# Scapa Flow and the Orkney Defences: Changing Perceptions

Gavin J Lindsay

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Contents

List of Figures

## Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief, this dissertation represents my own work. All sources that I have used and are not my own have been properly acknowledged and referenced using appropriate academic conventions for the Harvard referencing system following the UHI Millennium institute citation guidelines. I have not previously submitted this work or any version of it for assessment in any other module of the MA Archaeological Practice course at UHI Millennium Institute's Orkney College or in any of its partner colleges, or institutions.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to offer my thanks to the staff of the Archaeology Department of Orkney College, UHI and the Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology who have been of great help and support to me throughout the process of researching and writing this paper. In particular I would like to thank Martin Carruthers for persuading me to persevere with my initial research proposal and not choose a different period of study altogether. Had he not done this, then this dissertation would most likely have never materialised. I would also like to thank Dan Lee and Amanda Brend for their assistance with all matters relating to Adobe Illustrator and to Tom Muir of Orkney Museums for opening his personal library of wartime books and resources to me. My thanks also go to Lucy and Sarah at the Orkney Library and Archives who endured many weeks of my persistent requests for boxes of photographs and documents and who were kind enough to humour my outbursts of excitement upon discovery of new information within the microfilm documents. Finally I feel my largest vote of thanks must go to the men and women of the armed services who served in Orkney during the Second World War and whose story has been such a true privilege to explore over the course of my research.

## Abstract

As war engulfed the world for a second time in 1939, Orkney once more took up the call as the Royal Navy's main fleet anchorage. However, with another war came another way of fighting and as German forces swept across Europe with their Blitzkrieg tactics and air superiority, Orkney's defences found themselves ill-equipped to take on the task of protecting the Home Fleet. What followed in those early months of the war was what can only be described as a battle between the British forces tasked with the protection of the fleet and the German Luftwaffe; a battle which the British had to win in order to hold onto the anchorage of Scapa Flow and maintain the fleet's strategic Northern position. The events that took place between the 3rd of September 1939 and the 10th of April 1940 over Orkney read like any great battle account having the power to alter the course of the war, yet Scapa Flow and Orkney continue to be overlooked as a field of conflict. This paper endeavours to rectify that situation by presenting textual, oral and material evidence to support the assertion that Scapa Flow and the Orkney defences can be considered as a historical battlefield. In doing so, it will go on to demonstrate how the re-evaluation of the defences in this way can unlock an archaeological resource of unrealised potential.

Battlefield Orkney also allows a currently negative perception of the decaying 20th century military remains to be addressed as redefinition brings with it more integrated approaches to the interpretation and presentation of wartime heritage. Such a change also has implications for the management of the resource and a review of the current legislative framework associated with 20th century military sites and historic battlefields aims to further expound the point that Orkney's world war archaeology has more to gain from being considered as a battlefield than it does under its current status. This paper also takes issue with the definitions of battlefields, our perceptions of them and how such attitudes have influenced the classification and management of 20th century military sites both within and out with the UK. The complications that are unravel from this analysis, when considered, expose a problem rooted in a lack of recognition of the evolutionary changes in warfare that have taken place throughout the 20th century. Finally, as a result of these conclusions, it is suggested that if a suitable course of action is not found to address this situation, then there is a high risk of the material remains from recent conflicts entering the archaeological record and being met with a system of management that fails to recognise them as being the evidence of an evolved battlefield.

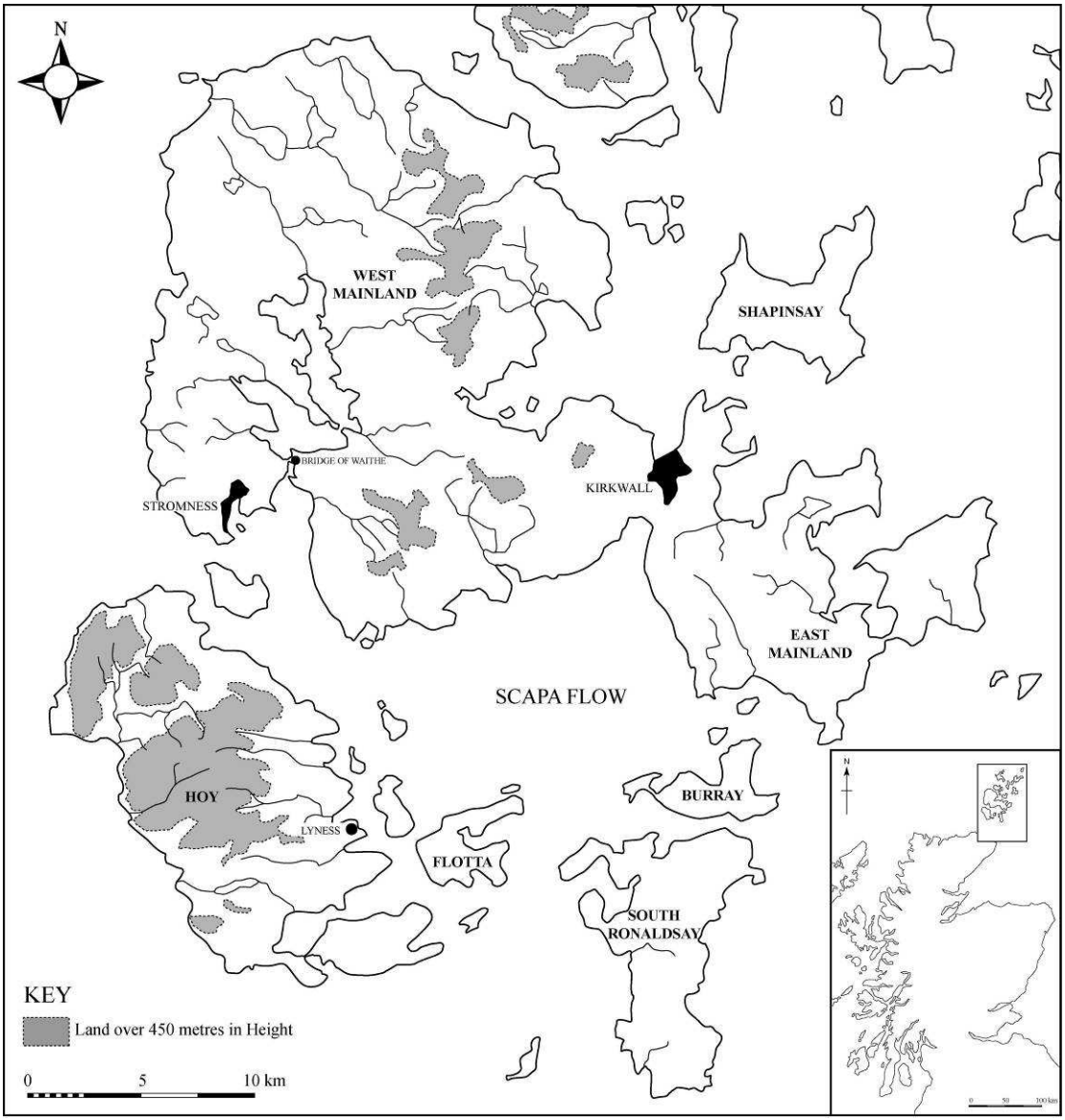


**Figure 1.1** – Location Map

# Chapter One

# Introduction

## Background and Geographical context

Situated off the North coast of mainland Scotland and enclosed by the Mainland and Southern Isles of the Orkney Archipelago lies the comparatively sheltered waters of Scapa Flow (Figure 1.1). This sea basin of some 120 square miles has navigable entrances to the East, West and South between the islands of Hoy, Flotta, South Ronaldsay, and until their blocking, Burray, Glims Holm and Lamb Holm. These allow access irrespective of weather to the Atlantic Ocean, the North Sea and the Pentland Firth. The high rising hills of the island of Hoy also provide a natural defensive screen, standing between the prevailing 100 mph gale force winds of the Atlantic and shipping at anchor within the Flow (Hewison 1985, 6). It therefore comes as no surprise to find that Scapa Flow has been recognised as an excellent natural harbour throughout history. During the first world war where the United Kingdom found herself engaged in hostilities against Germany, Scapa Flow not only offered itself as a safe haven for the new battleships of the British Fleet from the harsh Northern weather, but also became strategically important in allowing a large British naval force to be placed within striking distance of German ports. This was especially important at a time when naval wartime strategy was still very much one involving the blockading of enemy ports (Hewison 1985, 40) and of constraining German naval activity to the North Sea (Miller 2003, 15). The Second World War again saw Scapa Flow in use as a key strategic base for the British Fleet. It is the role that the Orkneys and their sheltered harbour played in this conflict that I shall be looking at more closely in this paper.

Although naval strategy and the art of waging war had moved on since the First World War, Scapa Flow still remained strategically important in the new methods of warfare that encapsulated the 1939 – 1945 conflict. Britain still required her fleet to be within close reach of the German coast as a very similar state of affairs to the previous war ensued. This was the guarding of the Northern exits from the North Sea into the Northern Atlantic thus restricting enemy fleet movements from their home bases into the expanse of the Atlantic where Britain's valuable life line of convoys could be seriously threatened (Miller 2003, 68). Perhaps the most significant difference strategically between the two conflicts in terms of how the naval war was fought was in the use of air power (Miller 2003, 68). Although the

First World War saw aircraft employed for reconnaissance and gun spotting purposes, by 1939 they had become a far more serious threat to shipping through direct aerial bombardment. This of course meant that the defence of the British Fleet and their base had to be revised. However it was not until after the war had begun that the true impact of direct bombing would be felt, the true vulnerability of ships and localities from the air fully realised and attempts made to defend against it implemented.

**Aims and Objectives**

It is into this scenario that my research focuses as I look at the steps taken by the government of the time and the admiralty to create a secure position where the Home Fleet could be defended whilst at anchor. More specifically, a study of publically available literature relating to the history of Scapa Flow and the role of Orkney during World War Two (WWII) is intended to reveal how the incongruous nature of current common perception, especially relating to events that took place during the opening months of the war, has led to a distinct lack of cohesion between the archaeological material remains, the way they are interpreted and managed, and how the conflict is generally presented to the public.

This paper endeavours to respond to the issues outlined above suggesting that by defining and recognising the period of intense military action over Scapa Flow, that occurred between the outbreak of war on the 3rd September 1939 to the 10th April 1940, as a battle, a remedy to the situation can be attained. The justification of such a definition will be made through supporting textual, oral and archaeological evidence which will highlight that Scapa Flow and the Orkney defences in the early months of the war can be studied and understood to a much greater extent as a battlefield. It will also be made apparent how this redefinition will aid the overall interpretation and presentation of the wartime history of Orkney and Scapa Flow, forming a more cohesive picture of events that combines both material remains and historical sources.

A battlefield designation will also have management implications and so this paper will also look at the current state of legislative policy regarding battlefields in Scotland and how the classification may effect the management of the archaeological resource as well as highlighting the increased opportunities for future archaeological research through the application of techniques and methodologies that are currently used by battlefield archaeologists.

The very nature of this research is such that it unlocks questions regarding the definition of battlefields in general and how a field of conflict that does not follow the etiquette of traditional field battles is recognised, interpreted and managed. It also takes issue with the very term itself and whether it is relevant to more recent conflict where the methods of waging war have become more indiscriminate, engulfing whole populations and raging over entire continents. It questions, as the remains of a more total war enter the archaeological record, whether the profession has the capacity to manage them within currently established definitions, methods of listing and scheduling, or whether new criteria and new management strategies are required to allow this material to be properly understood, preserved and presented to the public. Issues such as these will be unpacked and addressed as extensively as possible endeavouring to make evident that as the methods by which battles are fought evolves, so to the perception of battlefields/fields of conflict needs to change so that as conflict sites enter the archaeological record they can be recognised, interpreted and managed correctly.

# Chapter Two

## Current Perceptions of World War II Orkney

### Public perception as presented through published material

There have been a considerable number of publications on the history of Scapa Flow and Orkney's role in the First and Second World Wars which have been produced since the end of the conflicts and these vary quite dramatically in both content and their level of detail. From the more general Orkney history books and tourist guides to the very specific and detailed histories of Scapa Flow, it is possible to identify trends in the choice of events being retold and a story-like method of portraying them often with little or no regard for the associated physical remains. Understandably texts providing an overview of Orcadian history published shortly after the end of the war offer little reference to the recent conflict as memories would still have been raw. Marwick is an example of such an author, writing in 1951, whose reference to the sinking of HMS Royal Oak and the construction of the Churchill Barriers are his sole mentions of the role of Orkney during the Second World War and his account is fleeting and basic at best. The war was clearly a personally delicate subject as he breaks his descriptive dialogue in order to offer a stirring prayer that "*for the sake of Britain and the world*", Scapa Flow may never be required as a naval base again (Marwick 1951, 165).

By 1965 the minimal referencing of the 1939 – 45 conflict within Orkney histories appears to have diminished and more extensive coverage was given to the wartime legacy. Indeed Cousins and Miller actually give very concise accounts of Scapa Flow's wartime activity beginning with the First World War scuttling of the German High Seas Fleet and then moving on to focus not only on the well known stories of the Second World War, such as the sinking of HMS Royal Oak and the construction of the Churchill Barriers, but also describing the reasoning for Scapa Flow being used as a base, the inadequacy of the defences at the beginning of the war and the resulting first civilian casualties (Cousins 1965, 143-163), (Miller 1976, 138-139). Further to these remarks, Miller gives great detail as to the elaboration and development of the defences to combat the aerial threat and retells of the social conditions encountered by service personnel stationed on Orkney (Miller 1976, 140 & 143). Miller's detailed and comprehensive approach is really the beginning of an explosion in publications regarding Orkney during the war years. The 1980's saw the greatest proliferation of works on the subject with a number of volumes being published relating

specifically to Scapa Flow. Very few of these texts make particular reference to the material remains of the conflict and instead take a more removed historical approach linking the more high profile events together to create a biography of the war. Hewison succeeds in creating a very extensive account of Scapa Flow from its initial use during the Viking period through to the construction of the Flotta Oil terminal in 1973 and covers all aspects of the war years very fully. He is one of the few authors that gives details of the naval defence policies employed and discusses the conversations and decisions made by members of the admiralty and war cabinet which were so influential in plotting the course of events that involved or affected Orkney during the critical opening months of the war (Hewison 1985, 268-272).

What is perhaps made most evident is that it only appears to be specialist publications such as Hewison's 'The Great Harbour Scapa Flow' (Hewison 1985), Lambs's 'Skies over Scapa' (Lamb 2007) and James Miller's 'The North Atlantic Front' (Miller 2003) and 'Scapa' (Miller 2000), that paint a thorough and accurate portrait of events as they happened, the conditions experienced by personnel and the importance and wider implications of the actions that took place in the far North during the war. Interestingly the texts that may appeal to a much wider audience, focusing on Orkney history in general, especially the tourist orientated guides, do not place quite the same importance on this period of Orkney's past as they do others. The common tales again rear their heads very much regaled in a story format; the inadequacy of the Scapa Flow defences and the epic journey of U-47, her success at sinking HMS Royal Oak and the consequent construction of the barriers by the Italian Prisoners of War (Bailey 1985, 132-135), (Shei, Moberg 1985, 89-91), (Thomson 2008, 436), (Wenham 2003, 108) & (Wickham-Jones 2007, 201).

What is worth noting within these more recent histories and guides is that when they occasionally branch from the well known stories to other aspects of Orkney's wartime heritage, the facts often become confused and in some cases completely incorrect such as the dates of the commencing of German bombing over Orkney stated as beginning 5 months later than it did by Shei and Moberg (Shei, Moberg 1985, 89) or military installations are miss identified such as the Northern Anti-Aircraft Training Range at Yesnaby, described by Bailey as a gun battery (Bailey 1985, 135).

Leaving the content and format of chapters aside, what is made more painfully evident in these texts is the distinct lack of enthusiasm or regard for the standing remains left from the war. These structures of concrete and brick, although in the same condition as any that have

been untended and left to decay, are singled out and described as unsightly, dangerous and in need of clearance as they despoil places of natural beauty (Bailey 1985, 135). Even in recent tourist reference books that emphasise the importance of Orkney during the war, the remains are described as being unpleasant (Tait 1997, 155). Comments such as these speak volumes, offering a powerful indication of the general public attitude towards the military monuments in the landscape. Although the importance of Orkney and the role of Scapa Flow may be recognised and documented within the historical guides and specialist books, all be it briefly at times, it would be fair to say that the same texts that record and present this past also appear to condemn its material remains. This creates an interesting yet difficult dichotomy in the values placed on the two forms of evidence by the wider community which I would argue not only strongly contrasts with the public sentiments held for archaeology from Orkney's prehistoric heritage but also makes a combined interpretation and presentation of this period, using both the archaeological and the textual records, difficult as it requires the public to recognise the ruinous skeleton buildings of war as a valuable resource.

**Figure 2.1** – The *'unsightly despoiler of natural beauty'*. No: 1 Gun Position of Ness Coastal Gun Battery, Stromness.

## Archaeological perceptions

Although for the best part the public literature presented thus far has taken a historical view of WWII, this period is now also widely recognised as being of archaeological interest and as a result the study of military material remains across Britain has increased. However despite Scapa Flow ranking as one of the most historically significant military sites in Scotland its archaeological recognition has been anything but limited (Hunter 2000, 183). Orkney's first example of such a study came from the Royal Military College of Science in 1979, rather

than from any archaeological strategy, and is perhaps one of the first academic studies of this period of Orkney's history to embrace the material evidence. Here Hamilton-Baillie writes his paper on the coastal defence fortifications of Orkney spanning both world wars and includes in his research, field examination of the extant remains of the batteries and the collation of oral histories from veterans who were stationed at them (Hamilton-Baillie December 1979, 1). This paper offers a good example of a cohesive approach towards the study of 20th century wartime sites incorporating all of the available sources of information rather than just the historical which in comparison with the publications discussed previously in this chapter, would appear to be very much ahead of its time.

The archaeological approach to the study of 20th century military monuments has really developed from works such as Hamilton-Baillie's and also Henry Wills, who carried out and published a survey of over 5000 pillboxes in Britain in 1985. These studies have lead to the development of the Fortress Study Group, the Airfield Research group and other amateur interest groups connected with the surveying and recording of military remains (Osborne 2004, 8). John Guy of the Fortress Scotland Group carried out a substantial survey of sites in Orkney between 1992 and 1993, a copy of which is held in the local Orkney Sites and Monuments Record and the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, and although not complete in its nature it forms a comprehensive record of site function, location and condition according to what was visible at the time the work was carried out (Guy 1992-1993).

Local interest in the physical remains is clearly evident through the popular local publication by Jeff Dorman entitled Orkney Coast Batteries which spans the period 1914–1956 and makes use of much of Guy's work in its compilation (Dorman 1996). These efforts have been supplemented by the Defence of Britain Project which saw the archaeological surveying and recording of sites across the UK between 1995 and 2002 with the aim of determining the extent of the remains and the condition in which they survive and included some but not all of the sites in Orkney (Saunders 1998, 7). As part of a wider survey of documentary sources, commissioned off the back of a study of fortifications in England, the Council for British Archaeology published a gazetteer of site locations, types and periods of use for WWII defences in Britain which included Orkney (Redfern 1998, ix). This provides a record similar to that of Guy's, only utilising WWII papers and documents rather than the visible remains. This process of site identification, survey and recording forms the principle archaeological method employed in the treatment of recent wartime material in Orkney thus far.

These works really summarise the prevailing archaeological attitudes towards the military remains in Orkney where the focus has been on identification, recording and collation within the sites and monuments record with few interpretative pieces being produced that apply current archaeological theory to the remains in order to better understand them. It would appear however that Orkney is but an example of the current situation across the UK as the archaeological treatment of 20th century military sites has largely been influenced by the work of The Defence of Britain Project. A fine example of this is English Heritage's Monument Protection Programme which began in 1994 and was aimed at identifying the locations of sites constructed during the war through the use of WWII papers and documents and also evaluated their structural condition and setting within their historical context with a view to informing a planning protection strategy (Dobinson 1998, 2).

Although this work has been invaluable in collating the extent and condition of the 20th century military resource across the country, it could be argued that it has left little space for the sorts of interpretation seen in other period studies. The few works that have approached the subject of WWII military sites from a non recording or resource management perspective have made use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to examine how defences may have performed had they been put into action (Schofield 2005, 58) or have studied the social impact of barbed wire strewn beaches and restricted mobility on rural coastal communities (Newsome Autumn 2003). Such works are very much in the minority, however where they have been carried out they have very much been in keeping with modern archaeological approaches to landscapes of defence where the emphasis has been placed on the physical, historical and cultural context of a defencework (Muir 2006, 235).

One particular aspect of Orcadian 20th century military archaeology that has received modern research methodologies has been the submerged resource. Here the ScapaMAP project of 2000-2002 saw the application of modern underwater survey techniques to the WWI German High Seas Fleet in order to augment current knowledge and understanding of the wrecks and to better inform future management (Forbes 2002, 3). The result of this project was not only a comprehensive GIS and additional database but a series of recommendations for the dissemination of this material to the public (Forbes 2002, 61). Projects such as ScapaMAP are a good indication of the potential that archaeological techniques have for further understanding the resource left by two world wars as well as suggesting methods of safeguarding it for the future.

Sadly it would appear that the land based resource has not faired quite as well in its recognition and consideration within recent management or investigative outlines and perhaps the 2005 Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Site research agenda is a good example of these current perceptions. Here, although naturally focusing on the Neolithic importance of the World Heritage Site, the agenda discusses all periods of history within the designated UNESCO area and includes World War One and Two in its discussions. Interestingly, there is a distinct lack of emphasis on the importance of the land based remains. Although the scuttled German High Seas Fleet is described as "*an unparalleled underwater archaeological heritage resource*", there is no mention of the wealth of well preserved land based military structures or their archaeological potential (Downes, Foster et al. 2005, 79). Indeed the main legacy and historic importance attributed to the war years is the improvements made to the infrastructure of the islands and economic benefits brought by the influx of large numbers of service personnel (Downes, Foster et al. 2005, 79).

What has been revealed through this review of past and current publications is that although Scapa Flow and the Orkney defences have been widely written about and are recognised as being of historical importance, the physical monuments that are testament to the events that took place are viewed as little more than eye sores that should be removed. Archaeologists on the other hand, the group often attributed with the protection of such relics from the past, have developed few avenues of research or study into this vast, well preserved data set other than the incomplete site surveys that have been carried out thus far. Although it is understandable that in an island group as rich with archaeological heritage as Orkney, the most recent past may receive less attention, the perception presented through documents such as the World Heritage Research Agenda is of a lack of recognition for just how much can be gained through studying the wartime remains archaeologically. There is hope for change however as a Historic Lottery Funding bid aimed at developing interpretation and preservation of sites around Scapa Flow is currently underway. None the less, it would certainly be fair to say that the current presentation and treatment of this splendid resource is fragmentary and non-cohesive at best, portraying the historical but misrepresenting the material.

# Chapter Three

## A Re-evaluation of the Orkney Defences

It has been made evident through an appraisal of current perceptions towards the wartime resource, as voiced through literature on the subject, that the attitudes toward, and methods of presenting, Orkney's world war heritage do not adequately reflect the importance of the material remains. The result is a textual and historically heavy record which lacks interpretation and cohesion with its archaeological components. This is clearly a situation that requires remedying and as such an approach must be found that allows these diverse elements to be combined in order to create an engaging, better informed record for public presentation whilst allowing scope for further archaeological research and interpretation. Just such an approach, I would argue, is attainable through the re-evaluation of Scapa Flow and its associated military activity as being part of a field of conflict or battlefield.

### Contention Between Definitions of Battlefield and their Application to WWII Sites

Until recently, battlefield has seldom been a term used within archaeological discussions to describe military engagements of WWII as the general conception of a battlefield has been restricted to a limited or spatially fixed action that has taken place over a short period of time (Anderton 2001, 265). Even when dealing with WWI engagements, the difficulties of defining long drawn out battles that spanned many months, stretching over three dimensional landscapes both subterranean, on land and in the air have shown the limitations of the traditional approach of using top down diagrams, illustrating troop movements with sweeping arrows, to help interpret battlefields (Anderton 2001, 266). With the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War that followed, methods of waging war evolved and as a result our understanding of what constitutes a battlefield must also change.

Although they retain the diversity of space and time of the earlier WWI battlefields, the second conflict with Germany introduced a far more fluid and indiscriminate form of warfare involving entire populations, combatants and non-combatants alike with the air war bringing the threat of bombing to all corners of the British Isles (Anderton 2001, 267 & 268). These changes in how war was waged must therefore be acknowledged and reflected in how battlefields are interpreted and characterised archaeologically. Naturally a WWII battlefield will not necessarily be fought over the same kind of landscape, use the same kind of tactics or involve the same types of units as a Medieval battle and thus the classification of what

constitutes a battlefield must reflect the variations that are unavoidable when using a term that incorporates activity spanning thousands of years of human activity.

This issue of bounding events from the past, such as battles, by preordained ideas of space and time is an area in which wider discussions from within the archaeological profession can be of assistance. In more recent debates concerning 'interpretive archaeologies' the implications of the three age system, of periodisation and cultural classifications has been raised and also relates to preconceived designations of space and time. The concept of assigning a site or specific phase of activity on a site to a predefined length or period of historical time is not a neutral way of dividing the past and can have a profound effect on the interpretation of a site and material culture (Lucas 2001, 140). In highlighting this situation, what was previously a fundamental and uncontested process of classifying sites and setting them within broad, established historical frameworks, is now a practice as equally well critiqued as all other aspects of the archaeological interpretive process (Lucas 2001, 138). What could be drawn from this dialogue and applied to battlefields is the need to reflect on the previously established criteria being used to define site scale, both spatial and temporal, and to be aware of its interpretive implications. With this awareness, battlefield archaeologists are then in a better position to apply, discard or adapt any such criteria that may be inhibiting the analysis and understanding of a given site.

It is perhaps because of this need to include largely varying types of warfare within the term battlefield that few concrete definitions have been published. Historic Scotland, in their recent consultation document for a Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP) on Battlefields, offers a designation of a battle as being "*an action involving wholly or largely military forces, normally deployed in formal battle array. The number of combatants will have varied, but is expected to have been in the order of at least 500 on each side*" (Historic Scotland. 2008, 12). It is painfully evident that this definition is both exclusive and restrictive in its coverage and epitomises the age old problem of defining these sites which has ultimately let to the emergence of terms such as 'fields of conflict' or 'places of conflict' which lay the emphasis on the physical activity of combat taking place rather than the scale on which it occurs (Newman Autumn 2003, 37). Under his characterisation, Newman suggests that the term 'places of conflict' or indeed battlefield should exclude military sites that, although being built for a defensive purpose, never were the focus of fighting such as castles, fortifications or 20$^{th}$ century defences (Newman Autumn 2003, 38).

Following these kinds of classifications, it is understandable why the WWII remains, such as the anti-invasion defences in Britain, are not acknowledged as fields of conflict or battlefields. This is very much in spite of Anderton's argument of an all encompassing war where defensive structures that did not see combat merely represent those elements on the battlefield that were never fully utilised (Anderton 2001, 268). Ultimately what becomes clear from both Newman and Historic Scotland is that much of the argument surrounding definitions fails to recognise the more recent evolutions in warfare and specifically the formation of the integrated, wider battlefields that emerged between 1936 and 1945 (Anderton 2001, 268). Nonetheless what is most imperative is that the gap between battlefield definition and developments in the methods of waging war is bridged so that modern battlefields entering the archaeological record can be recognised for what they really are. I would argue that it is this particularly acute issue that the events that took place over the skies of Orkney between 1939 and 1940 can aid in rectifying as they represent both a multi scale 20th century battlefield and yet still conforms to traditional definitions.

**Orkney as a Battlefield**

As illustrated in the previous chapter, until now the Second World War defences of Orkney have largely been associated with the anti-invasion and other fixed defences of Britain. For the best part these were never engaged directly in combat with German forces. As such they have only really been recognised, studied, recorded or characterised as being part of the wider Home defence system that was never tested, but which had a great impact on the lives and movements of the local population (Newsome Autumn 2003, 45). However what is frequently not taken into consideration is the fact that many of the defence sites were called upon to perform their intended roles in the early months of the war when the threat of invasion was at its greatest. The summer of 1940 for example saw fierce fighting over Southern England where fighter squadrons of the RAF vigorously defended tactical and civilian targets from German bombing attacks (Townshend Bickers 1990). In addition to the fighter squadrons, military installations including airfields, radar stations, search light positions and anti-aircraft batteries also served active combat roles against the aerial aggressor performing the tasks they were built to do in an action which has become known as a battle, that being the Battle of Britain (Ray 1994, 48). Although not currently recognised as such, Orkney saw its equal share of action during the opening months of the war which can not only be classified as a battle in the modern multi spatial sense described by Anderton but also by the more traditional designations such as those put forward by Newman and Historic

Scotland thus placing the conflict over Orkney in a strong position to bridge the gap between the two definitional standpoints.

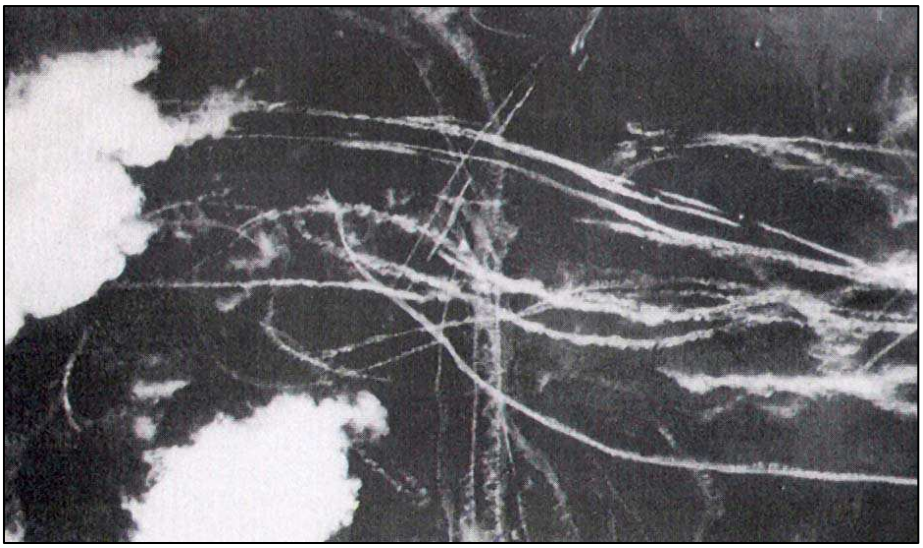

**Figure 3.1** – The contrails of high altitude dogfighting, evidence of the fierce fighting over Southern England which encapsulated the field of conflict that became known as the Battle of Britain (Ray 1994, 128).

Perhaps the greatest difference between the Orkney defences and those of the rest of the British Isles is that they were built in order to defend the strategically important position of Scapa Flow which in turn created a safe haven for the British Home Fleet when it was at anchor (Hewison 1995, 41) as opposed to being part of a general nationwide anti-invasion defence strategy. As the main base for the Royal Navy, the location received a great deal of attention from the German Air Force from as early as 6th of September 1939 (The Admiralty. 1976, 3), 3 days after the declaration of war, when high level aerial reconnaissance sorties were flown to identify the extent of the defences and the status of the fleet (Miller 2000, 99). On the 14th of October, U 47 successfully navigated into Scapa Flow through Holm Sound to sink HMS Royal Oak and 3 days later the first air raid took place by Junkers JU88 bombers which resulted in the beaching of HMS Iron Duke (Hewison 1995, 47). Two capital ships and over 800 men were lost within the space of a single weekend only 11 days into the war and whilst at anchor within the British Fleet's 'secure' main base (Hewison 1995, 47). This weekend of activity marked the beginning of a battle for air supremacy over Scapa Flow, which lasted until the 10th April 1940, the outcome of which would decide whether the British Fleet had the ability to safely position itself in a strategic position, guarding the northern exits into the North Atlantic from the Baltic and North Sea.

**Textual Evidence of Battle**

Although it perhaps does not appear obvious as a field of conflict at first, when the events and the sources of evidence are investigated in greater detail it becomes apparent that this period of action at the beginning of the war fulfils the criteria of a battlefield. In the traditional sense the field of engagement is represented by the waters of Scapa Flow, the islands surrounding it and the skies above it. The military forces involved in direct engagement are those of the Royal Naval ships at anchor in the Flow, the British anti-aircraft batteries situated around it, the bombers of the German Luftwaffe, the fighter squadrons of the Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm who engaged the hostile aircraft and also the radar stations that guided them to the interception. When the personnel involved on each side are tallied up, numbers in excess of 500 are easily manageable and thus this drawn out confrontation within the larger Battle of the Atlantic and wider still Second World War fits quite comfortably within Historic Scotland's provisional definitions of battlefield (Historic Scotland. 2008, 12 & 17) and equally agree with Newman's ideas on only including sites that saw active combat (Newman Autumn 2003, 38).

It is equally possible to identify movements across the battlefield in reaction to those of the opponent attempting to out manoeuvre the enemy and achieve victory. At the time of the sinking of HMS Royal Oak and the first air raid, the defences, as shown in Figure 3.2, surmounted to 3 anti-submarine booms, eight heavy anti-aircraft (HAA) guns located in two batteries around Lyness on Hoy, two antiquated 6 inch coastal defence guns at Ness near Stromness and Stranger Head on Flotta plus an equally aged 4.7 inch gun located at Neb on Flotta (Hewison 1995, 42). The German attack had in essence achieved complete success in that it had forced the admiralty to withdraw the fleet from Scapa Flow and disperse it throughout the Scottish ports leaving the Northern approaches open (Hewison 1995, 42). Being prior to the fall of France, had the Admiralty failed to react with the implementation of the 'Q' and 'R' Plans which involved the expansion of the Orkney defences (Hewison 1995, 42) and instead withdrawn from Orkney, this single incident could well have become the first significant British defeat of the war.

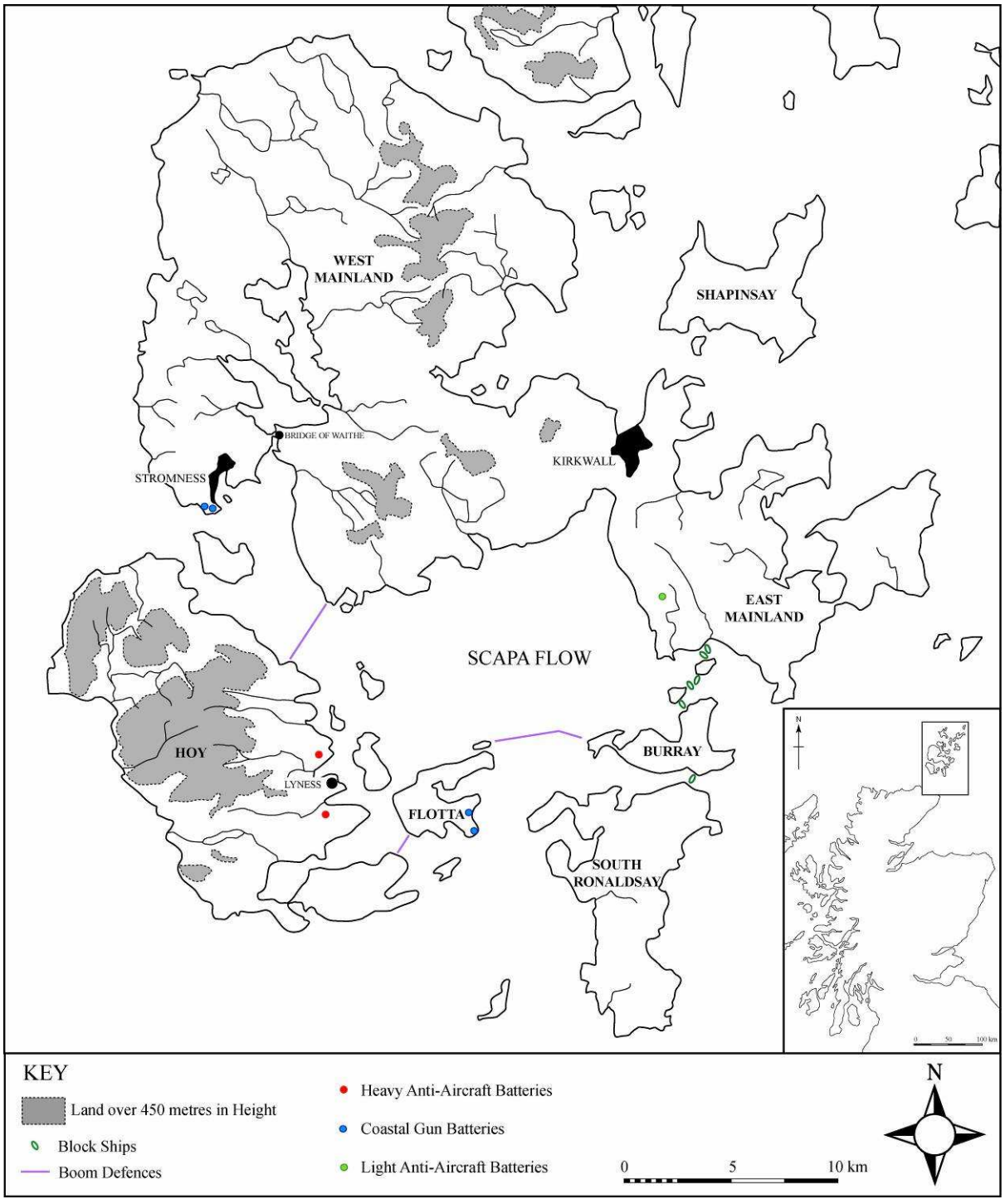


**Figure 3.2** – Distribution map illustrating the extent of the Orkney defences on the 17th of October 1939at the time of the first air raid on Scapa Flow.

However this was not the case and instead of a defeat, a counterattack took place as over the dark winter months of 1939-1940, when the raids ceased on account of the gales and snowy blizzards (Miller 2000, 103), intensive construction work was carried out with anti-aircraft and barrage balloon units being drawn from across the rest of the United Kingdom in order to allow the fleet to return to its base by March 1940 (Hewison 1995, 42). When the Luftwaffe returned in the spring to attack the Home fleet, which was once more anchored in Scapa Flow, they faced 39 HAA guns, 13 light anti-aircraft guns (LAA), 28 searchlights, 12 barrage balloons, 3 radar directed RAF fighter squadrons operating from Wick (mainland Scotland) and Hatston (mainland Orkney) and a new system of barrage anti-aircraft fire, shown in Figure 3.3, which was adopted over the fleet anchorage (Hewison 1995, 42) & (The Admiralty. 1976, 3). Figure 3.4, which depicts the strength of the Orkney defences by the middle of 1940, offers a stark contrast to the state of defences that were present in October 1939 (Figure 3.2), emphasising not only the scale of construction that took place over that winter but how much harder it must have been for Luftwaffe pilots to carry out their missions under such heavy, concentrated fire. In addition to the more traditional defences mentioned above, there was also a 'dummy fleet' (Figure 3.5) consisting of steamships and other aged vessels converted to resemble warships and aircraft carriers from the air (Hewison 1985, 290). The German strategy also changed to counter the intensification of defences and involved the bombing of land targets such as the aerodrome at Hatston and three other suspected airfields identified through aerial reconnaissance in addition to the Fleet targets. However after three costly raids in March and April 1940, the Luftwaffe finally ceased their attacks on Scapa Flow at the exact time when a withdrawal of the British from Orkney would have been most beneficial to German strategy and their swiftly progressing invasion of Norway (The Admiralty. 1976, 3).

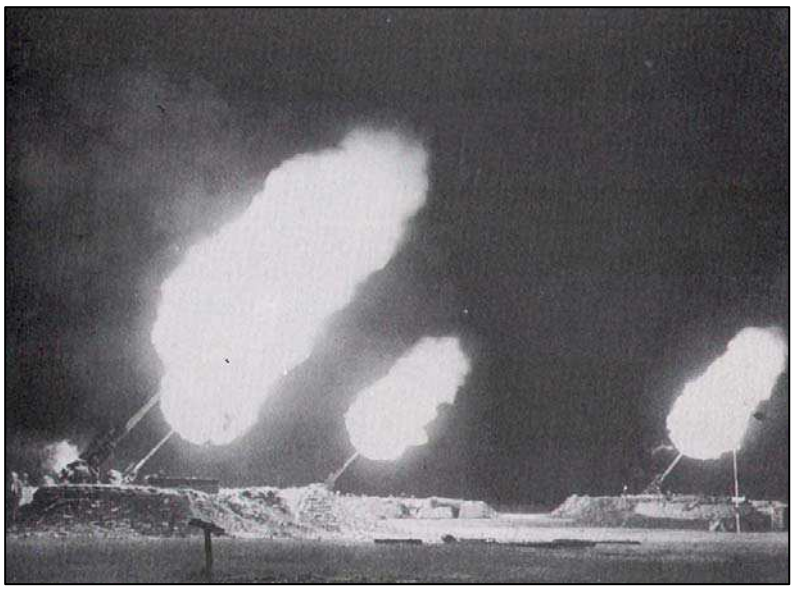

**Figure 3.3** – Anti-Aircraft guns from Southern England creating a barrage similar to that witnessed over Orkney. At its peak, the Orkney barrage could fire a curtain of over 1843 shells in under 3 minutes onto a fixed line, bearing and altitude creating a wall which any enemy raid would have to fly through (Ray 1994, 128).

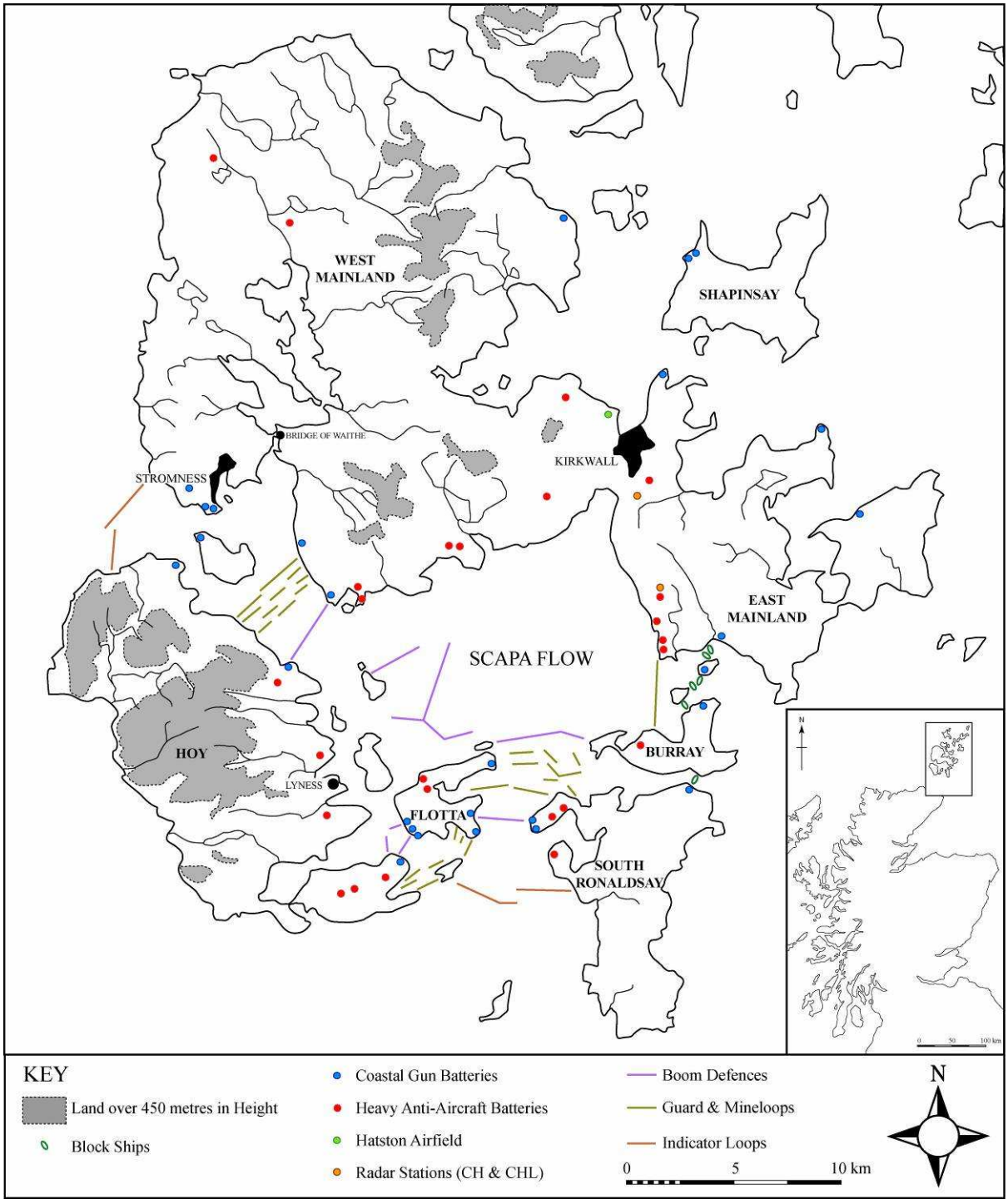


**Figure 3.4** – Distribution map illustrating the extent of the Orkney defences by the 10th of April 1940 at the time of the last major air raid of any strength on Scapa Flow.

**Figure 3.5** – The Elaborately named *Fleet Tender B*, previously *Waimana*, a 30 year old steamship converted to resemble the battleship *HMS Resolution* with the equally dummy *HMS Revenge* and aircraft carrier *HMS Hermes* in background. © Orkney Library & Archive Photographic Archive.

What this pocket summary of events is intended to illustrate is that both sides made changes to their battle plans throughout the period of engagement from 3rd September 1939 to 10th April 1940. This was done in an effort to maintain superiority and out manoeuvre their opponent, reacting and counteracting much in the same way as generals would on a traditional set piece battlefield thus consolidating the point that this period of military activity in Orkney should be perceived as a battlefield. What is perhaps of greater importance in this particular discussion is that although the bulk of the argument so far has been drawn from a re-evaluation of the literary sources, both oral testimonies and the material remains have the potential of providing evidence of battle which supplements and reinforces the textual references.

## Oral Evidence of Battle

Just as it is possible to obtain different perspectives of a traditional battlefield through personal accounts and testimonies, so to is it possible to gather in depth information concerning individual bombing raids on Orkney during the period in question. As well as providing vital evidence of specific incidents, these accounts inject life and humanity into the action and are a vivid reminder of the people who were stationed in Orkney during the war. They also can offer different perspectives on the same event which can help reduce inaccuracies caused through exaggeration or the hazing of details over time. Equally they can simply fill in some of the details not witnessed by other combatants, a fine example of

which relates to a German Junkers JU88 shot down in the morning of 17th October 1939 during the first air raid where John Atter B.E.M. describes how:

"*One of the destroyers found a target and down came an enemy plane, well away from us. I shall never forget the cheer that went up from the leading destroyer and the remark from the skipper as he steamed past us: 'My bird, I think!' He could have been on the grouse moors. I think the plane fell at Lyness.*" (Brown, Meehan 1968, 154)

The account is then amplified by Douglas Thomson, a gunner with 226 Heavy Anti-Aircraft Battery RA (TA) stationed at a gun site near Lyness and half a mile from the Pegal Burn on Hoy during the same raid where he describes how the aircraft "*burst into flames passing over us at about 200 feet. One German airman was seen to get out of the plane. His parachute opened and he landed half a mile from our gunsite……the bomber crashed on the banks of the Pegal Burn – the rest of the crew were all killed*" (Thomson 1995, 11). Accounts such as these can not only provide the details of battle but also offer information that can aid future archaeological work such as locating fixed gun positions and aircraft crash sites which can be investigated to add further details to the battle reports.

**Material Evidence of Battle**

As far as the material evidence of battle is concerned, little has been identified or researched in any depth as of yet however the potential of the resource remains very high. Through the use of gazetteers such as those compiled for the CBA by Redfern, it is possible to identify the locations of the wartime defences of the Orkney Islands. Anti-aircraft batteries and barrage balloon positions can be analysed in relation to known Luftwaffe targets in order to better understand the shape of the raids and what the aircraft would have encountered when attacking from particular directions before and after the build up of defences. This resource can also be used for the study of military life under harsh weather conditions, the use of the landscape in augmenting defences, deviations from architectural plans and initiative in the face of limited construction materials.

Further to the defences themselves, there are a host of other sources of material evidence to be studied including construction detritus, air crash sites, shrapnel scatters and backfilled bomb craters, similar to those in Figure 3.6, which can be identified through traditional archaeological signatures such as crop marks or geophysical anomalies. The potential of bomb craters and unexploded ordnance as an archaeologically retrievable resource is further

expounded by its presence in the submerged environment. Here it joins the other underwater material sources of battle such as anti-submarine nets, indicator loops, mine anchors and block ships which can be identified through the use of sonar and studied. In addition to this Whittaker and Lamb have produced lists from the records they have found that identify Luftwaffe aircraft shot down over Orkney during the Second World War. Their lists can reveal 11 confirmed losses between the 20th September 1939 and 10th April 1940 by a combination of anti-aircraft fire and allied aircraft (see Appendix I). Currently a number of these aircraft have been located during sonar surveys being carried out for the ScapaMAP project and potentially other crash sites may be indentified through future work (Forbes 17/12/2008). These aircraft are the ultimate material evidence of battle as some also represent the final resting place of aircrews engaged in the conflict and would not be present had a battle not been going on in the skies over Orkney (Figure 3.7).

**Figure 3.6** – Bomb craters near Sullom Voe, Shetland. An example of how an air raid from November 1939 can produce archaeological negative features which can be identified and studied (Miller 2003, 77).


**Figure 3.7** – The ultimate evidence of warfare, a Heinkel HE III forced to crash land at Wick after taking heavy damage from both anti-aircraft fire and RAF fighter's over Scapa Flow © Museum of Flight, National Museums of Scotland. Licensor www.scran.ac.uk.

**Summary**

The combination of all of this information allows a far more holistic approach to be taken towards Orkney's WWII resource, drawing the strands of data together in a way which is not being achieved through currently applied methods of interpretation or presentation.(Forbes 17/12/2008) It could be disputed that a battlefield classification would divide the wartime resource, as it excludes the events and construction works that took place after April 1940, but I would argue that it in fact does the opposite. It is as a consequence of the activity that took place in the time frame immediately after the declaration of war that defences continued to be build up throughout the war with major installations still under construction as late as 1943 (The Admiralty. 1976, 10). The later constructions directly relate to the earlier threats made to Home Fleet security and would most likely not have been built had it not been for the concentrated efforts of the Luftwaffe to disrupt the Home Fleet in 1939 and 1940. As such, a battlefield classification actually enhances the understanding of wartime activity in Orkney as it not only emphasises the catalyst for the intense military occupation of a relatively remote part of the British Isles, but also provides a wealth of opportunities for further study of the remains from this archaeologically under studied period of Orkney's history.

# Chapter Four

# Battlefield Orkney – Prospects from a Definition

## Archaeological Research Potential

The consideration of Scapa Flow as a field of conflict offers a great deal of potential for further archaeological research. Although it is possible to apply landscape history techniques to Orkney's defences such as those used in the interpretive works on the anti-invasion defences of Suffolk (Newsome Autumn 2003) or Taunton (Lacey 2003), the resource in Orkney has a unique opportunity for a different approach. As a strategically defended geography within the British Isles that saw active combat during the Second World War, Orkney places itself in an ideal position to draw upon archaeological techniques and methods of research that are currently being applied to battlefields. The study of fields of conflict, through the use of battlefield archaeology, has many benefits as the relatively young specialism can reveal a tactile and detailed perspective of human endurance through extreme circumstances which is often missing from traditional histories (Freeman 2001, 7). The battlefield archaeologist's approach is very much one born out of landscape archaeology and thus applies a host of methodologies normally used to study changes taking place over centuries to look instead at events that unfolded over very short time frames of days or even hours (Foard 2001, 88).

## Artefact Scatter Analysis

One such method utilised in battlefield archaeology is the analysis of unstratified artefact scatters where artefacts relating to the battle are identified and recorded through a method of systematic metal detector survey (Foard 2001). The location of these artefacts are then plotted so as to produce distribution maps which can in turn be used to suggest the location of various battlefield features or events such as areas of intense action, individual unit positions or episodes of combat between specific unit types (Pratt 2007, 25). The concept of artefact scatter analysis can be applied to the detritus of war found in Orkney. As mentioned in chapter three, recent sonar survey work by Forbes has already revealed the preservation of Luftwaffe aircraft shot down during operations over the archipelago and it is possible that further crash sites remain undiscovered around the shores of the Flow and the outer North Atlantic/North Sea coasts of the islands. These aircraft could offer a wealth of information regarding the effective damage of the anti-aircraft barrage put up by the British, its accuracy and the level to which the aircraft could absorb flak before no longer managing to maintain

flight. The submerged resource is likely to provide a greater source of intact information than its land counterpart is. This is partly due to recent research which has noted that inter-tidal and maritime crashes often took place at slower speeds and shallower dive angles, resulting in more intact remains (Holyoak 2001, 261 & 263). Studies have also realised that lowland crash sites tend to be subjected to both official and unofficial wartime salvaging as well as more recent amateur excavation which effects preservation as greatly as the high impact speeds of the crash, which cause the airframes to suffer severe compaction and fragmentation (Holyoak 2001, 261 & 263). Orkney offers further opportunities for the identification and analysis of the underwater crash sites as a result of other archaeological research that is currently underway such as Forbes' sonar surveys within Scapa Flow and Caroline Wickham-Jones' recently initiated sonar based inter-tidal, shoreline survey (Forbes 17/12/2008).

The analysis of the debris from battle can also be used to study specific events that occurred during the bombing of Orkney and are known from literary references to have left a lasting impact on the landscape not to mention the psyche of the British people at the time of the incident. At dusk on the 16th March 1940 Orkney received the melancholy title as the location for the first civilian casualty on British soil of the Second World War. This was a Mr James Isbister, a 27 year old man who lived in the small crofting community at the Bridge of Waithe on mainland Orkney (Miller 2000, 108). The reason for the bombing of this group of houses has been put down to the presence of a civilian airstrip, operated by Allied Airways and located near to the Bridge of Waithe during peace time, which was marked on maps of the time and had presumably been interpreted by German intelligence as being military (Hewison 1985, 293). This assumption is confirmed through the analysis of the Luftwaffe aerial reconnaissance photographs of the area that highlight an area to the North West of the bridge as being an airfield however as highlighted on the photograph shown in Figure 4.1, the houses that received the fifty bombs are more than 750m away from the southeast perimeter of their intended target. When coupled with the complete lack of damage by the thirty bombs dropped on Hatston aerodrome (Hewison 1985, 292), this evidence speaks volumes of German bombing accuracy in March 1940. Accounts record numerous houses receiving damage from high explosives detonating nearby (Figure 4.2) and this evidence would suggest that there may be the archaeological possibility of identifying bomb craters and shrapnel scatters in the close proximity to the crofts using systematic metal detector survey. Discovery of lines of craters caused by sticks of bombs would help inform our understanding of the direction from whence the attacking aircraft came which may in turn help explain why their accuracy was so poor.

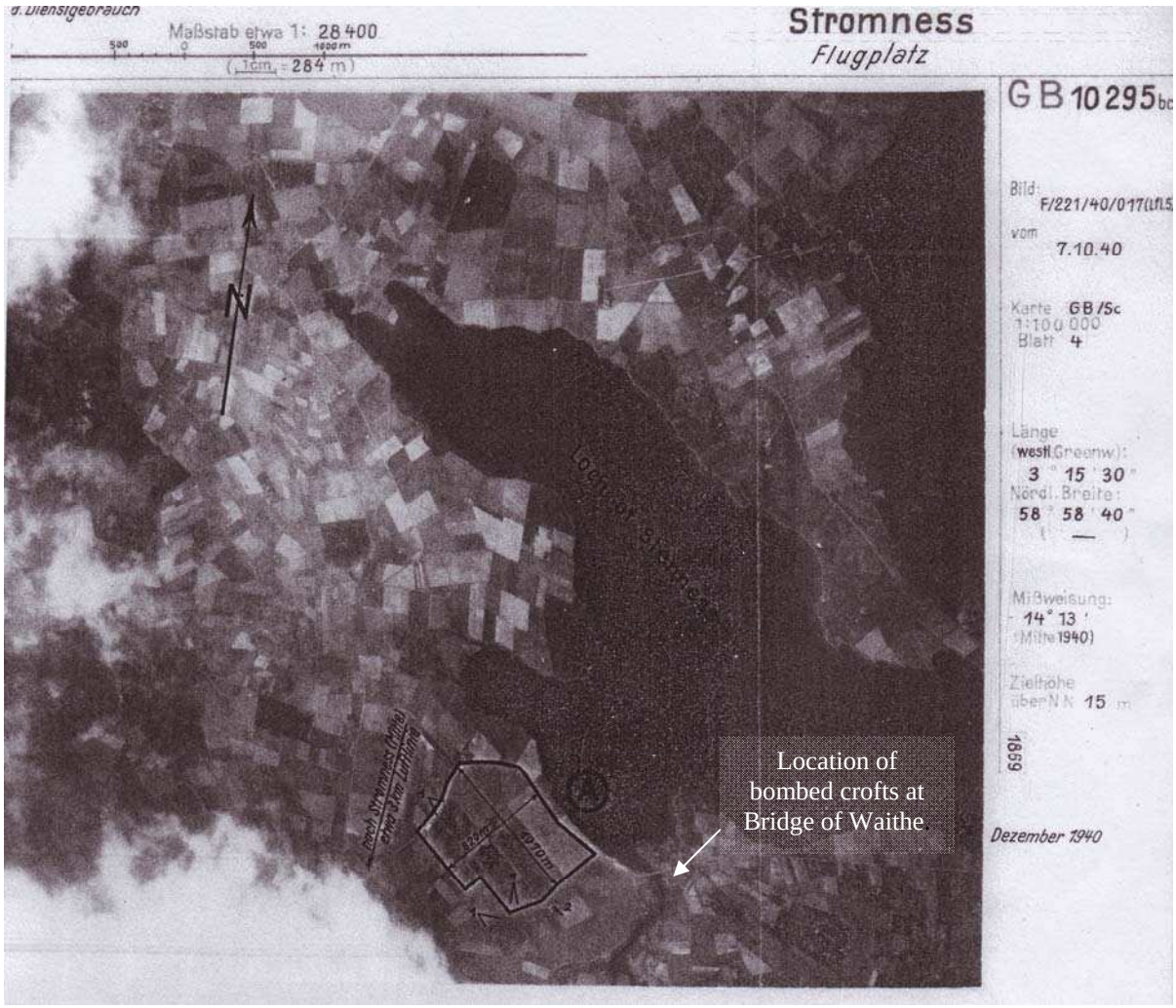


**Figure 4.1** – Luftwaffe Aerial Reconnaissance Photograph showing the area interpreted as Deepdale Airfield near Bridge of Waithe. The buildings marked 1 and 2, identified as barracks and warehouses, were in fact the farm buildings of Howe Farm. © Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.


**Figure 4.2** – Bomb damage to a croft at the Bridge of Waithe with associated crater caused by bombs dropped in the same raid that killed Mr J. Isbister. © Hulton Getty Licensor www.scran.ac.uk.

**Battlefields as Places**

Although much of the emphasis of battlefield studies is on the artefact scatters mentioned above, there has been interesting new work carried out by the Bloody Meadows Project which is more interested in studying the intricacies of the field of battle itself, treating it as a place of cultural significance (Carman, Carman 2001, 277). This research angle is aimed at understanding the individual's battle, what kind of people were involved, attitudes to what they had to do, the place in which they carried it out and the people they fought along side (Carman, Carman 2001, 277). For the best part this has been achieved through the use of phenomenological theories of movement through space under particular conditions, and how procession may reflect experiences and their meaning on the battlefield (Carman, Carman 2001, 277). Through the creation of longitudinal section drawings, which are not to scale and offer exaggerated topography, the project aims to create a more subjective view of the battlefield where lateral movements and associations between spaces on the field may be interpreted from a non top-down perspective which can also be more directly accessible by the public as a means of interpretation and experience of place (Carman, Carman 2001, 277 & 280).

This non-destructive methodology can have an equally applicable role in the study of battlefield Orkney. As there are so many individual accounts surviving from service personnel stationed in Orkney during WWII, it is already possible to gain great incite into the day to day conditions experienced by the troops and also begin to understand the emotions expressed during specific combat situations from a variety of locations on the battlefield. Although it could be argued that these oral histories remove the need for subjective methods such as phenomenology, I would contend that they remain just as relevant and that the presence of personal accounts can aid the process of experiencing the landscape dramatically. Through reading the reports and stories of those who were stationed in Orkney it is possible to gain a good understanding of the attitudes and mindsets of the 1940's combatant and thus reduce the age old phenomenological problem of viewing the landscape from a 21st century archaeologists perspective. In some cases there may also be the opportunity to use the personal accounts as a control in an analysis of how true to past experience the methods of phenomenology are, within the context of the WWII battlefield.

**Protection and Management Issues**

Like so many 20th century military sites across the UK, Orkney's wartime legacy is gradually succumbing to the sands of time. Natural decay, sped up in coastal regions by wave erosion, and the developer's bulldozer have been taking their toll on the number of surviving examples of WWI and WWII buildings and this has led to the critical recording of sites across the UK as a whole (Lowry 1996, xiii). However what has become evident through these programs of recording is that although the location, architectural details and condition of sites have been archived, there is a distinct problem faced in how to protect the buildings dating to these times of conflict from further damage, whether it is from nature or people. Although the majority of wartime sites are now catalogued within sites and monuments records as part of the archaeological record, this offers no statutory protection against destruction. As the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act of 1979, which allows for the protection of ancient monuments through scheduling, is designed for use in relation to buried or earthwork remains that have reached a relative plateau in their rate of decay, it would not seem an entirely suitable method for safeguarding structures that are still actively becoming two dimensional at a rather alarming rate (Holyoak 2001, 259). As scheduling only offers protection against illegitimate disturbance or damage and does not put pressure on the land owner to maintain or repair the scheduled monument, it would appear an illogical choice of protection for buildings that require work to either stabilise them or bring back into use (Holyoak 2001, 259). It has equally been found that protection as listed buildings has proven inadequate as a means of covering all 20th century military sites of archaeological importance owing to many sites being viewed as having "*little aesthetic or intrinsic architectural merit*" and thus not meeting the relevant criteria (Holyoak 2001, 259). The consequence of this situation is that individual 20th century military buildings are not managed well under current policy and legislation in the UK. It is therefore quite possible that Orkney's wartime material remains may fair better when considered as part of a battlefield.

As far as the management and protection of Scotland's battlefields is concerned, the situation is very much the same as described above with regard to the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979*, however both the Agriculture Act of 1986 and the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act of 1997 currently offer protection to at least two of Scotland's battlefields, namely Auldearn and Culloden, which are covered as conservation areas (MacSween 2001, 292). Although battlefields are also given mention as parts of the historic environment that warrant special attention in the 1999 National

Planning Policy Guideline, *Planning and the Historic Environment* (NPPG18), a Scottish policy document relating specifically to battlefields is still in the consultation phase of completion. Its intentions, at this stage, appear to be relatively similar to those of English Heritage who created a non-statutory register of historic battlefields. The main aim of their register was to identify and chart the extent of battles in England with a view to emplacing boundaries around them, combining them within a plan that highlights both the key points on the battlefield and their worth for further, more specific attention (MacSween 2001, 294). Historic Scotland's SHEP document also aims at an inventory of nationally important historic battlefields. It focuses on sites which have significant physical remains, that can be associated with nationally significant historical events and that can be defined within a landscape that hasn't been too heavily impacted upon by development (Historic Scotland. 2008, 13 & 16). The proposed management of the sites is intended to be implemented at planning authority level with the inventory serving as a source of information for interpretation, education and research, in addition to raising awareness of the importance of the protection and sustainable management of battlefield sites (Historic Scotland. 2008, 15-18).

It has already become evident through comments raised concerning the English Heritage Register of Historic Battlefields that the non-statutory inventory provides a far from satisfactory level of protection. Foard states that the register "*has completely failed to address the conservation of the archaeology of our battlefields*" (Foard 2001, 87). He goes on to say that "*it has also intentionally abandoned our siege sites in the misguided belief that such sites are effectively protected through the scheduling of defensive works*" (Foard 2001, 87). Foard squarely places the blame for this situation on the initial concept of the register which viewed battlefields as historical sites devoid of a major archaeological element (Foard 2001, 87). With the similarities between English Heritage's register and the proposed Historic Scotland SHEP all too apparent it is easy to become concerned about the consequences of the implementation of such a battlefield register in Scotland. However, it is hoped that through the consultation phase, the problems encountered with England's pilot register will be highlighted by the stakeholders and relevant changes will be made to Historic Scotland's SHEP paper in order to better safeguard battlefields in Scotland.

Although the presented situation regarding the protection and national management of both 20th century military remains and historic battlefields would appear bleak, it is evident that the current popular climate and fashionable interest in past conflict and battlefields puts the future security of fields of conflict in a much stronger position. Orkney therefore has much to gain from national recognition as a battlefield as any protection whether statutory or non-statutory would encompass the whole range of archaeological resources relating to the world war presence in the island archipelago. Of particular importance would be the integration of the submerged resource which could in essence cover the entirety of Scapa Flow taking in air crash sites, the anti-submarine nets, indicator loops, block ships, the wrecks sunk as a consequence of battle and other artefact scatters or debris relating to the battle. The advantage of such coverage is that it would embrace the sites relating to the sinking and recovery of the German High Seas Fleet as they inevitably rest within the later battlefield and would therefore need to be considered within any Scapa-wide management initiative.

A general management strategy for Scapa Flow has already been produced in the form of a report commissioned by Orkney Islands Council and carried out by the International Centre for Island Technology (ICIT). Although this document focuses on changes to resource distribution and exploitation, conflict between resource producers and the potential for utilising under exploited resources, it does take the submerged archaeological remains into consideration (Kerr 1999, 1). Documents such as this can prove very useful in ensuring that any battlefield management plan incorporating the submerged archaeology of Scapa Flow will cooperate effectively with wider maritime resource management strategies. It has been widely recognised that the submerged remains do not receive as much attention in Scotland and with the protection of such a unique underwater record such as the High Seas Fleet clearly being a high priority (Oxley 2002, 863 & 864), their inclusion within a wider battlefield management and protection scheme would, I'm sure be of great value.

**Opportunities for Interpretation and Presentation**

Perhaps one of the most significant benefits attributed to the interpretation of Scapa Flow and the Orkney defences as a battlefield is the prospect of addressing public perceptions to the wartime remains. Through combining the different sources of data, a cohesive and inclusive interpretation of Orkney's role during the war can be formed which in turn offers a great prospect for a different approach to the presentation of its story to the public. Battlefield tourism has become very much a growing industry within the UK where some sites prove to be very popular visitor attractions indeed accommodating large numbers of tourists annually

(Pollard Autumn 2003, 27 & 28). Naturally it does not take too much imagination to envisage the economic benefits to local groups and businesses of a similarly popular battlefield attraction in Orkney. In terms of the development of public access and interpretation, the battlefield offers the opportunity for people to engage with the concrete monuments of war distributed across the islands at a level not currently enjoyed as under such a classification they become connected into the wider narrative of events. Through the integration of sites such as the coastal and anti-aircraft batteries, command posts and airfields, these 'unsightly smears on the landscape' become 'unintentional monuments' in the sense that their primary purpose or function has been replaced by that of a place of memory and reflection on a time that has passed (Basu 2000, 226). Current interpretive strategies that make use of plaques and information boards, whether at sites or in museums, libraries and heritage centres can have the effect of interpreting the past for the visitor, driving their experience and understanding in a predefined direction rather than allowing them the space and freedom to develop their own thoughts and opinions (Basu 2000, 226). However with so many wartime sites in Orkney, the chance to use both traditional interpretative aids and more open approaches, that encourage the visitor to seek their own experiences either by adding to or creating their own sense and memory of place, these previously unappreciated sites can become central within the wider historical narrative (Basu 2000, 226).

**Summary**

This chapter has attempted to touch on some of the implications a change in perception from a collection of military remains to that of a battlefield may have on the future study, protection and presentation of the wartime archaeological resource in Orkney. What has been revealed is that such a change has the potential of opening up a wide range of different approaches to research and public interpretation. It also may provide further legislative support to the preservation of the material remains than is currently available through the traditional means of safeguarding archaeological monuments. Although additional funding, increased tourism and protective management schemes are by no means assured, what certainly becomes clear is that places such as Orkney, that have an active wartime history and a proliferation of intact remains, have a great deal to gain from affiliating themselves with historic battlefields.

# Chapter Five

# Global Implications

## Problems with Battlefield Definitions

The previous two chapters have endeavoured to highlight the suitability and advantage brought through the study of a World War Two defensive system from the perspective of a historic battlefield. However, in the process of interpreting the military engagement over Orkney as a battle, the lack of universal definitions for battlefields has been starkly revealed. All too often the classifications used are directed towards or influenced by the traditional set piece engagement. As a result of this, issues with the general recognition of 20th century fields of conflict as historic battlefields are caused which can also lead to conflictions in the management strategies of the archaeological resource. Chapter three has already discussed this issue briefly, highlighting the fact that First and Second World War battlefields are far greater in scale than any battle that had come before them, taking place over vast areas of land as well as in the air above it, the sea around it and the ground below it (Dore 2001, 263). New technologies enabling the enemy to fly over ground defences to strike at the softer heart beyond meant that conflict could span multiple countries and involve combatants and non combatants alike leading battles of the 20th century to far exceed the traditional definitions of battlefield. Sites of direct engagement between opposing land forces of WWI and WWII have faired better within the definitional confines as they still maintain the ephemeral, limited temporal and spatial nature that is familiar to the more ancient transitory battlefield (Scott, Babits et al. 2007, 432). As the conflict concerning Orkney very much falls outside of this category and into one of a static defence work which saw combat, the problems of definitions which have not taken into account the developments of 20th century warfare remain.

What has already been demonstrated is that it is actually quite possible to include such a defence work as a type of battlefield. The Orkney events could be viewed and argued by some as being evidence of activity that is more akin to a siege (Foard 2001, 87 & 88). The national monument protection bodies in the UK clearly view sieges as an entirely separate class of site (Historic Scotland. 2008, 12) but to all intent and purposes sieges are just another type of battlefield (Scott, Babits et al. 2007, 432). The evidence found on siege sites is very similar to that of the transitory battlefield only with one side fortified behind well established defensive works in an attempt to prevent the opposition from taking control of a particular

locale (Scott, Babits et al. 2007, 432). The main problem with 20th century defence systems being considered as battlefields really arises with the consideration of Newman's more traditionalist definition, where sites and their surroundings are only treated as battlefields when the physical act of combat has taken place across a specified landscape and where the installations and garrisoned military units within it have been actively involved in a distinct conflict (Newman Autumn 2003, 38). The issue lies in the fact that defence systems have a tendency to span large tracts of land, for example following a stretch of coast for many miles and incorporating many different types of defensive positions. The Orkney defences for instance include anti-aircraft guns, searchlights, radar stations and air squadrons for the protection against airborne raiders and coastal guns, pillboxes, anti-tank ditches, indicator loops, controlled mine fields, block ships and boom defences to guard against surface or submerged attacks (Redfern 1998). Over the course of the Second World War only the defences constructed to guard against air attack saw active combat and thus it could be argued that only they should be covered as being part of a battlefield. The result of such a decision would ultimately lead to the divided management and protection of the 20th century military material resource in Orkney, a most unsatisfactory state of affairs indeed. It is just such a situation as this that has materialised in other countries attempting to manage WWII defence systems where some elements saw action and others did not.

**Management Conflicts from the Continent**

The Atlantic Wall is perhaps one of the last monumental defensive lines constructed in the 20th century, extending along over 5000 km of coastline from Norway to the Spanish/French border shown in Figure 5.1 (Forty 2002, 6). Constructed by the German Forces between 1939 and 1943 to secure the western coastal front of Hitler's fortress Europe, the Atlantic Wall comprised of over 10,000 reinforced concrete bunkers with supporting infrastructure (Postiglione Accessed 09/12/08, 1). These fortifications were strategically located initially to block the Dover straight and support Operation Sea Lion, the German invasion of Britain, but later became a key component in the implementation of Hitler's Directive 40, the order to defeat any enemy attack before it reached the coast or on it (Forty 20027 & 19). Understandably what could be argued as being a valuable resource for 'trans national' cultural identity in Europe is greatly marred by what it represents to many of the countries that it now passes through and that suffered the associated atrocities of occupation during the Second World War (Postiglione Accessed 09/12/08, 2). In many ways its continued presence symbolises a deeply emotive and unresolved collective memory of embarrassment and oppression (Postiglione Accessed 09/12/08, 2). Clearly there are many ethical and cultural

resource issues related to the Atlantic Wall however for the purpose of this discussion, our interest must lie with the implications of management divisions. Although originally conceived as a defensive system which for the best part saw no action, with the allied invasion of German occupied Europe on 6th June 1944, the Atlantic Wall fortifications along the Normandy beaches of France became involved in the physical act of combat (Forty 2002, 106-108). The result is a similar state of affairs to that of the Orkney defences where aspects of the system saw action and others did not. The major difference with the Atlantic Wall is that the fortifications on the Normandy coast, such as at the Pointe-du-Hoc (Figure 5.2), have specifically been designated and recognised as battlefields (Burt, Bradford et al. 2007, 383) where as the rest of the wall is treated separately.

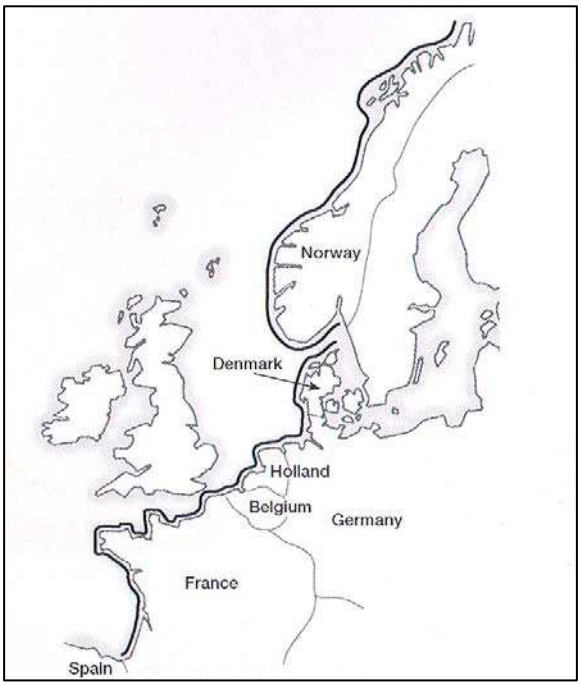


**Figure 5.1** – Location map illustrating the extent of the Atlantic Wall (Forty 2002, 6).

**Figure 5.2** – The Atlantic Wall Battlefield of Point-du-Hoc, Normandy (Forty 2002, 118)

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In 2004 the Atlantic Wall Project commenced which sought to raise awareness of the architectural, aesthetic and cultural landscape value of the defence system (Postiglione Accessed 09/12/08, 2). Its ultimate aim was the preservation and safeguarding of the transnational heritage resource through the creation of the Atlantic Wall Linear Museum (Postiglione Accessed 09/12/08, 2). This project has succeeded in creating a virtual online museum collating the diverse archive of information in one globally accessible place and thus forming a more cohesive approach to the management of the resource (Postiglione Accessed 09/12/08, 3). However, the issue remains that the Normandy sector is perceived and

managed differently as well as being independently owned. On 11th January 1979 the sector of the Atlantic Wall at Pointe-Du-Hoc, a heavily fortified promontory with 155mm guns that could fire onto the landing beaches of Omaha and Utah, and which saw fierce fighting on D-Day, was given to the American Battle Monuments Commission (Burt, Bradford et al. 2007, 383). As a result of Pointe-Du-Hoc receiving the distinction as a Class A Historic Site by the French Government and being owned by a small independent agency from the United States, the battlefield not only falls under distinctly different management initiatives to the rest of the Atlantic Wall but also has a different degree of protection (Burt, Bradford et al. 2007, 383).

**Looking to the Future**

This state of affairs, I would argue, is a direct result of the confusions caused by the definitions of battlefield. The Atlantic Wall represents a case and point of a linear defence system which, through circumstance, became a multi-spatial battlefield encapsulating the freshly evolved fluid, integrated and technologically advanced methods of waging warfare, but which has been interpreted, defined and constrained using the traditional perception of battlefield. The result is a conglomeration of many small battlefield sites located very close together, both temporally and spatially, but which in actual fact represent individual events within a much larger battlefield spanning many months and many thousand miles of French countryside.

Again this is a predicament where current theory recognised in prehistoric archaeology can be of use to a historical archaeological problem, in this case that of scale. An issue that has presented itself within prehistoric study has been the idea of scales of analysis where specific periods or activities in the past have been interpreted at different levels ranging from the 'bottom-up', site specific approaches to much broader 'top-down' landscape regionally or continentally specific approaches (Thomas 1996, 95 & 98). Each of these methods has positive and negative implications as they identify and interpret particular social and cultural activities that have taken place at certain scales (Thomas 1996, 95). However, the problem lies with the fact that human interaction seldom follows a system like pattern and will vary in scale as it reacts to different events and conditions (Thomas 1996, 95). As such neither direction would appear to offer itself as the single best approach to the study of past human behaviour. However, both are equally necessary and complimentary in as far as they allow a circular, reflective narrative to occur where the implications of the analysis of small scale activities are interpreted at larger scales and vice versa (Thomas 1996, 98). The application of such a reflective approach to battlefields would allow the analysis of the 20th century field

of conflict at the traditional smaller scale to be acknowledged as being equally as valid and necessary as analysis at the broad, countrywide scale as argued by Anderton. To achieve this, I would argue that what is still ultimately required is a battlefield definition that embraces the multiple scales at which battlefield exist.

What is illustrated here is an example of how global the issue of battlefield definitions really is. It also demonstrates how the failure to adequately recognise the evolutionary development of warfare and the battlefield is drastically impacting the management and interpretation of 20th century military remains. The mixed management of the Atlantic Wall offers a flavour of what could potentially happen with the Orkney Defences if the military sites that did not see combat or were constructed later than 1940 fail to be recognised, as I have suggested in chapter three, as being both integrally related to, and a consequence of the initial battle for Scapa Flow that took place between September 1939 and April 1940. What is needed is a wider recognition of the fact that the way war is waged changes over time and thus directly impacts the nature and characteristics of the battlefield. In much the same way as Anderton perceives Britain as a single field of conflict spanning 5-6 years and containing offensive and defensive elements some of which were never fully exploited (Anderton 2001, 267), so too must we acknowledge defence systems that were built and operated as single entities as being part of much larger battlefields that only saw action on particular fronts. In doing this we can take the first steps towards a more open appreciation of the evolving nature of the battlefield and begin to rectify the issues with definitions which have led to the mis-identification of wider, multi-dimensional 20th century battlefields as they have entered the archaeological record.

# Chapter Six

## Conclusion

Through the course of this study it has emerged that military sites dating from the two world wars offer a far greater potential for archaeological research than has currently been acknowledged. Methods and theories currently reserved for much older periods of human history can be of equal use in the interpretation of the more recent past offering a much fuller understanding of their material remains. In particular, an evaluation of current literature has revealed that general perceptions towards the World War Two military remains of Orkney have, until now, centred on the historical memory of individual key events and circumstances. In the course of these histories, little acknowledgement has been made of the abundance of physical monuments from this conflict sown throughout the Orcadian landscape. Research has also revealed that archaeological interest in this remarkably intact resource has largely been limited to the cataloguing and recording of sites as part of wider cultural resource initiatives which have failed to exploit its full archaeological potential.

In response to this situation, a re-evaluation of the World War Two military remains has been carried out revealing that a much fuller and more cohesive understanding of the archaeological resource can be achieved through reinterpreting the events that occurred between 3rd September 1939 and 10th April 1940 as a battle. In doing so, it has been possible to draw upon the techniques of analysis used in Battlefield Archaeology to combine textual, oral and material sources of evidence together thus enabling a more comprehensive and integrated approach to be taken towards the interpretation of the wartime resource in Orkney. All three sources have provided substantiating evidence of direct physical conflict between the British and German forces over Orkney during this time frame. This allows Scapa Flow and the wartime defences of Orkney to fit within current definitions of battlefield offered by by Newman (Newman Autumn 2003, 37) and Historic Scotland in their SHEP consultation paper on Historic Battlefields (Historic Scotland. 2008, 12).

It has also been demonstrated that the opportunities for studying Orkney's WWII remains archaeologically, by considering them as both the evidence of battle and the following post-combat consolidation of defences, are vast. The techniques used by battlefield

archaeologists, such as artefact scatter analysis, can be applied with the support of aerial photographs, sonar, metal detector and geophysical survey to successfully identify and investigate air crash sites, unexploded ordnance, shrapnel, bomb craters and backfilled or buried defence works. In much the same way as they do for older battlefields, the investigation of these features can enhance both the oral and textual records concerning the event that and in turn offer a more in depth narrative of the battle (Scott, Babits et al. 2007, 434). Equally in studying the battlefield as a place of cultural significance through the use of phenomenology and other post-processual landscape archaeological approaches (Carman, Carman 2001, 277), it is possible to not only contribute to the understanding of wartime Orkney, but also offer valuable new opportunities for the presentation and dissemination of this ill appreciated material resource to the public.

In carrying out this research, some of the shortfalls within current definitions of battlefields have been revealed. This has largely materialised as a result of arguing that elements of the Orkney defences, such as those that did not see active combat or were constructed shortly after the period of intense fighting, are equally integral parts of the battlefield. These definitional issues can be sourced back to a lack of recognition of the evolutionary developments in warfare that occurred over the course of the 20th century. Anderton identifies a new, multi-dimensional battlefield which arises through the emergence of modern, indiscriminate methods of waging war and which, for the best part, is not acknowledged within the traditional definitions of battlefield (Anderton 2001, 266). The failure to re-evaluate our understanding of what a battlefield constitutes as warfare has evolved has had an effect on how we recognise a field of conflict as it enters the archaeological record. This has been demonstrated in the case study of the Atlantic Wall where only small areas of the system around the Normandy coast that conform to the traditional criteria of a battlefield have been designated and protected as such. The remainder of the defence system, which is part of the larger field of conflict that Anderton alludes to, is treated separately, leading to a sequentially managed archaeological resource. If we are to avoid further misrepresentation of 20th century battlefields and military remains as a whole, it is imperative that the discrepancies within the definitions of historic battlefield sites are addressed and our perception of battlefield continues to be reviewed as warfare advances. In doing so we are safeguarding the future archaeological resource so that as more recent fields of conflict, such as those dating from the Cold War, enter into the archaeological record, they are identified correctly and managed appropriately.

## Appendix One – Luftwaffe Confirmed Losses Over Orkney collated from records appearing in Lamb, G. 2007 pages 188 – 194 & Whittacker, I.G. 1998 page 62

| Date Lost | Aircraft Type | Details of Incident | Grid Reference | NMRS No: |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 02/04/1939 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down off Hoy | N58 50.0 W3 30.0 | ND19SW 8003 |
| 20/09/1939 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down off Hoy | N58 50.0 W3 30.0 | ND19SW 8004 |
| 12/10/1939 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down over Scapa Flow by AA | N58 55.0 W3 0.0 | HY40SW 8010 |
| 17/10/1939 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down between Hoy & Stroma by AA | N58 45.0 W3 10.0 | ND38NW 8035 |
| 10/12/1939 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down over Scapa Flow | N/A | N/A |
| 04/01/1940 | Dornier Do17 | Crashed into the sea off Copinsay | N/A | N/A |
| 08/03/1940 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down 40 miles E of Orkney by Hurricane | N59 0.0 W1 10.0 | HZ41SE 8001 |
| 16/03/1940 | Unknown | Shot down over Scapa Flow by AA | N/A | N/A |
| 02/04/1940 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down by AA | N/A | N/A |
| 08/04/1940 | Heinkel He111 H3 | Shot down 9 miles SSE of Copinsay Light by Hurricane | N58 50 W2 2 5 | ND79SE 8001 |
| 10/04/1940 | Dornier Do17 | Shot down by Gladiator | N58 50.0 W2 30.0 | HY60SW 8016 |
| 10/04/1940 | Heinkel He111K | Shot down 1 mile E of Burray by Hurricanes | N58 51 W2 50 | ND59NW 8021 |
| 15/05/1940 | Dornier Do18G | Shot down East of Orkney by Blackburn Skuas | N59 0.0 W1 0.0 | HZ41SE 8004 |
| 25/12/1940 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down by Martlet | N/A | N/A |
| 04/03/1941 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down by Hurricanes | N/A | N/A |
| 06/03/1941 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down by Hurricane | N/A | N/A |
| 08/03/1941 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down 1 mile East of Westray Sound | N59 15.0 W2 55.0 | HY53SW 8003 |
| 25/01/1944 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down by AA | N/A | N/A |
| 22/02/1944 | Me BF 109 | Shot down 50 miles E of Stronsay by a Spitfire IX | N59 15.0 W0 50.0 | HZ62SE 8001 |
| 30/05/1944 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down by Spitfires | N/A | N/A |
| 09/12/1944 | Junkers Ju-88 | Shot down 80 (?) miles ENE of Herma Ness | N59 0.0 W0 0.0 | HZ61SE 8007 |

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