

# CIS THE BEACHCOMBER



Wikipedia

*He knows the beach like no other. Beachcombing is his passion, and passions should be shared with other people. Are you ready to become initiated in the mysteries of the strangest flotsam and jetsam?*

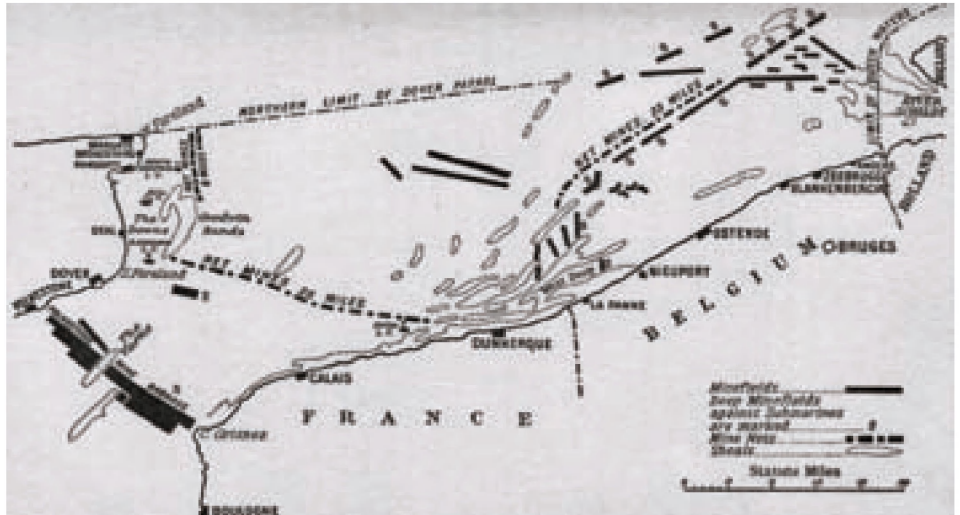
## NAVAL MINES, DECORATIVE AND DEADLY

The beach was largely off limits during World War I (see Mahieu E. in this issue). It was a dangerous place, partly because all sorts of war materials, in particular naval mines gone adrift, were washed ashore. Mines found on the beach were deactivated and often used as decoration.

### THE NORTH SEA CLOSED OFF BY MINEFIELDS

The warring parties extensively deployed naval mines in the North Sea and beyond during WWI. The mines were cheap and effective. The Germans targeted the routes of merchant and navy ships heading for and departing from the United Kingdom. The Allies tried to cut U-boats off with naval mines in the Strait of Dover and the northern part of the North Sea and keep the German fleet confined. As part of this strategy, the Americans and British developed the North Sea Mine Barrage in the final years of the war by laying 70,000 naval mines between the Orkneys and Norway. Earlier on (in 1915), the Allies had blocked the entrance to the English Channel with a chain of minefields (the Dover Barrage, see map) to confine German submarines to the North Sea. In all, some 235,000 naval mines were laid in minefields in WWI.

The best-known are the spherical metal devices with characteristic protuberances (Hertz horns), but various types existed. Quite a few of these mines broke from their moorings and went adrift after a while. For instance, the British Mark 3 naval mine, which was ignited by a protruding float that rotated upon contact with a ship, was not very successful: hundreds of these mines washed up on the surrounding beaches.



Just like the North Sea Mine Barrage constructed between the Orkneys and Norway in 1918, the Dover Barrage consisted of a chain of minefields laid by the Allies to keep the German fleet, including submarines, contained to the North Sea as much as possible (Wikipedia)

### DECORATION

Once washed ashore and deactivated, mines often got a second life. People enjoyed posing next to them, as is still customary with other remarkable objects such as wrecked ships or beached marine mammals.

Afterwards, they could be used as decoration in the officers' mess or as a flower tub in the garden. Naval mines from WWI can still be found in many places as eye-catchers

or decoration. However sinister these old spherical mines with their protuberances may be, they do look the part. And being cast-iron, they are solid in an old-fashioned way. I pass by two such mines almost every day, displayed at the entrance of the Naval Mine Warfare School (EGUERMINE or *Ecole de Guerre des Mines*) in Ostend. I hadn't noticed them until now...

Francis Kerckhof



### Sources

- <http://forumeerstewereldoorlog.nl/viewtopic.php?p=320684&sid=3d4777ae6f8504fbd39d59>



Posing next to a washed up naval mine was very popular. On the left: three German soldiers behind a British Mark 3 naval mine (Forum Eerste Wereldoorlog). On the right: a washed up naval mine in De Panne with young Belgian Prince Charles in Royal Navy uniform. This picture was taken by Belgian Queen Elisabeth in November 1918 (Royal Palace Archives)