Magiczny Kraków

Historical value

2022-12-06

Kraków forts and back-up structures were erected over the course of almost seven decades in the 19th and 20th centuries. Their construction incorporated various technologies, they were adapted to various kinds of armament and emplaced so as to protect Kraków effectively against potential enemies of the Habsburg Empire.

Although the Kraków forts were built by the occupier, their function was not to enslave Kraków. Their task was to fulfil a military role and to defend the city. Most of the forts did not prove effective in battles, but, as the Kraków Fortress, they allowed for manoeuvres of Austrian–Hungarian and German troops and the Polish Legion troops that ended in two victorious battles of Kraków in 1914. The first battle in defence of the fortress was fought on the northern bank of the Vistula in the second half of November, whereas the second one was fought in the southern bank at the beginning of December. Firing sometimes from the forts and sometimes being moved nearer the battlefield, the fortress artillery supported troops repulsing assaults of Russian troops. The garrison of the Kraków Fortress counter-attacked, and the halting of the Russian offensive in the autumn of 1914 changed the course of the war on the Eastern front.

The Kraków Fortress had more luck during the war than the Przemyśl Fortress, which was encircled twice and, after an almost half-year siege, surrendered on 22nd March 1915. Before the Przemyśl Fortress capitulated, everything in it that could be of any use to the Russians was destroyed or damaged. The Kraków Fortress did not have such dramatic experiences, and many of its forts and buildings from the times of Austro-Hungarian monarchy still exist. Many of them teem with normal life because they have been adapted for new purposes. In many forts, visitors can cross the thresholds that, with a little imagination and by means of exhibitions and details present there, can take them back to the world of the 19th-century *belle epoque* – the period in which the approaching 20th century took shape and the modern 21st-century world, in which we live and which still draws upon the ideas and inventions of the 19th century, was emerging.

The Kraków Fortress can also be regarded as the cradle of Polish independence. It was from Kraków that the 1st Cadre Company set out to fight for a free and independent Poland. Kraków was also the place where further Legion troops were formed and where Polish independence politicians were active before and during the war. Kraków was the first big city wrenched from the invaders' hands on 31st October 1918; it was where the cadre of the resurrected Polish Army was formed, where soldiers returning from fronts gathered and where new troops were established and equipped on the basis of resources stocked in the fortress.

The Kraków Fortress is a unique engineering heritage – one huge complex of defensive military and industrial architecture. Apart from defensive buildings, such as forts, it contains also numerous monuments of technology: monuments of civil engineering (roads and bridges), rail (Kraków railway stations, viaducts and infrastructure), aviation (the Museum of Polish Aviation and the hangar in Czyżyny – the Museum of Municipal Engineering) and industry (former factory complexes and quarries

and the Nowa Huta district built after World War II). Many former fortress buildings teem with normal life today and have found their new use.