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“I FELT SORRY FOR THE PEOPLE AND DIDN’T OBEY THE ORDER...”. THE ACTIVITY OF ALFONS HIMMEL, A MILITARY POLICE FUNCTIONARY FROM THE STATION IN LIPSKO, KREIS STARACHOWICE (GG), AS REFLECTED IN POST-WAR INVESTIGATIVE AND TRIAL MATERIAL

Summary

Lipsko is a small town in central Poland. During the German occupation, it belonged to the Kreis Starachowice, which was part of the Radom District within the General Governorate (GG). Between 1940 and 1944, a military police station operated there, where one of the functionaries was Alfons Himmel. After the war, Himmel went into hiding but was eventually identified, apprehended, and sentenced to death in a 1949 trial. His testimony, along with that of numerous witnesses to his crimes, serves as a valuable source for understanding various aspects of the occupiers’ policies towards Poles and Jews – especially the reasons for and procedures surrounding arrests and executions. These accounts also shed light on the everyday interactions between the military police and the local population.

Keywords

General Governorate • Radom District • Kreis Starachowice • German crimes • Holocaust

On the afternoon of Tuesday, 4 December 1945, Leokadia Kośnik, a postal clerk, was walking down a street in Wałbrzych when she noticed a man whose face and build seemed familiar. She recognised him as a German military policeman who, several months earlier, had taken part in setting fire to peasants' buildings in her home village on the Vistula River – and who had violently driven her away when she tried to douse the flames with a bucket of water.¹ At Leokadia Kośnik's urging, the man was apprehended by passers-by and brought to the Citizens' Militia station. There, he identified himself using a *Kennkarte* issued near the end of the occupation under the name of Leon Borek – an accountant born in Kozienice, residing in a village in Starachowice County, and employed in the accounting department of the Gieszcze Puste (now Głuszycza) Municipal Board in Wałbrzych County. Although he answered questions in Polish, his noticeable German accent likely raised suspicions. Moreover, the *Kennkarte* bore, among other markings, the stamp of the Military Police Station in Lipsko, corroborating Jadwiga Kośnik's testimony that the man had served there as a functionary. Suspicions may have been heightened by the discovery of a large amount of cash on the detainee – over 2,300 zlotys and 20,000 German marks.² Probably after a while, "Leon Borek" admitted that his real name was Alfons Himmel and that during the occupation he had been a military policeman in the aforementioned town. Four years later, the detained man was sentenced to death and executed in Radom prison.

Against the backdrop of thousands of cases prosecuted in post-war Poland under the so-called August Decree, Himmel's case may appear insignificant. Within the vast machinery of the German police apparatus in the General Governorate, he was merely a minor figure – a non-commissioned officer stationed at a pro-

¹ *Archiwum Delegatury Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Radomiu* (Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance, Delegation in Radom, hereinafter AIPN Ra), 108/137, vol. 1, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Leokadia Kośnik, 4 December 1945, p. 7.

² *Ibid.*, Alfons Himmel's personal inspection report, 11 December 1945, p. 3.

vincial outpost, overseeing several towns and impoverished rural areas on the Vistula River.

Yet the materials collected during the investigation and trial of Himmel hold exceptional value. Most notably, they underscore the critical role played by the German military police in the extermination of both Poles and Jews. On the scale of the Radom District, these records offer rare – and this is no exaggeration – insight into the everyday interactions between certain German police functionaries and the local populations under their control.

This is all the more valuable because Himmel,³ who knew Polish, was able – unlike other arrested Germans – to answer questions asked during interrogations at length, as well as to send the prosecutor and the court multi-page letters concerning his own activity.⁴ What is more, what he said about himself and what emerged from witness testimony paint a picture of a man with a morally ambiguous personality, whose actions alternated between cruelty – or even brutality – and acts of compassion toward the persecuted. Even in the last moments of his life, he seemed convinced that he would die innocently, because as a military policeman, he had done more good than harm for the inhabitants of Lipsko and the surrounding area.⁵

³ According to archival materials concerning Himmel and press reports from his trial (held in 1949), during the occupation, the military policeman spoke fluent Polish and understood perfectly well everything that was said to him in that language. In court, he uttered only short sentences in Polish, making longer statements in German. The press ironically remarked that he had “forgotten” Polish. When writing in Polish, he used the help of a translator.

⁴ The prosecutorial and court files underpinning this article are marked by a distinctive character, consistent with most materials generated under the Decree of 31 August 1944. While formal shortcomings in the prosecutorial proceedings are evident in retrospect, the materials nonetheless contain valuable information about wartime and occupation-era events that are rarely documented in sources of other provenance. In the investigation into Alfons Himmel’s activity, it is notable that the prosecutor rejected most of the suspect’s requests to interview individuals who might have testified in his favour. This was likely due to the already substantial body of incriminating evidence amassed against this military policeman. For more on the distinctive character of the so-called August trials, see for example T. Domański, “Sierpniówki jako źródło do dziejów Armii Krajowej,” in *Z dziejów Polskiego Państwa Podziemnego na Kielecczyźnie 1939–1945*, eds. T. Domański and J. Gapys, Kielce 2016, pp. 167–215.

⁵ As will be discussed later in this article, the indictment charged Himmel with involvement in dozens of repressive actions conducted by the military police from Lipsko, including numerous executions. Given the focus of *Polish-Jewish Studies*, I will not examine all of these events, but will concentrate on the extermination of Jews and the persecution of Poles who aided them. I also omit certain episodes from Himmel’s later life – such as his escape from custody, subsequent re-arrest, and recruitment, while in prison, as a secret collaborator for the public security authorities tasked with reporting on fellow inmates.

Alfons Erich Himmel was born on 1 May 1909 in Zabrze.⁶ All that is known about his father, Cyprian, is that he was a miner. His mother's name was Elizabeth, and the children's birth certificates state that her maiden name was Wollnitza, which should be considered a Germanised form of the Polish name Wolnica. This information suggests that the parents of the protagonist of this article formed a relationship in which, as was very often the case in Upper Silesia, both German and Polish traditions were cultivated daily. Alfons was raised with his twin brother Hugon⁷ and his brother Richard, who was two years older.⁸ At least four of his siblings died – his brother Heinrich died in 1911,⁹ his sister Anastasia in 1912,¹⁰ his sister Marie in 1913,¹¹ and another sister, Margarethe, in 1915.¹²

According to his testimony, Himmel completed primary school in 1923 and began an apprenticeship in accounting at one of the breweries in Zabrze. Although the details of this training remain unknown, he later stated that accounting was his profession before becoming a “police officer.” In 1929, he lost his job and remained unemployed until 1933, except for a brief period at a glassworks. That year, he found a permanent position at a brewery in Zabrze.¹³ This brought stability to the young man's life, which was confirmed by his marriage around 1937. Probably before the outbreak of World War II, the couple had two children.

Although he was drafted into the German army in September 1939, he was ultimately assigned, as he recounted, to the Border Guard (*Grenzschutz*). Over the next several months, he served at several posts – the longest being in Siemianowice Śląskie, where a section of the former Polish-German border served as a police border at the time. Although Himmel downplayed his work, describing it as checking passes and escorting people without the required documents to his superiors, his superiors' evaluation of him was positive. In June 1941, they

⁶ *Archiwum Diecezjalne w Gliwicach* (Diocesan Archives in Gliwice, hereinafter ADG), Records of the Parish of St Andrew the Apostle in Zabrze (hereinafter APZ), 1909, Birth certificate no. 576 of Alfons Erich Himmel.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Birth certificate no. 575 of Hugon Paul Himmel.

⁸ ADG, APZ, 1907, Birth certificate no. 1115 of Richard Joseph Himmel.

⁹ ADG, APZ, 1911, Death certificate no. 475 of Heinrich Gerhard Himmel.

¹⁰ ADG, APZ, 1913, Death certificate no. 345 of Anastasia Himmel.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Death certificate no. 642 of Marie Elisabeth Himmel.

¹² *Ibid.*, Death certificate no. 354 of Margarethe Himmel.

¹³ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 1, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Alfons Himmel, 11 December 1945, p. 14.

decided that Himmel was suited to work in the police force. After finishing a three-month training course in Zabrze, he was deployed to the General Governorate and stationed at the headquarters in Radom. Following a brief acclimatisation period, he was assigned to serve at the police station in Lipsko, a town located in the Kreis Starachowice within the Radom District of the General Governorate.¹⁴ He remained there from October 1941 (with breaks for a horse-riding course in Kozienice, holidays and hospital treatment) until July 1944, when the station was closed.¹⁵ Despite the absence of documented promotions in the archives, he swiftly attained the rank of senior sergeant (*Oberwachmeister*) – the highest rank permitted by his level of education.

It can be assumed that one of the most important reasons for sending Himmel to Lipsko was his proficiency in Polish. He spoke it fluently, so much so that some residents of the town were convinced that he was not German, but a Volksdeutscher who had lived in Poland before the war. Of all the military police officers serving at the station (initially nine, later twelve), only two spoke Polish.¹⁶ Himmel was therefore quickly sent on patrols, during which military police officers stopped suspicious individuals on roads, at markets and fairs, and searched farms for meat from illegal slaughter. After just a few weeks of service in Lipsko, he became a recognisable figure among the Poles living in the town and surrounding villages and was viewed rather positively. One witness stated: “At first, Himmel behaved tolerably, better than other military police officers.”¹⁷ Another witness stated, “During that period, Himmel demonstrated that he was a decent man with sympathy for Poles. On occasion, he would alert people in advance about upcoming searches.”¹⁸

¹⁴ During the occupation, the borders of the Kreis Starachowice overlapped with those of the pre-war Iłża County in the Kielce Voivodeship. It comprised 17 municipalities, including two urban ones – Iłża and Starachowice – and 15 rural ones: Brody, Chotcza, Ciepiałów, Kazanów, Krzyżanowice, Lipsko, Mirzec, Pawłów, Rzecznów, Sienno, Skarbka, Skarżysko Kościelne, Solec, Tarłów, and Wąchock.

¹⁵ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 1, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Alfons Himmel, 11 December 1945, pp. 14–15; *ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Alfons Himmel, 1 July 1946, p. 69.

¹⁶ For more on the station's staff and functionaries, see T. Domański and A. Jankowski, *Represje niemieckie na wsi polskiej 1939–1945*, Kielce, 2011, p. 173; S. Piątkowski, „W płomieniach zaś ciągle odzywały się jęki...”. *Niemieckie zbrodnie na niosących pomoc Żydom Polakach z Ciepiałowa i okolic (1942–1943)*, Warsaw, 2025, pp. 99–103.

¹⁷ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the main hearing in the case against Alfons Himmel, 15–18 February 1949, p. 192.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of Jan Sykucki, 25 January 1949, p. 57.

He acted much more gently than his colleagues from the Lipsko police station, Emil Martin and Gustaw Messel – for many people, encounters with these two often ended in beatings and arrests. Of course, this did not mean that he could remain completely passive in carrying out his duties. One of the Poles recounted:

Before the Jews were expelled, i.e. before October 1942, I was arrested by Himmel at a market in Lipsko. He was accompanied by another policeman, Werner. Himmel searched me, looking for papers [illegal press – S.P.] and weapons, called me a bandit, kicked me and told me to go. Then I ran away.¹⁹

Between October 1941 and November 1942, Himmel presented his actions to the prosecutor and the court, offering detailed insights into the operations of the Lipsko Military Police station. The station's control over its assigned area relied heavily on a network of permanent informers. Though numbering only around thirty, their reports had devastating consequences. They supplied the Germans with intelligence on individuals engaged in illegal slaughter and the meat trade, those suspected of possessing weapons – whether due to involvement in military conspiracies or criminal activities – and people who offered shelter to strangers. The scale of the informers' degeneration is evidenced by the fact that they were not paid for their "work" with money, but with pork fat, cigarettes and vodka (from time to time, large quantities of these products were delivered to Lipsko from the county headquarters of the Military Police in Starachowice).²⁰ It is also known that, after committing murders, military police officers sometimes allowed their "trusted" individuals to take the victims' more valuable clothing and footwear. Some informers used the Germans to settle scores with neighbours with whom they were in conflict, or even with members of their own families. Occasional informers acted similarly.²¹

¹⁹ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 2, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Jan Kwiatkowski, 21 July 1947, p. 10.

²⁰ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 1, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Alfons Himmel, 25 February 1946, p. 25.

²¹ One of the young farmers living in the village of Długowola was said to be an informer for the Lipsko military police. After the war, he was accused of denouncing sixteen men from various villages to the Germans, some of whom were killed. His involvement was mentioned to the Poles by the so-called

Himmel emphasised that Max Kuper, the commander of the Lipsko police station, was a rather passive person and did not take any action in response to most of the reports. He also gave examples of how he himself had helped Poles from Lipsko and the surrounding areas. These examples seem credible, as in most cases he gave the names of witnesses who could confirm his words or, if he did not know their names, he indicated the exact location of the house or farm where the events took place. Assigned by the station commander to carry out repressive measures, he sometimes – out of pity – refused to execute the orders given to him. When the measures were based on denunciations, he reportedly informed his superior that they stemmed from falsehoods motivated by personal revenge or envy. To support the innocence of potential victims, he cited statements from “trustworthy persons,” including village leaders and commanders of the *Polnische Polizei* stations in Lipsko and Ciepielów.²²

These statements make no mention of Jews. Nor has any archival material been found regarding the participation of military police from Lipsko in supervising the inhabitants of ghettos in this or other localities before their liquidation. Although it is not known whether Himmel and other officers carried out operations in the sealed quarters, they certainly repressed people who sneaked out of them in search of food. In this situation, Himmel’s very close acquaintance (probably established in the spring of 1942) with Helena Rozental, a young Jewish woman from Lipsko who spoke German and was trying to earn at least a small income by working as a manicurist in Polish homes, caused widespread surprise. Due to her good looks and pleasant disposition, the woman was known to many Poles, who called her Helcia. In a small-town environment, this intimacy could not go unnoticed. Although it was obvious to the Poles who observed the girl’s – as it was described – “dates” with the policeman (they often walked in the woods and suburban meadows) that this relationship was a romantic one, including sexual relations, Himmel did not mention this issue in his post-war testimony, stating

Blue Police, who carried out arrests on the orders of the military police. According to the father of one of the murdered men, the informer, by making false reports, eliminated peers with whom he used to keep company, namely those who were more popular with girls than he was (AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the main hearing in the case against Alfons Himmel, 15–18 February 1949, p. 126).

²² See e.g., AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 1, Letter from Alfons Himmel to the Prosecutor of the Special Court in Świdnica, 3 November 1946, pp. 92–94.

only: “I liked her very much and maintained friendly relations with her, seeing her every day.”²³

Helena Rozental often visited the home of a Lipsko-based lawyer, Stefan Mitrowski. He said that she spoke favourably of Himmel, describing him as the only one among the military police who was a “human being” and the only one from whom it was possible to obtain information about the Germans’ planned operations against the Jews. These and other statements made by the woman reinforced the lawyer’s conviction that she was involved in the left-wing underground and was sacrificing herself to protect the inhabitants of the Lipsko ghetto.²⁴

In the early days of October 1942 (the exact date is unknown), late in the evening, Helena, after visiting the Mitrowskis, went to the Lipsko mill for a meeting with Himmel. This venture ended in her death, which was witnessed by the owners and employees of the mill. However, due to the darkness, they did not see everything clearly and later were unable to present a consistent account of the course of events. Certainly, in addition to the protagonist of this article, the military policeman Emil Martin – already mentioned as being known for his brutality – was also present at the scene of the crime. Himmel claimed that he was late for the meeting and that Martin, who was accidentally passing by the mill, encountered Helena and killed her for leaving the ghetto illegally. According to one of the witnesses, however, Himmel talked to the woman and at one point took a pistol out of its holster and shot her in the face; Martin, who was nearby, finished her off by shooting her in the head.²⁵

This crime must have had a shocking effect on the Jews of Lipsko, as it was a kind of foreshadowing of the fate that awaited them. It also caused a stir among Poles, as evidenced by numerous discussions about the motives behind Himmel’s actions, whom the local public held fully responsible for the murder. People remembered Helena’s statements, in which she repeatedly told Poles that the policeman had promised, if the Lipsko ghetto was to be liquidated, “he would arrange for her

²³ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 2, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Alfons Himmel, 8 and 20 December 1947, p. 41.

²⁴ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 1, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Stefan Mitrowski, 16 July 1947, pp. 134, 136.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 135–136.

not to be deported.²⁶ Since the crime took place shortly before the liquidation of the quarter, some people assumed that Himmel, having learned of the date of the planned action, decided to fulfil his promise in such a gruesome manner. According to other rumours, the police authorities in Radom were informed about the gendarme's affair with a Jewish woman. They allegedly ordered Himmel to "solve the problem" immediately, threatening him with severe consequences for "dishonouring the race" as a German. Another resident of Lipsko recounted years later:

There was a case where a German gendarme fell in love with a very pretty Jewish girl [...]. She became pregnant, and Germans were not allowed to have children with Jews – it was unthinkable. He was ordered to kill her. So, he arranged to meet her outside the Jewish ghetto. She left, even though Jews were not allowed to leave the ghetto. Then the German arranged with another gendarme to "blow her away." Upon arriving at the bridge, she was shot in the back. Afterwards, they [namely, the gendarmes] notified the Jewish police that she had left the ghetto.²⁷

We will probably never know the truth. Himmel categorically denied the accusations of involvement in the woman's murder, claiming that upon hearing of her death, he suffered such a severe nervous breakdown that his superiors sent him on a two-week holiday, which he spent in Zabrze with his wife and children.²⁸ Even if we assume that the gendarme's feelings for Helena were very strong (as I mentioned, he himself described the relationship as nothing more than friendship), it is hard to believe his explanations.

The information about his leave was probably intended to counter the testimony of witnesses who claimed that between 10 and 12 October 1942, he and his colleagues from the military police station took part in the resettlement of Jews from three nearby towns – Chotcza, Ciepiałów, and Solec nad Wisłą – to the ghetto in

²⁶ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the main hearing in the case against Alfons Himmel, 15–18 February 1949, p. 192.

²⁷ "Wspomnienia lipszczan narodowości żydowskiej – fragment pracy Eweliny Ciupy," in *Przerwane sąsiedztwo: Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Lipsku i okolicy we wspomnieniach i opisach*, ed. M. Łata (supplement to the *Życie Powiśla* magazine 2012, no. 4, p. 86).

²⁸ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 2, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Alfons Himmel, 8 and 20 December 1947, p. 42.

Lipisko.²⁹ One witness testified that in Chotcza, a young Jewish man hid in a house but was discovered and killed when he tried to escape through a window. Although no one saw whether it was Himmel who shot him or not, it is known that Himmel ordered the Poles to bury the body of the man who had been killed.³⁰ The testimony of another witness was similarly ambiguous. He said: “When Jews were being transported to the ghetto from Solec to Lipisko, I watched from behind some bushes as three military policemen killed three Jews. Himmel was there [among them], and he also shot at the Jews.”³¹

The gendarme claimed that these testimonies were false. Although he admitted that he had participated in the liquidation of the Lipisko ghetto, which meant transporting its inhabitants to the ghetto in Tarłów, he emphasised: “I was in Lipisko during the deportation of the Jews, but I did not fire a single shot.”³² He is remembered walking around the Market Square with his colleagues from the police station, ordering Jews to get into peasant carts. However, it is not known whether he accompanied them as a guard. This detail is important because, although not a single person died in Lipisko itself during the deportation, murders of those attempting to escape are said to have occurred on the way to Tarłowo. Himmel’s role in these events remains unknown.³³

The liquidation of the ghettos in the Kreis Starachowice coincided with other events that significantly influenced Himmel’s actions. In the autumn of 1942, many Jews who had escaped deportation to the death camps were hiding in the forests of the region, seeking ways to survive. Red Army soldiers who had escaped from

²⁹ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Letter from Alfons Himmel to the District Court in Radom (SOR), 28 January 1949, p. 95.

³⁰ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 2, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Józef Wojtalik, 23 October 1947, p. 107.

³¹ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the main hearing in the case against Alfons Himmel, 15–18 February 1949, pp. 189–190.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 194.

³³ The case files contain the minutes of the interrogation of Alter Rozentel, a Jew from Lipisko who, however, did not reside in the town during the German occupation. He testified that he had learned from the accounts of his compatriots that, during the deportation of Jews from Lipisko to Tarłowo, Himmel allegedly shot ten Jewish children on the road between the two towns. Rozentel did not provide the personal details of these witnesses, stating: “I learned this from comrades whose names I cannot reveal for party reasons, and I will be able to do so only after receiving permission from my superiors and only confidentially to the prosecutor himself” (*ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Alter Rozentel, 8 January 1949, p. 92).

prisoner-of-war camps also saw an opportunity for survival there. The intensification of common banditry – particularly by armed groups attacking the farms of wealthier peasants, mills, and manor houses – was accompanied by increased activity of the Polish military underground. Its peak came on 28 October 1942, when partisans from the Peasants' Battalions (*Bataliony Chłopskie*, BCh) broke into the Baudienst penal camp in Solec nad Wisłą and freed about 300 young Poles taken from other Baudienst camps throughout the Radom District. Six Germans were killed in the fighting, and thirteen were disarmed.³⁴

Criticised by the district police authorities, Max Kupfer, commander of the Lipsko police station, had to admit that he and his subordinates were unable to ensure effective supervision of the area under their jurisdiction. Hugo Peterlugen probably replaced him, and the 3rd Company of the 1st Motorised Military Police Battalion (*I. Gendarmerie-Bataillon (motorisiert)*) was sent to the Kreis Starachowice. Formed a few months earlier and operating in the Lublin region, this unit quickly gained a grim reputation as a squad of murderers specialising in destroying forest camps and exterminating those hiding in them – mainly Jews.³⁵ Individual platoons of the company were eventually deployed in Ciepielów, Lipsko, Tarłów, and Sienna.

Due to his knowledge of Polish, Alfons Himmel was temporarily assigned to the military police headquarters in Ciepielów, which was located on a farmstead in the so-called Górki. Here, he immediately had the opportunity to see what “police work” based on extreme and unrestricted violence meant. Although there was a detention centre at the police station in Lipsko, where arrested persons were held, beaten and starved, it was nothing compared to the conditions in Ciepielów. Unlike the gendarmes from stationary posts, who patrolled the area on bicycles and peasant carts (wagons), the Germans from Ciepielów were equipped with cars and motorcycles. This allowed them to cover dozens of kilometres every day. Almost every venture ended with the capture of Poles and Jews encountered on the

³⁴ J. Marszałek, *Obozy pracy w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w latach 1939–1945*, Lublin, 1998, p. 24; M. Sołtysiak, “Partyzanckie Zgrupowanie BCh „Ośka””, in *Kazanów nad Itzanką*, ed. M. Sołtysiak, Radom, 2004, pp. 74–76.

³⁵ See R. Drabik, “Udział I Zmotoryzowanego Batalionu Żandarmerii SS w pacyfikacji ludności w dystrykcie lubelskim,” in *Wieś polska podczas II wojny światowej: Po pacyfikacji – losy i pamięć*, ed. M. Jedynak (in press); R. Drabik, “Udział I Zmotoryzowanego Batalionu Żandarmerii w wysiedleniach na Zamojszczyźnie,” *Archiwariusz Zamojski* 21 (2023), pp. 179–191.

roads and in villages, who were then transported to the farmstead and subjected to gruesome torture to extract confessions. A large wooden table set up in the courtyard was used for this purpose. The victim was strapped to it and beaten on the stomach and other parts of the body. The desperate screams of the tortured were drowned out by the gendarmes playing the accordion or playing loud music on a gramophone. The preserved materials contain no information that any of the prisoners held in the so-called Górki regained their freedom. A few were sent to Starachowice for further “investigation”; most lost their lives in executions carried out in a field adjacent to the farm buildings.³⁶

Although Himmel stated that he served in Ciepiałów only for a limited period, he was required to participate – as an interpreter – in the arrests and interrogations of detained persons. He was likely present at the scene of such events on numerous occasions, alongside other military police officers. One of the residents recalled it this way:

I also saw one of the Germans stop a Jewish man and woman who were passing by on the road. The Jewish woman handed him a bag of money to buy her freedom. However, the German did not let them go. There were several other Germans nearby with a lorry. [...]. The Germans immediately recognised that they were Jews. I saw how they pounced on these Jews and began to beat them terribly. They beat them with clubs, knocking out the Jewish woman's eyes, and tied the Jewish man's hands behind his back, ordering him to jump onto the back of the truck. They beat him with clubs as he tried. He was unable to jump onto the back of the truck. They took them to the palace and later shot them.³⁷

The gruesome actions of the functionaries of the 1st Motorised Military Police Battalion were aimed at gathering as much information as possible about the “enemies of the Reich” – not only those involved in military conspiracy, but also Jews

³⁶ See J.A. Młynarczyk and S. Piątkowski, *Cena poświęcenia: Zbrodnie na Polakach za pomoc udzielaną Żydom w rejonie Ciepiałowa*, Cracow, 2007, pp. 90–94; S. Piątkowski, „W płomieniach”, pp. 104–113.

³⁷ *Archiwum Delegatury Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Kielcach* (Archives of the Institute of the National Remembrance, Delegation in Kielce, hereinafter AIPN Ki), District Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation in Kielce (hereinafter OKŚZpNP), Ds. 85/69, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Stanisława Lewandowska, 6 October 1969, pp. 48–49.

in hiding and Poles who were aiding them. This served as a prelude to a massive pacification operation, which soon spread to numerous municipalities in the Kreis Starachowice. Even before the operation officially began, military police from the station in Lipsko were already involved and growing increasingly ruthless. One can only speculate about the reasons for this escalation. Undoubtedly, they were also enforcing the order that any Polish family found to be hiding Jews or in possession of weapons was to be annihilated and their farm destroyed.³⁸ Himmel was among the group of military police functionaries who approached the execution of this order with extreme diligence. It is unclear whether this was due to pressure from other functionaries in the battalion or, for example, a desire to “rehabilitate” himself in the eyes of his superiors for his relationship with Helena Rozenal. It is worth noting that, according to one Polish witness, two military police officers from Lipsko – Freilich and Kleiner – refused to take part in the executions and were not remembered by anyone as participants in the repressive actions.³⁹

It is significant that during the investigation and court proceedings, Himmel did not present any credible evidence of aid he allegedly provided to a person of Jewish descent.⁴⁰ He treated the fate of Jews captured by military police as a kind of backdrop to his story about Poles. It was obvious to him, and therefore not worth mentioning, that fugitives from the ghettos were first forced to testify and then shot in individual or mass executions. However, when recounting the events of autumn 1942, he gave two examples of support he allegedly gave to Poles who were helping Jews. He mentioned a Jewish man who was caught with a rifle and admitted that he had bought it from Leon Kniknicki, the commander of the *Polnische Polizei*

³⁸ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Letter from Alfons Himmel to the District Court in Radom, 28 January 1949, p. 97.

³⁹ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 2, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Ryszard Zapolski, 16 July 1947, p. 6.

⁴⁰ In one of his statements, Himmel claimed that after the liquidation of the ghetto in Tarłów, he supervised a twenty-man commando of Jewish forced labourers tasked with searching the area of the former sealed quarter for valuable items. The gendarme allegedly encouraged all the Jews to escape, and the escape was reportedly successful. He added that this was “common knowledge” in Tarłów and requested that the mayor of the municipality be interrogated on the matter. While the escape of the workers may well have been remembered by Poles, the concept that Himmel facilitated it seems rather unlikely. Such rumours would likely have reached Lipsko, exposing the gendarme to serious command-level consequences (AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Letter from Alfons Himmel to the District Court in Radom, 28 January 1949, p. 97).

station in Ciepiałów. Himmel allegedly warned the policeman about the arrest, and when the man fled, he persuaded his wife to file an official notice that her husband had been “kidnapped by partisans.”⁴¹ The second situation was supposed to have taken place in the village of Babilon. Himmel recounted:

Around 20 November 1942, a Jew was brought to the police station by two farmers from the village of Babilon, Lipsko Municipality. During the interrogation, he revealed where he had been hiding. I received an order, along with four gendarmes, to confront the Jew with the farmer who had sheltered him and to execute the culprit. Upon arriving at the first house in Babilon from the direction of Lipsko, I found a family of five, including two children. In response to their cries and pleas for mercy, I asked the farmer what he would do if he were in my place as a military police officer. He said he would certainly carry out the order. I felt sorry for these people and did not obey the order, explaining to the lieutenant that the Jew had denounced the farmer out of revenge, as he owed him money from the past.⁴²

Even if these stories were true, they could not obscure Himmel’s participation in the pacification of the Kreis Starachowice, which was confirmed by the testimonies of numerous witnesses. It began on 6 December 1942, when military police from Ciepiałów murdered at least thirty people in Ciepiałów and Rekówka, including members of the Kowalski, Kosior, Obuchiewicz, and Skoczylas families. Among the Poles murdered for helping Jews were both elderly people and children. The following day, the same functionaries raided the village of Świesielice and killed fourteen people (including members of the Wojewódka and Wdowiak families) suspected of possessing weapons and participating in the underground. The action was repeated on 8 December 1942, and Marianna Skwira, who had been helping Jews, fell victim to it. Her three children, as well as the entire family of a neighbour

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; S. Piątkowski, “Zbrodnie żandarmów z posterunku w Lipsku nad Wisłą na Polakach udzielających pomocy Żydom (1942–1943),” in *„Kto w takich czasach Żydów przechowuje?...”. Polacy niosący pomoc ludności żydowskiej w okresie okupacji niemieckiej*, ed. A. Namysł, Warsaw, 2009, p. 19.

⁴² *Ibid.*; AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Letter from Alfons Himmel to the District Court in Radom, 28 January 1949, pp. 97–98.

accused of the same “crime,” managed to save their lives by escaping and hiding in the forest.⁴³

Although Himmel did not take part in these events, on 8 December 1942, along with other military police functionaries from Lipsko, he visited the village of Boiska-Kolonia. This followed a tip-off from an informer who overheard two farmers discussing a hiding place at the home of their neighbours, Leon and Wiktoria Kryczek, where Jews were sheltered. The couple, along with two other Poles found in their home (Leon’s aunt Barbara Stefanek and his cousin Józef Ciesielski), were murdered. The Germans brought both farmers to the scene of the crime and severely beat them as punishment for failing to report the information they possessed to the military police.⁴⁴ It is worth noting that, as this was quite unusual behaviour for the Germans, they spared Leon and Wiktoria’s two small children and ordered one of the neighbours to take them to his home. However, Himmel never mentioned that this “act of mercy” was his doing.

According to witnesses, on 14 December 1942, during an operation in the village of Tymienica Stara, Himmel was reportedly acting as a guide for military police officers from Ciepiałów. For having provided shelter to Jews hiding in the nearby forests, the Germans killed Szczepan Lasek, around 80 years old, along with his two teenage grandchildren, Genowefa and Zdzisław. The latter attempted to flee the scene of the massacre, but after being shot twice by the military police, he managed only to reach his neighbours’ yard before losing consciousness. The Germans found him quickly, and one of them executed the child with a pistol shot. A witness recalled:

They stood there for a moment until he stopped moving, [and then] they left. One of the gendarmes opened the door to my flat, said something in German – which I did not understand – laughed, closed the door and left. After they left,

⁴³ See J.A. Młynarczyk and S. Piątkowski, *Cena poświęcenia*, pp. 95–108; S. Piątkowski, „*W płomieniach*”, pp. 122–149.

⁴⁴ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the main hearing in the case against Alfons Himmel, 15–18 February 1949, p. 223; *ibid.*, vol. 1, Minutes of the interrogation of Franciszek Krzak, 21 July 1947, pp. 121–122; S. Piątkowski, „*W płomieniach*”, pp. 20–21.

I approached the boy and found that he had been riddled with bullets. He was already dead.⁴⁵

The Germans then headed to Jan Szewczyk's farm. According to documents, a few days earlier, they had captured a Jewish man who, before his death, testified that he had been hiding at the home of a farmer to whom he had paid a large sum of money in exchange for help.

One of the gendarmes approached my son and shouted, "Were there Jews here?" They took me into the corridor, where one of them struck me on the shoulder with a stick. Then they led me out into the yard. When I said, "Gentlemen, I'm dying, though I am innocent," one of them hit me in the face. They took me to the barn and beat me with sticks as I lay on a hay basket. After the first beating, they told me to get up. Later, they laid me down again and resumed beating me. When they finally stopped, two of them went to the neighbours. Upon returning, they led me out of the barn. One of them – the one who spoke Polish – told me not to hide Jews, but to denounce them, because there was a reward for each Jew: 50 kilograms of sugar.⁴⁶

– Jan Szewczyk recalled. The Polish-speaking policeman was probably Himmel. Despite being tortured, Szewczyk did not confess to hiding fugitives from the ghettos, which probably saved his life and the lives of his loved ones.

The hero of this article also took part in an operation conducted by military police officers from Lipsko on 2 January 1943 in the village of Boiska. A few days earlier, they had captured a Jewish man with a leg wound. Upon noticing the professionally applied bandage, the Germans extracted a confession – likely under the pressure of beatings or perhaps because the detainee was lured by promises of mercy – that it had been applied by Józef Krawczyk, a resident of Boiska.

⁴⁵ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Wawrzyniec Jabłoński, 25 January 1949, p. 68. See S. Piątkowski, „*W płomieniach*”, pp. 152–154.

⁴⁶ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the main hearing in the case against Alfons Himmel, 15–18 February 1949, pp. 265–266.

The military police surrounded the Krawczyk family's house. I lived about twenty metres away from the Krawczyks and saw it from my window. After fifteen minutes, a military police officer, whose name I did not know, came to my flat and demanded that I go with him. I went with him, and he took me to the Krawczyk family's house, told me to take a sack and catch the hens [...]. It was quiet in the flat – only the military police were tossing belongings out of it. Then they led a cow out of the barn and told me to take it to the village leader.

– Jan Oleksiak recalled.⁴⁷ Soon afterwards, Józef, Zofia and Adam Krawczyk were shot dead in their home. The Germans then proceeded to rob the farm and load all of the valuable items onto sleighs or carts. A few minutes later, the house where the bodies of the victims lay was set on fire.⁴⁸

The military police then went to the Boryczka family farm, where they killed Zofia (who was of Jewish descent but had converted to Catholicism as an adult), her husband Stanisław, and their one-year-old son Zygmunt (according to some records: Zbigniew). Although they intended to set fire to the house where the bodies of the victims lay, they yielded to the pleas of the gathered farmers, who feared that the strong wind would spread the fire to the densely built-up village. The Germans then entered the neighbouring house. There, they found Józef Boryczka (Stanisław's brother), who fainted at the sight of them. When he regained consciousness, one of the Germans said, "Don't be afraid, we didn't come to kill you. We only killed your brother because he had a Jewish wife." He added that if Józef wished, he could move into the flat of his murdered relatives. Shortly after the military police left, Józef Boryczka – already on the verge of a heart attack – was taken to the hospital, where he died a few weeks later, never recovering the physical or mental health he had lost because of this ordeal.⁴⁹

The next operation by the Lipsko military police, in which Himmel was reportedly engaged, took place on 8 January 1943 in Służczyn. Its target was the farm-

⁴⁷ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Jan Oleksiak, 5 January 1949, pp. 74–75.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; S. Piątkowski, „W płomieniach”, pp. 164–169.

⁴⁹ AIPN Ki, OKŚZpNP, Ds. 7/69, vol. 5, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Genowefa Kołacz, 22 January 1973, pp. 21–22v; AIPN Ki, OKŚZpNP, Ds. 37/71, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Maria Włodarczyk, 22 January 1973, pp. 17v–18.

stead of Stanisław and Stanisława Borek, who lived there with their son Czesław and daughter Honorata Wójtowicz, her husband Piotr, and their several-month-old son Adam. They often took in “people from the forest” for the night, including Jews in hiding. The massacre began with the Polish neighbours being forced to take all their valuables out of the house and place them on a sledge. After completing this task, they were driven away and, from a distance of several dozen metres, could then watch as the Germans led the men, women and children who had been imprisoned in the barn to the house. Most of the adults were carrying sheaves of straw in their hands. After a while, one of the Germans broke a window and fired a series of shots from a submachine gun into the interior. Soon, the building was on fire. It is not known who among the victims died from bullets and who were burned alive.⁵⁰

Between late 1942 and early 1943, and in the months that followed, Himmel – along with other military police officers – actively participated in the murder of Jews seeking refuge near Lipsko. Those apprehended by military police patrolling the roads were often executed on the spot, though some were taken to the Lipsko military police station for interrogation. Jews captured by Poles collaborating with the Germans were also brought to the station. These prisoners were ultimately killed on a strip of wasteland behind the military police headquarters.

Eleonora Czerwonka recounted:

I lived near the military police station. It often happened that the military police would pass by my house and kill people. My flat is a little further back. Himmel often came to us and ordered my husband to bury the bodies. My husband lost his nerves because of this and died. Once, during the day, I saw the military police bring a Jew near my flat, and Himmel pointed his rifle at him. I ran away because I couldn't bear to watch it. There were three of them at the time. Shots were fired, and he [this man] was killed. Once, two people were killed, and the military police ordered me to take off their shoes.⁵¹

⁵⁰ AIPN Ki, OKŚZpNP, Kpp 5/81, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Bronisław Pałka, 9 December 1981, p. 166; *Polacy – Żydzi 1939–1945*, eds. S. Wroński and M. Zwolakowa, Warsaw, 1971, pp. 373–374.

⁵¹ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the main hearing in the case against Alfons Himmel, 15–18 February 1949, p. 226.

Another Polish woman, who worked at the police station as a cook, testified: “After the Jews were displaced, a Jewish woman was caught. Himmel led her out of the police station – I saw that, and then I heard a shot. It was Himmel who shot her. The Jewish woman was middle-aged.”⁵²

The murder of Jews was also connected to the death of a young Polish woman, Regina Wojciechowska, a resident of Radom who had come to Lipsko to visit her mother. In late summer 1943, she was returning home with her shopping when she saw military police approaching from the opposite direction. She stepped off the road and turned into a nearby meadow – she had forgotten to bring her identity documents. The Germans stopped their car, gave chase, and then opened fire. Regina was killed while attempting to cross the Krępanka riverbed. According to eyewitnesses, she was shot by Himmel, who fired a submachine gun while leaning against the bridge railing. After the killing, the military police stopped Poles walking along the road and told them they had “killed a Jewish woman.” Shortly thereafter, Himmel appeared at the Lipsko Municipal Office and ordered the body to be removed from the riverbank and buried in the Jewish cemetery. Local residents recognised the murdered woman and informed her mother of the tragedy.⁵³

According to witness testimony, Himmel underwent a radical transformation in 1943 – becoming, as one Pole described him, a “degenerate thug.” This shift was likely driven by his involvement in numerous crimes against Jews in hiding and the Poles who aided them, including interrogations, executions, and the burning of peasant farms. Around the same time, his brother (possibly his twin) was killed on one of the war fronts. Another contributing factor was an ambush in June of that year, carried out by a unit of the People’s Guard (*Gwardia Ludowa*) on the road between Lipsko and Ciepielów. The car carrying the military police came under fire, and Himmel was wounded in the arm and leg.⁵⁴ The injuries were serious, though not severe enough to cause a long break in service. According to witness

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Józefa Wojciechowska, 28 January 1947, pp. 143–144; *ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Jan Sadowski, 10 March 1948, pp. 211–212; *ibid.*, vol. 3, Minutes of the main hearing in the case against Alfons Himmel, 15–18 February 1949, pp. 217–218.

⁵⁴ Three Germans were reportedly killed and five others wounded in this operation. B. Hillebrandt, *Partyzantka na Kielecczyźnie 1939–1945*, Warsaw, 1970, p. 525.

statements, after being shot, he became convinced that Poles were “ungrateful” and did not deserve his selfless acts of kindness.

Himmel became a frequent guest of a Polish family living on Lipsko’s Market Square. According to witness statements, their flat served as a kind of contact point for Poles who, by bribing the military police, sought to halt repressive actions or avoid being sent to forced labour in Germany. Himmel, to some extent, encouraged such dealings by publicly – and audibly – hinting that the military police had received tip-offs about individuals accused of illegal slaughter, illicit trade, or aiding “bandits.” In response to these remarks, farmers often chose to offer the military police “gifts” such as vodka, poultry, and eggs. These bribes were delivered to the aforementioned family. A teenage girl from the household, frequently seen with Himmel and regarded by locals as his “fiancée,” acted as an intermediary. She herself firmly denied any intimate relationship, and noted that over time, Himmel had become an alcoholic – a weakness Poles exploited to settle various matters with the military police.⁵⁵

This view was confirmed by individuals who had personally asked the German to show “kindness.” Stefan Kędziora, a farmer from Maruszów near Lipsko, testified: “Once, while drinking vodka with Himmel and talking about these arrangements, Himmel said to me, ‘If someone accused you, I would shoot you, even though we get along well.’”⁵⁶ Jan Sykucki, the village leader of Lipsko, recounted that a military policeman repeatedly demanded he deliver hens, other poultry, and eggs to the station. When these requests were not fulfilled promptly, the officer reacted violently: “He summoned me from my home and began striking me in the throat with his revolver. With each blow, I fell to the ground, and blood began to flow from my ears.”⁵⁷ In the following weeks, the drunken gendarme publicly announced several times that he would kill Sykucki. Fear for his life prompted the man to flee to the forest and hide there for several months.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 2, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Eleonora Hamielec, 1 October 1947, pp. 16–17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Stefan Kędziora, 20 October 1947, p. 85.

⁵⁷ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Jan Sykucki, 25 January 1949, p. 58.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

In December 1943, the Germans killed three farmers suspected of secretly slaughtering animals and trading meat. The brother of one of the murdered men, Władysław Liborski, recounted these events in court as follows:

In December 1943, the military police came [to our house] and knocked on the door, demanding to be let in. The accused was [among them]; he entered first, with a dog. He put the barrel of his gun under my chin and leaned me over the table. He asked who was staying at my house. He checked my identity and asked about [my brother] Jan Liborski. Then they took me to him. When they went to my brother's place, and he opened the door, Himmel hit him in the face and asked about the pig and the meat. They led my brother and me out into the yard and asked about the meat. My brother said he didn't have any meat. Then [Himmel] asked me about the meat – I replied that I was angry with my brother, and he let me go, but set his dog on him. The dog bit my brother's hand and face, because we saw it afterwards. We found out about [my brother's] death in the morning. In the morning, I saw three corpses: one corpse was on the doorstep, and two were in the yard.⁵⁹

From time to time, however, Himmel made conciliatory gestures. It is difficult to determine whether these were genuine or motivated by a desire to rehabilitate his reputation among Poles. Notably, these gestures were directed towards individuals suspected of underground activity. Perhaps the gendarme had heard rumours that members of the resistance movement were planning to eliminate him (witnesses at the trial confirmed that such an idea had indeed been considered), prompting him to construct a kind of protective umbrella around himself. Józef Wojtalik, the village leader of Chotcza, recounted:

Once, when they [the military police] arrested three people and brought them – people who were supposedly [members] of the underground – to me, I don't know who intervened, but Himmel came. Because they were lying down,

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Minutes of the main hearing in the case against Alfons Himmel, 15–18 February 1949, pp. 215–216.

he ordered them to stand up, then released them and told them to go home. As he let them go, he said they weren't fit to be partisans – “What kind of partisans are they?”⁶⁰

In turn, Waclaw Szymański, a miller from Lipsko, described how, one day, passing military police officers invited themselves into his home for a meal accompanied by alcohol. During a lengthy conversation, Himmel pulled a list of names from his pocket and asked the miller what he thought of the Poles on it. Szymański got the impression that the officer intended to prompt him to warn those individuals that they might soon receive an unannounced visit from the Germans. That is exactly what he did: before the policemen left the mill, Szymański had one of his employees send an alert to his neighbours.⁶¹ A Polish woman also experienced Himmel's kindness. After the arrest of a group of Home Army soldiers from Lipsko, she moved to Starachowice. There, one day, she met Himmel, who warned her that she was wanted and then advised her to flee to another area of the General Governorate.⁶²

However, these events did not overshadow the military police's involvement in numerous repressive actions, particularly arrests and both individual and collective executions. These continued until July 1944, when the Eastern Front's advance to the Vistula River led to the closure of the military police station in Lipsko. After a brief stay in Starachowice, Himmel was transferred to the vicinity of Piotrków Trybunalski, where he performed guard duty. He later ended up in Wrocław and, after being drafted into the Wehrmacht, took part in the city's defence.⁶³ At the end of March 1945, he allegedly deserted and went into hiding in Gieszczce Puste (now Głuszycza), where a branch of the German Gross-Rosen concentration camp was located. As he himself described, he created a “partisan unit in defence of Jewish camps” there, which “killed” the camp guards, removed explosives placed under bridges, took care of protecting warehouses and factories, and then handed the town over to the Soviet army. As a result, he was to receive a “letter of protection”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 188–189.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 252–253.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 274.

⁶³ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 1, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Alfons Himmel, 25 February 1946, p. 23.

and be presented by the Soviets to the newly appointed mayor as a “German with a Polish heart.” Although he asked the court to contact the County Starosty in Wałbrzych, where documents confirming this tale were supposed to be kept, there is no indication that this happened.⁶⁴ The veracity of this story is contradicted by the fact that after the war, Himmel no longer used his own name but presented false documents to confirm his Polish nationality.

The trial of Alfons Himmel before the District Court in Radom began on 15 February 1949 and attracted considerable interest. “Himmel is calm and confident. Young, of medium height, with dark hair and a grim, cloudy expression on his face, he stands at attention before the court. He answers questions in Polish. Briefly and laconically, ‘yes’ or ‘no,’ ‘I don’t know,’ ‘I don’t remember,’” wrote the press.⁶⁵ His line of defence was very weak. He focused on gaps in his own memory, accused witnesses of lying, and emphasised his frequent absences from Lipsko due to holidays and health problems – which in many respects contradicted his earlier testimony. He also claimed that he bore a strong resemblance to Emil Martin, a gendarme known for his brutality, which meant that they were often mistaken for each other during the occupation. However, witnesses (a total of 95) stated that the two gendarmes differed so markedly in appearance that it was impossible to confuse them.⁶⁶ He admitted to taking part in four engagements with partisans, as well as shooting a Volksdeutscher employee of the Labour Office (*Arbeitsamt*) in Starachowice during an attempted escape. In describing the latter incident, he emphasised that the man’s death had benefited the Polish population, as he was known for blackmailing young women and “enslaving” them through threats of deportation to forced labour in Germany.⁶⁷ The verdict was announced on 21 February 1949, addressing several dozen charges outlined in the indictment. Himmel was acquitted of some charges, sentenced to imprisonment for others,

⁶⁴ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Letter from Alfons Himmel to the District Court in Radom, 30 May 1949, pp. 418–419.

⁶⁵ „Czy zabijał? – „Nie!”. Były żandarm z Lipska Alfons Himmel nie przyznaje się do zarzucanych mu zbrodni. Pierwszy dzień procesu,” *Życie Radomskie* 46 (1949), p. 3.

⁶⁶ See e.g., “Obciążające zeznania świadków przygwoździły pokrętnie tłumaczenia Himmla. Trzeci dzień procesu byłego żandarma,” *Życie Radomskie* 48 (1949), p. 3.

⁶⁷ AIPN Ra, 108/137, vol. 2, Minutes of the interrogation of the suspect Alfons Himmel, 8 and 20 December 1947, p. 39.

and received the death penalty for each of the dozen or so brutal murders. These were ultimately consolidated into a single sentence.⁶⁸

In the following months, he fought desperately to save his life. At his request, an appeal was lodged with the Supreme Court to overturn the verdict, arguing, among other things, that he had been convicted of a murder that was not mentioned in the indictment, and that the court had refused to hear several witnesses he had named who were supposed to testify to his honesty. In August 1949, the cassation was rejected, and the main argument was the vast amount of material gathered during the investigation and trial, which allowed Himmel's behaviour to be described as a "continuous crime."⁶⁹

Later that month, attorney Marian Bartł petitioned Polish President Bolesław Bierut for Himmel's pardon. He wrote in his request:

Without questioning the gravity of the crimes committed by the convicted person as a blind and ruthless executor of Hitler's extermination policy, by virtue of my position as a defence attorney, I would like to point out that, as the court proceedings have shown – the convict showed several acts of mercy and consideration towards individual persons of Polish nationality [...], which seem to testify to a certain humanity on the part of the convict, giving rise to the conclusion that if it had not been for the combination of circumstances and conditions unfavourable to him and the criminal course of action imposed on him in advance by his superiors, the convict would not have committed the crimes attributed to him.⁷⁰

However, the District Court in Radom refused to support this request and issued a brief but highly indicative opinion:

The heinous acts committed by the defendant, which formed the basis of his conviction, fully warrant the enforcement of the sentence. Even if only a fraction

⁶⁸ "Wielokrotna kara śmierci dla kata Lipska Alfonsa Himmla," *Życie Radomskie* 52 (1949), p. 3.

⁶⁹ APIN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Judgment of the Supreme Court, 14 July 1949, pp. 420–423.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Letter from the defence attorney Marian Bartł to the President of the Republic of Poland, 30 August 1949, pp. 427–428.

of the proven offences had been substantiated, the severity of the punishment would remain unquestionably justified.⁷¹

There is little room to challenge this argument.

In October 1949, the Ministry of Justice notified the judicial authorities in Radom that Bierut had not exercised his right of pardon. The sentence was executed on 22 November 1949, most likely by hanging on a gallows located in the garage of the prison on Malczewskiego Street in Radom. The fate of the body remains unknown – due to the absence of burial records, it is possible that the remains were transferred to the morgue of the Medical Academy in Lublin and used by students for anatomical study.

To summarise the information presented above, several key observations emerge. Alfons Himmel can be regarded as an “ordinary” individual who, at a pivotal moment in his life, made decisions that irrevocably shaped his fate. Had the Nazis not come to power in Germany and had World War II not erupted, he would likely have remained in Zabrze, working as an accountant and leading a quiet family life. After being conscripted into the military police and deployed to the General Governorate, Himmel appears to have quickly realised that even in a provincial police station, he had become “the master of life and death” for thousands of Poles and Jews. Initially described as relatively humane and restrained, he gradually transformed into a brutal perpetrator. This shift was likely driven by a sense of impunity, peer pressure, and a growing desensitisation to the killing of defenceless victims. While the extent of his anti-Semitic beliefs remains unclear, Himmel demonstrated particular zeal in participating in the extermination of the Jewish population. His postwar statements suggest – albeit subjectively – that he viewed Poles who aided Jews as dishonourable and undeserving of mercy. While witnesses spoke of several dozen people killed by Himmel (one of them stated that, according to rumours circulating in the Lipsko area, there were as many as 97 victims),⁷² he himself saw his actions differently:

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, Opinion of the District Court in Radom regarding the pardon of Alfons Himmel, 3 September 1949, p. 440.

⁷² APIN Ra, 108/137, vol. 1, Minutes of the interrogation of the witness Franciszek Zygmunt, 19 August 1947, p. 288.

[...] my attitude towards the Polish population was as correct, good and kind as it was possible under the difficult conditions of the occupation. I helped the Polish population not for material reasons, because there is no price for human life, but for idealistic reasons, according to the police principle: "Help people wherever and however you can." In all cases where I provided assistance, I risked my life. I did so willingly, convinced that I would be met with gratitude. As a German military policeman, I was aware of the harsh fate that befell the Polish people, which is why I did not miss any opportunity to help whenever the opportunity arose.⁷³

Everything indicates that he held this conviction until the very last moments of his life.

⁷³ APIN Ra, 108/137, vol. 3, Letter from Adolf Himmel to the District Court in Radom, 27 January 1949, p. 111.

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