

TV dig goes on the defensive

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By Dan Frost

WHAT would have happened if Hitler had invaded the UK?

How would London have defended itself if German Panzer tanks had been rolling up Shooters Hill from the coast?

These are the questions that Channel 4's Time Team sought to answer when they visited the area last summer, and the exciting results of their excavations will be shown on TV on Sunday evening.



Time Team Investigators

Magnus Andersson/28283/1

Speaking to The Mercury during the dig, Time Team researcher Ben Knappett said: *"This is 'stop line central'. If this had not worked the Germans would have taken London."*

He was referring to a network of land defences around Shooters Hill that would have been thrown into action in the event of a German invasion.

"We are basically trying to imagine what would have happened if Operation Sealion [a German plan to invade the UK] had gone ahead and the German Panzer tanks had rolled into London," he said.

"Shooters Hill was the main route into London - the A2 didn't exist - so we are looking at the lines of defence that were in place to slow the enemy attack down and give our boys a chance to regroup, and for our navy to come back and cut supply routes."

Among the discoveries were the remains of a concrete gun emplacement for a spigot mortar, which the Home Guard would have fired at the advancing tanks.

They also looked at a former pillbox on the site of the memorial hospital on Shooters Hill.

Like many set up all over the area, such buildings were disguised as everyday shops - the team believe this one was an off-licence - but would have sprung into life as defensive outposts.

The visiting archaeologists also spoke to many members of the public, some of whom lived through the war and others who were involved in the Shooters Hill defences.

- The Time Team programme was shown on Channel 4, Sunday 10 February 2008

Also see http://www.channel4.com/video/time-team/series-15/episode-8/shooters-hill_p_1.html

and http://www.channel4.com/video/time-team/series-15/episode-8/shell-shelter_p_1.html