

The WWII German Fuel Depot in the Bois de Pencran (Finistère-FR)

Giancarlo Tiziano Tomezzoli 

Faculté de Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université de la Bretagne Occidentale, Brest, France

Email: gt219490@gmail.com

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Abstract

In this article, after having evoked the population life in the cities of Landerneau and Pencran during the WWII, the hectic moments of the liberation of the cities and the presence of German fuel depots during the period of the Occupation in of west Brittany, it is illustrated the research work to identify the position and the features of a German fuel depot in the area of the Bois of Pencran. The French air reconnaissance images of the years close to the end of the WWII, because of the tree and vegetation coverage the area has not permitted a direct identification of the depot position. But Lidar images of the area have permitted the localization of possible vestiges of the WWII and of a structure, covering about 1 ha, probably corresponding to said depot. The pedestrian survey of the area has not permitted to identify WWII constructions or objects. The hope is that this article will stimulate interested persons to engage in researches concerning the WWII German fuel and ammunition depots in Brittany.

Keywords

WWII, Wehrmacht, Finistère, Landerneau, Pencran, Bois de Pencran, Fuel Depot, Logistics, Conflict Archaeology, Contemporary Archaeology

1. Introduction

A past publication (Tomezzoli, 2018) dealt with the parallel destiny of the Talards and Bouchemaine oil terminals active in Brittany during the period of the WWII France Occupation. Both have failed a complete destruction, but the German effort of rapidly put them back in operation demonstrate the pressing need of fuel supply by the *Wehrmacht*.

Pencran is a small Brittany municipality near Landerneau apparently without a big importance during the WWII.

Close to a forest named Bois de Pencran, its name in Breton language signifies: head of the wood (penn = head, krann = wood). Other significations of its name have also been proposed: high forest, top of the slope ([Commune de Pencran, 2026](#)).

But during the WWII Pencran played an important, silent role as place of an important German fuel depot.

2. Historical Context

The WWII histories of Pencran and Landerneau are closely linked.

The Declaration of war on Germany by Great Brittany and France took place two days after the German invasion of Poland on 1st September 1939. The progress on June 1940 of the German troops in France caused an atmosphere of unease in Brittany.

Starting from the 16th June 1940 artillery pieces were installed in the strategic points of Landerneau. At the invitation of the mayor Jean-Louis Rolland, many inhabitants found refuge during the night in the woods of Pencran, Lech and others. Few authorities remained in the city: the mayor, covering also the charge of French Chamber deputy for the Finistère, the chiefs and personnel of the municipal services, the health personnel and the parish priest. Their duties were to control the city, preventing lootings and providing health and religious assistance to possible injured. The decree on the population evacuation was promptly promulgated ([Le Gall-Sanquer, 2024](#)).

The combat group *Werner* of the *5. Panzer-Division* was the first to arrive in Landerneau on 19th June 1940 at 13:30. It was formed by the 31. *Panzerregiment* of the *Oberst Werner*, the 8. *Aufklärungsbataillon* of the *5. Panzer-Division*, the 1. *Gruppe* of the 116. *Artillerieregiment* and the 89. *Pionierbataillon*. In total, the group comprised more than thousand soldiers provided with tanks, armored cars and guns. The *Oberst Werner* died of a heart attack on 30th June 1940.

The French marine lieutenant Moreau with 150 French soldiers and two 75 mm guns was waiting for the arriving German troops, positioned under a railway bridge at the east entrance of Landerneau. He open fire on 13:30 against the arriving Germans. The Germans replied with the fire of 77 mm and 105 mm guns destroying the Moreau position and causing severe damages to the city. More than 400 bullets were fired causing the death of the lieutenant Moreau, fires and the first deaths ([Floch, 2012](#)). One bullet touched an ambulance of the *Hôpital Complementary de la Marine* in *Calvaire* causing the death of the military pharmacist Quesseveur and the sailor Caro. A young German officer menaced the mayor to destroy the city in case of German losses. The mayor asked the permission to extinguish the fire of the hostel of Grand Turk ([Le Gall-Sanquer, 2024](#)).

The Germans entered Landerneau at 16:30 and leaved it at about 17:15 in the direction of Brest, after having resupply and hoisted the swastika flag on the Elorn quay. Mr Moreul, in charge of the control of the inhabited Pont de Rohan on the Elorn, assumed the care of the injureds.

The population progressively abandoned the refuges and returned home (Floch, 2012; Le Gall-Sanquer, 2024).

Landerneau was an important point for the military system of the *Wehrmacht* in west Brittany. It is positioned at only 20 km from Brest and about 20 km from the Brittany north coast. Pencran is located about 5 km south-east from Landerneau (Figure 1).

The Kermadec manor or Pencran manor or Chef du Bois, property of the French colonel Rosmorduc, provided lodgement for a lot of German officers during the Occupation period.

The population suffered because of the city lodgement of many German soldiers and the imposed rationing of alimentation stuff due to German confiscations. Ration cards were rapidly printed and distributed to the population.

The shortage of food and other goods caused the emergence of the black market, which led to the enrichment of a few persons and to form a network of collaborators with the Germans for the procurement of said goods (Floch, 2012; Le Gall-Sanquer, 2024).

The *Flak-Brigade Veith - Funkkompanie* (unity L37 066 Fu) stationed in Pencran from 18th July 1940 to 13th August 1940. A cantonment of the *25. Luftgau Kompanie* of the *1. Nachrichten Regiment* (unity L42 432) was present in Pencran - Voas Glas on May 1941.

The headquarters of the *343. Infanterie Division* (Unity 00 384) was installed at the Kerlezerien castle in Landerneau (Tomezzoli, 2013), the Cadeville Manor southwest of Landerneau, rue de Quimper, and the Pencran Manor under the orders of the *Genrralleutnant* Zickwolff (1893-1943), who died in a car accident on 19th September 1943. The *Generalmajor* Kruse (1887-1962) replaced him on 1st February 1944. The last commander of the *Division* was the *Generalleutnant* Rauch (1889-1969).

An officer and six soldiers of the *Nachrichten-Abteilung* 343 were in place at Croix de Pencran (Floch, 2012).

Landerneau was never bombed by the Allied notwithstanding its position close to Brest. But with the intensification of the WWII the curfew was imposed, refuges were built in the city and air alarms became more and more frequent (Le Gall-Sanquer, 2024).

Groups of resistants formed in Landerneau starting from January 1943: the group Lambert founded by Marcel Briand and Henri Lambert former soldiers of the French 48th *Régiment d'Infanterie*, the *Organisation de la Résistance de l'Armée* (O.R.A.) local group and other. The search of equipment began with the thefts in quarries to collect explosives for preparing future sabotages. Boots and weapons were stolen elsewhere for the training of recruits.

Beginning of 1943 the resistants started a wave of attack against officials, members of nationalist parties and German collaborators, culminated in the Finistère by twelve attacks and the elimination of the abbot Jean-Marie Perrot (Le Gall-Sanquer, 2024).

One of the first sabotages was carried out on the dough elevator at the Grande Palud bakery, which produced bread for the *Kriegsmarine*.

Resistants carried out a sabotage on the Landerneau - Quimper line. They used *SNCF* (*Société nationale des chemins de fer français*) wrenches to unbolt fish-plates and sleepers. The operation took 45 minutes, after which the resistants dispersed; some of them spent the night in the Bois de Pencran. On 5th December, at around 00:30 o'clock, the *PV Q14* train derailed, with two locomotives and two wagons out line. The line remained closed for a day and a half.

The Lambert group, under the leadership of Jean Sizorn, carried out another sabotage between Landerneau and Dirinon, causing, on 19th December 1943 around 4:30 o'clock, a locomotive and a wagon coming from Brest to derail.

The Lambert group executed two other railway sabotages on 18th February 1944 and on 27th February 1944, on the line between Landerneau and Dirinon, followed by a further sabotage on 16th March 1944 at Quimerc'h. Other sabotages by him in the Landerneau area concerned electricity pylons and radio masts (Dourdon & Priol, 2025).

These actions caused revenge and inhabitants of Landerneau were killed or sent to the concentration camps (Priol, 2020).

During the first half of 1944, Mathieu Donnart and Jean Le Bras taken the initiative of constituting in Landerneau the nucleus of a *FFI* (*Forces françaises de l'intérieur*) combat unit. The recruitment of resistants proceeded well with the top priority of the utmost discretion because of the arrival in April 1944 in the city of the German *Kommando* Landerneau in charge to combat resistants. At the beginning only site surveys and reconnaissance actions were executed in preparation for future operations (Priol, 2020).

The German *Kommando* Landerneau or *Kommando* Schaad (*IC 343*) was founded on 17th April 1944 in Landerneau under the control of the 343. *Infanterie Division*. It was composed at the beginning by twenty German agents and ten Breton agents in the majority Breton nationalists. Its action range extended across the whole Finistère. Formally at the orders of *Leutnant* Krüger, actually it was directed by the *Feldwebel* Schaad attached as interpreter to the 343. *Infanterie Division* and to the *Kommando*. The actions of the *Kommando* were rather violent both during the interrogation of the prisoners and during the military actions (Le Gall-Sanquer, 2024).

The available weapons stock of the *FFI* Donnart - Le Bras unit was inadequate for combats in preparation of the arrival of the advancing American troops. The solution arrived at the end of July 1944 together with the Horace team of the inter-Allied Jedburgh mission.

In the night of 17th - 18th July 1944 the members of the Horace team, comprising two Americans and a Frenchman, were parachuted in the central Finistère. They take contact with the *FFI* in the Brest area at the end of July and organised parachuting zones for supply the *FFI* with weapons and materials.

A large-scale operation was planned to provide various *FFI* groups operating in

the Brest area with weapons. The intended purpose was to cause a general uprising some days before the arrival of American troops. In the Landerneau area (**Figure 1**), the *FFI* selected a drop zone near Pencran, close to the Saint-Urbain firing range, codenamed Uranie. Uranie was scheduled to receive weapons containers during the night between 2nd and 3rd August 1944. But during the day, German troops were remarked in the Uranie vicinity causing the Horace team to radio requesting the abort of the drop. The request for a new drop sent the day after received no reply.

Without weapons, the unit dispersed into the nearby area, attempting to join other combat units already formed participating in the liberation of Sizun. Some *FFI* groups remained in Landerneau, able only to watch the combats, other hid in the woods around Landerneau (Priol, 2020; Le Gall-Sanquer, 2024).

The documents in the Landerneau Archives allow for a reconstruction of the hectic moments of the liberation of the city.

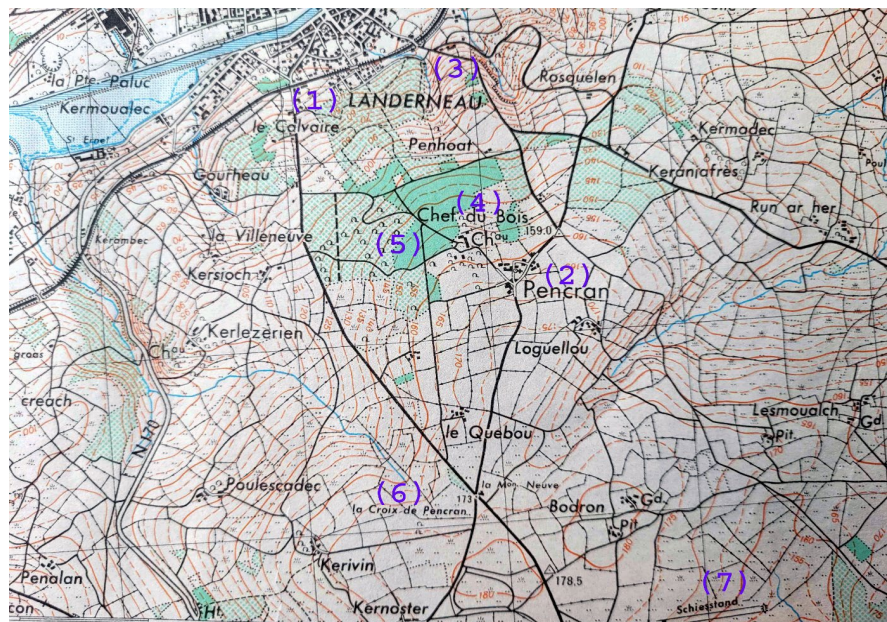


Figure 1. Pencran area - (1) Landerneau city; (2) Pencran; (3) Pencran Voas Glas; (4) Pencran Manor - Chef du Bois; (5) Bois de Pencran; (6) La Croix de Pencran; (7) Saint Urbain firing range - Uranie (Deutsche Heereskarte, 1943).

On 4th August 1944 the BBC announced a parachuting drop with the message: “Uranie is not pretty” in which twelve French soldiers were parachuted in the nearby Daoulas Valley. On 5th August the *Wehrmacht* start its retreat from Landerneau toward Brest, flown over by American planes. The principal city workshops interrupted work and all the house doors remained closed. The paratrooper of the *FFL* (*Forces Françaises Libres*) guided by groups of *FFI* reached Daoulas and the Landerneau-Quimper telephone cable was cut in the locality Saint-Urbain. The Landerneau mayor and the administrative authorities called on the population to remain calm. On 6th August the *Wehrmacht* and the *Kommandatur*

evacuated the city abandoning premises and supplies. The *General* Ramke and his parachutists imposed the state of siege and many families abandoned Landerneau. In the evening, the BBC announcement “Capture of Brest by the American army” brought jubilant peoples into the streets. In response, the Germans menaced to bombard the city. The mayor intervened again calling on the population to remain calm. On 7th August weary German troops continued to cross Landerneau. The population was confined to home, and all the shutters had to be closed up to 7:00 o’clock. A tank was placed on the quay opposite the Commissariat, guns and machine guns were placed at each crossroad. The Germans engaged in looting, while the American troops of the 6th Armoured Division were moving to the North on the roads from Plounéventer to Saint Éloi. On 8th August, menacing German soldiers were still looting and collected bicycles. The vehicle circulation was interrupted. The circulation of the *Passive Defence* vehicles was also interrupted. As the consequence of the evacuation, few Germans remained in Landerneau. On 9th August, the remained Germans imposed the ban of exit homes until 11:00 o’clock, so as to be able to live the city starting from 9:00 o’clock. While eight French planes circled over Landerneau, the mayor diffused a decree prohibiting to the population the looting of German installations. At 19:30 o’clock twenty-three American flying fortresses crossed the sky, while eleven French soldiers, led by a lieutenant, and four resistants take possession of the city. Arrived on a small van, they don’t see a German car and a motorcycle venturing back toward the Central Office. At 20:30 o’clock the police station was occupied by resistants, whose leaders established their headquarters at the Javel factory. During the night a German detachment of about 300 soldiers directed from Sizun to Brest crossed Landerneau. On 10th August the *FFI* occupied the Taylor barrack. At 10:00 o’clock a jeep with a British and some Americans soldiers arrived in Landerneau. A group of fifteen German soldiers attempted an attack from Brest towards Quimper, but were blocked at the wooden bridge crossing the Elorn. After the clash, they were rejected to the Allée de Peranrue. A paratrooper corporal and an *FFI* resistant were killed, and two German prisoners were taken to the Javel factory. During the evening a small American convoy directed to Lesneven crossed Landerneau.

The day after the German evacuation, in the evening of 9th August and during the 10th August 1944, a German incursion ran up against *FFI* resistants and Special Air Service (SAS) paratroopers. On 25th August, many bullets fell on Landerneau causing four dead at La Palud and four other injured, one of them dead later because of his wounds.

On 12th August, resistants occupied the City Hall to welcome the Allies. An American contingent arrived in Landerneau at 16:00 o’clock. Allied flags were flown up to the tops of the bell towers. A French and an American officer waved population and soldiers from the window of the City Hall (*Archives & Patrimoine(s) de Landerneau*, 1948, 1974; Priol, 2020).

Landerneau was liberated between 8th and 12th August 1944.

Pencran was liberated on 20th August 1944 (Floch, 2012).

3. The German Military Fuel Depots in West Brittany

Soon after the France invasion in 1940, the *Wehrmacht* identified several large forest sites as possible military supply bases because of their good hiding against Allied air reconnaissance and easy access to communication roads. Responsible for defense of the north-west France was the 7. *Armee* having headquarters and a supply and logistics chain in Le Mans. The supply chain from Le Mans extended west into Brittany via Laval, Vitré, and Rennes. During the Allied invasion of Normandy, in June 1944, the 7. *Armee* supply facilities hosted relevant quantities of materials: about 4318 m³ of fuel, 18,738 tonnes of ammunitions, and 11,500 tonnes of victuals. Following the *Führer Directive* 51 in November 1943, regional forests areas were transformed into military supply bases. **Table 1** (Passmore et al., 2013) and **Table 2** (Passmore et al., 2014) mention a fuel depot in the Bois de Pencran without indicating its position. **Table 1** and **Table 2** indicate also some other fuel and munition depots in Brittany possible subjects of further studies.

Table 1. 7. Armee fuel depots in Brittany.

N.	Forest	Locality	Code	Petrol (m ³)	%	Diesel (m ³)	%	Total (m ³)	%
1	Guerche	Guerche	Bruno	866	24.7	110	13.6	976	22.6
2	Branguily	Pontivy	Brigitte	450	12.8	50	6.2	500	11.6
5	Bois de Pencran	Landerneau	n/a	222	6.3	73	9.0	295	6.8
8	n/a	Rennes	n/a	122	3.5	31	3.8	153	3.5
15	n/a	Lamballe	n/a	2	0.1	40	4.9	42	1.0
16	n/a	Quimper	n/a	15	0.4	14	1.7	29	0.7

Table 2. Fuel (F) and Munition (M) storages in Brittany.

N.	Forest	Locality	Code	Type	Survey	Image
1	Guerche	Guerche	Bruno	F/M	Partial	C1316-0011_1949
3	Branguily	Pontivy	Brigitte	n/a	Partial	C1218-0121_1952
4	Bois de Pencran	Landerneau	n/a	F	None	C0816-0031_1952
12	Domaniale Rennes	Liffré	Maria	M	None	C1218-0121_1952
13	Quenecan	Mur de Br.	Manfred	M	None	C0319-0051_1952
14	Domaniale Rennes	Rennes	Moritz	M	None	C1218-0121_1952

The image C0816-0031_1952 was requested to the *Institut national de l'information géographique et forestière (IGN)*, but in the reply the IGN informed me that said image was withdrawn from the image collection because of the presence of a nearby French military base.

4. The German Military Fuel Depot in Bois de Pencran

Figure 2 shows the Bois de Pencran on a French air reconnaissance image of 24th May 1951. In **Figure 2**, the position of the Pencran Manor (2) is clearly distinguishable with respect to the trees and vegetation coverage of the Bois de Pencran (1). The position of the fuel depot (3) is not immediately recognizable because of said coverage. This situation suggested the examination of Lidar images (**Figure 3**, **Figure 4**) of the actual Bois de Pencran, in the hope that possible WWII vestiges have been preserved. The Lidar images at ground level, obtained via [Géoportail \(2026\)](#), permitted the elimination of said coverage and made evident WWII vestiges. In particular, they permitted the identification of a possible 1st and a 2nd bombed zone and a structure (3) probably corresponding to the German fuel depot.



Figure 2. Bois de Pencran area - (1) Bois de Pencran; (2) Pencran Manor; (3) emplacement of the structure surface. (IGNF_PVA_1-0_1951-05-24_C0516-0101_1951_CDP3601_0873).

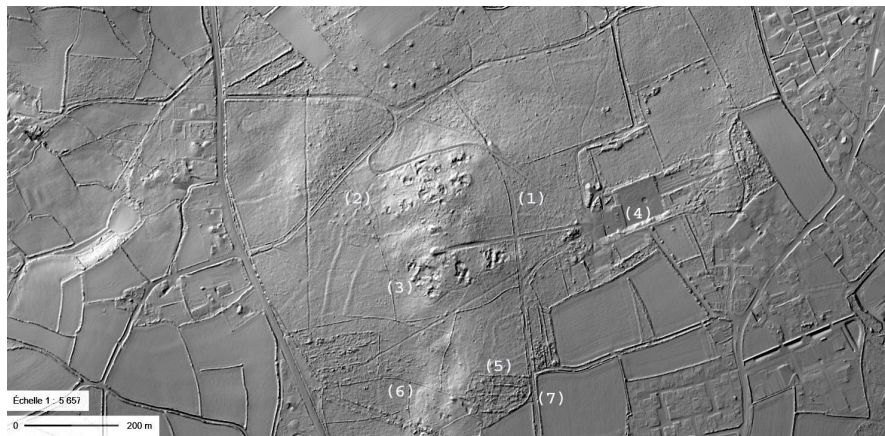


Figure 3. Bois de Pencran area, Lidar image - (1) Bois de Pencran; (2) possible 1st bombed zone; (3) possible 2nd bombed zone; (4) Pencran manor; (5) structure surface; (6) access path; (7) access road ([Géoportail, 2026](#) - air image: 10/06/2024).

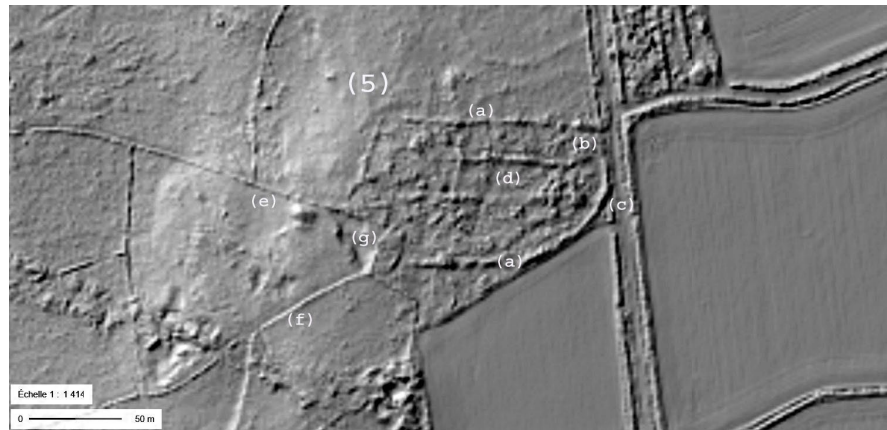
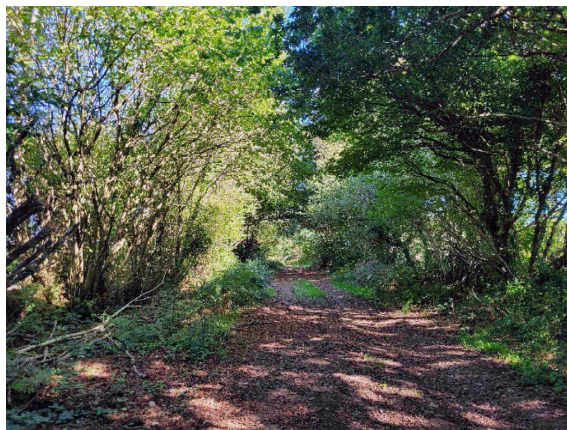


Figure 4. Bois de Pencran German fuel depot - (a) protection wall; (b) main entrance; (c) access road; (d) construction; (e) (f) access path, (g) access place (Géoportail, 2026 - air image: 10/06/2024, resolution 20 cm).

5. The Visit

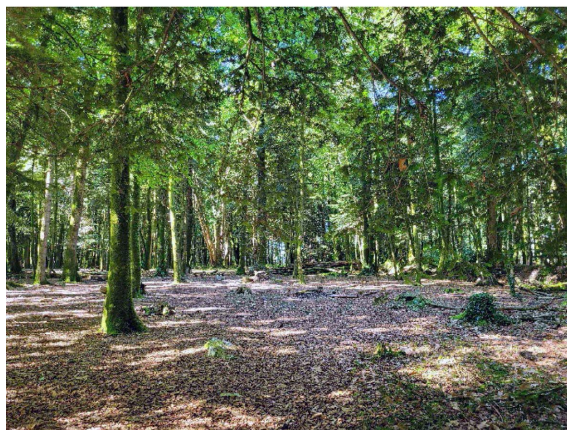
The visit on the terrain of the structure took place in the morning of 12/09/2026. The identified vestiges (Figure 5) were the following:



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Figure 5. Bois de Pencran German fuel depot - (a) access road; (b) main entrance; (c) depot surface; (d) Pencran manor.

- an access road (c) (48°26'5.64"N, 4°14'28.31"W, height 169.26): it is about 2 - 3 m large, covered by mood;
- a main entrance (b) (48°26'7.36"N, 4°14'28.9"W, h. 169.41): obstructed by stones, identified after several attempts walking along the access road;
- a structure surface (5) (48°26'6.68"N, 4°14'32.18"W, h. 166.52): the trees let free consistent open spaces of ground. The surface inspection has revealed no traces of a possible construction (d);
- the Pencran manor (4) (48°26'18.53"N, 4°14'19.45"W, h. 154.91): is located in a private terrain, so that its visit was not possible; its domain comprises the cadastral parcels 124, 159, 170 on the Carte de l'Etat-major of 1820-1866;
- a possible 1st bombed zones (2) (48°26'21.07"N, 4°14'38.17"W, h. 142.7): the thick vegetation prevented access;
- a possible 2nd bombed zones (3) (48°26'15.33"N, 4°14'36.29"W, h. 158.44): the thick vegetation prevented access.

6. Discussion

Assuming that the structure (5) corresponds to the German fuel depot, it is possible to develop several considerations.

The fuel depot constructors were workers of the *Organisation Todt (O.T.)* and the *Service du Travail Obligatoire (STO)*.

Figure 2, Figure 3 show a structure (5) probably corresponding to the fuel depot. The structure appears to have been encircled by a protection wall comprising a main entrance (b) on an access road (c) adapted to the circulation of vehicles and cistern vehicles. Two paths (e) (f) permitted the access to the structure through the Bois de Pencran. The structure measures 132 m as mayor axis and 74 m as minor axis for a total surface of 9430 m² corresponding to 0.943 ha measured with the "Mésurer une surface" tool of Géoportail which take into account the exact perimeter of the depot. At the interior of the wall was present a possible construction (d) of about 70 × 18 m, probably made by a simple wood palisade, or a concrete wall or a ground wall. Possible surveillance emplacements along the protection wall are not visible. Possible *Flak* and machine gun emplacements inside or outside the structure surface are not visible. Possible lodgement barracks on the structure surface or outside are not visible, therefore, it is possible that the depot personnel were lodged in the Pencran manor distant about 500 m from the structure.

Figure 3, Figure 4 show in the Bois de Pencran a possible 1st bombed zone (2) formed by two parallel lines of craters oriented north-est - south-west and the 2nd bombed zone (3) formed by a line of craters having the same orientation. These, possible craters could have been produced by allied bombers having discharged their bombs because of either flight technical problems or bad weather or produced by the fire of the German artillery in Brest against the advancing American troops.

The poor trees coverage of the structure in the image of 1951 (**Figure 2**), indi-

cates a similar poor coverage in the WWII years of the fuel depot activity, suggesting that the depot was probably masked by camouflage nets.

The absence of cisterns emplacements let to think that the fuel was stored in barrels and canisters. The barrels and canisters were deposited and load on trucks or cisterns trucks circulating around the construction.

The narrow access road, surprisingly, was not enlarged for allowing the passage of two trucks side by side in opposite directions.

The depot likely supplied in fuel, toward the end of the WWII, the vehicles of various German unities in Brest - Landerneau area: the 2. *Fallschirmjäger-Division*, the 343. *Infanterie-Division*, the *Kommando IC 343*.

Another, important fuel depot was the *Stp Ölberg*, coded B 105, at the Maison Blanche - Brest for the fuel supply of the U-Bootes and Kriegsmarine surface ships.

Two Pencran residents declared of not be aware of a nearby presence of German military bases, bunkers, and fuel depots.

7. Conclusion

It is rather probable that the structure discovered by the Lidar image of the Bois de Pencran corresponds well to the searched German 7. *Armee* fuel depot. But the visit on the terrain of the structure has provide no decisive evidence.

The unknown presence of the structure by the Pencran residents and its trees and vegetation coverage by the Bois de Pencran ensures, at the moment, its preservation against clandestine excavations and extensions of cultivated areas.

However, as usual in this kind of archaeological searches, many inquiries ask for replies: the construction phases of the structure, its possible upgrades, the organisation of the electricity food and water supply, the identity of the commanders, the military unit/s in service at the depot, the number of servants, the units supplied with fuel and the possible missions accomplished by the structure.

The hope is that this article will stimulate further researches on the German fuel and ammunition depots and form the basis for a more certain legal protection frame and cultural recovery of WWII German vestiges in Brittany.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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