



## The Evacuation Project

# The Rail Gun at the KESR

During World War II, two **Rail-Mounted Guns** were located at Wittersham Road Station in one of the Goods Yard Sidings and at Rolvenden Station. Today, the only evidence remaining of either gun is the Ammunition Store and the Gun Crew Shelter, both of which have been preserved in their original condition at Tenterden. The only other surviving memento is a kitchen knife presented by an army cook to Platelayer Arthur Smith. This may be seen in the Colonel Stephens Museum at Tenterden.

**Historical facts** about the guns are scarce and photographs rarer still.

The gun which was based at Wittersham Road from 10th February 1941 until 8th August 1944 weighed almost 86 tons, and was mounted on a six-wheeled bogie vehicle. It was an ex-Royal Navy gun from the First World War, and had its own engine. It fired 380 pound (172.37kg) **High Explosive Shells**, filled with 40 pounds (18.14kg) of Lyddite or Amatol explosive. Once ready for firing, the gun was secured to the rails by means of chains and clamps.

The **Gunnery Officers** were billeted in local houses with an HQ at Wassal Court, Rolvenden. The **troops** had to make do with being housed in a special train converted from French ferry vans which contained bunks and cookhouse facilities.

**Practice firing** caused more **damage** to the Railway than **enemy action** ever did, mainly due to the **shock waves** caused by each explosion. On 3rd and 5th May 1941, Wittersham Road Station building and bungalow sustained damage to the tune of £37.00. On 3rd May 1941, the gun at Rolvenden caused damage to the Station Building, lifted the roof off the engine shed, demolished a nearby platelayers hut and also caused damage to some carriages and wagons! This amounted to £171.00 worth of repairs. These may not seem to be large sums of money, but the total bill for the damage in today's money would be around £4,450. The **Army** paid the railway for the damage, as well as for supplying water and transporting supplies.

The guns had a **range** of around 14 miles. As the coast of France was over 30 miles away the guns could only have shot a shell a third of the way across the English Channel. *You might like to think about why the guns were put on the railway in the first place!*

