

Witold Jarno

(University of Lodz)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5845-6057>

## Major Zygmunt Kunisz – Artillery Officer Murdered in Kharkov (1894–1940)

*Major Zygmunt Kunisz – artylerzysta zamordowany w Charkowie (1894–1940)*

### ABSTRACT

The article describes the life of Major Zygmunt Kunisz, one of the victims of the Soviet crime of 1940. He was an artillery officer of armoured trains during the Polish-Bolshevik war, and after the war he served in the 22nd and 28th Light Artillery Regiment, and from 1935 as quartermaster in the 4th Heavy Artillery Regiment. In September 1939, he took command of the newly formed 1st artillery battalion of this Regiment, which he commanded during the September Campaign. After the Soviet aggression against Poland, Major Zygmunt Kunisz was taken prisoner by the Soviets in unknown circumstances. He spent several months in a prisoner-of-war camp in Starobelsk and was then murdered in a prison in Kharkov in April 1940. In Polish literature, this officer was often confused with his younger brother Tadeusz, also an artillery officer in the rank of major, in reports relating to the September 1939 campaign. This paper is based mainly on archival documents, memoirs and materials provided by Maria Kunisz, granddaughter of Stanisław Kunisz, Zygmunt's older brother. The purpose of this article is to clarify the discrepancies and misinformation still existing in relation to Major Zygmunt Kunisz, who was posthumously promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel in 2007.

**Key words:** Polish artillery, Polish-German war in 1939, prisoner-of-war camp in Starobelsk

This article is devoted to Major Zygmunt Kunisz, one among the thousands of Polish officers murdered by the Soviet regime in the spring of 1940<sup>1</sup>. He was an artilleryman, whose last pre-war assignment was the 4th

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<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are used in the text: HAB – heavy artillery battalion, HAR – heavy artillery regiment, LAR – light artillery regiment, FAR – field artillery regiment, IR – Infantry Regiment.

HAR in Łódź. He held the position of quartermaster of the regiment, and during the September Campaign he commanded the 1st artillery battalion of this regiment. This article was inspired by a letter from Maria Kunisz (a granddaughter of Stanisław Kunisz, Zygmunt's older brother), who pointed out a number of discrepancies in Polish historiography in relation to the life of Maj Z. Kunisz during the September Campaign, because he was, and still is, often confused with his younger brother Tadeusz, also a major of artillery. This article aims to clarify these discrepancies.

Zygmunt Kunisz was born on 29 December 1894 in Stawiszczce, in Taraszczański powiat (then Kiev Governorate, now Ukraine). He was one of the three sons of Konstanty Romuald and Jadwiga née Jasińska (Jasińska)<sup>2</sup>. The family came from impoverished Polish nobility, who typically cultivated Polish patriotic traditions in the family home and were attached to the Roman Catholic faith. The father (Konstanty Romuald) was born in 1860 and was a plenipotentiary of the Branicki estate in Stawiszczce. He was married twice and, interestingly, his wives were blood sisters. His first wife was Wacława née Jasińska, with whom Konstanty had two children: a son, Witold Wilhelm, and a daughter, Wacława<sup>3</sup>. After the death of his first wife, her sister Jadwiga (born in 1868), who soon became Konstanty's second wife, took care of the orphaned children. Three sons, Stanisław (born on 15 August 1890), Zygmunt (born on 29 December 1894) and Tadeusz (born on 28 November 1896), and a daughter, Wanda (born on 17 May 1898 or 1900), were born of the marriage. According to the information received from M. Kunisz, before World War I the Kunisz family owned a tenement house in Kiev, to which the family moved after the death of Konstanty, who died on 28 May 1904 and was buried in the cemetery in Stawiszczce. The widow moved to the tenement house in Kiev, which facilitated the education of the children. According to family reports,

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<sup>2</sup> As for Zygmunt's mother's name, there is a certain discrepancy: Jadwiga née Jasińska is mentioned in Maj Zygmunt Kunisz's record sheet (Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe [hereinafter: CAW], Akta personalne Zygmunt Kunisz [hereinafter: ap. Zygmunt Kunisz], ref. no. 424, Arkusz ewidencyjno-kwalifikacyjny z 1929 r., no pagination), while Maria Kunisz claims that her name was Jadwiga née Jasińska (so far Maria Kunisz has not been able to determine whether Jasińska or Jasińska was the actual name – Zygmunt Kunisz's mother appears as Jasińska in some documents, and in others as Jasińska – the latter version can also be found on her grave in Warsaw).

<sup>3</sup> According to Maria Kunisz's information, Witold Wilhelm became a socialist and left Russia because of his participation in the 1905 revolution, went to the United States and was never heard of again. Wacław's daughter (born on 28 July 1888 in Kiev) lived to the age of 79 years and died in Warsaw on 5 January 1968. According to family information, Konstanty Romuald and his first wife could also have had a second son named Wacław, but this is not certain.

the above mentioned tenement house was located on a hill (there is no information about its address) and there is a family story related to it: '... they had a beautiful tenement house and only one bicycle. The house was on a hill and Zygmunt and Tadeusz shared the bicycle when they rode it to school. As one rode the bike, the other ran alongside'<sup>4</sup>. The mother attached great importance to the education of her sons, and therefore supported their efforts in their pursuit of higher education: Stanisław studied at the Kiev University, just like the youngest of the brothers, Tadeusz. Zygmunt, on the other hand, graduated from the 7-class Kiev Realschule (vocational school), passing the graduation exam in 1915 (according to other data, he passed the exam in 1913), and then began studies at the Technical University of Kiev<sup>5</sup>.

The outbreak of World War I soon brought about radical changes in the life of the family. On 1 June 1916, Zygmunt, at the age of 22, broke off his studies and volunteered for the Grand Duke Konstantin Military School in Kiev. After six months of education, on 19 November, he was promoted to a non-commissioned officer rank, and after completing a shortened 4-month course in Category I, by order of 1 December 1916, he was promoted to the rank of officer cadet of line infantry (with seniority of 1 October). A few days later, on 5 December, he left the school and was assigned to the 164th Reserve IR, which was a part of the 13th Reserve Brigade. He came to the regiment eight days later (13 December) and took the position of junior officer in the 10th Rifle Company. He trained the incoming recruits for several weeks thereafter, and on 17 February 1917 he was transferred to the 47th Reserve IR (21st Reserve Brigade). On 7 March, he was appointed junior officer of the 9th Company. However, his service in this unit lasted only a few days, as he received permission to be transferred to the Polish Rifle Division established in January 1917 already on 11 March. It took two weeks to deal with the related matters, as it was not until 25 March that he was removed from the staff of the aforementioned reserve regiment. After a few days' journey, he reported to the Polish Rifle Division Command on 1 April 1917 and was assigned to the position of junior officer in the 5th Company of the 2nd Polish Rifle Regiment, the formation of which began in February 1917 in Boryspil (near Kiev). The said division was created by order of 11 January 1917 from the reformed Polish Rifle Brigade operating as part of the Russian army. To this end, the Brigade was withdrawn from

<sup>4</sup> Information received in November 2017 from Maria Kunisz (letter in the author's possession).

<sup>5</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Arkusz ewidencyjno-kwalifikacyjny z 1929 r., no pagination and information provided in November 2017 by M. Kunisz (letter in the author's possession).

the front line (it fought as part of the 25th Army Corps within the Russian 3rd Army) and transferred to the Kiev Military District. Maj Gen Tadeusz Bylewski became the commander of the new division (on 30 April the command was taken over by Col Lucjan Żeligowski, and later on by Col Jan Rządkowski), which consisted of four rifle regiments, a reserve regiment, an uhlan division, an engineering company, a hospital and a sanitary division. The regiments of this division included the aforementioned 2nd Polish Rifle Regiment, in which WO Z. Kunisz served. In mid-June 1917, the division was sent to the Galician front, where it fought in the Russian 41st Army Corps and later in the 22nd Army Corps. WO Z. Kunisz, as junior officer of the 7th Rifle Company, fought with his regiment at the end of June in the Komarowski Forest and the Sieńków manor farm, and on the Zbrucz River in July<sup>6</sup>.

The Polish Rifle Division stayed on the front line until autumn 1917, when it was incorporated into the newly formed the 1st Polish Corps in Russia in July and renamed the 1st Polish Rifle Division (it was commanded by 2nd Lt Gen Gustaw Ostapowicz). The newly formed corps consisted of soldiers of the Russian army of Polish nationality serving in the units of the Russian Western and Northern Front (the corps was commanded by 2nd Lt Gen Józef Dowbor Muśnicki). The division consisted of four rifle regiments (1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th), the 1st Artillery Brigade and the necessary division detachments. Warrant Officer Z. Kunisz served in the ranks of the 2nd Polish Rifle Regiment, but soon he was sent on a warrant officer course taking place near the division, in the village of Grudinówka, where he was trained from 3 October to 4 December. After completing the course, he returned to the 2nd Polish Rifle Regiment and was appointed junior officer of the 5th Rifle Company, and in February 1918, he was appointed to a similar rank in the 4th Company. During his service in the regiment, he took part in battles with the Bolsheviks at Zhlobin, Tikhinichi and in the area of Mogilev. He was in the ranks of the 1st Polish Rifle Division until 14 June 1918, when it was demobilised as a consequence of the disarmament of the 1st Polish Corps in Russia (stationed at that time in Bobruisk) by Germans on 21 May 1918. Most of his soldiers soon returned to the former Congress Poland, where some

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<sup>6</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Formularz służbowy za czas służby w armii rosyjskiej z 12 VI 1918 r., no pagination; H. Bagiński, *Wojsko Polskie na Wschodzie 1914–1920*, Warszawa 1921, pp. 53–57; W. Lipiński, *Walka zbrojna o niepodległość Polski w latach 1905–1918*, Warszawa 1990 (reprint), pp. 242–244, 248–250 and 256–258; M. Wrzosek, *Polskie korpusy wojskowe w Rosji w latach 1917–1918*, Warszawa 1969, pp. 26–27; idem, *Wojskowość polska podczas pierwszej wojny światowej*, in: *Zarys dziejów wojskowości polskiej w latach 1864–1939*, ed. P. Stawecki, Warszawa 1990, pp. 193–197.

of them took an active part in the action of disarming Germans and the process of rebuilding the Polish Army<sup>7</sup>.

After the demobilisation of the 1st Polish Corps in Russia, WO Z. Kunisz took a different path and returned to Kiev, where his widowed mother lived (his father died, as mentioned above, in 1904). In October 1918, he resumed his studies at the Technical University of Kiev which had been interrupted two years earlier, but this time, again, his education did not last long. When Kiev was informed that Poland had regained its independence, Z. Kunisz left the city and went on a long journey to Warsaw, where on 25 November 1918 he volunteered to serve in the Polish Army. He was admitted to the army on the same day upon presenting the required documents and undergoing a health assessment, retaining the rank of second lieutenant given to him by the order of 2nd Lt Gen J. Dowbor Muśnicki (just before the demobilisation of the 1st Polish Corps in Russia)<sup>8</sup>. He was assigned to the 1st Regional Warsaw Infantry Regiment, formed in the capital since 13 November and renamed on 27 November as the 21st IR. Its staff consisted mainly of soldiers from the former 1st Polish Corps in Russia and members of the Warsaw structures of the Polish Military Organisation. The first commander of the regiment was Col Bolesław Jaźwiński, while the commander of the 1st battalion was Capt Stanisław Wrzaliński<sup>9</sup>. 2nd Lt Z. Kunisz informed the commander of the Warsaw Military District about his acceptance to the Polish Army in his report of 25 November 1918, in which he wrote: 'I report that today I have joined the first battalion of the Warsaw Military District'<sup>10</sup>.

2nd Lt Z. Kunisz was assigned to the 1st Rifle Company, in which he took the position of junior officer. This company was a part of the 1st battalion, which stayed in Warsaw until mid-1919 to train its soldiers. After five months, on 1 May 1919, 2nd Lt Z. Kunisz was sent to Dęblin for a one-month Officer Course on Machine Guns, which he completed on 1 June. After returning to the 1st battalion of the 21st IR, he took the position of junior officer, but this time in the 4th Rifle Company. He held it until the 1st and 3rd battalion left for the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front, when

<sup>7</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Formularz służbowy za czas służby w armii rosyjskiej z 12 VI 1918 r., no pagination; H. Bagiński, *op. cit.*, pp. 154–156, 170–174, 218–223 and 314–321; W. Lipiński, *op. cit.*, pp. 275–283; M. Wrzosek, *Polskie korpusy*, pp. 239–260; idem, *Wojskowość polska*, p. 197.

<sup>8</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Arkusz ewidencyjno-kwalifikacyjny z 1929 r., no pagination.

<sup>9</sup> M. Fularski, *Zarys historii wojennej 21 Warszawskiego Pułku Piechoty*, Warszawa 1929, pp. 5–6.

<sup>10</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Raport ppor. Z. Kunisza do dowódcy Warszawskiego Okręgu Wojskowego z 25 XI 1918 r., no pagination.

serious personnel changes were introduced in the command. One such change included entrusting the command of the 2nd Rifle Company to Lt Z. Kunisz, with which he left the capital one the same day, along with the whole 1st battalion. At the end of the month, through Małkinia, Białystok and Lida, the battalion arrived in the Bohdanów region (Valozhyn Poviat, later incorporated to the Navahrudak Voivodeship), where it was directed to fight Red Army units. In August 1919, the 2nd Rifle Company commanded by 2nd Lt Z. Kunisz participated in the Polish offensive in Mińsk Litewski, reaching the Auta River in September. The second battalion, fighting since January 1919 on the Volhynian front, joined the regiment there. On 1 October, 2nd Lt Z. Kunisz was transferred to the position of junior officer in the 1st MMG Company in the 1st battalion of the 21st IR, which fought with enemy units for several following weeks. During one of the battles, in unknown circumstances, 2nd Lt Z. Kunisz was taken prisoner by the Bolsheviks on 21 October. He managed to escape, again – in unknown circumstances, on 20 December, upon which he later commented: 'I escaped from captivity on my own initiative'<sup>11</sup>. However, in the absence of any other information, it is difficult to determine what lies behind this statement. Four days later, he managed to reach Polish troops and reported to the commander of the Polish 8th Infantry Division. His health was impaired by captivity, so after his return to the 21st IR he was given sick leave, which extended until 5 March 1920<sup>12</sup>.

The return to the ranks of the Polish army brought a serious change in the military career of 2nd Lt. Z. Kunisz, because by order of the High Command of March 6, he was drafted off to armoured trains and was assigned to the position of commander of machine guns in the Piłsudczyk Szeroki armoured train: '[...] 2nd Lt Zygmunt Kunisz shall be transferred from 21 IR to the Piłsudczyk Szeroki armoured train. 2nd Lt Kunisz is to report to the railway officer in chief of the Lithuanian-Belarusian Front to be directed to the armoured train'<sup>13</sup>. However, it is difficult to determine whether this transfer took place at his own request or at the order of his superiors. He took up this post a few days later and held it until 17 August 1920. This train had an interesting backstory, as it was captured by Poles in August 1919 and, after the necessary repairs, conscripted into the Polish

<sup>11</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Karta kwalifikacyjna z 1920 r., no pagination.

<sup>12</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Arkusz ewidencyjno-kwalifikacyjny z 1929 r., no pagination. (contains information that he escaped from the Bolshevik captivity on 5 December); Krzyż Walecznych przyznany Z. Kuniszowi, ref. no. 63/K-5580 of 17 February 1921, sheet 2; M. Fularski, *op. cit.*, pp. 18–20.

<sup>13</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Pismo SG z 6 III 1920 r., no pagination.



army and used in battles in Volhynia<sup>14</sup>. In 1921, Lt Z. Kunisz received the Cross of Valour for courage shown in the said battles. The explanatory memorandum contained a description of the act giving rise to the award of that distinction: 'On 15 July 1920, our troops retreated along the Luninets-Sarny railway line. [...] The task of the Piłsudczyk Szeroki armoured train was to stop the Bolshevik pressure by means of excursions. During one of such excursions, the train came to the Sluch river and attacked the enemy on a bridgehead. The enemy responded with a heavy fire, breaking the track behind the train at the same time. Once the track was broken, the enemy's fire intensified and after some time the Bolshevik infantry started the attack. Only a hurricane-like fire from the train could drive them off the track and enable repairing the broken spot. 2nd Lt Kunisz Zygmunt, watching the events for the perspective of the machine gun commander, opened a hurricane-like fire on both sides of the track. The Bolsheviks started to attack the train, but 2nd Lt Kunisz directed machine gun fire so skilfully and without losing his head that he forced the enemy not only to stop the attack, but also to retreat with great losses. Thanks to that we managed to repair the broken track and secure the wings of our infantry'<sup>15</sup>.

A few weeks later, 2nd Lt Z. Kunisz was transferred to Cracow, to an equal position in a newly built armoured train number 23 – Śmierć (its commander was Lt Henryk Amrogowicz). He volunteered for service on this train on 18 August 1920 – on the day when the train was solemnly conscripted at the Grzegórzki station in Cracow to serve in the Polish army, and then assigned to the command of the 5th Army and sent to the Nieszawa region. However, due to the retreat of the Red Army from Warsaw, at the end of August the train was sent to Lublin, where it was subordinated to the command of the 3rd Army. In the following days, the above-mentioned armoured train took part in fights in the region of Zamość, and was directed to the area of Brest on the Bug and then to the Vilnius region. There, it participated in the Vilnius Operation and the creation of the so-called Central Lithuania, for which reason on 7 December

<sup>14</sup> M. Żebrowski, *Zarys historii polskiej broni pancерnej 1918–1947*, Londyn 1971, p. 97; M. Wrzosek, *Wojny o granice Polski Odrodzonej 1918–1921*, Warszawa 1992, p. 136. To learn more about Polish armoured trains in the years 1918–1921 see: T. Krawczak, J. Odziemkowski, *Polskie pociągi pancерne 1918–1939*, 'Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny' 1979, 24, 4, pp. 119–128; A. Ostrówka, *Pociągi pancерne Wojska Polskiego 1918–1939*, Toruń 2005, pp. 45–46; A. Szychowski, *Pociągi pancерne*, 'Bellona' 1923, 9, 6, pp. 162–179; S. Czerepiński, *Powstanie i praca pierwszych polskich pociągów pancерnych*, 'Przegląd Wojskowo-Techniczny' 1928, 4, 6, pp. 1184–1192; B. Sobczyński, *Rozwój historyczny pociągów pancерnych*, 'Bellona' 1934, 15, 1, pp. 14–24.

<sup>15</sup> CAW, Krzyż Walecznych dla Zygmunta Kunisza, ref. no. 63/K-5580 of 17 February 1921, sheet 1.

its name was changed temporarily to Pogoń (Pahonia), referring to the history of Lithuania. The name was changed back later'<sup>16</sup>. 2nd Lt Z. Kunisz took part in all these operations, and in the meantime was promoted to the rank of lieutenant by decree of 22 January 1921<sup>17</sup>. While serving in the crew of the Śmierć armoured train, he showed great dedication, which did not escape the attention of the commander of the train, who at the end of 1920 gave the following opinion: 'Brave, very capable and hard-working and very diligent in the performance of his duties'<sup>18</sup>.



Fot. 1. Zygmunt Kunisz in a captain's uniform (photo from the family archive of Maria Kunisz – copy in the author's possession)

The year 1921 brought the demobilisation of the Polish army, which was connected with the reduction of the personnel. Having served in the army for over three years, Lt Z. Kunisz made efforts to be included in the

<sup>16</sup> M. Wrzosek, *Wojny o granice*, p. 167.

<sup>17</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Arkusz ewidencyjno-kwalifikacyjny z 1929 r., no pagination; Dziennik Personalny Ministerstwa Spraw Wojskowych [hereinafter: Dziennik Personalny MSWojsk.] 1921, no. 6, p. 266.

<sup>18</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Karta ewidencyjna z końca 1920 r., no pagination.



professional officer corps, and thus to remain in the ranks of the armed forces. To this end, he submitted an appropriate application to the Human Resources Department of MMA on 23 September: 'The undersigned requests to be admitted to the professional service as a machine gun officer in armoured trains and undertakes to perform active service after the war'<sup>19</sup>. The request was granted and Lt Z. Kunisz remained in the ranks of the Polish army. Formally, the 85th IR became his main unit, but for almost 10 months he served (as an infantry officer) in the crew of the Pogoń armoured train and was promoted to the rank of captain on 3 May 1922 (with seniority of 1 June 1919)<sup>20</sup>.

Another change in his military career took place in July 1922, when he was drafted off for artillery training to the 22nd FAR stationed in Rzeszów. Upon his arrival in the regiment, he took the position of first officer in the 3rd battery (1st artillery battalion), which he held until 3 April 1923. During this period, he also served twice as substitute commander of this battery – in 1922 (13 November to 14 December) and in 1923 (from 2 January to 3 April)<sup>21</sup>. Following the training in the 22nd FAR, Capt Z. Kunisz was sent to the 2nd Course of Junior Artillery Officers in Toruń, which he completed on 1 February 1924 and obtained a very flattering opinion: 'Mature, well-balanced character. Kind and helpful towards his colleagues. Has a high level of military discipline and a sense of duty. Tactful and composed. Socially adept. [...] An intelligent and capable officer, a quick learner. A very good worker. Showed great leadership skills during practical classes at school, for example field service. [...] Battery commander material'<sup>22</sup>. Meanwhile, by order of the 3rd Department of Artillery of MMA, Capt Z. Kunisz was transferred in November 1923 from the infantry officer corps to an artillery officers corps, and, simultaneously, his main unit was changed from the 85th IR to the 22nd FAR<sup>23</sup>.

Having returned from the above-mentioned course to the 22nd FAR, he assumed the duties of adjutant to the commander of the 1st artillery battalion on 21 February 1924, and of officer of arms and mobilisation clerk on 5 March. Soon afterwards, from 28 March to 2 April, he also took

<sup>19</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Podanie por. Z. Kunisza do Departamentu Personalnego MSWojsk. z 23 IX 1921 r., no pagination.

<sup>20</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Główna karta ewidencyjna z 1929 r., no pagination; *Lista starszeństwa oficerów zawodowych*, Warszawa 1922, p. 68; *Spis oficerów służących czynnie w dniu 1.6.1921 r.*, Warszawa 1921, pp. 219 and 724.

<sup>21</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Arkusz ewidencyjno-kwalifikacyjny z 1929 r., no pagination.

<sup>22</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1923 r., no pagination.

<sup>23</sup> *Dziennik Personalny MSWojsk.* 1923, no. 77, p. 722.

part in a mobilisation clerk course organised by the 10th Corps District Command in Przemyśl, from which he returned to his duties as adjutant in the 1st artillery battalion. A month later, on 15 May 1924, an order for the transfer of Capt. Z. Kunisz to the 28th FAR was given, but due to unknown reasons the officer left the 22nd FAR only on 7 October that year, and then, the following day, he reported to the command of the 28th FAR in Zajezerze near Dęblin<sup>24</sup>. This regiment was part of the 28th Infantry Division established in the autumn of 1921 and comprising three infantry regiments (15th, 36th and 72nd IR) and the aforementioned field artillery regiment<sup>25</sup>. Capt Z. Kunisz served more than 10 years in this new unit (until May 1935), occupying various positions throughout that time. Initially, he became commander of the school and regiment battery of the NCO school (from 8 October to 15 December 1924), and then he became reconnaissance and mobilisation clerk in the regiment commander's team (from 6 January to 23 July 1925), commander of the 3rd battery (from 24 July 1925 to 30 September 1925), acting commander of the 1st artillery battalion (from 1 October 1925 to 1 February 1926), commander of the 1st artillery battalion (from 1 October 1925 to 1 February 1926), commander of the 3rd battery (from 2 February to 21 December 1926), acting commander of the 1st artillery battalion (from 22 December 1926 to 18 February 1927), commander of the 3rd battery (from 19 January 1927 to 25 February 1928), acting commander of the 3rd artillery battalion (from 26 February to 14 April 1928), acting commander of the 1st artillery battalion (from 15 April to 7 August 1928) and reconnaissance officer of the regiment (from 8 August 1928 to 2 April 1929)<sup>26</sup>.

From 1924 to 1929, Capt Z. Kunisz was very highly valued by his superiors. For example, in 1926 the then commander of the 28th FAR Col Włodzimierz Rómmel (who commanded the regiment in the period 1922-1929) described him as follows: 'In terms of personal merit, he can serve as a role model of an officer. [...] Manages the battery very well. Very good instructor and educator. A very well-trained professional. A valuable officer, generally speaking. Very good battery

<sup>24</sup> Dziennik Personalny MSWojsk. 1924, no. 51, p. 293.

<sup>25</sup> The command of the 28th FAR the 3rd artillery battalion was formed from scratch in autumn 1921, while the two remaining divisions were reorganized by renaming the existing 3rd division of the 8th FAR to the 1st division of the 28th FAR, and the existing 3rd division of the 18th FAR to the 2nd division of the 28th FAR.

<sup>26</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Arkusz ewidencyjno-kwalifikacyjny z 1929 r., no pagination and Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1924 i 1925 r., no pagination. To learn more about the history of the 28th FAR, see: A. Przybyszewski, *28 Pułk Artylerii Lekkiej*, Pruszków 2002, pp. 3-14.

commander. Division commander or regiment quartermaster material'<sup>27</sup>. The commander of the 28th FAR wrote an equally positive opinion in 1928: 'Performs excellently in the current position, just as in the position of battery commander that he previously occupied. Division commander material'<sup>28</sup>. No wonder, then, that on 2 April 1929, after almost five years in the 28th FAR, Capt. Z. Kunisz was ordered to attend the Artillery Battalion Commanders Course at the Artillery Shooting School in Toruń (the school was part of the Artillery Training Centre), which was meant to prepare the students for performing the function of artillery division commanders. The course lasted from 2 April to 1 September. After completing the course and returning to Zajezerze, Capt Z. Kunisz took over as substitute commander of the 1st artillery battalion of the 28 FAR on 2 September 1929, and was appointed as quartermaster of the regiment by regiment order of 20 December, which was confirmed by the order of MMA of 31 March 1930<sup>29</sup>. In the meantime, on 28 January, he was promoted to the rank of Major with seniority of 1 January 1930 due to the completion of the above mentioned course (slot no 30)<sup>30</sup>.

Maj Z. Kunisz did very well also as quartermaster of the 28th FAR, and that year was positively assessed by yet another commander of the regiment, Col Adam Epler (who commanded the regiment in the period 1929-1935): 'Extremely conscientious, hardworking, very loyal to his superiors. [...] As quartermaster – shows good organizational skills. [...] As an artilleryman – very well trained theoretically. Too little practice and experience'<sup>31</sup>. For this reason, it took him three more years to be promoted, which did not happen until March 1933, when he took the command of the 2nd artillery battalion of the 28th LAR (in 1932 all field artillery regiments were renamed to light artillery regiments)<sup>32</sup>. Unfortunately, he did not quite cope, which was reflected in the successive opinions of his superiors. For example, on 21 September 1934, Lt Col Jerzy Zawisza (deputy commander of the 28th LAR) stated the following: 'Works a lot on himself and has learned a lot, but does not know how to use his knowledge. Despite commanding a division for two years, has not yet gained the

<sup>27</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1926 r., no pagination.

<sup>28</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1928 r., no pagination.

<sup>29</sup> Dziennik Personalny MSWojsk. 1930, no. 8, p. 101.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 2, p. 25.

<sup>31</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1930 r., no pagination.

<sup>32</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1930 r., no pagination; Dziennik Personalny MSWojsk. 1933, no. 5, p. 80.

necessary experience and skill. All in all – a poor division commander’<sup>33</sup>. A similar opinion was written a few days later by Col Kazimierz Schally (commander of the 1st Artillery Group), but in this case one can clearly see that he relied on the above mentioned opinion of the deputy commander of the regiment: ‘As stated in the opinion of the regiment commander – not a valuable division commander, does not have the spirit of a line commander. Quartermaster material’<sup>34</sup>. In reality, it is difficult to know what the reason for the change in the opinion on Maj Z. Kunisz was. Were the assessments from previous years overly optimistic, or was he not yet properly prepared to command an artillery battalion and had too little experience in this regard? In the absence of information, this issue cannot be resolved unequivocally.

After two years of commanding the artillery battalion and receiving rather critical assessments of his work in this role, Maj Z. Kunisz was transferred to the 4th HAR in Łódź on 1 May 1935, where he became quartermaster of the regiment<sup>35</sup>. The regiment had been established in the autumn of 1921 and was stationed in two garrisons: the regiment’s command, together with the 1st and 2nd artillery battalion in Łódź, and the 2nd artillery battalion in Częstochowa. In the interwar period, the structure of this regiment changed several times, but the last major change in this matter before the outbreak of World War II was made in January 1930, when the armament of the batteries in the artillery battalion was unified – from that moment, the 1st and 2nd artillery battalion of the 4th HAR consisted of two 155 mm howitzer batteries each, while the 3rd artillery battalion consisted of two 105 mm gun batteries. The above organizational structure of the 4th HAR lasted until the mobilisation of the unit in 1939<sup>36</sup>. In terms of training, the regiment was under the command of the 4th Artillery Group in Łódź, commanded by: from April 1929 to September 1935 – Col / Brig Gen Stanisław Miller and then Col Leonard Lubański (until the outbreak of the war). In the period 1921-1939, the regiment itself was commanded by five officers (excluding temporary substitute officers):

<sup>33</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1934 r., no pagination.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>35</sup> *Dziennik Personalny MSWojsk.* 1935, no. 6, p. 39. According to A. Kuprianis, Maj Z. Kunisz (*Łódzka 4 Grupa Artylerii w latach 1929–1939*, Łódź 2010, p. 222) joined the 4th HAR already on 23 April 1935.

<sup>36</sup> CAW, Departament Artylerii, ref. no. I.300.34, vol. 34. Rozkaz o przebrojeniu baterii w pułkach artylerii ciężkiej z 13 I 1930 r., no pagination; 4 Pułk Artylerii Ciężkiej [hereinafter: 4. pac], ref. no. I.322.51, vol. 14. Rozkazy z 1930 r.; W. Jarno, *Okręg Korpusu Wojska Polskiego nr IV Łódź 1918–1939*, Łódź 2001, pp. 152–155; K. Czernielewski, W. Jarno, *Garnizon łódzki Wojska Polskiego 1918–1939*, Toruń 2008, pp. 157–160.

Col Witold Konczakowski from 17 September 1921 to 20 November 1925, Col Stefan Szaniawski from 4 December 1925 to 4 April 1929, Col Leon Bogusławski from 4 April 1929 to 17 June 1937, Col Kazimierz Weryński from 17 June 1937 to 29 April 1939 and Lt Col Jan Szewczyk from 29 April to September 1939<sup>37</sup>.

Upon his arrival in Łódź and taking up the position of quartermaster of the 4th HAR, Maj Z. Kunisz began arduous work, having at his disposal the staff of the quartermaster department of the regiment, which in August 1935 consisted of: Bolesław Ostrowski (mobilisation officer), Lt Mieczysław Wiliński (deputy mobilisation officer), Lt Stanisław Kochanowski (material administration officer and commander of the provision platoon), Lt Bronisław Jóźwiak (paymaster) and Senior Artillery Sergeant Jakub Błaszczuk (acting food supply officer)<sup>38</sup>. However, in 1936 Maj Z. Kunisz was assessed rather harshly as regiment quartermaster of the 4th HAR by his new superiors. The then commander of the regiment, Col L. Bogusławski, described him in the following way in his opinion of October 9th: 'Calm and composed. [...] Does not show initiative. Rather short-sighted. Avoids responsibility. Cannot tell the difference between important and less important matters. [...] An underdeveloped sense of organisation. Requires that his subordinates perform work which would be more efficient if he loosened up on formalities. [...] The generally good results of the quartermaster's office should be attributed primarily to the clerks and senior non-commissioned officers. [...] Not suitable for quartermaster position, especially in more difficult conditions, which prevail in the regiment for dislocation reasons. May be more useful as armament warehouse manager, training camp commandant or a district horse inspector'<sup>39</sup>. An even more critical opinion was written on 15 October 1936 by Col L. Lubański (commander of the 4th Artillery Group): 'Disciplined, hard-working, systematic, lacks brilliance and initiative. A good worker, rigorously committed to the rules. Tactical skills and training – poor. Due to a lack of decision making capabilities, initiative, educational capacity and the fear of taking responsibility, he is not suitable for an independent position. As a quartermaster, completely

<sup>37</sup> W. Jarno, *Okręg Korpusu*, p. 367. For more on the history of the 4th HAR in the interwar period see: idem *4 Pułk Artylerii Ciężkiej w latach 1921–1939. Organizacja, uzbrojenie i działania bojowe*, in: „Mieczem i szczytem”. *Broń na polu walki. Z dziejów wojskowości polskiej i powszechnej*, ed. A. Niewiński, Oświęcim 2016, pp. 217–223.

<sup>38</sup> CAW, 4. pac, ref. no. I.322.51, vol. 24, Rozkaz dzienny nr 214, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1936 r., no pagination.

weak, not suitable for a artillery battalion commander. Suitable for a limited administrative post'<sup>40</sup>.

It is difficult to decide unequivocally at this point whether both opinions fully reflected the reality or whether they were in a way derived from the previous opinions on Maj Z. Kunisz issued in the 28th LAR. However, as the command of the 4th HAR was taken by Lt Col K. Weryński on 17 July 1937<sup>41</sup>, the assessment of the quartermaster drawn up on 12 October of that year by the new regiment commander was completely different: 'Thanks to his great diligence and conscientiousness, he achieved quite good results as quartermaster, despite not being very talented in this area. Has mastered the administrative and economic regulations quite well. Not interested in other disciplines of professional artillery training. Acceptable as regiment quartermaster. May be considered for other administrative positions, e.g. district horse inspector. Not suitable as a line officer'<sup>42</sup>. Although the opinion of Col L. Lubański also shows a certain leniency, it is visible that the commander of the 4th Artillery Group followed the example of the 4th HAR commander: 'His good results as quartermaster of the regiment result from [...] his diligence and meticulousness, and the fact that the regiment commander decides on every detail. Technically and tactically weak, which together with the lack of talents in this area, decision-making skills and ability to take responsibility, makes him unsuitable as a line officer. With a good commander, he may keep up good work as quartermaster or in another administrative position with a simple scope of operation'<sup>43</sup>.

In 1938, a new full-time post of second deputy regiment commander (or, in fact, substitute deputy regiment commander) was introduced in heavy artillery regiments, which was in a way assigned automatically to quartermasters. In this situation, Maj Z. Kunisz took this second role while still acting as quartermaster of the 4th HAR<sup>44</sup>. In his role as second deputy commander of the regiment he did quite well, which is evidenced by the opinion of Lt Col K. Weryński of 19 October 1938: 'Achieved good results as the second deputy commander of the regiment thanks to his great diligence and conscientiousness. [...] Acceptable as quartermaster.

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> CAW, 4. pac, ref. no. I.322.51, vol. 29, Rozkaz dzienny nr 134, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1937 r., no pagination.

<sup>43</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1937 r., no pagination.

<sup>44</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczne uzupełnienie listy kwalifikacyjnej za 1938 r., no pagination.





Fot. 2. Major Zygmunt Kunisz with his family in the Zoological Garden in Warsaw – 1930s (photo from the family archive of Maria Kunisz – copy in the author's possession)

Not suitable as a line officer'<sup>45</sup>. The annual qualification list for 1938 also contained a description of the family situation of Maj Z. Kunisz: 'Married, has a daughter of school age. Lives modestly in a regulated environment. Healthy'<sup>46</sup>. It is worth mentioning that the earnings of an officer in the rank of major were enough for a family to maintain a decent standard of living, as, for example, in December 1936 Maj Z. Kunisz received a salary in the amount of PLN 665 (including PLN 490 of basic salary and PLN 175 of official allowance) and after he took up the position of second deputy commander of the regiment, his salary increased to PLN 715 (including PLN 490 of basic salary and PLN 225 of official allowance)<sup>47</sup>.

On 15 May 1937, Maj Z. Kunisz and a dozen or so senior officers from the regiment's command and the 4th Łódź Corps District Command received a commemorative badge of the 4th HAR<sup>48</sup>. He also held several

<sup>45</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Roczna lista kwalifikacyjna za 1938 r., no pagination.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> CAW, 4. pac, ref. no. I.322.51, vol. 60, Lista uposażenia oficerów 4. pac za grudzień 1936 r., no pagination and vol. 65, Lista uposażenia oficerów 4. pac z lutego 1939 r., no pagination.

<sup>48</sup> CAW, 4. pac, ref. no. I.322.51, vol. 29, Rozkaz dzienny nr 108, p. 1.

previously awarded honours: a Cross of Valour granted for the first time by order of 16 March 1921 (no 1330), a Silver Cross of Merit (awarded in 1928), a Memorial Medal for the 1918-1921 War (awarded in 1928) and a Medal of the Decade of Independence (also awarded in 1928), a Medal of Independence awarded on 9 November 1933 (No 3292) as well as the 22nd LAR commemorative badge issued on 5 May 1930<sup>49</sup>.

The peacetime service of Major. Z. Kunisz was interrupted by the mobilisation in August 1939. In the case of the 4th HAR it was carried out in stages, as it had already covered the 2nd artillery battalion stationed in Tomaszów Mazowiecki in March, while the remaining divisions of the regiment were mobilised as part of the emergency mobilisation announced on 23 August. During the procedure, the so-called peaceful 4th HAR was to form two artillery batteries (1st and 2nd) based in Łódź – three independent heavy artillery divisions for three infantry divisions: the 7th HAB for the 7th ID, the 10th HAB for the 10th ID and the 29th HAB for the 29th ID. The divisions were uniform in terms of organisation and had 6 guns divided into two batteries: the first batteries had three M29 105 mm guns each, and the second batteries – three M17 155 mm howitzers each. After the emergency mobilisation was complete, only units of the so-called peaceful 4th HAR that remained in Łódź were the regiment's command (still in the hands of Lt Col J. Szewczyk) and the so-called remains of the regiment, which, in the event of a general mobilisation, were to be reorganised to form the 1st artillery battalion of the regiment. To this end, the remaining part of the professional staff and the mobilisation reserve of the guns and the necessary equipment remained in the barracks in Łódź. The remaining professional staff of the 4th HAR included Maj Z. Kunisz, who as second deputy commander of the regiment was at the same time quartermaster of the unit, and then became commander of the so-called Remains of the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR<sup>50</sup>.

In view of the general mobilisation announced by the Polish authorities on 30 August 1939 (it began on the following day) the formation of the 2nd Heavy Artillery Reserve Centre, the Surplus Collection Unit of the 4th HAR and two veterinary hospitals (41th and 42th) as well as the reconstruction of the type I 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR out of the remaining professional staff and the incoming reservists began in line with the mobilisation plan 'W' in the Łódź barracks of the 4th HAR. It was

<sup>49</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Arkusz ewidencyjno-kwalifikacyjny z 1929 r., no pagination, Krzyż Niepodległości z 9 IX 1933 r., sheet 1-2 and Krzyż Walecznych 63/K-5580 z 17 II 1921 r., sheet 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> W. Jarno, *4 Pułk Artylerii Ciężkiej*, pp. 223–226; R. Rybka, K. Stepan, *Najlepsza broń. Plan mobilizacyjny „W” i jego ewolucja*, Warszawa 2010, p. 326.

planned to incorporate three batteries, four M29 105 mm guns each, and its formation was to be completed on the seventh day of the general mobilisation to be placed at the disposal of the command of the Łódź Army as an extra-divisional military reserve. As previously mentioned, after the mobilisation of the 7th, 10th and 29th HAB in the Łódź barracks of the 4th HAR at 6 Sierpnia St. 84/86 there remained a detachment, from that moment on bearing the name Remains of the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR, commanded by Maj Z. Kunisz. He directed the mobilisation of the reconstructed division, which began on 31 August. Initially, it took place without any major problems, although the difficulties in provisioning deepened each day. Eventually, the division received full equipment and armament in accordance with mobilisation tables (only a radio station was missing), and the command of individual batteries was taken over by: 1st battery – Capt Zenon Żurek (administrative and material officer of the 4th HAR until August 1939), the 2nd battery – Capt Jan Kucharczak (commander of the 7th battery in the 3rd artillery battalion of the regiment until August) and the 3rd battery – Lt Franciszek Wojtczak (platoon commander in the NCO regiment school until August). Due to the threat of German air raids, the battery that had been formed first was directed in the morning of 3 September to the village of Nowosolna near Łódź (now part of the city), while the two remaining batteries continued the mobilisation procedures in the barracks in Łódź<sup>51</sup>.

In the morning of 5 September, due to the fact that the location of the Łódź Army was becoming less and less advantageous, Lt Col J. Szewczyk (commander of the 4th HAR) received an order from Col L. Lubański (commander of the artillery of the Łódź Army) to regroup his unit to the forests in the area of Natolin (between Łódź and Brzeziny), where it was to wait for further orders. As Lt Col J. Szewczyk was supposed to report immediately to Col Eugeniusz Żongołłowicz (commander of the 44th reserve ID) in Stryków, the command of all regrouped forces of the 4th HAR was temporarily taken over by Major Z. Kunisz. Under his command, the 1st division of the 4th HAR marched in the afternoon without any major problems to the ordered region, where new orders were to be delivered by a liaison officer. However, Lt Col J. Szewczyk did not find the commander of 44th ID in Stryków, so he had to get new orders from the commander of the artillery of the Łódź Army, Col L. Lubański.

<sup>51</sup> CAW, Kampania wrześniowa, ref. no. II.3.13. Relacja ppłk. dypl. J. Szewczyka; W. Jarno, *Okręg Korpusu*, pp. 347–349; L. Głowacki, *Obrona Warszawy i Modlina na tle kampanii wrześniowej 1939*, Warszawa 1985, p. 334; W. Jarno, *4 Pułk Artylerii Ciężkiej*, p. 236; P. Zarzycki, *4 Pułk Artylerii Ciężkiej*, Pruszków 1999, pp. 27–28; K. Czernielewski, W. Jarno, *Garnizon łódzki*, p. 475.

Lubański ordered to regroup the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR to the forests in the vicinity of the town of Budy Radziwiłłowskie, located north-east of Skierniewice. Lt Col J. Szewczyk decided that his return to the Natolin forests near Łódź was unnecessary, so, instead, he chose to go in the direction of Skierniewice and the town of Byczka (located by the Jeżów-Skierniewice route) and wait for the arrival of his unit. Meanwhile, a liaison officer was sent to Maj Z. Kunisz with an order to regroup again<sup>52</sup>.

Having received the order in the evening of 5 September, Maj Z. Kunisz (who commanded not only the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR, but also temporarily all the so-called remains of this regiment) ordered to start preparations for a night march to the indicated concentration area. The column of the 1st division of the 4th HAR got lost in the darkness and took a wrong turn towards Łowicz. According to Piotr Zarzycki, the reason for this was the shelling of the column by German saboteurs, which was supposed to lead to confusion and make the unit lose its way. As a consequence, Maj Z. Kunisz lost contact with the regiment commander and had to lead a retreat of his division in the following days (most of the remaining detachments of the 4th HAR from Łódź were scattered in the meantime). As he had no new orders, he decided to carry out the last received order to regroup the unit to the forests north-east of Skierniewice. Therefore, on 6 September he ordered a further march in the direction of Łowicz, from where the column was to turn towards Skierniewice, having reached the Kamion region (east of Skierniewice) on 8 September. This was where two guns and a dozen or so soldiers (including three who died) were lost as a result of a German air strike and a clash with the enemy's armoured unit. As he still had not received any new orders, Maj Z. Kunisz decided to direct the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR towards Warsaw. Despite the general chaos on the roads, they managed to reach the capital, from where the artillery battalion was sent to the Otwock region (on the right bank of the Vistula) and reached its destination on 11 September. However, a few days' retreat resulted in the loss of most of the guns, because in the vicinity of Otwock Maj Z. Kunisz managed to bring (according to P. Zarzycki's findings) only four out of the 12 guns with which the artillery battalion had left Łódź<sup>53</sup>.

In the new concentration area, the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR was reunited with Lt Col J. Szewczyk, who took command of all the detachments of the 4th HAR gathered here, which were already heavily

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<sup>52</sup> P. Zarzycki, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>53</sup> W. Jarno, *4 Pułk Artylerii Ciężkiej*, s. 236–237; idem, *Okręg Korpusu*, p. 347; P. Zarzycki, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–29.

disorganised, temporarily subjugating the weakened 10th HAB from the 10th ID, which was also located in the vicinity of Otwock (it was mobilised in Łódź by the so-called peaceful 4th HAR). For the next three days, the unit of Lt Col J. Szewczyk was subordinate to the commander of the Borderland Cavalry Brigade, Col Jerzy Grobicki, who was organising defence along the Vistula River at the stretch from the capital to Góra Kalwaria. At the same time, Maj Z. Kunisz was still in command of the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR, now reinforced with the surviving equipment of the 10th HAB. However, in the evening of 13 September, in light of the departure of the Borderland Cavalry Brigade in the direction of Garwolin, Lt Col J. Szewczyk was ordered to regroup his unit to Warsaw, where he was to strengthen the defence of the Brigade. This regrouping took place on 14 September, but due to the chaos on the roads, the column of the remains of the 4th HAR was dispersed again. The general confusion engulfed also Maj Z. Kunisz, who failed to reach Warsaw. Lt Col J. Szewczyk, on the other hand, who did manage to get to Warsaw, was assigned to take command of the 20th ID, while the collective command of the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR (which included the remains of the 10th HAB, as previously mentioned) was taken over by Maj T. Kozłowski (the former commander of the 10th HAB)<sup>54</sup>. In the following days, the remains of the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR took part in the defence of the capital, and its soldiers, after the capitulation of the capital, were taken prisoner by the Germans<sup>55</sup>.

Certain information are missing about the life of Z. Kunisz (hitherto in command of the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR) from 14 September onwards. In the chaos prevailing on the roads near Warsaw, he separated from his own unit in unknown circumstances and in the resulting confusion he headed, like many other soldiers from various broken units, towards the east. Perhaps he hoped to join the 2nd Heavy Artillery Reserve Centre mobilised in Łódź by the 4th HAR, which was also moving eastwards after leaving Łódź. Family reports on this subject are also rather vague – this is what has been preserved in the memory of M. Kunisz: 'I remember snatches of a conversation between Zygmunt's daughter and my father: "he was carrying important military documents and ran away with them

<sup>54</sup> The unit consisted of two batteries at that time: the 1st 105 mm gun battery, commanded by Lt Tadeusz Otolirski (four canon mm guns from the 1st division of the 4th HAR) and the 2nd battery of the Reserve Capt Gustaw Zygałowicz (three 155 mm howitzers from the 10th HAD).

<sup>55</sup> W. Jarno, *4 Pułk Artylerii Ciężkiej*, p. 237; idem, *Okręg Korpusu*, pp. 347–348; P. Zarzycki, *op. cit.*, pp. 29–30; L. Głowacki, *op. cit.*, p. 334; *Warszawa we wrześniu 1939 roku. Obrona i życie codzienne*, ed. C. Grzelak, Warszawa 2004, p. 528.



from the Germans (...) by retreating to the east'<sup>56</sup>. This information is difficult to verify, but if it is true, it would indicate that he did not get lost in the wartime turmoil in the Otwock region, but was carrying out an order to take some important documents (in such a case it could have been documents of the 4th HAR taken from Łódź) to the 2nd Heavy Artillery Reserve Centre evacuated from Łódź. The only thing we know about the wartime operation in this Centre is that it reached Kowel on 13 September<sup>57</sup>. However, the information provided by M. Kunisz does not change the fact that the further fortunes of Maj Z. Kunisz in the September Campaign remain unknown – and one thing we know for sure is that he was taken prisoner by the Soviets in unknown circumstances.

It is vital at this point to address numerous inaccuracies that have appeared in the historiography thus far, because Maj Z. Kunisz was, and still is, often confused with his younger brother Tadeusz, also a major of artillery. Firstly, we should clarify the fundamental matter, i.e. which one of the Kunisz brothers served in the 4th HAR in Łódź and later commanded the 1st artillery battalion of this regiment, which was reconstructed during the general mobilization. It was definitely Zygmunt, Tadeusz's older brother both according to the files of the 4th HAR, as well as the personal file of Maj Z. Kunisz. It is also confirmed by the '1939 Officer's Yearbook' by Ryszard Rybka and Kamil Stepan, which contains clear information that in March of that year, Maj Z. Kunisz served in the 4th HAR, while his brother Maj T. Kunisz was staff officer in the command of the 3rd Artillery Group in Vilnius<sup>58</sup>. Moreover, a monograph of Jan Wróblewski on the Łódź Army untruthfully states: 'The 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR (commander: Maj T. Kunisz), consisting of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd gun batteries and an ammunition column, was mobilized in Łódź'<sup>59</sup>. P. Zarzycki too, in his outline of the history of the 4th HAR, wrote that the commander of the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR was Maj T. Kunisz, though it should be added that a correct information can be found on the following pages: 'Commander of the 1st artillery battalion, Maj Zygmunt Kunisz, who was murdered in the spring of 1940, fell into Soviet hands in unknown circumstances'<sup>60</sup>. Unfortunately, in his 2001 monograph on the 4th Łódź Corps District Command, the author – based on the

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<sup>56</sup> Information received in November 2017 from Maria Kunisz (letter in the author's possession).

<sup>57</sup> W. Jarno, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

<sup>58</sup> R. Rybka, K. Stepan, *Rocznik oficerski 1939. Stan na dzień 23 marca 1939*, Kraków 2006, pp. 545 and 751.

<sup>59</sup> J. Wróblewski, *Armia „Łódź” 1939*, Warszawa 1975, p. 43.

<sup>60</sup> P. Zarzycki, *op. cit.*, pp. 28 and 30.



above papers – reported incorrectly that: ‘(...) after the announcement of the August mobilisation, Maj Tadeusz Kunisz took command of the 1st artillery battalion’<sup>61</sup>. and, a few pages further on, that the artillery battalion was commanded by Maj Edward Kunisz<sup>62</sup>. This is an obvious mistake, because no such officer served in the Polish army in 1939 (this name was wrongly given by Lt Col J. Szewczyk in his report on the participation of the 4th HAR in the September Campaign<sup>63</sup>). These discrepancies were also pointed out by Artur Kuprianis in his monograph on the 4th Artillery Group<sup>64</sup>. An analysis of personal documents of Maj Z. Kunisz and the 4th HAR it is clear that it was Maj Z. Kunisz who served in the 4th HAR stationed in Łódź as second deputy commander of the regiment and quartermaster of the regiment, and in September 1939 he commanded the 4th HAR, reconstructed during the general mobilisation of the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR.

Another problem is that the brothers are confused in relation to the service in the command of the Prusy Reserve Army, which in September 1939 was concentrated at the back of the Łódź Army in two groups – one in the region of Piotrków Trybunalski and Tomaszów Mazowiecki, the other in the region of Skarżysko-Kamienna and Szydłowiec. Since the command of the Prusy Reserve Army was made up of officers who previously served in the Vilnius garrison (where Major General Stefan Dąb-Biernacki, who became the leader of the above mentioned army, was stationed before the war), Col Stanisław Künstler (former commander of the 3rd Artillery Group in Vilnius) became commander of the artillery of the Prusy Reserve Army. It is not surprising, therefore, that Maj T. Kunisz was also included in the command of this army as his deputy, considering that, as has been mentioned before, he had been a staff officer in the command of the 3rd Artillery Group<sup>65</sup>. However, the participation of two artillery officers of the same name in the September Campaign in two almost adjacent operational units led to further mistakes. For example, in the 2003 publication *Charków. Księga cmentarna* the following note appeared in relation to Maj Z. Kunisz: ‘Later on, he served in the 22nd FAR, 28th FAR and in the 4th HAR since 1933 – in 1938 made deputy regiment commander. In 1939, in the command of the artillery of the Prusy Army’<sup>66</sup>. A similar note can be found

<sup>61</sup> W. Jarno, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 347.

<sup>63</sup> CAW, Kampania wrześniowa, ref. no. II.3.13. Relacja ppłk. dypl. J. Szewczyka z okresu kampanii wrześniowej, sheet 198.

<sup>64</sup> A. Kuprianis, *op. cit.*, p. 485.

<sup>65</sup> R. Rybka, K. Stepan, *op. cit.*, p. 545.

<sup>66</sup> *Księga cmentarna Charków*, Warszawa 2003, p. 278.

in Tadeusz Kryśka-Karski's *Straty korpusu oficerskiego 1939–1945*<sup>67</sup> and in Jan Wróblewski's monograph on the Prusy Reserve Army<sup>68</sup>. In these cases, we are dealing with obvious mistakes because, as has already been stated, from 1935 Maj Z. Kunisz served in the 4th HAR in Łódź, while his younger brother Tadeusz was in the commandment of the artillery of the Prusy Reserve Army.

Another problem that has appeared in the historiography so far is, as it seems, the inaccurate information provided by Ludwik Głowacki that Maj Z. Kunisz served in the Northern Front rebuilt in the Lublin region under the command of Major General S. Dąb-Biernacki (former commander of the Prusy Reserve Army). The said general, having exercised incompetent command leading to the rapid disintegration of the operational unit on the left bank of the Vistula, moved together with his staff (or rather abandoned divisions retreating in combat if truth be told) to the right bank of the Vistula, where on 11 September he was nominated as commander of the Northern Front, and was given the task to organise the defence of the Lublin region and move back in the direction of Tomaszów Lubelski in cooperation with the Lublin Army commanded by Brig Gen Tadeusz Piskor. Many commanders from the Prusy Reserve Army (including from its headquarters) came to the eastern bank of the Vistula and took an active part in creating gathering points for the retreating scattered soldiers. One such point in Dorohusk was commanded by Col Stanisław Künstler, former artillery commander of the Prusy Army, whose deputy from the beginning of the September Campaign was Maj T. Kunisz<sup>69</sup>. However, L. Głowacki's study provides a baffling account related to this issue: '(...) the commander of the Dorohusk gathering point was Col Stanisław Künstler and his deputy – Maj Zygmunt Kunisz. He organised the protection of road and railway bridges on the Bug River near the town of Wilczy Przewóz'<sup>70</sup>. It seems that in this case there was a mistake in personal details, because from 11 to 14 September Maj Z. Kunisz was with his unit, i.e. the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR, in the Otwock region, while Col S. Künstler, having withdrawn from the Lublin region together with the artillery staff of the Prusy Reserve Army under his command, had his deputy, Maj T. Kunisz, with him. Maj T. Kunisz was killed during the defence of a bridgehead on the Bug River in the Wilczy Przewóz region in the morning of 17 September against several German tanks, which came from the north-east<sup>71</sup>. This is

<sup>67</sup> T. Kryśka-Karski, *Straty korpusu oficerskiego 1939–1945*, London 1996, p. 220.

<sup>68</sup> J. Wróblewski, *Armia „Prusy” 1939*, Warszawa 1986, p. 46.

<sup>69</sup> L. Głowacki, *Działania wojenne na Lubelszczyźnie w roku 1939*, Lublin 1976, p. 170.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 177.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 177–178.

also confirmed by Maria Kunisz (granddaughter of the oldest of the three Kunisz brothers, Stanisław), who in May 2017 informed the author of this article of the following: 'I say so because such explanation has been passed on in my family: Major Tadeusz Kunisz died on 17 September 1939 in Wilczy Przewóz near Dorohusk beyond the Bug on the German front during an air strike. The message was relayed to Tadeusz's family by a soldier who came to their house in Vilnius specifically to inform them about this<sup>72</sup>. Since Maj T. Kunisz was killed near Wilczy Przewóz, he was probably also Col S. Künstler's deputy, which means that it most certainly was not Maj Z. Kunisz, as L. Głowacki claims.

Moreover, when listing the personnel of the command of the Northern Front, the aforementioned L. Głowacki also stated that the artillery commander was Col S. Künstler mentioned above, and his deputy was Maj Z. Kunisz<sup>73</sup>. However, this is probably a consequence of the author's earlier error with regard to the gathering point in Dorohusk, because it is difficult to believe in such a coincidence that after the death of Major T. Kunisz on 17 September his brother Zygmunt was placed in the command of the Northern Front and took the position of Tadeusz (i.e. deputy artillery commander in the command of the Northern Front). This seems impossible, although it cannot be ruled out either, as we do not know – as mentioned earlier – the fate of Maj Z. Kunisz after his separation on 14 September in the Otwock region from the 1st artillery battalion of the 4th HAR, as well as the circumstances in which he was taken prisoner by the Soviets. However, the likelihood of Maj Z. Kunisz turning up in the middle of September in the Northern Front artillery command was low – one can even say that it was negligible. Consequently, it can be assumed that the deputy of Col S. Künstler was in fact Maj T. Kunisz. It is true, though, that Col S. Künstler was taken prisoner by the Soviets in September 1939 and sent to a camp in Gрязowiec (he was not murdered by the NKVD in the spring of 1940 and survived the war). And that is the case, then, potentially, if we assume that Maj Z. Kunisz was also in the command of the Northern Front – he could also be taken prisoner by the Soviets. Nevertheless, this story seems almost unlikely, so the information given by L. Głowacki about Maj Z. Kunisz being Col S. Künstler's deputy in the artillery command of the Northern Front is probably wrong and refers to his brother Tadeusz, who died on 17 September.

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<sup>72</sup> Information received in May 2017 from Maria Kunisz (letter in the author's possession).

<sup>73</sup> L. Głowacki, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

One thing is beyond doubt – Maj Z. Kunisz had to be in the areas occupied by the Red Army in September 1939, because in unknown circumstances he was taken prisoner by the Soviets to never come back. He became one of several thousand Polish prisoners of war held in a Soviet camp for Polish officers in Starobelsk. The camp was established pursuant to a directive of Lavrentiy Beria of 19 September 1939 and was located in a former monastery on the Ajdar River in the Voroshilovgrad region in Ukraine (near the Moscow-Donbas railway line), about 220 km southeast of Kharkiv. Capt Alexander Berezhkov was the camp's commandant, while Mikhail Kirshin, was the commissioner. The first transport of Polish prisoners of war arrived to Starobelsk already on 28 September, and more transports came on the following days, resulting in the number of 7,351 prisoners on 3 October. Among them there were several thousand non-commissioned officers and privates, who were quickly deported from the camp and sent to construction works or to Germany as part of an exchange. Additionally, on 2 October 1939, the purpose of the Starobelsk camp was changed and only officers and senior state officials were to be detained there – as in the case of the camp in Kozielsk. As a consequence, new Polish officers taken prisoner were brought in from November, including from the transit camps in Szepietówka, Jarmolińce and Kamieniec Podolski (most of the officers detained in Starobelsk were defenders of Lviv). Since the end of November 1939 until the liquidation of the camp, there were about 4 thousand people in the camp<sup>74</sup>. However, we do not know when and from where Maj Z. Kunisz was brought to Starobelsk, but it probably took place in October or November 1939.

Officers in the rank of colonel and above were not placed directly in the camp, but in the nearby NKVD building located at ul. Kirowa 5, while the remaining officers were placed in the actual POW camp located on the outskirts of the town at ul. Kirowa 8, about 3 km from the Starobelsk railway station. It was separated from the rest of the village by a high wall. There were 22 buildings in the camp, and in the central part there was a former monastery with multi-tier bunk beds. The housing conditions were abhorrent and the camp was massively overcrowded. Officers in the

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<sup>74</sup> B. Gałek, *Starobielsk. Obóz jeniecki NKWD wrzesień 1939 – maj 1940*, Warszawa 2014, pp. 59, 66–67, 78, 84, 111–112 and 131–133; Z. Peszkowski, S. Zdrojewski, *Starobielsk–Charków*, Łódź–Orchard Lake 1998, pp. 19–23; S. Jaczyński, *Ocaleni od zagłady. Losy oficerów polskich ocalałych z masakry katyńskiej*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 51–57; *Katyń dokumenty zbrodni*, vol. I, *Jeńcy nie wypowiedzianej wojny sierpień 1939 – marzec 1940*, Warszawa 1995, doc. 11, pp. 79–82 and doc. 129, p. 309 and vol. II, *Zagłada marzec – czerwiec 1940*, Warszawa 1998, doc. 20, p. 74, doc. 77, p. 152; S. Kalbarczyk, *Wykaz łagrów sowieckich miejsc przymusowej pracy obywateli polskich w latach 1939–1943*, p. 1, Warszawa 1993, pp. 240–242.

rank of major, probably including Maj Z. Kunisz, were located in an old two-storey barrack number 13 (about 300 officers were placed there in total). Unfortunately, no details about his stay in the camp are known<sup>75</sup>.

Maj Z. Kunisz stayed in the Starobelsk camp until its liquidation, which took place pursuant to the decision of the Politbureau of the Central Committee of the AUCP(b) of 5 March 1940 ordering the execution of almost 15,000 Polish prisoners of war imprisoned in Kozielsk, Starobelsk and Ostashkov. This decision set in motion the preparations for the mass murder of officers, policemen and officials held in these camps. 39 transfer lists of Polish officers from Starobelsk, which contained over 3.8 thousand names in total, were drawn up from March to May<sup>76</sup>. However, as Beata Gałek pointed out: 'In 1990, 45 personal lists of Kozielsk prisoners of war and 65 lists of Ostashkov prisoners were handed over to Polish authorities. The lists were kept in the office of the Board for Prisoners of War. However, we have not received any similar letters from the camp in Starobelsk. To this day, we do not have the execution lists signed by Merkulov and sent to the regional boards of the NKVD. We have photocopies of copies (not originals) of the list of Starobelsk prisoners of war who left the camp to be transported to the places of execution'<sup>77</sup>. The liquidation of the Starobelsk camp began on 5 April 1940 – transports were dispatched daily from 5 to 26 April in groups of 65 to 260 people, as well as on 2, 8, 11 and 12 May<sup>78</sup>. Groups of Polish officers gathered in accordance with the relevant transfer list and went to the station in Starobelsk, and then they were transported by rail to Kharkiv, where in the basement of the NKVD headquarters they were murdered with a shot in the back of the head (they were then buried in secret in Piatykhatky – now a Kharkiv)<sup>79</sup>.

Since the list of the names of prisoners transferred out of the Starobelsk camp and prisoner transport lists are still unknown, the order in which the individual prisoners were removed is not known. Maj Z. Kunisz is

<sup>75</sup> S. Jaczyński, *Zagłada oficerów Wojska Polskiego na Wschodzie: wrzesień 1939 – maj 1940*, Warszawa 2006, p. 140; B. Młynarski, *W niewoli sowieckiej*, London 1974, pp. 234–235; N. Lebediewa, *Katyń. Zbrodnia przeciw ludzkości*, Warszawa 1997, p. 110; B. Gałek, *op. cit.*, pp. 122 and 126; Charków. *Księga cmentarna*, Warszawa 2003, p. XXVII; W. Materski, *Katyń. Od kłamstwa ku prawdzie*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 26–29 and 35.

<sup>76</sup> N. Lebediewa, *op. cit.*, p. 175; B. Gałek, *op. cit.*, pp. 341 and 344; Charków. *Księga*, p. XLVI; Z. Peszkowski, S. Zdrojewski, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–25; S. Jaczyński, *Ocaleni od zagłady*, pp. 86–93.

<sup>77</sup> B. Gałek, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

<sup>78</sup> *Katyń dokumenty*, vol. II, doc. 196, pp. 314–317, B. Gałek, *op. cit.*, p. 355; S. Jaczyński, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–124.

<sup>79</sup> More on this: B. Gałek, *op. cit.*, pp. 359–381; Charków. *Księga*, pp. XLIX–L.



listed under number 1749 on the NKWD list from Starobelsk<sup>80</sup>. One thing is certain – he was murdered in the basement of the NKVD prison in Kharkov. The precise date of his death is unknown to this day, but it probably took place in April 1940. The Soviet crime against Polish officers from Starobelsk remained a mystery for many years. It was only on 14 April 1990, on the eve of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, that the authorities of that country announced official information about the execution of Polish prisoners of war by the NKVD in 1940. Two years later, in October 1992, the then president of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, handed over documents concerning the Katyn crime to Poland, finally confirming the responsibility of the highest Soviet authorities for the crime and its concealment for many years.

Finally, let us take a quick look at the family life of Maj Z. Kunisz: In the first half of the 1920s, while serving in the 22nd FAR in Rzeszów, he met Helena Dregierówna (born in 1888), who was six years older than him and with whom he soon got married. Their only daughter, Irmina Jadwiga (she got her middle name after her grandmother), was born on 27 September 1928<sup>81</sup>. Zygmunt's mother (Jadwiga) also left Kiev after the Bolshevik Revolution and came to Poland. She lived in Warsaw, where she died on 15 March 1943 (buried in the Bródno cemetery). When World War II broke out, Zygmunt's wife (Helena née Dregier) and her daughter Irmina Jadwiga were in Volhynia, where they were staying for the summer. Unable to return home, they went to Nowa Wilejka, where Zygmunt's older brother lived. A few months later, after the signing of the new Soviet-German border treaty on 28 September 1939, she and her daughter managed to return to the German occupation area. However, since Łódź was incorporated into the Third Reich on 9 November 1939, and the Polish population was displaced from the Third Reich into the General Government, they could not return to Łódź and left for Kielce. It was there that Zygmunt's wife died after the war in 1976, as well as the only daughter of Zygmunt and Helena – Irmina Jadwiga (on 23 March 1985 at the age of 58). His older brother Stanisław graduated from Kiev University and, after the Bolshevik Revolution, came to reborn Poland where he took up a job as a natural science teacher at the Coeducational Middle School in Granica and in 1921 married Maria née Rymśa (daughter

<sup>80</sup> J. Tucholski, *Mord w Katyniu. Kozielsk, Ostaszków, Starobielsk*, Warszawa 1991, p. 944; *Katyni. Lista ofiar i zaginionych jeńców obozów Kozielsk, Ostaszków, Starobielsk*, comp. by A. Szcześniak, Warszawa 1989, p. 320; *Charków. Księga*, p. 278; A. Moszyński, *Lista katyńska. Jeńcy obozów Kozielsk–Ostaszków–Starobielsk zaginieli w Rosji Sowieckiej*, London 1982, p. 294.

<sup>81</sup> CAW, ap. Zygmunt Kunisz, ref. no. 424, Arkusz ewidencyjno-kwalifikacyjny z 1929 r., no pagination.



of the headmaster of the middle school). Later on, he was a teacher in a male seminary in Pułtusk, since 1930 – director of the State Teachers' University in Świsłocza, and since 1936 – a science and geography teacher at the St. Casimir Middle School in Nowa Wilejka. After the outbreak of World War II, he taught in a primary school in Niemenczyn – he died on 21 October 1944 (his wife Maria died in 1970 in Warsaw). He had four children: three sons, Stefan, Jerzy and Tomasz, and a daughter, Janina. However, the youngest of the brothers, Tadeusz – as previously reported – became a professional officer and died in September 1939 in the rank of major. He was married to Zofia née Arcinowska, with whom he had four children: Maria Danuta, Julia Barbara, Andrzej and Ewa Teresa. The Kunisz brothers (Stanisław, Zygmunt and Tadeusz) had a sister, Wanda, who worked in the Main Measurement Office before the war – she died in 1944 in the women's camp in Ravensbrück<sup>82</sup>.

Finally, it should be added that in November 2007, Minister of National Defence Aleksander Szczygło posthumously appointed 7842 officers murdered in the spring of 1940 to higher ranks by a decision of 5 October 2007 as a tribute to the memory of the thousands of victims of the crime committed by the Soviet authorities. Maj Z. Kunisz, who was posthumously promoted to lieutenant colonel, was among them<sup>83</sup>. Apart from outlining the profile of Maj Z. Kunisz, as mentioned in the introduction, is also to clarify a number of issues relating to his service in September 1939, as there are still errors in this regard, both in scientific publications and on the Internet. We can only hope that this fortunes during the September campaign will not be confused with his brother Tadeusz's, which unfortunately still happens today.

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<sup>82</sup> Information received in November 2017 from Maria Kunisz (letter in the author's possession).

<sup>83</sup> Thirty years earlier, Stanisław Ostrowski (President of the Polish Government in Exile) conferred the War Order of Virtuti Militari (no. 14384) on Polish soldiers murdered by the Soviet authorities in the spring of 1940 by a decree of 11 November 1976.

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## STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł opisuje życie majora Zygmunta Kunisza – jednej z ofiar zbrodni sowieckiej z 1940 r. Był on oficerem artylerii między innymi pociągach pancernych w czasie wojny polsko-bolszewickiej, a po jej zakończeniu służył w 22 i 28 pułku artylerii lekkiej, zaś od 1935 r. kwatremistrzem w 4 pułku artylerii ciężkiej. We wrześniu 1939 r. objął dowództwo nowo sformowanego I dywizjonu tego pułku, którym dowodził w trakcie kampanii wrześniowej. Po agresji sowieckiej na Polskę – major Zygmunt Kunisz dostał się w bliżej nieznanych okolicznościach do niewoli sowieckiej. Przez kilka miesięcy przebywał w obozie jenieckim w Starobielsku, po czym w kwietniu 1940 r. został zamordowany w więzieniu w Charkowie. Postać tego oficera była w polskiej literaturze często mylona w odniesieniu do kampanii wrześniowej 1939 roku z jego młodszym bratem Tadeuszem – także oficerem artylerii w stopniu majora. Tekst został oparty w głównej mierze na dokumentach archiwalnych oraz wspomnieniach i materiałach przekazanych przez Marię Kunisz – wnuczkę Stanisława Kunisza, starszego brata Zygmunta. Artykuł ten ma na celu wyjaśnić istniejące nadal rozbieżności i błędne informacje na temat majora Zygmunta Kunisza, awansowanego w pośmiertnie w 2007 r. na stopień podpułkownika.

**Słowa kluczowe:** artyleria polska, wojna polsko-niemiecka 1939, obóz jeniecki w Starobielsku

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Witold Jarno (born in 1970) – associate professor, doctor habilitatus, employed in the Department of Polish and World History after 1945 at the Institute of History of the University of Łódź. Graduate of the Faculty of Philosophy and History (1994) and Faculty of Law and Administration (1998) of the University of Łódź. The main fields of his scientific interests are the history of Poland and the history of the Polish military in the 20th century. He is the author of many articles and monographs on this subject: *Okręg Korpusu Wojska Polskiego nr IV Łódź 1918–1939* (Łódź 2001); *Okręg Generalny Wojska Polskiego nr III Kielce w latach 1918–1921* (Łódź 2003); *Strzelcy Kaniowscy w latach 1919–1939* (Warszawa 2004); *1 Dywizja Strzelców Armii Generała Hallera w latach 1918–1919* (Łódź 2006); *Garnizon Łódzki Wojska Polskiego 1918–1939* (Toruń 2008, co-author); *Terytorialne władze wojskowe w Polsce w latach 1945–1949. Organizacja i działalność okręgów wojskowych* (Łódź 2011); *13 Dywizja Piechoty w wojnie 1939 roku* (Warszawa 2012); *10 Dywizja Piechoty w wojnie 1939 roku* (Pruszków 2016, co-author); *Obchody Milenium w diecezji łódzkiej (1966–1967)* (Łódź 2017, co-author) and co-editor of a monograph titled *Budownictwo wojskowe w Łodzi* (Łódź 2016). E-mail: wjarnolodz@op.pl.

