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Fortifications of Pomeranian fortresses Toruń, Grudziądz and Chełmno in the interwar period

Summary

After the end of the military operations of the Great War (1914-1918), the conflict later called the First World War, a peace conference was convened in Paris. As a result of the agreed provisions and decisions made upon the Treaty of Versailles, in January 1920 the lands of Pomerania, reborn after the years of partitions, were handed over to the Republic of Poland. The Polish Army took over three defensive sets: Toruń, Grudziądz and Chełmno, which until that moment were German fortresses.

The basic time limits adopted in the work and marked in the title as „interwar period” are the years 1920-1939. The first of these caesuras determines the moment when all three fortresses were taken over by the Polish Army as a result of the restitution of Pomerania. On the other hand, the final chronological border is related to the outbreak of World War II (started on the 1st September with the Polish campaign of 1939), and more precisely – it concerns the beginning of the German occupation of the area where the three fortresses: Toruń, Grudziądz and Chełmno were located, as the work also shows the role of fortifications in military operations in 1939. Presentation of the subject in the above-mentioned timeframes allows us to fully capture and show the entire period of administration of the defense sets in Pomerania by the Polish Army, from the takeover of the fortifications to the withdrawal of Polish forces from the fortresses and their occupation by the German army.

The total study of the history of the three fortresses situated in the Polish part of Pomerania in the interwar period is a completely new, original research concept. So far, no complete scientific coverage of the history of any of these defense sets in the period 1920-1939 has been developed, with the exception of works dealing with some selected, strictly defined, narrow topics.

The content is presented in eight chapters. The work has a mixed, problem-chronological structure. The choice of such a structure enables clear presentation of all issues.

The I chapter entitled „The outline of the history of the fortifications of Toruń, Grudziądz and Chełmno until the First World War” goes beyond the proper chronological framework of the main topic. The history of the fortifications build in these three cities and the later fortresses is presented in a short, summary form. The main part of the chapter is preceded

by the presentation of the geographical conditions and the strategic location of Toruń, Grudziądz and Chełmno that influenced subsequent decisions on the construction of fortifications.

The next parts of the work (II-VIII) are the implementation of the research topic. The beginning of chapter II outlines briefly the several months period after the end of the First World War (until December 1919). Then, the occupation of Pomerania (including the fortifications in the region) by the Polish state at the beginning of 1920 was discussed. Activities of the Pomeranian Front were presented – military preparations, the revindication action, as well as the activities of the military passing and acceptance commissions of fortresses and the actual condition of the fortifications at the time of their takeover. The last subsection discusses the regulation of property value of the Pomeranian fortresses and the Polish-German negotiations on the return of the fortresses' archives.

The next chapter (III) presents the fortification preparations undertaken in all Pomeranian defense sets during the summer 1920, related to the impending threat of an enemy attack at the turning point of the ongoing Polish-Soviet war. The assumed and actual cast of the lower Vistula line is shown, and in the last subsection – the assessment of the fortification activity and the role of the built field fortifications.

Chapter IV presents the organizational and administrative system that functioned in the fortifications in Toruń, Grudziądz and Chełmno. The administration of the fortresses was often reorganized in the interwar period. Its subsequent structures were introduced and the fortress personnel were characterized. The changes taking place in the administration structure of the fortresses in relation to the existing number of jobs and their shortages in selected fields were discussed. In the second section, attention was paid to the issue of naming convention and numbering of the fortress works and to the related ambiguities. The last part of this part of the work presents the classification of the fortresses and their individual fortifications into various categories related to their maintenance or possible expansion. The main inventory of the Pomeranian fortifications was also discussed.

The pages of the next V chapter of the work present the activities related to demolition and conservation of defensive works. The first part of the discussion was divided into fragments devoted to the leveling of field fortifications and the dismantling of permanent fortifications. The second section covers their maintenance. Due to the nature of the sources and the clarity of the argument, a chronological division was adopted, with three periods.

The content of chapter VI presents the issue of the use of fortifications and the accompanying back-up facilities. In the following sections of the first subsection, particular

ways of using (functions) of the fortresses are discussed. A different arrangement was adopted in the second section. It contains a description of the use of the fortification areas, which is formed into some subject categories. This fragment also presents the cases of the land's ownership related to the lands taken in order to build the fortifications. It also characterizes – kept continued since the Prussian-German partition - fortress areas of construction restrictions and the construction of new buildings within their range.

Chapter VII presents the important issues of the strategic and operational concepts of expansion and use of the fortifications of Toruń, Grudziądz and Chełmno in a potential war. The issues are presented in chronological order, distinguishing the three most important periods of the concept's development. This division was based on the scale of the intensity of works, which was the most advanced in the first few years after Pomerania returned to the Republic of Poland. The content of the chapter also includes unrealistic or alleged plans to build new fortifications in the area of the Pomeranian fortresses.

The last chapter (VIII) presents the history of the fortifications of the Pomeranian fortresses in 1939. This part of the research opens with a fragment devoted to the presentation of the general plans and conditions of defense of the „Pomerania” Army – an operational union whose area of operations also included Toruń, Grudziądz and Chełmno. The second subsection discusses the period immediately preceding the outbreak of the war in terms of fortification preparations. The last subsection concerns the course of hostilities. The role of the used fortifications and the fate of the Vistula crossings were emphasized, the defense of which was one of the main reasons for the construction of fortresses on the lower Vistula by the army of the Kingdom of Prussia, and then the German Empire.