

THE KENLEY RIFLE RANGE

Here airmen and infantry, who defended the airfield, practiced their shooting skills.

STAND BACK from the low (30cm tall) concrete wall in front of you **AS THE GROUND DROPS 2.5 METRES THE OTHER SIDE** to see the impressive brick wall of the rifle range some 25m away. This brick wall is an essential safety feature designed to catch stray bullets that completely miss their target.

Those shooting here fired from this end, beneath a tin covered wooden awning, towards targets fixed to two parallel concrete walls in front of the brick wall that forms the back of the firing range. These two concrete walls and the hollow that once lay between them are now largely buried by sand but you can still see some metal fixings on their inside faces where the targets were attached - as shown below.



The brick wall facing us has two surviving revetments, or supporting walls, at right angles to it which also help enclose sand placed here to catch bullets fired at the targets. Originally a small brick building stood on the left where people could shelter close to the back of the range protected from bullet ricochets by an angled concrete wall (now demolished).

The date the range was completed was scratched in wet mortar "29-6-28" but this is now buried. The brick wall at the far end of the firing range is in good condition for its age although the bricks facing you have suffered some damage from weathering and bullets.



Pock marks and holes made by different calibre bullets.



This wall separates the range from the airfield. Airmen fired from its base, beneath cover, towards their targets.



Front (east side) of the main brick wall.



Back (west side) of the main brick wall.



The airmen shown are using pistols in a range very similar to Kenley.



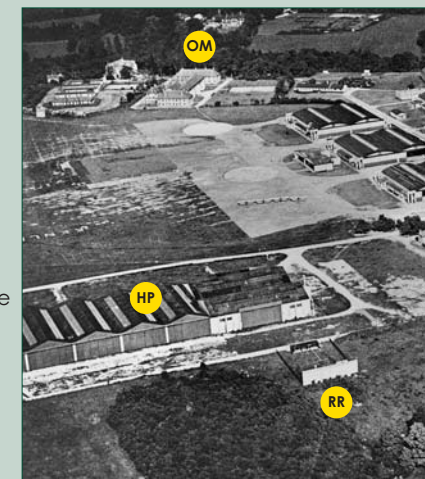
Illustration of Kenley rifle range looking east.

Ground Defence Training

All airmen had to complete ground defence training annually. They drew Lee Enfield .303 rifles from the Station Armoury and were issued with 25 rounds (bullets) of ammunition in clips of five. The airmen fired at cardboard targets using one set of five from three positions: prone (lying down), kneeling and standing. Each airman then fired from the position he chose for the remaining ten rounds, hoping to get five holes in a 2-inch (51mm) diameter circle to earn his marksman's badge.

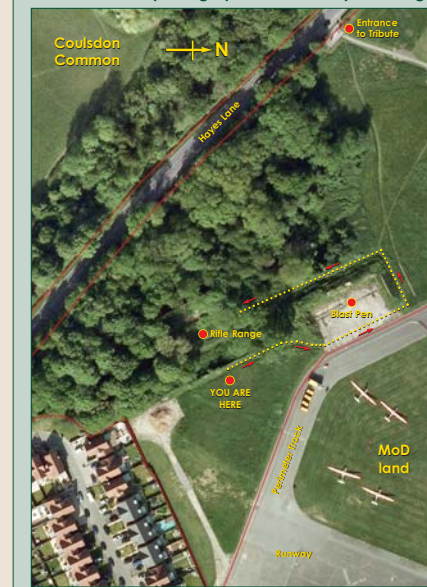
Target practice also included firing a pistol, Sten and Bren guns. All of this would take place under the watchful eye of a Non Commissioned Officer of the RAF Regiment.

You can see the lean-to shelter and the back of the main brick wall of the rifle range (RR) in this aerial photograph taken about 1931/32. Beyond the range lies the concrete wall that separates it from the Handley Page aircraft sheds (HP), demolished about this date, and the newly built Officers Mess (OM) that still stands today. Notice that the rifle range was built on open land near the edge of an ancient wood on its north side.



Kenley Airfield showing position of the Rifle Range.

Modern aerial photograph of the Kenley rifle range



1940's aerial photograph of the Kenley rifle range



You can approach the rifle range on level paths by following the perimeter track clockwise, to the far end of the next blast pen, walk round to its back and return southwards to stand in the range itself.



This board forms part of the Kenley Heritage Trail created and funded by a partnership between the City of London Corporation, Kenley Airfield Friends Group and Tandridge District Council.