

The fight for fuel

At the end of 1943, after the conquest of Italy, the facilities producing synthetic fuel from coal became one of the most important targets of the Allies' planes. The facilities were located in Zdzeszowice and Kędzierzyn or, to be more exact, in Bierawa and Blachownia. In 1944, all three facilities became the target of multiple attacks of the Allies' air forces. Inevitably, these attacks led to casualties among the civilian population, as well as the prisoners and forced laborers employed there. It is estimated that circa 1000 people, half of whom were the inhabitants of nearby towns, were killed by the bombs.

In 1944, the American 40th Air Division, stationed in Italy, fought a successful battle against Germany to stop the production of synthetic fuel, which went down in history as the Battle for Fuel. Carpet bombings of the facilities producing synthetic fuel were done from July to December 1944. The damages caused in December completely stopped production.

When beginning the war, the German authorities took the possibility of carpet bombings into account. Due to this reason, thousands of brick and concrete bunkers of various categories were build across entire Germany. In the region of Kędzierzyn-Koźle, one can still stumble upon several types of shelters - from air-ride slit trenches enforced with bricks or concrete, protecting against debris at best, to advanced shelters of the Salzgitter type (e.g., at ul. Piotra Skargi in Kędzierzyn-Koźle), which had to endure the direct hit with a bomb weighing 250 kg.

One form of active defense involved steam generators, designed especially for this purpose, which, once it was known that the Allies' planes were coming, were used to fill the area of the facilities with smoke.

Regardless of all these means of defense, there also functioned the so-called Flak-Division - a developed division consisting of several smaller divisions, utilizing the system of observation stations of the anti-aircraft artillery across entire German-occupied Europe. It had stationary and mobile cannons at its disposal.

Researching and commemorating the battle for synthetic fuel are the tasks of the Association Blechhammer - 1944. For a dozen or so years, the association has run its museum in the basement of the "Lech" Community Center in the neighborhood of Blachownia, and, in the recent years, has also had the shelter of the Salzgitter type, situated in the same neighborhood, for its disposal. Visiting the museum is possible after prior arrangement via telephone - contact: www.blechhammer1944.pl.