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Base Sous-Marine BETASOM

France

Boulevard Alfred Daney
Nouvelle-Aquitaine (Région), Gironde
(Département) Country: France (FR) 51100
Bordeaux

Commission

1941

Completion

1944

Original name

Base Sous-Marine

Original use

Military/naval base

Current use

Culture/leisure/tourism / Cultural Center

Engineers

Fritz Todt, founder and main OT executive,
Organisation Todt (OT) – civil and military
engineering organisation in Nazi Germany, Third
Reich

Concrete by reinforcement

Reinforced concrete

Construction method

Cast-in-place concrete, in-situ concrete

Architectural concrete

Architectural concrete

Structural types

One-dimensional/concrete frame

Description

Under the German occupation during the Second World War, the Atlantic ports of France became strategic enclaves for the defense of continental Europe against a possible Allied attack from England. The port of Bordeaux was one of five submarine bases constructed in a record time, run by a mixed organ of military and civil engineers, who played a key role in the construction of large-scale infrastructures for the Third Reich. It was called was the Todt Organization (OT) and, in 1944, it managed more than 1,400,000 workers under conditions of forced labor, prisoners of war, and detainees from occupied countries.

This gigantic bunker, able to stand up to air raids, is colossal in size: 245 meters long, 162 meters wide, and 20 meters high. It consists of 11 independent bays linked by an interior road and is located on the water's edge, on one of the docks of the Garonne River, about 100 km from the Bay of Biscay, which can be reached via the Gironde estuary. The 3.5-meter-thick concrete walls were covered by a second 2.1-meter-thick shell made of the same material, in order to withstand the increasing power of the allied bombs. A third reinforcement, using a system called frangos – a framework of concrete beams on the roof that was meant to absorb the impact of bombs – was never completed. In total, more than 600,000 m³ of concrete were used in its construction. The base was evacuated at the end of August 1944 and occupied by the Free French Forces on the 26th of that same month. The final submarines had left port just two days before. Today, the space, essentially intact, is used as a cultural center while preserving its original appearance. A variety of concerts, exhibitions and art installations are programmed there, occupying just a third of the complex; the remaining space is still waiting to be filled.

Links

[In Situ](#)