

Marlborough Tank Island War Walk



Photo A: An image of Marlborough Common during the war, looking north; note the hatted camp in the background

Photo B: The Kingsbury Hill road block, looking towards the Town Hall, 1943; note the bent rails, to the left of the road, ready to be slotted in place



Photo C: The Green, 1943; note the round Type 25 pillbox in the foreground, the British Restaurant and another pillbox under the trees, and the edge of an emergency static water tank on the left of the photograph

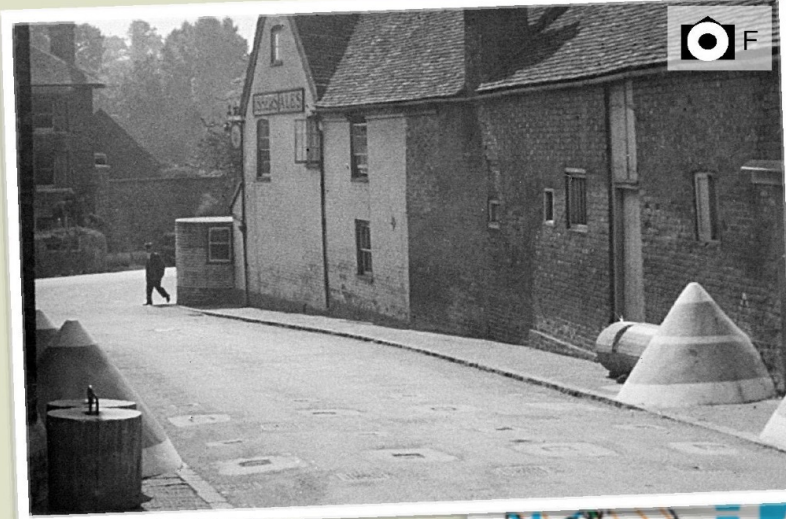


Photo F: The Hyde Lane road block, 1943



Photo E: A round Type 25 pillbox at the western end of the High Street, 1943

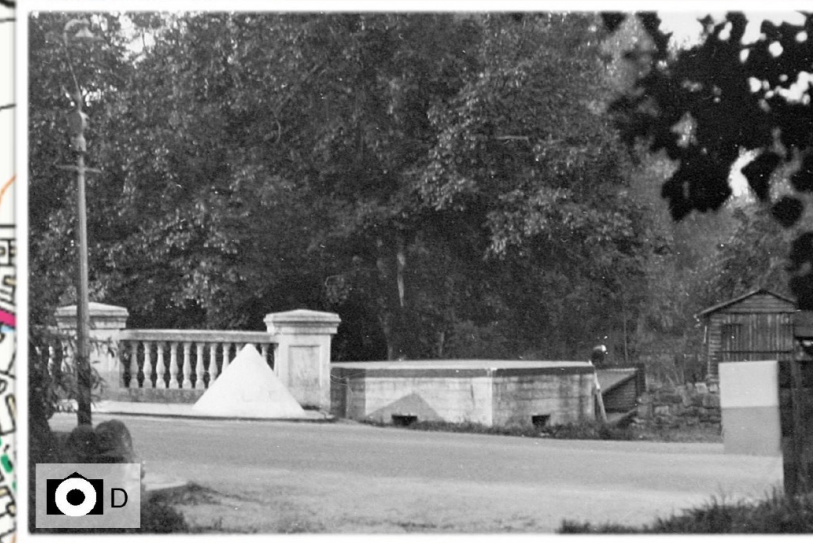
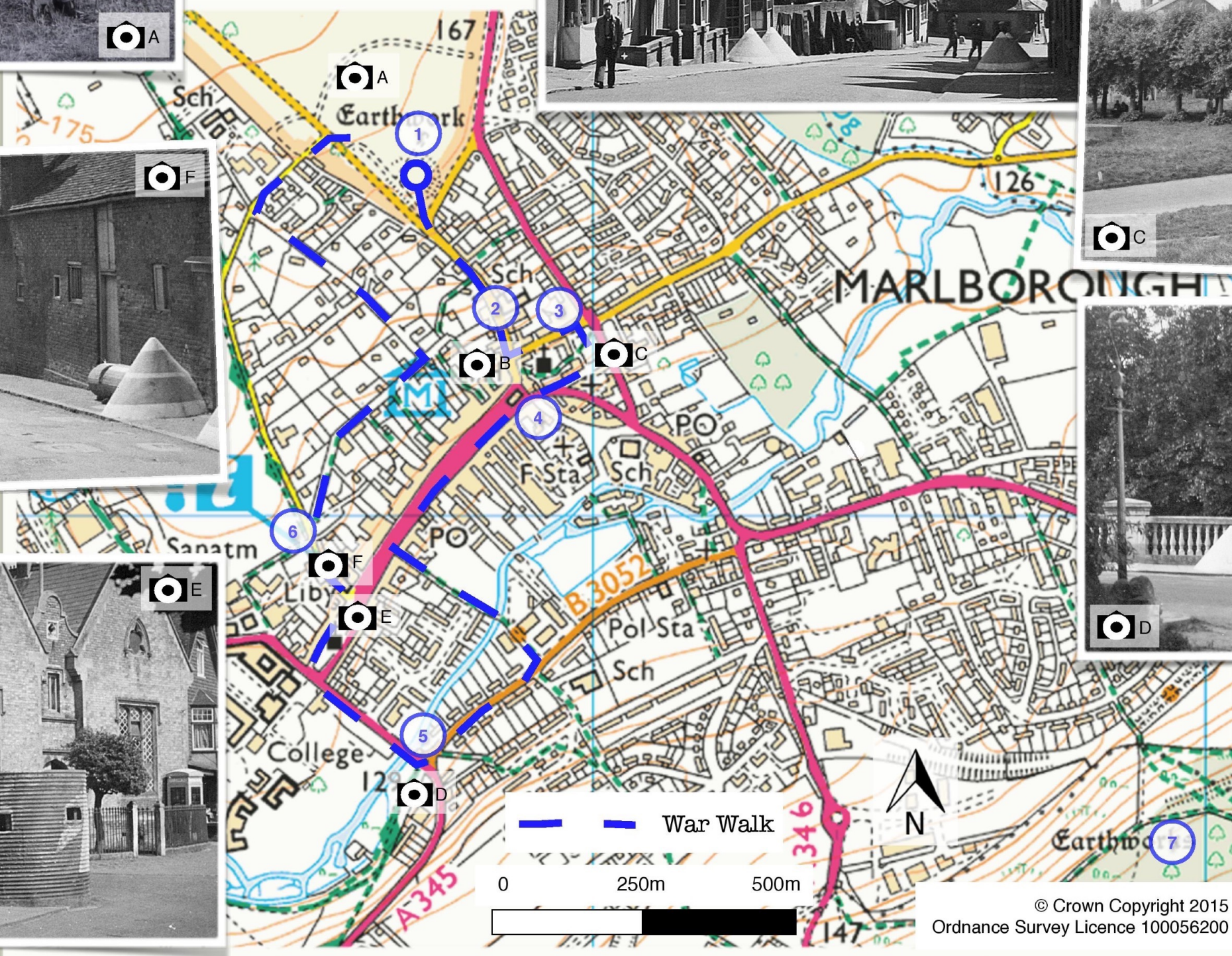


Photo D: The Cow Bridge hexagonal Type 24 pillbox, 1943

Photo E: A round Type 25 pillbox at the western end of the High Street, 1943

Photo F: The Hyde Lane road block, 1943

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About two miles; pavements, one incline; sixty minutes



War Walk



Did you spot the entrance to the Town Hall's Second World War air raid shelter?



Don't miss the mini-pillbox, built to defend the Kingsbury Hill road block in 1940; which can be seen to the rear of the concrete 'pimples' in Photo B, close to number '2' on the map.

Look out for the sniper position, prepared in June 1940 by cutting a firing loophole in the wooden panel above the garage door in The Hermitage on Hyde Lane; close to number '6' on the map overleaf, about 100m north of the Hyde Lane road block (Photo F).



Please wear suitable clothing and footwear, and take care when crossing roads. Leave gates and property as you find them, take your litter home, protect plants and animals, keep dogs under control and consider other people.

Many rights of way cross private land, and we ask you to keep to the paths and be responsible when using them.

This War Walk follows public rights of way or roads, and is generally easy going.

Enjoy the countryside

The nation's popular memory of its Second World War anti-invasion defences is characterised by lines of static pillboxes and anti-tank barriers; absent road, village and town signposts; and mined beaches whose access was blocked by swathes of barbed wire entanglement.

Less well known is Britain's revised defence plan, adopted once General Sir Edmund Ironside had been replaced by General Alan Brooke in July 1940 as Commander-in-Chief Home Forces. Brooke favoured a more mobile and aggressive defence, based on a network of towns and villages defended by the Home Guard, and locally constituted regular Strike Forces tasked with harassing and destroying the potential invader.

In Wiltshire, the market town of Marlborough was given a key role and designated an 'anti-tank island', a term which was quickly abridged to 'Tank Island'.

Marlborough's surviving war time archaeology reveals a multilayered defensive plan, with two outer defensive lines along the line of the former railway and the River Kennet, and two inner citadels, one at either end of the High Street, reinforced by the use of road blocks, pillboxes and strongpoints. Had they invaded, there is no doubt that the Germans would have faced stiff opposition.



Marlborough Tank Island

Getting There

How to get there

Rail: the nearest mainline stations are at Pewsey (5.7 miles) and Great Bedwyn (6.4 miles)

Bus: call Traveline (0870 608 2608) for details or visit www.traveline.info

Car: park in Marlborough's High Street or in a marked off-street car park (charges apply)

SATNAV: High Street, Marlborough, Wiltshire, SN8 1LZ

Maps

Ordnance Survey Explorer Series, number 157 (Marlborough and Savernake Forest), 1:25,000

Start

Marlborough Common: SU 187 695

Don't Forget...

...to visit Savernake Forest (?), one of the country's largest wartime ammunition depots, and the Merchant's House Museum, on Marlborough's famous High Street.

Useful contacts

Kennet Valley at War Trust

www.kennetvalleyatwar.co.uk

Marlborough visitor information

www.marboroughwiltshire.co.uk

The Merchant's House

www.themerchantshouse.co.uk

The Walk

From Marlborough Common (number '1' on the map) walk south down Kingsbury Hill, turning first left into Silverless Street (just beyond '2', which marks the site of the Kingsbury Hill road block) and on to The Green (3). Look out for the mini-pillbox and the reinforced strongpoint near the junction, and the foundations of the British Restaurant on The Green, which can still be seen.

Leave The Green by the south west corner, and head for the High Street, passing the Town Hall (4) on your right. Can you spot the entrance to the former air raid shelter? Continue along the High Street for a further 300m, then turn left down Figgins Lane, cross the River Kennet by the footbridge, and walk on to the 'T' junction with George Lane. Turn right and walk a further 250m to the site of the Cow Bridge road block (5).

After pausing to look at the Type 24 pillbox, turn right, re-cross the River Kennet and walk 200m north west to the western end of the High Street. Pass the entrance to Marlborough College on your left and turn right passing St Peter's Church on your right. After a further 100m turn left into Hyde Lane, walking through the site of the road block and past the sniper position (6) which once overlooked the playing fields. Turn right and walk north east along Back Lane, and then north west along Cross Lane to the 'T' junction. Turn right and return to Marlborough Common.