



PRZEMYŚL

THE MOLOTOV LINE



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The interior of the combat bunker
at Marszałka J. Piłsudskiego Street



www.przemysl.pl



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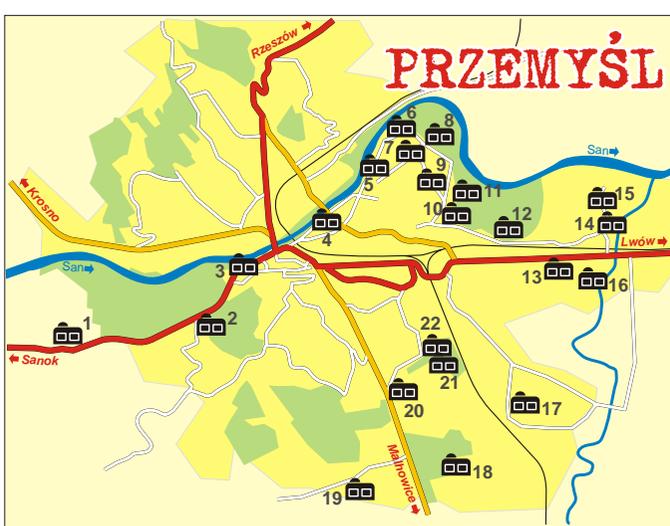
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The Molotov Line sites in Przemysł I:

1. Ruins of the double embrasure concrete combat bunker for side fire at Sanocka Street.
2. Double embrasure artillery traditor above Sanocka Street, at Krzemieniec.
3. Four embrasure concrete combat bunker for double side fire with a combat and observation dome at the Marshal Józef Piłsudski Waterfront near the Gromada Hotel.
4. Single room fortification for side fire at the President W. Wilson Waterfront by the Bridge named after R. Siwiec.
5. Three embrasure concrete combat bunker for side fire with a combat and observation dome at Sanowa Street.
6. Single room fortification for head fire at Sanowa Street at entrenchment number 3.
7. Three embrasure concrete combat bunker for side fire at Słoneczna.
8. Single room fortification for side fire at Wiejska Street at entrenchment number 2.
9. Concrete combat bunker for head fire at Kokosza Street.
10. Concrete combat bunker for side fire at Wilcza ska Street.
11. Concrete combat bunker for side fire at Sza cowa Street at entrenchment number 1.
12. Concrete combat bunker for head fire at Sybiraków Street..
13. Concrete combat bunker for side fire at XX "Przekopana" Fort.
14. Single room fortification for head fire at Piaskowa nad Wiarem Street.
15. Concrete combat bunker for double side fire with a combat and observation dome at Piaskowa Street, on the premises of a sewage treatment plant.
16. Single room fortification for head fire at Mała nad Wiarem Street.
17. Concrete combat bunker for head fire at Sielecka Street, on the premises of the "Elbud" company.
18. Concrete combat bunker next to Okopowa Street
19. Concrete combat bunker at Fabryczna Street
20. Concrete combat bunker at J. Słowackiego Street, next to Dobromilska Gate.
21. Concrete combat bunker number 1 at XXI "Bako czyce" Fort.
22. Concrete combat bunker number 2 at XXI "Bako czyce" Fort.



The Molotov Line in Przemysł I

The Second World War was a tragic period in the over one thousand year history of Przemysł I. Przemysł I, which at that time was the biggest town situated between Krakow and Lviv, suffered more profoundly than during the First World War, when, having been a formidable Austro-Hungarian stronghold it had been under the Russian Army siege for several months.

Shortly before the Second World War broke out two aggressor countries, namely Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, had concluded the secret agreement on the drawing of new spheres of influence in Europe. Poland, surrounded by enemies and invaded in September 1939, was torn in two by the two occupants. At the end of September 1939, sealing the forth partition of Poland, the occupiers ultimately drew up a new shared border. The partly ran along the San River, which is the biggest Vistula River tributary in southern Poland, and cuts through the centre of Przemysł I. This is probably the main reason why none other Polish city of the same size experienced such tragic events. The Old City, the city centre, as well as other districts on the right bank found themselves under Soviet occupation. The left bank district, Zasanie, was the trophy of the Nazis. Both the Nazis and the Soviets introduced their own order. Persecution, arrests and executions increased. The Soviets forcefully resettled thousands of families to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Anyone who lived in the border region and owned a dog or a pigeon could have been considered a spy, and with a bit of luck, only landed up in prison. Many Przemysł I inhabitants from both sides of the San River suddenly lost touch with their families on the other side of the river, as well as their source of income. One town suddenly found itself divided and run by two totalitarian regimes. Equally tragic was the fate of the inhabitants of the other towns in the Przemysł I area situated on the right bank of the San River. In 1940, the Soviets evicted most of the inhabitants of the villages in a 800 metre wide border zone.

In 1940, despite the officially declared friendship with the

Nazis, the Soviets started the construction of fortifications, including more than two and a half thousand reinforced concrete bunkers, along their new western border. Those fortifications became commonly known as the Molotov Line much later. They were named after Vyacheslav Molotov (real name Skriabin), the Soviet Union Prime Minister, Foreign Minister and a signatory of the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, who, in 1940, signed the death sentence for thousands of imprisoned Polish officers and policemen. The 4500 kilometre long Molotov Line stretched from the Carpathian Mountains to the Baltic Sea. It was divided into 13 Fortified Regions consisting of defence centres. These created the resistance spots, usually made up of 3 to 5. Each resistant spot consisted of 15 to 20 combat concrete bunkers. The southernmost one was the Przemysł I Fortified Region, with its centre in the city of Przemysł I. It stretched from Bieszczady Mountains in the south to Sieniawa in the north, and its main task was to defend the bridges and fords on the San River. The Przemysł I Fortified Region was neighboured by the Rawa Ruska Fortified Region to the north. Up until June 1941, 99 sites were constructed in the area of the Przemysł I section of the Molotov Line and 186 others were under construction. They were mainly one or two storey bunkers with walls and ceilings of one to two metres thick, equipped with heavy machine guns and anti-tank cannons. The bunkers were built by the soldiers from the special construction battalions. The Soviets also forced the inhabitants of neighbouring villages to help. Some of the bunkers (as many as 3 in Przemysł I) were equipped with special combat and observation domes taken from Polish fortifications on the eastern border of the Second Polish Republic. Some of the bunkers in Przemysł I and its closest vicinity were built upon the 19th century fortification of the Przemysł I Fortress, constructed by the Austrians.

Up to June 1941, only 25% of the planned works along the Molotov Line were completed. Out of 2500 bunkers just around 1000 were equipped with artillery, and around 1500 with heavy machine guns. Despite many faults and gaps, the Molotov Line in the Przemysł I section was quite a significant obstacle for the enemy. However, in spite of the huge concentration of troops along the border with the Nazi Germany, the Soviets were not able to force the enemy back. The reasons for which, were command mistakes, the bunkers being understaffed and poor armament. There was a lack of coordination among the artillery and machine guns fire system in individual sites. The camouflage of the bunkers and communication with the command centre were poor. There were no anti-tank and anti-personnel barriers. Most of the bunkers did not have their own energy and water sources. The strategists also wondered at the location of the Molotov Line at the very border. According to one of the theories, the Molotov Line was a great mystification and a camouflage of the real plans of Stalin, who wanted his army to march further west, but was forestalled by Hitler. One thing is sure, Stalin wanted both the Second World War to break out, and the later confrontation with Nazi Germany. Despite alarming signals from the border that were reaching Moscow, Stalin did not entirely believe in the possibility of an attack by the ally. The fact that many bunkers were staffed only after the German attack had begun might be proof of that.

The German plan of the invasion of the Soviet Union was code named "Operation Barbarossa". One of its first stages was the battle of Przemysł I. The area surrounding the city, defended by the 99th Soviet Rifle Division, was to be attacked by the 101st German Infantry Division. On 22nd June, 1941, at the crack of dawn, the residents of Przemysł I were woken up from their sleep by the roar of the artillery shells raining down on the districts on the right bank.. Terrified residents, searching frantically for shelter, saw the ruins of the first destroyed buildings, fires, the dead and wounded. Equally surprised and disoriented Soviet soldiers took their positions along



the San River. However, their cannons remained silent, as the orders stated explicitly, that border troops were to open fire only after the former ally crossed the border. After more than two hours of intensive shelling of the city, the Germans started to take the railway bridge by storm and the pontoon crossing on the San River. However it was not easy due to the strong resistance of a small number of Red Army soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Niechayev, as well as soldiers in the concrete bunkers situated just a couple of dozens metres from the river banks. Around noon, the Germans were finally able to cross the San River. After killing the last defenders of the railway bridge, the Germans took control of this strategic crossing over the San River. German troops crossed the river marching over the bridge, and, encountering no resistance, took control of the Market Square and the railway station. Intoxicated with the feeling of victory, as well as with spirits from plundered shops, the Germans celebrated their first success over the Russians. The Russians meanwhile withdrew from the city to the south, to Ni ankowice, several kilometres away. The Soviet command that was placed there decided that Przemyl would be quickly recaptured. On the night of 22/23 June 1941, the Soviet troops stormed the city recapturing almost all districts on the right bank of the San River. The Germans put up some resistance till early afternoon in the area of the railway station and the railway bridge. Pursuing the Germans, the Red Army soldiers even crossed the San River during the night and, to the complete surprise of the inhabitants of the Zaszanie district, they even made a short reconnaissance on the "German" side of the city. The Russian counter attack infuriated the Germans who renewed intensive shelling of the Przemyl city centre. This is when the city encountered the greatest losses in its long history. Thousands of German shells rained on the city from the other side of the San River. German troops renewed their offensive on the city's outskirts. Bloody and fierce battles with use of heavy armour and air force lasted until 27th June 1941 in various places, including the area of Medyka. Meanwhile, the units of the Ukrainian Nationalists, serving under the German command, committed several crimes on innocent Polish civilians in the villages to the east of Przemyl. Having been surrounded, the Soviet command decided to withdraw their troops from Przemyl to the east. Only soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Czaplina, who were putting up a strong resistance in the four embasure combat bunker at the Marshal Józef Piłsudski Waterfront (next to the current Gromada Hotel) fought to the very end. The weapons in the bunker fell silent probably on July 1st 1941, after the soldiers defending their positions were burnt alive by



German flame throwers. The 99th Rifle Division was the first of all Soviet units taking part in the Second World War to be honoured with the Order of the Red Flag and the title of Guards and Przemyl I Division.

As the result of several days of fierce battles between the Germans and the Soviets, almost half of the city's buildings were destroyed, including whole quarters of town houses and numerous historic buildings. Many inhabitants were killed. The traces of the German-Soviet battles of June 1941 can be seen in the city centre even today. Empty squares and gaps in the congested housing, as well as the traces of shells on the walls of many town houses recall the tragedy of one of the most beautiful Polish cities. Among the buildings destroyed or severely damaged during the battles, and later pulled down, were historic houses in the area of the Market Square and the Old City, public buildings, sanctuaries and monasteries.

In 2006 and 2007, on the initiative of military history and equipment lovers in Przemyl, the staging of the "Operation Barbarossa" - the Battle of Przemyl 1941, was organised on the site of the battles. Numerous participants from Poland and abroad took part, dressed in German and Soviet uniforms with respective military equipment. The historical reconstructions were watched by thousands of inhabitants of the city and region, as well as tourists.

There are 22 Molotov Line bunkers in the administrative borders of Przemyl. Their level of preservation differs, but most of them need urgent restoration. Some of the sites are located on private properties or the premises of factories and companies. Several dozens of bunkers and their ruins are situated in the city's neighbourhood, in the area of Krasiczyn, Dybawka, Łuczycze, Siedliska and Medyka.

Thanks to the Przemyl lovers of defence architecture, two of the bunkers have been turned into historic attractions. The restored "caponier 8813" bunker at the Marshal Józef Piłsudski Waterfront near the Gromada Hotel (photograph 3) hosts an interesting exhibition of military items from the Second World War. It is open on Saturdays and Sundays, or after an advanced booking on the phone number +48 505 077 838 or +48 791 108 810, www.projekt8813.pl. The other bunker "Sanowa half-caponier" at Sanowa Street (photograph 5) was taken by the "Caponier - the Przemyl Defence Area" Association. Contact: +48 513 993 933 or +48 513 087 775, www.kaponiera.org.

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