

(Izbiica Kujawska), Władysław Bentkowski (Dobrów), Eugeniusz Bralicki¹ (Dąbie), Józef Bystrzycki (Majdany), Stanisław Brzeziński (Kłodawa), Szymon Cząstkowski (Kłodawa), Piotr Duda (Kielczew), Zygmunt Gogela (Dąbie), Stanisław Jabłoński (Kłodawa), Ignacy Jankowski (Izbiica Kujawska), Feliks Januszewski (Dobrów), Michał Kalinowski (Szczkówek), Bronisław Karniewski (Kłodawa), Tadeusz Kędziński (Kłodawa), Tadeusz Kowalewski (Kłodawa), Józef Kona (Dąbie), Stanisław Kwiatkowski (Kłodawa), Stanisław Lewandowski (Kłodawa), Władysław Lewandowski (Kłodawa), Henryk Lewandowski (Izbiica Kujawska), Antoni Lewandowski (Dąbie), Jan Lewiński (Kłodawa), Stanisław Lidwiński (?), Jan Luciak² (Izbiica Kujawska), Tadeusz Łaskiewicz (Kiejsze), Waclaw Łaskiewicz (Kiejsze), Zdzisław Łaskiewicz (Kiejsze), Jan Michalak (Kłodawa), Feliks Misiak (Praksedów), Józef Moderacher³ (Izbiica Kujawska), Stanisław Nowacki (Bierzwienna), Stefan Nowacki (Bierzwienna), Waclaw Okupski (Dobrów), Henryk Orywoll (Dąbie), Bronisław Pawłowski (?), Zygmunt Piaskowski (Janowice), Józef Rosiak (Zygmuntówek), Roman Rosiak (Bierzwienna), Stanisław Sikorski (Kłodawa), Szymon Szrejbrowski (Izbiica Kujawska), Marian Szymański (Kaczyniec), Józef Śmiateński (Korzecznik), Stanisław Tatarczan (Łubianka), Jan Tomczak (Praksedów), Aleksander Trzaskalski (Kłodawa), Józef Woleniczak (Olszowka), Henryk Wronierski⁴ (Izbiica Kujawska), Stefan Wronierski⁵ (Izbiica Kujawska), Stanisław Wronkiewicz (Kłodawa), Czesław Zapędowski (Dąbie), Mieczysław Żywanowski (Wawrzyny), Feliks Żwirkowski (Kłodawa), Jan Żwirkowski (Kłodawa), and two unidentified people.

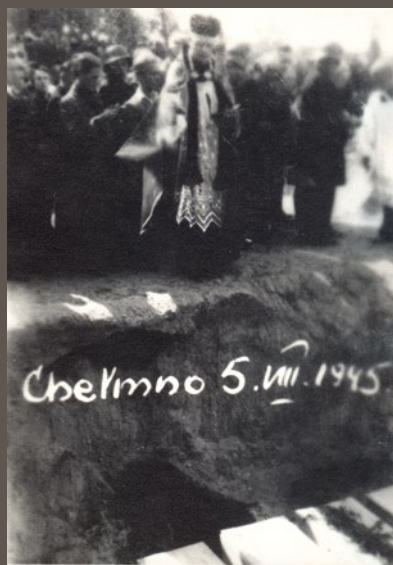
In 1991, a monument was erected to commemorate the victims in their burial place. Its main purpose was to surround a metal cross that had been placed there before, and to put up an altar to the burial place of the hostages. On the monument, there are plaques with names of the victims of the execution carried out in November 1939: fifty-four identified and two unidentified.

Kamil Janicki

¹ The findings of Kazimierz Kasperkiewicz suggest that the murdered was called Eugeniusz Białecki.
² The findings of Przemysław Nowicki suggest that murdered was called Jan Łuczak.
³ The findings of Przemysław Nowicki suggest that murdered was called Józef Modrzejewski.
⁴ The findings of Przemysław Nowicki suggest that murdered was called Henryk Wiśniewski.
⁵ The findings of Przemysław Nowicki suggest that murdered was called Stefan Wiśniewski.



The monument devoted to Polish hostages.



The ceremonial funeral of the victims, August 5, 1945, the Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw.

MUSEUM OF THE FORMER GERMAN KULMHOF DEATH CAMP IN CHEŁMNO ON NER

BRANCH OF THE MARTYRDOM MUSEUM IN ŻABIKOWO



Kamil Janicki

POLISH HOSTAGES - THE FIRST VICTIMS OF THE RZUCHÓW FOREST

The Rzuchów Forest (sometimes also called the Chełmno Forest) is inextricably linked with the first German extermination camp that operated there off and on from 1941 to 1945 and claimed the lives of approx. 200,000 people, mostly Polish Jews. It was the location of mass graves, the place where bodies were burnt in crematoria built specifically for this purpose, and the place where individual Jewish forced labourers as well as whole transports of victims were murdered during the second period of the camp's operation. However, the forest witnessed the first tragedy and German murder two years before the Kulmhof Death Camp in Chełmno-on-Ner was opened.

The authorities of the Third Reich wanted to Germanise the Wartheland and create living space for Germans by exterminating Poles and Jews. It was decided that the most effective way to do this would be to first get rid of Polish elites, which was clearly indicated by the highest German officials. As early as on September 7, 1939, head of the Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei – Sipo*) and the Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst – SD*) Reinhard Heydrich said that "the gentry, the clergy and Jews" in Poland should be murdered. Also Chief of the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht Wilhelm Keitel on September 12, 1939, said that representatives of "the intelligentsia, the gentry, and Jews" had to lose their lives, and called the extermination operation "political cleansing of the land" (*politische Flurbereinigung*). Governor of Danzig-West Prussia and NSDAP leader Albert Forster went even further and said: "[...] it is of utmost importance to capture and isolate Polish leaders and intellectuals including teachers, the clergy, people with higher education, and possibly merchants." On September 21, 1939, a meeting was held at the Security Police Office in Berlin. The topics discussed included the extermination and imprisonment of Polish elites and the intelligentsia in concentration camps in the territory incorporated into the Third Reich, meaning also the Wartheland. After the meeting, on September 29, 1939, Heydrich told General Walther Brautisch that they could show no mercy to the gentry, the clergy, teachers, and legionaries in Poland. All highest-ranking officials of the Third Reich supported the plan to liquidate the elites of the Polish nation, which was to result in its degradation by eliminating the leading class and rendering the national and cultural rebirth impossible.

This task was entrusted to operational units of the Security Police (*Einsatzgruppe der Sipo*) and the Security Service. These units entered the territory seized by the German army and arrested people based on prepared proscription lists (*Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen*), which contained names of people that could pose a threat to the future German authorities. Some of the lists had already been drawn up before the war broke out. They were made using all kinds of information, such as press releases, reports from German diplomatic posts, and reports about Poles displaying anti-German

sentiment. Many of the lists were compiled with the help of the German minority in Poland. The lists comprised political activists, people holding prominent positions in the social, cultural, and scientific life, participants of anti-German national uprisings in 1918–1921, and all other people considered hostile towards Germany (*Deutschfeindlich eingestellte Personen*). Other lists were drawn up in the first weeks of the occupation by Sipo and SD units based on all kinds of Polish records (e.g. records of offices and organisations) as well as testimonies and accounts of Germans who had lived in Poland before the war.

Einsatzgruppen also worked with *Selbstschutz* (Self-Defence) police units made up of representatives of the German minority at the end of September and at the beginning of October 1939. The whole operation carried out by the operational units was called Operation Tannenberg (*Unternehmen Tannenberg*). All Poles included in the special lists were to be arrested and then sent to concentration camps or executed. During the operation, representatives of all social classes were killed, however, as most came from the Polish social elite, meaning the intelligentsia, the whole operation is sometimes referred to as Intelligentsia mass shootings (*Intelligenzaktion*).

This operation was also carried out in the Koło District. From the second half of September to mid-November 1939, a large group of people (approx. 100) were arrested, most of whom were representatives of social, political, and financial elites of the district. For example, in a small town of Dąbie, the arrested included a teacher, a pharmacist, a doctor, and some prominent local figures. Many of the people arrested in the Koło District were also citizens who did not occupy any higher positions – administrators and farmers. Some of them were arrested because of their patriotic attitudes, respect in the local community, or military past. Many of them were apprehended based on information provided by the German minority, who informed against Poles breaking the invaders' law or displaying pro-Polish or anti-German attitudes. This can be exemplified by the story of the Wiśniewski brothers from Izbica Kujawska, who returned from the 1939 defensive war with weapons and in full uniforms of Polish armed forces. They were informed on by the local German population and then arrested at the end of September 1939 by the local military police. Many Poles were also arrested because of slander spread by their German neighbours who used this opportunity to settle old, prewar scores or to take over their property. The aim of the arrests was to terrorise the local population and to discourage them from any attempts to resist the German authorities. They were made by the local posts of German military police (sometimes supported by *Wehrmacht* and *Selbstschutz* units), by order of the Security Service and the Koło Landrat.

Handarmerleposten Dobrzyszewo, Kreis Wartburg, R. S. Posen. den 10.11.1939. 32/44

Handarmerleposten Wartbrücken, Kreis Wartburg, Prov. Posen. den 8. November 1939. 36/43

VERZEICHNIS
der in Postenbezirk Wartbrücken befindlichen polnischen Intellektuellen-Personen.

Nr.	N a m e	Wohnort	Beruf	Bemerkung
1	Andreas Sochacki	Ghonj	Landwirt	Deutschenmässiger u. Spitzgeb.
2	Bruno Dominjak	Gosdow	"	"
3	Stefan Sohranaki	Skobilice	Arbeiter	"
4	Josef Bucharski	Gosdow	Landwirt	"
5	Jan Zufriet	Isdaga	"	"
6	Wladislaw Gajda	"	"	Deutschenmässiger u. Plünderer.
7	Leon Lopatka	"	"	"
8	Stenislus Knitta	"	"	"
9	Felix Knitte	"	"	"
10	Wladislaw Gimbaki	Dobrow	"	"
11	Felix Jamschewski	"	Fleischer	"
12	Josef Gal	"	Arbeiter	"
13	Wladislaw Bentkowski	"	"	"

Bentkowski
Jan. 1944

A list of the arrested on November 8, 1939. They included Władysław Bentkowski, who was later executed in the Rzuchów Forest, State Archive in Poznań.

The whole group arrested in the district stood trial and then spent a few weeks in prison in Koło. According to the final report of the investigation into this case carried out from 1971 to 1975 by the District Commission for the Investigation of German Crimes in Poznań: "The operation in the Koło-Dąbie District was one of many such operations carried out in the territory occupied by Germans during the first period of the war. From mid-September to mid-November 1939, many citizens from the area were arrested [...] and imprisoned in Koło. [...] This operation was no different from others conducted in Greater Poland and it was launched [...] under the pretence of taking hostages, people who stood out on account of their position, prewar political attitude, social activity, and financial situation." Having spent a few weeks in the Koło prison, on November 15, 1939, fifty-six hostage-prisoners were taken to the Rzuchów Forest in two transports and shot. The transports of Polish

Handarmerleposten
den 15. 11. 39
aufgeföhren Geföhlinge

49

44

Handwritten list of names and details, including names like Andrzej Sochacki, Bruno Dominjak, Stefan Sohranaki, etc.

A list of people shot in the Rzuchów Forest, State Archive in Poznań.

Handwritten list of names and details, including names like Andrzej Sochacki, Bruno Dominjak, Stefan Sohranaki, etc.

hostages were remembered by Józef Piaskowski, who had worked as a driver in the Koło town hall at the time. As he testified after the war: "Prisoners were led out [...] The lorry I drove could accommodate up to thirty people [...] We went towards Chełmno. [...] In the forest, the prisoners got off. The area was surrounded by military policemen, and I even saw some Wehrmacht soldiers. After the prisoners walked away, I was told to reverse the lorry to the road. I drove back to Koło, again to the prison yard. Prisoners were loaded and I again took them to the same place in the forest. When I was driving through the Chełmno forest, I could hear gunshots. During the loading I looked into the rear-view mirror and I saw some people I knew: Kune from Dąbie [...], the road inspector Orywoll from Dąbie and the chemist Gogol from Dąbie." After the execution, bodies of the hostages were buried in a mass grave in the Rzuchów Forest.

The remains of the victims were exhumed in the summer of 1945, during an investigation into the death camp in Chełmno carried out by Judge Władysław Bednarz. On account of the fact that the exhumation protocol was not preserved, its course and results of the examination of the bodies were determined based on the testimonies and accounts of witnesses to the exhumation in the summer of 1945. This is how Janina Zapędowska, wife of the murdered Doctor Czesław Zapędowski, recalled the exhumation: "The grave of the executed, with the body of my husband, was huge and very deep. So deep that in order to recognise the body of your relative, you had to go down a long ladder into the pit with bodies. [...] Some of them were lying lengthwise, and the next layer was lying crosswise. I think there were three layers of bodies. In fact, you could only recognise your relatives based on their clothes as apart from clothes there were only skeletons. I recognised my husband by his suit, which was in shreds." Some information about the course of the exhumation was also provided by a report on the investigation carried out by the District Commission in Poznań from 1971 to 1975: "After three graves, one large and two smaller, were dug up, 56 bodies were found. The skulls of the murdered indicated that the victims had been shot in the head. Out of the bodies exhumed, fourteen were identified by family members based on characteristic clothes and other features. All exhumed bodies, both identified and unidentified, were put into coffins and buried in one grave where they were found."

As the investigation report indicates, thanks to the help of the victim families, fourteen bodies were identified. Later, based on examinations, identities of other hostages murdered in November 1939 in the Rzuchów Forest were determined. Today, we know the names of fifty-four out of fifty-six victims. On a commemorative plaque there are the following names: Jan Bajer (Kłodawa), Kazimierz Bentkowski