

IN RESISTANCE TO HITLER AND STALIN

Catalog to the Permanent Exhibition



Witold who? Pilecki? — Yes, Pi-lets-ki!

Everything changed when the German Wehrmacht invaded Poland in 1939. Witold Pilecki was 38 years old at the start of the Second World War. He gave up his regular life to fight against the German occupiers. He allowed himself to be arrested and transported to Auschwitz, where he organized a resistance network. He was one of the first people to send reports about the crimes committed in the concentration camp to the outside world. He later took part in the Warsaw Uprising against the Germans.

The victory over Hitler, however, did not result in freedom for Central and Eastern Europe, but instead brought new oppression. Pilecki took up the fight against the regime the Soviet Union had installed in Poland. His recognition of the criminal nature of both the Nazi and the communist regimes proved clairvoyant. He courageously and decisively opposed the two totalitarianisms that shaped the twentieth century.

Witold Pilecki

May 13, 1901	Pilecki was born in Olonets, Russia.
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1910	The family moved to Vilnius.
November 1918	At the end of the First World War, Poland was reestablished as an independent nation after being partitioned for 123 years.
1922	Pilecki began studying art in Vilnius, but had to stop due to lack of funds.
April 7, 1931	Maria Ostrowska and Pilecki married.
September 19, 1940	Pilecki allowed himself to be arrested and brought to Auschwitz.
April 26, 1943	Pilecki escaped from Auschwitz.
August-September	
1944	In the Warsaw Uprising, Pilecki fought against the German occupation.
October 1944	Pilecki was captured and brought to the prisoner-of-war camp in Murnau, Bavaria.
May 8-9, 1945	End of the Second World War
Summer 1945	Pilecki was stationed in Italy and composed his report about Auschwitz there.
May 1947	The secret service of the communist regime in Poland arrested Pilecki in Warsaw.
March 15, 1948	Pilecki was sentenced to death for "spying for the West."
May 25, 1948	Pilecki was executed.
1990	_After the collapse of the communist regime, Poland became democratic; Pilecki was finally rehabilitated.



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Content

191 Rediscovering Pilecki

198 Abbreviations

192 Transcriptions of the newspaper articles

5	FOREWORD Wojciech Kozłowski
6	ESSAY Hanna Radziejowska: Three reflections on Witold Pilecki
8	ESSAY Mateusz Fałkowski: Do we need heroes?
12	ESSAY Jack Fairweather: Discovering Pilecki
14	1918–1939 Poland before the Second World War
19	1939 Another war, another partition
27	1939–1940 The German and the Soviet occupation of Poland
43	1939–1940 Resistance
55	1940-1943 Pilecki as a witness of the transformation of Auschwitz
81	1940–1943 Reactions of the outside world
112	ESSAY Rafał Ruciński: Report crimes! Publications of the Polish government-in-exile
	rubilcations of the rollshi government-in-exile
121	1943 Escape through occupied Poland
133	1943–1945 The Polish fight for sovereignty
	<i>5</i> ,
144	ESSAY Vera Franke • Anka Bobczuk: The new permanent exhibition.
	A look behind the scenes
150	ESSAY Bartłomiej Kapica: The memory of Witold Pilecki during the Cold War
154	ESSAY Krzysztof Kosior: Memories of Witold and Maria Pilecki within the famil
159	1943 Auschwitz as the symbol of the Holocaust
163	1945 Postwar Poland: displacement and oppression
170	1948 Pilecki's trial and death sentence
189	1945-1990 No mention of Pilecki in postwar Poland

Foreword

Wojciech Kozłowski

For the past five years, the Pilecki Institute has been a focal point for an international debate on history in Berlin. It serves as a hub for exhibitions, educational programs, archival work, and discussions on 20th-century history and current challenges.

We aimed not only to present Polish history and the Polish perspective on history in Berlin but also to integrate ourselves into Berlin's institutional landscape, a goal we successfully achieved. We also succeeded in introducing a broader range of perspectives on Eastern Europe to Berlin and presenting Polish history within a regional context. Russia's war against Ukraine, drawing upon totalitarian ideology and practices reminiscent of the Stalinist era, emphasizes the importance of engaging with history. It highlights how such engagement enables us to address present-day challenges faster and more effectively.

Collaboration with the Bundesarchiv in archival matters, educational partnerships with the Berlin Senate, and numerous collaborations with German academic institutions and NGOs have opened new paths for Polish-German dialogue.

The permanent exhibition "Witold Pilecki: In Resistance Against Hitler and Stalin" that we present to you goes beyond showcasing the life of Witold Pilecki. While it certainly honors his legacy, one of its core messages is our conviction that Pilecki, with his biography, should not only be regarded as a hero of Polish history or the Polish struggle for freedom but

also be recognized as a part of the European pantheon of memory.

The exhibition also emphasizes that Pilecki wasn't acting alone. His efforts to establish a resistance network at Auschwitz and relay intelligence about the atrocities to the Allies were crucial components of a larger initiative by the Polish underground state and the Polish government-in-exile to expose German crimes to the world.

The efforts of Pilecki and the Polish underground state to convey the horror of the situation and mobilize a response from the free world were only met with partial success. We know from the archives that although the Allies received reports based on Pilecki's information as early as December 1940, their reaction to them was neither prompt nor adequate.

Pilecki's narrative, therefore, encapsulates not only the broader Polish resistance against Hitler and Stalin but also serves as a universal tale of confronting evil.

Warsaw / Berlin, September 2024

Three reflections on Witold Pilecki

Hanna Radziejowska

1

An inscription on the wall of Pawiak prison in Warsaw, where the Gestapo tortured Polish prisoners, read: "It is easy to speak about Poland; it is difficult to work for her, even harder to die for her, and most difficult to suffer."

Witold Pilecki's story reminds us primarily of the immense cost of liberty, democracy, and freedom in Poland and Europe. Often, the values ascribed to such concepts as patriotism, heroism, and the fight for freedom are treated as something outdated, like Gombrowicz's ironic reflections on an individual's "greatness." Statements such as "our grandparents fought for our freedom" often sound trite to us today. However, as Timothy Snyder stated, the future exists only when our world is based on values – freedom, democracy, justice — because they enable choices, and decisions and choices imply the existence of a future

The mystery of the causes and effects of human choices, the connections between the past and the future, the history of making specific decisions and the resulting moments of heroism (as in the case of Pilecki) is not relegated exclusively to the past and abstract mythology. Pilecki's story cannot belong only to the realm of memory culture, that is, the way in which certain events are remembered. It should prompt us to reflect on the essence of history—history that matters precisely because of the values chosen and the associated influence on our present and future.

I recently listened to a debate in Kyiv with Ukrainian soldiers who explained that they are fighting so that their families, children, friends, and compatriots never have to see what they are experiencing and can be happy.

Today, as war rages in Europe, and civilians and soldiers die every day, we also better understand events from 80 years ago. We understand that our grandparents said the same thing then as the Ukrainian soldiers are saying now: their struggle and suffering became the source of our freedom. The story of Pilecki and his colleagues in the Home Army tells a bitter truth that there is no price for freedom. Freedom is priceless because such is human life and suffering. It should not be acceptable to reconcile with the emptiness left by those who gave their lives to defend it

Thanks to such closeness to history, we discover even more clearly how much Pilecki remains a part of Polish and European heritage—the struggle for freedom, democracy, truth, justice, and a free Poland.

2

The exhibition uses Pilecki's biography to discuss the significance of bearing witness. Pilecki experienced German crimes in occupied Warsaw and the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, and was fully aware that he had to remember everything to later bear witness to the crimes and the essence of both totalitarianisms. His reports, written after escaping from Auschwitz, are an excellent example of this. His effort to remember and bear witness was the result of a decision to act; to act in every situation and regardless of circumstances, to not concede to evil and to do everything to fight against it.

Both of the 20th century's totalitarian regimes — Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia — fought against memory and history. This is one of the reasons why we in Poland started telling the story of our grandparents and the occupation so late. Communism

in Poland erased individual and social memory of those who fought for a democratic state. That is why Pilecki's Report was first published in Poland in 2000, and only ten years later in English and German. Democracy is a space where the recovery of memory takes place, and historical research becomes possible. This exhibition is part of this broader process of the democratic recovery of memory.

3.

The third reflection is connected to the second, and is rather somber. Our exhibition depicts Witold Pilecki's effort to inform the world about German crimes, with the ultimate goal of stopping them. Pilecki sends requests for the bombing of Auschwitz, plans a prisoner uprising, collaborates with others to provide information that the Polish government-in-exile then publicizes, and tries to convince the Allies of the need to punish the crimes. All without success. In the exhibition, we see a shocking interview with Jan Karski, who recounts his meeting with Roosevelt and Churchill. Karski, an emissary of the Polish underground state, recalls the reactions of both political leaders of the free world to his information about the Holocaust: "it is so terrible that no one will ever believe it."

In the exhibition, we witness the great effort of the Polish state to make Western societies, elites, and political classes aware via publications, conferences organized by the government-in-exile, and initiatives of the heinous crimes committed by the Germans. Alongside these efforts, we see reactions, short articles or even notes on the less significant interior pages of the "Daily Telegraph" and "New York Times". Page 5, page 11. A reflection arises: such an obvious crime, so much collected material, evidence, testimonies — and the world remained silent, making it difficult to punish the criminals after the war. The so-called "second guilt" of post-war Germany is its failure to punish the war criminals. Of all the German

workers at the colossal death factory at Auschwitz, only five percent faced any justice.

Such unimaginable crimes! Let this be a warning for us today when we witness Russian crimes in Ukraine: we must not allow atrocities to go unpunished, and peace must not be without justice.

Do we need heroes?

Mateusz Fałkowski

Why do we need heroes in our democracies? The shortest attempt at an answer: by agreeing on whether Witold Pilecki was a hero and why we recognize him as such, we also agree on our culture. By defining a system of coordinates that determines what heroism is and who our heroes are, we mutually assure ourselves of the culture we want to live in.

However, heroism is difficult for the modern individual to grasp and, for many, is somewhat at odds with the spirit of mass democracy. At the same time, democracies without heroes can quickly perish. Ukraine's defensive war after the Russian full-scale invasion of February 2022 showed us this even more clearly. Ordinary people have become heroes en masse, although heroism by its very nature is not a matter of the masses.

The attitude of the Ukrainian people was met with admiration, but also provoked voices in the public debate in Germany, such as that of social psychologist Harald Welzer who responded with the statement that he "preferred to live in post-heroic times": "Personally, I experience very unpleasant feelings when someone fights 'bravely for their country', when civilians are asked to make Molotov cocktails for the purposes of a private defense of their homeland, when an aesthetic and rhetoric of war is celebrated that we have not considered socially acceptable for decades. I thought it was good to live in post-heroic times." ¹

Not only the reactions to the war in Ukraine, but also the somewhat older tensions surrounding the desire to remove monuments to historical figures such as the generals of the southern states in the United States, as well as similar protests in Europe, show that the idea of heroism still plays an important role in our

societies. We question the heroes of the past, but we also fight for the memory of those who were previously erased from history. Dieter Thomä describes how the attempt to rename Vienna's *Heldenplatz* (Heroes' Square) to "Platz der Demokratie" (Democracy Square) met with public protest.² Indeed, democracy does not replace heroes, rather it is heroes who are also needed in a democracy. The story of Witold Pilecki makes a special case in this context.

Witold Pilecki was born in Karelia in 1901 and took part in the Polish-Bolshevik War of 1920. Since the Polish state defended its existence during this war, Pilecki was able to enjoy two decades of family happiness in a free country and to administer his estate in Sukurcze. With the invasion of the German Third Reich and the Soviet Union in September 1939, a long and dangerous journey began for him, along with a long separation from his wife and two children.

In mid-1940, Pilecki decided to try to get to the Auschwitz concentration camp, which had just been set up by the German occupiers. The decision was taken under special conditions, characterized by great uncertainty. The communication channels did not always work. The conspiracy structures were only just emerging and the various groups had only just come together. Under conspiratorial conditions, the exact decisions about the courses of action that were considered feasible were not made at the top, but largely from below. It was in these scattered underground networks that the question "What is possible?" was discussed. Pilecki undertook an almost death-defying mission — he was to gather information from the then-newly established German camp at Auschwitz. Of course, he did not have all the knowledge in 1940 that we have today, but the decision to voluntarily go to the site of the raids in the Warsaw district of Żoliborz on September 19, 1940, to allow himself to be captured and taken to the camp was a heroic one — in the most literal sense of the word.

Under the false name of Tomasz Serafiński, he managed to build up resistance networks in Auschwitz under the most repressive conditions. From December 1940 on, for over two years, he passed on information that managed to reach Warsaw. From there, this information reached the Allies in London in messenger jackets and luggage on detours through occupied Europe. Pilecki wanted to organize an uprising of the prisoners in the camp and counted on support for such resistance from outside. From his position as a prisoner there, he asked for the camp to be bombed. Through various middlemen, he passed on information about the subsequent transformations of Auschwitz, about the various stages of the long and terrible experiments with death by the camp's creators. About the murder of Polish political prisoners, about the gassing of Soviet prisoners of war and finally about the place and method of the mass extermination of European Jews. On April 26, 1943, Pilecki and his two comrades, Jan Redzej and Edward Ciesielski, managed to escape Auschwitz.

He understood the role of the witness very well. Immediately after his escape, he began writing a comprehensive report on Auschwitz. He was briefly reunited with his family: his wife Maria and his young children Zofia and Andrzej. In August 1944, he took part in the largest armed civil uprising of the Second World War — the Warsaw Uprising. He was then sent to a prisoner of war camp in Murnau. When the camp was liberated by the American army, he joined the Polish forces in the west, which were stationed in Italy in 1945. He rewrote his account of his experiences at Auschwitz. On October 19, 1945, in San Giorgio in the Italian Abruzzo region, he handed over the densely written 104 pages of "Report W" to his superior, General Pełczyński, who took Pilecki's report with him to London. The manuscript ended up in the London archives of the Polish Underground Movement, but for decades no one was to read this text.

Pilecki decided to return to Poland, where he had left his wife and children and where communists had meanwhile assumed power with the help of the Red Army. He managed to visit and see the site of the former Auschwitz camp once again. As the communists felt insecure about their legitimacy in Polish society, they regarded Witold Pilecki and other Home Army fighters as a threat. Exactly two years after the war—on May 8, 1947—Pilecki was arrested. He was then sentenced to death in a show trial based on false accusations. The sentence was carried out in a Warsaw prison on May 25, 1948, and the place of his burial remains unknown to this day.

Seen from a temporal distance, it is startling that Pilecki was made unable to attend the meetings of the survivors at the very time when their efforts to preserve the knowledge of what happened in Auschwitz for future generations began. His voice could not be heard loud and clear alongside the testimonies of Primo Levi or Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, for example. In 1947, Primo Levi published his famous book about his experiences in Auschwitz, and in Paris the first of the major conferences took place at which the survivors of Auschwitz came to speak and tell the world what they had seen and experienced³. Pilecki could not speak either then or in the subsequent debates – as at this point he was already being tortured in a Warsaw prison.

Pilecki's torturers not only sentenced him to death, but also imposed a sentence of silence on his story. For decades, until the end of the Cold War, Pilecki's fate, his wartime past, his mission in Auschwitz and his death in 1948 at the hands of the communists were kept taboo. For a long time, his story remained unknown beyond a very close family circle in Poland and an equally small circle of military officers in exile. Pilecki remained a taboo figure for political reasons until 1989. The Cold War acted as a kind of memory freezer. But even after the upheavals of 1989, it still took a dozen years for Pilecki's report,

his biography, his name and his face to really become known to Poles, and only now are they becoming known to the rest of the world. But why is this time shift important here?

Heroes become such for us for several reasons: because they expose themselves to danger and because they fight for a cause that is greater than themselves. But heroes also need us — they need an audience of sorts. Someone has to speak of their heroism, just as Homer spoke of Achilles or Odysseus. The poets decide what remains. There must be a community that remembers this heroism.

Yet despite the heroic struggle of Ukrainians against Russian aggression after 2022, we live in times that seem less favorable to heroes and heroism. This time shift, the time when the memory of Pilecki was frozen by the Cold War, has led to his story being perceived with a certain skepticism or distance. It is seen as something distant, as part of a mere military history, as an example of martyrdom or, in its excessive war heroism, as unsuited to the era of capitalist democracies. When we revive the memory of Pilecki decades later, we encounter the anti-heroic affection of modern societies. It is perhaps most evident in the German debate, but can also be seen in Poland.⁴

Even if the word "courage" has a positive connotation in the public sphere, as in the discourse on "civil courage", "heroism" is already becoming something ambivalent. Civil courage or "everyday heroes" are sometimes contrasted with the rather unpopless popular heroism. The critical approach to heroism in our societies results in part from a re-assessment and redirection of our attention from these heroes—the warriors who later traditionally appeared on bronze monuments—to, for example, the suffering of the civilian population. Well, this brings us back to what heroism is, and what Pilecki's heroism was. It was not his willingness to fight, but his ability to sacrifice himself in the name of a greater and broader cause. Not the blood on the sword, but the willingness to

sacrifice himself for others, to sacrifice his own life – this is what makes a hero.

Pilecki's story is also an example of the "democratization of heroism": Pilecki is here not a leader, not a general, not a "great fighter." Rather, he is part of a larger picture, the Polish resistance movement and the underground state. He is one of many participants who took on a great responsibility. This story is also about values: Heroism implies that one does not act in one's own interests, but precisely for the common good.

Why and what for do we need heroes? By agreeing on whether Pilecki was a hero and why we recognize him as such, we also agree on our culture and on the culture we want to live in. It is our political community that sets the coordinate system that determines what we define as heroism and who our heroes are. And that works both ways. Remembering Pilecki and others (including, of course, possible critical voices) allows us to constantly calibrate this coordinate system. "A hero is ultimately determined by the social coordinate system that evaluates the deed and in this way defines what heroism is [...] the selfsame action that makes one a hero in one place can make him a criminal or a fool in another, different coordinate system."

Some people are bothered by the fact that heroism is commemorated by state or public institutions such as museums or schools. But a hero is always socially (and politically) constructed. By calling someone a hero, we also reassure each other about our culture and norms. About the norms that can define such heroism.⁸

Do heroic acts affect us or do we only recognize them in an abstract way? Regardless of how we answer this question, heroes can also be important to us insofar as they activate the ability in us to act. A look into Pilecki's biography can also mean a look into ourselves. It can activate the initiative and the ability to act in us, for example when we think of the ability

to report on war crimes, even in current wars. Heroes can help us recognize ourselves in them and thus give us the opportunity to take initiative and act.

Perhaps a convincing argument for the skeptics — representatives of the post-heroic strand in the historical debate — will be the observation that Pilecki's heroism also represents brotherhood. For Pilecki's commitment is not only a story of individual heroism, but also of brotherhood in the face of danger. In working together to build the resistance network in Auschwitz, in the danger of escaping together with Redzej and Ciesielski. By creating a team and a sense of bonding based on trust and the shared experience of danger, Pilecki could echo the words of Jan Strzelecki: "At the core of our existence was a community held together by a strong bond that can best be described by the concept of brotherhood. This existence, which was lived under constant threat, with the knowledge that we walked together on the edge of life, that every encounter increased the likelihood of final separation, opened up for us the meaning of the word "community."9

However, heroism remains difficult for the modern man to accept. Which is a good thing. Because heroes embody virtues that strive for universality, but in an extremely hyperbolic and therefore rare form. Heroes shine and humanity does not shine; we admire heroes precisely because they do NOT embody conventional human traits. In the first paragraphs of this text, I outlined Pilecki's biography as a journey through monstrous countries, camps and prisons; as a journey that was characterized by separation from his family, by his return and also by various dilemmas. This is Odysseus. Odysseus embodies heroism, but also the contradictions of humanity.

Around the time Pilecki was sentenced to death and his story to silence, in 1947, the poet Tadeusz Różewicz wrote about his experiences of the occupation: "I'm searching for a teacher and a master/let him give me back my sight hearing and speech/let him name objects and concepts again." In the same volume of poetry from 1947, Niepokój, he added: "I call out in a whisper: I am alive". "O Witold Pilecki's story helps us to name certain things and concepts. This is another reason why we need heroes, even in post-heroic societies.

- 1___ "Social psychologist Welzer warns of a new 'aesthetics and rhetoric of war' in Germany", Stern, 16.3.2022, www.stern.de/gesellschaft/ukraine-krieg---harald-welzer---nirgends-hoert-man--moment-mal---31701534.html.
- 2.... Dieter Thomä: Warum Demokratien Helden brauchen [Why do democracies need heros]. Ullstein, Berlin 2019, p. 9.
- 3__Laura Jockusch: Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe. Oxford UP 2012.
- 4___"I wonder if we need heroes" this phrase from the MP Krzysztof Mieszkowski's speech to the Culture Committee of the Polish Sejm on July 4, 2024 sums up the discussion.
- 5___Joerg Lau: Pathos des Eigenssins. Zivilcourage und Heldentum [The Pathos of Self-Interest. Civil Courage and Heroism], "Merkur" No. 724/725, September-October 2009, pp. 753-761.
- 6___It is not the blood on his weapons that makes the warrior a hero, but his willingness to sacrifice himself in order to save others.

 Herfried Muenkler, Heroische und postheroische Gesellschaften [Heroic and post-heroic societies], "Merkur" No. 700, 09/2007.
- 7..... Christian Schneider: Wozu Helden? [Wherefore heroes?], "Mittelweg 36", 1/2009, p. 92.
- 8___Jan Philipp Reemtsma: Der Held, das Ich und das Wir [The Hero, the I and the We], "Mittelweg 36", August-September 2009, p. 13.
- 9___Jan Strzelecki: Próby świadectwa [Attempts at a Testimony]. Warszawa 1974, p. 15.
- 10_Tadeusz Różewicz, poems Saved (transl. into English by Joanna Trzeciak) and Chased (transl. into English by Karolina Golimowska) from the volume Niepokój [Anxiety], Kraków 1947.

Discovering Pilecki

Jack Fairweather

I only heard of Witold Pilecki's story by chance.

In 2011, I met a friend with whom I'd covered the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We were trying to make sense of what we'd witnessed. He had travelled to Auschwitz and learned about Pilecki's two-and-a-half-year mission to the camp. The idea of resisting the Nazis from the center of their greatest crime felt shocking. I thought of the camp as the ultimate symbol of suffering and victimhood. Who would voluntarily expose themselves to such horror, I wondered? And what could such a man's story tell me about confronting evil today?

Then I discovered another remarkable fact about Pilecki: next to nothing had been written about him outside Poland. I managed to glean a little online. He had gone on to fight Poland's Communist regime at the end of World War II, been captured, executed, and all trace of his wartime record locked away in military archives until the collapse of the Soviet Union. It wasn't until 2012 that one of Pilecki's reports was finally translated into English. I remember eagerly reading the report upon publication only to find it deepening the mystery. Names were hidden to protect colleagues, events obscured or omitted. The report left unanswered the crucial questions: What happened to the intelligence he had risked his life in Auschwitz to gather? Why were his calls for action unheeded? How many lives might have been saved had the world listened?

This exhibition is based on the three years' research it took to answer these questions, which formed the basis of my book *The Volunteer*. The story you are about to discover is of the greatest historical importance. Pilecki arrived in Auschwitz at its beginning, when it served as a concentration camp for Polish political prisoners and the majority of its inmates were ethnic Poles. He thus witnessed the steps by which the Nazis conceived of and built their death factory for Europe's Jews. Pilecki was the first to alert the world to the camp's horrors through his smuggled reports and the first to try and stop them. Three years before Allied commanders publicly acknowledged the camp's existence Pilecki was urging them to bomb it.

The facts presented here establish Pilecki's role as a first witness to the Holocaust in Auschwitz. But the exhibition wouldn't be complete without explaining how he managed to carry out his mission. How do you survive in a death camp? How do you build an underground numbering over a thousand men without being detected? How do you smuggle out to London the Nazis' greatest secrets? I could hazard some answers here but I believe in that old maxim of writing that it's better to show, not tell. This exhibition gives visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in Pilecki's world, in the sights, sounds and objects that he experienced. My hope is that by doing so we can come closer to the man himself and his choices, and shed some light on our own time. As a reporter I've always been drawn to extremes - and I've found none greater than Pilecki's story of survival in Auschwitz. It describes the worst we can do to each other, and surprisingly, some of the best.

A note on our approach:

Pilecki's story offers a radically different perspective on Auschwitz. But it also presents a historical conundrum: namely that the main source for Pilecki's story is Pilecki himself. After his escape from Auschwitz in April 1943, Pilecki wrote three reports about his activities in the camp, along with a memoir of his early life and several smaller texts. Historians traditionally play down such testimony in favor of documentary evidence and it is true that a personal perspective, enormous suffering, and time can play on the human memory. But we believe it's a mistake to simply dismiss what historical actors noted down, be it during the action or in hindsight. Like other historical records, their accounts must be put into relation with other sources to test their accuracy.

For three years my research team and I counter-checked Pilecki's own story with thousands of pages of evidence from the testimonies of other witnesses and secret or official documents from the archives. My researchers Marta Goljan, Katarzyna Chiżyńska and Ingrid Pufahl spent three years consulting material at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Central Archives of Modern Records, Central Military Archives, Institute of National Remembrance, the Ossolineum, the Chronicle of Terror Archives at the Pilecki Institute, the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust, the National Archives in Kew, the Wiener Library, the National Archives in Washington, DC, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the FDR Presidential Library, the Hoover Institution, the Yad Vashem Archives, the Central Zionist Archives, the German Federal Archives in Koblenz and Berlin, the Swiss Federal Archives, the Archivum Helveto-Polonicum Foundation, and the International Committee of the Red Cross Archives.

Whenever gaps remained, it was our great privilege to be able to consult with Pilecki's children Andrzej and Zofia, his nephew Marek Ostrowski, and those who had known Pilecki or shared his experiences like Kazimierz Piechowski, Bohdan Walasek, Jerzy Zakrzewski, Jerzy Bogusz, Janusz Walendzik, Mieczysław Gałuszka, Zofia Zużałek, Jacek and Ryszard Stupka, Józefa Handzlik, Anna Czernicka, Stefan

Hahn, Mieczysław Mastalerz, Kazimierz Albin and Zofia Posmysz. I am grateful to the families of those connected to Witold's story for sharing their time, memories and private papers: Maria and Szymon Świętorzecki, Marek and Barbara Popiel, Yaninka Salski, Jarosław Abramow-Newerly, Daniel Piechowski, Jan Tereszczenko, Piotr Woyna-Orlewicz, Ewa Biały, Adam Wojtasiak, Zofia Wiśniewska, Maria Serafińska-Domańska, Stanisław Domański, Jan Dembinski, Jan Jekiełek, Krystyna Klęczar, Wiesław Klęczar, Kazimierz Klęczar, Andrzej Molin, the Stupka family, the Kożusznik family, Krystyna Rybak, Robert Płotnicki, Jacek Dubois, Bożena Sławińska, Henryk Bleja, the Harat family, Beata Ciesielska-Mrozewicz, Felicjan Świerczyna, Piotr Wielopolski, the Mikusz family, Krzysztof Nahlik, Jan Chciuk-Celt, Stefan Pagowski, Tadeusz M. Płużański, Marta Orłowska, Wanda Janta, Ryszard Stagenalski and Stanisław Mróz.

And what we found was that in almost all cases, Pilecki's story, as told by himself, stood the test. Indeed, it's a remarkable how much he got right, given the conditions in which he wrote on the run or in hiding. But should we really be surprised given his mission to speak truth in the face of evil?

"Nothing should be 'overdone'", he writes in the preface to one of his reports. "Even the smallest fib would profane the memory of those fine people who lost their lives there."

Our hope is that with this exhibition we can finally

Poland before the Second World War

The end of the First World War in 1918 sealed the fate of the great powers of Europe. Tsarist Russia, Austria-Hungary, and the German Empire ceased to exist. Poland had been partitioned among these three empires for 123 years. Now, after prolonged occupation and bitter struggles for liberation, the country could be reestablished.

Poland faced enormous challenges: unifying three territories that had developed in very different ways, modernizing the economy, and overcoming social tensions. Moreover, poverty and illiteracy were widespread, the infrastructure was decrepit, and authoritarian and nationalist tendencies were on the rise. Almost one-tenth of the population was Jewish, one of the highest percentages in the world during the interwar period.

The young nation, however, was dynamic. Its role models were the Western democracies. The regained independence led to a blossoming in art, culture, architecture, and science. And a modern civil society with liberal forces also developed. Witold Pilecki observed these changes very precisely. His ancestors, members of the lower nobility, had already fought for a free Poland. For their participation in an uprising against Russia they had been exiled to Karelia on the Russian-Finnish border. There, in tsarist Russia, Witold Pilecki was born in 1901.

Poland 1922

After the First World War, Poland was put back on the European map. Armed conflicts preceded the drawing of borders. The Polish army had fought the Bolsheviks in the east, and there had been Polish uprisings in Silesia and Greater Poland in the west. Poland had also annexed the Lithuanian city of Vilnius in 1920.

map: Peter Palm



Poland was a multicultural country. According to a 1930 census, Poland's population at the time was 14 percent Ukrainian, 9 percent Jewish, 4 percent German, and 3 percent Belorussian. The world economic crisis exacerbated social conflicts throughout the world during the 1930s. In Poland as elsewhere, nationalist and antisemitic tendencies were on the rise. This led to boycotts and the plundering of Jewish businesses, to discrimination against Jewish university students, and to efforts to reduce the number of Jews in various occupations. Violent attacks on Jews also increased. All of this was opposed especially by the socialist, liberal, and agrarian parties.

Jewish life in Poland was extremely diverse during this period. There were numerous Jewish sports clubs, academic associations, rabbinical schools, and libraries. Patriotic Jewish artists and scholars were committed to the Polish Republic. Representatives from Jewish political parties had seats in the Polish parliament.

The family moved to Vilnius in 1910. Even as an adolescent, Pilecki supported Polish self-defense units during the First World War. He also fought in the Polish-Soviet war (1919 to 1921) that arose from border disputes after Poland had been re-established. Pilecki never entirely left the army, participating in reserve training almost every year.

After the death of his father in 1926, Pilecki took over the family's indebted country estate in Sukurcze and modernized it. As estate manager, he was progressive and socially oriented. Pilecki supported the tenant farmers and established a cooperative with them that guaranteed them better milk prices.

In 1931 Pilecki married Maria Ostrowska, a teacher. The couple had a son and, a year later, a daughter — Andrzej and Zofia. Their family life was modern. Pilecki was a devoted father, and Maria continued to work as a teacher even after the birth of the two children.

Despite his numerous responsibilities, Pilecki also found time to write poems and paint. A number of his paintings and drawings have survived to the present day.



Witold and Maria Pilecki with their son Andrzej, 1933





The Pilecki family: Witold, Maria, young Andrzej, and his sister Zofia, 1934

Witold Pilecki and his son Andrzej with their calves

all photos: Private collection of the Pilecki family

Another war, another partition

Both the Soviet Union and the German Empire sought to undermine the newly founded country. Poland was labeled a "seasonal state", one of limited duration and questionable existence. The Nazis intensified this rhetoric beginning in 1938. Hitler and Stalin signed a nonaggression treaty on August 23, 1939. A secret supplemental protocol outlined how Poland and Eastern Europe would be divided between the Soviet Union and Germany.

The two dictatorships invaded Poland in 1939. The German Wehrmacht marched in from the west on September 1, while the Soviet Union attacked from the east on September 17. Members of the Polish government fled to Romania and were incarcerated there. Hitler sought to eradicate the Polish nation and all Polish political, cultural, and religious elites. His goal was to subjugate Poland completely to create "new Lebensraum," living space for Germans.

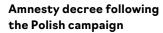
From the beginning, the German military conducted the war with extreme brutality. The Polish civilian population was virtually defenseless against the air raids of the German Luftwaffe and the ruthless violence of German soldiers. Faced with Germany's military superiority, Warsaw capitulated on September 28 – not least to save the capital from further destruction.

Hundreds of thousands of people left everything behind and tried to escape the advancing troops. Depending on their personal histories and their affiliations, they fled across the country to the west or the east.

Heinz Boesig, Max Ehlert, BArchiv B101I-121-0008-27



"Actions carried out in the occupied Polish territories from September 1, 1939, until now, to express resentment of atrocities committed by the Poles, are not to be investigated as criminal acts."



German war crimes were responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of people. In a secret "amnesty decree" on October 4, 1939, Hitler guaranteed impunity for the perpetrators.



Julien Bryan and Kazimiera Mika, September 13, 1939, near Warsaw

The photographer Julien Bryan consoles 12-year-old Kazimiera Mika, whose older sister was killed in a German air raid. "While I was photographing the bodies, a little tenyear-old [sic] girl came running up and stood transfixed by one of the dead. The woman was her older sister. The child had never before seen death and couldn't understand why her sister would not speak to her. ... The child looked at us in bewilderment. I threw my arm about her and held her tightly, trying to comfort her. She cried."

USHMM, Washington



Attacks on the civilian population

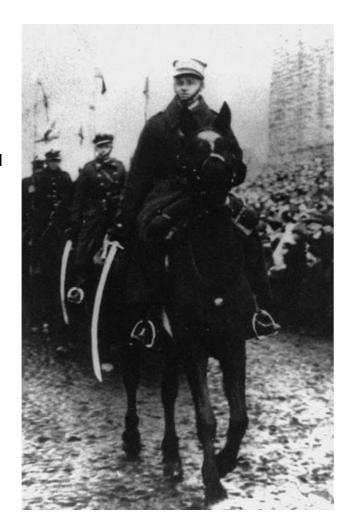
Thousands of civilians were killed in German air raids in September 1939. A photograph by the American correspondent Julien Bryan became a symbol of the German crimes. It shows the twelve-year-old Kazimiera Mika, stunned as she mourned her sister.

USHMM, Washington

Witold Pilecki as a Polish officer

In August 1939, Poland mobilized one million soldiers. One of these was Witold Pilecki, who was deployed as the commander of a unit of ninety reservists. Thirty of them died in the fighting during the first weeks of the War. After the Polish military forces surrendered in early October, Pilecki traveled to Warsaw, the center of the resistance to the German occupation, to join the underground.

Hundreds of thousands of Polish families fled from the two advancing enemy armies. The Red Army's invasion of Poland also affected the Pilecki family. Pilecki hoped that his wife Maria had left the border region with their children and been able to flee to her family in Ostrów Mazowiecka near Warsaw.



Witold Pilecki leading a military parade near Sukurcze, 1920s
Pilecki participated almost every year in reserve exercises.
In April 1932 he organized reserve duty training exercises in the Lidzki district with cavalrymen who served under the Polish forces as of 1937.

Private collection of the Pilecki family



talk at the demarcation line in occupied Poland at the end of September 1939 On September 28, 1939, the day Warsaw surrendered, the German Reich and the Soviet Union signed a Boundary and Friendship Treaty. It sealed the partition and renewed the occupation of Poland. Soviet and German soldiers conversing in late September 1939 at the demar-

Getty Images

Soviet and German soldiers

cation line in occupied Poland.



the Hitler-Stalin Pact by Clifford Berryman, Washington Star, October 9, 1939

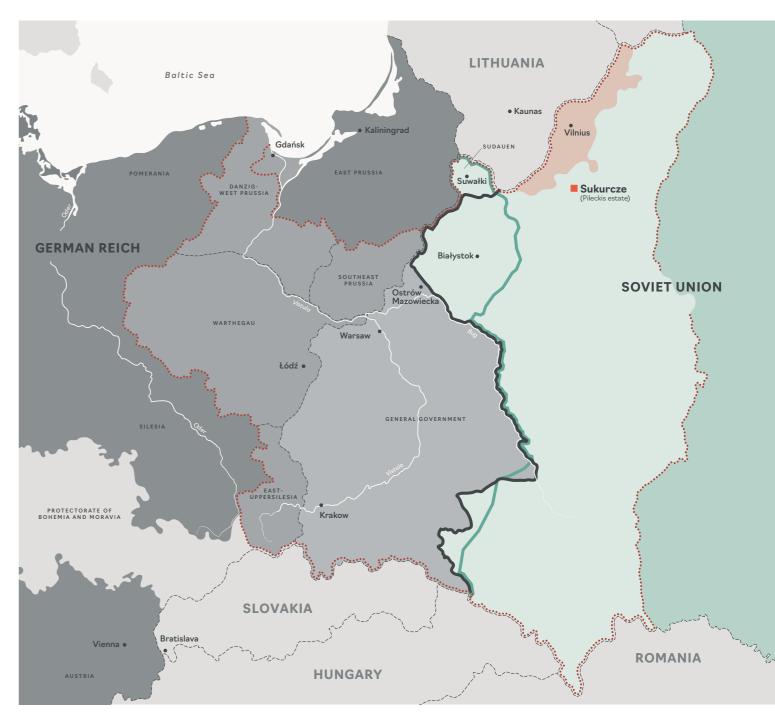
Library of Congress



The Partition of Poland

The Soviet Union took the Polish territories east of the Bug River and the German Reich occupied the remaining Polish territory. The western part of the annexed area was incorporated into the German Reich by the Nazis, who engaged in a brutal Germanization. They deported and expelled hundreds of thousands of Poles to make room for German settlers. The eastern part became the General Government, which the Germans governed as a colony, terrorizing and plundering the local population.





map: Peter Palm



The German and the Soviet occupation of Poland

The end of military operations marked the beginning of the terror against the Polish population. In many places the Nazis forced Jews into ghettos. In the so-called Intelligenzaktion (Intelligentsia Operation), the Germans systematically arrested and murdered educated Poles including physicians, teachers, and clergy. Education for Poles was to be limited to the primary school level. Institutions of higher learning and cultural facilities were forced to close. According to Nazi ideology, Poles would serve Germans in the future solely as a source of cheap labor.

The Soviets introduced a "dictatorship of the proletariat" in their occupied territory. They expropriated large-scale estates and collectivized agriculture. They also planned to eradicate the Polish nation and Polish culture. They arrested countless Poles; hundreds of thousands were deported to Siberia and Central Asia.

As an estate owner, Pilecki's wife Maria also feared Soviet reprisals. She fled with her children from Sukurcze to her mother in German-occupied Ostrów Mazowiecka, where her husband had searched for them in vain several months earlier.

"

Toppling the Adam Mickiewicz Monument

The Mickiewicz Monument was destroyed on August 17, 1940. The Nazis wanted to eliminate all symbols of the Polish culture and nation.

Krakow National Archives









A Polish girl views the destruction wrought by German air raids, Warsaw 1939

USHMM, Washington

The German bombing destroyed Warsaw

Families settled into the ruins and had to beg for food.

USHMM, Washington

Ruins of a Catholic church in Warsaw, after 1945

Many buildings of great architectural and historical value throughout Poland were destroyed.

USHMM, Washington

The Destruction of Warsaw

Warsaw, Poland's capital, was bombed continuously for almost four weeks. The Germans bombed hospitals, groups of refugees on the streets, and historically significant buildings. Many thousands of civilians were killed by the bombs and artillery fire.

The introduction of a racial hierarchy by the German occupiers

The Nazis established a brutal racial hierarchy in Poland. Signs stating "Only for Germans" were posted in numerous buildings, public transportation, and restaurants. Many Poles lost all their belongings. Jews were subject to the most severe repressions. In November 1940, the Germans evacuated parts of the center of Warsaw and forcibly moved the Jewish population there. The Warsaw Ghetto thus created was soon completely overcrowded. It became the largest detention camp in Europe.

The occupiers exploited Polish agriculture for the benefit of the German military and German settlers. This resulted in a shortage of food. The Germans responded by rationing food supplies: Poles received around 800 calories per day, Jews a maximum of 500.



"For Jews. For Non-Jews"

Virginia Holocaust Museum



"No entry for Poles!"

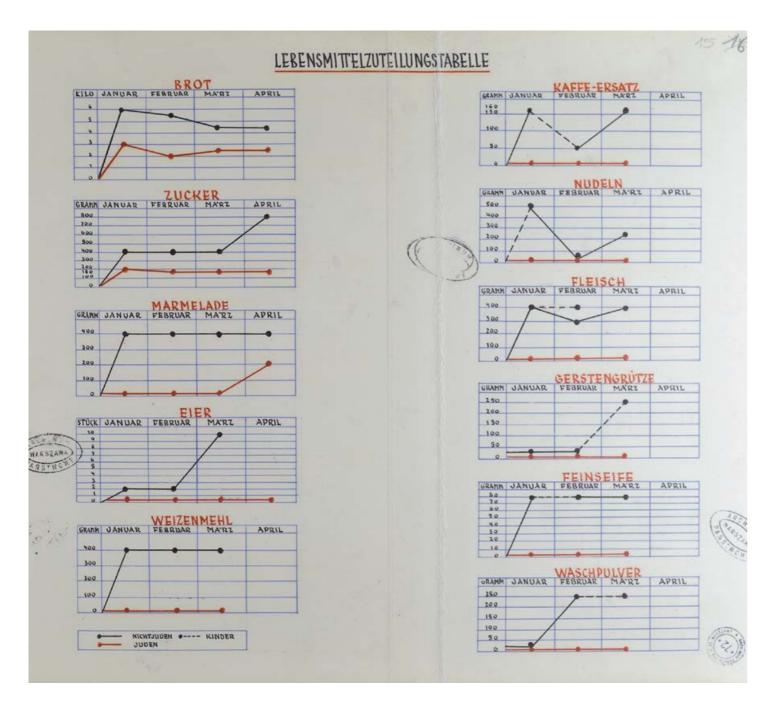
Sign at the entrance to a park in Poznań

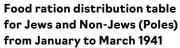
"Only for German passengers"

Sign on the streetcar line 8, car no. 94 in occupied Krakow. Strict racial segregation was implemented almost everywhere in German-occupied Poland.

NAC







Poles officially were allowed only ca. 800 calories per day, Jews from 200 to a maximum of 500 calories. They had to buy anything else illegally at exorbitant prices. Germans were allowed roughly 2,600 calories per day.

Staatsarchiv Warschau



A wall topped with barbed wire separated the "Jewish residential district" (Warsaw Ghetto) from the rest of the city

Ludwig Knobloch, BArchiv, B101I-134-0791-29A

Bekanntmachung

Betr.: Todesstrafe für unbefugtes Verlassen der jüdischen Wohnbezirke.

In der letzten Zeit ist durch Juden, die die ihnen zugewiesenen Wohnbezirke verlassen haben, in zahlreichen Fallen nachweislich das Fleckfieber verbreitet worden. Um die hierdurch der Bevölkerung drohende
Gefahr abzuwenden, hat der Herr Generalgouverneur verordnet, dass in Zukunft ein Jude, der den ihm zugewiesenen Wohnbezirk unbefugt verlässt, mit dem Tode bestraft wird.

Die gleiche Strafe trifft diejenigen, die diesen Ju'an wissentlich Unterschlupf gewähren oder in anderer Weise (z. B. durch Gewährung von Nachtlagern, Verpflegung, Mitnahme auf Fahrzeugen aller Art usw.) den Juden behilflich sind.

Die Aburteilung erfolgt durch das Sondergericht Warschau.

Ich weise die gesamte Bevölkerung des Distrikts Warschau auf diese neue gesetzliche Regelung ausdrücklich hin, da nunmehr mit unerbittlicher Strenge vorgegangen wird.

Warschau, am 10. November 1941.

gez. Dr. FISCHER

Gouverneur

Obwieszczenie

Dotyczy: kary śmierci za nieuprawnione opuszczenie żydowskich dzielnic mieszkaniowych.

W ostatnim czasie rozprzestrzenili żydzi, którzy opuścili wyznaczone im dzielnice mieszkaniowe, w licznych udowodnionych wypadkach tyfus plamisty. Aby zapobiec grożącemu w ten sposób niebezpieczeństwu dla ludności, rozporządził Generalny Gubernator, że żyd, który w przyszłości opuści nieuprawniony wyznaczoną mu dzielnice mieszkaniowa, bedzie karany śmiercia.

Tej samej karze podlega ten, kto takim żydom udziela świadomie schronienia lub im w inny sposób pomaga (np. przez udostępnienie noclegu, utrzymania, przez zabranie na pojazdy wszelkiego rodzaju itp.).

Osądzenie nastąpi przez Sąd Specjalny w Warszawie.

Zwracam całej ludności Okręgu Warszawskiego wyraźnie uwagę na to nowe postanowienie ustawowe, ponieważ odtad bedzie stosowana bezlitosna surowość.

Warszawa, dnia 10 listopada 1941.

(-) Dr FISCHER

Announcement of November 10, 1941, introducing the "Death penalty for leaving the Jewish ghettos without authorization"

Jews in Poland were very quickly stripped of all rights. Anyone who helped them risked the death penalty. The Nazis also paid Polish collaborators, so-called szmalcowniki, for betraying hiding places of Jews.

IPN

The Intelligentsia Operation and the creation of the Auschwitz concentration camp

The Germans regarded the Polish intelligentsia as the nucleus of resistance to the occupation. In order to stem this resistance, as early as the fall of 1939 they began fiercely opposing any form of cultural independence in Poland. They banned the free press and closed libraries and educational facilities.

Already on the first day of the war, the Nazis started systematically eliminating the "leading Polish intellectual elite." By the summer of 1940, they had arrested and murdered over 100,000 public figures—professors, lawyers, and artists. Due to the overcrowded prisons, SS leadership decided to create the first concentration camp in the occupied Polish territories, rebuilding a former barracks in the town of Oświęcim (Auschwitz). The first transport of 728 prisoners arrived in Auschwitz in June 1940.

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© *~	Flamischer Gobelin /Brüssel/ Auf Seite der Kolumne Archi- medes in Umrahmung, oben Architektur, Kertuschen, Frück te. IVII Jh.	JAN RAKS	456x428	Ibiory im. Krosnowskie K.1441.Pad stwows Ibi ry Sstuki.		Königliche Schloss in Warschat /gepeckt in der Kiete MW2
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"It must be avoided that a Polish intelligentsia tries to become the leading class. A low standard of living must be maintained; we want only to get labor from there."

Looted art

German professors organized the looting of the Polish cultural heritage. The document lists the artworks confiscated from the National Museum and the King's Palace in Warsaw.

BArchiv R52-II/275, K.5

The arrest of the professors

Painting, Mieczysław Wątorski A lecture at Jagiellonian University on November 6, 1939, was a trap. The German security police arrested 180 Polish professors and three students.

Archiwum UJ



Hitler quotation from a meeting with Keitel on October 17, 1939

















The top row shows civilian photographs of the first Auschwitz prisoners, who arrived in the camp on June 14, 1940. Many of them were students and members of patriotic organizations that had formed throughout the country at the beginning of the German occupation. The bottom row shows their prisoner mug shots from the spring of 1941.

APMA-B

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Fragments of record cards of Gestapo prisoners arrested on April 12, 1940

Under the heading "occupation" (Beruf), the entry "teacher" (Lehrer) can be seen, next to which it is noted that the prisoner was arrested "during actions against the Polish intelligentsia."

IPN













Betuf:

Gymnaliallehrer

Wurde im Zuge der Aktion gegen die polnische Intelligenz am 12.4.40 festgenommen.

Beruf:

Lehrer

Wurde im Zuge der Aktion gegen die polnische Intelligenz am 12.4.40 festgenommen.

Betuf:

Gewerbeschullehrer

Wurde im Zuge der Aktion gegen die polnische Intelligenz am 12.4.40 festgenommen.



German soldiers led more than 1,700 Poles into a forest near the village of Palmiry and killed them in a mass execution

NAC



The first transport of prisoners to Auschwitz, June 14, 1940, Tarnów

APMA-B



Resistance

In September 1939, a government-in-exile was established as the legal successor to the imprisoned Polish government. Its seat would be in London. The new prime minister was Władysław Sikorski, a general and former prime minister of the Second Polish Republic with liberal and democratic views. The government-in-exile functioned as the negotiating partner for the Allies. Its central goal was the liberation of Poland.

In the meantime, formidable civilian and military organizations formed underground in Poland. Despite ruthless persecution by the Nazis, almost all political groups of the prewar period established their own conspiratorial structures. Military groups soon united under the command of the Home Army.

Polish resistance ensured the continuation of state institutions. Schools and courts remained in operation underground and even social welfare was continued. Large numbers of Poles of all ages and social classes were active underground at great personal risk. Thus, the largest underground state in Europe developed. It was subordinate to the government-in-exile in London and reported first-hand from occupied Poland. Communication across occupied Europe, however, was quite difficult.

Pilecki arrived in Warsaw in early November 1939 and quickly joined the underground.

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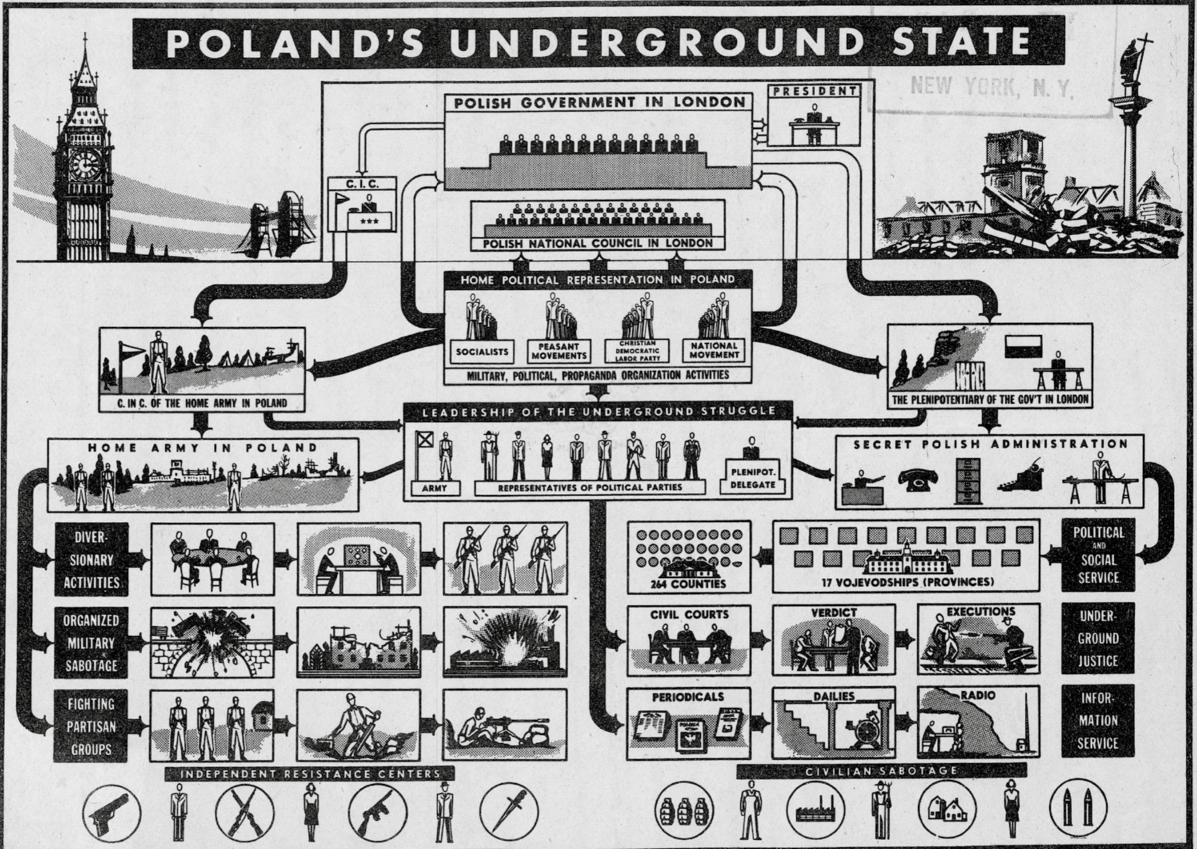
"Hitler kaput"

With the battle cry "Hitler kaput" (Hitler is finished) and a swastika on a gallows, especially young boy and girl scouts drew attention to the existence and activities of the underground.

FotoKarta

Main structure of the Polish underground state, 1943

Archiwum UJ



Pilecki in the military resistance

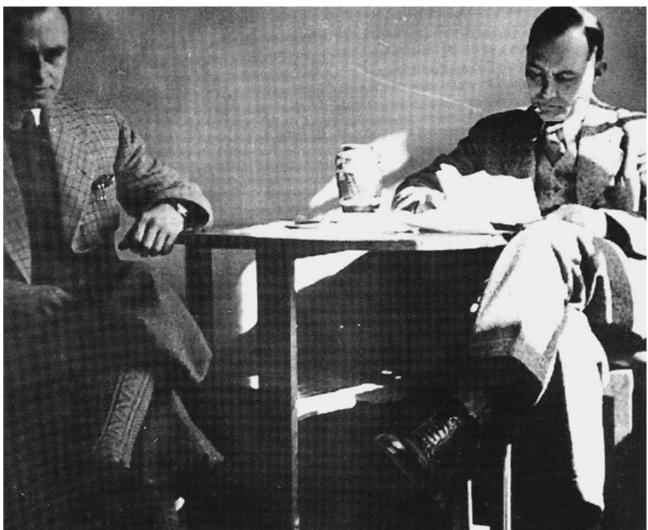
Together with several officers and students, Pilecki established an underground cell on November 9, 1939. The highest-ranking officer, Jan Włodarkiewicz, assumed the leadership. Pilecki was in charge of recruiting new members for the group, which was now called Tajna Armia Polska (TAP) or Secret Polish Army.

Pilecki was well aware of the limited influence of his military group. He pushed to have it join the military underground, which was later consolidated into the Home Army. The government-in-exile appointed Home Army commander-in-chief General Stefan "Grot" Rowecki to lead the military resis-tance for all of Poland and to work for the liberation of the country. At its peak, the Home Army had 350,000 members.



Stefan "Grot" Rowecki
Stefan Rowecki was commanderin-chief of the Home Army. With
great organizational and political
prowess he was able to bring
many opposing groups together
in the underground army. He
was a loyal member of the Polish
government-in-exile. In 1944 he
was murdered in the Sachsenhausen
concentration camp.

PAP/CAF



Witold Pilecki and Jan Włodarkiewicz

Radical nationalist groups in Poland sought to exclude Jewish and other national and religious minorities. Włodarkiewicz also had a very narrow definition of who belonged to the Polish nation. Pilecki successfully opposed this. What counted for him were patriotic commitment and willingness to fight for a free Poland. He considered political convictions and religious or national affiliation to be secondary.

IPN

Civilian resistance



People from all segments of the population joined the Polish underground. They took up the struggle for freedom and resisted the Nazis at the workplace, in associations, as well as together with friends and neighbors. Many officials conscientiously continued their prewar responsibilities in the underground.

As members of the intelligentsia, teachers were especially threatened. The Nazis dismissed them from their jobs, persecuted them, arrested them, and even executed them. Despite this grave peril, teachers organized illegal instruction for their students that often took place in a tense atmosphere of hushed whispers. Students were also aware of the danger. Secret instruction in occupied Poland was nevertheless widespread and held at all levels, from primary school to the university.



Teachers of the secret intermediate and high school in Legionowo

Bronisław Romanowska-Mazur

Secret biology instruction, Krakow, 1943

Janusz Baster/Muzeum Krakowa

Secret Latin instruction, Krakow, 1943

Girls learned Latin and Biology in the apartment of their teacher. The lessons in the underground focused in particular on the subjects that were officially banned: Polish, history, and geography.

Janusz Baster/Muzeum Krakowa



51

Grund: Hat gesungen: Noch ist Polen nicht verloren.

Grund: hat gesagt: Deutschland kann den Krieg nicht gewinnen

M. war Kurierin in der poln.Widerst.Beweg. "ZWZ" und wurde am 17.7.1942 fentgenommen. Der Vorgung wird von der Gaspol.Kattowitz begroeitet.

wurde am 20.12.41. im Zuge der Aktion gegen die ven. Urg. "Weißer-Edier" lestgenommen. Z. wurde in das KZ.Auschwitz eingelielert. Z1/Scho Z. ist im 28.4.42 im KJ Auschwitz verstorden.

Reasons to be arrested

Everyday life in occupied Poland was extremely dangerous. Random arrests were the order of the day. Merely not being able to present "good papers" (for "ethnic Germans" or with the note: "vital to the war effort") was enough to be deported to a camp or to forced labor in Germany. In revenge for Polish acts of resistance, the Nazis publicly executed innocent hostages.

IPN

"Reason: said that Germany could not win the war."

"Reason: sang 'Poland is not yet lost.'"

"M. was a courier in the Polish resistance movement ZWZ and was arrested on July 17, 1942. The case will be handled by the State Police in Katowice."

"Arrested on December 20, 1941, during an operation against the secret organization 'White Eagle.'

Z. was taken to the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Z. died in Auschwitz on April 28, 1942."

Pilecki's mission

Witold Pilecki and his sister-in-law Eleonora Ostrowska

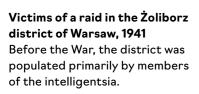
Pilecki's contact for the reports he smuggled out of the camp was supposed to be his sister-in-law Eleonora Ostrowska in Warsaw. In order to protect her and his family, Pilecki assumed the name of the resistance fighter Tomasz Serafiński.

Private collection of the Pilecki family



The concentration camp in Auschwitz began operations in June 1940. Initially, only rumors of the unusually severe treatment of prisoners in Auschwitz reached the underground in Warsaw. The Nazis had in the meantime imprisoned several TAP members in Auschwitz. The resistance group around Pilecki planned to infiltrate the camp to gain information about conditions there. Włodarkiewicz proposed Pilecki for this mission. He was to let himself be arrested.

In the late summer of 1940, warnings of impending mass arrests circulated in Warsaw. The prisoners were apparently to be taken to Auschwitz, although it was also possible that the Nazis would immediately execute them or deport them to Germany to perform forced labor. Pilecki allowed himself to be arrested on September 19. He arrived in Auschwitz three days later.



Muzeum Warszawy





Pilecki as a witness of the transformation of Auschwitz

The name Auschwitz today stands for the industrialized mass murder of European Jewry. The Germans established the camp in the small town of Oświęcim, initially as one of many detention centers for Polish political prisoners. Many of them survived the inhuman conditions of the concentration camp for only a few weeks.

After the Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the Germans deported tens of thousands of prisoners of war to Auschwitz. The camp was far too small for so many people. Under extremely harsh conditions, the Nazis then forced the prisoners there to build a huge new camp in the neighboring village of Birkenau. As the Wehrmacht's eastward advance stalled, however, the expected numbers of Soviet soldiers were not taken prisoner. Shortly thereafter, the Nazis started deporting Jews from all over Europe to Auschwitz. Most of them were killed in gas chambers right after they arrived.

Witold Pilecki witnessed how the Germans transformed the detention center in Auschwitz into a central stage of the Holocaust. During the more than two-and-a-half years of his imprisonment, he fought for the lives of his fellow prisoners and established an underground network. Pilecki planned an uprising to liberate the camp. To garner support for this, he repeatedly smuggled information to Warsaw. His detailed reports reflected the changes in the camp and the desperation of the prisoners.

Surviving the inhumanity of the camp

The prisoners were subject to the random brutality of the SS. Starvation, beatings, as well as hours of standing at roll call in every kind of weather were part of everyday life in the camp. Polish Jews and clergy had it even worse. They were directly assigned to penal units, where the Nazis – follow-ing their principle of "extermination through work" – forced them to perform extremely hard labor. Almost none of them survived the tortures.

Pilecki quickly realized that the most pressing issue was survival. The voluntary mission had become his life task: he began building a network, as the only way for a prisoner to survive was in the protection of a group. For this network Pilecki recruited trustworthy men, including many he knew from the Warsaw underground.

PILECKI ____

"I consider this place in my story to be the moment when I bade farewell to everything I had hitherto known on this earth and entered something seemingly no longer of it."

"During the first years we had had roll call three times a day. In addition to the other brutal, though primitive, ways of finishing us off, the roll calls with the extended punishment parades were also a quiet way of finishing us off."

Gate to Auschwitz I, the main camp, with the inscription "Arbeit macht frei" (Work sets you free)

DPA/Picture Alliance



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Pilecki's mug shots

He puffed up his cheeks to alter his appearance.

APMA-B

Pilecki's Prisoner Registration Card

Pilecki ist unter falschem Namen in Pilecki was registered in Auschwitz under a false name. He had found an identity card issued to Tomasz Serafiński in an empty apartment in Warsaw and had used the document to protect his family. Pilecki's escape in 1943 was recorded on his prisoner registration card.

APMA-B



"Roll-call 1941/1942" Wincenty Gawron

Oil painting, plywood, 87 × 105 cm, USA 1964

The prisoners had to report to roll call every morning and evening. The SS often forced them to remain standing at attention for hours, even in the icy cold or sweltering heat. After a day of hard labor this was torture for the already weakened prisoners. They did not receive a piece of dry bread to eat until after the roll call. Wincenty Gawron was a good friend of Witold Pilecki.

APMA-B

Pilecki's call for the bombing of Auschwitz

The conditions in the main camp were catastrophic. The severe physical labor and the starvation led to an enormously high mortality among the prisoners. Like his fellow inmates, Pilecki was extremely debilitated by late October 1940. He saw only one recourse: getting help from outside.

Pilecki smuggled out his first oral report to the Warsaw underground with the assistance of a released prisoner who memorized the contents. The report detailed the conditions in the camp and the magnitude of the Nazis' crimes. Pilecki urged the underground to convince the Allies to bomb Auschwitz in order to allow the prisoners to escape. If they were to die in the bombings, he argued, it would be a deliverance given their situation.

PILECKI &

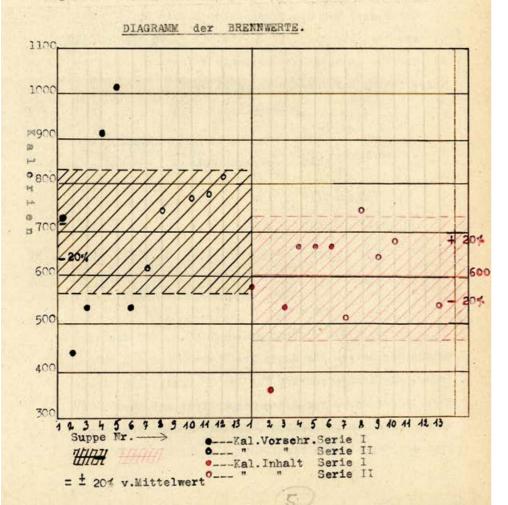
"Let none of you imagine that he will ever leave this place alive. The rations have been calculated so that you will only survive six weeks. Anyone who lives longer must be stealing, and anyone stealing will be sent to the penal company, where you won't live very long."

SS-Obersturmführer Fritz Seidler to the inmates, cited from Pilecki's 1945 report

ERGEBNIS.

Die Zusammenstellung der Brennwerte aller Suppen in Tabelle I. ergibt einen durchschnittlichen Gehalt von 705 Kalo rien für die Kochvorschriften u. 600 Kalorien für die fertigen Suppen.

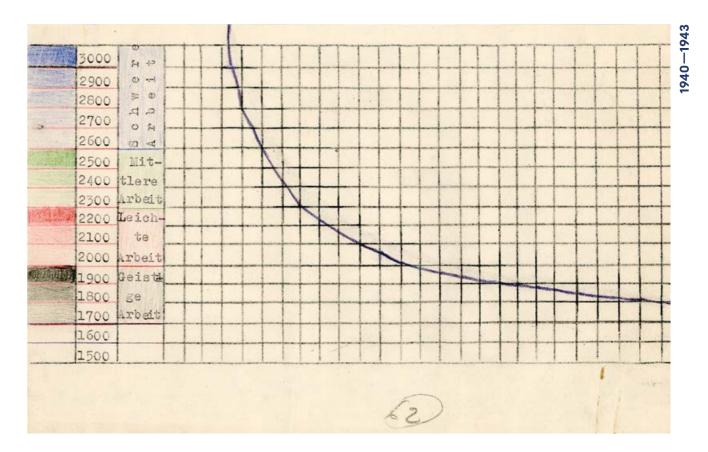
Mit Ausnahme der dünnen Rübensuppe Nro 2 u. der Suppe
Nro 8 bewegen sich alle Brennwerte der fertigen Suppen ein heitlich zwischen 500 u. 700 Kalorien um den Mittelwert. Der
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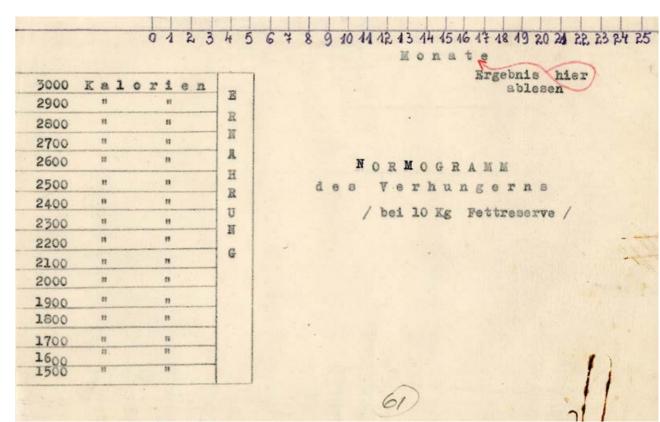


"Nomogram of starvation", a study on hunger and life expectancy in Auschwitz by Hans Münch, 1947

The food rations for the prisoners were calculated extremely tightly and barely sufficed for survival. Despite the hard physical labor they hardly received more than a thin soup and bread, with virtually no meat or fat. Former SS doctor Hans Münch evaluated and compiled the data after the war.

APMA-B





Forced labor, cold weather, disease

Within a few months, the Auschwitz main camp was hopelessly overcrowded. The inmates were forced to build additional prisoner barracks. They were beaten by SS men as they unloaded freight cars and carried heavy building materials such as bricks, steel beams, and pipes with their bare hands over many kilometers to the camp.

In the fall the temperatures were already icy cold. Pilecki and his fellow prisoners were unprotected from the weather. Their uniforms were flimsy and some of them worked barefoot or in wooden clogs. Pilecki realized that he could only survive if he were assigned to a workshop indoors. In December 1940, he managed to be sent to the joinery.



Construction work in the main camp Prisoners building the camp kitchen. The photograph was taken by the SS.

PILECKI

"The main task was: To set up here a military organization in order to:

- keep up my comrades' spirits [...];
- by organizing, whenever possible, additional food and distributing clothes amongst the members;
- send information out of the camp; and, as the crowning glory,
- prepare our own detachments to take over the camp."



Forced labor for the Krupp Works
Prisoners put to work building the
Krupp Works (later Union Works)
near the main camp. The photo was
taken by the SS in 1942 or 1943.

APMA-B



Labor indoors
Prisoners working in the camp
locksmiths' shop. The photograph
was taken by the SS.

APMA-B

PILECKI ___

"Hitherto, working in the fields, I had not worn a cap or socks.

Here, indoors in the warmth, irony of ironies, on the 8th I received socks...,
and on the 15th of December — a cap."

Euthanasia: Murdering patients in the sick bay

In 1941, after a hard winter, the camp sick bay was overcrowded. The SS exploited this situation. In the legal vacuum of the camp, SS physicians were free to conduct experiments in mass murder. They found that the most effective way to kill someone was a phenol injection directly into the heart. With this method, on some days they murdered almost a hundred prisoners who were unfit for work. They disguised these murders as "mercy killing," or "euthanasia," claiming they were alleviating the suffering of the sick.

At this time, Pilecki was also seriously ill. He survived in the sick bay only with the help of Władysław Dering, a trained physician put to work as a camp nurse, who had been an important part of Pilecki's network from the beginning. The sick bay became a center of the underground. Pilecki thus also learned how the indifferent act of letting prisoners die in Auschwitz had evolved in the sick bay, which had become an experimental laboratory for deliberate mass murder.



"Injection into the heart by SS doctor Josef Klehr" Drawing by the former prisoner Mieczysław Kościelniak, 1972 APMA-B

PILECKI Ø

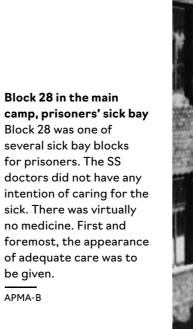
"They were being finished off with phenol a new method. Thus did the image of Auschwitz change radically."



Władysław Dering

The Polish prisoner and physician Władysław Dering worked as a nurse in the prisoners' sick bay. Pilecki knew him from the Warsaw underground. Dering saved the lives of many fellow prisoners. In the summer of 1943, however, he participated in the human experiments conducted by the SS doctors. Although he was never convicted of war crimes due to insufficient evidence and through the support of former prisoners, Dering remains a controversial figure to the present day.

Archiwum UW



APMA-B

be given.



The first experiments with Zyklon B

Hygienic conditions in the camp were catastrophic. Disease spread quickly in the overfilled, lice-infested prisoner barracks. Instead of building sanitary facilities, the SS deloused prisoners by submerging them in tubs filled with a chlorine solution. Their clothing was treated with Zyklon B gas, a cheap and fast-working pesticide.

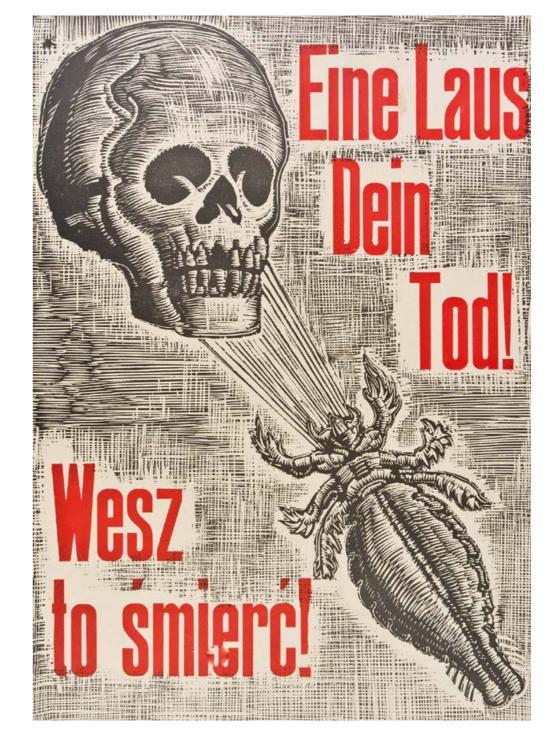
The Nazis also experimented with using Zyklon B to kill the many prisoners of war who were brought to Auschwitz after the invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. The first gassings were carried out in September 1941. Pilecki learned that 600 prisoners of war and 250 sick Polish prisoners were selected by camp physician Siegfried Schwela and gassed to death in the basement of a prisoner barracks. He was greatly alarmed. Marian Dipont, a Polish doctor put to work as a camp nurse, was released from Auschwitz on September 14, 1941. He memorized Pilecki's report and subsequently arrived in Warsaw with what was probably the first news of the mass killing with poisonous gas.



Siegfried Schwela

For fear of getting infected, the SS reduced their contact with the prisoners. But the prisoners placed lice infected with typhus on the jacket collars of SS men. The camp doctor Siegfried Schwela, who was responsible for the death of many prisoners, presumably died from a deliberately induced infection.

APMA-B



"Eine Laus Dein Tod" (A Louse Is Your Death)

The poster warned against lice, which spread deadly diseases such as typhus. The slogan could be read all over in the German concentration camps. The epidemics also threatened the SS guards.

APMA-B

The first gas chamber

Beginning in the fall of 1941, more and more Soviet prisoners of war arrived in Auschwitz. Pilecki observed Nazis leading approximately one thousand naked prisoners of war to the crematorium. He assumed they were being issued underwear there. Later he learned that the SS had gassed all of them to death in the expansive crematorium of the main camp. The Nazis had developed the first gas chamber and could now murder hundreds of people at once.

This new dimension of barbarism strengthened Pilecki's conviction that he had to demand a reaction from the outside world. He was aware of how risky his plan was. In November, he dispatched two messengers with additional reports describing the mass murder with gas and the expansion of the main camp into neighboring Birkenau as a new and enormous camp complex.



Crematorium in the main camp (Auschwitz I)

The SS converted the mortuary of the crematorium in the main camp to a gas chamber. They could gas several hundred people to death at once in this room.

Zbigniew Klawender / APMA-B

>> Soviet prisoners of war
The Germans murdered almost
15,000 Soviet prisoners of war
in Auschwitz.

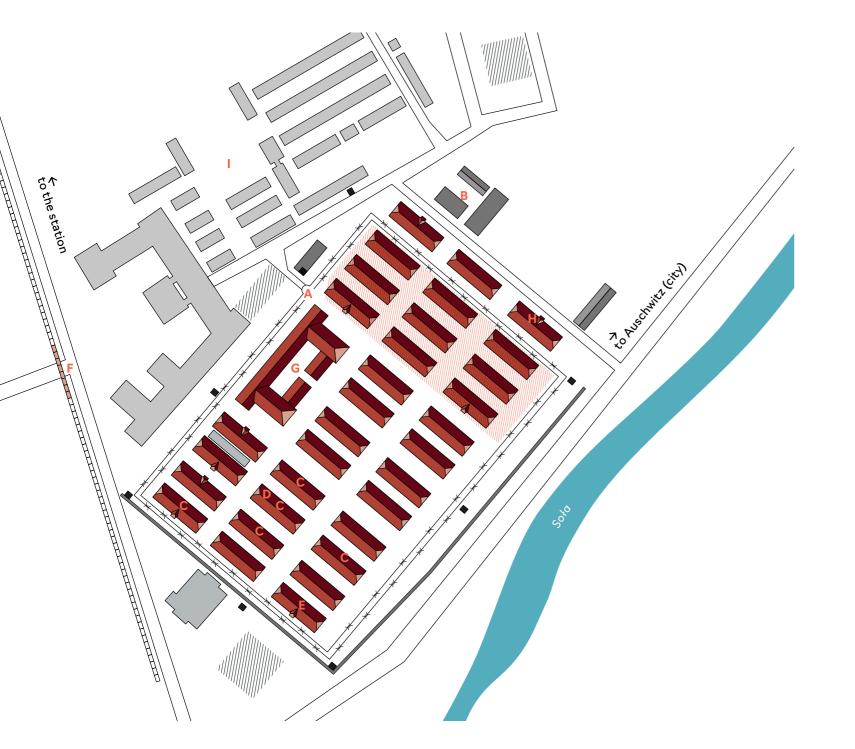
APMA-B

PILECKI _____

"Our comrades working as Pflegers [nurses] who the following day had to clear out the corpses said that it was a terrible sight. ... They [those murdered] must have been Bolshevik senior ranks judging by the uniforms, from different formations, in which they were gassed. This was the first effort there at gassing using Prussic acid."



The Auschwitz main camp



- A Entry gate to the camp with the words "Work Sets You Free"
- B Gas chamber and crematorium
- C Prisoners' sick bay
- "Treatment room" in Block 20, where prisoners were killed with phenol injections
- "Death Block": Block 11 with a "death wall" in the courtyard; first gassing deaths
- F Section of train tracks where prisoner transports were unloaded
- G Prisoners' kitchen
- H Camp commandant's office
- Service buildings and workshops

___ W

Electrified double barbed wire fence

- Russian prisoner-of-war camp (October 1941 – March 1, 1942)
- Guard towers
- Execution sites outside the camp enclosure (gravel pit)

PILECKI ___

"I assumed at the time that they were issuing these prisoners of war underwear and clothes, but did not know why they were using for that purpose the crematorium and the precious work time in that factory, where our fellows, working three shifts and round the clock, could not keep up with burning the remains of our fellow inmates."

Map of the main camp

Prisoners were first gassed to death as an experiment in a basement in the main camp (E). The Nazis then expanded this into mass killings and set up the first gas chamber in the main camp (B).

map: Christine Kitta

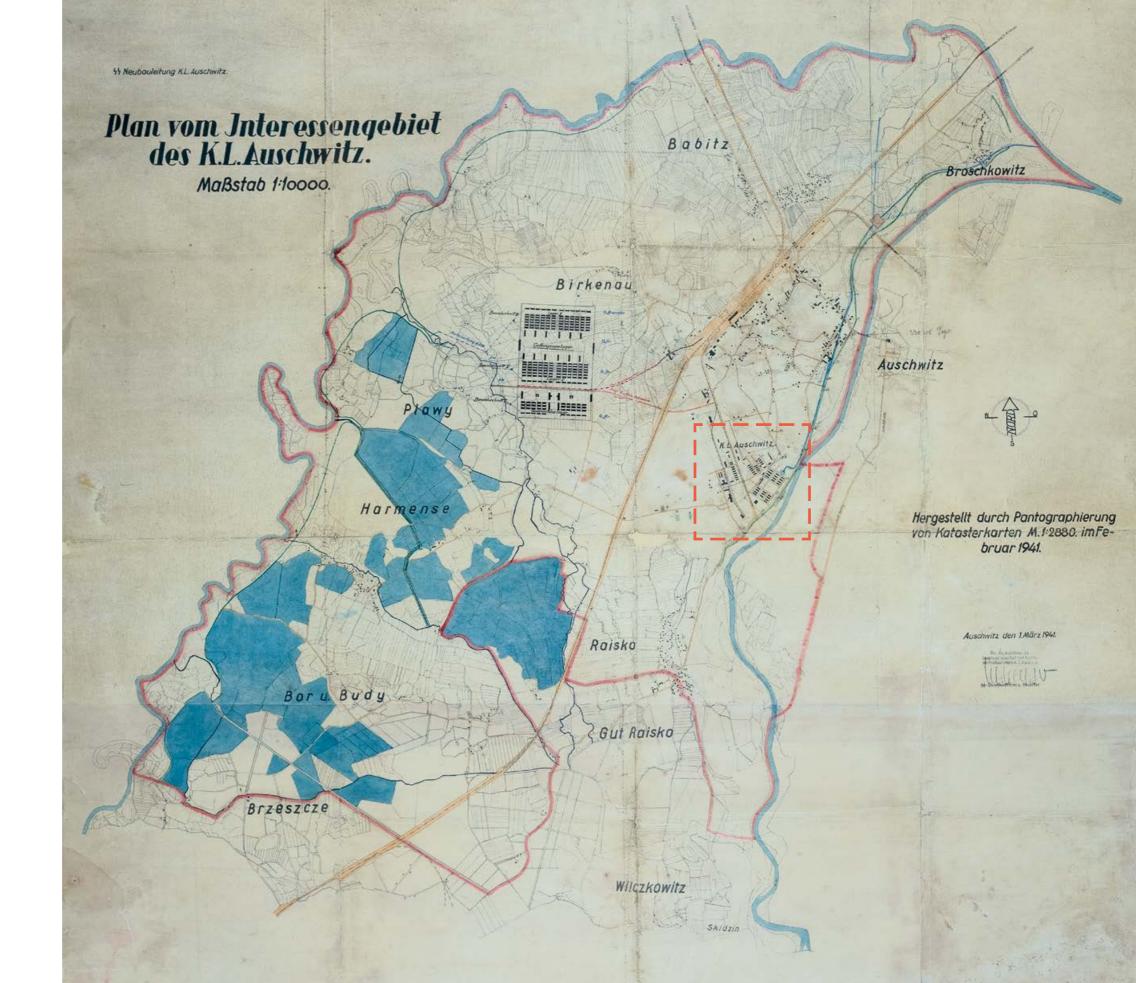
The Auschwitz main camp and the Birkenau extension

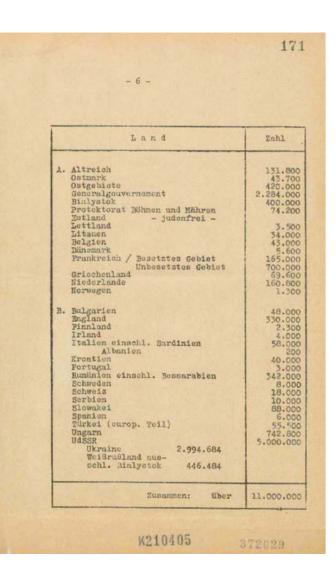
Map of the new Auschwitz-Birkenau camp

In early 1941, Himmler initiated the plans to expand the camp. German companies such as Krupp and IG Farben set up operations nearby. They wanted to take advantage of the many prisoners that the German Reich made available to them as slave labor. The expansion was to create space for 100,000 prisoners.

APMA-B







Minutes of the Wannsee Conference, page 6

The minutes of the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 documented the organization of the Holocaust. Eleven million Jews from throughout Europe were to be deported to the East. The goal was their extermination. A simple table lists the number of Jews in the occupied countries.

PAAA Berlin, R 100857, Bl. 171

The genocide of the Jews

The Wannsee Conference – the meeting on the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" – took place in Berlin on January 20, 1942. There had already been systematic mass shootings of Jews since the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. The conference now addressed technical and organizational questions about how to efficiently murder the eleven million Jews in Europe. The first mass transports arrived in Auschwitz in the spring of that year. In late April, the Nazis sent mothers and children directly to the gas chambers.

Pilecki's network expanded over time into almost all of the work crews. In this way he was able to quickly learn what was going on in the camp. When he heard about the escape plans of fellow prisoners Stefan Bielecki and Wincenty Gawron, he commissioned them to sound the alarm in Warsaw: The Germans were gassing children, the elderly, and the sick immediately upon arrival, and everyone else was forced to work themselves to death.



PILECKI ___

"One wonders what the SS men were actually thinking.
There were a great many women and children in the
wagons. Sometimes the children were in cradles. They
were all to end their lives here together."

The deportation of Jews from Slovakia, Stropkov in Slovakia

In March and April 1942, young Jews were deported to Majdanek and Auschwitz; in May, entire families. The photograph shows Tova Mendel (with a headscarf) and Salomon Findling (tall man behind Tova) and their children Frederika, Helena, Mikulas, and Israel. They were deported from Stropkov, Slovakia, on May 23, 1942. None of them survived.

Yad Vashem

The valuable "Canada" warehouses in Auschwitz

Mountains of suitcases, shoes, and suspenders from newly arrived Jewish prisoners were taken to the tannery and sorted there. The inmates who did this frequently found jewelry and money hidden in the leather goods. The SS men collected these valuables for themselves, although this was explicitly forbidden. Whatever the SS missed, the prisoners secretly appropriated for themselves. By trading such items for food, medications, and clothing, they were able to significantly improve their own living conditions. In this way Pilecki-who had started working in "Canada"—and his associates were also physically in a better position to resist.

Pilecki's organization consisted of approximately one thousand men. They awaited orders from the Home Army to begin a prisoner uprising in the camp. Quasi-military plans for the liberation of the camp had existed for some time. Pilecki counted on the support of the Allies and expected them to bomb Auschwitz. However, he received no response. Pilecki was unsure if his reports had even made it through.



"In theory, it was forbidden to have products from 'Canada,' let alone bring them into the camp. There were constant checks at the gates. Anyone caught with something from 'Canada' went to the bunker and rarely returned. However, the level of risk in life in Auschwitz differed from that in the outside world, and it was always so great that it was nothing to risk one's life for some pleasing trifle."



"Canada" in Auschwitz

Prisoners sorting the personal effects of the new arrivals. The objects were stored in an area that the prisoners ironically referred to as "Canada," since that country symbolized wealth for many of them. The photo was taken by SS men in late May or early June 1944.

[&]quot;Das Auschwitz-Album", Yad Vashem

Escape plan

The SS learned from prisoners working as informers about a secret Polish resistance group in the concentration camp. In March 1943, the Nazis began targeting Polish prisoners—including many of Pilecki's associates—to be murdered or transferred to a different camp. Resistance in Auschwitz now appeared to Pilecki to be hopeless, all the more because there had been no indications from Warsaw in support of a prisoner uprising. Pilecki decided to flee the camp.

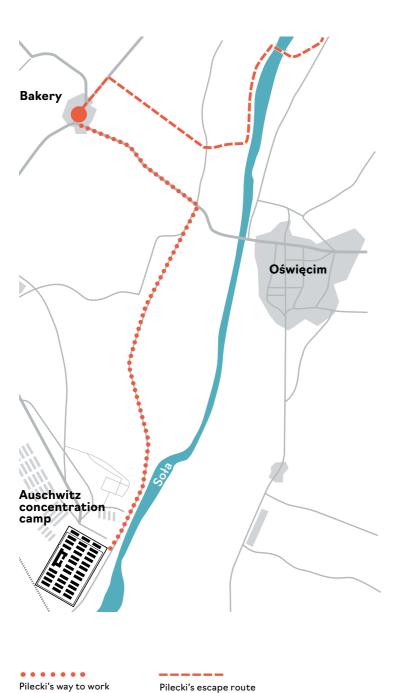
With two other men, Jan Redzej and Edward Ciesielski, Pilecki arranged a transfer to work in a bakery outside the camp. From there, the three men planned to escape on the night of Easter Monday — April 26, 1943 — as Pilecki believed the SS guards were usually more careless on holidays.

Map showing Witold Pilecki's escape route

map: Christine Kitta

Bakery building

APMA-B



PILECKI __

"For some months now we had been able to take over the camp on more or less a daily basis. We awaited an order on the assumption that without one, ... we could not act simply for our own benefit We could not try such an experiment without orders from [Home Army] High Command. But our hands itched daily. ... We still had great hope that we would be able to play a part as an organized element in an overall coordinated operation."

"Lately I have had no instructions.

Now the German have shipped out our best people with whom I've been working. Therefore, I'm going to leave.' Captain 159 looked at me in some surprise and said: 'Yes. I can see that, but can one pick and choose when one wants to come to Auschwitz and when one wants to leave?' I replied: 'One can.'"





Reactions of the outside world

The government-in-exile in London documented in detail the crimes of the Germans and Soviets in occupied Poland, gathering evidence through its underground network and Polish diplomats abroad. The exile government published books and eyewitness reports, organized public exhibitions, and displayed photo documents. The Allies were informed early on.

The first reports of the mass extermination of Jews reached the Western world in 1942. The enormous number of reported victims appeared implausible to the Allies. In the United States and Western Europe, little attention was paid to the fate of the Jewish population in the territories of Eastern Europe occupied by the Germans. Their own war efforts had priority. Newspapers also published hardly anything about the killing.

The evidence collected by Pilecki and his network as well as by many other initiatives and organizations could not arouse the Allies to action. Skepticism and indifference prevailed. But the documents do prove that the world was well aware of the crimes.

4

Władysław Sikorski with Charles de Gaulle and Winston Churchill at the presentation of a tank

The Polish armed forces in the West had almost 200,000 soldiers and provided significant support for Britain. The pilots defended British air sovereignty and Polish ships transported war materials and accompanied the convoys from the United States. Polish soldiers fought on all front lines, from Norway to Libya.

IWM



Churchill and Sikorski accompanied by high-ranking British and Polish officials in the yard of No. 10 Downing Street in London, August 5, 1940

PISM

82

PILECKI ___

"The prisoners beg the Polish Government, for the love of God, to bombard these warehouses and end their torment. Should they [the prisoners] die in the attack, it would be a relief given the conditions. This is the prisoners' urgent and wellthought request by the witness of their torment."

With these words, Stanisław
Radziwiłł summarized Pilecki's
request for the bombing of
Auschwitz. In addition to other
messages Rowecki had gathered
in Warsaw, in Geneva Radziwiłł
received the request via the Polish
agent Julia Lubomirska.

Pilecki's request reached London

Along an arduous and risky journey clear across Nazi-occupied Europe, reports from the Warsaw underground reached Sikorski in London. In a letter to Air Chief Marshal Richard Peirse, commander-in-chief of Britain's Bomber Command, Sikorski's aide-de-camp summarized the request for the camp to be bombed.

National Archives Kew, London

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Reply to the request to have Auschwitz bombed

Reply to the request to have
Auschwitz bombed Included in the
communication were Prime Minister
of the Polish government-in-exile in
London General Sikorski, his aidede-camp Stefan Zamoyski, head of
Bomber Command Air Chief Marshal
Richard Peirse, and the chief of
the British Air Staff Charles Portal.
Charles Portal wrote to Peirse,
"an attack on a polish concentration
camp at Oswiecim is an undesirable
diversion for our bomber force and
unlikely to achieve its purpose."

National Archives Kew, London

Polish G.H.Q. Rubens Hotel, S.W.1. OPY.

28C

SECRET.

30th. December, 1940.

A few days ago the following report was received from Poland.

"The prisoners of the concentration camp in Oswiecim implore for a bombing of the camp in the shortest possible time.

The camp in Oswiecim is at present one of the worst organized and most inhuman concentration camps.

The prisoners number many thousands (the figure is estimated at 20,000.)

The camp is continually being enlarged. Conditions there are incredible. It is a wonder how the prisoners manage to survive.

According to our informations, it would not be difficult for a bomber to reach Oswiecim, for the river Vistula would indicate the route. The camp is located in the barracks of the former immigration office built during the last war when it contained repatriation offices. The whole camp is surrounded by barbed wire with electric current of high tension. There are munition dumps of the Gestapo close to the camp which could by being exploded give the opportunity of escape to hundreds of prisoners.

The prisoners implore the Polish Government to have the gamp bombed. The destruction of the electrified barbed wire, the ensuing panic and darkness prevailing, the chances of escape would be great. The local population will hide them and help them to leave the neighbourhood. The prisoners are confidently awaiting the day when Polish planes from Great Britain will enable their escape. This is the prisoners unanimous demand to the Polish Government in London.

COPY.

mmander-in-Chief the Polish Army A.D.C.

No. 46/41

TB

4th. January, 1941.

Sir,

I have been instructed by my Commander-in-Chief to put before you the enclosed copy of a report lately received from a German Concentration Camp in Oswiecim S.W. Poland. It is yet another proof of the vital importance attached throughout the population of our Country to the necessity and urgency of effective bomber action of the R.A.F. over Poland.

In this special case it seems to be a duty to comply with the demand of several thousand Poles suffering under rigogous conditions. A successful result should certainly prove to be worth the effort. General Sikorski attaches great importance to this matter and would be very pleased if you kindly gave it your consideration and advised him of your decision.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Signed) STEFAN ZAMOYSKI. Count Stefan Zamoyski, Captain. A.D.C.

Air Marshal Sir Richard E.C. Peirse, K.C.B., C.B., D.S.O.,
Air Ministry,
Whitehall
S.W.1.

29/10

(Dept OA)

SECRET.

Wanuary, 1941.

Dear Duine

I have received your letter dated 8th January with enclosures from Zamoyski, the A.D.C. to General Sikorski.

I think you will agree that, apart from any political considerations, an attack on the Polish concentration camp at Oswiecim is an undesirable diversion for our bomber force and unlikely to achieve its purpose. The weight of bombs that could be carried to a target at this distance with the limited force available, would be very unlikely to cause enough damage to enable prisoners to escape.

I should be grateful if you would reply to General Sikorski, explaining this to him.

Yours eve

Air Marshel Sir Richard E. C. Peirse, K.C.B., D.S.O., A.F.C.,
Headquarters, Bomber Command,
Royal Air Force,
c/o G.P.O. High Wycombe,
BUCKS.

CRET.

Headquarters,
Bomber Command,
Royal Air Force,
c/o G.P.O.,
HIGH YCOMBE, Bucks.

RECE/DO/6.

8th. January, 1941.

I enclose a copy of a letter I have had from Zamoyski, A.D.C. to General Sikorski, in which a proposal is made that we should attack a Polish Concentration Camp at OSWIECIM. I cannot here assess the political value of such an expedition, but if you judge it to be a desirable diversion then this is to let you know that from the point of view of distance I could undertake it with a small Wellington force under suitable moonlight conditions.

I feel pretty sure that when our Polish Wellington Squadrons are fully trained we shall have a good deal of pressure exerted upon us to let them undertake, from time to time, attacks on targets in Poland.

If your answer in the present case is a negative one, perhaps you will let me know what line you think I had best take with Sikorski or you may, yourself, wish to have a word with him.

(Sgd.) R. E. C. PEIRSE.

Air Chief Marshal Sir C.F.A. Portal,
K.C.B.,D.S.O.,M.C.,
Air Ministry,
King Charles Street,
hitchall, S.W.1.

Headquarters,
Bomber Command,
Royal Air Porce,
c/o G.P.O.,
HIGH YCCMBE, Bucks.

RECE/DO/6.

15th. January, 1941.

290

Many thanks for your letter of the 12th.

January in reply to mine about General Sikorski's proposal. I enclose for you a copy of my reply to the General.

'Sgd) R. E. C. PEIRSE

P.S. I have after all as you will see made so steerlie mention of the.

RECP.

Air Chief Marshal Sir C.F.A. Portal,

R.C.B., D.S.O., M.C.,

Air Mini try (Dept.OA),

King Charles Street,

Whitehell, S.W.1.

Copyrig NOT TO BE REPRODU

OF SUCCEST.

Hoadquarters,

Bomber Commend,

Royal Air Porce,

Q'o C.F.O.,

HIG WYCOME, Pucks.

HEGE/DO/56.

19th. Jamuary, 1941.

I have given very careful consideration to the proposal made to me by Captain Count Temographi in his letter No.46/41 dated the 4th. January in regard to the air attack of the Concentration Comp at OSTECIM. I have also discussed it with Sir Charles Fortal.

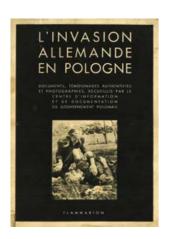
Our conclusion is, I am sorry to say, that a successful attack on OSTECIM is not a practical proposition.

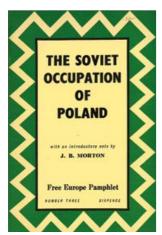
There are too main reasons for this. Firstly, my bomber forces have a major role directed against cortain Industrial resources and provided so can achieve the necessary concentration it is estimated that we are likely to precipitate a crisis in Commany's war economy this year. This requires that so take advantage of every opportunity to strike against those targets with all our available force. The weather conditions which would enable us to attack targets in Feland are just those which allow us to engage our major targets in Cornery.

Secondly, our experience shows that sporadic attacks on targets such as OSEECEN would be very unlikely to achieve the result for which it is hoped - namely, the destruction of barbed wire defences and an examition dusp - in such manner as would permit the escape of the prisoners. Air benbardment of this nature would need to be extramely accurate if serious essentities were not to be caused amongst the prisoners themselves. Such accuracy cannot be guaranteed.

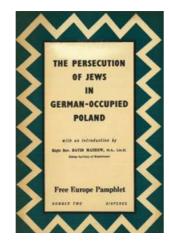
I am so sorry to have to give you this answer, but I know you will appropriate the reasons and the fact that only by rigid concentration of our banbur forces on the main objectives are so littly to be effective against our common energy.

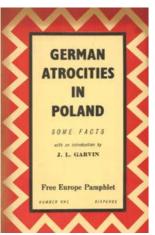
(Sgd.) R. E. C. PEIRSE.

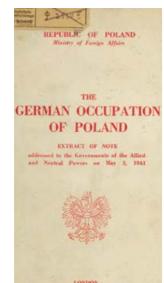








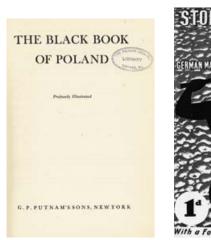


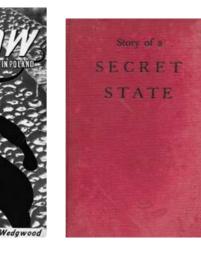




POLISH







Books published by – or in collaboration with – the government in exile, 1940–44

Public Relations

The Polish government-in-exile published books and eyewitness reports, organized exhibitions, and presented photographic documentation of the crimes of the Nazis in Poland. The Allies long viewed Auschwitz as an ordinary albeit brutal concentration camp for Polish political prisoners. Sikorski worked persistently to enlist support for Poland. He was constantly on the move—he met with Churchill and traveled to the United States.





Poland Exhibition

The exhibition was displayed in Edinburgh on behalf of the Polish government-in-exile in 1942/43.

PUMST

General Władysław Sikorski's visit to the United States in 1941

NAC

The German invasion of the Soviet Union: The beginning of the mass murder of Jews in the East

The partition of Poland by Hitler and Stalin led to brutal economic exploitation as well as the deportation and murder of countless Poles. When the Germans subsequently invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, the alliances shifted. Stalin joined the anti-Hitler coalition. The British pushed the Polish government-in-exile to resume diplomatic relations with the Soviet occupying power. This strategy made it almost impossible for the exiled government to draw the attention of the Allies to Soviet crimes in Poland.

After the German Wehrmacht invaded the Soviet Union, SS mobile killing units or Einsatzgruppen carried out mass shootings of the Jewish civilian population with increasing frequency. The government-in-exile learned about these events in the East from various sources. Allied and Polish cryptologists had succeeded in breaking the Enigma machine—the German cipher device—which meant the Allies could eavesdrop directly on secret German dispatches.

Signing of the Polish-Soviet Agreement, July 30, 1941

Churchill pressured the Polish government-in-exile to work together with the Soviet Union.
Sikorski, who was counting on British support in restoring Polish prewar borders, had to comply.
Poland thus involuntarily ended up on the side of the Soviet Union, which had been occupying Poland's eastern territory since 1939.

From left to right:
Władysław Sikorski, Anthony Eden,
Winston Churchill, and Iwan Maiski
NAC





"In my opinion it is incorrect to describe Polish information regarding German atrocities as trustworthy. The Poles, and to a far greater extent the Jews, tend to exaggerate German atrocities in order to stoke us up."

Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, British diplomat and member of the Joint Intelligence Committee during WWII

"... we had to be absolutely precise and very cautious not to meet with the criticism that we exaggerated."

Edward Raczyński, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the government-in-exile

>>

Massacre of Babyn Yar

In the Babyn Yar ravine near Kyiv, the Nazis killed more than 33,000 Jews in mass executions on September 29 and 30, 1941. The SS men searched through the mountains of clothing left behind for valuables. Historians estimate the total number of victims of the "Holocaust by bullets" to be 1.5 to 2 million. Despite the intercepted German messages, British intelligence considered the report to be a "product of Slav imaginations." They treated them as pure inventions, typical war propaganda, as the British themselves had circulated during the First World War.

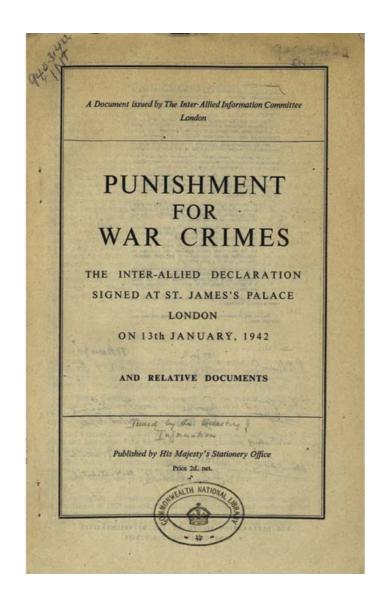
Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung



War crimes must be punished

Sikorski urgently sought to secure military support from the Allies as well as their commitment to punish Nazi atrocities after the war. To this end, the government-in-exile published The Black Book of Poland, a meticulous documentation of German crimes in Poland since the start of the war.

Under Sikorski's direction, the exile governments of occupied European countries met at St. James Palace in London on January 13, 1942, to demand that the perpetrators be tried in a court of law after the war. The Declaration of St. James Palace was a precursor to the Nuremberg trials, where beginning in the fall of 1945 the major war criminals were held accountable for their actions during the war. The Inter-Allied Commission on the Punishment of War Crimes and the United Nations War Crimes Commission (UNWCC) also had their origins in this declaration.





"[This declaration,] on the one hand ... serves as a warning to all those who oppress or help to oppress our civil populations by making them clearly understand that there can be no crime without punishment; on the other, it gives a gleam of hope and comfort to all those millions of men and women who, while still fulfilling their daily tasks in their Occupied Fatherland, will henceforward know that punishment awaits the enemy's acts of violence, that there is no suffering without redress."

Sikorski's opening address at the Inter-Allied St. James Conference on January 13, 1942

~

The first page of the St. James Declaration

The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union did not sign the St. James Declaration. Many Western Allies considered the reports of German war crimes to be exaggerated. In this phase, however, disinterest and reluctance to commit to expensive obligations also predominated.

NLA

Amsterdam • • Berlin NETHERLANDS London • Warsaw **GERMAN REICH** Kiew • Brüssel BELGIUM Guernsey (1940 german occupied) • Lemberg Luxemburge Praha • Paris SLOVAKIA Atlantic Ocean FRANCE Bratislava HUNGARY Vienna • •••• Front lines January 1942 Budapest SWITZERLAND ••• Front lines November 1942 Vichy • **ROMANIA** Borders 1942 Zagreb **Vichy France** Black Sea Bukarest • CROATIA Belgrad Administrative borders within the occupied territories Marseille **BULGARIA** German Reich ITALIA Sofia **PORTUGAL** Adriatic Sea Territories annexed by Corsica Istanbul Madrid the German Reich Rome Ankara • Lisbon Tirana • SPAIN ALBANIA **TURKEY** Territories occupied by the German Reich Sardinia Balearics GREECE Tates allied with the German Reich and its occupied terri-SYRIA Mediterranean Sea tories, including Italy and Italian-occupied territories Gibraltar (brit.) Cyprus (brit.) Rhodes Algier Allied powers Tunis • Damascus / Sicily Beirut **ALGERIA** Neutral states MAROC TUNISIA (french) Malta (brit.) (french)

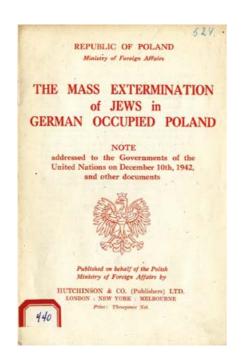


Jan Karski

Jan Karski, Polish diplomat and officer in the underground, was a courier for the Home Army. He smuggled himself into the Warsaw Ghetto and a short time later reported about the "Final Solution" personally-as an eyewitness to the Holocaust-to US President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Karski's information provided the basis for Raczyński's note of December 10, 1942. Edward Raczyński, foreign minister of the government-in-exile, sent this initial official report on the Holocaust to the foreign ministers of all the Allied countries. He confirmed "that the German authorities aim with systematic deliberation at the total extermination of the Jewish population of Poland."

USHMM

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Raczyński's note of December 10, 1942

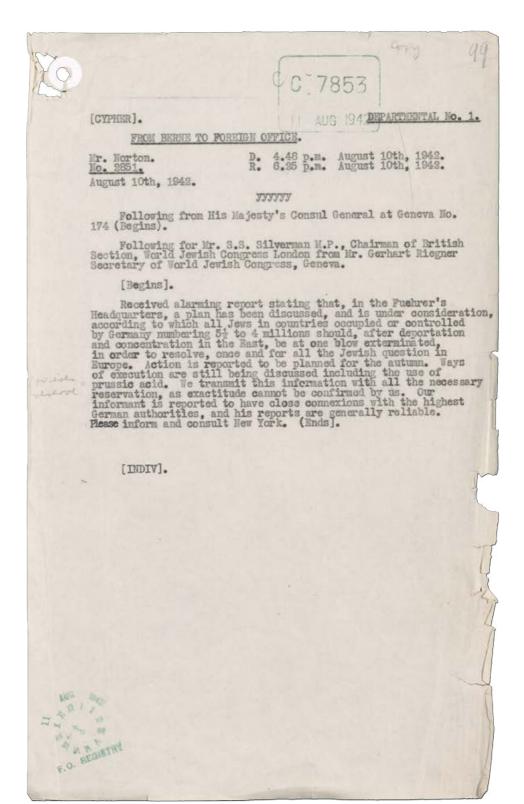
Official diplomatic memo from the Polish government-in-exile to the foreign ministers of the Allies

Library of Gdańsk PAN



"Most recent reports present a horrifying picture of the position to which the Jews in Poland have been reduced. The new methods of mass slaughter applied during the last few months confirm the fact that the German authorities aim with systematic deliberation at the total extermination of the Jewish population of Poland and of the many thousands of Jews whom the German authorities have deported to Poland from Western and Central European countries and from the German Reich itself."

Edward Raczyński, Minister of Foreign Affairs



The Riegner telegram to the Foreign Ministry in London, 1942

The National Archives of the UK

of the government-in-exile, December 10, 1942

AXIS FROM BOSNIA

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6 YEAR OLD

"BLACK DIAMOND" STRAIGHT RYE

2.19 full quart

"Black Diamond" straight bourbon its sister whiskey, is also 6 yrs. old 200 pd. Full quart 2.15

10-YEAR-OLD IMPORTED SCOTCH WHISKEY

3.29 1/5 quart

20-YEAR-OLD IMPORTED BRANDY

2.99 4/5 quart













YOUR FAVORITE BRANDS AT ROCK BOTTOM PRICES

CALVERT SPECIAL. Blended whiskey. THREE FEATHERS. Blended whiskey. 721/2 grain neutral spirits. 86.8 pf. 721/2 grain neutral spirits. 86.8 pf.

CARSTAIRS WHITE SEAL. Blended whis-key, 72% grain neutral spirits, 86.8 pf. mouth, the world's finest. GOLDEN WEDDING. Blend of straight imported dunonner. The last of the whiskies, all 5 years old. 86 pf. world-famous French aperitifs. MOUNT VERNOM. Straight rye whiskey, SHEWAN-JONES BRANDY. From Cal bettled in bond. 100 proof. formia. A fine domestic brandy, 86 p CARIOCA RUMS. White and Gold labels, from Puerto Rico. 36 proof.

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"Warsaw Fears Extermination"

The public learned of the Nazi atrocities only through isolated reports. The international press generally mentioned the mass murder of the Jews only in short blurbs in the interior of the newspapers. A 1942 article in The New York Times about the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto appeared on page 7, inconspicuous between ordinary news and advertising.

The New York Times, July 29, 1942: "Warsaw Fears Extermination", p. 7

» Transcript on p. 192

Evidence from many sources

Like Pilecki's network in Auschwitz, other networks and organizations also provided information about the beginning Holocaust and sought to rouse the world to action. One of these was the Jewish workers' party, the Bund, which was active in the Polish underground. According to a Bund report from May 1942, the Nazis had already murdered 700,000 Polish Jews. Through this report, Szmul Zygielbojm – a Jewish member of the government-in-exile in London – had early knowledge about the dramatic situation in Poland. In late 1942, he urgently appealed to the world to bring an end to the mass murder.

Gerhart Riegner of the Jewish World Congress in Geneva was one of the first people to warn the Allies about the planned murder of "31/2 to 4 million" Jews. The Allies regarded the so-called Riegner telegram of August 1942 as a "wild rumor, fueled by Jewish anxieties."

"Germans Murder 700.000 Jews in Poland"

The article, which referred to "the greatest massacre in the world's history," was published on page 5 of a six-page issue.

Daily Telegraph, 25 June 1942, p. 5 » Transcript on p. 192

GERMANS MURDER 700,000 JEWS IN POLAND TRAVELLING GAS CHAMBERS

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NUFACTURE TO EN

HE DAILY TELEGRAPH AND MORNING POST, THURSDAY, JUNE 25, 1942

U.S. AIR PATROL

OFF ALASKA

SMALL SHOPS TO MERGE

ALTERNATIVE TO

KING SIGNS From All Quart SOVIET PACT





AC-SPHINX SPARKING PLUGS

Emanuel Ringelblum (first on the left) and Oneg Shabbat staff member Rachel Auerbach with Jewish writers and historians, 1930

The secret Oneg Shabbat archive was started in the Warsaw Ghetto under the leadership of historian Emanuel Ringelblum. Ringelblum and his resistance group collected and secured documents and diaries about the life and suffering of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, including also reports by the few who managed to successfully escape from the Treblinka extermination camp. The Bund report drew its information from this Ringelblum Archive.

YIVO





"The responsibility for the crime of the murder of the whole
Jewish nationality in Poland rests first of all on those who are
carrying it out, but indirectly it falls also upon the whole of
humanity, on the peoples of the Allied nations and on their
governments, who up to this day have not taken any real steps
to halt this crime."

From Szmul Zygielbojm's suicide note



Sven Norrman (right), director of the Polish branch of the Swedish company ASEA. This was the Warsaw seat of the company prior to the war

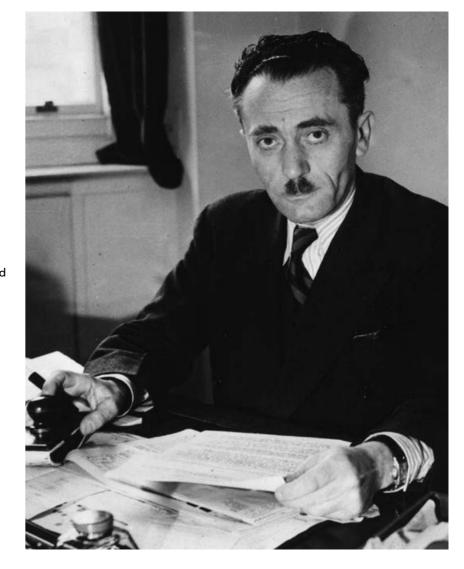
The Swedish businessman Sven Norrman worked as a courier for the Polish underground. In Warsaw, Rowecki passed the Bund report on Nazi crimes in Poland on to him. Thanks to Sweden's neutrality in the Second World War, Norrman was able to travel throughout Europe unchecked. He smuggled the documents as microfilms via Stockholm to the Polish government-in-exile in London.

3B

Szmul Zygielbojm

Zygielbojm was one of two Jewish members of the Polish government-in-exile. He emphatically demanded public measures be taken to end the mass murder of European Jews, "the greatest crime in human history." The inaction of the Allies and the murder of his wife and oldest son in the Warsaw Ghetto left him in despair. He committed suicide in May 1943.

PISM



When the world learned about Auschwitz

Reports about the Holocaust increased during the fall of 1942. On November 25, the influential newspaper The New York Times for the first time mentioned the Nazis' program "toward complete liquidation" of Polish Jews, referring to "great crematoriums" in Auschwitz, albeit buried on page 10. Only on December 18, 1942, did a report about the "cold-blooded extermination" of Jews appear on the front page of the newspaper. The New York Times also published the actual text of The Joint Declaration by Members of the United Nations, a formal statement to the world about the Holocaust, in which twelve allied nations pledged to prosecute the extermination of the Jewish people. Newspapers around the world published the declaration as well.

By that time at the latest, the world was aware of the genocide of European Jewry. Politicians could no longer claim to know nothing about the "Final Solution." The mass deportations and the killings, however, were not stopped. With the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the Jewish population sent a signal in April 1943. The Nazis, however, brutally suppressed the uprising. The mass murder continued.

"11 Allies Condemn Nazi War on Jews"

The New York Times, 18 December 1942, p. 1 » Transcript on p. 194

"All the News That's

The New York Times.

South From Coast to

Divide Axis Force

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MAYOR, ICKES ACT HERE

Dewey Proposes New Fiscal Year To Start April 1 on Cash Basis

FLYING FORTRESSES BLAST BIZERTE AND TUNIS

AND MAUL HIS ENCIRCLED ARMORED FORCES;

U. S. PLANES STRIKE WARSHIPS OF THE FRENCH FLEET BURNING AT TOULON DESERT TRAP SHUT

Marks Six-Day Air

in a 'Thankless' Task

War News Summarized



FORTRESSES ERASE City Is in Confusion in Test 12 ZERO ATTACKERS Of Double Air Raid Signals of the

THE PLAY

Hamlet,' at the Kuo T'ai Theatre in Chungking,

KILLS POLISH JEWS

Slaughter of 250,000 in Plan to Wipe Out Half in Country This Year Is Reported

REGIME IN LONDON ACTS

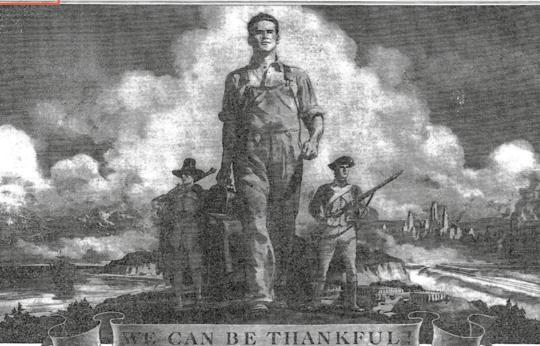
Officials of Poland Publish Data-Dr. Wise Gets Check Here by State Department

THE PRESIDENT OF ECUADOR ADDRESSING THE PAN-AMERICAN UNION

OUR CAUSE IS AS ONE, MEXICO MAY DRAFT U. S. CITIZENS THERE

Mercury





WE can be thankful that the Hudson, the Ohio and the Mississippi are not "rivers of blood"—like the

We can be thankful for the spirit of unity that has prevailed throughout America during the greatest crisis of our history.

We can be thankful for the privilege of paying larger and larger individual income taxes—thankful for our ability to pay them!

We can be thankful for our abundance of good and

We can be thankful that justice and freedom and human rights are written indelibly into the law of our land—in

our Constitution and Bill of Rights.

We can be thankful for the tolerance and the blessings of liberty which each of us is permitted to enjoy as

These are privileges which we, as Americans, must pro-tect and respect—never abuse. For even the right to enjoy

for this, we, too, are thankful.

wholesome food, our adequate housing and warm clothing. good whiskey — depends, in the long run, upon the discretion and wise conduct of the individual.

For many years the House of Seagram has consistently urged moderation in drinking. On this Thanksgiving Day, we who make fine whiskey are pleased and gratified to know that our continued efforts to promote the wise use of liquor have been commended and supported by the trade, the public, the press, the legislators and

THE HOUSE OF SEAGRAM Fine Whiskies Since 1857



"Himmler program kills Polish Jews" and "Details reaching Palestine"

News about the murder of the Jewish population spread. Oświęcim (the Polish name for Auschwitz) was publicly referred to as the site of mass murder for the first time.

The New York Times, 25 November 1942, p. 10 » Transcript on pages 196-197

Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto

Waffen SS soldiers leading captured Jews to the assembly point for deportation. On April 19, 1943, Jewish resistance fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto waged an uprising. By that time, the Nazis had already deported hundreds of thousands of Jews to the Treblinka extermination camp and gassed them there. The poorly armed insurgents managed to resist the German troops for four weeks. On May 16, 1943, the Nazis suppressed the uprising and destroyed the Great Synagogue.

Yad Vashem

Report crimes!

Publications of the Polish government-in-exile

Rafał Ruciński

In September 1939, the Polish authorities became aware of the particular nature of the violence in the unfolding armed conflict. This was not just another war aimed at shifting a specific border or capturing a city. The goal of Germany's invasion was the total annihilation of the Polish state and the enslavement of its citizens in line with Nazi ideology. To justify repression in occupied Poland, the Germans embarked on a wide-ranging propaganda campaign, reporting alleged "Polish crimes" committed against the German minority.

During the September 1939 campaign, the Polish government fled to Romania, where its members were interned and effectively lost the ability to exercise power. President Ignacy Mościcki decided to transfer power to representatives of the émigré Polish opposition in France, mainly represented by the so-called *Front Morges* and members of the National Party, Labor Party, Polish Socialist Party, and People's Party. The new Polish authorities, residing in Angers and later in London after the fall of France, sought to counter Nazi propaganda by seeking credible accounts and documents from home that demonstrated violations of international law. For this purpose, specialized units were established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Government in autumn

1939 to compile information flowing in from Poland. These included the Social Department at the Presidium of the Council of Ministers and the Ministers' Committee for National Affairs. Utilizing this data, the Ministry of Information undertook the fight on an informational front. The gathered reports were intended to serve as evidence in the future post-war trials of perpetrators. Moreover, it was hoped that credible source material would break British skepticism towards reports of German atrocities.¹

The publications examined at the exhibition represent only a small selection from over thirty titles issued between 1940 and 1945 by the Ministry of Information of the Polish government-in-exile. Nonetheless, they effectively illustrate key moments when the global public opinion gained and then expanded its knowledge about the criminal activities of the German Reich in the occupied territories.

The first publication issued by the émigré Polish authorities was L'invasion allemande en Pologne, presented in Paris on 20 April 1940. An English version entitled German invasion of Poland was published in May of the same year. The publication presents the course of the September campaign and the turmoil faced by the civilian population through photographs by Julien Bryan and eyewitness testimonies. At the same time, employees of the Ministry of Information worked on a series of publications under the Free Europe publishing house. Additional publications were released in 1940, including German Atrocities in Poland and The Persecution of Jews in German-occupied Poland. The first informed about the German campaign known as the Intelligenzaktion: the annihilation of culture and the Catholic Church through the destruction of monuments, closing of churches, and arrests of priests. The latter publication summarized the occupier's anti-Jewish legislation and reported the first murders of Polish Jews, destruction of synagogues, and extortion of ransom from Jewish communities by the occupying authorities. In early 1941, the

third volume in the "Free Europe Pamphlets" series titled *The Soviet Occupation of Poland* was published. The émigré authorities endeavored to address the occupation of the Second Polish Republic's eastern territories by the Soviet Union until the outbreak of the German-Soviet war and the signing of the Sikorski-Mayski Pact. However, this was viewed unfavorably by the British authorities, who saw the Soviets as future allies against Hitler. The pamphlet contained basic information about the situation of the civilian population under Soviet occupation.²

The second group of publications presented at the exhibition Witold Pilecki. In Resistance to Hitler and Stalin is directly associated with the figure of Witold Pilecki and his reporting on the German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. It should be noted that many of the reports sent by Pilecki from Auschwitz cannot be conclusively identified, so it is not possible to precisely trace their influence on the shaping of the finalized notes, dispatches, and publications that were broadly disseminated. Intelligence data, including work by Witold Pilecki, went through many intermediaries who used them to write reports that landed on their superiors' desks. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to determine which part of Pilecki's reports reached beyond the camp to Warsaw or was passed on to higher-ranking individuals in the Polish government-in-exile, and then to the Allied governments. Nonetheless, due to the fact that Witold Pilecki was the only known source of information about the Auschwitz camp in its early existence from 1940-41, it may be assumed that information on this topic comes from Captain Pilecki's reports.3

One of the first publications where information about the Auschwitz concentration camp appeared is an excerpt from a diplomatic note titled *The German occupation of Poland: Extract of note addressed to the Governments of the Allied and Neutral Powers* dated 3 May 1941. This note contained a document titled "Obóz w Oświęcimiu" ["The Camp in Auschwitz"] pre-

pared by Stefan "Grot" Rowecki, commander of the Union of Armed Struggle-Home Army (ZWZ-AK) in Warsaw, probably based on information from Aleksander Wielopolski, a courier who cooperated with Witold Pilecki. The publication contained fragments of the ZWZ-AK commander's report on Auschwitz concerning daily life in the camp, high mortality rates among prisoners, and the exceptional brutality of the guards. Even at that early stage, Auschwitz was known as an extremely harsh labor camp for Polish political prisoners. Moreover, the publication contained German acts detailing the violence of the occupation legal system and eyewitness accounts with attached documentation.

A reprint of the report also appeared on November 15, 1941, in the press bulletin Polish Fortnightly Review, a bi-weekly publication issued by the Polish Ministry of Information. This bulletin was aimed at the Western press. Editors could reprint information and articles from it without the need to gain prior permission.4 The same issue also included reports on the tragic living conditions in the Warsaw Ghetto. In the issue from July 1, 1942, also available at the exhibition, the bulletin published information about the expansion of the camp in Birkenau. There are also reports about the gassing of Soviet prisoners of war, which Witold Pilecki mentioned in his reports written after escaping from the camp in April 1943. It is presumed that this information might have come from him. The report of the Polish Underground regarding experiments with gas on Soviet prisoners of war reached London through the Swedish courier Sven Norrman, alias "Szirer", in late 1941.

Another publication pertaining to the Auschwitz concentration camp was *The Black Book of Poland*, published in 1942 in London and New York. It was a collection of documents, testimonies, eyewitness accounts, and ministerial summaries describing and illustrating with photographs Nazi crimes against the Polish nation and war crimes in occupied Poland

committed in just two years. These included massacres, torture, expulsions, forced colonization, persecutions, and destruction of cultural heritage. There was also an extensive chapter on concentration camps such as Auschwitz.

Two more publications in the exhibition deserve attention. Stop Them Now — German Mass Murder of Jews in Poland was published in December 1942 by Szmul Zygielbojm, a Jewish politician and activist, and member of the National Council. The publication was based on reports from the Jewish organization "Bund" in occupied Poland and accounts from other underground organizations. Zygielbojm sought to draw the world's attention to the extermination of Jews in occupied Poland, which entered a new phase with Operation Reinhardt — the industrial killing of the Jewish population in the camps in Bełżec, Treblinka, and Sobibór. Following Bund's lead, Zygielbojm cited what was then considered an incredible figure of 700,000 murdered Polish Jews, which later turned out to be true. As a protest against the world's inaction, Szmul Zygielbojm committed suicide on 12 May 1943, as the battles in the Warsaw Ghetto were coming to an end.

The second publication, Story of a Secret State, is associated with Jan Karski, a legendary courier and emissary of the Polish Underground State. Having witnessed the Holocaust firsthand, Karski plied the Western Allies to help the Jewish people and Poland. Despite his contacts with influential figures in the West and meetings with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt himself, he encountered a lack of interest in the fate of Polish Jews. While in the USA in 1944, at the behest of the émigré Polish authorities, he wrote the book Story of a Secret State based on his personal experiences. Karski described the struggle of the Polish Underground State against the occupier, his missions in the occupied country, and the extermination of Jews. The book was published in the USA in 1944 and became a bestseller.

The above publications were available to the average citizen in bookstores in Great Britain and the USA. The Ministry of Information also distributed them to leading politicians and figures in the Western world. Moreover, diplomatic notes such as the so-called "Raczyński Note" titled *The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland* from December 1942 were sent to representatives of allied and neutral countries. The extent of the Polish government-in-exile's action is evidenced by where we find these publications today — in India, the United States, and Australia.

The informational campaign led by the Polish government-in-exile began in the autumn of 1939, but only began to yield results in 1942. Polish intelligence data, initially viewed by the British as unreliable 6, began to overcome skepticism over time in tandem with information from MI6 sources. In St. James' Palace in January 1942, a coalition of governments from occupied states7 was formed under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski. These governments became signatories to the first declaration on the prosecution of German war criminals, a first step towards ensuring post-war justice. Only on 17 December 1942, in the House of Commons, did the governments of allied nations, including Great Britain and the United States, which were not signatories to the St. James Declaration, announce the joint United Nations Declaration on the Persecution of Jews in response to the "Raczyński Note". These actions formed the basis for the establishment of the United Nations War Crimes Commission (UNWCC), responsible for bringing German war criminals to justice after the conflict.8 Despite undeniable successes, the Polish informational campaign was unable to exert sufficient pressure on the Western Allies to utilize their capability for direct military intervention against concentration camps and halt the Holocaust.

These publications are the end result of a long exchange of information that linked occupied Poland

with London during the Second World War. It is worth remembering that they were the result of the efforts of thousands of anonymous informants, couriers, and members of the underground who obtained and passed on information, risking what was most valuable so that the free world could learn about the tragedy unfolding in the occupied territories.

- 1___ Dominika Uczkiewicz:, Problem odpowiedzialności karnej za zbrodnie wojenne w pracach rządu polskiego na emigracji (1939–1945). Warszawa 2022.
- 2___ Ibidem, pp. 66-74.
- 3 ___ Adam Cyra: Rotmistrz Pilecki. Ochotnik do Auschwitz. Oświęcim 2000.
- 4___ David Engel:, In the Shadow of Auschwitz. The Polish Government-in-exile and the Jews, 1939-1942. London 1987, p. 172.
- 5_ The note was named for the then Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Polish government-in-exile, Edward Raczyński.
- 6. In the words of Victor Cavendish-Bentinck, a British diplomat and member of the Joint Intelligence Committee: "In my opinion it is incorrect to describe Polish information regarding German atrocities as trustworthy. The Poles, and to a far greater extent the Jews, tend to exaggerate German atrocities in order to stoke us up." National Archives, FO371/34551.
- 7 ___ These were the governments of Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Yugoslavia, and France libre. Among the invited guests who did not sign the declaration were representatives from the USA, the nations of the British Commonwealth, the USSR and China.
- 8 ___ Michael Fleming: In the Shadow of the Holocaust. Poland, the United Nations War Crime Commission, and the Search for Justice. Cambridge 2022.

1944-1945

117

List of the 30 publications 1939–1945

Date 1939 Number of **Publications**

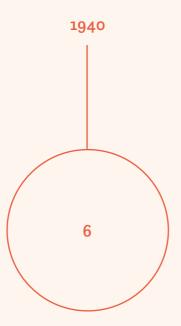
Location

Title

116

Les Relations Polono-Allemandes et Polono-Soviétique au Cours de la Période 1933-1939: Recueil de documents officiels

Paris



Paris/London

L'Invasion Allemande en Pologne

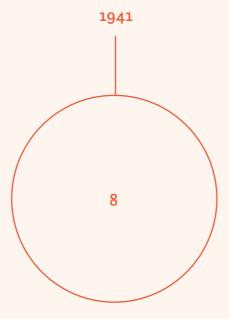
The German Invasion of Poland

Poland after One Year of War

German Atrocites in Poland: Some Facts (Introduction by James Louis Garvin/ Pamphlet 1)

The Persecution of Jews in Germanoccupied Poland. 1940 (Introduction by David Mathew/ Pamphlet 2)

The Soviet Occupation of Poland. (Introduction by James Bingham Morton/Pamphlet 3)



London

Hlond, August, The Persecution of the Catholic Church in Poland (preface by Cardinal Hinsley)

The German Fifth Column in Poland

German Occupation of Poland: Extract of Note Addressed to the Governments of the Allied and Neutral Powers on May 3

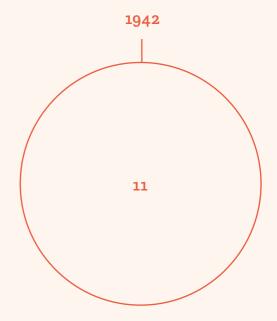
Slavery Under Hitler's New Order (Introduction by Walter Citrine)

Poland and Danzig

Underground Poland Speaks: Manifesto to the People of the World (Introduced by Philip Noel-Baker)

Eastern Poland

A Worker's Day Under German Occupation (Introduced by Jim Griffiths)



London

The German New Order in Poland

Bestiality... Unknown in any Previous Record of Human History

The Legal Position of Jews in Poland

The Martyrdom of Polish Professors

The Polish Spirit of Freedom

Unknown Europe (Introduced by Vernon Bartlett)

Stop Them Now: German Mass Murder of Jews in Poland (Introduced by Josiah Wedgwood)

German Failures in Poland: Natural Obstacles to Nazi Population Policy

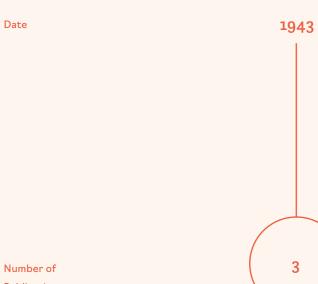
Labour's Protest: German Atrocities in Poland and Czechoslovakia

Towards a New Poland: A Programme of the Polish Underground Movement (Foreword by Arthur Greenwood; Introduction by Jan Kwapinski)

The Mass Extermination of Jews in Occupied Poland:

Note Addressed ot the Governments of the United Nations on 10 December 1942, and Other Documents

List of the 30 publications 1939–1945



Location

Title

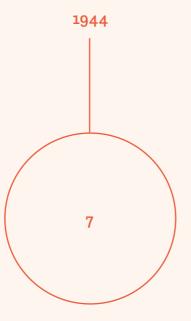
Number of Publications

The Protestant Church in Poland

London

The Quest for German Blood: Policy of Germanization in Poland

The Case of Henryk Erlich and Victor Alter (Foreword by Camille Huysmans)



London/Boston

Justice Outlawed (Foreword by Henry Slesser)

Story of a Secret State

About the Curzon Line and other lines

The Camp of Death

Democratic Poland Answers

How Warsaw Fell

Polish Labour Underground Press



London

63 Days: The Story of the Warsaw Rising

The Nazi Kultur in Poland



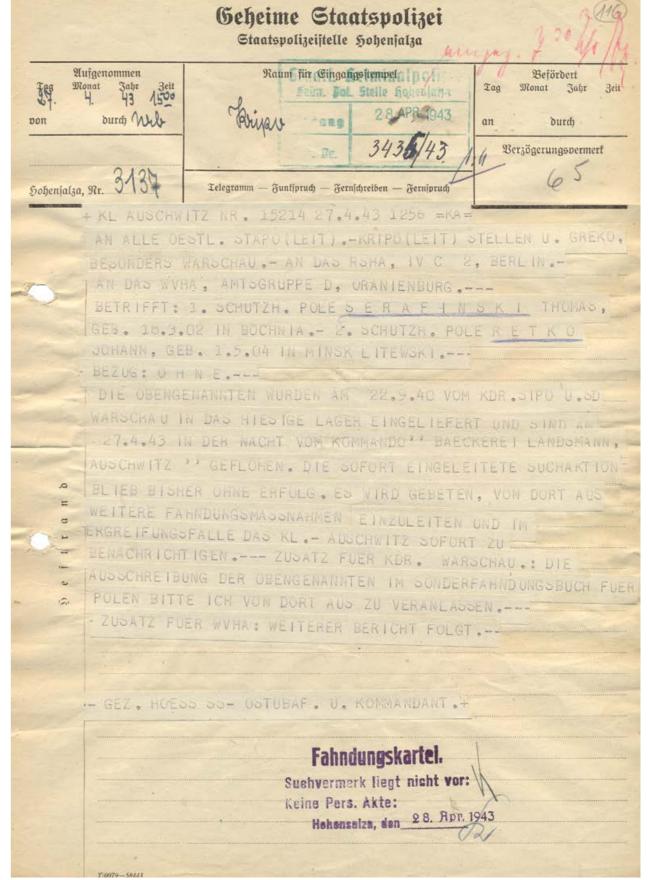


Auschwitz escapees in front of the Koryznówka house in Nowy Wiśnicz, summer of 1943

From left to right: Jan Redzej, Witold Pilecki, Edward Ciesielski.

APMA-B

Gestapo manhunt telegram
after Pilecki's escape
A total of 928 prisoners
attempted to escape from
Auschwitz. Only 221 succeeded.
APMA-B



Resistance in freedom

In Bochnia, Pilecki made contact with the underground. In the process, he met Tomasz Serafiński in a neighboring village. Serafiński, of all people, was the man whose papers he had taken before being arrested in Warsaw. Pilecki had been using Serafiński's name in Auschwitz to protect his own family.

The two men quickly came to trust one another. Pilecki told Serafiński about his plan to liberate the Auschwitz concentration camp. Serafiński discussed this with the resistance in Krakow. However, the atmosphere of mistrust was widespread. The Germans had infiltrated the Polish underground and many of its members had been arrested or were on the run. People in the underground didn't believe Serafiński and thought Pilecki was a German agent. Pilecki was initially refused forged papers that would have allowed him to travel safely through Poland.



Drawing of Serafiński and Pilecki

Maria Serafińska-Domańska, Private collection

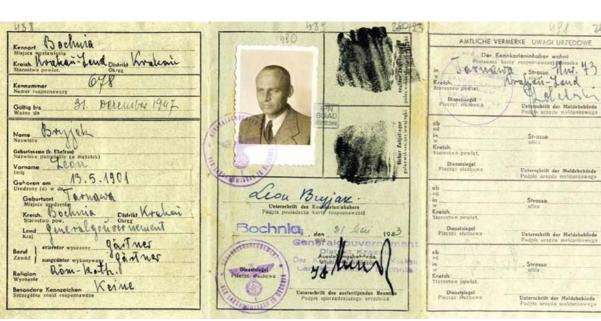


Mug shots of Edmund Zabawski in the Auschwitz concentration camp

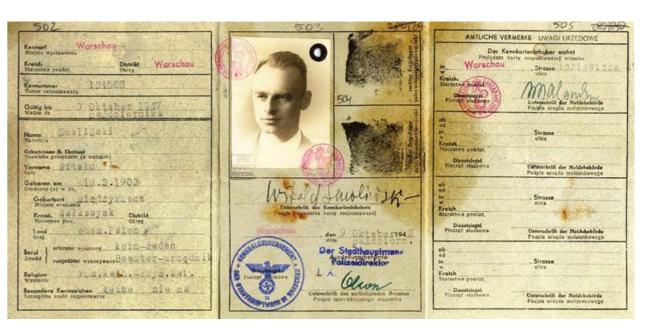
Through Zabawski's assistance, Pilecki was able to stay in Koryznówka. After Pilecki escaped, Zabawski remained in Auschwitz as his contact.

APMA-B





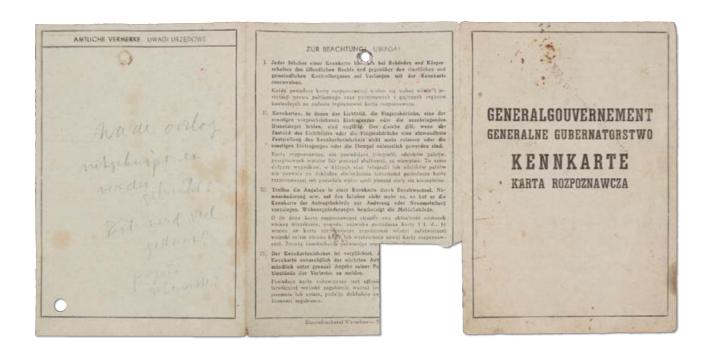




Forged identity cards of Pilecki

To keep his true identity secret, Pilecki had to change his alias often.

IPN





The "real" Tomasz Serafiński, ca. 1940

Maria Serafińska-Domańskat, Private collection



The safe house Koryznówka

After escaping, Pilecki was able to recuperate in Koryznówka. It was there that he wrote his first report.

Private collection of the Pilecki family

Pilecki, Redzej, and Ciesielski now understood how little the world knew about the German crimes in Auschwitz. For the Home Army in Warsaw, Pilecki composed an initial report about the structure and organization of the resistance in the camp. He showed that there was a sufficient number of inmates ready to resist in Auschwitz. Pilecki finally did receive forged papers from Warsaw, but the Home Army rejected his plans for an uprising.

The search for Pilecki led the Gestapo to the real Tomasz Serafiński. Fortunately for Serafiński, he did not resemble the mug shots, but the situation became increasingly dangerous for Pilecki. Nevertheless, with the help of Zabawski's family he was able to send encrypted messages to Auschwitz about his plans for an uprising. The contacts in the camp, however, advised against a revolt. They argued that an isolated operation would have little chance of success and that the Germans would respond with brutal reprisals.

The first page of Pilecki's report, written in June 1943 in Nowy Wiśnicz Ludmila Serafińska, Tomasz Serafiński's wife, keeps the elevenpage report, contrary to Pilecki's instructions. The original is still owned by the Serafiński family, a copy is in the Auschwitz-Birkenau State

Museum. Pilecki wrote a more detail-

ed version in Warsaw in the fall of

1943.

Czerwiec 1943 roku Wiśnicz

-110-

PARSTWOWE MUZEUM W OSWIREIMIU ARCHIVUM

Mipisane dla upamiętnienia nazwisk, faktów po szczęśliwie udanym samoplnym wyjściu z obozu w Oswięcimiu.

czasie od 15-20 II 1939 na rozkaz gen. Piekarskiego przez majora Landzenko zorganizowałem we Włodawie oddział konny 255 koni i pieszy ponad.150 ludzi. Ha to przyjechał oficer tej samej co ja brygady, starszy stopniem i mój przyjaciel Włodarkiewicz, któremu ustąpiłem dowództwa nad odziałem. Z oddziałem tym trwaliśmy konno i zbrojno "w różnych terminach do dnia 17. paźdź. 1939 a historię tegoż upemiętnili już moi koledzy. Oddział ten był macsątkiem organizacji TAP, którą założyliśmy w arszawie w pierwszej połowie listopadal939. W marszawie pracowałem jako główny inspektor TAP nom de guerre Witold, co sprawdzić możną dziś jesucze u pułk.Kurtiusa i por.Bielecklego. Dązyżem do wcielenia TAP do ZWZ. Podjalem pracy w Oświęcimiu, gdzie przyjechałem z kpt.Troinickim "Fred" warszawskim w nocy z dnia 21-22 września 1940. Po paru tygodniach zorganizowałem pierwszy związek organizacji wojskowej w Oswięcimiu wśród warszawiaków i przesłałem w październiku 40 r.meldunek do warszawy przez zwolnionego z lagru Wielopolskiego, pracującego w wywiadzie u Tęczyńskiego. Kierownictwo tej pierwszej "piątki górnej" powierzylem pułk. puranaciemu, którego znając już przez lat kilkanaście już w początku 40r. wojąggiem w warszawie do pracy w TAP. na stanowisko szefa sztabu. W listopadzi. 1940 r.zorganizoważem drugą piątkę górną" wsród najstarszych trzech cyfro-wych numerów.haftlingów". w maju 41r wsród kolegów z IV i V transportów marszawskich trzecią" piątkę górną" a w październiku 41 r. czwartą. nigdy nie trzymałem się ślepo liczby pięciu. Każda z tych "piątek górnych" nie wiedziała nic o piątkach innych, rozwijała się samodzielnie, rozgałęziając się tak caleko jak ją suma energii i zdolności jej członków/plus dolności kolegów stojących na szczeblach niższych a przez piątkę stale debudowywanych/ naprzed wypychały. Fraca polegała na ratowaniu życia kolegów przez korganizowanie cożywiania, polecanie władzom bloków, opiece na "krankenbau", organizowanie dostawy bielizny urządzanie na Lepszych posadech-stenowiskach, podtrzymywanie na duchu, kolportowanie wiadomości z sewnątrz, łączności z cywilną 1-nością, przekazywanie wiadomości obozowych na zewnątrz, powiązanie w jeden łańcuch energiczniejszych jednostek dla skoordynowanej akcji opanowania obozu w chwili gdy takowa nedejdzie z zewnątrz, będź to w formie rozkazu będź desantu. Tak jak w celu większego bezpieczenstwa powsiątem myśl by jedna piątka nie nie wiedziała o drugion, tak również w tym celu cmijałem//początkowo/ ludzi tojących na świecznikach", którzy tu byli pod własnymi nazwiskami jako dkownicy i słabo zakonspirowani robili już plany opanowania obozu. I tak w zwietniu 41r koledzy coraz to częściej poczęli przynosić wisdo-mości, że pułk. Stawasz i pułk. Kumuniecki przygotowują się do openowania obozu /przy tym mniej więcej podawano terminy/ i pułk. Kumuniecki idzie potym se zdrowymi na Katowice a pulk. Stawasz z chorymi zostaje na miejscu Zee względu na rozgłos narazie trzymałem się od tego z dala. Tymczasem organizacja /słowo to było zakazane i używane tylko w znaczeniu zupełnie innym/ rozwijała się dość szybko. Jielki mlyn lagru wyrzucał wciąż trupy. Jielu kolegów ginęło, których wciąż trzeba było zastępować innymi woięż trzeba było wszystko wiązeć na nowo. Wsyłaliśmy już na zewnątrz wiadomości, które były podawane przez radia zagraniczne. Władze lagru waciekały się. Daleko rozgaięzione już poszczególne piątki górne zaczęży "w terenie" wzajemnie się domacywać meldując o namaczlnej "innej jakiejś organ." w listopadzie 41r wystałem do marszawy przez zwolnionego z lagru cot. Libaonu meldunek. Jednocześnie pisałem w listaon do rodziny / sólna droga/ by mnie nie starano się z lagru wykupić, co mogłoby się zoarzyć, gdyż nie miałem żadneł sprawy a hazardowały mnie gra i oczekiwana przysziości rozgrywka na miejscu. z grudniu 41r. przesłażem meldunek przez pułk. Deringa zwolnionego do sarszawy, którego jednak po parudniach znowu w arszawie aresztowano i po, paru miesiącach rozstrzelano na Pawisku w styczniu 42r. przez sierż. woźniaka.



The Polish fight for sovereignty

The German capitulation in Stalingrad in early 1943 marked the turning point on the eastern front. After this, the Allies anticipated a victory over Hitler and regarded the Soviet Union as an equal partner. They could not afford a breach with Stalin because of Polish interests. In late 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt approved the ceding of eastern Poland to the Soviet Union.

This jeopardized Poland's right to exist. The Polish underground increased its attacks on SS members and on German businesses in preparation for a national uprising. The Home Army wanted Warsaw to be liberated from the German occupation before the Red Army marched in as the next occupying power. This would require every available weapon. The liberation of Auschwitz, as Pilecki had planned, was inconceivable.

The Polish Home Army rose up on August 1, 1944. The Germans, however, brutally suppressed the Warsaw Uprising within two months. Pilecki took part in the fighting and was arrested. He remained a German prisoner of war until the end of the Second World War.

~

Warsaw's city center, a group of insurgents at Dąbrowski Square, October 1–2, 1944

WUM



German soldiers at one of the uncovered mass graves at Katyn, April 1943

The discovery of mass graves in Katyn, Russia, led to mutual recriminations. The German and Soviet sides accused each other of the murder of more than 4,000 Polish officers. Not until 1990 did the Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev assume responsibility for the crime. The true extent of the massacre finally became known at that time: in 1940 the Soviet secret police shot more than 21,000 Polish officers, police, and intellectuals.

PAP

Burning portraits of Adolf Hitler

WUM



Pilecki's return to Warsaw

Pilecki returned to Warsaw in August 1943, almost three years after his voluntary arrest. Large parts of the city had been destroyed. The area of the Warsaw Ghetto was now a landscape of ruins. During his internment, Pilecki had avoided contact with his family to keep them out of danger. Only at the very beginning had he written to them to tell them that "everything was just fine."

Pilecki felt obligated to remain in Warsaw. In early 1944, he met Emil Fieldorf and joined his anti-Soviet underground cell. The work required his full commitment. Pilecki pledged to serve his country and made a decision once again for Poland and against returning to his family.



Witold and his wife Maria

Pilecki could not visit his family living in Ostrów Mazowiecka because Maria had to work as a housekeeper for a German family. They met in Pilecki's apartment in Warsaw. He probably only met his children once. He communicated with his family primarily through letters.

Private collection of the Pilecki family



Ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto

The area of the Warsaw Ghetto became a desert of rubble in the middle of the city. Only the St. Augustine Church was spared.

DPA/Picture Alliance

The Warsaw Uprising

As the Red Army advanced, fear of a Soviet occupation grew in Poland. Stalin's intentions were clear. The Home Army sought to reconquer the Polish capital from the Nazis before the Soviet army arrived and challenged the country's independence.

The Warsaw Uprising against the German occupation began on August 1, 1944. The Nazis retaliated brutally, executing at least 40,000 bystanders in the Warsaw district of Wola. Despite superior German military strength, the Polish population initially held its ground. Pilecki was part of a small unit that blockaded a major thoroughfare and held off enemy tanks for almost two weeks. Without Allied support, however, the uprising collapsed after two months. More than 160,000 Poles, primarily civilians, died in the fighting. Warsaw was completely destroyed.



A group of insurgents relaxing in the ruins of one of the apartment buildings destroyed in September 1939

WUM



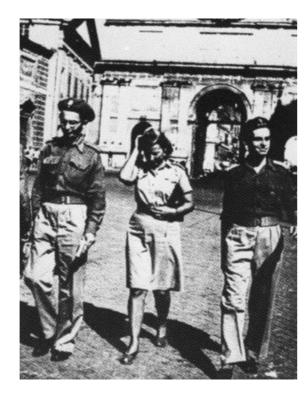
Warsaw's city center, armed group of insurgents, August 1944

WUM

Pilecki's complete report

While Pilecki was waiting in Italy for new instructions from General Anders, he used the months of August and September 1945 to write his most extensive eyewitness report about his imprisonment in Auschwitz. Maria Szelągowska, an intelligence officer who had also been interned in Murnau, helped Pilecki with the paperwork and typed the report. Pilecki's account provides very precise and personal insights into the development of the Auschwitz concentration camp into an industrial killing complex. In San Giorgio, a port town south of Ancona, Pilecki turned over the more than 100-page report to General Tadeusz Pełczynski for safekeeping. Pełczynski took the report with him to London.

General Anders approved Pilecki's plan in September and commissioned him to establish an underground cell in Warsaw and to document communist crimes in Poland. Together with Maria Szelągowska, Pilecki returned to Warsaw via occupied Germany in October 1945.



From left to right: Jan Mierzanowski, Maria Szelągowska, and Witold Pilecki in Rome, summer of 1945

Private collection of the Pilecki family

PILECKI __

"I have been offered a commercial deal to publish this for big bucks in America, but for the time being I have not decided to take this step because I have not had the time to polish the style and also because I would feel remorse at selling it for money. There have been others who have wanted to get hold of it from me, but in my opinion the right thing to do is to put this in your hands, General. Perhaps someone in London might also find it interesting."

Pilecki's cover letter to Major General Tadeusz Pełczyński

General Anders's army against Stalin

The Germans arrested the insurgents of the Warsaw Uprising. Pilecki was detained in the Murnau prisoner-of-war camp in southern Bavaria. As in Auschwitz, he was registered there under a false name.

The Red Army took control of Warsaw in January 1945. Stalin appointed communists to head the new administration. After Sikorski's death in 1943, the influence of Polish general Władysław Anders increased. "Anders's Army" had successfully fought against the Germans in Italy. Anders then called for resistance to the Soviet's seizing power in Poland.

The United States Army liberated the Murnau camp in late April 1945. While many Poles were war-weary, Pilecki wanted to continue fighting for Poland's independence. He traveled to the Italian city of Ancona in July to receive orders from General Anders.



"We want to continue to fight, but for a free and independent Poland. Russia has no right to our territory.... It broke all agreements and has usurped these lands through a treaty and an alliance with Hitler. There are no Russians in this territory. Aside from Poles there are only Ukrainians and Belorussians. No one asked them to whom they want to belong. They are well aware that the elections that took place in 1939 under the pressure of the Soviet bayonet were pure farce."

Quotation from Anders's diary

General Anders's protest to Churchill

At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin agreed to partition Poland and cede the eastern territories to the Soviet Union. General Anders opposed this arbitrary shifting of the Polish borders and protested in vain to Churchill. The western Allies were willing to compromise with Stalin and the Polish government-in-exile had no say in the matter. Poland became part of the Soviet sphere of influence.



The "Big Three"
Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin
(from left to right) at the
Yalta Conference, February 1945
PAP/DPA



General Anders and Winston Churchill Winston Churchill (left) and General Władysław Anders (center) in Italy, August 1944

NPG



Witold Pilecki in the Officers' Camp VII A in Murnau

Pressured by the Polish government-in-exile, the Western Allies recognized the Polish Home Army as an official part of the Allied military forces. As a result, the Germans had to view the captured fighters as prisoners of war and put them in POW camps rather than shooting them immediately.

Private collection of the Pilecki family

The new permanent exhibition

A look behind the scenes

Vera Franke · Anka Bobczuk

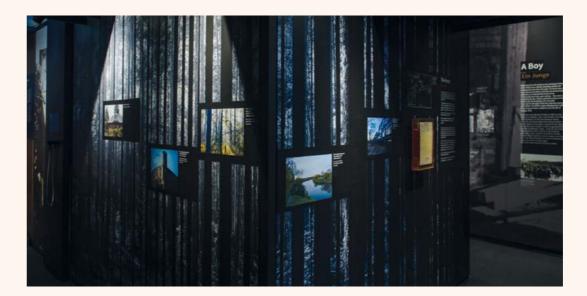
The Pilecki Institute opened its doors in Berlin in September 2019 with the exhibition *The Volunteer*: Witold Pilecki and His Mission in Auschwitz. The exhibition was developed by a Polish-American team working with the curators Hanna Radziejowska and Jack Fairweather, but it did not last long.

The subject of the exhibition was based on Jack Fairweather's book The Volunteer, a comprehensive, detailed, and exciting report on Pilecki's life and work. The texts in this inaugural exhibition presented the work in a condensed form but in fact they were nevertheless far too detailed. Also missing was a structure that broke the information down into different chapters that could be presented in separate rooms. The setup onsite was more like a labyrinth whose rather high walls were literally filled with text but offered little orientation. The most important milestones in Pilecki's life were depicted in a steady stream incorporating individual highlights but without any interruption. The original intention was to be as comprehensive as possible, not least because the Polish perspective of the story is largely unknown in Germany. An attractive design form was selected for the challenging subject matter: a lot of light and sound effects, contrasting colors, and scenographic elements were to engage the audience emotionally and spur enthusiasm for Witold Pilecki's story. One installation was a hall of mirrors that staged the exhibition in a particularly atmospheric albeit controversial manner. Hanging from the ceiling were illuminated, plastic human torsos wearing the clothing of concentration camp prisoners. The bodies were multiplied endlessly through the mirrors. Some visitors considered it a successful work of art: to others it seemed inappropriately carnivalesque.

Shortly after the exhibition opened, there were already critical in-house discussions on the presentation. Although the impressive production had been praised by the media,¹ many visitors felt overwhelmed by the exhibition. The complex intertwining narrative threads and the extremely orchestrated implementation did not do justice to Witold Pilecki's story. While the sound and lighting effects could be greatly reduced, the Covid pandemic forced the exhibition to close in early 2020 in any case. The Pilecki Institute team then had time to rethink the exhibition design and render it more suited for a contemporary German audience.

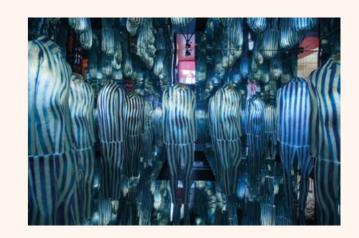
The exhibition concept and design were analyzed in a workshop with designer Vera Franke that focused on the narrative structure, text hierarchies, and how to deal with images, as well as on concrete points such as the readability of the texts within the graphic design. Some texts, for example, had been printed directly onto the photographs and were almost impossible to read. Moreover, it was particularly apparent that a text structure typically found in German museums was missing. Such an orientation is usually offered through the room texts, subtopic texts, and image and exhibit descriptions. Whereas historical exhibitions in Germany are often prepared in a serious, matter-of-fact tone, other countries aim instead to emphasize emotions and tell what happened in a more visual, cineastic style. They use effects such as back-lighted surfaces, extreme image motifs, special lighting effects or scenographic structures that accentuate the subject matter, as was evident with the illuminated bodies of prisoners or a forest made of wooden strips.

As it turned out, it was necessary to thoroughly revamp the exhibition on Witold Pilecki in Berlin to better address the visual habits and expectations of the local target audience. This was conceived as a permanent exhibition and led to the collaboration between the assistant curator Anka Bobczuk and



The atmospheric staging of Pilecki's escape with sounds and lighting effects was not suitable for the new exhibition.

The hall of mirrors provoked a wide variety of reactions. It was too sensational for the new exhibition.





After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Pilecki Institute immediately became a central point of contact for Ukrainian aid organizations. In the rooms of the original exhibition, the floor was marked with adhesive tape so that the numerous relief supplies could be sorted.

The new permanent exhibition. A look behind the scenes

Rafał Ruciński from the Pilecki Institute and external support. This included Vera Franke from the Franke/ Steinert office for the structural work and project management, the graphic artist Christine Kitta for the new design, and editor Doris Schemmel for the new version of the texts. The revision aimed to offer a better presentation of the narrative of the curators Hanna Radziejowska and Jack Fairweather, reworking the content into individual, clearly recognizable exhibition chapters.

It is always something of a balancing act to base a historical exhibition on a biography. There is inevitably the danger that far-reaching historical contexts become compressed into a single life story. With the new conception, the audience still definitely hears the precise story of the life of Witold Pilecki, his achievements and his courage, which is particularly important as knowledge about him had been buried for so long. However, the new exhibition sought neither to stylize him into a hero nor to downplay the significance of his networks and supporters, because his story — as no one knew better than Pilecki himself — was closely interwoven with those of many other resistance fighters. Moreover, his life must be viewed within the framework of complex historical contexts that have been intensively researched. These too have been given the necessary space in the new exhibition.

Pilecki himself wrote a comprehensive report on his time in Auschwitz as part of an underground military operation. The report was so vivid and descriptive – not least thanks to his dark humor – that more space in the revised exhibition is dedicated to this unique source, in particular for work with school groups. His report now appears in the exhibition as a series of quotations marked with a red pencil icon.

Against this background, the new exhibition focuses on the following questions: What did Pilecki report from Auschwitz? What did he observe and document? What information made it to the Polish

government-in-exile in London and how did it get there? How did the Allies respond to the reports? In short, why exactly did Pilecki risk his life in the Auschwitz concentration camp? In order to answer these questions more precisely, the chapter on the Allied reactions has been expanded. In this room, original publications are exhibited that confirm the work of the Polish government-in-exile. International news clippings are also displayed that describe the public reactions to the reports of atrocities committed in Poland by the Germans. More recent research has been integrated into the revised exhibition. Another aspect that has hitherto received insufficient attention in Germany is the Polish perspective of the role played by the Soviet Union in the Second World War. For Poland, the Red Army invasion in the eastern part of the country, only a short time after the German invasion in 1939, was disastrous. The situation changed very little when the Soviet Union later joined the Allied forces against Hitler and after the Allied victory in 1945, when the Soviets became the occupying power in Poland. It was ultimately the Soviet Union that was responsible for Pilecki's execution.

The revamping of the exhibition utilized larger, clearly structured rooms with a total of eleven chronological chapters. Two storylines run parallel in the two main rooms. This is indicated by a timeline and graphically designed through reversed colors. Visitors thus can follow both Pilecki's path, on the one hand, and the concurrent historical events, on the other. In this way there are corresponding stories of Pilecki's life and of the outside world, for example: "Pilecki in the Warsaw Underground" and "The Invasion of the Wehrmacht in Warsaw." And: "Pilecki in Auschwitz" and "The Allied Reactions to the Reports from Auschwitz."

Within the individual chapters, room texts and theme texts have been distinguished, primarily typographically. The exhibition texts have been simplified and rewritten by Doris Schemmel in cogent and concise language. Christine Kitta developed a new structure for the entire graphic design, giving it a clear form. The choice of images and exhibits has been completely revised. An effort was made to select photographs that did not depict victims. Brutal, gruesome photos used solely for effect have been removed. For example, one image by the photographer Julien Bryan shows a girl mourning her dead sister. However moving and powerful this image might be, we replaced it with a more documentary photograph from the series in order to avoid any sensationalism.

Because the first exhibition had been displayed for such a short time, a complete dismantling was ruled out essentially for reasons of sustainability. The main structures from the initial exhibition, walls of a steel frame structure and aluminum Dibond panels, were reused by covering the exhibition panels with newly printed films.

The exhibition was expanded with several show-cases for original objects and facsimiles. Especially the work of the Polish government-in-exile is now better documented. The exhibition has been augmented with objects on loan from Poland's Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Three media stations were created: An extremely vivid, interactive application helps visitors understand the activities of the network around Witold Pilecki in Auschwitz more precisely. Another station traces some of the routes of the couriers who smuggled Pilecki's reports out of the camp and additional materials can be viewed in a media archive. For work with groups and school classes, there is now a large worktable with chairs and a moveable box containing panels on which the quotations and excerpts

from Pilecki's report are printed. These serve as work materials and a basis for discussion.

The collaboration has been an extremely productive albeit protracted process, as the renewed analysis of this sensitive subject demanded comprehensive and ambitious research that continued to raise new, detailed questions. The revision process continued over two years. Russia invaded Ukraine when the team was close to completing the implementation and the Pilecki Institute immediately became one of the main contact points for Ukrainian relief organizations. Due to a lack of space, the mountains of aid materials—in particular medical supplies—were stored amid the original exhibition, where they were then picked up by trucks and brought to the crisis areas. The correlation between the information on the exhibition panels and the current political situation was disturbing. And now there is also a second, brutal war in the Middle East. Both battlegrounds clearly demonstrate how little we have learned from the past and how necessary and crucial it is to continue to examine history.

The new exhibition Witold Pilecki: In Resistance to Hitler and Stalin opened in September 2023. For at least five years it will continue to tell Witold Pilecki's extraordinary story to its many visitors.

¹ Jens Bisky: Freiwillig nach Auschwitz, 30. Juli 2020, Süddeutsche Zeitung: www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/auschwitz-pilecki-museum-1.4983832?reduced=true (last accessed: 11 March 2024) and Rolf Brockschmidt: Widerstandskämpfer Pilecki: Der Mann, der freiwillig als Häftling nach Auschwitz ging, 22. Januar 2020, Tagesspiegel: https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/der-mann-der-freiwillig-als-haftling-nach-auschwitz-ging-4137451.html (last accessed: 11 March 2024).



Clear colors and a clear layout make it easier to access the complex Polish (pre)history.



Each chapter of Pilecki's biography is presented in a different color, but the structure remains the same throughout the exhibition, helping visitors to find their way around.



Pilecki's Auschwitz report has been given more weight in the new exhibition. With its straightforward tone, it provides an undisguised insight into everyday life in the concentration camp. Selected quotes are particularly useful for working with school classes.



Wieder Krieg, wieder Teilung Another partition

The state of the state

The selection of photos was based on strict criteria. Instead of creating a voyeuristic atmosphere, the pictures should document the narrative.

The heart of the exhibition juxtaposes two narrative strands. The blue walls document Pilecki's time in Auschwitz, while the white walls show what happened in the outside world.

The Memory of Witold Pilecki **During the Cold War**

Bartłomiej Kapica

In 2019, the European Parliament established 25 May as the International Day of Heroes of the Fight Against Totalitarianism. The date was not chosen randomly: on 25 May 1948, Witold Pilecki - who had volunteered to be imprisoned at the German Auschwitz concentration camp — was murdered in the communist prison on Rakowiecka Street in Warsaw. Therefore, the Parliament not only paid homage to an unquestionable hero, but also symbolically restored his memory to the entire continent, thus cementing the experience of 20th-century history between Western, Central, and Eastern Europe.

The Second World War widened the gaps in perception of the 20th century between various parts of the European continent. While the Soviet Union occupied East-Central Europe, Western societies experienced postwar divisions. The communist movement in both France and Italy could boast of participation in anti-German resistance (simultaneously striving to erase all memory of its stance in the years 1939-1941, when the German-Soviet alliance was in force), but its broad social support also resulted from abject poverty and skillful perpetuation of the myth of the Soviet Union as the conqueror of fascism. What is more, the devastation of Europe combined with aggressive Soviet politics required the involvement of the United States and their participation in the postwar reconstruction effort, reinforcing the bipolar view of the world as divided into West and East.²

The emerging postwar order generated a lot of discussion. The debate focused not only on the future of Europe, but also on its character and identity.

According to the dominant narrative, fascism and Nazism had discredited all right-wing ideologies, while communism offered a determined future, which was supposedly materializing at the time in Eastern and Central Europe. The past, in turn, called for a reckoning. The communists provided an outlet for emotions related to revenge, deliberately conflating independence activists who fought against the German occupier with actual collaborators. The intentional blurring of boundaries and the falsification of reality served to protect the rule of terror, which was all the easier because violence was prevalent in Europe at the time.³ Subjected to Sovietization, East-Central Europe was "the other" Europe, barely visible on the very edges of everyday life in the continent's West.

It is therefore not surprising that Sovietization did not raise intellectual objections in the West, and that the decision to politically oppose the Soviet Union was abandoned at the crucial moment in the summer of 1944.4 When Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote in 1947 that "In reality 'Russian expansion' in Europe began one day at Stalingrad to end with the war at Prague and on the frontiers of Yugoslavia. At that time no one raised any objections," he was merely constructing a narrative for a process that had already been concluded.5 However, this disregard and acquiescence did have a boundary — a geographical one. As Merleau-Ponty cautiously observed, "If it happens tomorrow that the U.S.S.R. threatens to invade Europe and to set up in every country a government of its choice, a different question would arise and would have to be examined."6 In this discourse. therefore, Europe was limited to the western parts of the continent, and Merleau-Ponty simply gave expression to the prevailing sentiment. The separation of Eastern Europe from its Western counterpart was hardly noticed in the latter.7

Arthur Koestler's bestselling novel Darkness at Noon, which was published in 1945 and presented the

problem of communist trials to a wider audience in the West, was equally unable to tear down the wall of misunderstanding.8 In this book, the victims are subjugated by means of dialectics, not violence, and their ranks are limited to communists who perished in the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s.9 Despite Koestler's undeniably uncompromising stance and the campaign launched against his book by Moscow and its subservient parties, paradoxically his take on the subject found reflection in the policies of the latter. For obvious reasons, the most open and liberal communist party in the West at the time, the Italian Communist Party, was not interested in the systemic violence of Soviet-imposed regimes in East-Central Europe, and its attention was drawn to the political trials only in the early 1950s, when they started targeting the communists themselves. The Italian Communist Party, however, was unable to move beyond the Stalinist interpretation, which ascribed the blame for launching the apparatus of violence to the malevolent American influence.¹⁰ This dualistic discourse legitimizing violence was to be an answer to the alleged equivalence between American and Soviet influence in Western and Eastern Europe, respectively.

It was in such a context that the trials of people who actively opposed the loss of sovereignty - the trials which were organized by communist authorities in the first years after the war in breach of all principles of the rule of law—went unnoticed in the West. At the time, the communists themselves did not care to utilize the trials in their foreign policy, as they served a primarily internal role. 11 Witold Pilecki was arrested in 1947 and tried before a military court; at the time these courts constituted "the heart of darkness", devouring hundreds of innocent victims who were sentenced to death.¹² Subordinated to the communist authorities, the press did not portray Pilecki's heroic stance in its reports, and for obvious reasons. Attempts were made to strip him of basic dignity, and he was persistently denied the title of soldier and officer.¹³ He was falsely accused of espionage.14 With the help of secret services and the censorship office, the communist authorities manipulated the facts right from the beginning of the trial until Pilecki was sentenced to death in mid-March 1948. 15 These actions were the foundation of both the political system created by the Soviets and the communist politics of memory. On 25 May at 9.30 p.m., Pilecki was murdered with a shot to the back of the head in the prison on Rakowiecka Street in Warsaw, but both his death and the place of his burial – which,

despite various efforts since 1989, remains unknown to this day — were withheld from the public. Amnesia and violence were both integral to the building and and violence were both integral to the building and legitimization of the new regime.

Nevertheless, the memory of Witold Pilecki has prevailed thanks to his family and those who shared in his fate and ideas. For political reasons, however, this memory could not be transplanted from the individual level into the social consciousness, as such processes require institutional support. The political and historical institutions of the time were preoccupied with deprecating the wartime activities of the underground movement affiliated with the Government-in-Exile and creating the legend of the communist underground, among others by exaggerating its merits.16 The propaganda attacked the Home Army the largest underground resistance movement in German-occupied countries - among others for its alleged collaboration with the Third Reich and passivity, while former Home Army soldiers were persecuted and murdered. Since the memory of Pilecki combined the activities of the Home Army during the Second World War with the beginnings of communist rule in Poland, his story was monitored, manipulated and silenced by the authorities, and only political changes could alter this state of affairs.

The first cracks in the wall of silence appeared towards the end of Stalinism, when the state lost its monopoly of historical narratives. ¹⁷ In the spring of 1956, during the post-Stalinist "thaw", columnists from a critical youth weekly demanded "reaching out to the people of the Home Army", but this was to be limited to their wartime activities, while their pro-independence fight after the introduction of communist rule in Poland was to be passed over.¹⁸ These attitudes, however, made it possible to broach previously suppressed topics. After the partial rehabilitation of the Home Army, which resulted from grassroots pressure on the temporarily weakened regime, Witold Pilecki could be restored to public consciousness.¹⁹ In 1957, Kazimierz Moczarski — a former prisoner of the Stalinist regime who spent many years in the same cell with the Nazi criminal Jürgen Stroop, and whose fate was a perfect illustration of the perversity and cynicism of the communists — penned an article in which he mentioned Witold Pilecki. Moczarski himself was a Home Army soldier who was innocently sentenced to death, though his death sentence was later commuted to a prison term. In his article, Moczarski wrote about Pilecki's activities at Auschwitz.20 In response, a short note was sent to the editorial board,

in which the author expressed her thanks for reviving "the cherished memory of Tomek (the late Witold Pilecki) who died such a tragic death." This enigmatic mention was the only possible way — approved by the censorship — to publicly refer to Witold Pilecki's life. The beginnings of the communist regime in Poland could be presented solely as an epic tale of general enthusiasm and rapid modernization, while history — even in its retouched version — served to legitimize the system."

Although information about Witold Pilecki that began surfacing in the 1960s pertained also to his wartime activities, it was only in the late 1970s that the subject could be discussed more comprehensively. At the time, the memory of the Second World War underwent a major reevaluation in Europe. The origins of this phenomenon paradoxically justify viewing "the Iron Curtain" more as a "semi-permeable membrane" than an impenetrable barrier.23 For it was in the Polish émigré circles in the West that the story of Witold Pilecki was unearthed from the archives, this thanks to the book of the Polish historian Józef Garliński on the Auschwitz underground movement and the work of the British historian Michael Foot — who was Garliński's friend — devoted to Europe's most courageous resistance fighters during the Second World War.24 Although Garliński's works were banned in Poland, Foot's book was discussed in the national press, thus allowing the broader public to learn about Pilecki's heroism during the war.²⁵ Following these publications, the censorship office demanded that all texts about Pilecki be submitted for approval "due to the controversies surrounding Pilecki's actions and the complexity of the issue."26 Interestingly, information about "Witold Pilecki's undoubtedly patriotic and even heroic stance during the occupation" was crossed out from the censorship office's internal documentation, which proves that the interpretation adopted during the Stalinist period was still in full force at the time.²⁷

Nevertheless, despite the censors' best efforts, the late 1970s saw the emergence of an organized opposition, which broadened the scope of freedom and allowed for the circulation of knowledge that did not have the imprimatur of the authorities. As a result, Pilecki could be mentioned among others during a

sermon delivered in one of the churches in the Old Town of Warsaw on the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising on 1 August 1980.28 The founding of "Solidarity" was a watershed moment for the Polish People's Republic as far as the scope of freedom was concerned. Although censorship was not abolished, it was visibly curtailed, as evidenced in publications devoted to Witold Pilecki, which had hitherto never ventured beyond 1945. The author of a 1979 article about Pilecki wrote that he had to end his story with his hero being deported to a German POW camp after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising. In his new text, the censors did not erase all mentions concerning Pilecki's postwar fates — which was definitely a novel approach — but all the fragments pointing to the injustice and criminality of Pilecki's death sentence were carefully pruned.29 It was only after 1989 that this subject could be openly discussed.

The collapse of communist rule in East-Central Europe liberated the memory of Pilecki from political control and supervision. In the meantime, the paradigm of memory concerning the history of the 20th century has undergone considerable change. United Europe defined its mission as promoting the memory of the victims.30 This meant the abandonment of the previously dominant "grand narratives", in which the division into East and West constituted an insurmountable barrier. The tragic experience of people who had faded into the background of these narratives finally came to the fore; even in the 1970s it was hardly present in the discourse in both the East and the West. 31 These changes "unlocked" the memory of Pilecki, while the virtues he embodied — the universality of truth-telling and the supreme value of human life — became the established norm of liberal democracy. Witold Pilecki symbolizes the values of contemporary Europe, which is now one and united.

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Memories of Witold and Maria Pilecki within the family

Krzysztof Kosior

Most of my knowledge about my great-grandfather Witold comes from my grandmother Zofia, who preserved his memory for many years. Guarding these memories became a sort of mission in her life. But the first information I received was from my mother when I was around 10 years old. It wasn't much – just on outline given in a rather matter-of-fact manner, perhaps as encouragement to find out more. Of course, I never met my great-grandfather, but over time, visits to my great-grandmother Maria and grandmother Zofia allowed me to build my own image of him.

The authorities of the People's Republic of Poland did not inform the family of his death. One day, after the sentence was passed, his wife Maria tried to deliver a food package to the prison on Rakowiecka Street in Warsaw, where she was informed that "Pilecki is not here, he's gone!" The package was not accepted.

For many years, there was no information about his fate. Great-grandmother Maria hoped that perhaps he had been deported somewhere to Siberia and would return one day. From the second half of the 1970s, the family was sure that Witold had most likely been murdered. Nevertheless, Maria lived in hope until 1990 when the communist archives were opened, and the document of his execution in May 1948 was found.

The memory of Witold lived on in the family, although due to the threat of persecution, it was limited only to brief recollections within a narrow circle until the late 1970s. My great-grandmother attached

great importance to maintaining confidentiality. Maria was an incredibly brave woman who had to adapt without her husband to a new reality in a Poland under communist rule, with two young children, and with the imposed stigma of being the "wife of a traitor."

My great-grandmother, Maria Pilecka née Ostrowska, came from Ostrów Mazowiecka, born into a family known for a large and thriving horticultural and fruit-growing farm. Her father Konstanty imported special varieties of roses from France and other countries, among other things. She worked as a teacher, which was regarded as ennobling the family. I remember her as an elegant lady with impeccable manners. She placed great importance in appearance and propriety, she could speak beautifully and interestingly. She worked at the municipal school in Krupa, where she met Witold Pilecki, who lived nearby in the manor house in Sukurcze. They started a family, but the outbreak of war forced her to return to her hometown of Ostrów.

After the war, Maria faced repression amid the new realities of communist-ruled Poland. Wherever she tried to find work, the stigma of being the "wife of an enemy of the people" resulted in refusal of employment. It was a very difficult time for the family, and in winter, it became dramatic. Grandmother Zofia remembered gathering pine cones in the forest for fuel. The family survived thanks to Maria's determination, the help of the family in Ostrów Mazowiecka, and friendly neighbors who sometimes shared things like a bucket of coal for fuel.

I think these experiences left a lasting mark on Maria. After the attack on Poland from two sides by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, her flight with two young children from the Vilnius region to Ostrów Mazowiecka only succeeded on the second attempt. The first attempt ended with their detention by the Red Army and requisition of everything they had with them. Then came years of poverty and hunger,

years of being separated from her husband, his arrest, and subsequent persecution. And finally, the moment Witold left. The trauma of those experiences remained with Maria until the end of her life. Nevertheless, she remained a very warm and brave person. She became an educator to several generations of young people, always offering warmth and good advice. Yet, in her heart, she certainly carried the memory of persecution.

The years immediately following the death sentence on Witold in 1948 were a period of existence on the brink of poverty for Maria and her children. The family's situation improved only when Maria was accepted for work at the "Ognisko" ("Hearth") Friendship Society for Homeless Children in Świder near Warsaw, founded by Kazimierz Lisiecki. It was a place full of often troubled youths, children orphaned by the war and in need of support in the post-war reality. Thanks to the hard work of the caregivers, many of these young people later achieved great success. Maria initially helped with the daily functioning of the Society and eventually became a caregiver there.

Uncle Andrzej (Witold's son) was studying and living in a dormitory in Warsaw at that time. He would visit his mother at the "Ognisko" in Świder quite regularly. Andrzej's sister, my Grandmother Zofia, still lived in Ostrów Mazowiecka at that time. After a while, Andrzej fell in love with Kazimierz's daughter, Barbara Lisiecka, and the feeling was mutual. While at "Ognisko", Zofia met Lech Optułowicz, a ward and later a caregiver, who had lost his father in the last days of the war during the sinking of the SS Cap Arcona.

In those years, the communist system was actively developing its apparatus of repression. Any activity considered "subversive" or inconsistent with the accepted vision of history posed a real threat to the repressed and their families. The terror of denunciation and the fact that it was never known whether

one could trust a neighbor or acquaintance left a mark of mistrust on society as a whole. At that time, everyone feared the Security Office. A society deeply affected by the cruel war was still being terrorized even after the so-called "liberation." Acts of mutual support among people were all the more valuable, and great secrets, passed on only to the most trusted, were even more intriguing. These were shared in the evening, whispered, and under oath. Both situations became part of my family's experience.

Witold's brother Jerzy and his sisters Maria and Wanda played an important role in preserving family memories. The siblings kept a few mementos that they managed to save, and Maria (whom they called *Musia*) even wrote down the family history. The children of Wanda and Jerzy continued this work after their parents.

From later times, my mother Małgorzata remembers that souvenirs and materials related to Witold were kept by her mother, my grandmother Zofia. These were stored in a chest of drawers where she slept. That was still a time of fear, perhaps even a certain psychosis, that at any moment the Security Office might come and disrupt our lives. When Małgorzata was about 12 years old, her mother first told her about her grandfather under the categorical condition of secrecy. No one was allowed to talk about it, especially not at school!

This story remained exclusively oral history, passed down within the family circle. It wasn't until 1974 that the emigrant historian Józef Garliński published the book *Fighting Auschwitz* in London. But the Polish version of the book was still a long time coming and was not published until the 1990s. Michael Foot's book *Six faces of courage* was published in 1978, and included a profile of Witold Pilecki among others. The translation of this book reaching the family was a small breakthrough for the grandchildren, as fragments of family memory were beginning to be organized by recorded history.

The first commemorations also began to appear in Wincenty Gawron relied on data he knew from the the era of the Polish People's Republic. The first white plaque to appear in a public space was unveiled in the late 1970s (though it remained somewhat hidden, placed behind a figure of the Pensive Christ). It was placed on the wall of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, a few hundred meters from Wojska Polskiego Avenue in Warsaw, the place from which Witold Pilecki was transported to Auschwitz. The family was present at the unveiling, where an atmosphere of uncertainty It turned out then that the country's authorities and conspiracy prevailed.

told appeared in the press. The author of the short article became a victim of harassment and was fired from his job. In December 1986, the Pilecki family received the Star of Perseverance (known as the Zakroczym Star) from the hands of a chapter of former chaplains of the Polish Army. If I'm not mistaken, it was the first decoration awarded to Witold since the end of the Second World War. Grandmother Zofia told me that she remembered the ceremony well because schools and streets. she went there full of fear and uncertainty, afraid she would be detained by the Security Office.

In the late 1980s, Andrzej Kunert's Słownik biograficzny konspiracji warszawskiej 1939–1944 [Biographical Dictionary of the Warsaw Conspiracy 1939–1944 was published, becoming the first scientific publication containing a brief mention of Witold Pilecki. A little later, Witold Pilecki posthumously received further decorations: the Auschwitz Cross (1988), the Warsaw Uprising Cross (1990), the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta (1995), and the Order of the White Eagle (2006).

In 1990, one of Witold's subordinates from the Auschwitz conspiracy, Wincenty Gawron, arrived from Chicago in the USA to design and fund a plaque in the Garrison Church on Długa Street in Warsaw. I remember that the admiration for the fact that "Finally it's possible!" was mixed with embarrassment about the incorrect date of Witold's birth (1902).

camp conspiracy. Long discussions were provoked by the subtitle "Volunteer at Auschwitz," as many people pointed out at that time that it sounded inappropriate (volunteering to go to the camp), and that it should rather be written "voluntary prisoner." Today, years later, I think "volunteer" is probably better received...

In 1992, Witold's son, Andrzej, went to Sukurcze and Krupa in present-day Belarus for the first time. had made sure that no trace was left of the Pilecki At the end of the 1970s, the first mention of Wi- (Domeyko) house. The building was demolished, even the foundations were dismantled, and the nearby spring was filled in.

> From the late 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium, half a century after Witold Pilecki's death, his memory began to be institutionalized, thanks in part to the historian Adam Cyra, curator at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum: his report was published, and Witold became the patron of many



Auschwitz as the symbol of the Holocaust

Soldiers of the Red Army liberated the Auschwitz concentration camp on January 27, 1945. They found approximately 7,000 weak and completely emaciated survivors. In Auschwitz alone, the Nazis had murdered more than a million people from all over Europe.

Throughout the world, the name "Auschwitz" has become the symbol of the Holocaust. However, Auschwitz was only one of thousands of Nazi camps. The Holocaust took place at countless locations and it did not start with gassing people to death. The Germans had already committed a massacre of Polish Jews when the war had just started in early September 1939. Later the Nazis' Einsatzgruppen murdered between 1.5 and 2 million people in mass shootings, especially in the Baltic states, Belorussia, and Ukraine.

Despite Pilecki's unabated calls for a military operation on the camp, he was unable to stop the killing. His determination from so early on has proved clairvoyant.

Thanks to an initiative of former Auschwitz prisoners, the grounds of the concentration camp became a museum. They worked to preserve the site in order to create a monument for future generations. Pilecki himself visited the former concentration camp in 1946, one year before the museum opened.

Sites of German mass crimes 1933–1945

- Main concentration camp
- Death camp (built in 1941–42)
- "Euthanasia" centers
- Sites of mass murder
- Main ghettos
- Cities

---- International borders

German territorial borders 1939–1941

..... Borders of Poland 1922

Dimensions of the Holocaust

The Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and extermination camp has become the symbol of the Holocaust, since most of the Western European Jews were murdered there. The Jewish diaspora in the east were killed predominantly in camps such as Belzec, Treblinka, and Sobibor, or by operations of the SS mobile killing units and the German police. All told, the Nazi racial policies took the lives of roughly six million European Jews, three million of them from Poland and two million from the Soviet Union.

map: Peter Palm



Liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp

on January 27, 1945

The photo was staged for Soviet propaganda purposes. The Red Army liberated only about 7,000 prisoners in the camp complex. Many of them died soon after from exhaustion. Shortly before liberation, the SS had forced most of the prisoners on death marches westward.

Getty Images



Poland after 1945

Poland could continue to exist within its new borders and was not ceded to the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Stalin maintained absolute power over Poland and installed a totalitarian regime of terror. Poland became a satellite of the Soviet Union and, like many other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, was behind the Iron Curtain.

map: Peter Palm

Р

Poland since 1945

Polish pre-war border

Satellite states of the Soviet Union

Territory Acquisitions of the Soviet Union 1939–1945

Western border of the Soviet Union

since 1945

200 km

Postwar Poland: Displacement and oppression

By the end of the Second World War almost six million Poles had died, including three million Jews – more than 90 percent of the Jewish population in Poland. The Polish intelligentsia had been decimated by a third. Hundreds of thousands of people suffered lasting physical and psychological damage. The material losses were equally massive: entire cities had been destroyed along with the infrastructure and large parts of the cultural heritage.

The defeat of Nazi Germany did not mean freedom and independence for Poles. The victorious Allied forces – the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union—redrew the borders of Europe. The eastern half of Poland, including important centers such as Lviv and Vilnius—where Pilecki had grown up—fell to the Soviet Union. Lithuanians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians who lived in these border regions now became citizens of the Soviet Union. As compensation, Poland was given the eastern part of what had previously been Germany. Millions of people were displaced as a consequence of this shifting of borders. Poland was no longer a multi-ethnic state.

In Warsaw, Stalin installed a government of Polish communists loyal to Moscow. There were no free elections.

The new government persecuted the opposition and arrested tens of thousands of members of the underground.

Many were tortured and murdered. For Pilecki, the resistance continued against the next totalitarian regime.





The secret police of the new regime secretly monitored and photographed people who visited the graves of members of the Home Army.

IPN





Trial of the Sixteen in Moscow

Official NKVD photo from the dossier of Leopold Okulicki, the last commander-in-chief of the Home Army, following his arrest in 1945. At a meeting initiated by the Soviets, the Soviet secret service arrested leading Polish underground forces and took them to Moscow. At a show trial, they were convicted and given long prison sentences. In a single blow, Stalin eliminated the leaders of the democratic opposition in Poland.

TASS



The referendum and rigged elections 1946/47

In 1946 the Polish communists conducted a referendum. Under the slogan "Three Times Yes" they promoted approval of three important economic and territorial questions. The results were obviously falsified. The Communist regime was now firmly in control and the fate of Poland for the coming decades was sealed.

PAP

Resistance and reconstruction in communist Poland

Poland was in turmoil. Resistance groups attacked members of the regime installed by Stalin. Polish society had been marked by war. People were wearied, impoverished, and starving. Their social structures had been destroyed. Plundering was a daily occurrence and diseases such as typhus and dysentery became widespread.

At the same time, Poles also celebrated the end of the war and sought a return to normality. Hundreds of thousands of people took part in the country's fresh start. They cleared away the rubble and helped rebuild factories, schools, and hospitals.



Women mourning the death of family members at the funeral of victims of the Kielce pogrom, 1946 On July 4, 1946, a mob from the city of Kielce murdered forty Jews with the help of Polish militiamen and soldiers. Consequently, 10,000 Jews who had survived the Holocaust left Poland. Pilecki sent a report on the pogrom in Kielce to the West.

USHMM

Polish agricultural losses

The war left deep scars in the countryside. As part of the so-called "atonement measures," the Germans had burned hundreds of villages to the ground and the residents were either murdered or sent to a con centration camp. Many fields laid fallow because there was a shortage of workers. Landmines and abandoned war materials posed a major problem. The photo shows a farmhouse in eastern Poland, on the territory of present-day Belarus or Ukraine, which had been destroyed during the German invasion in 1941.

AAN



The reconstruction of Warsaw

Beginning in January 1945, there was a steady influx of people to Warsaw. Family members found each other in the ruins of the capital, as did survivors of the war and occupation. The communist rulers rebuilt Warsaw with the goal of winning over the Polish population for the idea of socialism. They wanted everyone, regardless of political stance, to be able to identify with this patriotic project.



A woman painting a fence in Warsaw's Old Town

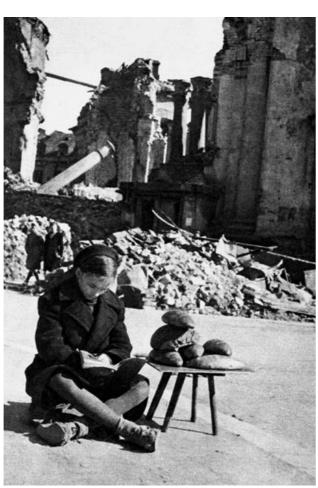
Countless people participated in the reconstruction of Warsaw.

NAC

A girl selling bread, Warsaw 1945

Trading quickly got going again, at first from door to door and then stands and market booths were set up in surviving basements, as well as provisional services and the first stores and restaurants.

East News







An improvised hairdresser's salon at the corner of Marszałkowska and Wspólna Streets, Warsaw 1945 A meal in ruins, probably staged, Warsaw 1945

East News

East News

Pilecki's trial and death sentence

The underground continued its armed resistance against the Polish communists. Drawing on the experience of his previous resistance groups, Pilecki established a network of surveillance and intelligence cells. Many of the members Pilecki selected for these tasks were administrative staff in the new government. In this way, he was able to document the communists' increasingly vicious treatment of the Polish opposition and reported to General Anders on the situation in Poland.

In early May 1947, members of the Polish secret police arrested Pilecki and several of his comrades in arms. Pilecki was interrogated and tortured almost daily for more than a year. Under duress he signed preprepared confessions. On March 15, 1948, the regime sentenced Pilecki to death "in the name of the Republic of Poland." On May 25, 1948, the sentence was carried out. He was buried in an anonymous mass grave. To the present day his mortal remains have not been located.

Witold Pilecki during his show trial, 1948

NAC

Pilecki's show trial

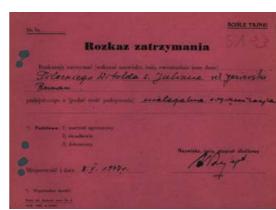
In March 1948, the state prosecutor charged Pilecki with high treason. For the communist leaders, Pilecki's trial became a demonstration of power — a show trial with a predetermined sentence. The list of the charges against Pilecki was long. He was accused of being an "imperialist agent" and a "Western spy."

In addition to treason, he was also charged with planning to assassinate members of the secret police, the use of forged documents, and the illegal possession of weapons. Pilecki confessed to the illegal possession of weapons and forged identification papers.

However, he denied being a foreign spy or having planned assassinations. He insisted that he had never betrayed his fatherland. PILECKI __

"After returning to my country, I continued my work."





Warrant for Witold Pilecki's arrest

IDN





Warrant for the arrest of Maria Szelągowska, Pilecki's comrade in arms and resistance fighter for the Home Army

Like Pilecki, Szelągowska was sentenced to death in a show trial. "Due to her sex" the death penalty was commuted to life imprisonment. She remained in prison until receiving amnesty in 1956.

IPN



May Day parade in Warsaw

With portraits of Stalin and Polish President Bolesław Bierut, whose postwar government was extremely repressive.

East News

tygodnia











FOT .: FILM POLSKI, API, BURZYNSKI

ROGER GARAUDY

NARÓD FRANCUSKI W WALCE

Niedawno odwiedził Polskę czołowy francuski literat i polityk, listów. Zeby sparaliżować przemy toger Garaudy. Napisał specjalnie dla "Przekroju" artykuł ilustru-na korzyść imperializmu amery acy obecne polożenie polityczne Francji, który poniżej drukujemy. kańskiego, rząd nasz zaatakowa

Roger Garaudy. Napisał specjalnie dla "Przekroju" artykuł ilustrujący obecne polożenie polityczne Francji, który poniżej drukujemy, anak polityczne polityczne przekroju" artykuł ilustrujący przez dokad przekroju" przez polityczne przekroju" przez polityczne przez przekroja w przez polityczne przekroja w przez polityczne przekroja w przez polityczne przekroja w przez przekroja przek

rializm amerykański i bomba a-tomowa — spadkobiercy Hitlera! We Francji najbardziej klasyczym przykładem nowego typu na-zędzia w ręku USA, jest Leon Ilum. Stara się on udowodnić, tak ak zresztą cała prasa reakcyjnorządowa, począwszy od socjali-tów, a skończywszy na gaulli-itach – że plan Marshalla jest ży-

A oto, jak sprawa przedstawia się naprawdę. – Amerykańscy miliarderzy oświadczyli: pożyczymy Europie pieniędzy pod warun-kiem, że będziemy kontrolować ich wydatkowanie przez uległe nam rządy. Co powiedziawszy, dali roz-kaz rządowi francuskiemu prze-pędzenia ministrów komunistycznych. Taki sam rozkaz dostały rządy Belgii i Włoch. Reakcyjna burżuazja tych krajów, wspierana przez socjalistów i "chrześcijan-de-

szczyć ten wasz przemysł na korzyść naszych monopoli. — Wiec Leon Blum popłynał do Washing-tonu sprzedać Byrnesowi film fran-

W LATO ZIMNE

W Rumunii w lato zimne czaban młodziutki zginał: prosit ostatnim słowem:

"Pochowajcie mnie pod drzewem jodłowym;

polóżcie mi kapelusz pod karkiem;

na jodle powieście fujarke:

dajcie znak — pierścień — mojej niebodze...

A dokoła jodły tej niech owce chodzą:

białe owce bliżej, czarne dalej,

wszystkie owce, cośmy razem je pasali".

KAZIMIERA IŁŁAKOWICZÓWNA

PILECKI Ø

"I already feel very tired and would like a quick end."



Press report about the trial of the "paid agents of General Anders's Intelligence Service"

From left to right: Witold Pilecki (left) and Maria Szelągowska (center)

The government-controlled media exploited Pilecki's case. They accused him of being a member "of an espionage group of General Anders," which they claimed was threatening society and the youth.

Przekroj 14 March 1948, Issue 153 (11/1948), p. 3

Press report about the trial of the "paid agents of General Anders's Intelligence Service"

Second row (from left to right): Witold Pilecki, Maria Szelągowska

Dziennik Zachodni 6 March, 1948, Issue 65 (1094), Year 4, p. 1.

Pilecki's last contact with his family

After the war Pilecki visited his family, who were living outside of Warsaw. He suggested that his wife take the family to Italy to live in exile. Maria Pilecka, however, refused. Pilecki had difficulty reconnecting with his children. Zofia was twelve and Andrzej fourteen years old. After more than five years of separation, they had become estranged.

Prior to his arrest, Pilecki hardly saw his family at all. Maria Pilecka was devastated by the trial against her husband. In the courtroom, she could see that he had been tortured. All pleas for clemency were denied. Not until 1990 did the family learn that the death sentence had been carried out against Pilecki on May 25, 1948. Zofia and Andrzej have always been proud of their father. They were never influenced by the communist propaganda.

Pilecki's children Zofia and Andrzej in Sukurcze, 1936

Private collection of the Pilecki family



Pilecki's letter to his son Andrzej, 1943/44

As a former art student, Pilecki was a gifted illustrator. He painstakingly illustrated his letters to his children and filled them with useful advice. Pilecki was a dedicated letter writer and took Zofia and Andrzej seriously. With a light touch he passed on valuable knowledge, encouraged them in their own endeavors, and shared with them his love of nature.

Private collection of the Pilecki family

1.

Take a board 2cm thick, 15cm wide, 25cm long. [drawing] Make a small round opening in it through punching a hole 10 cm from one end. [drawing] Then cut a triangle in it with an ordinary saw [drawing]. A board prepared that way forms a small workshop surface, which, when attached to a table with a screw, makes it possible to do all kinds of sawing with a fretsaw without ruining the table. It also allows you to change direction (stitch) - [drawing] while working on the inside of the round hole [drawing]. [The board] is screwed to the table with screws [drawing] or with one movable screw which does not break the table and which can be unscrewed [drawing] [drawing] FRETASAW [drawing], a saw blade [drawing] is attached to the fretsaw with the teeth facing down [fig.] and not up.

When positioning the blade, its one end has to be screwed firmly to the fretsaw near the handle, and then — resting the handle against the chest, and pressing the free arm of the fretsaw with the left hand — you stretch and with the right hand screw the other end of the blade into the free arm of the fretsaw so that it is stiffly stretched — like a string in a guitar, but not too tight — so that it doesn't break [drawing].

2.

Using a fretsaw prepared in this way, you can saw the outer contours of an object in a chipboard: a shelf, a frame, a side of a box, or whatever you want to saw along the lines of a drawing, drawn on the chipboard from a pattern through a tracing paper — as shown here [picture].

Then you file all the small and larger holes that are inside the frame according to the same drawing. To do this, in each particle of the chipboard (which needs to be sawed and cut out to make a hole) you need to make a hole with a crochet hook carefully so as not to break the chipboard [drawing]. Then unscrew the blade from one end, put (thread) the object to be sawn (frame) from the chipboard on to the blade (through the hole made with a crochet) and again screw the end of the blade released for a moment to the fretsaw and continue to saw all the holes that are drawn and placed inside the frame, as well as the one large rectangular shape for the placement of the photograph [drawing].

Tax prey so towano "land rege" - sy pitowyje sig no odgrecie zasna tank konduny jakingo predpiniolu: potenie, romeeni isolnesso bake podetecka i workshe canalisen co nig chee pitower no linji vysuura ktory zostat na dyktą z janiegos is zoru prece Kalke pracrysowany - tak the tu mizej just nary sowane Marty price supritoring sig wrystair atward wate i vigure, where se weitight rame posting tens samego rysunku W furn cela w warder crester dysty courted observed) treeba wholis daining su detrian ostrožnie by nie zjamać dystu Nasteponie ad srubować prira a jednego nouca, natożyć (nasisać) wypita averationed predict (raune) : divity no pritie hamore (proces driver zvolima sudativien i zuowu zarrabować zvotniony he choix xoniec pitri do fautregi i dalej wypiłowywać uszystkie obwork, utóre ja haryrowane, a um excrone wewnester rameri jax rowniet fen jeden wieten obsir protongthy olla unierzonewa fol gralis

In general, while performing this work you have to saw calmly, evenly and nicely, so the saws don't break. You have to stay calm and move your hand evenly, without pressing on the fretsaw so that the positioning remains rather straight and only a little inclined [drawing], and not like that one here [drawing]. When the saw is moving steadily (not pressed down too much) along the path of the pencil - you need to keep blowing away the accumulated sawdust so that you can clearly see the drawn line - and comes to a spot where you need to turn more sharply or gently to the right or left — you have to stop and, without entirely pressing on the saw, continue to move faster in place slowly turning the sawed out frame in the right direction with your left hand [drawing]. After all the outer lines and inner parts have been filed out, the frame should be cleaned with glass paper and a stem should be attached to it. You can even put some varnish on it [drawing].

When I was eight I used to make pretty boxes, shelves and all kinds of frames for pictures, and in the recent years, that skill, which is very pleasant by the way, has proved very useful.

It is necessary to learn to saw calmly. Once you let me know that you've understood and know how to saw, I will send you nice projects, patterns to work with.

Worde pury dej volacie choodis do by sig preyency crais pitowaé sporajnie, rowno i Tadnie - by sa pitri nie Tamaty - treela rachowy was his sporcej inie nerce porundé rownomiernie, nie nacincaé na laubrege fax by potozenie ly so tante wigger proste trocky tylko pochylone goly hitra posuvasia sporcajnie nie naciskana zbytuto stierar olówka - przytym tacha stale zdniuchiwać elierające są trocina tak ley jamo widzeć naryzowano, linie - i dojakie do miejs - gdrie tucka rawieić i ostro lub Tagoderie es pravo lab is loiso - naleig ratingmac sy i nie nacistaly zupernie na pri porustač dalej seubciej no miejsce powoli obracaje strong. wypitodaywang ranning is odpowreding Po wy into wanin way strick linis new netvernysh i crester weisne henry halery various, ocrysici mlaugu parrieven i dovobić nożne Možna ukost wine lossai laxseveni

John miateur 8 lat-wyfitowywateur Tache

podeteenca, piteeni, i welkere varung do obrazów
a w ostatnich latach devar mulejstnoo'e
ta, setora jest baroteo przyjemna—

agromuse mi się przydata.

Volezię tylko nauczyć się pitować

sportojest. Jan napisnen mure za

zvozumiase jorx to się pituje i
potrafise to przystę ci Tachee
projekty—wxory—do vokoty—

projekty—wxory—do vokoty—

Pilecki's letter to his son Andrzej, May 28, 1944

Private collection of the Pilecki family

Boy, I awfully regret that I cannot cuddle you closely to my chest. You took my rhymed remarks to your heart and probably even burst into tears. But as becomes a knight, you are thanking me politely for my letter. My poor puppy! I know that it is not all your fault. You had other reasons not to write to me. You should realize once and for all that parental remarks even if unpleasant at times — ...

(I had parents myself and wondered sometimes: what do they want from me?) ... But at the end everything I learned from my father and mother came in very handy later on in life — more even than school. It has prevented me from making bad mistakes in life. You are unnecessarily so concerned about the pigeons. I doubt if your wheat for them will mature. Just let the sparrows from under the roof find out — they will pick it out before it is ready. I kiss you warmly.

Prasense satuje sa me moje Chrispana strasense satuje sa me magani Merca Prajetes sy moini magani mierstowanejmi i penno sij poprakates-jan na mara postestato-drig knjesz jednak mi estelazne na list. - Potedna moja stobasa. Mojem i me me me usnjetum jest Twoja me me usnjetum jest Twoja me me me moje stobasa.

Pilecki's letter to his daughter Zofia, October 18, 1943

Private collection of the Pilecki family

Dearest Zosieńka! Your first letter to me made me very happy. Andrzejek could also write to me, in spite of his sick leg. After all a letter is written with a hand, not a leg — one just needs to be more determined, but I suppose he's going to write me next time. I'm very happy to hear that you are such a [note at the top: Thank you very much also for the flowers and for the little pear tree] devoted housekeeper and that you like to breed various animals and enjoy planting all kinds of plants in the garden. I, too, like every worm, every beetle, peas and beans and generally everything that is alive — therefore, I am very pleased to see the same qualities in you — my kids.

Andrzejek and I will certainly also find [note at the top: "Burchel" — that is something that the world has probably not yet heard of — it seems to be called like that only in Ostrów] common preferences, once we talk or write letters to one another. I wrote my last letter to you as if you were adults — knowing that you will not yet understand everything in it. I wrote therefore about the most important things which you will understand later — one day. I wrote that we live in such times, in which it is unknown whether I will be able to still write to you when you are adults (and a letter can be kept until then). Dear Zosieńka! You have such a nice hair and you want to have it cut. Try to keep it. More patience! Thank you both for all the good wishes you keep sending me, as well as for all the beautiful pictures. I wish you good health, good luck at school and more patience in accepting what Mommy or other elders tell you.

I kiss you warmly. [note at the top: I'm sending ribbons for Zosieńka and stockings for Andrzejek].

Jestem bardro rad z pierw stego Twego listu do mnie.

Stego Twego listu do mnie.

Shokejek też moż t lug-pomimo chore; nożki, list napisać, bo precte list ng pine
rezerva, a me nożką-treba
tylko bejć wrecj zdecydowa
negu- no, ale jorzy puszoraw
te ou napine do mnte następnyme rasem. Bardro
sig cresze, re jestes take, 2a-

wotana, gosposia i hubisa nozne zwiero tra hodować, jar nownież plantować whelkie noślinki w ogrodku. Ja nownież lubię każdego nobaczka, żuenka, groker i fasolke, i wsystro co żej te-- dlatego też jest uni barono przej ennie, że w Waż-drie czakach mojeh-wishe, tesame cedny. Z ofudrej krem napewno też znaj drienny

pordemantany re sobatus pordemantany re sobatus hapitemy do stebre listy. Popuedni lit-prisatem do Mas, jour do stavony ch, wiedras, jour do stavony ch, wiedy despe o fem, re wongstrieps wim drisiaj jervere me zvozumiecte, leas prisatem dlatego o recrach najwatniejonych, które zvozumiecte coe po fem kiedyo, - že ryje my w tarkich crasach, kiedy

nie wiadomi jest cry hyde of moie risad do was - edy be driecte dovoili (a list moie sig ponechować). Zo vienko!

mass torki e Taiol ne w Toski, a chan je obcinać. Stara nie il meteliować. Wicaj ampinosal nie il meteliować. Jornow row nier za prevne obraski.

Zycre walu zdrowa, powodrema w naece i więcej cierpliwości w przy mowaniu tego co walu Manus luci inter stari mone catrije was serderinie





No mention of Pilecki in postwar Poland

Pilecki's life story was suppressed for decades. The communist regime determined what Poles were allowed to memorialize. The Home Army and the government-inexile were rarely mentioned at official commemorations. According to the interpretation of the ruling powers, resistance in Auschwitz had been organized primarily by communists. Other resistance groups—such as Pilecki's network—were ignored.

After his death, Pilecki's written papers were locked away in the state archives in Warsaw. The regime treated his family as enemies of the state. Maria Pilecka withdrew to an ecclesiastical orphanage, where she worked as a cleaning woman.

After Stalin's death in 1953, there was also a phase in Poland in which Stalinist repressions were eased. Pilecki's daughter Zofia Pilecka-Optulowicz attempted at this time to have her father rehabilitated. However, the redress of state injustices did not succeed until the democratization of Poland decades later. Pilecki was rehabilitated on October 1, 1990.

Since that time, Witold Pilecki and his work have become a part of Polish memory culture. Numerous streets and schools today bear his name.

<

Witold Pilecki with his dog Neron on the steps of his estate in Sukurcze; the two were inseparable, 1930s

IPN



"Only when one grasps the true horror of his fate can one comprehend what the Second World War in Europe was really about."

Norman Davies about Witold Pilecki

Rediscovering Pilecki

Pilecki repeatedly documented the crimes in Auschwitz. Immediately after his escape from the camp, he completed an initial brief report. Shortly thereafter he composed a second report, Raport W, in Warsaw. He then wrote his most extensive and significant report in Italy in the summer of 1945.

This final report was sent to the Polish government-in-exile in London via General Pełczyński in San Georgio, Italy. No one in London, however, was willing to publish it. The Cold War suppressed issues of the recent past. In 1974, Josef Garliński, a Polish historian living in exile in London, published Fighting Auschwitz, a book on resistance in the Auschwitz concentration camp, which introduced Pilecki to a wider audience. Garliński's research was based on Pilecki's report as well as interviews with survivors.

The opening of Polish archives during the political and social upheaval after 1989 made it possible for historian Adam Cyra and Pilecki's son Andrzej to review Pilecki's papers. In 2000, Cyra published the first biography of Witold Pilecki in Polish.

After British journalist Jack Fairweather happened to learn of Pilecki's story, he began a long-term research project, which resulted in his biography *The Volunteer* detailing Pilecki's life. This exhibition is based on Fairweather's book.

Warsaw Fears "Extermination"

Germans Murder 700,000 Jews in Poland

Traveling gas chambers

The New York Times

Nazi authorities in Poland are planning to "exterminate" the entire Warsaw ghetto, whose population is estimated at 600,000 Jews, a Polish spokesman asserted tonight on the basis of reliable reports from the Continent. Preliminary notices have been posted ordering the deportation of 6,000 Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to the East, the spokesman said, and "up to now two train-loads of Jews have departed toward their doom without anything further being heard from them."

The spokesman said that a wave of despair and suicides had swept the Warsaw ghetto at news of the latest persecutions, which came after the disclosure that Heinrich Himmler, Nazi Gestapo chief, had made a surprise visit to Poland for conversations with occupation officials. The spokesman asserted that Gestapo agents killed all members of the National Medical Council and other doctors and patients, all Jews, in a raid on a council meeting in the Warsaw ghetto.

It was believed that the Germans would deport all Polish Jew officials from the ghetto first, taking 6,000 officials of the Jewish administration in Warsaw and 2,000 policemen. The spokesman said that out of 100,000 workers in the ghetto, between 70,000 and 80,000 were forced to work in Nazi workshops to pay German authorities for the meager supplies of food sent into the ghetto.

Published July 29, 1942 © The New York Times Daily Telegraph Reporter

More than 700,000 Polish Jews have been slaughtered by the Germans in the greatest massacre in the world's history. In addition, a system of starvation is being carried out in which the number of deaths, on the admission of the Germans themselves, bids fair to be almost as large. The most gruesome details of mass killing, even to the use of poison gas, are revealed in a report sent secretly to Mr. S. Zygielboim, Jewish representative of the Polish National Council in London, by an active group in Poland. It is strongly felt that action should be taken to prevent Hitler from carrying out his threat that five minutes before the war ends, however it may end, he will exterminate all Jews in Europe. It was the avowed intention of the Germans from the early days of the war to exterminate the Jewish population on Polish territory. In a 1940 New Year message, Gauleiter Greiser said that the only use to be made of the Poles was as slaves for Germany, but for the Jews, there was no future. This extermination policy began in 1941 in Eastern Galicia, and everywhere the procedure has been the same. Men and boys between 14 and 60 have been driven together into one place, usually a public square or a cemetery, and there killed, either by knifing, machine-guns or grenades. They had to dig their own graves beforehand.

HOSPITAL VICTIMS

Children in orphanages, pensioners in almshouses and the sick in hospitals have been shot. Women have been killed in the streets. In many places Jews were deported to "unknown destinations" and killed in neighboring woods. In Vilna, 50,000 Jews were murdered in November. The total number slaughtered in this district and around Lithuanian Kovno is 300,000. Practically all the Jews in Zyrovice, Lachovice, Mira,

Kosov and other similar towns have been killed. In Rovne the murders began early in November. In three days and nights, nearly 15,000 men, women and children were shot. Total deaths in other places have been:

 Lvov:
 30,000

 Stanislavov:
 15,000

 Slonin:
 9,000

 Hancedicze:
 6,000

 Tarnopol:
 5,000

 Brzezany:
 4,000

 Zlochov:
 2,000

SLAUGHTER BY GAS

In November the slaughter of Jews by gas in the Polish territories incorporated in the Reich also began. A special van fitted as a gas chamber was used into which were crowded 90 victims at a time. The bodies were buried in special graves dug in the Lubardski Forest. On an average 1,000 Jews were gassed daily. In Chelmno from November last to March 5,000 from four towns, together with 35,000 from the Lodz ghetto, and a number of gypsies, were murdered this way. In February the extermination of Jews started in the so-called General Government, the eastern part of Poland, not incorporated in the Reich. The Gestapo paid daily visits to the Jewish quarters and killed people systematically in the streets and houses. In March 25,000 Jews were deported from Lublin in sealed wagons for an "unknown destination." All trace of them has been lost. About 3,000 more were put into barracks in a Lublin suburb. Now there is not a single Jew there. In Cracow during March 50 men on a proscribed list were shot outside their homes. A similar number of men and women were killed outside their street doors during an arranged night of terror in the Warsaw ghetto. All social groups in the ghetto were affected. More such nights are expected.

19 IN A ROOM

The Warsaw ghetto, actually an extensive concentration camp, houses 600,000 Jews on an average of 19 to a room. Before the war, when the district had twice as many houses, the total population was 130,000. All children under five and all adults over 50 are refused medical supplies. This means that only a minimum of aid reaches the inside of the barrier to allay the ravages of typhus and typhoid. According to statistics issued in Poland by the German authorities, the number of funerals from the Warsaw ghetto rose from 900 in January 1941, to 5,620 in August. Statistics available from secret sources in Poland show that during the whole year there are no fewer than 76,000 funerals. A large proportion of the deaths were due to starvation. In the three years 1939-1941 the number of deaths in Warsaw alone rose from 7,696 to 42,239. The Jewish population of the ghetto had risen in that time from 375,000 to 407,000 through the influx of Jews deported from other provinces and countries. I understand that the Polish Government intends to make the facts in this report known to the British and Allied Govern-

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11 Allies Condemn Nazi War on Jews

United Nations Issue Joint Declaration of Protest on "Cold-Blooded Extermination"

Special to The New York Times WASHINGTON, Dec. 17

A joint declaration by members of the United Nations was issued today condemning Germany's "bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination" of Jews and declaring that "such events can only strengthen the resolve of all freedom-loving peoples to overthrow the barbarous Hitlerite tyranny." The nations reaffirmed "their solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution and to press on with the necessary practical measures to this end." The declaration was issued simultaneously through the State Department here and in London. It was subscribed to by eleven nations, including the United States, Britain and Russia, and also by the French National Committee in London. The declaration referred parto the barbarous forms it is taking.

TEXT OF DECLARATION

The attention of the Belgian, Czechoslovak, Greek, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norwegian, Polish, Soviet, United Kingdom, United States and Yugoslav Governments and also of the French National Committee has been drawn to numerous reports from Europe that the German authorities, not content with denying to persons of Jewish race in all the territories over which their barbarous rule has been extended, the most elementary human rights, are now carrying into effect Hitler's oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe. From all the occupied countries Jews are being transported in conditions of appalling horror and brutality to Eastern Europe. In Poland, which has been made the principal Nazi slaughterhouse, the ghettos established by the

German invader are being systematically emptied of all Jews except a few highly skilled workers required for war industries. None of those taken away are ever heard of again. The able-bodied are slowly worked to death in labor camps. The infirm are left to die of exposure and starvation or are deliberately massacred in mass executions. The number of victims of these bloody cruelties is reckoned in many hundreds of thousands of entirely innocent men, women and children. The above-mentioned governments and the French National Committee condemn in the strongest possible terms this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination. They declare that such events can only strengthen the resolve of all freedom-loving peoples to overthrow the barbarous Hitlerite tyranny. They reaffirm their solemn resolution to insure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution, and to press on with the necessary practical measures to this end.

PRELIMINARY STEPS TAKEN

ticularly to the program as conducted in Poland and The declaration had been forecast through diplomatic conversations that had been conducted in recent days looking to a joint denunciation of the persecution. The nations for some time have been assembling evidence, sifting it, and exchanging it among one another. Secretary of State Cordell Hull was asked today what practical steps could be taken to reinforce the protest. Statements have been made by President Roosevelt and heads of other governments during recent months, he replied, in regard to the development of plans, and concrete progress to discover and assemble all possible facts relating to these inhuman acts together with the names of the guilty persons, to the end that they may be apprehended at the earliest possible opportunity, not later than the end of the war, and properly dealt with. These undertakings, he added, are being carried forward now. The matter has been active for months, not only with reference to Jews, but also to other innocent civilians who

have been the victims of reprisals and persecution. President Roosevelt, in a statement on Oct. 25, 1941, denounced the execution of innocent hostages. On Jan. 13, 1942, the representatives of nine governments whose countries are under occupation issued a protest in London and declared that those responsible would be "handed over to justice and tried." Subsequently the attention of Secretary Hull was formally called to "the barbaric crimes against civilian populations" in occupied countries through a communication from the governments of Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg, Norway, The Netherlands, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the French National Committee.

ROOSEVELT STATEMENTS RECALLED

President Roosevelt on Aug. 21, 1942, issued a statement denouncing the persecutions and warning those responsible that "the time will come when they shall have to stand in courts of law in the very countries which they are now oppressing and answer for their acts." In another statement, on Oct. 7, 1942, President Roosevelt advocated a United Nations Commission for the Investigation of War Crimes for meting out "just and sure punishment" to the "ringleaders responsible for the organized murder of thousands of innocent persons and the commission of atrocities which have violated every tenet of the Christian faith." And last week the President gave sympathetic consideration to a proposal of a committee of Jewish organizations in this country, headed by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, for a United States commission to consider the persecution of the Jews and to act in conjunction with the United Nations in the matter.

Published on 18 December 1942 © The New York Times

Himmler Program kills Polish Jews

Slaughter of 250,000 in Plan to Wipe Out Half in Country This Year Is Reported

REGIME IN LONDON ACTS

Officials of Poland Publish Data –
Dr. Wise Gets Check Here by State Department

By JAMES MacDONALD Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES LONDON, Nov. 24

Old persons, children, infants and cripples among the Jewish population of Poland are being shot, killed by various other methods or forced to undergo hardships that inevitably cause death as a means of carrying out an order by Heinrich Himmler, Nazi Gestapo chief, that half the remaining Polish Jews must be exterminated by the end of this year, according to a report issued today by the Polish Government in London.

The report, some details of which have been printed recently in Palestine newspapers, said the only Jews being spared in Poland were the able-bodied who could provide "slave labor" for the German war effort.

The Polish authorities gave out statistics showing that up to Oct. 1, about 250,000 Polish Jews had been killed under the Himmler program, put into effect this year.

As an instance of the rapidity with which the Jewish population had been cut down, either by evacuation to the Nazi war factories, deaths from disease or by liquidation, the Polish officials said only 40,000 October ration cards had been printed for the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto, where the population last March was 433,000. This had been a reduction from 130,000 ration cards in September for the Warsaw Jews.

MASS KILLINGS IN FREIGHT CARS

Declaring that the Nazi program to reduce the number of Jews in Poland by 50 per cent this year was a "first step toward complete liquidation," the report said:

"The most ruthless methods are being applied. The victims are either dragged out of their homes or simply seized in the streets.

"The Germans have mobilized a special battalion under the command of S.S. men and these are characterized by their utter ruthlessness and inhumanity. The victims when caught are driven to a square where old people and cripples are selected, taken to a cemetery and shot there.

"The remainder are loaded into goods trucks [freight cars] at a rate of 150 to a truck that normally holds forty. The floors of the trucks are covered with a thick layer of lime or chlorine sprinkled with water. The doors are sealed.

"Sometimes the train starts immediately on being loaded. Sometimes it remains on a siding for two days or even longer.

"The people are packed so tightly, that those who die of suffocation remain in the crowd side by side with those still living and with those slowly dying from the fumes of the lime and chloride and from lack of air, water and food.

"Wherever the trains arrive, half the people are dead. Those surviving are sent to special camps at Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor [in Southeastern Poland]. Once there, the so-called settlers are mass-murdered.

Details Reaching Palestine

Wireless to THE NEW YORK TIMES JERUSALEM, Nov. 24

FEW SURVIVE FOR LABOR BATTALIONS

"Only the young and relatively strong people are left alive for they provide valuable slave labor for the Germans. However, the percentage of these is extremely small, for out of a total of about 250,000 resettled, only about 4,000 have been sent to do auxiliary work on the battle fronts.

"Neither children nor babies are spared. Orphans from asylums and day nurseries are evacuated as well. The director of the biggest Jewish orphanage in Warsaw and well-known Polish writer Janusz Korczak, to whom the Germans had given permission to remain in the ghetto, preferred to follow his charges to death.

"Thus under the guise of resettlement in the east, the mass murder of the Jewish population is taking place."

The report remarked in connection with the data showing the population of the Warsaw ghetto as 433,000 in March that, although there was extremely high mortality there because of bad hygienic conditions, starvation, executions and the like, the number in the ghetto had remained more or less stable because Jews from other parts of Poland and from Germany, Austria and the Netherlands had been taken there.

Published by THE NEW YORK TIMES (November 25th, 1942)

Information received here of methods by which the Germans in Poland are carrying out the slaughter of Jews includes accounts of trainloads of adults and children taken to great crematoriums at Oswiencim, near Cracow.

Polish Christian workers have confirmed reports that concrete buildings on the former Russian frontiers are used by the German as gas chambers in which thousands of Jews have been put to death.

All children aged 1 to 12 have been gathered from large city ghettoes or towns and slain wholesale within a few minutes by machine-gun fire. Similar massacre of elderly Jews have occurred.

Any Jew put on forced labor who is on the sick list for more than two days is taken out and shot as use-

These deeds, it is stated, are part of a planned action that Gestapo Chief Heinrich Himmler had prepared and ordered to be carried out when he visited Warsaw at the end of last June. Himmler appointed a Vernichtungskommission or a destruction commission headed by a notorious Nazi thug named Feu. The Mayor of the ghetto at Warsaw, Adam Czerniakow, committed suicide during the Summer after the Germans ordered him to prepare a list for deportation.

Reports of the Himmler program that had been brought here since then have been authenticated by non-Jewish neutral persons who have visited Nazioccupied Eastern Europe.

Published by THE NEW YORK TIMES (November 25th, 1942)

Abbreviations

ABB Asea Brown Boveri

A-BSMA Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Archive

APAM-B State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau (Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau)

Archives of the Jagiellonian University

Archiwum UW University of Warsaw Archives

(Archiwum Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego)

BArch Federal Archives

Corbis Stock Market images

DHI German Historical Institute Warsaw

Foto Karta The KARTA Center Foundation Archive

(Archiwum Fotografii Ośrodka KARTA)

HIS The Hamburg Institute for Social Research

IPN The Institute of National Remembrance Warsaw

(Instytut Pamięci Narodowej)

IWM Imperial War Museum in London

LC Library of Congress

Museum Warschau The Museum of Warsaw (Muzeum Warszawy)

Museum der Stadt Krakau Historical Museum of the City of Kraków

(Muzeum Historyczne Miasta Krakowa)

NAC National Digital Archives

(Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe)

NLA National Library of Australia
NYPL The New York Public Library

NPG National Portrait Gallery

PAAA Berlin The Political Archive of the Federal Foreign Office

PA Picture Alliance

PA/DPA Picture Alliance / The German Press Agency

PAN Biblioteka Gdańska The Library of Gdańsk (Gdańsk Library PAN)

PAP Polish Press Agency (Polska Agencja Prasowa S.A.)

PAP/CAF Polish Press Agency

PAP/DPA Polnische Presseagentur/The German Press Agency

PISM The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum, London

POSK The Polish Social and Cultural Association

(Polski Ośrodek Społeczno-Kulturalny)

PUMST The Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in London

Staatsarchiv Warschau State Archive in Warsaw

(Archiwum Państwowe m. st. Warszawy)

TASS Russian News Agency

USHMM, Washington The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

VHM Virginia Holocaust Museum

WUM Warsaw Uprising Museum

Yad Vashem, Jerusalem Yad Vashem - the Holocaust Heroes' and Martyrs'

Remembrance Authority

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

Private Collection Maria Serafińska-Domańska, Private Collection

Pilecki Family, Private Collection

"... the exhibition about Witold Pilecki impresses visitors with its nuanced portrayal and helps German visitors in particular to develop a deeper understanding of the Polish perspective on two totalitarian systems of the 20th century."

TAGESSPIEGEL

"It was one of the most courageous acts of the 20th century:
In 1940, Witold Pilecki smuggled himself into the Auschwitz concentration camp
to report about it. But the Allies did not believe him —
and the communists even labelled him a traitor."

SPIEGEL

"If the story of Witold Pilecki were a novel, it would still be unbelievable: In 1940, the Polish officer allowed the SS to arrest him and deport him to Auschwitz so that he could suss out possible resistance."

DEUTSCHLANDFUNK

"The new Pilecki Institute in Berlin is showing an impressive exhibition about its namesake, a Polish patriot and resistance fighter."

SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG · JENS BISKY

"The story of the voluntary Auschwitz prisoner is also a story of recognizing and naming a 'crime without a name'."

HANNA RADZIEJOWSKA

www.pileckiinstitut.de

