

The fort of Peigney

The fort of Peigney was called « Fort Constance Chlore », under the naming system developed by General Boulanger. Constance Chlore (Constantius) was a Roman emperor who defeated the Alemanni at the Battle of Peigney in 301 AD. The fort, initially conceived in 1866, was constructed and completed at the same time as its twin, the fort of the Bonnelle. Although they were not finished, these two forts were operational for the defense of Langres during the war of 1870. However, only the Bonnelle opened fire on an "Uhland" reconnaissance unit of the Prussian army, thus revealing its presence and location, because of the use of black powder by the artillery of that time.

Following this conflict, the military engineers carried out additional works the fort. The works ended on the 18th March 1879. The fort of the Bonnelle would later be extensively overhauled.

Even though it was outmoded from its conception, by recent advances in defensive and field artillery, the fort of Peigney was the only one in France to retain its original configuration. The fact that it was an anachronism in terms of defense, for the period, is part of its charm.

Situated at 2,200 metres from the towers of the cathedral in Langres, the purpose of this fort was to defend the ancient Roman roads to Metz and Basel, as well as the north-south axis defined by the Marne and the Saône. The canal of the same name, and its supply reservoirs, were still in the project stage, as was the rail link. The fort was designed to resist a siege. Its position was determined, as for all other forts, by its altitude, view point and water supply.

The fort of Peigney is a trapezoid, with a 300 metre front facing the enemy, a 450 metre back and two sides of 250 metres (measured at the level of the counterscarp wall). On the front and sides, the fort has an outer defensive bank with bastions (gun platforms), and an inner bank with raised bastions. The built surface area is less than one hectare which encloses a total area of 18 hectares. Note that the officers' barracks facing the guardhouse were constructed after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

On the outer bank, the counterscarp walls were never fully completed and have been used as a quarry for local buildings. There are 4 bastions for infantry and artillery, 10 small shelters for short-range artillery and the rifle gallery for defending the bank, which is at a height of 4.5 metres. The inner defensive bank is 10 metres above the ground level, and contained the raised bastions for the long-range artillery and the infantry responsible for defending the flanks of the drawbridge and curtain walls.

The inner and outer banks are separated by a moat, which is protected at each end, at the opening into the outer ditch by a cofferdam crowned with a "dame". A dame is a cylinder of stone with a pointed top, designed to stop an enemy from walking along the top of a wall. The scarp of this inner moat is a masonry wall about 10 metres high, topped by a parapet surrounding the raised bastion. The part of rampart that is common to the bank and to the inner fortress is topped by a covered

walkway, also called "rifle gallery" an anachronism dating from the Renaissance. Oriented towards the town of Langres, that this fort defended, these 150 metre galleries are separated from the guardhouse by an open section of rampart. They are a unique feature of the fort.

Contrary to the outer moat, the inner moat is protected by rifle galleries where it faces the front of the fort. The galleries on the back exclusively defend the inner moat and 2 large doors leading into it. These doors enabled artillery crews, men, horses and guns to access their positions on the top of the outer bank. These galleries can be considered as caponiers.

You enter the fort by a barbican, of which the gate is offset to the drawbridge. The drop-down drawbridge is now fixed, but the room for the counter-weights remains visible in the guardhouse. Like all major structures built around Langres, including those built later, the entrance gate of the fort is oriented toward the towers of the cathedral. Initially the guardhouse, like those in the other forts, did not have a tiled roof. Beyond is the central axis of the fort, built on an ancient Roman road that is still visible in a small gorge lower down the slope.

Entering the front courtyard of the fort, you see the officers' barracks. This building contains 6 storerooms or workshops, a stable and 8 dormitories, arranged symmetrically around the central corridor. There are vaulted cellars along the entire left hand side of the building, which are accessible via a staircase in the corridor. A large shaft and hook in first storeroom the left, allowed the lowering or raising of goods.

Further along on the left, the second last room is magnificently decorated with biblical verses written in Gothic blackletter characters. The room was used as a chapel for German prisoners interned in the fort at the end of the Second World War.

Matthieu 23:8

Einer ist euer Meister, Christus; ihr aber seid alle Bruder.
Einer ist euer Meister, Christus; ihr aber seid alle Brüder.
Christ only is your master, you are all brothers.

Hébreux 13:8

Jesus Christus gestern und heute und derselbe auch in Ewigkeit.
Jesus Christus gestern und heute und derselbe auch in Ewigkeit.
Jesus Christ yesterday and today is eternal.

The toilets for senior and junior officers are situated to the right at the far end. To the right and left of the courtyard, you see the two powder magazines of the fort, each with a capacity of 30 tonnes.

After passing through the central corridor, you enter the rear courtyard, with the troops' barracks. The upper story is accessible by 2 staircases, one at each end of the barracks. A tunnel permits access to the scarp on the front of the ramparts

surrounding the raised bastion. The central corridor, which separates the 8 dormitories, descends to the inner ditch. Inside you can see a huge water tank resting on solid iron beams. A few metres further down on your right, you will see the edge of a cistern that is fed by gravity from a collector and filter on the flat roof of the barracks (Rouby system?).

At the 2 ends of the barracks there are washrooms, each with a well. That on the left still has the metal shaft of the pump, one of the rare pieces forgotten by scrap merchants and looters.

Monsieur Henri Barby, April 2015

English translation by Monsieur Paul Gallwey