

Modern reality of old fortress

Legendary Brest Fortress – courageously defended in 1941 – was constructed 170 years ago

By Valentina Kozlovskaya

Brest and Brest Fortress are connected by many centuries of shared history, although the city is a thousand years old and the citadel was built only 170 years ago: opening on April 26th, 1842.

Brest Fortress is situated on the site of former Berestie, listed as a 1st class fortress of the Russian Empire. It is associated with two major events: the signing of the Brest Peace Treaty at the White House in 1918, and the heroic defence of the citadel in 1941. Modern Brest residents view their fortress as a place of historical significance, boasting a glorious memory, associated with patriotism and inspiring tourism.

In summer 1914, WWI began. To ensure the strength of Brest-Litovsk Fortress, several more forts were constructed, and the first line of defence was fortified. People worked day and night but, in November, a storehouse of weapons exploded, killing around 200 people. Moreover, most of the weapons were destroyed. The Kaiser's troops were approaching, so the fortress garrison was evacuated in August 1915, leaving the city to be occupied by German and Austrian troops. Interestingly, a commemorative coin was minted to honour the seizure — featuring General Field Marshal von Mackensen (and a German soldier against the background of the fortress on fire on the reverse).



Brest Hero Fortress becomes monument to defenders' courage

On March 3rd, 1918, the Brest Peace Treaty was signed between Soviet Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey. Several years ago, Brest local researcher Anatoly Gladyschuk discovered documents confirming that the peace agreement was agreed in December 1917: not in the fortress but near Brest — at the village of Skoki's Nemtsevich mansion (which then housed the Commander of the East-

ern German front, General Field Marshal Prince Bavorsky). Meanwhile, the Brest Peace Treaty was signed at the White House.

During the years of the Soviet-Polish War (1918-1921), the fortress and the city many times changed ownership. The Riga Treaty gave Brest-Litovsk to Poland, with a Polish garrison settling at the fortress. The military town's headquarters included a court, a prosecutor's office

and a military hospital. On September 1st, 1939, Germany attacked Poland, launching WWII, and, on September 14th, the 10th tank division of the 19th army squad of Lieutenant General Guderian attacked Brest-on-the-Bug (the city changed its name many times). The fortress was under siege, with the garrison finally evacuating on the night of September 16-17th, leaving it to occupation by the German 76th infantry.

The Soviet Union signed a treaty of friendship with Germany on September 22nd, 1939, with Brest hosting a solemn march of Russian and German regiments. The Germans left the fortress to the Russians, moving beyond the Zapadny Bug River after the march.

Of course, on June 22nd, 1941, the fortress was again attacked by the Germans, as documented by many films (including *Brest Fortress*) and

books — all devoted to the heroic defence of the citadel by Soviet soldiers.

Over the past fifteen years, 30 Brest Fortress sites have been restored, with CIS governments allocating funds for reconstruction: Belarus and Russia are providing \$300,000 each, with the remaining states each allocating \$175,000. Belarus and Russia have already fulfilled their obligations, paying even more. Ukraine has allocated the agreed sum, while Kazakhstan has provided \$130,000, Azerbaijan — \$80,000, and Moldova — \$2,000.

The Orthodox Convent of the Holy Nativity and Mother of God, at Volynsk Fort, has been renovated, while Fort #5 now hosts a museum of fortification. The Defence Museum has undergone major reconstruction, featuring an open-air exhibition of armoured machinery. The Kholmok Gates now host a gallery and, last year, a grave of unknown Soviet soldiers was discovered at the fortress; their remains have been re-buried with all possible honours.

No doubt, the present memorial encapsulates more than mere memories, as it is ever changing. The southern defensive barracks are soon to be restored, housing an exhibition for the Defence Museum. The 333rd rifle regiment's barrack is also being revamped and the Brest authorities are preparing Pogranichny Island border checkpoint for free access for tourists.

Veterans still in the ranks Debating the law



Flowers from veterans to their companions in arms

By Yelena Proklova

According to Svetlana Yermakovich, the Head of the Labour and Social Protection Ministry's Department for Veterans and Elderly People Affairs, six Heroes of the Soviet Union currently live in the Republic: awarded during the

years of the Great Patriotic War. Victor Vetoshkin, Belarus' only full Cavalier of the Order of Glory, resides in Minsk.

As of April 1st, 2012, there are 7,650 people still living in the Republic who have USSR orders or medals for selfless action or perfect military service in the rear

during the war years. Moreover, 459 Belarusian residents are still with us who once worked in air or naval defence, or in building defensive installations or pre-front sections of railways or motorways. Naval crew found themselves interned in the early years of the Great Patriotic War in the ports of other states.

As of April 1st, 2012, 118 people in Belarus took part in mine clearing after liberation from German occupation, from 1943 to 1945. Meanwhile, 790 people residing in Belarus worked at enterprises and institutions in Leningrad during the blockade: awarded medals 'For the Defence of Leningrad', or 'Resident of Blockaded Leningrad' badges.

Sadly, 1,063 people have been registered as disabled since childhood as a result of being wounded during the Great Patriotic War. Over 2,000 residents are direct relations of soldiers and partisans who died during the Great Patriotic War and 35,000 are former prisoners of Nazi concentrated camps, jails, ghettos and other places of enforced imprisonment.

By Yekaterina Medvedskaya

International Youth for Peace Law Competition brings together youngsters from around the world for seventh year in a row, promoting international dialogue and application of the law

The Youth for Peace Law Competition is to be held in Minsk from May 14-19th. Traditionally the best law students from all over the globe arrive to test their debating abilities. This year, the forum will bring together teams from 15 countries, including India, Nepal, Cuba, Poland, China and Kenya. Taking part will be the winner of the 2012 Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition (Washington): Lomonosov Moscow State University. They'll be joined by Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, which won the Martens Competition for International Humanitarian Law. The jury will comprise leading world experts in international law.

During the competition, open lectures will be held by foreign



teachers, specialists in international law and practicing lawyers, enabling students to learn more about international experience and trends in the sphere of law.

Since last year, the Youth for Peace Law Competition has been held under the aegis of the UN Academic Impact Global Initiative. The forum is organised by the International MITSO University (Minsk), with support from the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus and the Justice Ministry. *The Minsk Times* is also an information partner of the Law Competition.