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Tomasz Mering, born 1977, lives in Wejherowo, Poland. Author of comic books, storyboards and animations, associated with comic artists of Tricity. In his works he often brings up historical subjects and draws inspiration from literature. His cartoon stories have been exhibited in Tricity, Płock, Łódź, Białystok and Magdeburg, Germany and were published in many magazines. Winner of a contest for comic book evoking the spirit of the Gdańsk city architecture and a competition for poster which promotes reading. Moreover, he is the laureate of the contest for comic strips about Lublin Cider (*Cydr Lubelski*). Tomasz Mering has been awarded a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in the area of literature for making a comic book. He is a member of the Association of Polish Artists and Designers. Author's website: www.mering.pl

THE PIAŚNICA FOIREST

A historical non-fiction comic book

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Introduction

The First World War, put to an end by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, didn't solve all the problems which had caused its outbreak. The provisions of the Treaty were disputed by some of the countries, including Germany. The Weimar Republic and, subsequently, the Third Reich raised territorial claims against Poland, which regained its independence after 123 years of subjugation, concerning for instance the region of Pomerania. Adolf Hitler had been infringing the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles since 1935. Reestablishment of obligatory military service (1935), remilitarization of the Rhineland (1936), annexation of Austria (1938), conquest of the Sudets (1938), incorporation of Bohemia and Moravia into the Reich (1938) and occupation of Klaipeda (1939) constitute just some examples of German attempts to change the post-war European order. In 1933 Hitler demanded revision of the eastern German border, including the establishment of the so-called Polish Corridor (or Pomeranian Corridor) in order to incorporate it to the territory of the Third Reich. Initially, the anti-Polish attitude of the official propaganda was mitigated (1934). However, from October 1938 to late August 1939 the Reich reiterated territorial demands against Poland (inclusion of the Free City of Danzig to Germany and construction of an extraterritorial motorway and railway line which would connect the Reich with East Prussia). As soon as Poland rejected the aforementioned proposals Hitler denounced the German-Polish non-aggression pact (the declaration on non-application of violence in their mutual relations signed in 1934).

On 1 September 1939 at 4:48 a.m., the German battleship SMS *Schleswig-Holstein* opened fire against the Polish Military Transit Depot at Westerplatte.

Some time before that, the Germans had started to bombard some Polish cities (including Wieluń, Ostrów Wielkopolski, Poznań, Cracow, Biała Podlaska and Tczew).

In October 1939, Polish territories (Pomerania, Greater Poland, Silesia and a part of north Mazovia) were annexed into the Third Reich, which was illegal in terms of international law. German authorities aimed at reconstructing the economic, social and ethnic structure of those terrains in order to adapt them to the contemporary ideology and eventually integrate them into the Reich. Polish administration was dissolved and the Polish people could no longer occupy executive positions or managerial posts. At that time, the Germans established the Reich District of Gdańsk and East Prussia (*Reichsgau Danzig-Westpreussen*).

Already in autumn 1939 numerous public offices started their operations implementing the Germanization policy of the Third Reich in the East. In October 1939 Hitler issued the decree *On Strengthening of Germanness*. Then the Office for Strengthening of Germanness was created and *Reichsführer SS* Heinrich Himmler became its commissioner. One of the main provisions contained in that document proposed to eliminate those national groups which constituted a *threat to the Reich and its people*¹.

The occupant started to establish a new legal system. A series of ordinances regulating the criminal law in the occupied Polish territories was initiated by Gen. Walter Brauchitsch's ordinance of 5 September 1939 which established the rule of German law. Also, on 1 October 1939 the General Quartermaster of the Chief Headquarters of Wehrmacht issued a regulation *on prosecution of criminal acts committed before 1 September 1939 on the Polish territories occupied by the Wehrmacht*².

First repressions were initiated by the Wehrmacht troops and by operational groups of Security Police and Security Service (*Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des Sicherheitsdienst*) that followed every army participating in the warfare of September and October 1939, and after that by German paramilitary self-defence forces (*Selbstschutz*). Actually, the operational groups of the Security Police and the *Selbstschutz* arrested and executed many political, cultural and local government activists.

1 See: *Okupacja i ruch oporu w Dzienniku Hansa Franka 1939–1945. T. I. 1939–1942* [Occupation and Resistance Movement in Hans Frank's Diary 1939–1945. Vol. I. 1939–1942], selected and edited by L. Dobroszycki, translated by D. Dąbrowska, M. Tomala, Warsaw 1972, p. 112–114.

2 See: A. Konieczny, *Pod rządami wojennego prawa karnego Trzeciej Rzeszy. Górny Śląsk 1939–1945* [Under the regime of the Third Reich's Military Criminal Law. Upper Silesia 1939–1945], Warsaw 1972, passim. See more: W. Jastrzębski, J. Sziling, *Okupacja hitlerowska na Pomorzu Gdańskim w latach 1939–1945* [The Nazi Occupation in Gdańsk Pomerania in the years 1939–1945], Gdańsk 1979, p. 56–69, et al.

They also penetrated offices, archives and gathering places of Polish social and political organizations. Around 80 thousand names appeared on special lists of persons to be arrested and, after a selection, physically eliminated. The aforementioned operational groups, the *Selbstschutz* and the Police of Gdańsk had those lists at their disposal. An eradication of Polishness consisted in extermination of Polish intelligentsia, devastation of Polish culture and shutdown of various Polish organizations³.

That operation had a code name *Unternehmen Tannenberg* (Operation Tannenberg). From 7 September 1939 the Operation Tannenberg was combined with the *Intelligenzaktion* which aimed at a physical elimination of Polish society leaders in the western territories. The *Intelligenzaktion* developed on a wider scale in October 1939 thus its code name took different geographical adjectives depending on the territory where it was implemented (*Intelligenzaktionen: Pommern, Posen, Litzmannstadt, Masowien, Schlesien*). Those actions also took place in 1939/1940 in the General Governorate (for example in the cities of Cracow, Lublin, Częstochowa, Warsaw, including the famous *Ausserordentliche Befriedungsaktion* (the *AB-Aktion*, the Extraordinary Pacification). The aim of the operational groups and the *Selbstschutz* consisted of *political land purification* (*politische Flurbereinigung*)⁴.

3 Learn more about complicated conditions resulting from the so called proscription lists from: W. Długoborski, *Geneza Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen i jej funkcje w kampanii wrześniowej i pierwszych tygodniach okupacji* [The Genesis of Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen and Its Functions in the September Campaign and During the First Weeks of the Occupation], (in:) *Reminiscencje września 1939. W 70 rocznicę Kampanii Wrześniowej* [Reminiscences of September 1939. The 70th Anniversary of the September Campaign], scientific editor: W. B. Moś, Bytom 2009, p. 45–84; K. Leszczyński, *Działalność Einsatzgruppen policji bezpieczeństwa na ziemiach polskich w 1939 r. w świetle dokumentów* [Operations of Einsatzgruppen of the Security Police in the Polish Territory in 1939 in the Light of the Documents], "Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni Hitlerowskich w Polsce" (hereinafter "BGKBZH") ["Bulletin of the Central Commission for Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland"], vol. XXII, Warsaw 1971, p. 7–30; J. Skorzyński, *Selbstschutz – V kolumna* [Selbstschutz – The 5th Column], *ibid.*, p. 5–56; D. Steyer, *Eksterminacja ludności polskiej na Pomorzu Gdańskim 1939–1945* [The Extermination of the Polish People in Gdańsk Pomerania 1939–1945], Gdynia 1967, p. 34–62; C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce* [The Third Reich's Policy in occupied Poland], vol. II, Warsaw 1970, p. 254–255; W. Jastrzębski, *Organizacja policji bezpieczeństwa i służby bezpieczeństwa w Okręgu Rzeszy Gdańsk–Prusy Zachodnie* [The Organisation of the Security Police and the Security Service in the Reich District of Gdańsk and West Prussia], "Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu" ["Bulletin of the Central Commission for Investigation of Crimes Against the Polish Nation"], vol. XXXIII, Warsaw 1991, p. 33–45.

4 See for example: F. Halder, *Dziennik wojenny: codzienne zapisy szefa Sztabu Generalnego Wojsk Lądowych 1939–1942* [The War Diary: daily notes of the Chief of General Staff of the Land Forces 1939–1942], edit. H. A. Jacobson, co-op. A. Philippi, translated by B. Woźniecki, Warsaw 1971, vol. I, p. 117; C. Madajczyk, *op. cit.*, Warsaw 1970, p. 49 et al.; *Encyklopedia "białych plam"* [The Encyclopaedia of "white spots"], collective work, vol. XIII, Radom 2004, p. 293; M. Wardzyńska, *Był rok 1939: operacja niemieckiej policji bezpieczeństwa w Polsce Intelligenzaktion* [It Was 1939: The Operation Intelligenzaktion of the German Security Police in Poland], Warsaw 2009, p. 144–185; K. Radziwończyk, *Akcja Tannenberg*, [Operation Tannenberg], "Przegląd Zachodni" ["The Western Review"], 1966, no. 3–4, p. 41.

The extermination in Pomerania had several phases. Practically, the first period covered the whole September 1939. At that time, a major role in genocide was played by the Wehrmacht as well as the operational groups of the Security Police and the Security Service. The next phase lasted from late September to January 1940.

In that phase the *Selbstschutz* troops, which carried out the largest number of executions, were general implementers of the annihilation programme. During the last phase (1940–1945) the number of mass executions significantly decreased. Nevertheless, some cases of elimination of groups of several or various dozens of people still took place. They were based on verdicts of the so-called “administration of justice”.

Detainees were often incarcerated in provisional arrests or internment camps created by the Wehrmacht, the police and the *Selbstschutz*. They were also held in custody in the existing prisons and in those established by the Gestapo or other police forces. During the whole autumn 1939, the representatives of Pomeranian intelligentsia were transported to the Stutthof concentration camp. The persecutions also affected a small (at that time) number of Jewish people which hadn't left their places of residence⁵.

In the western territories, including Pomerania, victims of the mass repression were mainly the most active individuals in public, economic and social life. As already mentioned, exceptional severity was applied to the physical extinction of the Polish community leaders and head persons which did not necessarily include people with higher education. It affected mostly clergy, teachers, lawyers, officers, landowners, public officials, members of social and political organizations (especially The Polish Western Association), insurgents of the Greater Poland Uprising and the Silesian Uprisings, and people who potentially constituted a threat to the implementation of the Third Reich's projects, including peasants and workers often antagonised with the Germans who had lived in Poland before the war. Sometimes they were close neighbours. Their physical elimination was precisely planned. The same concerned the Catholic Church. Many priests were murdered or transported to various camps. The Germans aimed to destroy the ecclesiastical community perceived as a permanent anchor of Polish identity dated back to the period of the Partitions of Poland⁶.

5 For more information about the Jewish martyrdom see: D. Drywa, *Zagłada Żydów w obozie koncentracyjnym Stutthof 1939–1945 [The Extermination of Jews in the Stutthof Concentration Camp 1939–1945]*, Gdańsk 2001.

6 See more: W. Długoborski, op. cit.

During the operations mentioned above, carried out until late December 1939 (or until early January 1940), more than 40 thousand people were killed on the annexed territories, of which about 30 thousand in Pomerania. The best known crime scenes in the region include the valley near Fordon (presently a town district of Bydgoszcz) later named the Valley of Death, the town of Grudziądz and its vicinity: Księżę Góry Hills, Mniszek, Grupa, and besides that: Tuchola, Pelplin, Kocborowo, Świecie, **the Piaśnica Forest near Wejherowo**, the Szpęgawskie Woods near Starogard, the Barbarka Forest near Toruń and many more.

Approximately ten thousand people lost their lives in Greater Poland, one and a half thousand in Silesia and about one thousand in north Mazovia⁷.

Already during the occupation, some publications of the Underground Poland and the Polish Underground State contained reports about German crimes in Pomerania and a tragic situation of those territories. However, not all the details of those atrocities were known. For this reason, the name "Piaśnica" had never appeared in the clandestine publications, same as "Szpęgawsk". The reports disclosed general information about executions, for example in northern regions of Pomerania, and about graves in the forests near Starogard.

The newspaper *Ziemie Zachodnie Rzeczypospolitej* (Western Territories of the Republic of Poland), supplement to the *Rzeczpospolita Polska* (Republic of Poland) published by the central authority of the Government Delegacy for Poland, which was a civil segment of the Polish Underground State, described the Pomeranian tragedy in the following way: *There is no other land nor other conquered country that has experienced as much terror and as many Gestapo actions as the Western Territories during the first year of the war. They were attacked by the best police forces which were very well-trained and familiar with every detail concerning the territory prepared for the operations. Only later, after the first period of terror, when the troops needed to get a new prize, a weaker and less militant element came into play (...)*⁸. At that time nobody knew that the actions were organised by the special operational groups of the Security Police and the *Selbstschutz* as mentioned above.

7 C. Łuczak, *Polska i Polacy w drugiej wojnie światowej* [Poland and the Polish People in the Second World War], Poznań 1993, p. 101; B. Bojarska, *Eksterminacja inteligencji polskiej na Pomorzu Gdańskim. Wrzesień–grudzień 1939* [The Extermination of the Polish Intelligentsia in Gdańsk Pomerania. September–December 1939]; id., *Piaśnica. Miejsce martyrologii i pamięci. Z badań nad zbrodniami hitlerowskimi na Pomorzu* [Piaśnica. A Place of Martyrdom and Memory. The Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Pomerania], Wejherowo 2009.

8 "Ziemie Zachodnie Rzeczypospolitej" ["Western Territories of the Republic of Poland"], 1942, no. 1.

A year later, the same newspaper alarmed: *A man who has never experienced the occupation of Pomerania, could never imagine that hell. Since Pomerania was thrown on the rock bottom of the invasion inferno (...). There was no difference between a man, a woman and a child. From the very beginning night echoed with screams, cries and gunshots*⁹.

Other (non-serial) publication of the Government Delegation reported that: *A historic tragedy which takes place in the Western Territories, requires special means of expression. Severity and intensity of fights and attempts to eradicate Polishness filled the atmosphere with such a huge tension that life under these circumstances has become extraordinary difficult and completely unheard of until now*¹⁰.

In this regard, correct is the standpoint of Czesław Madajczyk who wrote that *the western territories of the Second Polish Republic after their incorporation into the Third Reich were the first front line of battle for independence*¹¹.

Professor Bogdan Chrzanowski, PhD

9 Ibid., 1943, no. 3. It was a comment concerning the imposed obligation to register on the German National List – Deutsche Volksliste (DVL-GNL). Those issues were repeatedly raised in the aforementioned newspaper and many other clandestine publications (see for example an article published in the "Biuletyn Informacyjny" ["Information Bulletin"]. Edition "P" ("Powiat") ["District"], 1941, no. 7, *Z Kaszubami nie udało się* [It Didn't Work with the Kashubians]. See more: C. Madajczyk, *Polityka III Rzeszy...* [The Third Reich's Policy...], vol. I, p. 398–399. See more about consequences of the signing on the list: J. Sziling, *Przymusowa służba Polaków z III grupy niemieckiej listy narodowościowej w Wehrmachcie na przykładzie Pomorza* [Obligatory Military Service of the Poles from the 3rd Group of the German National List in the Wehrmacht Troops Demonstrated by the Example of Pomerania], "Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu" ["Bulletin of the Central Commission for Investigation of Crimes Against the Polish Nation"], vol. XXXIII, Warsaw 1991, p. 92–113; L. Jażdżewski, *Kaszubi w Wehrmachcie* [The Kashubians in the Wehrmacht], typescript of a doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Prof. J. Borzyszkowski in the Institute of History of the University of Gdańsk; id. *Kaszubi w Wehrmachcie 1942–1945 w świetle źródeł* [The Kashubians in the Wehrmacht 1942–1945 on the basis of printed sources], "Przegląd Zachodni" ["The Western Review"], 2001, no. 1, p. 253, and scientific works written by other authors. After the war the people listed on the GNL were subject to verification and rehabilitation procedure. The verification concerned the people who had lived before the occupation in the territories of the Reich or the Free City of Danzig, that is, the people who had German or Gdańsk citizenship but after the war declared to be Polish. Whereas, the people registered on the GNL in the territories of the pre-war Poland were subject to the rehabilitation.

10 *Z pierwszej linii frontu* [From the First Front Line], (red. K. M. Pospieszalski), (pub. Government Delegation), Warsaw 1943, p. 31.

11 C. Madajczyk, op. cit., p. 139.

THE PIAŚNICA FOIREST

A historical non-fiction comic book

On 11 November 1918 the Regency Council created at the initiative of German and Austrian emperors transferred, by means of a decree, the military power and the general command of Polish troops to Józef Piłsudski. After 123 years of partitions, Poland regained its independence and obtained direct access to the sea. The city of Wejherowo became a base of a new great centre of maritime economy which was Gdynia.



That city hosted a headquarters of a relatively large military garrison. In 1928, Wejherowo became the capital of the Maritime District which had been formed from the Wejherowo District and Puck District.

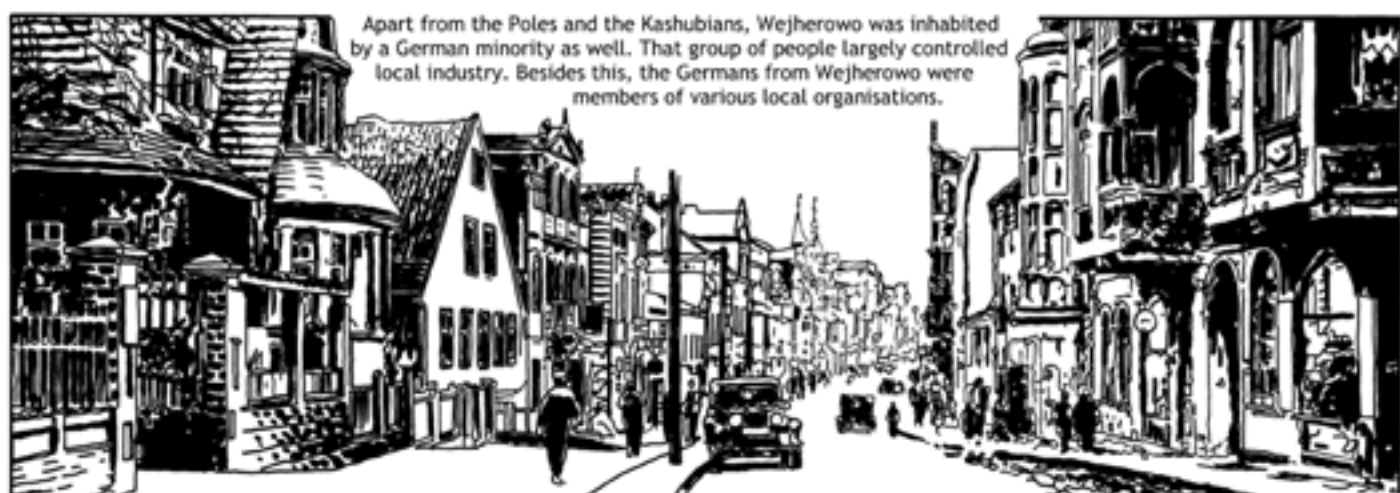
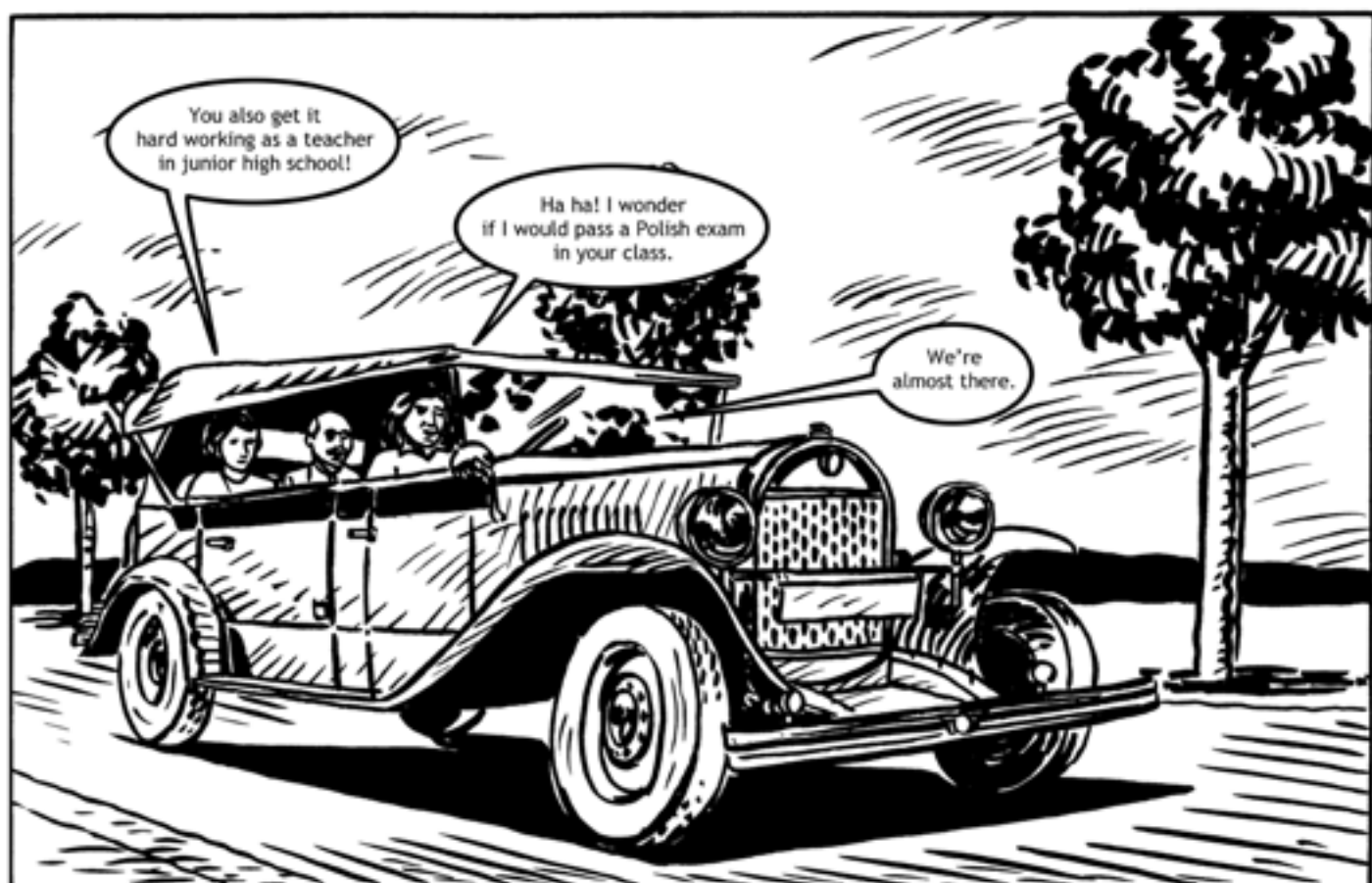


There were various schools in Wejherowo, for example the Junior and High School for Girls whose director was Sister Alicja Kotowska, the Superior of the local Congregation of the Sisters of the Resurrection.

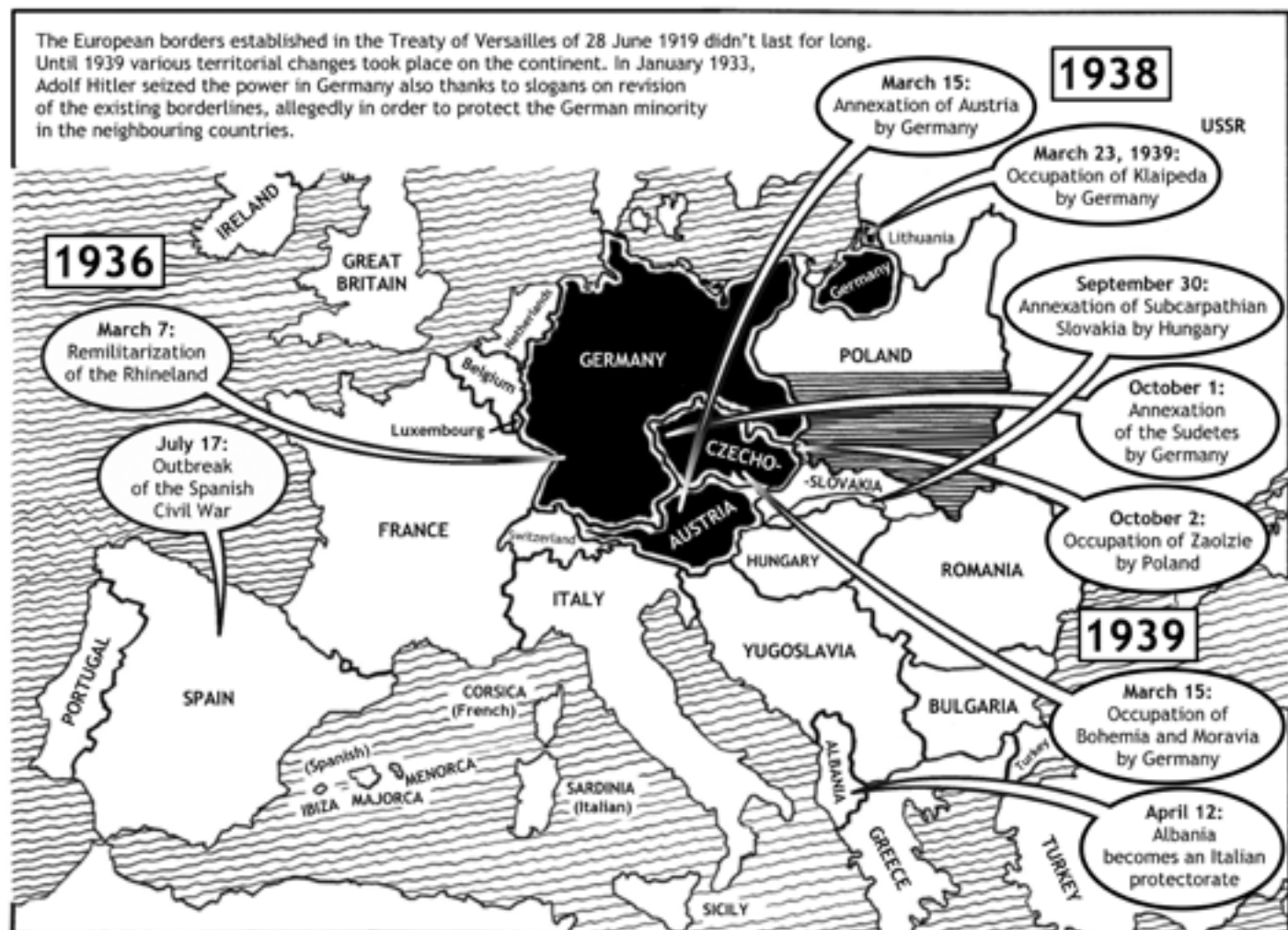








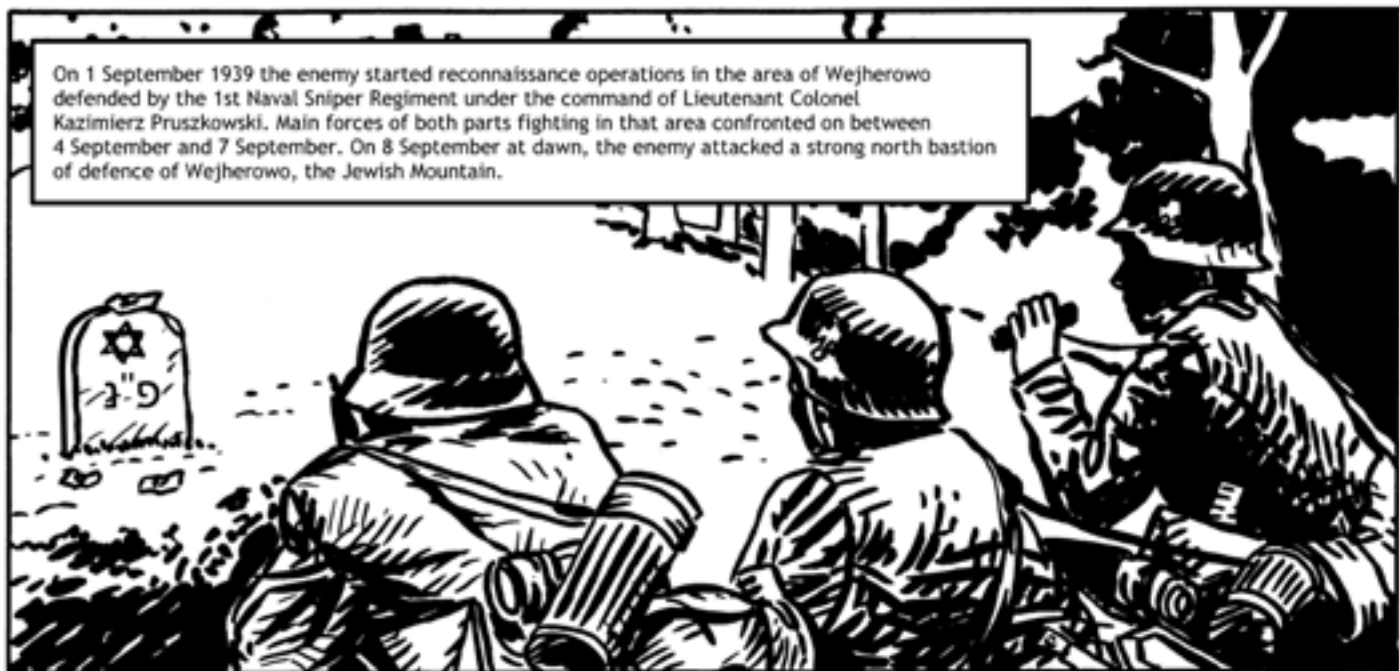
The European borders established in the Treaty of Versailles of 28 June 1919 didn't last for long. Until 1939 various territorial changes took place on the continent. In January 1933, Adolf Hitler seized the power in Germany also thanks to slogans on revision of the existing borderlines, allegedly in order to protect the German minority in the neighbouring countries.



On 31 August 1939, the Germans gave Poland an ultimatum of sixteen points (although they never did it officially) which contained demands concerning the incorporation of the Free City of Danzig into the Reich and conducting a poll to decide whether the area of "so-called Corridor" which extended from the Baltic Sea to the Kwidzyn-Grudziądz-Chełmno-Bydgoszcz line (including these cities) and to Trzcińka in the west" shall belong to Germany or to Poland.



On 1 September 1939 the enemy started reconnaissance operations in the area of Wejherowo defended by the 1st Naval Sniper Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Kazimierz Pruszkowski. Main forces of both parts fighting in that area confronted on between 4 September and 7 September. On 8 September at dawn, the enemy attacked a strong north bastion of defence of Wejherowo, the Jewish Mountain.



On the same day in the evening, the Germans occupied the village of Bolszewo and afterwards they reached Gniewowo situated in the southeast of Wejherowo breaking deeply into the ring of Polish defence.



On 8 September, shortly before midnight, the commander of the Land Coastal Defence, Colonel Stanisław Dąbek, being aware of the futility of further resistance in that area, commanded Lieutenant Colonel Pruszkowski to pull out to the Reda-Ciechocino line. The Polish troops left Wejherowo overnight.



The following day the Voluntary Scout Company of Wejherowo suffered big losses fighting on the foreground of Kępa Oksywska (in the village of Biała Rzeką). Many scouts were taken captive. The occupants considered them to be bandits and therefore murdered most of them.



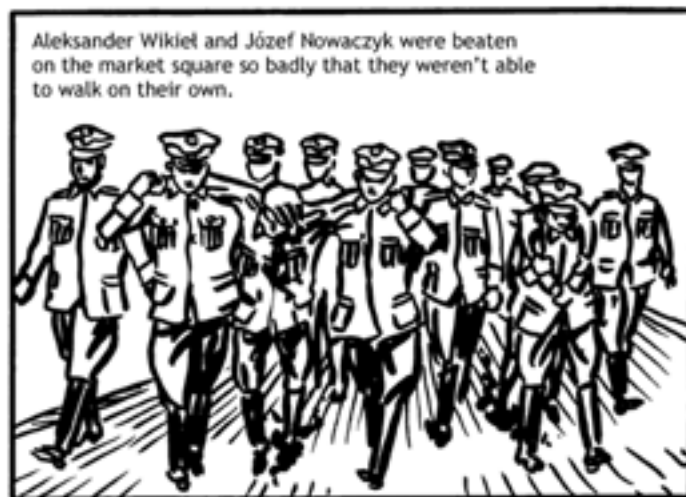
On 9 September 1939 approximately 600 Polish prisoners of war who had participated in the defence of the area between Reda and Biała Rzeką, were taken captive by the German troops.

On 9 September 1939 the German troops marched into Wejherowo. From the very first days of the occupation the Germans started to arrest Polish citizens of Wejherowo, particularly representatives of the intelligentsia.



In accordance with the order, the prisoners were supposed to be "given back" in the transitory camp of Wejherowo.





Aleksander Wikel and Józef Nowaczyk were beaten on the market square so badly that they weren't able to walk on their own.



In the prison yard, the Germans executed Aleksander Wikel and Józef Nowaczyk, and an unknown member of the Riflemen Association.



The body of the killed man was buried in the yard corner of the Wejherowo prison, near a dumpster and next to Wikiel and Nowaczyk's buried bodies. After the war, it wasn't possible to find the remains of the murdered men.



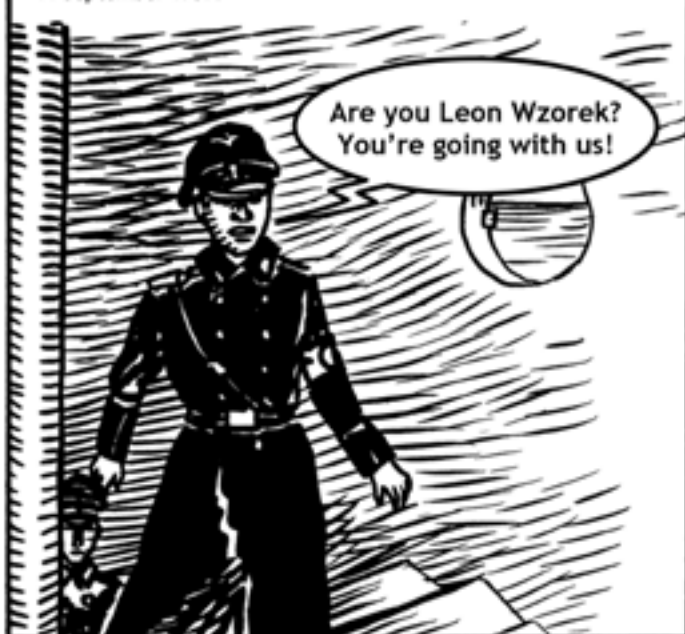
The September Campaign continues. The Rozewie Lighthouse, the furthest north place on the Polish coast.



Leon Wzorek, the first Polish lighthouse keeper after the regaining of the Polish independence in 1918 staid on duty. He refused to evacuate to the Hel Peninsula.



11 September 1939.



He was interrogated and beaten in the prison of Puck and then transported to the prison of Wejherowo.



Leon Wzorek was murdered in the Piaśnica Forest probably in December 1939.



On 19 September 1939 in front of the Artus Court in Gdańsk during a mass rally Hitler's favourite, the self-proclaimed ruler of the Free City of Danzig, Albert Forster said that "in ten years there would be not a one Pole in Gdańsk and in the whole Pomerania region". He also claimed that "the Polish language would be no longer heard in there".



On 12 October 1939 Albert Forster as a governor (NSDAP gauleiter) of the newly established Reichsgau Danzig-West Prussia, arrived to Wejherowo along with the Gestapo officers.



He gave there a memorable anti-Polish speech which was transmitted on the streets of the town.

In five years everything will be German here. I know that some might still think that there would be Poland in here. We have secured ourselves against those people and the Polish intelligentsia will be no longer disturbing us anymore. We need to exterminate those lousy Polacks starting with those who are still in their cradles.

My countrymen!
The lives of Poles
are in your hands!

Let the Polish dogs die!
Death to all the Poles!

Heil!
Heil!
Heil!



The sisters Stanisława and Kazimiera Panek, Dr Franciszek Panek's daughters, were arrested and locked up in the prison of Wejherowo. The Gestapo and the command of a local Selbstschutz occupied their mansion.



Arrests of gendarmerie stations, court prisons and Gestapo detention centres in Pomerania were full of confined Poles.



The village of Leśniewo near Wejherowo during the potato harvest. Oberwachmeister Wittke from Wejherowo and forester Stöckel came to a German farmer Walter Mahlke.



Take your son Werner and turn up together in the forest tonight. Bring your shovels with you.



I've got a strip of land for you to dig. The trench needs to be 2.5 meters deep. Don't tell anyone about that. Understood?



Yes, sir.

That night 10 pits were dug in the Piaśnica forest. The work was carried out by the local Germans, for example by Walter and Werner Mahlke, Emil Reiner and Paul Lietzow, all of them from the village of Leśniewo.



According to the report by Wiktor Brylowski, who worked as a railwayman on the Wejherowo Station, those types of human transports were carried out in the last one wagon, and then in the last two wagons of the Lębork-Gdańsk train.



Those last railway cars were shunted to the side tracks with a railway ramp in the Wejherowo Train Station.



Get into the buses and lorries!



Women, children and men separately!

No, I beg you!

Mutti!...



Teofil Mudlaj, a linesman on the Wejherowo-Krokowo roadway, each day saw about 12 lorries loaded with people driving into the forest. After a few minutes gunfire would start... And then loud cries were often heard from the forest.



Lorries with luggage were driven to the Gestapo headquarters situated in Dr Panek's mansion. On the same day in the evening, Wiktor Bryłowski prepared empty wagons for their journey back to Łębork.



About an hour after the train departed from the railway ramp...





Mrs Elżbieta Ellwart from the village of Orle related what she had seen at that time in the Piaśnica Forest:

In the second half of October or in November 1939
I was walking from Orle to Leśniewo to visit my parents-in-law.
I was nine month pregnant. I felt very lonely. My husband was mobilised
by the army at the end of August 1939. He was supposed to come back home
any day and I waited for him. At first, I was walking along the road
that crossed the forest. Then I diverted to a narrow forest pathway
near the junction of the Wejherowo-Krokowa roadway.



I landed on a small hill...



I looked around and I saw a dead body of Boleslaw Witkowski, the parish priest of Mechowo, hanging from a tree.



Do you know where you are now? Are you aware of what's happening here?

Do you know who we are and what uniforms we wear? Do you realise what you see around here?

I don't see anything and I know nothing.



We're taking the lady with us.

We're not supposed to shot anyone else.

Who are you?
What are your parents' names?
What are your siblings' names?
Names of your relatives?



My name is Elzbieta Eliwart.

Your maiden name is Lehmann... Are you German?

I was born here.



If you tell anyone what you've seen here - you, your family and your whole village will die.



I looked around again and I saw a newly dug rectangular pit.



I realised that the crying which I'd heard when I was walking through the forest was coming from here.

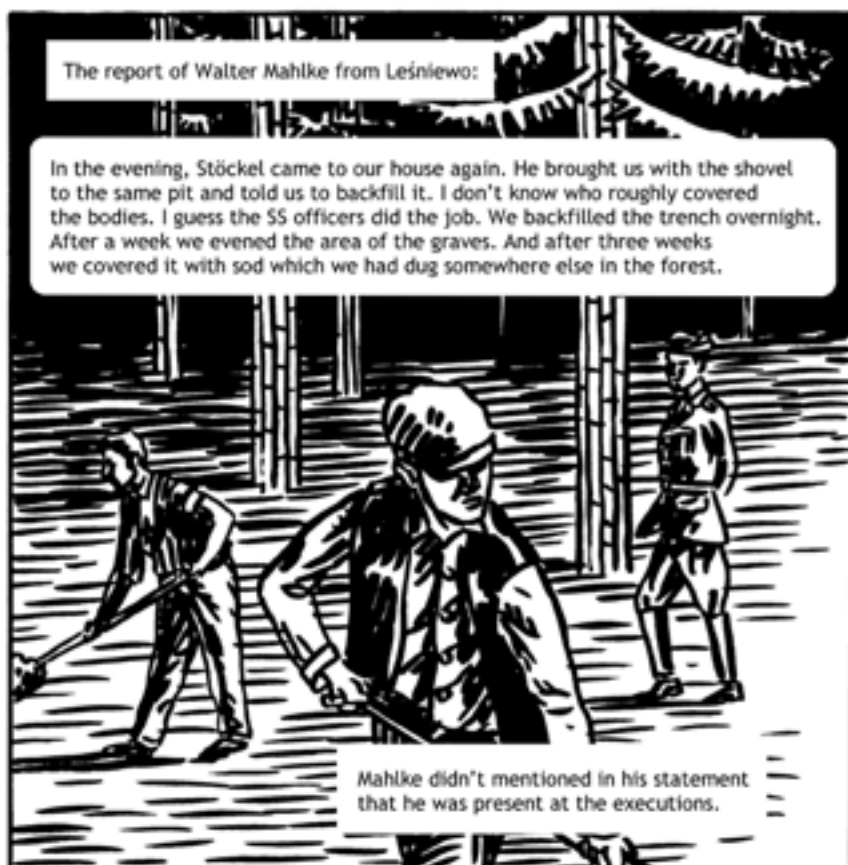
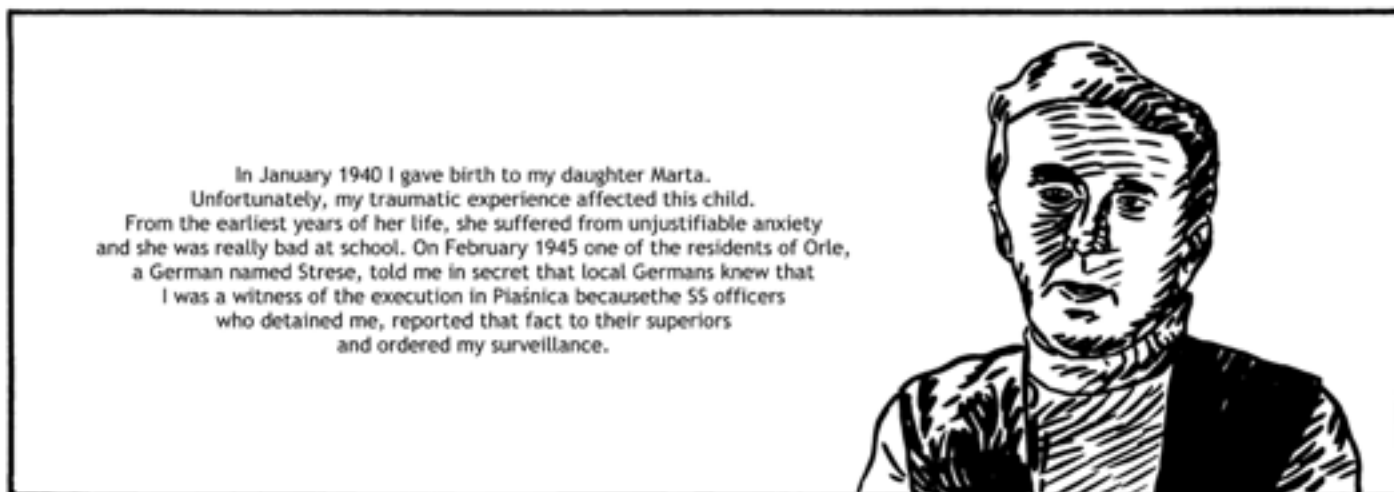


Get out of here!



Walk faster, lady!







That day, Irena Jankowska, the daughter of Aleksander Jankowski, came to the prison of Wejherowo to make sure that the Germans didn't take her father away.



Holy Mary!
It's Sister Alicja!



Irena Jankowska recognised Sister Alicja Kotowska inside the car. Before the war, Sister Alicja admitted her into the first class of the Junior High School of which she was a director.



BANG! BANG!
BANG! BANG!



UNDRESS!



OH, NO!...

Jesus Christ!...

Don't cry, Kazimiera.
Our deaths will be
revenged.





In 1944 the Germans started to cover up traces of the crime in the Piaśnica Forest. The manual labour of digging up the graves and burning the bodies was performed by prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp appointed by the Germans.



When the work was done, the prisoners were executed and then the Germans burnt their bodies as well.



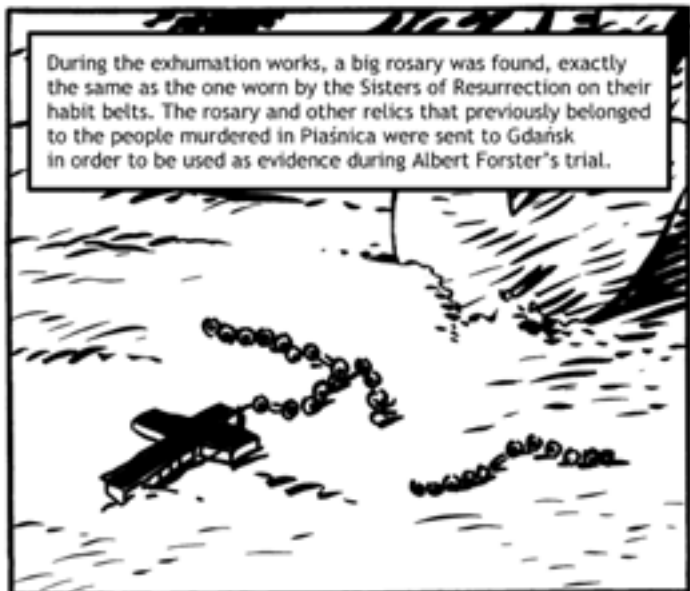
In 1946 the bodies of the victims were exhumed in the Piaśnica Forest.



Old companions of Sister Alicja Kotowska's monastic life took part in the exhumation of her buried body.



During the exhumation works, a big rosary was found, exactly the same as the one worn by the Sisters of Resurrection on their habit belts. The rosary and other relics that previously belonged to the people murdered in Piaśnica were sent to Gdańsk in order to be used as evidence during Albert Forster's trial.



In Poland Albert Forster was tried for his wrongdoings before the Supreme National Tribunal of Gdańsk. On 29 April 1948 he was sentenced to death. The sentence was carried out on 28 February 1952 in the Detention Ward for Warsaw Mokotów.



I hereby sentence the citizen Albert Forster to death by hanging...



On 5 August 1945, there was a national demonstration of several thousand people in Piaśnica accompanied by a mass and a consecration of a cross. Other important pilgrimage to the Piaśnica graves took place in autumn 1946.



In 1955, the Memorial to the Victims of Piaśnica was erected. There are three caskets built in a niche of the monument which contains soil taken from the Stutthof concentration camp, from Westerplatte and from one of the fireplaces in Piaśnica. Near the memorial, there is a plaque showing the precise location of 26 mass graves which have been marked and taken into care.



On 13 June 1999 Pope John Paul II beatified 108 Polish martyrs who had been murdered during World War II. The beatification mass was celebrated in Warsaw and one of the beatified people was Sister Alicja Kotowska from Wejherowo.



During the period from October 1939 to spring 1940 thousands of people were shot in mass executions in the Piaśnica Forest near Wejherowo. Among them were the representatives of the Polish elites, including priests, teachers, social and political activists and many more. Arrests of the Poles started as soon as the Germans marched into Poland, and they were carried out on the ground of the special prosecution book (Sonderfahndungsbuch) containing information that had been provided already before the war by the most trusted local Germans who had cooperated with the German intelligence. The victims were transported by trains from the Third Reich. They were Polish, Czech and also German. Apart from that, mentally ill patients taken from medical institutions were exterminated there as well. From the railway ramp in Wejherowo, those people were transported by lorries to the place of the massacre in Piaśnica. The executions were mostly performed by members of the military unit SS Wachsturmbann "Eimann" of Gdańsk, gendarmerie officers, members of the special operational group Einsatzkommando 16 and the Selbstschutz. Since 2011, the investigation department of the Institute of National Remembrance, Branch Office in Gdańsk has been conducting an investigation into the crime committed in the Piaśnica Forest which may bring a new insight on the data concerning the number of victims.



Aleksander Burkiet
student



Alojzy Blaszkowski
post office clerk



Jan Przedziecki
merchant



Józef Gniech
caretaker in the
Starosta Office



Karol Biliński
Mayor of Wejherowo



Augustyn Kołodziejka
police officer

In the Piaśnica Forest, the Germans murdered priests, teachers, lawyers and clerks, but also merchants, craftsmen, farmers and workers who were known for their patriotic activity. Many of them were members of various associations such as Polish Western Association, Ex-Insurgents and Ex-Soldiers Association and Falcon Gymnastic Society.



Jan Lubocki
smith



Lucjan Michalski
clerk



Jan Patelczyk
railwayman



Edmund Duszyński
teacher



Kazimierz Schwarz
judge



Stanisław Szyszka
worker



Kazimierz Bieliński
director of electric
plant



Leon Nejman
Mirza Kryczyński
lawyer, Polish Tatar



Roman Kuniewski
forest manager



Hipolit Roszczyński
municipal governor
of the municipality
of Rumia-Zagórze



Teofil Naczk
caretaker of the
Junior High School
of Wejherowo



Witold Taraszkiewicz
police officer



On 16 December 2015, the Piaśnica Museum was constituted in Wejherowo as a branch office of the Stutthof Museum. The establishment carries out investigation works on the crime of Piaśnica. It focuses as well on various educational and cultural activities. A seat of the Piaśnica Museum will be located ultimately in Franciszek Panek's pre-war mansion situated at 6 Ofiar Piaśnicy Street in Wejherowo which is currently being renovated.

NEWLY CREATED MUSEUM IS LOOKING FOR MEMENTOES

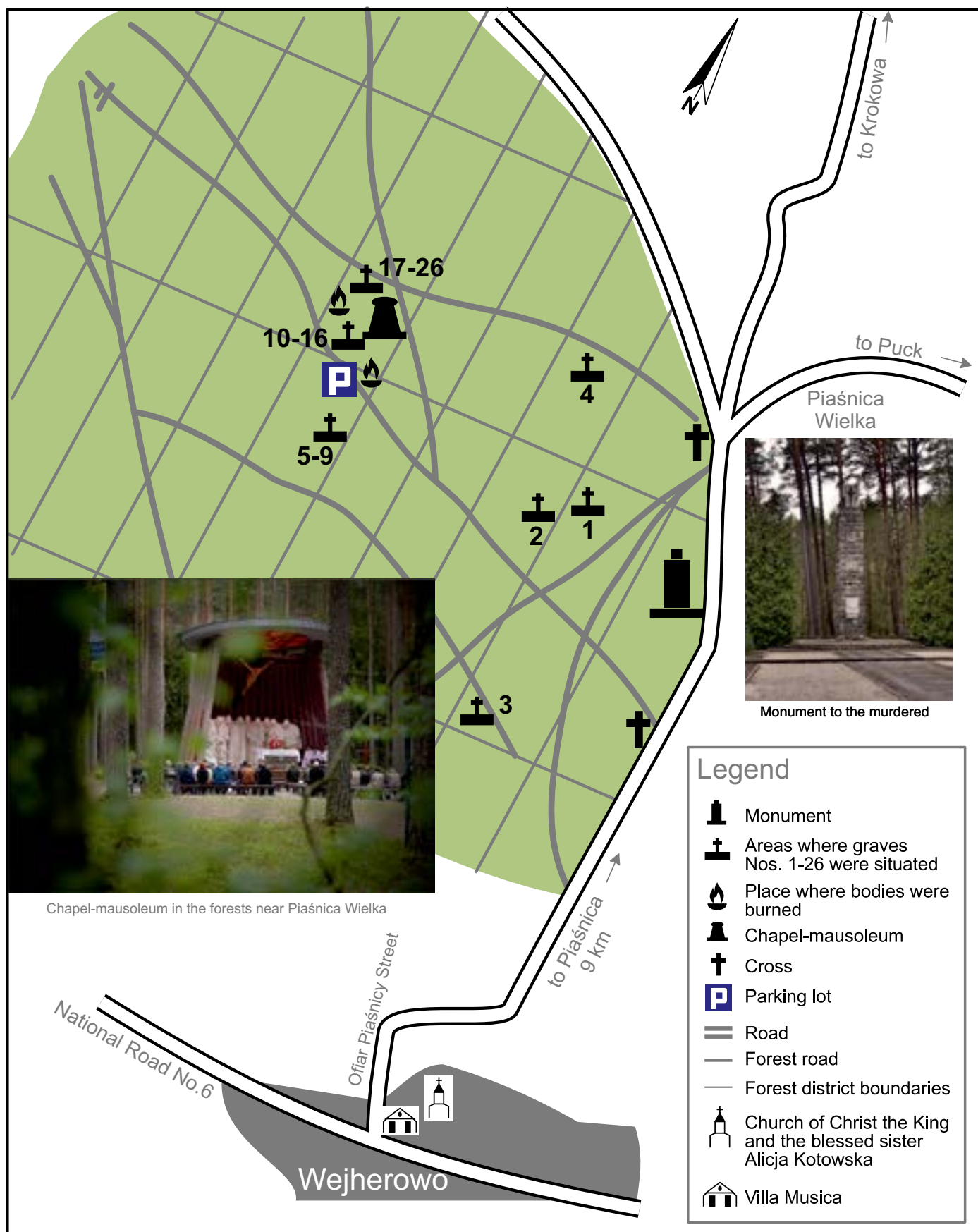
The Piaśnica Museum appeals for assistance with finding any mementoes related to the crime committed in the forests near Piaśnica Wielka (Pomeranian Voivodeship) in 1939. The crime claimed thousands of victims who were executed near Piaśnica Wielka and buried in mass graves. It was one of the first massacres of civilians committed on such a huge scale during World War II.

The Piaśnica Museum in Wejherowo was established on 16 December 2015. After the building is refurbished and suitably adapted, the Museum will function in the historic Villa Musica in Wejherowo (former headquarters of a local unit of Gestapo). The obtained mementoes will be used for preparing a permanent exhibition at the museum. They will also broaden the knowledge of the tragedy in Piaśnica, which has not been thoroughly examined so far, and majority of its victims remain unknown.

As a result of a disinterment carried out in 1946, some personal belongings of the victims, such as, amongst others, crosses, medallions, wedding rings, prayer books and other items were taken out of mass graves in the forests near Piaśnica Wielka. Abundant photographic documentation of the disinterment was prepared. It showed the works of the commission, as well as the discovered bodies and objects. Unfortunately, the objects and pictures presented subsequently at exhibitions with the aim to facilitate identification of the bodies were lost after 1948 in circumstances that remain unexplained. Any information on what happened to exhibits of value for the Piaśnica Museum can help us in finding them.

**Should you have any mementoes or information,
please contact us:**

The Piaśnica Museum in Wejherowo
11/2 Św. Jacka St., 84-200 Wejherowo
phone (58) 736-11-11; mobile phone 501-047-240
e-mail address: muzeum@muzeumpiasnickie.pl
www.muzeumpiasnickie.pl



Mass graves of the victims, places where bodies were burned, a chapel-mausoleum, and a monument dedicated to the murdered are situated ca. 9 km to the north of Wejherowo, within 250 hectares of forest areas.

