

PACZESNY, Józef
Polish Witnesses to the Holocaust Project
Polish
RG-50.488*0157

Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Józef Paczesny, born on September 26, 1930, in **Lutomirów**, Poland, remembers living in Koło during the war and how he would often pass by the concentration camp prisoners in Chełmno. He describes Chełmno and the daily transports that came from the Łódź ghetto in June and July of 1944. He discusses the hunger that the prisoners suffered and discusses the many failed attempts of prisoners at escape. In addition, he shows several sites that have relevance for his testimony.

[01:] 00:50:00 – [01:] 09:30:25

Mr. Paczesny remembers the first year of the occupation, which he spent in Koło; explains that in 1942, at 12 years old, he became a forced laborer on a farm near the concentration camp at Chełmno; describes the area around the farm; explains that he heard from the locals, that at the beginning of the war, the prisoners were gassed in trucks and then burned in a crematorium; explains that later the gassings took place in showers in the forest; remembers the regular transports that came, on the local railroad, from the Łódź ghetto; explains that the people were driven from the train station to the church, where they were held overnight without food or water; explains that the next day they were transported in trucks to the forest where they were murdered; explains that the prisoners were mostly the elderly and families with children; explains that the prisoners climbed up the church steps onto ramps to get into the trucks; explains that, on the ramp, the more athletic prisoners were selected to work in the “Waldkommando” (forest command); remembers that the people being deported behaved calmly; explains that they were sure they were just being sent to work; explains that the church was guarded by the SS and there was no possibility of escape; points out that in June and July of 1944 the transports were taking place regularly throughout the entire day.

[01:] 09:31:00 – [01:] 18:59:25

He remembers that in front of the church there were big barrels of water, from which the prisoners were allowed to drink before the transport; explains that locals knew about the murders, so as a result the atmosphere was very tense and full of fear; explains that at a palace nearby the camp the clothes of the people who had been murdered were sorted and torn apart; explains how men in the “Waldkommando” would pump water from the river for the steam engines; talks about 14 men who worked everyday within the vicinity of the local houses; recalls that the prisoners were chained and guarded by armed SS men; recalls that he often brought bread and vegetables to the prisoners; explains that when they had time his comrades **Zofia Wojciechowska** and **Janina** and **Anna Mizurkiewicz** would prepare soup for the prisoners and

put it near the river; explains that in return for the food, the prisoners would give them small gifts, for example: a small mirror or cigarette case; explains that these items were put in the museum at Chełmno; explains that sometimes the adults received clothing; says that a “Waldkommando” of 15 men would spit at the palace where they were imprisoned; explains that the locals said that men who spit on the palace were shot just two days before the Red Army liberated the camp; explains that his family fled.

[01:] 19:00:00 – [01:] 28:50:25

He later remembers a concentration camp called “Quartier 77,” which was established in the forest; explains that access was forbidden; says that he could only drive up to the guard; explains that the Jewish men in the “Waldkommando” wore civilian clothing; discusses the failed attempts of prisoners to escape; explains that the prisoners would hide near the river and beg him for help; explains that he brought them in a boat to the other side of the river; explains that an SS man would look around the forest for prisoners to capture; explains that the SS men would beat and shoot the prisoners they captured; points out that a neighbor of his followed and watched this happen; mentions that the punishment for helping Jews was death.

[01:] 28:51:00 – [01:] 35:08:00

He remembers the smoke that came from the crematorium and describes the deportations of Jews from the church into the forest; mentions that the SS stayed in the rectory across from the church.

Box 1, Tape 2

[02:] 01:00:00 – [02:] 09:34:25

Remembers that the prisoners in the “Waldkommando,” who worked by the river, begged for food; explains that the villagers wished they could warn the prisoners that they would be murdered; points out that the concentration camp was established in 1939 and was at first for political prisoners and the intellectuals of Koło; explains that in June and July of 1944 more than 100 people were killed each day; approximates that the casualties totaled more than 10,000.

[02:] 09:35:00 – [02:] 15:29:25

He talks about the transportation from the Łódź ghetto; explains that approximately 600–700 people were in the transport; explains that the people were calm and were not beaten; describes the trucks in which the prisoners were transported to the forest; explains that the details of murders became public after the war when two former prisoners reported them.

[02:] 15:30:00 – [02:] 25:00:25

[*Looks around the area*] He points out that he was able to follow the transport every day during his chores; [*points to the street through which the people were driven in the transports*];

remembers the shouting that he would hear coming from the church during the night; *[he points to the staircase in front of the church where a ramp was built and points to the area where the water barrels stood]*; remembers that the people would board the cars with their bags.

[02:] 25:01:00 – [02:] 35:00:25

[He points to the meadow, where prisoners escaped across the river]; explains, how the SS would beat the prisoners; *[points to the rectory where the SS-Sonderkommando Kulmhof would stay]*.

Box 1, Tape 3

[03:] 00:50:00 – [03:] 09:56:25

[A plaque on church reads]:

In this Church, in 1944, several thousand Jews were imprisoned before they were murdered by the National Socialists in Chelmno. In June and July of 1944, approximately 7,000 Jews were brought here to be gassed in the forest during the night.

[He points to the road that led to the camp and points out the remains of the camp wall; later points out the train station and the house in which he lived]; explains that he lived a short time with **Anna Wojciechowska's** daughter; explains that she, along with her sister, would prepare soup for the prisoners and put it by the riverbank; *[points to another riverbank, where prisoners were apprehended; points to the opposite bank, where a palace once stood]*; remembers that life was hard at this place and that his childhood was lost.

[03:] 09:57:00 – [03:] 18:46:25

[He goes to the first bridge that was built after the war]; explains that during the war he had a small boat with which he could go across the river; *[points to the spot, where the prisoners would stand to get onto the boat; later points to the meadow near the forest, where the SS would capture, beat, and kill the prisoners]*; remembers that his neighbors **Wieczorek** and **Wachenek** would follow and watch these events take place; explains that the SS men were often drunk and therefore the population never approached them and asked them what was going on; remembers the murders of four prisoners of the "Waldkommando" in the camp.

[03:] 18:47:00 – [03:] 24:58:00

He closes by explaining that the river before the war was much brighter and that there was no island in it; remembers that he was shocked at the abuse he witnessed near the river; explains that he was so sad that he could not help the prisoners; asserts that the men had had a good chance at life, if they had been allowed to follow their opportunities.