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ALFONSAS LIPNIŪNAS, IN THE CLANDESTINE RELIGIOUS LIFE IN THE
GERMAN NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMP STUTTHOF IN 1943–1945.
MARTYRDOM IN THE DEATH MARCH AND DEATHS IN PUCK



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SUMMARY The article examines the role and significance of the Servant of God, Father Professor Alfonsas Lipniūnas, in the clandestine religious life of the Stutthof concentration camp between 1943 and 1945. It reconstructs the circumstances of his arrest following the failed German attempt to mobilize Lithuanian youth into the Waffen-SS, his imprisonment in the Gestapo prison in Kaunas, and his deportation to Stutthof together with other representatives of the Lithuanian intelligentsia. Particular attention is given to Lipniūnas's pastoral activity under the extreme conditions of the concentration camp: the secret celebration of Mass, hearing confessions, administering Holy Communion, providing spiritual support, and organizing religious practices despite strict SS prohibitions and the threat of death.

The article demonstrates that clandestine religious life in Stutthof fulfilled not only a sacramental but also an existential and resistant function. It strengthened prisoners' moral resilience, sustained a sense of community, offered hope, and helped preserve human dignity within the Nazi system of terror. Lipniūnas's ministry extended beyond Lithuanian prisoners: his pastoral assistance reached Polish, Latvian, Czech, German, and other inmates, while his cooperation with Lithuanian and Polish priests helped develop a broader underground network of religious life in the camp. The article also discusses his experiences during the Death March, his ministry

¹ The Lithuanian version of this article was prepared for the commemoration conference in Vilnius in 2023, organized by the Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania <https://www.genocid.lt/UserFiles/File/Titulinis/2023/20230317_konferencija_Grot.pdf>. Thus, the topic was not presented in the 2024 conference "The Fates of Stutthof Prisoners in Exile," as the rest of the papers of this volume. However, it is included here due to its thematic relevance as an important contribution to the biography of Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas, who was imprisoned at the Stutthof concentration camp. The text of the paper in Polish was received from the author in 2026. With the author's consent, the article was translated into English to ensure its wider dissemination among researchers.

in the temporary camp at Geś and later in Puck after liberation, where he died on 28 March 1945 from the consequences of typhus and exhaustion.

The study argues that Father Professor Alfonsas Lipniūnas remained in the memory of Stutthof prisoners as a witness to faith, charity, and spiritual resistance. His activity in the concentration camp reveals the significance of religious practice under conditions of totalitarian violence. It situates his martyrdom within the broader context of spiritual resistance and Christian solidarity.

KEYWORDS: Alfonsas Lipniūnas, Stutthof concentration camp, clandestine religious life, Death March, spiritual resistance, martyrdom.

After a failed attempt to mobilize the hiding Lithuanian youth, the German occupation authorities accused the intelligentsia of inciting against the Third Reich.² During a meeting in Riga on March 13, 1943, Heinrich Himmler ordered Lithuanian General Commissioner Adrian von Renteln to impose repressive measures in retaliation for the nationwide boycott of the recruitment of Lithuanian youth into the Waffen-SS. On March 16 and 17, 1943, the Germans arrested 46 Lithuanians, including four general counselors, five university lecturers, four gymnasium principals, three lawyers, two priests, teachers, journalists, officials, and a doctor. Most of them were residents of Vilnius, Kaunas, Marijampolė, and Šiauliai.³

Among those arrested was Rev. Prof. Alfonsas Lipniūnas, professor at the Seminary of the Archdiocese of Vilnius and chaplain of Vilnius University, known for celebrating Holy Masses daily at the Gate of Dawn and preaching at the academic church of St. John.⁴ During the Soviet and then German occupation, he preached courageous sermons, addressed especially to Lithuanian youth, maintaining faith in their abilities and moral values.⁵ During one of his sermons delivered in March 1943 in St. John's Church in Vilnius, he reacted sharply: "No one has ever bought Lithuanian youth. Neither for cigarettes nor for vodka. And they won't buy them now."⁶

² Sruoga, Balys. *Las Bogów (Forest of the Gods)*, 2nd edition. Stutthof Museum in Sztutowo, 2013, 22.

³ Kuczma, Kordian. Litewscy „więźniowie honorowi” w obozie koncentracyjnym Stutthof (Lithuanian “honorary prisoners” in the Stutthof concentration camp). *Stutthof Museum Notebooks*, 10(20), Sztutowo, 2022, 108–110.

⁴ Alfonsas Lipniūnas was born on March 12, 1905, the General Commissariat of Lithuania's operation in Tal-konys, Pumpėnai commune, Panevėžys County. He graduated from the Panevėžys Gymnasium, the Kaunas Theological Seminary, and theology at the University of Kaunas. From 1935 to 1937 he studied theology at the University of Lille and for the next two years at the Catholic Institute in Paris. After being ordained a priest in 1930, he served as vicar at the Cathedral of Christ the King in Panevėžys and, until 1935, as director of the diocesan youth center. From 1939, he lectured at the Pedagogical Institute based in Panevėžys, then in Vilnius. In 1942, he lectured in sociology and pastoral theology at the Vilnius Theological Seminary and chaplain at Vilnius University. On August 7, 1942, he was appointed professor at the Seminary of the Archdiocese of Vilnius by Archbishop Mečislovas Reinys.

⁵ Antanavičius, Juozapas, Gasparaitytė, Romualda, and Elżbieta Grot. *Ksiądz Alfonsas Lipniūnas w relacjach i wspomnieniach więźniów obozu KL Stutthof (Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas in the Accounts and Memories of Prisoners of the KL Stutthof Camp)*. Gdynia, 2002, 39. Ksiądz Alfonsas Lipniūnas.

⁶ Ibid., 40.

Father Lipniūnas never accepted the authorities, neither Soviet nor German. During the period of operation of the General Commissariat of Lithuania, part of the Reich Commissariat “East” (September 1, 1941 – the summer of 1944), he established the Lithuanian Foundation to provide aid to the starving inhabitants of Vilnius – Lithuanians, Poles, and Jews. Thanks to his efforts, the Catholic Academic Youth organization *Future People* was revived in Vilnius, whose members were involved in the work of the Foundation.⁷ Father Lipniūnas, who exerted great influence on young people and enjoyed their trust and authority, was arrested on March 16, 1943, in Vilnius and transported to the Gestapo prison in Kaunas.

Initially, the Germans intended to shoot the arrested Lithuanians. After the intervention of Major General Emil Just, the Wehrmacht commander in Lithuania, the commander of the Security Police and Security Service in the Lithuanian General District, SS Standartenführer Karl Jaeger issued a decision to send 46 Lithuanians with a death sentence to the KL Stutthof concentration camp for “leading the Lithuanian resistance movement, in particular opposing mobilization to the Waffen-SS.”⁸

Rev. Prof. A. Lipniūnas, along with the other arrested Lithuanians, was imprisoned in the Gestapo cellars in Kaunas, and later in a church in Tilsit. Warned by a Gestapo officer of the intention to transport their group with a death sentence to the camp Stutthof, Prof. Vladas Jurgutis (Chairman of the Bank of Lithuania) informed Rev. Prof. A. Lipniūnas, who prepared the entire group for the event of death, taking over the role of their spiritual guardian without revealing the reason.⁹ In Tilsit, after dividing the hostages into two groups, they were transported by rail to Gdańsk and then delivered by car to the Stutthof concentration camp on March 25 and 26, 1943.¹⁰

In 1943, the Stutthof concentration camp had been in operation for three and a half years, beginning on September 2, 1939. The SS officers managing the camp were instrumental in the deaths, illnesses, and disabilities of many prisoners. From its inception to its end, the camp Stutthof was a tool of terror used against political opponents, including Poles and Jews living in the Free City of Danzig and Pomerania. Although the camp met the requirements for German state concentration camps from the outset, it was not until Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS,

⁷ Ibid., 38. The ruling National Party in Lithuania banned “Ateitininkai” (Christian youth organization). During the German occupation, it operated underground, while during the Soviet occupation it operated in exile. In 1989, it was reactivated in Lithuania. The organization included student, university, and alumni unions. It contributed to the formation of Catholic trade unions and student corporations.

⁸ Kucзма, Kordian. Litewscy „więźniowie honorowi” w obozie koncentracyjnym Stutthof, 110.

⁹ Sruoga, Balys. *Las Bogów*, 28.

¹⁰ Archives of the Stutthof Museum in Sztutowo (hereinafter: AMS). *Księga ewidencyjna więźniów z 1943 r.*, sygn. I-IIIE-7 (*Prisoner record book from 1943*, reference number I-IIIE-7), 256.

personally visited the camp on November 23, 1941, that he agreed to grant it this status, effective January 7, 1942.

From 1942 to 1945, the Stutthof Concentration Camp was subordinated to the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps in Oranienburg, Group D, of the SS Main Administrative and Economic Office (SS Wirtschaftsverwaltungshauptamt SS – WVHA). Prisoners were placed under the control of the Reich Main Security Office (SS Reichssicherheitshauptamt RSHA). The Office issued a so-called *Schutzhaftbefehl*, an order for the indefinite protective detention of a given individual, signed by an officer of a local Gestapo station pursuant to the regulation “On the Protection of Nation and State” of February 28, 1933.¹¹

In 1943, 11,863 prisoners were registered in KL Stutthof, assigned numbers from 17,907 to 29,770. On March 31, 1943, the camp held 3,950 prisoners, including 285 women.¹² The Lithuanian hostages began their stay during the typhus epidemic that broke out in the camp in the spring, leading to the deaths of approximately 1,500 prisoners. Based on the incomplete documentation, the deaths of 3,876 prisoners in 1943 can be confirmed by name, including 2,770 in the first six months of the year¹³.

Upon entering the camp gate, the SS treated the 46 Lithuanians in the same manner as all other prisoners previously imprisoned at the Stutthof Concentration Camp. They were subjected to a brutal admission procedure. The new arrivals were stripped of their personal belongings, money, valuables, clothing, and shoes. After bathing in the camp bathhouse and being disinfected, they were issued camp underwear, jackets, trousers, and caps made of blue-and-gray striped fabric, along with wooden clogs. Their hair was severely shaved, and then they were issued strips of fabric with a red triangle in the center, with the letter L and their camp number. The red triangle denoted their status as political prisoners. Rev. Prof. A. Lipniūnas, who arrived at the camp on March 26, 1943, was assigned the number 21,332.¹⁴

The quarantine period involved registering prisoners at camp offices and rigorously enforcing camp discipline and drill. Initially, the Lithuanian group lived in barracks no. 2 in the Old Camp. After the quarantine ended, in April 1943, the priest and the other Lithuanians were transferred to barracks no. 6, which was

¹¹ Ryszka, Franciszek. *Państwo stanu wyjątkowego*. Wydanie III poprawione i uzupełnione (*State of emergency*, 3rd edition, revised and supplemented). Wrocław, 1985, 353–375.

¹² AMS, *Księga ewidencyjna więźniów z 1943 r.*, sygn. I-IIIE-7 (*Prisoner record book from 1943*, reference number I-IIIE-7); *Księga zgonów*, sygn. Z-V-16 (*Death Book*, reference number Z-V-16); Kłys, A. *Wykaz więźniów zmarłych w obozie Stutthof w 1943 r.* (List of prisoners who died in the Stutthof camp in 1943). *Stutthof Museum Notebooks*, 7(17), 2019, 107–277.

¹³ Grot, Elżbieta. Eksterminacja pośrednia. In *Stutthof. Hitlerowski obóz koncentracyjny*. (Indirect extermination. In *Stutthof. Hitler's concentration camp*.) Ed. W. Steyer. Warsaw, 1988, 211; Kłys, A. *Wykaz więźniów zmarłych...* (List of prisoners who...), 108.

¹⁴ AMS, *Księga ewidencyjna z 1943 roku*, sygn. I-IIIE-7 (*Record book from 1943*, reference number I-IIIE-7), 256.

managed by the Polish block leader Wacław Kozłowski, known for his exceptional cruelty and murder of fellow prisoners.¹⁵ The block elder's repression did not spare Father Lipniūnas, who was beaten and had his glasses broken. After this incident, out of respect for the priest, the Polish prisoners repaired his glasses.

The Lithuanians were then transferred to barracks no. 8b. The first period of their stay in the camp proved to be difficult for the priest and his companions due to meager rations and no food parcels coming from their families and friends. The prisoners were given low-calorie meals three times a day. For breakfast and dinner, they received a ration consisting of half a liter of cereal coffee substitute and a piece of bread, some margarine and jam, and for lunch, half a liter of soup, usually made from potatoes, turnips, and cabbage. Forced to perform hard physical labor daily, the prisoners quickly lost their strength. The lack of food parcels, warm clothing, and medicine worsened the situation of the starving prisoners, who did not always have the opportunity to “organize” additional food at their workplaces. Father Lipniūnas, like other prisoners, began to lose weight, looked unwell, and his companions began to call him “Sadness”. Hard work under the supervision of SS men and kapos, long periods of standing at roll calls in the camp square regardless of weather conditions, diseases, typhus epidemics, life in the camp in constant stress and humiliation caused by terror, harassment, beatings, poor hygienic and living conditions in the barracks, lack of warm clothing, no possibility of maintaining personal hygiene and washing clothes, and insufficient medical care contributed to the exhaustion of physical and mental strength of individual prisoners, and ultimately led to premature deaths.¹⁶ In these extreme conditions, without outside help, a prisoner could survive only a few months. Nine of the 46 Lithuanians died between April 14 and May 15, 1943.¹⁷

¹⁵ Grabowska, Janina. Odpowiedzialność za zbrodnie popełnione w Stutthofie. Procesy. In *Stutthof. Hitlerowski obóz...* (Responsibility for the crimes committed in Stutthof. Trials. In *Stutthof. Hitler's concentration camp*), 319; Sruoga, Balys, op. cit., 73–83. For his criminal activities in KL Stutthof, the Polish prisoner Wacław Kozłowski was sentenced to death by hanging in the Gdańsk trial held from April 25 to June 1, 1946. The sentence was carried out publicly in July 1946 in Gdańsk.

¹⁶ Grot, Elżbieta. Eksterminacja. In *Stutthof. Hitlerowski obóz...* (Extermination. In *Stutthof. Hitler's concentration camp...*), 179–203.

¹⁷ Also: Bubnys, Arūnas. Antinacinė lietuvių rezistencija 1941–1944 m. (Anti-Nazi Lithuanian resistance – 1944). *Mokslas ir Lietuva*, 4, 1992, 126–136. They were: Major Stasys Puodžius (born March 15, 1896) died on April 14, 1943; Zigmas Masaitis (born January 27, 1903) a teacher of mathematics, school principal in Marijampolė, died on April 18, 1943; Algirdas Tumėnas (born April 23, 1909) an economist from Vilnius, died on April 19, 1943; Peter Kerpė (born February 4, 1890) a technician, died on April 20, 1943; Kazimieras Bauba (born December 26, 1908) a teacher of Latin and school principal in Kaunas, died on May 14, 1943; Ignas Budrys (born February 4, 1885), an agronomist, died on May 15, 1943; Antanas Januševičius (born November 25, 1912), a teacher of history and school principal in Marijampolė, died on June 7, 1943; Bronius Grigas (born September 5, 1902), a vice-mayor of Vilnius, died on May 2, 1943; Vytautas Tumėnas (born February 23, 1906), a teacher of history from Vilnius, died on May 15, 1943.

The situation of the 37 surviving Lithuanians changed when Theodor Meyer announced to those gathered in front of the barracks on May 31, 1943, that they had been granted the status of honorary prisoners (*Ehrenhäftlinge*).¹⁸ Such a decision must have been made at the Reich Main Security Office, probably after numerous interventions by family members.¹⁹ It did not mean the release of prisoners, but their stay in the concentration camp for an indefinite period. The new classification placed this group in a privileged position compared to others. From May 31, 1943, they were released from forced labor, were no longer required to wear camp numbers, and had their hair regularly shaved. But they had to continue wearing striped trousers and a yellow armband. From then on, they could write weekly letters to family and friends and receive parcels from them. They were permitted to use the SS library and listen to the radio via a loudspeaker installed in their barracks, but were prohibited from meeting or interacting with other prisoners. Violating this prohibition could result in the loss of their honorary prisoner status.

On September 28, 1943, the Lithuanians were transferred to the New Camp, to a separate section in barracks no. 11. It looked exactly as Balys Sruoga characterized it: "The room was tiny: the same three-tiered wooden bunks, but everyone had their own bed. That meant a lot. There were two blankets and no lice. Only Lithuanians were housed here. Not only were there no foreigners, but there was no authority. Even the block leader, the distinguished executioner and professional Zimmermann, lived separately from the other prisoners and barely interfered in our affairs."²⁰ This barracks housed a canteen, a work assignment office, and several craft workshops. The block leader was the German criminal Hans Zimmermann.²¹ Among the group of honorary Lithuanian prisoners, Dr. Antanas Starkus from the Institute of Pathology in Kaunas and a political prisoner number 21,256, worked voluntarily in the men's prison hospital in the Old Camp until the day the evacuation was announced in 1945. Thanks to his professional qualifications, he identified a disease causing the high mortality rate among prisoners – ulcerative colitis – and recommended its effective treatment with neosalvarsan.²² Mykolas Pečeliūnas (Michał Peczeluna), political prisoner no. 21,251 involved in the camp

¹⁸ No documents have survived to establish the reason for the change in prisoner category of the 37 surviving Lithuanians. One can only assume that this decision was made at the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA) in Berlin, and the Stutthof concentration camp authorities were obligated to implement it.

¹⁹ Relacja M. Peczeluny więźnia KL Stutthof nr 21 251 (The account of M. Peczeluna, prisoner of KL Stutthof no. 21), 251. In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 83.

²⁰ Sruoga, Balys, op. cit., 108.

²¹ Sruoga, op. cit., 108–111; Yla, Stasys. *A priest in Stutthof. Human experiences in the world of subhuman*. New York, 1971, 119–120.

²² AMS, *Zespół relacji i wspomnień*, Relacja dr J. Węgrzynowicza, t. 6 (*A set of accounts and memories*, Report by Dr. J. Węgrzynowicz, vol. 6), 255–260.

resistance movement worked in the warehouse, where items taken from prisoners during their admission to the camp were stored; Juozas Narakas, political prisoner no. 21,252, and Rapulas Mackonis no. 21,318, were employed in sorting and recording items taken from prisoners. Priest Stasys Yla worked in the SS library, and Balys Sruoga, no. 21,319, was assigned to the camp office.

The change in the status of Lithuanian prisoners improved their living conditions in the camp. Father Lipniūnas, who corresponded with Bishop K. Paltarokas of Panevėžys, wrote in one of his letters dated July 5, 1943: "I'm very happy to receive food parcels from Lithuanians who remember me. Dear Excellency, please don't worry. I'll be back healthy and refreshed. Goodbye and best wishes."²³

The food the priest mentioned, which he began receiving in parcels from his parishioners in Lithuania, was distributed to his fellow prisoners in accordance with the principle he applied in his everyday life: *everything for others, nothing for yourself*.²⁴ It should be particularly emphasized that sharing food with other prisoners suffering from hunger in the camp was a heroic act.

After his prisoner status was changed, Father Lipniūnas decided to begin covert pastoral work, despite the risk of losing his honorary prisoner status and facing the death penalty. His supporter, Father Stasys Yla, helped organize an extremely clandestine religious life in the camp, operating on mutual trust and the highest degree of secrecy. Father Lipniūnas secretly celebrated his first Holy Mass on June 13, 1943, in the Old Camp in barracks no. 8a, with approximately 20 prisoners in attendance. From then on, Holy Mass in this barracks was celebrated regularly every Sunday, secretly from the SS, maintaining all precautions.²⁵

The presence of two Lithuanian priests in the camp motivated Polish political prisoners living in the Old Camp to contact them in the hope of expanding their religious practices to include confession and receiving Holy Communion. Most of them came from Catholic families and were arrested by the Gestapo for their participation in underground organizations operating in Pomerania: the Grey Ranks (Związek Walki Zbrojnej and Armia Krajowa) and the Secret Military Organization "Gryf Pomorski" (Pomeranian Griffin). They practiced their religious life in the camp in a strictly underground setting, organizing communal prayers, reciting the Holy Rosary, and holding religious services. Father Lipniūnas granted them their first discharge during lunchtime on August 14, 1943. The following day, Polish political prisoner Zofia Buske managed to transfer approximately 30 communicants from the commandant's building to the Old Camp. The prisoners received

²³ Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 42.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Relacja Michała Peczeluny (Report by Mikhail Peceluna). In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 84.

their First Holy Communion in a room known as the Strohistuba, to which they had a key. In Strohistuba, during working hours, a group of selected female prisoners, under the supervision of a kapo, wove straw sandals and other small items for the SS. To ensure a dignified reception of Holy Communion, the prisoners set up a small altar in the room behind the stove, made of cardboard, covered it with a white napkin, and decorated it with flowers and candles. In the early morning hours, before roll call, they would quietly go to Strohistuba individually or in pairs to receive Holy Communion in reverence.²⁶

Initially, due to the need to maintain security, the number of prisoners practicing religious life secretly in the Old Camp was limited to a dozen or so.²⁷ Participating in religious practices gave prisoners the strength to survive, instilled faith in regaining freedom, brought relief from suffering, comfort, and hope for survival.

Father Lipniūnas granted absolution to the prisoners several more times, approaching the barbed-wire and electrified fence separating the men's camp from that of the women's. Walking in pairs, the prisoners, their gaze fixed on the priest, made their confessions. Thanks to Father Lipniūnas, the prisoners were able to receive Holy Communion in 1943 and 1944 on Christmas Day, Easter, First Fridays, Pentecost, the Feast of the Virgin Mary on August 15, and All Saints' Day on November 1. By the end of 1944, the group of initiated prisoners housed in the women's barracks at the Old Camp had grown from 12 to approximately 60–70.²⁸ The group included Polish women – Zofia Buske, Helena Chrzanowska, Bronisława Ciara, Jadwiga Dąbrowska, Elżbieta Marcinkowska, Anna Paszkowska, Jadwiga Rotecka, and Halina Strzelecka.²⁹

The hosts for the initiated female prisoners in the Old Camp were carried by Poles Zofia Buske and Helena Geysztor, among others, and delivered by the prisoners, Marceli Ciara (Pole) and Michał Peczeluna (Lithuanian).³⁰

Bronisława Ciara provided interesting information in her report, mentioning the celebration of Holy Masses ordered by her husband Marcel Ciara from Father

²⁶ Ibid., 60; Archiwum Fundacji Pomorskiej Armii Krajowej w Toruniu (*Archives of the Pomeranian Home Army Foundation in Toruń*) – AFPAK Toruń, *Teczki osobowe członków pomorskiego ruchu oporu – relacja zbiorowa więźniarek KL Stutthof towarzyszek Jadwigi Roteckiej-Szewczukowej* (*Personal files of members of the Pomeranian resistance movement – collective account of prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp, companions of Jadwiga Rotecka-Szewczukowa*); Strzelecka, Halina. *Koncentrationslägret inifrån* (*The concentration camp from the inside*). Uppsala, 1998; Taz, *Christian life in the concentration camp*, “La Vie Spirituelle” Juin 1957, 592–602 based on the translation of Marek Orski's text from French into Polish.

²⁷ Strzelecka, H. *Christian life in the concentration camp*, 61. Information provided by Jadwiga Rotecka-Szewczukowa, no. 17, 633.

²⁸ Relacja Elżbiety Marcinkowskiej-Szucy i Jadwigi Roteckiej-Szewczukowej oraz relacja Haliny Strzeleckiej (The account of Elżbieta Marcinkowska-Szucy and Jadwiga Rotecka-Szewczukowa and the account of Halina Strzelecka). In Antanavičius et al., *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 60–62, 68–70.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Relacja Michała Peczeluny (Report by Michał Peczeluna). In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 84.

Lipniūnas for the intention of their children³¹ on the occasion of her name day and birthday. Another case was secretly receiving Holy Communion on her name day in a linen repair shop, after which several men, including her husband, came from the New Camp to collect it on that day.³²

After the Lithuanians were transferred to the New Camp on September 28, 1943, Father Lipniūnas celebrated daily Masses at dawn in a tiny utility room in barracks no. 11, assisted by one or two altar boys. It is known that the altar boy was initially Lithuanian Pilypas Žukauskas-Narutis, no. 21, 244, and that Polish political prisoners Maksymilian Deyna and Albin Makowski³³ joined in 1944. They first met Father Lipniūnas in the camp on January 16, 1944. During a walk, Makowski made his first confession in the camp, and a few days later, he secretly received Holy Communion.

In his memoirs, Makowski described his meeting with Father Lipniūnas this way: “On October 1, 1943, I and 15 of my fellow camp members formed the ‘Living Rose’ to devote ourselves even more fervently to praying the rosary, which proved increasingly effective, exerting its salutary influence on us. And the Sunday quarter-hour Gospel readings deepened our spiritual lives even further, immunizing us and protecting us from the effects of the camp hell. However, I was not fully satisfied until January 16, 1944, when I met Father Lipniūnas, a Lithuanian professor at the Higher Seminary in Vilnius. He spoke Polish poorly. But what good was Latin, or perhaps French? I eagerly availed myself of it, if I could communicate fully. Thanks to this meeting, I made my first camp confession in the form of a shared, inconspicuous walk around the campgrounds. And a little later, taking every precaution, I secretly received Holy Communion, my first after a 14-month break of enforced restraint. It’s difficult to describe the enormity of spiritual experiences in such a cruel life situation.”³⁴

On February 13, 1944, after a special spiritual experience, A. Makowski decided to ask the priest for a few communion wafers for his closest barrack mates. From

³¹ The married couple Marcella Ciara and Bronisława Ciara were involved in underground activities within the ZWZ-AK (Union of Armed Struggle-Air Forces) in Gdynia. Their apartment at 10 Mściwoja Street served as an important point of contact for Captain Józef Olszewski, codenamed “Andrzej,” Commander of the ZWZ-AK Maritime Sub-District. During the Gestapo’s crackdown on Home Army structures in Gdynia in the fall of 1942, the Ciaras were arrested and, following a Gestapo investigation in Gdańsk, imprisoned in the Stutthof concentration camp. Their minor children, left behind in Gdynia, were placed under their care. Marcella Ciara died during the Death March in 1945; his wife, Bronisława, survived the sea evacuation. She was placed under the care of the Swedish Red Cross. After completing her treatment, she returned to Gdynia to be with her family.

³² Relacja Bronisławy Ciary (Account of Bronisława Ciary). In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas*., 63–66.

³³ Relacja Michała Peczeluny i relacja Pilypasa Narutisa (Report by Michał Peczeluna and report by Pilypas Narutis). In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas*., 86, 99; Makowski, Albin. Spotkanie z księdzem. *Przewodnik katolicki*, nr. 26–28, 1968, 237, 240; Information provided to the author by Leszek Zdrojewski on December 18, 2002.

³⁴ Makowski, op. cit., 237.

then on, he began serving as a minister. He distributed the communion wafers to a growing number of initiated prisoners. In January 1945, 490 prisoners received Holy Communion from him. He distributed the communion wafers for the last time just before the evacuation of prisoners from the camp, which started on January 25, 1945.³⁵

Thanks to Makowski's memoirs, we know about the preparations for celebrating Holy Masses in barracks no. 11 in the New Camp: "I was a frequent guest at Father Lipniūnas's, and taking advantage of his kindness, I taught him Polish in return, which he increasingly mastered. Whenever possible, he celebrated Mass early on Sunday mornings in a small cell, at which I participated as an altar boy. One of my colleagues from Toruń was the general supplier of communion wafers. My father would send me a parcel of raisins, which were used to make the sacramental wine, which was stored in a small glass bottle. He used a glass as a chalice. Two candles also lit, illuminating the windowless cell. A slightly protruding, wider shelf served as the altar, where dishes were placed after meals. The missal was a Latin Polish Roman Missal, Belgian edition from 1931. It was a very modest chapel, barely large enough for the priest and the two attendants – the altar boys. The liturgical vestments were even poorer, consisting of an ordinary striped uniform and a small stole, the only external symbol of priesthood."³⁶

Father Lipniūnas celebrated secret Masses every day at dawn, and in the evenings, he prayed in the barracks with the prisoners, composing prayers especially for them. His knowledge of several languages made it easier for him to fulfill his priestly duties towards prisoners of Latvian, Czech, German, Polish, and other nationalities. He provided spiritual support to prisoners who approached him, heard confessions, and granted absolution.³⁷ He provided sacramental wine, hosts, prayer books, and other necessary paraphernalia to Polish priests imprisoned in the Stutthof concentration camp by the Germans in 1944 for their activities in Polish underground organizations – the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) and the Secret Military Organization "Gryf Pomorski." Polish priests, including Father Józef Bystron, Father Franciszek Grucza, Father Kazimierz Zwolenkiewicz, and Father W. Prądyński, all recalled their collaboration with the Lithuanian priest in their accounts.³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., 237, 240.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Letters from Father W. Prądyński and Father Canon S. Pelpliński to Elżbieta Grot from 1999.

³⁸ Archiwum Zgromadzenia Sióstr Dominikanek w Krakowie (*Archives of the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters in Kraków*) – AZSD Kraków, Relacje Klementyny Zastrzeżyńskiej i ks. Franciszka Gruczy (The accounts of Klementyna Zastrzeganyńska and Father Franciszek Grucza); Letter from Father W. Prądyński to the author from 1999; Zwolenkiewicz, Kazimierz. *Wspomnienie (Memories)*. Pelplin, 1998; Dunin-Wąsowicz, Krzysztof. *Ruch oporu w hitlerowskich obozach koncentracyjnych 1933–1945 (Resistance movement in Nazi concentration camps 1933–1945)*. Warsaw, 1979, 352.

Thanks to these contacts, Polish priests were able to conduct clandestine pastoral work among prisoners, hearing confessions and administering Holy Communion at the New Camp. Some of them, like Father Grucza, using various stratagems, even reached the Jewish Camp, to barracks no. 27, where the Dominican Sister Julia Stanisława Rodzińska was staying. She was brought in a transport of women from the Prawieniszki (Pravieniškės) penal camp to the Stutthof Concentration Camp on July 9, 1944, and registered under number 40,992.³⁹ Before that, Sister Julia spent a year in solitary confinement in the Gestapo prison in Łukiszki (Lukiškės) in Vilnius, accused of collaborating with the Home Army and helping Polish priests.⁴⁰ In barracks no. 27, where prisoners of Polish, Russian, Lithuanian, Latvian, German, and Jewish nationalities were held, she had the courage to lead communal prayers, setting an example of piety for her fellow prisoners and giving them encouragement and faith in their survival. Sister Julia provided special care and protection to mothers whose children awaited their return home. During the typhus epidemic, Jewish women were gathered in barracks no. 30, where, deprived of food and water, they died en masse.⁴¹

Polish priest K. Zwolenkiewicz mentioned the Holy Masses secretly celebrated by himself and by priests Walenty Putz and Franciszek Grucza from the spring of 1944, before noon every Sunday in barracks no.9 in the New Camp, thanks to the paraments lent by a Lithuanian priest.⁴² The priests took special care of those sentenced to death, whom they visited to hear their confessions. Father Józef Bystron also mentioned the joint Holy Masses celebrated by Polish priests with

³⁹ AMS, *Wykaz więźniów transportu z obozu karnego w Prawieniszkach do KL Stutthof z 9 lipca 1944 r.*; sygn. I-IIB-11 (*List of prisoners transported from the penal camp in Prawieniszki to KL Stutthof on July 9, 1944.*; ref. no. I-IIB-11); Archives of the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters in Kraków (AZSD Kraków), Relacje Klementyny Zastrzeżyńskiej i ks. Franciszka Gruczy (Accounts of Klementyna Zastrzeganyńska and Father Franciszek Grucza).

⁴⁰ Dombek, Justyna. *Servant of God Sister Julia Stanisława Rodzińska OP (1899–1945)*. In *Męczennicy za wiarę 1939–1945*, praca zbiorowa (*Martyrs for the faith 1939–1945*, collective work). Warsaw, 1996, 281–285; Grot, Elżbieta. *Błogosławieni więźniowie obozu Stutthof (Blessed prisoners of the Stutthof camp)*. Gdańsk, 1999, 36–37. Dominican Sister Julia Stanisława Rodzińska, born on March 16, 1899 in Nawojowa, died on February 20, 1945, sick with typhus in the Stutthof concentration camp. She was beatified among the 108 martyrs of World War II by the Holy Father John Paul II on June 13, 1999, in Warsaw. A teacher by profession, she provided educational services for Polish children orphaned after World War I in Mielżyn near Gniezno, from 1921 in Rawa Ruska, and then from 1922 to 1940 in Vilnius. She was the headmistress of the Primary State School named after Our Lady of the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius, and from 1934 served as Mother Superior of the Dominican Sisters' Convent in Vilnius and Head of the Orphanage. She was described as "the mother of orphans" in Vilnius and "a sister of mercy" in the Stutthof concentration camp, providing spiritual care to the prisoners in the Jewish Camp and caring for the Jewish women suffering from typhus gathered in barracks no. 30, called the "death barracks" or the "finishing room" (Stinksaal).

⁴¹ Grot, Elżbieta. *Błogosławieni więźniowie obozu...*, 32–38.

⁴² Zwolenkiewicz, Kazimierz. *Wspomnienia*, 58–60.

Father Lipniūnas in Block no.11 at the New Camp.⁴³ Lithuanian and Polish priests are known to have given their final blessings to prisoners sentenced to death by hanging or being led to the gas chamber. For example, on July 26, 1944, the Polish priest Bartnik gave his final blessing to prisoners of the Warsaw transport from Pawiak sentenced to death. Father Yla heard confessions and gave absolution to his compatriots with whom he had been staying in the prisoner hospital during the typhus epidemic.⁴⁴

The clandestine pastoral work and collaboration between Lithuanian and Polish priests in the Stutthof concentration camp continued until January 25, 1945, when the evacuation of prisoners from the camp began. Krzysztof Dunin-Wąsowicz, one of the political prisoners who arrived at the camp Stutthof on May 24, 1944 from Pawiak, and a witness to Father Lipniūnas's activities in the camp, wrote about the importance of religious life in his post-war book: "Organizing religious life despite Nazi prohibitions kept many prisoners' spirits up, created a sense of community, faith in victory, and faith in imminent freedom. These were extremely important psychological factors, helping to preserve humanity, to preserve all the values that the Nazi system sought to trample and destroy in the concentration camps. Therefore, we believe that organizing religious life in the camps was also a form of resistance, a form of mass psychological warfare, often effective."⁴⁵

The subsequent fate of the prisoners was influenced by the preparations made by the highest authorities of the Third Reich, starting in the second half of 1944, in the event of a lost war after the defeats in the East. Recognizing the need to leave the Reich district of Gdańsk-West Prussia (Reichsgau Danzig-Westpreussen), they commissioned Albert Forster, acting as Gauleiter of the NSDAP, Reich Governor, and Defense Commissioner, to develop plans for the evacuation of property, German population, forced laborers working in industry and agriculture, and prisoners from the Stutthof concentration camp and prisons. For this purpose, A. Forster appointed a special staff, which developed a secret evacuation plan under the codename "Fall Eva" (Fall of Eve), which was approved by the higher authorities on September 4, 1944. A. Forster was responsible to Führer Adolf Hitler for the entire evacuation in this district, while the Higher SS and Police Leader SS-Gruppenführer Fritz Katzmann was directly responsible to Heinrich Himmler for the evacuation of prisoners from KL Stutthof.⁴⁶ As part of the secret plan, the Stutthof

⁴³ Relacja ks. Józefa Bystronia (Account of Father Józef Bystronia). In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 74.

⁴⁴ Yla, Stasys. *A Priest in Stutthof...*, 50–51, 105.

⁴⁵ Dunin-Wąsowicz, Krzysztof. *Ruch oporu w hitlerowskich obozach...*, 352, 355.

⁴⁶ Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku, Zespół Gauleitung Danzig, sygn. I 2, 5226 (*State Archives in Gdańsk. Gauleitung Danzig Collection*, file no. I 2, 522).

concentration camp commandant was tasked with developing a detailed prisoner evacuation plan. In the autumn of 1944, two variants were developed, taking into account the order of Himmler, the chief administrator of state-owned Nazi concentration camps, to evacuate prisoners from threatened areas to camps located further from the war fronts. In the case of the Stutthof concentration camp, it was westward. The first plan, approved by the concentration camp headquarters in Oranienburg by Himmler, assumed transporting prisoners from the ports in Gdynia or Gdańsk to Lübeck and then delivering them to the Neuengamme concentration camp near Hamburg. The second plan assumed a foot evacuation to the School for Junior SS Leaders in Łębork on Koszarowa Street and then through the Reichsgau Pommern to the Sachsenhausen or Ravensbrück concentration camp.⁴⁷

The launch of the winter offensive on January 12 by the Red Army and the rapid occupation of individual towns in the Żuławy region contributed to SS-Gruppenführer F. Katzmann's issuance, on January 16, 1945, of an order implementing the secret plan "Fall Eva". In the third stage of evacuation, after announcing the password "seal," the planned evacuation of prisoners from the Stutthof concentration camp began. As Red Army troops approached Elbląg and Malbork on January 23 and 24, 1945, towns approximately 40–50 km from Stutthof, A. Forster and F. Katzmann, acting in consultation with the highest authorities of the Third Reich and the administrators of the concentration camps, decided to evacuate the Stutthof prisoners from the district under their control. The refusal of the German Navy (Kriegsmarine) command to evacuate the prisoners by sea contributed to the implementation of the second option – a foot evacuation by land towards Łębork. SS-Sturmbannführer Paul Werner Hoppe, commandant of the Stutthof concentration camp, established an evacuation staff, appointing SS-Hauptsturmführer Theodor Meyer, the former camp director and Schutzhaftlagerführer, as its leader. Also included were SS-Unterscharführer Reiss, SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Laub, who oversaw the smooth running of the evacuation, and Dr. Heinrich Plaza, who oversaw sanitary matters. The prisoners were to be escorted by SS men from the Stutthof concentration camp garrison, under the command of SS-Hauptsturmführer Richard Reddig, equipped with pistols, machine guns, ammunition, and specially trained dogs. The SS men were permitted to use firearms to prevent any escape attempts or incitement of rebellion. The camp command planned to evacuate prisoners from KL Stutthof to Łębork within seven days, along a 140-kilometer route leading through Mikoszewo – crossing the Vistula River – Szewce – Błotnik – Cedry Małe – Cedry Wielkie – Trutnowy – Pruszcz Gdański – Straszyn – Bąkowo – Lublewo – Kolbudy – Niestępowo – Żukowo – Przodkowo – Załęże – Pomieczyno – Luzino – Godętowo.

⁴⁷ AMS, *Wspomnienia Teodora Meyera*, sygn. Z-V-20 (*Theodor Meyer's memoirs, reference number Z-V-20*).

Evacuation director T. Meyer was required to submit daily reports on the evacuation's progress to the commandant of KL Stutthof and to Dr. Putz, the representative of the Higher SS and Police Leader in Gdańsk for evacuation matters. After crossing the Gdańsk-West Prussia border, T. Meyer was to contact Emil Matzuw, Higher SS and Police Leader in Szczecin, to whom the so-called Pomeranian district was subordinated, regarding further evacuation.

The day before the evacuation began, on January 24, 1945, the concentration camp records listed 46,500 prisoners: men, women, minors, and children. The central camp held 23,000, and 25 subcamps located from Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) to Szczecin, and from Słupsk, Gdynia, and Gdańsk to Bydgoszcz and Toruń, held 23,500 prisoners. The prisoners came from 28 countries and represented over 40 nationalities. Among the evacuees were Poles, Russians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Finns, Danes, Norwegians, French, English, Germans, Italians, Czechs, Jews, and citizens of Western European and Baltic countries, as well as Hungarians. Despite the threat of the typhus epidemic spreading outside the camp, which developed in the camp in November 1944, contributing to high mortality among prisoners, and acting in accordance with the provisions of the secret plan and subordinating himself to the superior authorities in the Gdańsk-West Prussia and Reich districts, the commandant of KL Stutthof, SS-Sturmbannführer Paul Werner Hoppe issued at 5:00 a.m. on January 25, 1945, Special Order No. 3, demanding the evacuation of prisoners from the camp to begin at 6:00 a.m. on the same day.⁴⁸

On January 25, 1945, during the roll call in the early morning hours, having separated the sick from those fit to march, the SS began to march hourly individual columns of 800 to 1,600 prisoners out of the Stutthof main camp, maintaining a distance of 5 km between columns. Ultimately, seven columns were led out of the camp on the first day, including one women's column. The following day, January 26, two columns were led out: one male, one female. The prisoners marched in columns, arranged in close ranks of five. In total, approximately 11,000 prisoners moved out of the main camp under the supervision of II Schutzhaftlagerführer Sette: men, women, some minors, and children. Among the prisoners were people infected with typhus without any symptoms, suffering from phlegmon, tuberculosis, and those mentally and physically exhausted from strenuous physical labor and prolonged starvation. This group of prisoners decided to participate in the evacuation out of fear of being murdered by the SS.

⁴⁸ AMS, Rozkaz operacyjny komendanta KL Stutthof nr 3 z 25 stycznia 1945 r., sygn. I-I-6 (*Operational order of the commandant of KL Stutthof No. 3 of 25 January 1945, reference number I-I-6*).

Before marching, prisoners received a two-day food ration consisting of half a loaf of bread, 120 grams of margarine or processed cheese, or a piece of dry horse meat. Prisoners were allowed to take a tin bowl, a spoon, a blanket, their meager food supplies, and personal belongings. Most marched covered in blankets, wearing wooden clogs, with their feet wrapped in rags, and dressed in striped uniforms or civilian clothes marked on the back with an oil-painted red cross. On the first day, the columns reached Mikoszewo, where they crossed the Vistula River via a train ferry, tugboats, or river berlines. From Świbno, the prisoner columns moved through the villages in the Gdańsk Uplands, including Cedry Małe and Cedry Wielkie, towards Pruszcz Gdański. The next section, from Pruszcz Gdański through Łapino, Kolbudy, Pręgowo, and Niestępów, was exceptionally difficult for the prisoners. They passed through the former Free City of Danzig, where German residents offered no food or assistance during escapes. The SS forbade residents of nearby villages from approaching the columns, and prisoners from contacting them. Further difficulties were blizzards, snowdrifts, and unswept secondary roads, which allowed passage for Wehrmacht units and German civilians evacuated from East Prussia. In just a few days, over one hundred prisoners died.⁴⁹ The occasional escapes from the columns usually ended in death from gunfire or being mauled by dogs. The SS shot any prisoner who remained at the end of the column.⁵⁰

The SS joined the Lithuanian and Latvian honorary prisoners from barracks no. 11 with those from barracks nos. 1, 2, and 3, who formed the first column. These prisoners were transported by narrow-gauge railway to the station in Mikoszewo, then ferried across the Vistula River, and then marched through Cedry Małe, Cedry Wielkie, and Trutnowy to Pruszcz Gdański, where they were held overnight at the airport in barracks housing Jewish female prisoners. The next day, they reached Kolbudy, where they slept in a large brick outbuilding. On the third day, after walking several kilometers, they reached Żukowo.

During the march, Father Lipniūnas carried a heavy backpack filled with sacred vessels and books instead of bread. Before leaving the camp, he distributed his small food supplies to other, hungrier prisoners, even though he himself weighed little more than 40 kg. The rapid march in unfavorable weather conditions, without additional rations, a hot meal, and warm clothing, contributed to

⁴⁹ Dunin-Wąsowicz, Krzysztof. *Obóz koncentracyjny Stutthof (Stutthof concentration camp)*, 1971, 117.

⁵⁰ Oddziałowa Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Gdańsku – (Branch Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation of the Institute of National Remembrance in Gdańsk) – OK. Gd., S 11/73, vol. 3, *Śledztwo w sprawie zbrodni popełnionych w okresie od 25 I 1945 r. do 9 V 1945 r. na ewakuowanych więźniach obozu koncentracyjnego Stutthof na lądzie i Morzu Bałtyckim*, Protokół przesłuchania świadka Piotra Kaisera (*Investigation into the crimes committed between January 25, 1945, and May 9, 1945, against evacuated prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp on land and in the Baltic Sea*, Minutes of the interrogation of witness Piotr Kaiser), 544.

his physical weakening. Father Lipniūnas, marching alongside Pilypas Žukauskas, became exhausted and began to weaken, unable to keep up with the other prisoners. This was a dangerous situation, posing a risk of being shot by the SS. Both were pushed by a Lithuanian prisoner into the center of the column, thus preventing the threat.⁵¹ During an overnight stay in a church in Łebno, Kashubia, Father Lipniūnas secretly celebrated Holy Mass at dawn for the martyrs of the Death March, having previously done so in the church in Przodkowo. This event was recorded in an ink drawing by Polish prisoner Jerzy Krasnopiór during his stay at the RAD camp in Geś in 1945.⁵² From Łebno, the SS led the first column through the villages of Strzecz, Bukowina, and Dzieścilec toward Łębork. The column was turned away from the road to Łęczyce and led through Łebunia along the road toward Łębork, then Łeba. After passing the village of Krępa Kaszubska, the column proceeded along a side road leading to a German labor camp, *Reich Labor Service* (hereinafter, RAD) in Geś.⁵³

During the evacuation, it turned out that the SS men could not bring the prisoners to Łębork as planned, because the Wehrmacht had occupied the buildings of the school for junior SS officers for hospital purposes. For this reason, SS Hauptsturmführer Teodor Meyer, the director of the KL Stutthof camp responsible for the evacuation, was forced to seek alternative accommodations for the prisoners. The Gauleiter and Governor of the Reich District of Pommern (Western Pomerania), Franz Schwede-Koburg, and the Higher SS and Police Leader in that district, SS Obergruppenführer Emil Matzuw, refused permission for the prisoner columns from KL Stutthof to pass through their district, demanding that all prisoners be shot. After many efforts, T. Meyer was given access to summer camps belonging to the German Labor Service, the so-called Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD), located in the Łębork district, which were in the towns of Geś, Gniewino, Krępa Kaszubska, Łowcz, Nawcz, Rybno, Tawęcín, and Toliszczek.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Relacja Pilypasa Žukauskasa Narutisa (Report by Pilypas Žukauskas-Narutis). In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas*., 99–100.

⁵² Ibid., 100; Grot, Elżbieta. Z Wilna do Pucka (From Vilnius to Puck). About Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas, a Lithuanian candidate for the altars. *Zapiski Puckie*, 2002, no. 2, 30. This fact, in commemoration of the celebration of Holy Mass in the church in Przodków by Father Prof. Lipniūnas, was recorded in an ink drawing of Our Lady Queen of Poland on the reverse side by Jerzy Krasnopiór, political prisoner of KL Stutthof no. 35 831. He made this drawing during his stay in the RAD camp in Geś in 1945.

⁵³ Grabowska, Janina. *Marsz Śmierci. Ewakuacja piesza więźniów KL Stutthof i jego podobozów 25 stycznia – 3 maja 1945 (Death March. Foot evacuation of prisoners from Stutthof concentration camp and its subcamps, January 25–May 3, 1945)*. Gdansk, 1992, 18–20; Zapiski M. Peczeluny (Notes of M. Peczeluna). In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas*., 90–98.

⁵⁴ Grabowska, Janina. Ibid., 17; Grot, Elżbieta. *Jeśli ludzie zamilkną głazy wołać będą. Upamiętnienia Marszu Śmierci więźniów KL Stutthof na Ziemi Kaszubskiej (If people fall silent, the stones will cry out. Commemoration of the Death March of Stutthof Concentration Camp prisoners in the Kashubian region)*. Gdynia, 2003, 24–27.

On February 5, 1945, out of 840 prisoners who had been marched from the Stutthof Concentration Camp on January 25, 1945, 630 from the first column reached Gęś; the day before, on February 4, 1,015 of the 1,237 prisoners in the fourth column had already arrived. From both columns, 432 prisoners were lost, some of whom escaped under favorable circumstances, while the escort shot the rest. At the RAD camp in Gęś, used as a temporary evacuation camp for a temporary period, the SS gathered a total of 1,645 prisoners of various nationalities and ethnicities, who were held there until March 9, 1945, in unheated wooden barracks.

During their several-week stay at Gęś, the prisoners, exhausted after the arduous march, deprived of adequate food, medical care, and disinfection supplies, died primarily from typhus, typhus fever, and starvation. On the orders of the SS, the prisoners buried the deceased in individual and mass graves near the camp.

Lithuanian honorary prisoners, 7 Latvians and 1 Pole, Dr. Aleksander Witkowski from Gdańsk, lived together in the smallest barracks.⁵⁵ Even here, Father Lipniūnas tried to reach out to the sick and dying in extreme conditions, bringing them words of comfort and consolation, and administering the sacrament of confession. In the overcrowded Lithuanian barracks, only communal prayer was possible, but to celebrate Mass, Father Lipniūnas went to the more spacious barracks where the Polish priests lived. Father W. Prądyński remembered one such Mass.⁵⁶

A significant event in Gęś was the unexpected death of Professor Konstantin Čakste, son of Latvia's first pre-war president, on February 21, 1945. At the request of Latvian honorary prisoners and with the consent of the Gęś camp commandant, SS officer Bratke, Lithuanian priests Lipniūnas and Yla conducted a Catholic funeral the following day, even though the deceased was a Protestant.⁵⁷ With the intention of locating Professor Čakste's burial site, the funeral attendees wrote their names on a piece of paper, placed it in a bottle, and buried the bottle in the grave.

⁵⁵ Dr. Aleksander Witkowski, born on October 25, 1902, a Pole from the Free City of Danzig, was imprisoned in the Stutthof concentration camp after his arrest in Gdańsk. He was political prisoner number 944 from September 1939 to January 1945. He served as a physician in the men's prisoner station. He participated in the Death March, marching in the first column. He was held with Father Professor A. Lipniūnas at the RAD camp in Gęś.

⁵⁶ *Zapiski z Marszu Śmierci Michała Peczeluny i relacja ks. W. Prądyńskiego* (Notes from the Death March of Michał Peczeluna and the account of Father W. Prądyński). In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 96, 103.

⁵⁷ Prof. Dr. Hab. K. Čakste (1901–1945), a lawyer, lectured at the Universities of Riga, Paris, and Brussels. From 1941 to 1944, he led the Latvian resistance movement, founded by the Democratic Centre party. On August 13, 1943, he was elected President of the Central Council of Latvia. He was active underground, creating structures for a future independent state. In November, he sent a memorandum to the governments of Western Europe declaring the Latvians' will to fight against the German Reich in order to regain an independent state built on democratic principles. He was arrested on April 29, 1944, in Jūrmala. He was imprisoned in the Riga Fortress, then in the Salaspils Concentration Camp, and from September 10, 1944, in the Stutthof Concentration Camp as political prisoner no. 86,192, classified as an honorary prisoner.

On the grave, they placed a wooden birch cross and carved the name and surname of the deceased with a knife.⁵⁸

The approaching front and the threat of the Red Army taking over the Gęś camp forced the SS on March 9, 1945, to remove prisoners fit to march while the sick were left behind. The SS led the column of prisoners, including Father Lipniūnas, alongside roads towards Piaśnica Wielka, then through Leśniewo and Połczyno to Puck.⁵⁹

The SS men brought the prisoners to Puck on March 11, 1945, arranging overnight stays in a barn. During the overnight stay on March 10/11, a group of Lithuanian prisoners successfully hid in straw when the SS ordered them to march out of the barn in the morning. The SS organized another overnight stay in a former brewery located on the Bay of Puck, opposite the Parish Church of St. Peter and Paul. The Stutthof camp prisoners were forced into the cellars, from where they were taken out in groups to the yard at night and shot. Columns of prisoners from the RAD camp in Rybno were also brought to Puck on March 11, 1945⁶⁰ and a group of Jewish women from the evacuation camp organized in the farm buildings of the estate in Godętowo. On March 12, 1945, in the morning hours, a group of approximately 1,500 people in Puck was freed from the hands of the SS by Red Army soldiers. The SS, fearing arrest, left Puck hastily, dragging a small group of prisoners with them towards Żelistrzewo, from where they escaped.⁶¹ During the evacuation on foot, the prisoners were led through the former Free City of Gdańsk, Kashubia, which belonged to the Second Polish Republic before the outbreak of the war, and the Lębork region, which was part of the pre-war German Reich. The Kashubian population provided food, assistance with escape, and shelter along

⁵⁸ Relacja Pilypasa Narutisa oraz zapiski z Marszu Śmierci Michała Peczeluny (Pilypas Narutis's account and Michał Peczeluna's notes from the Death March). In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 95, 101. During the exhumation in 1951, the remains of 162 prisoners of KL Stutthof, including Čakste, were transferred to the cemetery in Krępa Kaszubska. However, there is no absolute certainty in this matter, as the 1951 exhumation report makes no mention of Professor K. Čakste's grave. Traces of this grave may have been destroyed by the NKVD. Red Army soldiers stayed in Krępa Kaszubska and Gęś for a longer period of time. However, this is only my hypothesis.

⁵⁹ Along the way, the group was divided. The SS led one group of prisoners to the RAD camp in Rybno, which housed several hundred prisoners evacuated from the Stutthof concentration camp in the 6th column on January 25, 1945. The group of prisoners from Gęś was added to the prisoners previously held in the Rybno camp, whom the SS led to the prison in Wejherowo. These prisoners were freed from the SS on March 12, 1945, the day Wejherowo was captured by the Red Army. See Grabowska, Janina. *Marsz Śmierci...* (*Death March...*), 28–29.

⁶⁰ Archiwum Muzeum Ziemi Puckiej w Pucku (*Archives of the Puck Region in Puck*), Relacja Łucjana Nowaka spisana przez Zygryda Prószyńskiego w 1987 r. (Report by Łucjan Nowak in the collection of accounts collected by Zygryd Prószyński in 1987).

⁶¹ Yla, Stasys. *A Priest in Stutthof*, 252.

evacuation routes and in evacuation camps, thanks to which half of them survived the Death March (Marsz Śmierci)⁶².

After being freed from the SS, Father Lipniūnas headed to the Puck parish church, where, on his 40th birthday, he celebrated Mass for the victims of the Death March and gave blessings for the survivors. Pilypas Žukauskas-Narutis and Michał Peczeluna (Mykolas Pečeliūnas) served as altar boys. Father Lipniūnas decided to remain in Puck, where he settled in a ground-floor room near the church provided by Urszula Jankowska. Because Puck was occupied by Red Army soldiers, Father Lipniūnas and Father Yla decided to celebrate Mass daily in their room.⁶³ With those less fortunate in mind, Father Lipniūnas began participating in the collection of food, clothing, and medication. The priest's charitable and pastoral work was interrupted when he began to show symptoms of typhus. His Lithuanian comrades, striving to provide the best possible medical care and assistance, arranged for Father Lipniūnas, who had a high fever and symptoms of typhus, to be admitted to the city hospital.

After the German residents fled, the hospital was organized from scratch by the surviving Stutthof concentration camp prisoners and Polish residents of Puck. A Russian doctor from the Stutthof concentration camp, Fiodor Soprunov,⁶⁴ and a Pole, Alfons Wojewski, were involved in providing medical assistance. Roman Kulbicki, a Polish political prisoner at the Stutthof camp, was responsible for administration, while Otylia Grabowska, a resident of Puck, was responsible for supplies.⁶⁵ Doctor Wojewski sought to isolate typhus patients from the inhabitants of Puck to prevent an epidemic in the city. To this end, a separate hospital for infectious disease patients was established in the building of the pre-war Municipal Savings Bank.⁶⁶ Between March 12 and the end of June 1945, 535 former prisoners were registered at the hospital, including 315 patients with typhus.⁶⁷

⁶² *Stutthof jidze. Marsz śmierci we wspomnieniach mieszkańców Pomieczyna i okolic*. Ed. Daria Kaszubowska. Pelplin, 2017.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁶⁴ Doctor Fiodor Soprunov, born January 1, 1917, was a Russian inmate of the Stutthof concentration camp from 1943 to January 25, 1945, as prisoner no. 21,256. He worked in the men's section from 1943 to 1945 and participated in the Death March. He arrived in Puck with a group of Jewish female prisoners from the evacuation camp in Godętowo.

⁶⁵ Alfons Wojewski, born on May 19, 1912, was imprisoned in the Stutthof Concentration Camp from 1943 to January 25, 1945, where he worked as a doctor in the prisoner hospital. Evacuated from the camp on January 25, 1945, he reached a temporary evacuation camp in Gęs near Łeba in February. He was evacuated in March 1945 with a group of prisoners and taken to Puck, where he was liberated on March 12, 1945.

⁶⁶ Two certificates of vaccination against typhus of M. Pečeliūnas signed by doctor A. Wojewski in the hospital in Puck on June 5, 1945, in the collection of M. Pečeliūnas.

⁶⁷ Archiwum Ziemi Puckiej w Pucku (Archives of the Puck Region in Puck), Relacja Łucjana Nowaka w zbiorze relacji zebranych przez Zygryda Prószyńskiego (Report by Łucjan Nowak in the collection of accounts collected by Zygryd Prószyński).

Despite the efforts of his Lithuanian friends, Father Lipniūnas's body, exhausted by the hardships of the last months in the Stutthof concentration camp, especially the Death March and several weeks of starvation in Geś, broke his defenses. A cold bath at the hospital in Puck led to pneumonia and a sore throat. The priest died in the hospital on March 28, 1945. His death was registered at the Civil Registry Office and in the parish death register.⁶⁸ A preserved list of those who died in the hospital in Puck shows that between March 17 and June 19, 1945, 48 prisoners from the Stutthof camp died, including 32 women aged from 17 to 50 years of Polish, Lithuanian, and Russian nationality, as well as Jewish women from Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Hungary. The list also includes two Lithuanians, Rev. Prof. A. Lipniūnas and Engineer Antanas Šapalas.⁶⁹

Lithuanian witnesses to the life and martyrdom of Father Lipniūnas knew he had died a holy priest devoted to God, the Fatherland, and his neighbors. After obtaining permission from the Russian city commander, they organized a funeral, burying him in a single grave at the cemetery on Linden Avenue. Engineer Antanas Šapalas died in the hospital in Puck three weeks later, on April 19, 1945. He was the leader of the illegal Christian youth organization "Ateitininkai" in Kaunas before his arrest. In recognition of his achievements, he was buried in a separate grave next to Father Lipniūnas.⁷⁰

After the end of the war, 234 prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp – victims of the Death March – were buried in a mass grave at the same cemetery.⁷¹ Most of them were murdered by SS escorts between Piaśnica Wielka and Puck between March 10 and 11, 1945. After the war, 191 victims were found with gunshot wounds to the back of the head. Forty-three people were buried in the same mass grave, out of 48 who died in the hospital in Puck after March 12, 1945.⁷²

The journey from Vilnius to Puck, undertaken by priest Alfonsas Lipniūnas, a professor at the Seminary of the Archdiocese of Vilnius in the last two years of his

⁶⁸ Archiwum Parafii p. w. Św. Apostołów Piotra i Pawła w Pucku, *Księga zgonów w 1945 r.* (Archives of the Parish of St. Peter and Paul the Apostles in Puck, *Death Book of 1945*); Abridged copy of death certificate no. 50/1945 issued on 21 September 2000 by the Civil Registry Office in Puck, made available to the author by M. Pečeliūnas, see Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 46.

⁶⁹ AMS, *Wykaz zmarłych więźniów KL Stutthof w szpitalu w Pucku*, sygn. Z-V-201 (*List of deceased prisoners of KL Stutthof in the hospital in Puck*, reference number Z-V-201).

⁷⁰ The inscriptions on the tombstone inform to this day that the martyrs of Lithuania rest in this place. *Engineer Antanas Šapalas (1911–1945)* and *Kunigas (Priest Alfonsas Lipniūnas (1905–1945))* who died for God and Country: *Pro Deo et Patria*, at the bottom: *Martyres / Lituani / des KZ Stutthof*.

⁷¹ Most of them were murdered by SS escorts between Piaśnica Wielka and Puck between March 10 and 11, 1945. After the war, 191 victims were found along the route, with evidence of gunshot wounds to the back of the head. Forty-three people who died in the hospital in Puck after March 12, 1945, were buried in the same grave.

⁷² Grot, Elżbieta, and Jarosław Ellwart. *Śladami Marszu Śmierci więźniów KL Stutthof (In the footsteps of the Death March of the prisoners of KL Stutthof)*. Gdynia, 2020, 103.

life, from March 16, 1943, to March 12, 1945, was undoubtedly one of the most difficult. His imprisonment in the Gestapo prison in Kaunas, in the German Nazi concentration camp in Stutthof from 1943 to 1945, and especially his torturous journey during the evacuation of prisoners from the camp in 1945, brought about his premature death at the age of 40 on March 28 in Puck, just a few days after his liberation from the hands of the SS. He became one of the martyrs of KL Stutthof and its victims. In the years 1939–1945, the Stutthof concentration camp had 110,000 prisoners, 65,000 of whom died, including approximately 20,000 during the land and sea evacuation in 1945. The evacuation of 37,000 prisoners from the camp⁷³ were called the Death March and the Death Cruise (the sea evacuation) by the survivors.

Thanks to the separate burial, exhumation was carried out because of favorable political conditions. The bodies of the deceased, Rev. Prof. A. Lipniūnas and Engineer Antanas Šapalas, were exhumed and brought to Lithuania on August 29, 1989, at the initiative of the parish priest, Monsignor J. Antanavičius, supported by the parish priest of the Vilnius Cathedral and journalist Aldona Kudžmaitė. After the ceremony in Vilnius, Father Lipniūnas's body was taken to the Cathedral of Christ the King in Panevėžys on September 4, 1989, and, after the funeral service, it was placed in a tomb in front of the cathedral.⁷⁴

Lithuanians remember Rev. Prof. A. Lipniūnas as a friend and educator of young people, a preacher and professor at the Seminary of the Archdiocese of Vilnius, and a protector of the starving residents of Vilnius during the German occupation. Former prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp remember him as a titan of faith, an organizer and advocate of clandestine religious life in the camp, and a bearer of hope for despairing prisoners sentenced to death. Performing priestly ministry in the conditions of a German concentration camp required great courage.⁷⁵

It is important to emphasize that, despite the dangers, Father Lipniūnas served as a priest in the concentration camp, bringing daily solace to fellow prisoners suffering spiritually and physically. Thanks to the opportunity to receive the holy sacraments, they were able to draw comfort and faith in regaining freedom and find new strength to survive. The priest's courageous, heroic attitude inspired other prisoners who sought solace in religious life. Father A. Lipniūnas enabled several hundred prisoners to participate in clandestine religious life. Mykolas Pečeliūnas (Michał Peczeluna) stated in his account: "Religious life in the camp developed on a large scale. The SS men didn't suspect a thing. Perhaps SS man Klamann knew,

⁷³ Ibid., 138.

⁷⁴ Grot, Elżbieta. *Upamiętnienia Marszu Śmierci więźniów KL Stutthof na Ziemi Kaszubskiej*. Biuletyn Rady Ochrony Pamięci Walk i Męczeństwa. *Przeszłość i Pamięć*, 4, /2001, 60; Grot, Elżbieta. *Jeśli ludzie...*, 115–117.

⁷⁵ See – Relacja M. Peczeluny (M. Peczeluna's account). In Antanavičius et al., *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 86.

but he didn't betray us."⁷⁶ One of the Polish political prisoners, Elżbieta Szuca, née Marcinkowska, stated years later that being in the Stutthof concentration camp among political prisoners of high moral character, deeply religious, and practicing their faith in secret, thanks to the work of Rev. Prof. A. Lipniūnas, was of great significance to her. The opportunity to participate in clandestine religious life was a source of powerful spiritual experiences, giving her hope for surviving the nightmare of the camp.⁷⁷ In 1944, when the number of prisoners at KL Stutthof was systematically growing, numerous transports of prisoners from all over Europe and the USSR were brought to the camp, and the crematorium furnaces were working continuously, burning the gassed and murdered bodies. Jadwiga Rotecka-Szewczukowa, no. 17,633, reported the following:⁷⁸ "In this intense and profound depression, Holy Communion was the nourishment that nourished the spirit and strengthened our faith in freedom. Even more so did we reach out for the power and strength hidden in the Blessed Sacrament." Another Polish prisoner, Bronisława Ciara, political prisoner of KL Stutthof no. 17,518, emphasized the fact that "Rev. Prof. Lipniūnas spread religious practices to an extent that was unthinkable in the camp."⁷⁹ For his pastoral work, Father Lipniūnas earned the gratitude of his Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish, Czech, and German companions in suffering.

Former Lithuanian honorary prisoner, Father Stasys Yla, in his memoirs published in New York in 1971, repeatedly recalled the events related to Rev. Prof. A. Lipniūnas, testifying to his extraordinary attitude in the Stutthof concentration camp and during the Death March, as well as in the first days after regaining freedom, until the day of his death in Puck.⁸⁰ Thanks to the preserved fragment of Father Lipniūnas's sermon prepared for Good Friday, the words recorded there became a symbol, consolation, and hope for Lithuanians living abroad and waiting for the opportunity to return to a free country, as well as for those who had to live in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic: "I suffer and die. But I will rise again. Without death, there is no resurrection. So, we, and the entire suffering nation, will rise victorious."⁸¹ I am not afraid to die; I just want to serve my country." This is what Rev. Prof. Alfonsas Lipniūnas wrote down in his notebook.⁸²

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Statement by Elżbieta Szuca, née Marcinkowska, a conversation with Elżbieta Grot, 2010.

⁷⁸ In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 61.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁸⁰ See – Yla, Stasys. *A Priest in Stutthof. Human experiences in the world of subhuman*. New York, 1971.

⁸¹ In Antanavičius et al. *Father Alfonsas Lipniūnas...*, 48.

⁸² Ibid.

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Elżbieta Grot

Nepriklausoma tyrėja, Lenkija

DIEVO TARNO KUNIGO ALFONSO LIPNIŪNO IŠSKIRTINIS VAIDMUO 1943–1945 M.
ŠTUTHOFO KONCENTRACIJOS STOVYKLOS SLAPTAME RELIGINIAME GYVENIME:
KANKINYSTĖ MIRTIES MARŠE IR MIRTIS PUCKE

SANTRAUKA. Šis straipsnis buvo parengtas ne redakcinėje skiltyje minėtos 2024 m. įvykusios konferencijos „Egziliniai Štuthof kalinių likimai“, skirtos Štuthof koncentracijos stovyklos išlaisvinimo 80-mečiui, bet 2026 m. iš autorės gauto teksto lenkų kalba pagrindu. Autorei sutikus siekiant platesnės sklaidos straipsnis buvo išverstas į anglų kalbą. Lietuvių kalba šis straipsnis buvo parengtas 2023 m. kovo 17 d. Vilniuje vykusiai konferencijai, surengtai Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centro (<https://www.genocid.lt/UserFiles/File/Titulinis/2023/20230317_konferencija_Grot.pdf>). Straipsnis pateikiamas ir šiame „Darbų ir dienų“ tome dėl teminės atitikties – svarbaus indėlio į kunigo Alfonsą Lipniūno, kalėjusio Štuthof koncentracijos stovykloje, biografiją ir žinių apie koncentracijos stovyklos uždarymą.

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas kunigo profesoriaus Alfonso Lipniūno vaidmuo, kurį jis atliko 1943–1945 m. Štuthof koncentracijos stovykloje. Tyrime aptariamos jo suėmimo aplinkybės, kai nepavyko sėkmingai organizuoti Lietuvos jaunimo mobilizaciją į SS kariuomenę (vok. *Waffen-SS*), ir jo kalinimas Kauno gestapo kalėjime bei deportacija į Štuthof koncentracijos stovyklą kartu su kitais Lietuvos inteligentijos atstovais. Ypač susitelkiama į Lipniūno pastoracinę veiklą, vykdytą koncentracijos stovykloje ekstremaliomis sąlygomis: slaptas šv. Mišių aukojimas, išpažinčių klausymas, Komunijos teikimas ir dvasinė pagalba kalinams, religinės praktikos organizavimas, nepaisant griežtų SS draudimų ir mirties pavojaus.

Straipsnyje parodoma, kad slapta religinė veikla Štuthofe atliko ne tik sakramentinę, bet ir egzistencinę bei rezistencinę funkciją. Ji stiprino kalinių moralinį atsparumą, palaikė bendruomeniškumą, teikė viltį ir padėjo išsaugoti žmogiškąjį orumą nacių teroro sistemoje. Lipniūnas rūpinosi ne vien lietuvių kaliniais, bet ir lenkais, latviais, čekais, vokiečiais bei kitų tautybių kaliniais. Lietuvių ir lenkų kunigų bendradarbiavimas sudarė sąlygas platesniam pagrindinio religinio gyvenimo tinklui stovykloje. Straipsnyje aptariamos kunigo patirtys mirties maršo metu, jo tarnystė laikinoje Gėšios stovykloje ir sulaukus išlaisvinimo Pucke, kur jis 1945 m. kovo 28 d. mirė nuo šiltinės ir išsekimo padarinių.

Kunigas profesorius Alfonsas Lipniūnas Štuthof kalinių atmintyje liko kaip tikėjimo, artimo meilės ir dvasinės rezistencijos liudytojas. Jo veikla koncentracijos stovykloje atskleidžia religinės praktikos reikšmę totalitarinio smurto sąlygomis ir leidžia jo kankinystę vertinti platesniame dvasinio pasipriešinimo bei krikščioniškojo solidarumo kontekste.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Alfonsas Lipniūnas, Štuthof koncentracijos stovykla, slaptas religinis gyvenimas, mirties maršas, dvasinė rezistencija, kankinystė.