



Monument in memory of Stanisław Kaszyński, unveiled in 1991 in the Rzuchów Forest. The Archives of the Museum of the Former German Kulmhof Death Camp in Chełmno-on-Ner.

she was moved to the Gestapo prison at 16 Sterlinga Street, where she was murdered.

The Kaszyńskis orphaned four children: Zbigniew (13), Maria (11), Barbara (5) and Stanisław (2). After their mother had been arrested, the children were taken care of by Cecylia Sońta, Karolina Kaszyńska's friend, and then by some relatives from Brudzew (Maria – Eleonora Kaszyńska and Konstanty Kaszyński, Barbara – Jadwiga Królikowska and Aleksander Królikowski, and Stanisław – Jadwiga Kaszyńska and Stanisław Kaszyński). Having spent six months with the Pietraszeks, Zbigniew worked in the fields to make a living. In 1946, guardians of the Kaszyński siblings applied to the Jewish Historical Institute for financial support for raising the children.

On May 23, 1994, the Regional Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against the Polish Nation – Institute of National Remembrance in Łódź launched an investigation into the murder of Kaszyński. Unfortunately, the identity of the members of *Sonderkommando Kulmhof* responsible for the murder was not established, and so the investigation was suspended by decision dated May 15, 1996.

Stanisław Kaszyński, the man who remained faithful to his beliefs until the very end, is still remembered in the local community. In 1991, a monument devoted to him was unveiled in the Rzuchów Forest, near the grave of Polish hostages shot by Germans on November 15, 1939. The obelisk includes a plaque with the following inscription: "In memory of Stanisław Kaszyński, secretary of the Chełmno-on-Ner Commune, b. November 16, 1903, murdered by Nazis on February 28, 1942, in Chełmno, near the church, for his attempt to inform the world about the crimes committed against the Jewish population."

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Photograph on the first page: Stanisław Kaszyński and Karolina Kaszyńska, 1930s, a private collection.

Photograph in the background: The view of Chełmno from the south. The mansion, former residence of the von Bistram family, is visible to the left; in the centre there is the Church of Birth of the Holy Virgin Mary, photo by Tadeusz Klonowski, before 1943, the collection of the Klonowski family.



Stanisław Kaszyński. A Silent Hero from Chełmno-on-Ner

Bartłomiej Grzanka

From the beginning of the 19th century, the village of Chełmno located on the Ner was the seat of the Commune Office. After Poland regained independence in 1918, the Chełmno Commune was located in the Kolo District in the Łódź Province (and from 1938 in the Poznań Province). During the interwar period, Chełmno had about 500 inhabitants (there were over 4,000 inhabitants in the whole commune, including 200 of German nationality). In the 1930s, there was also one Jewish family in Chełmno: the Rosentals.

The commune administration included a Commune Council (in rural communes, such as Chełmno, councils consisted of 12 people) and a commune head who formed the Commune Board together with a deputy commune head, two councillors and a secretary (clerk). From 1928 to the outbreak of the Second World War, the position of the secretary of the Chełmno Commune was held by Stanisław Kaszyński, whose fate was inextricably linked with the fate of the victims of the death camp established by Germans in the village in the autumn of 1941.

Stanisław Kaszyński was born on November 16, 1903 in Brudzew, as a son of Andrzej and Marianna née Gołębowska. Having passed school-leaving examination, he worked for some time as a clerk in Babiak, and then – as was already mentioned – as the secretary of the Chełmno Commune. In 1929, Stanisław married Karolina Pośłowska (b. October 20, 1909), daughter of restaurant owners from Babiak, graduate of one of the lower secondary schools in Warsaw.

As an educated man, Kaszyński was a highly respected member of the local community. Apart from the purely official activities related to his position, he also got very actively involved in the activities of a number of organisations operating in the commune. He was the fire chief of the volunteer fire department established in Chełmno in 1918, and he was involved in the operations of the local branch of the Air and Chemical Defence League (*Liga Obrony Powietrznej i Przeciwgazowej*, LOPP). The branch authorities had their seat in the building of the Commune Board. The composition of the branch's board changed, however, the position of its secretary was always held by Stanisław Kaszyński. The branch organised, among other things, annual collections of money in order to support the development of the Polish air force; other forms of its activity included talks and lectures. Kaszyński frequently gave speeches on public holidays and on other occasions. The commune secretary was also a member of an amateur theatre group created by the Rural Youth Club in Przybyłów.

After the hostilities ceased in 1939, Chełmno, under its German name *Kulmhof*, became part of the *Reichsgau Wartheland* created from sections of the Polish territory annexed to the Third Reich (it was still located in the Kolo District, renamed *Kreis Wartbrücken*, in *Regierungsbezirk Hohensalza*). Germans were appointed to all the highest positions of the local government. The administrative head of the Chełmno Commune became Volksdeutsch Konrad Schulz, who had been the head of the DVP (*Deutscher Volksverband in Polen*) unit in his home

MUSEUM OF THE FORMER
GERMAN KULMHOF
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BRANCH OF THE MARTYRS'
MUSEUM IN ŻABIKOWO





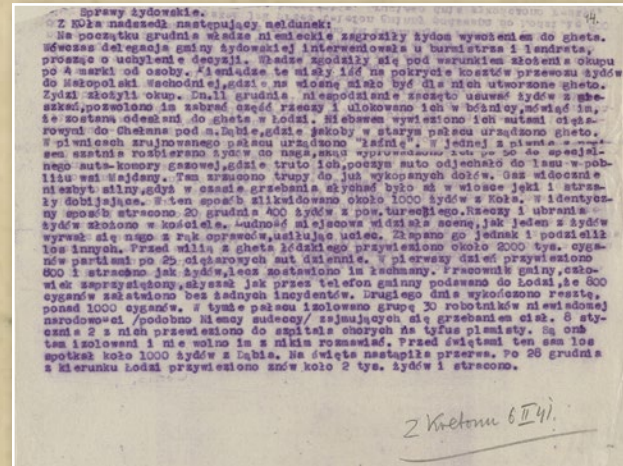
Councillors of the Chełmno Commune with Board members in front of the building of the Commune Board. In the centre there is the commune head Franciszek Opas (with the chain), sitting as the third from the right is the secretary – Stanisław Kaszyński. Standing as the sixth from the left is Konrad Schulz, who was the administrative head of the commune during occupation; January 16, 1939. The collection of Bogusław Potyrański.



The building of the Commune Board in Chełmno; during the camp's operations it served as the seat of its commandants, 1945. The Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw.



The presbytery; during the camp's operations it was used by the German commune authorities and the SS-Sonderkommando as an administration building, 1945. The Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw.



The "Jewish Matters" report, annexed to the economic part of the report from the Łódź Division of ZWZ-AK, code name "Kreton". University of Warsaw Library.

village of Sobótka before the war, and Kaszyński was replaced as secretary by a certain Kluge. Kaszyński and two other Poles remained in the office on lower positions.

In the early autumn of 1941, SD officer and leader of the SS-Sonderkommando SS-Hauptsturmführer Herbert Lange came to the village. His unit had murdered about 10,000 mentally disabled patients as part of the so-called "wild" euthanasia in the Reichsgau Wartheland and East Prussia. *Kulmhof* was to become the centre of the extermination of Jews from the Reichsgau Wartheland, which had been planned by Reich Governor Arthur Greiser himself. The *Sonderkommando* arrived in the village not later than in the middle of November and started preparation work. Local inhabitants were told that a ghetto or a transition camp for Jews would be created in the village. The grounds of the Chełmno estate leased from the *Koło Landrat* were enclosed with a high fence. Apart from the mansion, Lange requisitioned for the purposes of the extermination camp the parish church, the building of the Commune Board (where the leader of the *Sonderkommando* lived), the presbytery, the building of the volunteer fire department, and some houses from which Poles had been displaced. The displaced included the Kaszyńskis, who moved in with the Adamczyks. At the time, Stanisław Kaszyński was already interested in the Germans' activities. For example, he asked Jan Bąberski, a boy he knew, to provide some information. After the war, Bąberski testified that he had witnessed a conversation between Kaszyński and *Amtskommissar* Schulz, during which the German said: "It will be hot in Chełmno, blood will be shed and few will survive." The first victims were brought to *Kulmhof* on December 7, 1941 from *Koło*, and after having spent the night in the mansion they were murdered in

gas vans. Their bodies were buried in a mass grave in the nearby Rzuchów Forest (also called the Chełmno Forest before the war).

When Stanisław Kaszyński, who had been actively involved in the local issues for years, saw the tragedy of people whom he might have known (after the Jews from *Koło* had been murdered, some inhabitants of the Czachulec rural ghetto were brought to *Kulmhof*, including Jews from Kaszyński's home village of Brudzew and from nearby Dąbie), he decided to inform the world about the death machine operating in the village. As an intelligent man, he was probably aware that even an indirect attempt to help the Jews murdered in *Kulmhof* might have tragic consequences for his whole family. Thanks to the fact that he spoke German and that the only telephone available in the village could be found in the presbytery used by the commune authorities and the camp's administration, he could follow the *Sonderkommando's* activities on a regular basis.

We do not know how Kaszyński started his cooperation with the Polish Underground State. In the *Koło* District, there were structures of the Union of Armed Struggle (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej*, ZWZ), in February 1942 renamed the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*, AK). The *Koło* District of ZWZ-AK was part of the Łódź Division, code name "Kreton". Neither do we know how Kaszyński provided them with information, but we do know that it regularly reached the district intelligence cell of ZWZ-AK, which was confirmed after the war by its head Zygmunt Walter-Janke. Reports on the organisation and operations of the camp were then sent to the Bureau of Information and Propaganda of the ZWZ-AK Headquarters. Details of the extermination of Jews as well as of Roma and Sinti deported to *Kulmhof* from the so-called Gypsy camp operating in the Łódź ghetto could be

found in the "Jewish Matters" annexe to the economic part of the report from "Kreton" dated January 28, 1942. The document most probably reached the Bureau of Information and Propaganda of the Home Army Headquarters in Warsaw on February 6, 1942. Information in the report came from different sources including local inhabitants and employees of the hospital in *Koło*. In one case, the report indicated a specific source: "An employee of the Commune Office, a sworn man, heard someone saying over the telephone to someone in Łódź that 800 Roma had been done away with without any incidents." This source was Stanisław Kaszyński.

Cooperation with the structures of the Polish Underground State was not his only attempt to inform the public about the extermination camp. In January 1942, he tried to send information about the crimes committed in *Kulmhof* to the West. The supposed addressee of the letter was the International Red Cross in Switzerland, however, according to some evidence it was an unidentified diplomatic post in Switzerland or the Swiss Consulate in Berlin. Unfortunately, the letter was intercepted by Germans in unknown circumstances. Most probably, Kaszyński gave it to a friend who frequently went to Łódź and who were to put the letter in a postbox. Instead, the friend gave it to someone else, this person gave it to his German friend, and this woman handed it over to the Gestapo. Information about the letter reached the *Sonderkommando*, members of which arrested Kaszyński in his workplace and locked him in the mansion's basement.

After several days, two SS men led Kaszyński out and escorted him towards the building of the Commune Board. Suddenly, the prisoner broke free and started to run but he was shot dead outright. This is how this

moment was described by one of the Mischczak sisters, witnesses to Kaszyński's death: "I saw [...] some struggle and suddenly, when the three of them walking down the road were nearing the passage between the church and the palace, where we stood, Kaszyński broke free, turned right and started to run. We heard shots and I saw Kaszyński falling down." Three men were ordered by the SS men to put the body on a ladder taken from the nearby house of the Ludwickis, and to carry it to the mansion's basement. Then the body was buried in an unknown place in the Rzuchów Forest.

The exact dates of Kaszyński's imprisonment in the mansion and death have not been established. His relative, Stanisław Kaszyński, who applied to the Municipal Court in *Koło* in 1948 for death confirmation, provided the alleged dates of his arrest and death, claiming that Kaszyński had been arrested on January 31 and murdered on February 2, 1942, during an attempted escape. However, the Municipal Court did not take this information into consideration and recorded the death date as February 28, 1942. The list of deaths drawn up by order of the Chełmno Commune Board on December 8, 1945, stated that Kaszyński had been killed on February 3, 1942, while the register of places and facts of crimes committed by Germans in the area of the then Konin Province published in 1981 provided the date February 2, 1942.

A tragic fate also befell Stanisław Kaszyński's pregnant wife Karolina. She was questioned by the Gestapo, and after several searches of the Kaszyńskis' house she was arrested on the charge of disseminating hostile information, and taken to the women's prison at 13 Gdańska Street in Łódź (where she stayed from February 22 to June 15, 1942). Then