

Torun - "Thorn" - Poland

The city of Torun was founded in 1231 by Polish Knights. In 1264, the Knights further built the city and then on a hill between the two rivers, the Struga and the Wisla, they built a battlement with walls and moat for the protection and safety of the town. The castle was destroyed in the war of 1454.

Over the years the battlements had additions built and improvements made, but only on a small scale. In 1655, the Swedish occupied Torun, and rebuilt the battlements, in a stronger and more modern version. Over the next 100 years, the battlements deteriorated, until the Prussians occupied Torun in 1703, and then started to build a new, strong fortress which was successful in protecting the city from many attacks.

In 1815, Torun was given to Prussia at the Vienna Conference. The Prussian border was located about 10 kilometres west of Torun. When Prussia was given the city, work was started immediately to rebuild the old fortress.

When the railway between Bydgosz and Warsaw was built, more forts were built around the city, and older one relocated to further protect the city. A railway station was located in a new fort, specifically built for the protection of the railway in 1863.

Between 1878 and 1892, 7 main forts and 6 secondary forts housing 84 bunkers for soldiers and ammunition were built. These forts were built around the city limits with underground tunnels and roads linking the forts. Some of the forts housed 500 to 600 people.

The forts were used during World War 1, by the Poles. After W.W.1 the forts were used for storage and as Army Barracks.

In 1939, the beginning of World War 2, the forts were not used for military reasons, until the Germans took over the forts and used Forts 7 - 8 and 9 as POW camps for the people of Torun and surrounding towns. Fort 7 was used for executions, and part of it is today called the "Wall of Death".

Fort 11 was used for British P.O.Ws. To this day, you can find writing on the remaining walls of the fort, put there by British Soldiers.

Fort 12 was used for Russian POWs, and in the nearby forest, the dead were taken to be buried.

In 1944, during the German occupation, the Germans strengthened the fort walls with concrete and built more concrete bunkers, 12 km from the centre of Torun and also in the forest. About 8 km from the centre, they built a wide ditch surrounding

the city, which was to protect the city from tanks. This was part of the German concept to close off the city to better protect it from outside attack.

In February 1945, the Russian and Polish army overthrew the Germans and Turon once again came under Polish ownership.

After the war, the Polish began to demolish some of the forts and bunkers. Forts 2 - 4 and 6 remained, and they are used as factories under the Polish Government. The forts are now located outside the perimeter of the town, and some are used as homes for the town's people. One fort remains the central railway station of Turon, which is underground. Some parts of the forts are still used as army barracks. Other forts are warehouses and hold imported wines in the cellars.

From the original 84 bunkers, 20 have been destroyed, 10 are still standing unused, and 54 are used for storage by the surrounding factories or as workrooms.