

Extermination Camp Chełmno

An old palatial estate at Chełmno, Poland (Kulmhof in German), about 70 kilometers west of Łódź, became the first Nazi camp dedicated exclusively to mass killings by gas. The first commandant of Chełmno was Herbert Lange, who previously had administered the Nazis' euthanasia program. The first transport of Jews arrived at Chełmno on December 7, 1941; there they were suffocated to death by exhaust fumes of sealed vans. A frequent visitor to Chełmno was Hans Biebow, Nazi ruler of the Litzmannstadt (Łódź) Jewish ghetto. By war's end, an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 people, mostly Jews from Łódź and the surrounding Warthegau district, had been put to death at Chełmno. No mail was allowed. Operations continued until January 17, 1945, when the Red Army approached.

On an April 30, 1942, postal card from Hamburg, Germany, Adolf Peine inquired of the Nazi ghetto rulers at Litzmannstadt concerning a 50-reichsmark payment he had sent to Berta Rückersberg, a ghetto inmate, which had not been acknowledged. At that time, ghetto residents were forbidden to send mail to outsiders, to prevent news about the deportations and panic in the ghetto from reaching the outside world. From mid-January to mid-May of 1942, 66 transports carried 54,990 Jews from the Litzmannstadt ghetto to the Chełmno extermination camp, where they were gassed to death. The card has a May 4 boxed receiving handstamp of Biebow's ghetto administration at the left.

