

Hiking route along the battlefield of Dishoek

A hiking route has been plotted along the battlefield where the decisive struggle was fought to liberate the Scheldt estuary and the seaway to Antwerp. This was necessary in order to supply the allied armies during their advance toward Berlin. At five most prominent points the course of the battle is recounted.

Antwerp was liberated on 4 September 1944. The only seaway to that harbour was through the estuary of the river Scheldt, which was controlled by the Island of Walcheren. On 1 November 1944 the battle for Walcheren commenced with the invasion at Westkapelle. Two Royal Marine Commando's (each comprising 420 men) fought their way through the dunes from Westkapelle to Vlissingen.

On 2 November 47 Royal Marine Commando led the attack from Zoutelande. A footpath marking five points has been plotted at the site of the heaviest fighting where the battle of the Scheldt was decided.

The commando troops encountered fierce opposition in the dunes of Valkenisse and Dishoek, suffering heavy casualties. At the end of the morning of 3 November German resistance was overcome, securing the sea way to Antwerp and enabling supplies to be sent to the front against Nazi-Germany.

The Memorial

At this point you will see the seaway to Antwerp and the coast to Westkapelle. On 3 October 1944 the dykes were breached there through heavy bombardment in order to flood the island of Walcheren. From Oostende (just over the horizon to the South-west) an invasion fleet was mounted with veteran troops from the landings in Normandy, who, to a man, considered the invasion of Walcheren more hard fought. 47 Royal Marine Commando suffered heavy losses, the names of the fallen are inscribed on the Memorial.

Umbrella

After neutralizing German resistance in Valkenisse on 3 November 1944 the battle was directed toward the observation post at this location, from which enemy fire was directed toward the commando troops. At the western edge of this high dune the Germans had built a large bombproof bunker with a roof made of reinforced concrete on 4 heavy metal poles, an observation post for gun guidance. The heavy square concrete roof was supported by 4 steel pillars in the corners, which is why the commandos referred to it as the "Umbrella bunker". The advance of 47 Royal Marine Commando halted during the evening of 2 November, to be resumed the next morning, reaching the breach at Nolledyke around 4.00 pm; German resistance had finally been overcome.

Battlefield

The battlefield has remained practically intact since the battle took place. Here the advance of the British forces was brought to a halt by the Germans on 2 November 1944. The following night the commando troops and the Germans remained in close contact and during the standoff the opposing forces were in anticipation of the fateful and decisive battle which would take place in the morning of 3 November 1944. These peaceful dunes formed the front of the advance of the commando troops between 2-3 November. The vegetation was sparse at the time, there was little cover and the commandos' silhouettes stood out in the moonlight against the light sands.

Provisional farmhouse

The flooding and hostilities had led to the destruction of many a farmhouse on Walcheren. After the drainage of the island provisional farmhouses were set up at the locations where traditional farms had disappeared. This pleasant restaurant and holiday resort was established at the location where a farm was devastated during the bombardment of Battery Dishoek on 28 October 1944, linking it inextricably with the war narrative of Walcheren and particularly Dishoek. On 28 October the Coastal Battery Dishoek was bombed. The farmhouse at this location was destroyed and in 1946 – 47 after the dykes were restored and the flooding drained, provisional farmhouses and barns were set up in order to resume agriculture and cattle breeding. At this spot also large provisional farmhouse was erected. This building is inseparably linked to the war history of Walcheren and particularly of Dishoek.

Museum

Museum 'Bunkerverhalen Dishoek November 1944' is situated in the last, more or less intact bunker remaining from the Battle of the Scheldt. It presents an impressive combination of history and culture in a scenic, natural environment where the decisive battle of the Scheldt and particularly the battle for Dishoek was delivered.

Before you is the entrance to the former Coastal Battery Dishoek. On 2 November a severely wounded German soldier was brought here, the inexperienced German doctor, who had not finished his studies, was in despair. What should he do? During the following night he crossed the dunes and the front line, waving a white flag. He presented his case to the British medical officer, Captain John Forfar, who agreed to visit the wounded behind the German lines. Medicine above enmity was his belief. Out of respect a street was named after him.