Magiczny Kraków

New plant monument to an American bomber

2022-11-27

Kraków decided on an unusual way of commemorating the history of the US Fifteenth Air Force Boeing B-17G ‘Kandie’ – a ten-man, four-engine strategic bomber that made a crash-landing near Fort 52 in Borek Fałęcki in 1944. A special installation presenting the silhouette of the U.S. bomber was put in the revitalised park.

‘A silhouette planted with geranium, the silhouette of the big B-17 tail that will be overgrown with climbing plants. An unusual monument – not of bronze or stone, but, we can say, of plants and of the human memory of the ten boys who landed here on the second day of Christmas 1944,’ says Krzysztof Wielgus, PhD, from the Commission of Military Architecture of the Polish National Committee ICOMOS.

On 26th December 1944, the huge U.S. B-17G Flying Fortress was forced to make a crash landing after a German anti-aircraft battery scored a direct hit on an engine. Pilot Harry Filer safely landed the damaged aircraft in the field in front of Fort 52 ‘Borek’. The crew luckily survived the landing, but they were taken captive by the Germans and returned to the USA only after the war.

Struck by a German Flak over the synthetic fuels plant at Blechhammer (today’s Kędzierzyn-Koźle), this aircraft took part in the strategic bombing campaign to destroy German fuel plants in Silesia. Thanks to the co-operation of the intelligence of the Home Army, the 15th Air Force carried out 16 large air raids on German petrol production installations from July 1944 till January 1945. As a result of these operations, the German ‘fuel tap’ was eventually turned off.

As you may remember, the park near Fort Borek was officially opened as a more resident-friendly space. The green area around the former artillery Fort 52 ‘Borek’ being a part of the Kraków Fortress was to fulfil a camouflage function by hiding this crucial structure from the eyes of the potential enemy. For many years after the structure ceased to serve military purposes, the forest around the fort was accessible to inhabitants, but the area lacked recreational infrastructure, e.g., marked paths or benches to rest on.

The space full of green and signs of history acquired a new revitalised shape. As a result of works carried out there by the City Green Administration, alleys with two different kinds of surface – the mineral (gravel) surface and the concrete surface with exposed aggregate – were built. A path of deck grating appeared in designated areas. The park has been equipped with lighting, benches and dustbins. New shrubs and perennials have been planted there.