

THE ENIGMA OF THE NAZIS' *REGENWURMLAGER*

A vast underground complex built by the Nazis in western Poland was a surprise discovery for invading Soviet Red Army troops in late January 1945, but the Russians, who administered the region until 1993, never properly explored the tunnels. What secrets are still to be found within?

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Secret Tunnels and Bunkers

A few of the unsolved mysteries of World War II literally lie under our feet. Some below-ground structures, bunkers and fortifications built by Nazi Germany contain secrets which have not been revealed until recently, at least in the public arena. One such underground system of fortifications, built by the Germans, was discovered in Poland after the Nazis were crushed by Soviet troops in the area. So many years have passed since the discovery, and we still know very little about the site.

Lubuskie (or Lubusz) Province (*województwo* or voivodeship, meaning an administrative province) is located in western Poland. The province borders the German state of Brandenburg. For centuries, this part of Poland had been under Prussian control and formed part of the province of Posen (Poznań in Polish). After Poland was liberated following the defeat of Nazi troops by the Soviet Army, the area was returned to it. Those Germans who lived in the province were forced out, and Poles from those eastern parts of Poland who had been transferred to Ukraine were later resettled in Lubuskie Province.

The main rivers of the region are the Odra (Oder in German), running along the Polish–German corridor, and its tributaries, the Bóbr (Bober) and the Warta (Warthe). The voivodeship is the most forested area of Poland; its deep forests are full of lakes. Międzyrzecz (Meseritz in German) is a small town on the River Warta's tributary, the Obra. The town dates back to the 10th century.

To the west of the town, in the Lubuskie Lake District, approximately 100 kilometres west of Poznań and 220 kilometres east of Berlin, along the Odra–Warta area stretches an enormous underground system of fortifications built by Nazi Germany as part of the Ostwall (East Wall) to strengthen the Eastern Front and defend the Third Reich. This area is called the Międzyrzecki Fortified Region (or Międzyrzecki Rejon Umocniony in Polish). The Germans called it *Regenwurmlager* ("Earthworm Camp") and codenamed it "RL".

A very elaborate system of bunkers was built there from the late 1920s, through the 1930s and during the war. The bunkers are sometimes compared with the famous Maginot Line. There are reinforced-concrete underground corridors some 50 or more kilometres long, located 30–50 metres below ground. Today it is possible to visit a part of the corridors near the village of Kaława (Kalau in German), near Pniewo (Pinnow), about 12 kilometres southwest of Międzyrzecz, and to see the Scharnhorst armoured turrets, but only with an experienced and trained guide (there are multilingual guides at the site). There are exhibitions of military equipment from World War II...and bats.

There is actually a bat reserve near Nietoperek (Nipter in German), located in the underground bunkers. More than 30,000 bats of 12 species in the reserve during the winter make it one of the largest winter camps of bats in Europe. The communist government of Poland wanted to designate the

underground passages as a dumping site for nuclear waste, but changed its plan after Polish scientists were able to alarm their western colleagues.

Few people realise that the tunnels are largely unexplored and contain traps designed long ago to kill those who wander into the secret Nazi fortifications. There have been deaths of careless tourists who perished in the elaborate traps built by Nazi engineers.

The Międzyrzeczki Fortified Region (MFR) consists of reinforced-concrete bunkers and large steel turrets. There are kilometres of anti-tank barriers—square-pyramidal reinforced-concrete blocks, each about 90 to 120 centimetres high. These are called "dragon's teeth"—*Drachenzähne* in German or *Zęby smoka* in Polish. About 21 of the bunkers are joined by a subway system at a depth of 30 to 50 metres. There is a labyrinth below the MFR which has been left largely undisturbed, save for the bats. The main tunnel, the main traffic road, extends along the north–south line. It is basically an axis of tunnels.

There are side tunnels which branch from the main tunnel and connect with the so-called "structures". Concrete stairs lead from the side tunnels to the surface part of the structure. This type of bunker is called a *Panzerwerk*. The bunkers on the surface were equipped with armoured turrets, their steel walls 25 centimetres thick. They contained machine guns, flame-throwers and grenade-launchers.

The underground portion of the MRF contained storerooms, barracks, ambulances, ventilation systems,

engine rooms as well as lighting, sewage and communications systems. The structures were connected through the use of an electric train.

The multi-storeyed concrete corridors may still hide secrets of Nazi Germany's nuclear weapons research and development efforts undertaken during World War II.

The Soviet Red Army liberated the "impenetrable" fortifications from the Nazis between 30 January and 2 February 1945, and the last vestige of German resistance in the immediate area was crushed on 28 February 1945. The area was in Soviet/Russian hands from then until 12 May 1993. According to the Russians, the Międzyrzeczki Fortified Region still contains mysteries.

There was a Jewish presence in Międzyrzecz, too. A cemetery was established there in the mid-17th century. It was vandalised during World War II, and there are no gravestones or structures remaining. One *matseva* (sepulchral stone) was removed to the Międzyrzecz Museum, and others were taken

to the forest near the cemetery. There was a ghetto in the area during the war. Some Jews of Międzyrzecz were transported to the Baranovich ghetto in the Novogrudok district of Belarus to be murdered there. On 26 September 1942, remaining Jews from the Biała Podlaska ghetto in Poland's Lublin Province in the southeast were deported to the ghetto in Międzyrzecz, and from there to the Treblinka death camp in November 1942...

Of course, much has changed on the surface, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union when Poland became a free nation. Where once one could find scars of the Nazi

occupation and the presence of Soviet troops, today there are tourist hotels and museums; instead of ammunition and mines, people find mushrooms and berries. However, there have been deaths and injuries: local people who were less than careful have fallen into hidden cargo elevator shafts as deep as 20 metres. There are old mines in the forests around the *Regenwurmlager*, according to Latvian researchers (see the Nectonlab web page <http://tinyurl.com/khc7cmz> for maps, photographs and illustrations; the text is in Russian).

Here, though, we are concerned with the mysteries that have remained locked in the underground structures built by the nefarious German Third Reich.

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One of the *Regenwurmlager* tunnels, featuring railway tracks and sealed-off side tunnels. (Source: survincity.com, <http://tinyurl.com/m9yfnsa>)

Unfortunately, we do not know what information about the *Regenwurmlager* is in the possession of the Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego, Poland's Internal Security Agency. We do not know if any findings have been shared with the Americans, NATO or the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution which is the Federal Republic of Germany's domestic intelligence service. An examination of the Soviet sources is in order, and here we find more success.

Information from Russian Sources

Basically, only the Soviet military administration was able to investigate the odd reinforced-concrete SS "city" discovered shortly after victory over the Third Reich. Yet the Soviets failed to undertake any systematic exploration of the *Regenwurmlager*. The Kremlin sent no instructions to do so, and the local commanders saw no need to volunteer their efforts.

However, there was one Soviet military officer who wanted to uncover the secrets of the Nazi underground bunkers.

In the early 1960s, Colonel Alexander Liskin, a military prosecutor, descended into the tunnels of the *Regenwurmlager* and also collected information, testimonies and legends about the area. Later, he shared his findings in articles published in the Russian newspaper *Sovershenno Sekretno* (issue 5, 1994) and in *Vokrug Sveta* magazine (issue 5, 1995).

The author of this NEXUS article researched Liskin's articles as well as ones in other Russian publications, such as Nikolay Cherkashin's article in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (11 November 1999) and Alex Bure's article in *Sekretniye Issledovaniya* (Belarus, April 2002). The author also researched Soviet military publications and open sources. Some current German sources were also helpful regarding names of towns and villages.

The Red Army Defeats the Nazi Troops

Kęszyca (Kainscht in German) is a picturesque village, bordered by forests full of berries and mushrooms as well as lakes. Under Nazi occupation, the village, located near Międzyrzecz, was also part of the Międzyrzecki Fortified Region. The German garrison in the MFR consisted of two regiments, security forces and the SS school of the 3rd SS Panzer Division *Totenkopf* (*Totenkopf* meaning "Skull").

In October 1939, Hitler had set up the SS field divisions which would later form the Waffen-SS. Among them was the *Totenkopf* division. Its officers and soldiers perpetrated horrors which were typical of the epoch of terror in Nazi-occupied Europe. One battalion was stationed in the Nazi-occupied Soviet Union with the Kommandostab Reichsführer-SS (Command Staff, Reich Leader of the SS), and was tasked with killing Jews. The *Totenkopf* division also took part in atrocities, mostly against partisan units of guerrilla fighters and enemy soldiers.

The Nazi troops, according to local residents, did not put up a stiff fight when the Red Army pushed into the MFR at the end of January 1945. However, to escape surrendering to the Soviets, the SS forces in the MFR began a hasty retreat. They disappeared without trace in a matter of hours—but to where? The only road in the area was already captured by tanks of the 44th Guards Tank Brigade of Soviet General Mikhail E. Katukov's 1st Guards Tank Army.

The tank battalion of the fearless Soviet commander Major Alexey Karabanov, posthumously awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union designation, pierced the minefields surrounding the *Regenwurmlager*, but Karabanov was burned in his tank there. The Red Army soldiers under the command of Soviet Colonel Iosif Gusakovsky broke through this Nazi Maginot Line, chasing Hitler's forces from the Polish land which had been under German domination for centuries.

According to the Latvian researchers' Nectonlab (*Laboratoriya Nectona*) website, <http://nectonlab.org>, the steel and concrete fortification

(blockhouse) *Panzerwerk* 712, under the command of Friedrich Helmigk, held on for two more weeks after the area fell to the Red Army. Eight people defended *Panzerwerk* 712; they were cut off from the rest of the Nazi forces and were not aware of the state of affairs. The blockhouse defended the approach to the Neuhöfchen–Starpel [Nowy Dworek–Staropole] road. After fierce drumfire by concrete bombs, the exhausted German soldiers of *Panzerwerk* 712 surrendered on 28 February 1945 and were released by Soviet soldiers for their valour. The Germans were 18-year-olds; the Soviet soldiers tore off their epaulettes and basically chased them away towards home. In the early 1990s, some of the former German soldiers visited *Panzerwerk* 712 and thanked the Russians for their mercy.

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Soviet Occupation of the MFR

The Soviet military troops who were stationed in Poland formed the so-called Northern Group of Forces (NGF); it was established in June 1945. Until 1956, there were no legal regulations which would formulate principles for the Soviet troops to be stationed on Polish territory. Soviet soldiers and the property utilised by them were beyond any control of the Polish authorities. Later agreements between the two countries regulated their legal status and procedure of movement.

Some NGF units were stationed in Kęszycza. There was a signal brigade of five battalions, a fuel depot, a field radar station, barracks, warehouses, garages and other buildings, occupying an area of nearly 120 hectares. The brigade was an elite Soviet military force which assisted the General Staff in controlling Soviet troops in the huge territory of the European theatre of military activities.

Alexander Liskin's Investigations

Keszycza is located on a hill surrounded by pine forests, with Lake Kęszyckie (Jezioro Kęszyckie) nearby. Its beauty is breathtaking. When Colonel Alexander Liskin visited the area, the lake still had an air of mystery about it.

An artillery regiment was located in the vicinity, and a Polish security official, Telyutko, who supervised the area for the Międzyrzecz authorities, represented the Polish military forces in the region because the territory had been transferred to the Soviet forces for temporary use.

According to Liskin, in 1945 the Soviet commanders immediately undertook a scrupulous field-engineering reconnaissance of the area. They made discoveries which amazed even the battle-hardened Soviet military.

First, near the lake, the Soviet engineers found a reinforced-concrete box containing the isolated outlet of a 380-volt underground power cable. Then they found a concrete well which swallowed water falling down into it. At the same time, reconnaissance engineers discovered that the underground electrical supply and communication lines came from Międzyrzecz, but they also believed that there might be a concealed autonomous electrical power station, its turbines moved by water falling into the well. There were rumours that the lake was somehow connected to the numerous nearby reservoirs, but the brigade lacked the resources to confirm this.

Kęszycza was then, as it is now, a quiet place, peaceful,

and full of the aroma of the nearby forest. However, rumours about the lake aroused Liskin's curiosity. He explored the area with the aid of local Soviet officers.

When Liskin took a boat ride around the lake, he discovered even more mysteries. From the eastern side of Lake Kęszyckie, he saw man-made hills overgrown with young trees. They contained artillery caponiers (fortification structures). The hills contained secret passageways leading to galleries below. Not far away there were two tiny "lakes", and nearby there were signs stating "Danger! Mines!" in two languages.

Liskin reported that according to the Soviet field engineers, the "lakes" were actually entrances to the underground city; these entrances had been flooded.

There was a very strange "island" in the middle of one of the lakes. This island slowly drifted, as if held by an anchor. The island was overgrown with pine and willow trees. This island's area was no more than 50 metres. The impression was that the "island" slowly and with difficulty rolled about in the black waters of the reservoir. The lake obviously had an artificial addition whose shape resembled a human appendix. The water here was clearer, and a measuring pole indicated a depth of up to three metres. It was still hard to see anything because the fern-like weeds completely covered the bottom of the lake. There was a grey concrete tower in the middle of this little "bay"; it had served some purpose before, but now it contained water.

Furthermore, Liskin learned that during the initial reconnaissance, Soviet military engineers had discovered an entrance to the tunnels disguised as a hill. They surmised that what

lay before and under was a complex structure full of traps, including mines. Once a slightly inebriated Soviet sergeant major made a bet and rode his motorcycle through one of the mysterious tunnels; he was never heard from again.

Liskin was more cautious, and he approached the brigade's commanders. He found out that the brigade's field engineers and communications technicians had not only descended below into the same tunnel where the sergeant major disappeared, but also had walked it for dozens of kilometres and had discovered previously unknown entrances. Information about this expedition was kept secret. Liskin discussed the expedition with a staff officer, who told him that to preclude tragedies the Soviets had installed a metal grating and armoured

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panel at the entrance to the tunnel. Yet they were of the opinion that there were other entrances to the tunnels.

The officers shared with Liskin their assessment of what may be below. It was an underground city containing everything necessary for autonomous existence for many long years. The expedition discovered a subway system, complete with rails. There was no soot on the ceiling of the tunnel. The walls contained rows of cables, and it was thought that the train was electrically powered. The expedition entered the tunnel, but not where it began because the tunnel entrance was somewhere under the lake. Its other end was probably near the Odra River, in the west. However, Latvian researchers who have been to the site claim that this is a mistake; that this was actually a branch railway line from east to west, mistakenly assumed to extend in the direction of Berlin.

Soviet field engineers also discovered a concrete vertical pipe. They assumed that this was from an underground crematorium, and that those who built this city were burned here. However, German researchers who have studied the fortifications in recent years believe that the pipe was part of the ventilation system of the never-completed underground fifth armoured battery, *Panzerbatterie 5*.

As the expedition's engineers slowly and cautiously walked the tunnel in the direction of West Germany, they discovered dozens of tunnels to the right and left of them. Most of the tunnels had been carefully sealed off.

What lies behind the sealed entrances? What sites, what sections of the underground SS city, are hidden there? We still have no answers...

The area was dry for the most part. As they walked through the tunnels, the Soviets began to lose perception of being in the real world. They concluded that investigation of this huge underground city lying under the fields, rivers and forests was for well-equipped experts with time and access to resources. The expedition members estimated that the underground city of *Regenwurlager* could extend for dozens of kilometres and continue under the Odra. What the final destination would be, they had no idea.

Some time later the Commander of the Northern Group of Forces, Colonel-General P. S. Maryakhin, arrived in Kęszyca and descended into the underground SS city. The author of this NEXUS article was not able to find out if the Soviet commander had discovered anything of importance during his mission.

Liskin determined that from 1958 to 1992 there had been nine commanders of the brigade, and each one of

them had to get used to being a neighbour of the mysterious underground territory.

Spiridonov's Findings

One of the last commanders of the brigade, Colonel Vladimir I. Spiridonov, learned more about the *Regenwurlager*. He was privy to reports of the field engineers because most of the brigade's commanders considered it to be their duty to learn as much as possible about the SS city.

Spiridonov revealed that the area where the subway extended under the Odra was flooded. The distance between Kęszyca and Odra is 60 kilometres. The walls and ceiling of the subway system are covered with concrete slabs and the floor with rectangular stone slabs. Spiridonov drove 20 kilometres through the underground tunnel towards Germany in a Soviet military vehicle.

As Spiridonov learned, the person who knew most about the city was a quiet Pole, Dr Podbelsky of Międzyrzecz, who at the end of the 1980s was about 90 years old. He secretly explored the underground city in the late 1940s and 1950s. Dr Podbelsky told local inhabitants that the Germans started building the city in 1927, but they embarked on intensive construction in 1933 after Adolf Hitler came to power.

In 1937, Hitler reportedly visited the *Regenwurlager*, arriving by the underground subway. (Again, Latvian researchers who have spent time in the area refute this legend.) It was then that the

city was turned over to the army and the SS. There were some secret passageways from the *Regenwurlager* to strategic underground storage places and a power plant, located in the area of Wysoka (Hochwalde in German) and Pieski (Pieske) villages some five kilometres from the lake to the north and the west.

Lake Kęszyckie itself is a mystery waiting to be solved. It is as deep as 20 metres at its eastern end. One summer, Soviet officers were fishing in the lake and discerned something in the murky bottom which looked like a hatch. They nicknamed it "eye of the inferno", and this eye seemed to be closed shut. What was the purpose of the hatch? Was it a Kingston valve to flood the underground city in case of an emergency? But if the city was not flooded, then it may have been kept intact for some other purpose and may contain unimaginable secrets.

Spiridonov found many intriguing sites around the lake and in the forest. Among them were pillboxes containing machine guns, surrounded by minefields,

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barbed wire and deadly traps. He found ruins of military structures and remnants of the hospital for the SS elite forces. However, throughout the Soviet control of the territory there was no comprehensive and detailed exploration of the *Regenwurlager*.

Obviously, the Soviets and the Polish government at the time would attempt to limit access to the *Regenwurlager* to prevent unauthorised movement to and from West Germany. To expect anything less from them would be highly naïve, and yet there are no records that I know of to provide pertinent details about such Soviet security measures or actions.

Unanswered Questions

We do not know what the Polish government discovered after the Soviets departed, but it is very

unlikely that the Poles have had the resources to explore the underground city.

Has the city itself been "put on ice" for some future use? Did the Polish government know something sinister about the site, and plan to dump nuclear waste into the *Regenwurlager* tunnels to render the underground SS city forever inaccessible?

What is hidden behind the sealed tunnels in the underground SS city? It may be possible that the *Regenwurlager* contains hidden treasures, perhaps artworks looted by Nazi invaders in occupied Europe, but it could be that it holds a still undiscovered key to the Nazi German program to build an atomic bomb.

Did the fleeing SS *Totenkopf* forces in the Międzyrzecki Fortified Region enter the *Regenwurlager* to disappear into the bowels of the Earth?

So far we have only questions, but no answers. ∞

About the Author:

Paul Stonehill is a researcher, author and lecturer specialising in anomalous phenomena, especially Soviet and Russian military research into the subject. He is the author of numerous articles for UFO-related magazines, as well as of several books including *Paranormal Mysteries of Eurasia* (Galde Press, USA, 2011), *UFO Case Files of Russia* (with Philip Mantle; 11th Dimension Publishing/Healings of Atlantis, UK, 2010; see review in NEXUS 17/05) and *The Soviet UFO Files: Paranormal Encounters Behind the Iron Curtain* (Quadrillion Publishing, UK, 1998). His articles "Mysterious Amazon Women of Eurasia", "Haunted Railway Tracks: The Ghost Trains of Eurasia", "UFO Sightings over Kazakhstan", "UFOs over Russia's Remote Arctic Regions", "Investigating the 'Ghosts of the Ocean'" and "Soviet UFO Sightings in International Waters" were published in NEXUS 21/02, 21/01, 20/05, 20/04, 18/06 and 18/04 respectively.

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