



## A BIT OF HISTORY

The strategy implemented during the Second World War resulted in a triple line of defence:

**FIRST LINE:** Around fifty casemates and concrete shelters were located on the banks controlling any potential river crossings; these were outposts (defensively positioned around the area) occupied by 2 or 3 people.

**SECOND LINE :** 18 structures monitored any major enemy advances; as in Rhinau, these were points of support.

**THIRD LINE :** Further west, about 3 km from the Rhine, 53 casemates were positioned in line with the villages.

The mission of the first line was to channel any crossing, as well as to observe the situation. Then, the reserves had to intervene from the forest to push back the enemy. In the worst case, the third line intervened to stop any further advances.

For a long time, the Rhine represented an insurmountable obstacle for an army, and its defence was less developed than in the northern part of Alsace, where there were forts. But the river was at the heart of the battle of 15 June 1940, considered a battle of prestige, better known as the great amphibious offensive of June 1940.

Rhinau was the right wing of the battle, but shortly before this, the infantry was withdrawn to go to the Belgian border and the Vosges.

## DIRECTIONS

By car, on the D1083 take the exit for Benfeld, then Rhinau; in Boofzheim, follow signs for Obenheim. The trail starts next to No. 24 Route de Strasbourg.



## NEARBY

### Other cultural heritage brochures

- Sand: St. Maternus' Chapel
- Neunkirch: Notre-Dame de Neunkirch
- Gerstheim: St. Denis' Church

### Other sites

- Marckolsheim: Maginot Line Memorial
- Europa Park by cross-border ferry
- Locks on the Rhine River
- Flat-bottomed boat trips through the forests of the Rhine Valley
- Many cycling paths and hiking trails
- Bike tour A wink in Germany from Rhinau (18km)

## CONTACT

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## CULTURAL HERITAGE

# The Casemate Trail

## Boofzheim



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DURATION OF VISIT : 1 HOUR  
DISTANCE : 1,24 MILES





## SITE DESCRIPTION

*Remember to bring a torch to tour the inside of the casemates.*

Between 1930 and 1940, the French High Command built a vast fortified system to protect vulnerable and threatened regions along the country's border, better known as the Maginot Line (named after the Minister of War, André Maginot).

The Maginot Line comprises a heterogeneous range of structures, from modest blockhouses to mighty underground fortresses. These modes of defence differed in their design according to their strategic, geographic or topographic position. The casemates were built according to a standard plan that could vary depending on the layout of the area and each one's specific role.

The term "casemate" encompasses what are also called bunkers or blockhouses (usually isolated and small in size). A casemate is said to be passive when it can only be used as a barracks, its openings playing no role in defence. An active casemate, intended to serve as a firing location, has a ventilation system to remove gun smoke. A casemate unit consists of a crew (like on a ship).

In Boofzheim, there are still vestiges of the French line of defence: a casemate that served as a command post (CP), infantry and engineer casemates, an anti-aircraft casemate and a machine-gun nest. These units belonged to the Erstein sub-sector, under the command of the Gerstheim CP and the CP that had participated in the Battle of the Rhinau Salient.

## THE CASEMATE TRAIL

*Trail map displayed on-site*

- 1 This CP (command post) casemate was used for transmitting messages (with underground cables), occupied by French troops: the 34th FIR (fortress infantry regiment), 6th company belonging to the Erstein sub-sector of the SBRF (Lower Rhine Fort Sector). The firing chamber defended the heart of the casemate. A loophole, also known as an embrasure, is located next to the entrance. The table served as a support for the crossing machine gun whose casings fell into the chute. Guides for the shutters still remain. In the wall, we can see where the radio set was located. It was resized with a mallet to accommodate the larger post-1940 radios.

16 to 24 men could be stationed inside the casemate. At its core, the door was armoured and a ventilation grille enabled soldiers to protect themselves from grenades. Next is the rest area.

Then we arrive in the 2nd firing chamber, which is larger and has a range of 6 km, bearing in mind that we are 3 or 4 km from the Rhine.

On the outside of each gun embrasure we see a "diamond ditch" (angular shape) which prevented intruders from approaching and, in the event of bombardment, provided a space where reinforced concrete debris could fall out of the way to prevent the embrasures from being obstructed.

- 2 4 5 These are the engineering casemates, where the water source was located. There was only one for each sector. This is where the soldier on chore duty came to fetch water (about 20 litres per trip and per man for each casemate). There were no shutters, only sandbags and wood.
- 3 Inside this anti-aircraft casemate, there are 4 rooms containing 2 pieces of artillery. Heavy French machine guns were used there, with automatic ejection without return (Hotchkiss). The reloading team was positioned behind the door.
- 6 The machine gun nest is made of concrete. It is a fixed station, round in shape. 3 or 4 men were positioned there.

## LEARN MORE

- Roger Bruge, *Offensive sur le Rhin*, 1977
- Rhinau parish and town newsletters
- Jean-Bernard Wahl, *La Ligne Maginot en Alsace*, 2001
- Municipal archives of the towns affected by the fighting
- Denkschrift (archival account), *Deutscher Frontkämpferverband*
- Historical novel by François-Michel BARTHELEMY : « 5h30 Route d'Obenheim », 2020

