

DEFENCE AREA 68

GODNEY

1. Area details:

Godney, which consists of Lower and Upper Godney, is 2½ miles NNW of Glastonbury.

County: Somerset.

Parish: Godney

NGR: centre of area, ST 492428.

1.1 Area Description: [see Map 1].

The defence area is centred on the small settlement of Upper Godney in the Somerset Levels, which is made up of farms and a few houses situated in a flat landscape intersected by many ditches, drains, and rhynes. The roads are narrow and set on causeways above parallel ditches on either side. The area is in sight of Glastonbury Tor, which rises dramatically on the southern horizon. The boundaries of the area are determined by points on the zig-zagging pattern of roads and rhynes through which the defence line makes its way across the area. The focus of the area is the central crossroads at Upper Godney, at which a viewshed is formed from a slight eminence to the east, farm buildings to the south, and various streams that carry the defence line to the north and the south-west. This is a working agricultural landscape to which few tourists make their way.



Fig. 1 - Glastonbury Tor seen on the horizon from near Higher Bridge Farm. GHQ Line Green followed the line of the drain to the left, and at this point was strengthened with a row of anti-tank cubes [UORN 16342].



2. Assessment.

2.1 Defences: [see Map 2]

Defence overview -

The defences at Godney form part of GHQ Line Green, which is described in the report on Defence Area 20 - River Brue: Cripp's Bridge. [See as well the map at Fig. 2 within that report]. The River Brue formed the principal anti-tank obstacle from the west as far as Meare, where the Line left the river to take a course more directly to the east, eventually passing to the south and east of Wells. From Meare it followed a series of waterways, including at Godney the Division Rhyne and a short length of the River Sheppey. Within Upper Godney, however, it was considered necessary to strengthen the anti-tank capability of the water obstacle with rows of concrete cubes and an artificial anti-tank ditch. The Line was further fortified with pillboxes and roadblocks. Bridges were undoubtedly also prepared for demolition. These defences were designed to hold up an attack from the south or the east.

GHQ Line Green entered the defence area from the west, following the course of the Division Rhyne. It turned north towards Upper Godney along the line of another drain, and was fortified here by a line of anti-tank cubes standing 4ft high. From Higher Bridge Farm it was continued by a machine-dug anti-tank ditch running parallel with the River Sheppey across a meadow at the centre of Upper Godney. The Line was then taken to the north by a further line of anti-tank cubes, until it left the defence area following the course of the Frogmore Rhyne.

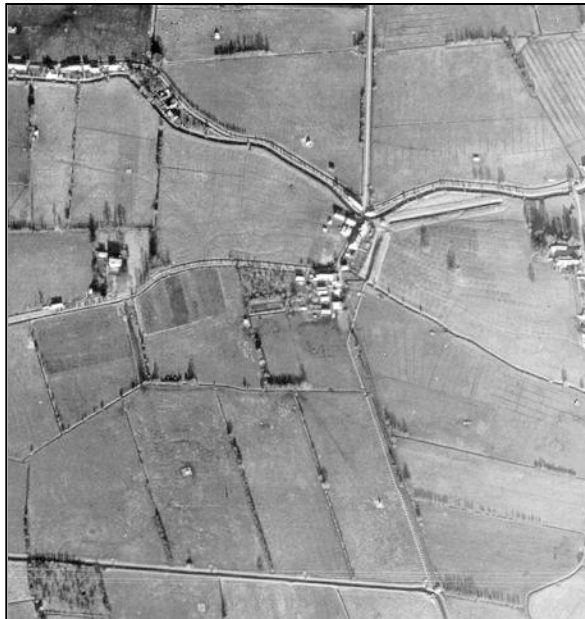


Fig. 2 - Air photograph taken in January 1947 showing Upper Godney at the centre. The line of the anti-tank ditch, with a gap plugged by a pillbox [UORN 8390], can be clearly seen. Lines of anti-tank cubes continue the Line both to the north-east and the south. The anti-tank ditch was infilled later in 1947.



Fig. 3 - At Upper Godney, the anti-tank ditch ran diagonally across this meadow supplementing the obstacle provided by the River Sheppey in the foreground.



The defence works -

Prominent at the centre of Upper Godney are two type 24 brick-shuttered pillboxes [UORNs 8391 and 8390]. The latter stood in a gap left in the anti-tank ditch. Other pillboxes to the north have been destroyed, but show on 1947 air photographs. At Higher Bridge Farm, some of the anti-tank cubes survive, although these have been moved from their original position and are lined up at the side of a trackway. They were made using corrugated-iron shuttering [UORNs 13973 and 13974].



Fig. 4 - UORN 8391: type 24 infantry pillbox, prominent at the centre of Upper Godney.



Fig. 5 - UORN 8390: this hexagonal pillbox once stood in a gap in the anti-tank ditch. Why the gap was left is not clear, unless it was to provide agricultural access to the field.



Fig. 6 - UORN 13973: anti-tank cubes lined up at Higher Bridge Farm, not far from their original situation. It is clear that they were made using corrugated-iron shuttering at the sides.

At Garslade Farm, on the lane to Polsham, is the site of a roadblock, with the plugged sockets to take vertical steel rails still visible [UORN 15669]. A further type 24 pillbox stands at the south-west corner of the defence area where the Godney Road crosses the Division Rhyne [UORN 2994]. There was undoubtedly a roadblock here as well, but nothing remains.



Fig. 7 - UORN 15669: concrete sockets to take upright steel rails mark the site of a roadblock. More sockets probably survive under the grass.



Fig. 8 - UORN 2994: a type 24 infantry pillbox stands on the north bank of the Division Rhyne, which at this point provides the main anti-tank obstacle for GHQ Line Green.

2.2 Landscape:

There have been few changes in the past sixty years in the landscape of Godney. The small settlement has received little, if any, building development, and it is surrounded by the same pattern of small fields intersected by rhynes and drains as prevailed when the defence line was inserted through them in 1940.

Apart from the few houses at the settlement of Upper Godney, this is predominantly a farming landscape: there are three working farms within this small defence area alone. The lanes are narrow, with ditches on either side, and the passing of motor vehicles can be difficult.

All the defence works can be viewed from the lanes and from a footpath that follows the Division Rhyne. Pillboxes, UORNs 8390 and 8391, are prominent at the centre of Upper Godney, but stand on private land, and permission should be gained before seeking to inspect them at close-quarters.

2.3 Statement of Significance:

This defence area is important because it illustrates how the principal anti-tank obstacle of a major stop line was strengthened artificially when it was required to cross a landscape without a waterway wide or deep enough to provide an adequate natural defence. The way the surviving pillboxes related to the line of the anti-tank ditch can be readily understood. The remaining anti-tank blocks show as well how the stop line was carried to the south.

The excellent air photographic evidence enables the defence strategy to be reconstructed at Godney. This is a small, remote settlement which in 1940 had suddenly to face the reality of a major defence line being placed through it. The

evidence of that incursion surviving on the landscape today, otherwise returned to its peaceful seclusion, makes a most interesting case study.

It would be possible to set out a short 'pillbox walk' around Upper Godney (possibly starting from Meare) to view the Second World War defences here, although it would not be wise to encourage car-borne visitors to come into the area as the roads are so narrow and parking very difficult.

3. **Recommendations:**

1. That the surviving anti-invasion defence works in the Godney area be considered of national importance. They enable the defence of this section of GHQ Line Green to be interpreted, and provide evidence of the articulation of the defence and the inter-relationship of its functionally different components. Such interpretation is assisted by the excellent air photographic evidence of defence structures that were built as part of the overall strategy, but which have now been removed.
2. That consideration be given, in a possible initiative with Somerset County Council and the local authority, to establishing a 'pillbox walk' that would take in the defence works around Upper Godney. Such a walk should start outside the area where parking facilities are better. An information board on the Second World War defences, and GHQ Line Green in general, might also be set up, possibly adjacent to the meadow containing pillbox, UORN 8391, at the centre of Upper Godney.

4. **Supporting material.**

4.1 **Photographs:**

Figs. 1 and 3-8 - taken (AWF) during field survey, 17.1.2003.
Fig. 2 - CPE/UK/1944 fr.1215 (23.1.1947) - NMR.

4.2 **Documentary Sources:**

'Southern Command Home Defence Programme, 1940' (map from General Headquarters Papers, Defence Works) - TNA: PRO WO 199/48.
'Report on Reconnaissance of Outer Bristol Defence Position', 18.6.1940 (from 48 Division 'GS' War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/578.
'Somerset Sub-Area Defence Scheme', August 1940 (from Somerset Sub-Area HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1317.
'Western Area Defence Scheme', 23.6.1941 (from Western Area HQ War Diary) - TNA: PRO WO 166/1251.

4.3 **Published Source:**

(Major) M. Green, *Warwalks: Stop Line Green* (Reardon Publishing, 1999).

4.4 **Aerial Photographs:**

CPE/UK/1924 fr.1069 (16.1.1947) - NMR.
CPE/UK/1944 frs.1215-1217 (23.1.47) - NMR.
CPE/UK/1992 frs.4397-4398 (13.4.47) - NMR.



- 4.5 **Ordnance Survey 1: 2500 Plans:**
ST 4842-4942 (1971) - BLML.
- 4.6 **Defence of Britain Project Database:**
[see 5. 'Annex'].

