower scales³⁸, such as *Festungen*, complexes and individual properties ('what was their place within the system?').
- If members of the public have specific questions or issues about single properties, the inventories and the *Atlas* could help to make responsible decisions. The same goes for site managers with similar questions.

³⁵ These include *Atlantikwall in kaart. Bunkers en bezetting in Zuid-Holland* (in Dutch only) by J. Rijpsma and A. van Beveren. Produced in part thanks to a grant from the 'Erfgoedlijn Atlantikwall' of the provincial government of South Holland.

³⁶ This approach is based on the previously mentioned report by MOOI Noord-Holland (footnote 13).

³⁷ This GIS is not in the public domain; it can only be accessed by the municipal governments of Velsen and Beverwijk.

³⁸ The reports by MOOI Noord-Holland provide further details on the scales (see bibliography).

The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands could take a leading role in coordinating further research to ultimately ensure greater unity and alignment. The focus could be on the following areas:

- Specifics: A list of Atlantikwall topics requiring further research should be produced in collaboration with the heritage sector and the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands. Governments and heritage professionals jointly identify these knowledge gaps and develop a strategy to remedy them. The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands can take the initiative on this front and allow the relevant parties to take things from there. The following topics could be considered:
 - Insight into the operation or effects of the Atlantikwall system, as described above. What are the essential qualities of the Atlantikwall in each municipality or province?
 - Develop storytelling lines to serve as a solid starting point for deeper stories at regional and local level. We will discuss this in greater detail in the section about Faro and participation.
 - Maintenance of concrete remains, preservation of drawings by soldiers, or the corrosive influence of long-term exposure to sea winds on metal bunker components.
 - Reuse during the Cold War.
 - Managing 'discreet' traces.
 - Managing vandalism.
- Develop sensitive management guidelines for Atlantikwall remains. It goes without saying that existing knowledge should be compiled wherever possible. The management guidelines could be based on various strategies, such as preservation, development or 'leave untouched'. Guidelines could be developed for each strategy and used as the basis of research by design. Practical guidelines for governments regarding opening up closed bunkers (to tourism and recreation) could also be considered, as exemplified by the outcomes of the pilot project at Festung IJmuiden. There is also a link to environmental policy.
- Establish a network or platform of contact points or support teams operating at provincial level, aided by the provincial heritage policy support agencies.
- This will create a living heritage community for the Atlantikwall at provincial and national level. The Atlantikwall could also be put on the agenda of existing heritage and environmental policy partnerships between provincial and municipal governments.
- Education: Given the historical distance, the various Atlantikwall museums could focus on educating new generations and warning them of the atrocities of war

and fascist and totalitarian ideologies. There are also clear storytelling opportunities regarding the relationship between nature and Atlantikwall heritage.

- International: Support a dynamic network of public authorities from all Atlantikwall countries. If possible, leverage existing international partnerships. Various international projects and partnerships took shape between 2010 and 2020. While most have petered out, they could still be revived by public authorities or – perhaps more effectively – by museums and grassroots initiatives. Knowledge about the Atlantikwall system could also be developed and shared at international level and be levelled up. Partnerships between public authorities and private parties are recommended. The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands will investigate whether the Atlantikwall could be a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe and what the consequences would be of that decision.

Approach: bottom-up, participatory forms of collaboration

The Faro Convention

Lastly, we will reflect on the role played by residents and users in Atlantikwall heritage management, which we summarise as 'participation in heritage'. As established, this Vision for the Atlantikwall was prompted by a grassroots movement. The Dutch central government has responded to calls from various sections of society to take a stance on Atlantikwall remains management. It is therefore an example of an approach in which users, and not just experts, determine the value of heritage. This is in line with the principles of the 2005 Faro Convention, which states that: *'Heritage ultimately derives its significance from people. Everyone has a right to heritage. It is therefore essential that everyone who wishes to access heritage is able to, and that everyone has a say in what constitutes heritages and how it is managed. Cultural heritage, if nothing else, warrants the largest possible democratic participation.'*³⁹

The provisions of the Convention have no direct effect, but rather represent an appeal to formulate policy. Crucially, the convention calls on us to consider why we preserve heritage, for whom, and how this benefits society as a whole. The convention casts public authorities in an active role to ensure that people can participate in the entire process of heritage formation –

³⁹ <https://www.cultureelerfgoed.nl/onderwerpen/erfgoedparticipatie-faro>

from heritage identification and interpretation all the way to protection, preservation and presentation – in the context of heritage communities, for instance. Public authorities' other role is to encourage public reflection and debate on the opportunities and challenges presented by heritage.

The significance of the Faro Convention for Dutch practices concerning heritage is represented by three core goals. These goals provide guidance for the heritage sector and public authorities, helping them to embed the Faro Convention in policy and practice:

1. Normalise participation and co-creation in heritage management practice.
2. Connect cultural heritage to social and community development goals.
3. Be open to alternative views on heritage and create more opportunities to appreciate public knowledge.

Implementation according to the Faro Convention approach

This has the following practical ramifications. Firstly, the acknowledgement that the Atlantikwall possesses various types of heritage and usage values, and that these are represented by more than just the material remains. Until recently, Atlantikwall remains sustained little to no interest among public authorities. While thirty or so bunkers and bunker complexes have been designated as national monuments, no further progress has been

made. This Vision, distilled from consultations with a variety of organisations and sent as a draft to those same organisations for their feedback, is an attempt to pursue practices that reflect the spirit of the Faro Convention. Pursuing practices in the spirit of the Faro Convention also means that the Atlantikwall represents heritage whose past and present significance needs to be explored. Stories about the Atlantikwall dating from both during the war and in the post-war transition years can hold the keys to unlocking that significance, but are not an end in themselves. The Atlantikwall is the backdrop to a spectrum of stories, varying from military history, war and peace, good and evil, everyday life during the war and the post-war period, including modern times. There are many possible parallels in significance between then and now. Sympathy for the Atlantikwall's stories and significance ties in with the Faro approach to heritage management. Projects focusing on story oral history and storytelling in relation to the Atlantikwall should be organised as locally as possible. For instance, it is well known that the people of the Wadden islands had a unique experience of the war with respect to the mainland.

Storytelling helps to increase support for the sensitive management or preservation of the Atlantikwall while presenting opportunities for the tourism and recreation sector, as mentioned in the section on recreation. Storytelling should be sought at a certain level of abstraction and subsequently developed at a provincial or local level. One of those storytelling narratives could relate to 'daily life', as this is a very general subject and



Fig. 24 Art in a barracks near Formerum on the island of Terschelling



Fig. 25 Battery Fiemel at the Punt van Reide (Province of Groningen). Owner Groninger Landschap has returned a stylized FLAK cannon. A visitor center is nearby.

can be further developed at municipal level, for example. Values and stories, and their significance and location, vary from place to place. This is supported by an approach based on a process of participation in heritage, led by local or regional heritage community who collect the stories and decide how to act on them. These communities could also form by association with a theme, such as tourism or recreation. The provincial heritage policy and management support agencies could help to set up and facilitate these forms of participating in heritage at provincial level. The Dutch central government will need to explore its role in this context. A collaboration with the Faro programme office⁴⁰ until 2025 inclusive (terminating thereafter) would make sense and should be explored in greater detail. The core question in this approach should be: how can a party's Atlantikwall-related initiative build on what has already been developed by experts? Support for local and regional 'bunker associations', whose efforts could be considered an example of participation in heritage, could happen along these lines. This support would come from the Dutch central government, via provincial government and provincial heritage policy

support agencies, down to municipalities. The provincial government of South Holland and its Atlantikwall Heritage Trail could serve as an example. In Part 3, we discussed the role that heritage policy and management support agencies and heritage information points and archives and repositories could play in this. The private owners of Atlantikwall properties form a unique heritage community – one that does not see itself as such, but is regarded in this way for the purposes of this Vision. The provincial government of Zeeland stated that a large number of bunkers are located on the land of private owners. This situation is undoubtedly familiar in other parts of the country. This heterogeneous group of people could be asked what they think should happen to these monuments and what role they envisage for themselves. There is potential to draw a parallel with policy for other monuments in the vicinity of homes and gardens, such as dolmens. Another aspect of the Faro Convention approach is the concept of multiple stakeholders. In the sense of Atlantikwall management, this means that the stories of the Germans – those on the 'wrong' side of the war – should also be considered, to the extent that there are still survivors who are able to recount their stories.

⁴⁰ See <https://faro.cultureelerfgoed.nl/welcome>

This could be in addition to the stories of everyday experiences as told by Wadden islanders, such as those collected in the project funded by the Waddenfonds fund. More broadly speaking, the Faro Convention approach also considers other social uses of heritage, such as repurposing, incorporating heritage in development plans, and holistic partnerships between groups based on mutual respect. The attendees of regional meetings held during the autumn of 2022, in preparation for the publication of this Vision, raised a number of topics that could be addressed. Below is a selection:

Policy related to the Faro Convention

- Develop flanking tourism and recreation policies to further broaden the experience of the Atlantikwall. This is a task for all public authorities in collaboration

with museums, site managers, other owners, and tourist organisations such as Tourist Information Centres, Visit Wadden, Liberation Europe and the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC). Site managers and heritage organisations also play a key role: what is possible (and impossible) when it comes to decaying or hazardous constructions, nature conservation legislation and vulnerable nature? What significance do Atlantikwall remains hold for residents? What future do they envisage for those remains?

- The provincial heritage policy support points for monuments and archaeology could tackle this in collaboration with the parties mentioned. This could be part of the work of the previously proposed support team.
- The Cultural Heritage Agency's platform for military heritage ('Platform Militair Erfgoed') has organised Atlantikwall-focused meetings in the past and will continue to do so.

Suggestions for Faro-related projects for the Atlantikwall

(based on suggestions put forward during the regional meetings about this Vision in the autumn of 2022)

Storytelling with broad stories about ideology, strategy and system, narrowing down into local stories, e.g.:

- Stories of workers and contractors (oral history) – if still alive.
- The Wadden region is seeking to establish a macro-narrative that explains the islands' experience of occupation: how did the Atlantikwall affect small and, at the time, relatively isolated communities? This will delve deeper into the project funded by the Waddenfonds fund (see <https://www.atlantikwall-wadden.nl/nl> for the results) (in Dutch only).
- Placenames, such as 'Pindaberg' in Zandvoort. While this is a reference to the Indian troops who cleared munition and other debris at this location, the name would no longer be tolerated nowadays due to its racist connotations in Dutch. How does one deal with this?
- Establishing 'national bunker days' in connection with the annual 'Fortenmaand' (fort month). Acting as a united front with provincial governments.

Appendix 1 - The Atlantikwall: German coastal defence 1940 – 1945

(this appendix was written by Jeroen Rijpsma, 2023)

Introduction

The Atlantikwall is a German Second World War coastal defence system that protected the western front of the Third Reich. Nazi ideology was guided by many elements, one being a German-dominated Europe. When the Nazis failed to defeat Great Britain in the Battle of Britain, the conquered territories in the west were consolidated by erecting fortifications along the coast. While Hitler himself first mentioned the name 'Atlantikwall' only in August 1942, during a conference about coastal defence reinforcements, the German armed forces were already concentrating on the surveillance and defence of the coastal strip as early as 1940, immediately after occupying West European countries. After the German invasion of Russia stalled at the end of 1941, the fear of an Allied attack began to intensify. This prompted the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (Armed Forces High Command, OKW) to order the fortification of the coastal strip, called 'Neue Westwall', from northern Norway to the south of France. The Westwall ties in with the defensive line that the Nazis had constructed shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War along the country's western border from Kleve (Cleves) to Switzerland. At the time, several European countries had built a defensive line along their own borders, such as the Alpine Wall in Italy. In the Netherlands, the announcement of the concept of the Atlantikwall in the autumn of 1942 fuelled an already vigorous building programme by the Wehrmacht, which had constructed hundreds of bunkers in that year. Nowadays, the term 'Atlantikwall' is a catch-all for all German defence structures along the coast of Western Europe, regardless of the country in which it is built or its year of construction. The term often also refers to Second World War bunkers used for air defence, harbours or airport infrastructure (not coastal defence). The rest of this Vision adheres to this broad definition. This encompasses thousands of structures, buildings and traces, many of which survive to this day.

Occupying forces

The Wehrmacht consisted of the navy, army and air force, all under the command of the OKW. Each service branch had an elaborate hierarchy composed of many varied parts, each with a specific task. In the Netherlands, three territorial commanders for the navy, army and air force were appointed under the highest military rank, the *Wehrmachtbefehlshaber in den Niederlanden* (military

commander in the Netherlands, WBN). Even at this level, each had its own military apparatus for implementing strategic, operational and tactical duties and assignments. Some military units were commanded by higher levels of command outside the Netherlands, such as the navy's E-boot or Marder units or the air force's night fighters or bombers. The command structure for all three service branches in the Netherlands set out a sectoral division of the coastal belt. Not all of the country fell under one national command unit. The administrative structure of German military occupying forces in the Netherlands was complex, particularly in the case of coastal defences. This structure also changed frequently during the war years. The navy and air force split the Netherlands into two sectors, whereas the army designated between three and four *Küstenverteidigungsabschnitte* (Coastal Defence Sections, KVA) under the responsibility of an infantry division. The boundaries of the sectors shifted several times during the war. Some Dutch sections in the north and section were not under the WBN: throughout the war, Rottumeroog and the Delfzijl area fell under the command of the *Küsten-Befehlshaber Deutsche Bucht* throughout the war; Schiermonnikoog and Ameland fell under its command only in the first years of the war. Zeelandic Flanders, and from September 1942 Walcheren and De Bevelanden, were under the military command of the German 15th Army, headquartered in the French town of Tourcoing. The Dutch territories under the command of the German army and air force corresponded with the territories of the WBN, as mentioned above, but the navy extended across the province of Zeeland. The SS, *Zollgrenzschutz* (Customs Border Guards), the German Labour Front and other semi-military organisations also played a role in the coastal defences.

Evolution of a coastal defensive line

The development of the German coastal defences can be roughly divided into six phases. They are determined by the physical appearance or fortification of the defensive line in the coastal landscape.

Phase 1: From surveillance to defence, May 1940 – December 1941

Following the occupation of Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and France, the Wehrmacht began preparing for an invasion of England. As the German high command believed the likelihood of British reprisals along the European mainland coast was slim, only strategically or politically important locations, such as ports (including Rotterdam), the Channel Islands and the northern French coast were protected. The remainder of the coastal belt was guarded by provisional observation and surveillance posts called *Küstenposten* or

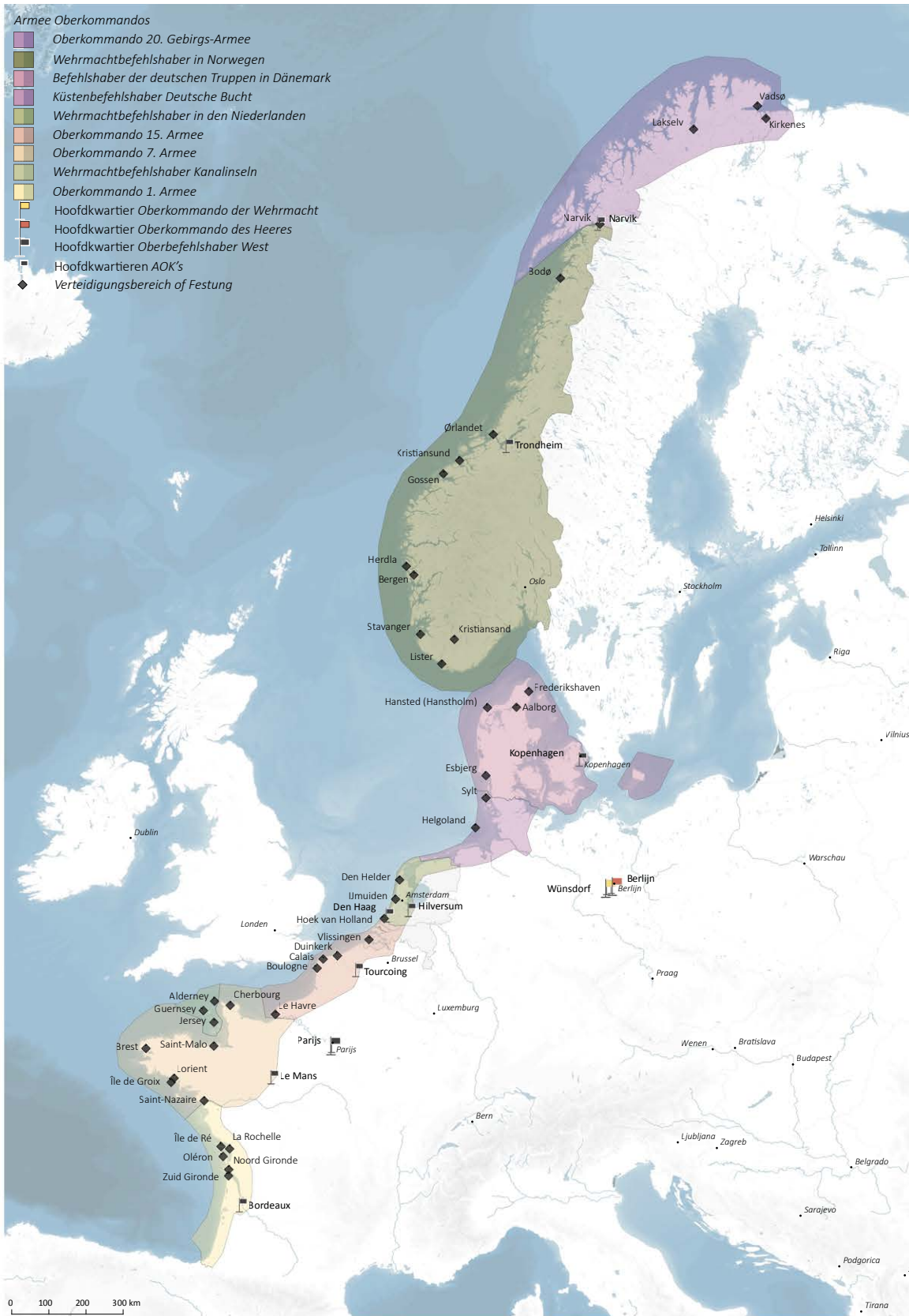


Fig. 26 Chain of command of the entire Atlantic Wall



Fig. 27 Construction of a tank wall near Katwijk

Küstenwachen. The western coast experienced a period of relative calm following the German defeat at the Battle of Britain at the end of 1940. The shift focused to the east, prompting the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Until 1941 inclusive, surveillance rather than defence was the order of the day.

Phase 2: Neue Westwall, December 1941 – August 1942

At the end of 1941, the German invasion of Russia stalled – the military operation would last longer than planned. A strong coastal defensive line became a necessity in order to prevent the emergence of multiple fronts. On 14 December 1941, the OKW ordered the construction of the *Neue Westwall*. The name was derived from the ‘*Westwall*’, a defensive line built along the French-German border at the end of the 1930s. The idea was to prevent a naval attack by using a series of support points housing troops and artillery. These support points operated autonomously and differed in their scope and strength. Many were subsequent developments of the *Küstenposten* and *Küstenwachen*. Air bases, radar stations and headquarters were incorporated into the shallow linear defensive line. The reinforced concrete bunkers (*ständige Bauten*; *St*) were a major element in the line, providing protection against bombs. In 1942,

however, a shortage of manpower, material, equipment and fuel rendered the construction of *St* bunkers impossible. As an alternative, the Wehrmacht engaged local contractors to build provisional bunkers made of lightweight concrete. A large number of variations of this *Verstärkt Feldmäßiger Bauweise* (reinforced field-type construction) corresponding to the description *Küstenverteidigung* appear only in the Netherlands.

Phase 3: Atlantikwall Winterausbauprogramm & 2. (Rest) Programm, September 1942 – November 1943

The British-Canadian raid on the French port of Dieppe, ending in disaster, occurred on 13 August 1942 – less than a week after the term ‘*Atlantikwall*’ was first employed. This event bolsters Hitler’s view that bombproof *St* bunkers – technically sophisticated designs with reinforced concrete walls and roofs from 1.5 metres to 3.5 metres thick – had to be given the highest priority. Destined to become an impenetrable fortress, the line was named ‘*Atlantikwall*’ and thereby gained huge symbolic and propaganda value. The new and existing support points were named *Widerstandsneste* or *Stützpunkte*. Barriers such as mine fields, barbed wire, anti-tank walls and anti-tank trenches were installed between them, ‘sealing’ the line to the fullest possible

extent. The defence concept also changed. The various support points were clustered within an organisationally and tactically coherent defensive area called *Stützpunktgruppen* (support point groups) and *Verteidigungsbereiche* (defensive areas). These defensive areas, which operated autonomously, had a sea front against naval attack and a land front to protect the mainland against Allied air-landing units in the hinterland and breakthroughs elsewhere. Between the defensive areas lay less important coastal strips, called *Freie Küste*, where only a series of separate support points were built. While there were no strong land defences, attention was paid to the depth of the line like elsewhere. During the winter of 1942, 15,000 St bunkers were to be built at all support points; 2,000 of these were located in the Netherlands. As the emphasis was more on protecting crews and less on shielding weapon systems, most bunkers built were to house commanders, crew and field hospitals. The branches of the armed forces and the *Festungspioniere* plotted exact locations; the latter provided advice on fort construction and were charged with technical systems. German and Dutch contractors, coordinated by the German state military engineering organisation 'Organisation Todt' (OT), were tasked with building rough concrete constructions. Despite significantly improved logistics and material supplies, only 40% of the building target was achieved. This prompted a second building programme in the summer of 1943.

Phase 4: Schartenbauprogramm & Sommerausbauprogramm, December 1943 – August 1944

Building progress stagnated in the summer of 1943 as all labourers in the Ruhr valley were drafted to repair British bomb damage. At the same time, those bombing raids made it clear that heavy guns were no longer safe out in the open in gun emplacements. All guns had to be protected by a thick layer of concrete. The OT's return to the Netherlands in 1943 saw the start of the *Schartenbauprogramme* ('Scharte' is the German term for an embrasure). Delays from the previous programme also had to be remedied. Eventually, in the summer of 1944, upon the completion of the fourth and last St bunker construction programme, the target (measured in cubic metres of concrete) was met. This was followed by more sporadic bunker building, such as the air defence battery at Delfzijl. This development phase in the coastal defences occurred concomitantly with a fifth phase in which field marshal Erwin Rommel instigated very different defensive measures.

Phase 5: Rommel's doctrine, January 1944 – October 1944

In January 1944, Hitler declared that the defensive area around the eleven major port cities in the Atlantikwall, including IJmuiden and Hoek van Holland, would be a 'Festung'. This status meant that garrisons were furnished with additional supplies and munition, but equally entailed an order to fight 'to the last bullet'. In the same month, field marshal Rommel visited the Netherlands in his capacity as Atlantikwall inspector. He concluded that, in the event of an invasion, the enemy would need to be eliminated at sea, or in the worse case in the breakers. Starting in 1944, Rommel therefore ordered the placement of a variety of barriers in the tide mark, many of which were mined. He was also wary of the danger of Allied air-landing units, which he intended to obstruct by flooding low-lying areas of water (inundation) and, on higher areas, planting additional mine fields and thousands of wooden poles connected by wires – known as Rommel's asparagus. Simultaneously, a 'Neues Landfront' (new land front) was constructed some kilometres to the east to support the coastal defences and bolster the existing 'Landfront'. The defensive strip along the coasts was made deeper, and all sorts of obstacle sand barriers were erected along the coastal defensive line. The 'Vordere und Hintere Wasserlinien' (front and back waterlines) was constructed further to the east. They roughly followed the route of the Old and New Dutch Waterlines and used the inundation technique. Light defensive structures were occasionally added to the lines.

Phase 6: Atlantikwall on the front line, November 1944 – April 1945

The Allied invasion forces disembarked in Normandy on 6 July 1944 (D-Day), breaking through the Atlantikwall within a couple of hours. The advance through France and Belgium was the scene of fierce battles, including the Battle of the Scheldt in the Netherlands. The Zeelandic section of the Atlantikwall played a prominent role in this conflict. After liberating Walcheren and Brabant, in November 1944 the Allies ended their advance at the large waterways that divide the Netherlands in two. Until liberation in May 1945, there were no significant movements at the river front from the Meuse at 's-Hertogenbosch to the Western Scheldt at Schouwen. The existing *Stützpunktgruppen* on Schouwen-Duiveland, Overflakkee and the Island of Dordrecht were located on this front line, separated by the northern banks of the Eastern Scheldt, the Volkerak and the Hollands Diep river, which were hastily equipped with new support points. While these were provisional in nature, being mere earthen defence posts, they were nevertheless numbered as Atlantikwall support points.

The coastal defensive line from Schouwen was redirected past Moerdijk, so to speak. The Atlantikwall bunkers northwards along the entire Dutch coasts were also occupied, partly with inferior German troops.

Summary

The Atlantikwall was, in essence, a defensive line running along the border of an empire. The concept of the defensive line was not novel; the Maginot line (along the French-German border) and the New Dutch Waterline had gone before it. The personality of a fortified defensive line was determined not just by the military and economic importance of an area, but also by its geography and geology. In all cases, existing landscape features were used to their fullest extent and, where necessary, adapted to defence requirements. The Atlantikwall was unique, however, in terms of its scope, organisation and the ideology that inspired its

construction. Another factor at play in the interwar period and during the Second World War were rapid technological developments that had an incisive impact on land, air and sea warfare. As a result, the German service branches – army, navy and air force – had multiple duties as far as the protection of the Third Reich's western front was concerned. This took effect in both a physical and organisational sense in the coastal defensive line, characterised by holistic defensive systems. The Atlantikwall also differs from other defensive lines in that it was not constructed in peacetime; rather, the entire strategy, concept and construction took place during wartime. This, coupled with fast-paced political and military developments, resulted in several distinct construction phases. As the coastal defensive line evolved during the war years, it is characterised not only by area-specific but also period-specific features.

Appendix 2 – Brief summary of how Atlantikwall remains are managed in Europe

4141 The information in this section is based on the Cultural Heritage Agency memo ‘HET BEHEER VAN DE ATLANTIKWALL DOOR OVERHEDEN IN EUROPA *Vergelijkend onderzoek naar de rol en betrokkenheid van diverse (rijks) overheden en beheerders van het erfgoed van de Atlantikwall in Europa*’ (in Dutch only) [Comparative research into the role and engagement of various central governments, public authorities and heritage site managers of the Atlantikwall in Europe], by Celine Meijer and Ben de Vries, February 2021 (see also footnote 21).

France

France is home to by far the most Atlantikwall remains. This should come as no surprise, as the French coast was at greatest risk of Allied invasion due to its proximity to England – as became clear on D-Day. The question as to whether the Atlantikwall should be viewed as contested heritage or a ‘guilty landscape’ holds little importance in France. The remains have no negative or ideological connotation, and there were no grounds to demolish them. The bunkers also posed no ongoing risk to public safety in the fore-dune, as was the case in the Netherlands, despite the fact that many properties along the Brittany, Normandy and Pas-de-Calais coasts now lie haphazardly on the beaches due to erosion and dune subsidence. In politically centralised France, there is a conspicuous absence of direction from the national government; ultimate responsibility is born by the regional councils. The French public shows a huge interest in the Atlantikwall and is aware of its history. The beaches of Normandy have functioned as places of remembrance for years and have functioned as a popular tourism attraction for just as long. The coast is also home to many museums.



Fig. 28 Bunker located on the beach due to coastal erosion in Contis (France)

Protection efforts focus predominantly on the D-Day landing beaches, which have been proposed for the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Denmark

The Atlantikwall is not ‘contested heritage’ in Denmark. The Danish Nature Agency was an early adopter of site preservation, opening up sites and turning them into tourist attractions. The Atlantikwall is not protected by NGOs, as this is the government’s task. While monuments in Denmark are protected, there is no official register or list. Bunkers are privately owned or owned by municipalities or museums. The coastal bunkers fall under the guardianship of the Danish Coastal Authority of the Ministry of the Environment. Some sites, such as Second World War evacuation shelters in cities, are reused as rehearsal venues for music groups or as galleries or shops. Channel Islands (Crown Dependencies) The Channel Islands, officially Crown Dependencies, were the only part of the UK that came under German occupation. They were heavily defended, predominantly for propaganda purposes, and had more and heavier defences than elsewhere. At the end of the war, the local population showed a fondness toward this heritage (from a war that they had won). The Channel Island Occupation Society (CIOS), a volunteer group established some decades ago, cares for the most important sites, including those in private ownership. Heritage sites are privately owned or government-owned, and some are protected.

Belgium

Belgium has about 70 locations, 38 of which protected, featuring a few hundred surviving remains. A large number of the properties were dismantled after the war to make way for hotels and villas, with the exception of one area: Domein Raversijde. This area has functioned as an open air museum since 1992 and is unmatched in terms of its scale, authenticity and visitor numbers.



Fig. 29 In Raversijde (Belgium) the Atlantikwall has been particularly well preserved as part of a royal domain, now owned by the province of West Flanders

Raversijde is home to protected dune areas as well as military relics from both the First and Second World Wars. It is the only section of the Belgian coast in which parts of the Atlantikwall have been preserved as they were built in the landscape. Raversijde is also protected nature area, comparable to the Dutch dunes. The provincial government of West Flanders rents the area from the Belgian federal government. The Flanders Heritage Agency currently has no plans to perform a systemic inventory and valuation of war heritage from 1940 to 1945.

Norway

The majority of Norwegian Atlantikwall remains are managed by the Norwegian Defence Estates Agency (NDEA). There is no exhaustive inventory of these remains, nor are there any general protection guidelines for the Atlantikwall sites and the properties located on them. That said, the Riksantikvaren (the Norwegian equivalent of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands) has set up a working group for Second World War heritage.

Germany

A total of ten 'Regelbauten' (standard fortifications) survive in Germany. Most Germans view bunkers as 'contested heritage' that is best 'out of sight, out of mind'. In any case, many bunkers were removed by order of the Allies immediately after the war. While there has been more interest in Second World War heritage in recent years, it remains a fraught subject. What has become permissible are structures representing the victims, such as the air defence bunkers (*Flaktürme*) in cities and ports which served to protect the population. The Atlantikwall is present in two federal states: Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony. There are no surviving parts of the Atlantikwall on the North Sea coast that are registered monuments.

Appendix 3 – Parties involved

Four regional meetings were organised at the end of 2022, focusing on the Atlantikwall and this Vision

- 22 September 2022: Huis van Hilde in Castricum (North Holland); in collaboration with Netwerk Historisch Cultuurlandschap (multistakeholder collaboration and consultation platform for the Dutch cultural landscape), 'Atlantikwall en het landschap'. Participants: approx. 100 (<https://www.historischegeografie.nl/2022-castricum-atlantikwall> (<https://www.historischegeografie.nl/2022-castricum-atlantikwall>)))
- 16 November 2022 (plus follow-up meeting on 16 November 2023): Meeting of the 'Erfgoedlijn Atlantikwall' (Atlantikwall heritage trail), provincial government of South Holland. Participants: approx. 60

- 29 November 2022: Groede Podium, Groede (Zeeland; in collaboration with Erfgoed Zeeland). Participants: approx. 30

- 8 December 2022: Atlantikwallcentrum in Den Helder. Participants: approx. 40

Each session included presentations about the Atlantikwall, the aim of the Vision for the Atlantikwall and the *Atlas van de Atlantikwall in Nederland* (then still being drafted). The participants then engaged in an interactive dialogue on the approach and content of the Vision. Many people and institutions subsequently took part in more focused meetings on the Vision.

Talks were also held with heritage experts employed by site managers, military historians, provincial government policymakers, municipal governments and provincial heritage policy and management support agencies.

The insights gained were compiled and incorporated into this Vision for the Atlantikwall.



Fig. 30 Bunkers and barriers in Groede



Fig. 31 A road built by the German occupiers in the Festung IJmuiden, also an example of a 'soft trace' of the Atlantikwall

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The Atlantikwall, built by the German occupying forces during the Second World War, extends for 5,000 kilometres along the coast of West Europe. The scale of the Atlantikwall and the ideology that inspired the construction of this colossal structure is a permanent reminder of the scale and all-encompassing nature of occupation in Europe.

Focusing on the Dutch section of the defences, this Vision for the Atlantikwall recommends careful, holistic management of the surviving parts, which should be considered as a system and preserved as a matter of principle. This should be underpinned by a mutually coordinated, cross-governmental policy for heritage and the environment. Ongoing knowledge development regarding the operation of the Atlantikwall both during and after the Second World War is also necessary.

This Vision was written for public heritage professionals and other professionals, as well as any readers who are interested in military heritage.

The Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands offers expertise and advice to give the future a past.