The German
Military Underground Hospital
and Ammunition Store

LA VASSALERIE,
ST. ANDREW'S,
GUERNSEY.

OCCUPATION NEWSPAPERS & RELICS ON VIEW.

(First opened to the public on July 29th, 1954)

The numbers on this plan do not necessarily correspond with the arrow
and number system in the tunnels.
The German Military Underground Hospital and Ammunition Store is the largest structural reminder of the German Occupation existing in the Channel Islands. This maze of tunnels covers an area of about 75,000 square feet. Almost invisible from the surface (except for the entrances) this vast concrete maze is built under a low hill in the heart of the Guernsey countryside. The escape shafts are no more than square holes level with the field surface above.

Hundreds of slave workers of several nationalities helped to build it, working for the Todt Organisation. It took them approximately 3½ years to excavate, concrete and equip the place, yet it was only in actual use for some nine months. During that period thousands of tons of ammunition were stored there, but the actual hospital was only used to accommodate troops brought from France where they were wounded in action against the Liberating Forces.

Designed to accommodate 500 patients, the Hospital, in an emergency, could have housed three or four times that number. Included in its medical staff were at least six German female nurses. The Hospital was ready for use in 1944.

The Hospital comprises two main corridors running parallel to each other. Between them, and connected to both, are the wards, operating theatre, X-ray room, laboratory, dispensary, staff sleeping quarters, etc. On the other side of one of the corridors are store rooms, cinema and mortuary. At the end of one of the main corridors are the central heating boilers and kitchen.

It will be noticed that one corridor and entrance were not concreted, and that the entrance has partly fallen in since 1950. This gives one a good idea of the kind of difficulties which confronted the slave workers. In this work several lost their lives and many are probably buried in the concrete. In addition to using explosives and pneumatic drills, the excavating was carried out with the aid of picks and shovels, sledge hammers and bare hands.

One day a local grave-digger was told to report to the German Hospital. There the Germans told him that seventeen workers had been killed by an explosion. He buried them in a cemetery adjoining a workers’ camp at Les Vauxbelets. Altogether 54 men and women were buried in this cemetery.

Some of the granite excavated was crushed, graded and then used in the 15,000 tons of concrete. Part of the cement used was British, captured in France after Dunkirk. Most of the stone was dumped from the trucks of the light railway running through the tunnels and across the road. The granite was thrown into a valley there and the ground level was considerably raised in consequence.

Although the Hospital and Ammunition Store are almost empty today there are still some signs of their previous uses. Much of the central heating plant remains, there are hospital beds still to be seen and signs of the cooking arrangements. The tunnels had their own electric generating plant which also supplied the power to drive the air-conditioning plant, for the Hospital was completely gas-proof.

There are three tunnel entrances and five ventilating shafts. These last had iron ladders or concrete staircases for use as emergency exits. The shallowest is 45 feet, and the deepest is 75 feet below the surface. The 75 feet shaft has a reservoir driven into one side which could hold thousands of gallons of water, thus making the tunnels independent of an outside supply. The water was pumped into the reservoir from the well in the floor nearby.

The Ammunition Store is even larger than the Hospital. It was similarly designed, but here every room was packed with ammunition, covered by tarpaulins in order to keep it dry. In the height of summer condensation is very apparent, whereas in winter the tunnels are almost completely dry.