

„ Coastal artillery in the system of military defence of Poland in the years 1920-2015”

Summary

Soon after gaining independence in 1918, Poland started the process of securing its borders. Their coastal part, of a short beach line was to be reinforced, too. From the beginning of the 20s of the 20th century, plans of creating one of the most important structures of coastal artillery defence were made. However, the unprofitable financial status of the country caused a delay in building first elements until the beginning of the 30s. Three batteries of light calibre guns were constructed, one of which was to defend the newly built port in Gdynia, whereas the other two were crucial for the military status of the Hel Peninsula. A wider development of the coastal artillery took place in mid 30s, when the strongest battery of modern medium calibre guns were built in the Hel Peninsula. What is more, seven solid anti-aircraft batteries of medium calibre were created, four of which were placed in Gdynia and three were put in Hel.

Unfortunately, all the batteries were unable to secure the coast of Poland, especially in the incoming military confrontation with a much stronger opponent, such as the Third Reich. Nevertheless, the coast had to be defended, so as of the first months of 1939 its reinforcement by improvised structures began. Due to a fatal military status of the country, The Polish Army started a meaningless war against Germany on the 1st of September 1939. After a month's defence, the Hel garrison surrendered as one of the last assemblies of the Polish Army. After taking up Hel, the Germans improved its fortifications by installing, among others, a battery of coastal artillery of the heaviest calibre and several anti-aircraft ones. Gdynia also gained a strong anti-aircraft defence. Named Gotenhafen, it was one of the most important bases of the German Fleet.

In 1945 the Polish coast border was much longer in comparison with the interwar period. Poland was influenced by the Soviets, so the allied western countries soon became its opponents. First post war plans of reinforcing coastal defence were based on Russian concept and arms. The most crucial points in the Coast of Poland were going to be defended. The plans included the Hel Peninsula, bases in Gdynia and Świnoujście. During the beginning period of the Cold War, a system of Solid Artillery Batteries was created, which consisted of 11 coastal batteries of medium and light calibre. A number of anti-aircraft batteries was placed in the most strategic places.

In the 1960s, two batteries of anti-warship missiles helped reinforce the coastal defence. A number of anti-aircraft missile battalions was built along the coast. They were able to fight sea targets. During the 1970s and 1980s, this army had the highest defensive potential of the Polish Coast in history.

However, soon afterwards, a deformation of the Solid Artillery Batteries deteriorated their military status. Until the end of the 20th century most of the missile units were disarmed, which significantly lowered military abilities of the coastal area.

Nowadays, only a tiny number of modernized post-Russian arms units is facing the beginning of the 21st century. Undoubtedly, the creation of the Mobile Coast Missile Unit armed with Norwegian modern anti-warship missiles has been crucial to the coastal defence. There is a chance, that another unit will be created in the future.

Summarising, since gaining independence, Poland has tried to improve its coastal border

defence, but because of the country's unfortunate geopolitical position and economic instability, it has not been able to reach a satisfactory level of military security. The loss of the September 1939 war against the Third Reich only confirmed the situation. After WW 2 and the change in the geopolitical situation, the defence of the coast became an important part of the country's military defence.

The coastal artillery had been significantly developed, but in the 80s and 90s of the 20th century most of its units were disarmed. Currently, Poland is in the process of reinforcing its coastal defence again, despite its being complicated and costly.