

## THE SPY WHO VOLUNTEERED FOR AUSCHWITZ

**POLISH CAPTAIN WITOLD PILECKI**

**SUPPORTS THE FACT THAT THE ALLIES KNEW OF THE DEATH CAMPS AS EARLY AS 1942**

**NO ONE BELIEVED WHAT HE SAW AND HIS STORY WAS SUPPRESSED FOR OVER 60 YEARS**

**THE MAN THAT WOULDN'T GIVE UP – NO MATTER WHAT & IT COST HIM HIS LIFE**

186



*Colorized pre-1939 picture*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J76gQB4UDz4>

The true story of a Polish spy who volunteered to be incarcerated in Auschwitz to obtain evidence to tell the world the truth about Hitler's final solution and who was eventually murdered by the Soviet Communist regime in Poland in 1948

### INTRODUCTION

Born May 13, 1901, Olonets, Karelia, Russia.

Died May 25, 1948, Warsaw, Poland.



*The Witold Pilecki family in the mid 1930's*

On September 19, 1940, Witold Pilecki, a Polish soldier, was captured by German SS officers and sent to the concentration camp in Auschwitz. Considering he was a spy, things had turned out exactly as he'd planned. Captain Pilecki's mission was to organize resistance from within the most horrific symbol of the Holocaust, send information to the Allies, and record the horrors he witnessed for the sake of history.

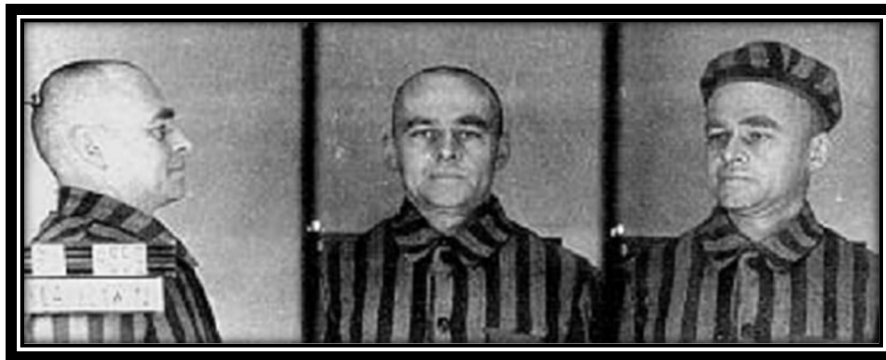
Under the pseudonym Tomasz Serafinski, Pilecki arrived in Auschwitz sometime in the evening between September 21 and 22, 1940, and described what he found as "another planet"—a hell in which every building's walls were covered in swastikas and corpses lay everywhere.

"We were struck over the head not only by SS rifle butts but by something far greater," he wrote. "Our concepts of law and order and of what was normal, all those ideas to which we had become accustomed on this Earth, were given a brutal kicking."

Pilecki went on to live in inhumane conditions for nearly 1,000 days. Pilecki's clandestine intelligence, received by the Allies in 1941, was among the earliest describing the appalling conditions of the Nazi death camp.

Pilecki's comprehensive 1945 report on his undercover mission was published in English in 2012 under the title [The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery.](#)

Yet, for some reason, his story still isn't widely known. I wanted to know more about the career of this exceptional man, so I got in touch with the people who recently translated the book into French—former director of the AFP bureau in Warsaw, Ursula Hyzy, and Patrick Goddard, who is a professor of history.



*Auschwitz concentration camp photos of Witold Pilecki taken in 1941*

## WORLD WAR TWO AND THE POLISH SECRET ARMY

Pilecki was born on 13 May 1901 in Karelia, Russia, where his family had been forcibly resettled by Imperial Russian authorities after Poland's January Uprising of 1863 and 1864 was suppressed.

Pilecki co-founded, with his commander, Major Włodarkiewicz., the Secret Polish Army in 1939. Known as *Tajna Armia Polska*, it was one of the first underground organizations in Poland.

Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Pilecki was mobilized as a cavalry platoon commander and assigned to the 19<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division – part of the Polish Army Prusy. After his platoon moved towards Lwów, modern-day Lviv, in Ukraine, they disbanded after eastern Poland was annexed by the Soviet Union.

As the resistance movement grew, Pilecki became the organizational commander of the group. By 1940, the organization had around 8,000 men – over half of which were armed – across Warsaw, Lublin, and other Polish cities. It became part of the Home Army in 1941.

## AUSCHWITZ

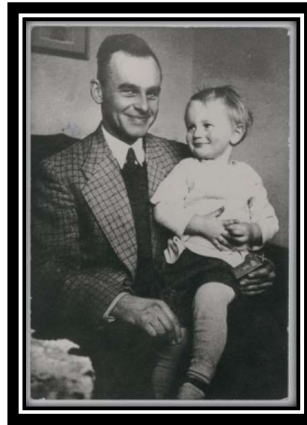
A major point during this time is the fact that Pilecki and his superiors were unaware of the horrible conditions and atrocities taking place inside the Auschwitz Camp until Pilecki arrived as a prisoner and began his mission as a spy. As stated in the introduction above he spent almost three years as a prisoner before his escape.

Pilecki was 40 years old when he voluntarily went in under the alias Tomasz Serafinski. He was a young, well-trained soldier who had participated in the Russo-Polish War of 1919–1920; in September 1939, the beginning of the Second World War, he'd fought against the Germans under the command of Major Jan Włodarkiewicz. Together with Włodarkiewicz, they built a resistance movement, the Polish Secret Army, which expanded rapidly across Poland.



*Witold Pilecki with his wife, Maria, at their home before the Auschwitz Mission*

In the summer of 1940, raids began in Warsaw; the Germans used to stop people randomly and deport them to Auschwitz, which had just opened. These raids were meant to sow terror and put together a servile workforce. Major Włodarkiewicz and Pilecki decided to learn more about the camp where two members of their organization were already interned. They wanted to organize the fight from within, and Pilecki volunteered to do it.



*Pilecki with his Nephew*

He soon began to implement what they called the "conspiracy." In the fall of 1940, he created a network of five prisoners who didn't know each other, to limit losses in the event of arrests by the Gestapo. His first task was to improve the life conditions of its members. Priorities were for all members of the network to find a job "under one roof," to avoid the harsh climatic conditions, to be under the command of a non-brutal kapo, and to be better treated in hospitals by asking civilians to give them drugs and vaccines. Pilecki and his network infiltrated most of the camp's administrations (you have to bear in mind that the SS used some prisoners as second-in-commands) and succeeded.

The organization provided the Polish underground with information about the camp from October 1940 – just weeks after Pilecki arrived. His reports were forwarded to the British government and in 1941, his resistance movement broadcasted information on the number of arrivals, deaths, and the conditions inside Auschwitz.

"Together with a hundred other people, I at least reached the bathroom," Pilecki's Auschwitz report reads. "Here we gave everything away into bags, to which respective numbers were tied. Here our hair head and body were cut off, and we were slightly sprinkled with cold water. I got a blow in my jaw with a heavy rod. I spat out my two teeth. Bleeding began. From that moment we became mere numbers — I wore the number 4859."

That was a small and early number for a camp that would — one year later — see numbers in the 15,000s.

Alex Storozyński, president and executive director of the Kosciuszko Foundation, tells NPR's Mike Pesca that one of the early signs of Auschwitz's true purpose to Pilecki was the prisoners' diet. "The food rations were calculated in such a way that people would live for six weeks," Storozyński says.

Here's Pilecki's description of what a German officer told him: "Whoever will live longer — it means he steals. You will be placed in a special commando, where you will live short.' This was aimed to cause as quick a mental breakdown as possible."

Pilecki was assigned to backbreaking work — carrying rocks in a wheelbarrow. But he also managed to gather intelligence on the camp and smuggle messages out with prisoners who escaped. SS soldiers assigned Poles to take their laundry into town, and sometimes messages could be smuggled along with the dirty clothes to be passed to the underground Polish army.

"The underground army was completely in disbelief about the horrors," Storozyński explains. "About ovens, about gas chambers, about injections to murder people — people didn't believe him. They thought he was exaggerating."

Pilecki also hoped to organize an attack and mass escape from the camp. But no order could be procured for such a plan from the Polish high command.

"We were waiting for an order, as we understood that without such one — although it would be a beautiful firework and unexpected for the world and for Poland — we could not agree to do that," Pilecki wrote.

For the next two and a half years, Pilecki slowly worked to feed his reports up the Polish chain of command to London. "And in London," Storozyński says, "the Polish government in exile told the British and the Americans, 'You need to do something. You need to bomb the train tracks going to these camps. Or we have all these Polish paratroopers — drop them inside the camp. Let them help these people break out.' **But the British and the Americans just wouldn't do anything.**"

The first reports were transmitted by released prisoners. Later, everything was relative to the success of escape attempts. Some escapes were truly spectacular—for example on June 20, 1942, four prisoners armed and dressed as SS came out of the camp through the front door in broad daylight, using the car of the camp commander. Information was also transmitted via civilians. They were forwarded to the underground HQ in Warsaw, and from there they were transmitted to the Polish government, who were in exile in London.

Their most impressive feat was the making of a radio transmitter using parts they found around the camp: It worked for several months in 1942. It was hidden in the hospital, a place the SS were reluctant to go to, and it'd transmit information at different times of the day to avoid being detected. However a member of the organization was too talkative, and this radio eventually had to be removed. Their reports included essential information about the awful treatment of the Jewish population of the camp.

Pilecki was one of the first to talk about the gas chambers in Auschwitz II, in Birkenau. He gave a few details on the crematorium furnaces. He obtained information from commandos who were working at Birkenau, and he expanded his network to reach the extermination camp. Pilecki also mentioned the killing of Gypsies: "They were liquidated in the manner of Auschwitz," he wrote, that is to say, using Zyklon B gas.

Pilecki's mission was not only to create a support network and to inform but also to organize the fight. This struggle has taken different forms. First, a constant struggle to avoid the pitfalls of the Germans, save as many lives as possible, and try to kill the most dangerous SS and informers.

The Germans had set up a mailbox for accusations: For any significant denunciation, a prisoner was rewarded. Many letters were posted. Pilecki and his comrades opened that box and read the letters carefully: They destroyed the most dangerous letters and would post their own to denounce the most malevolent individuals.

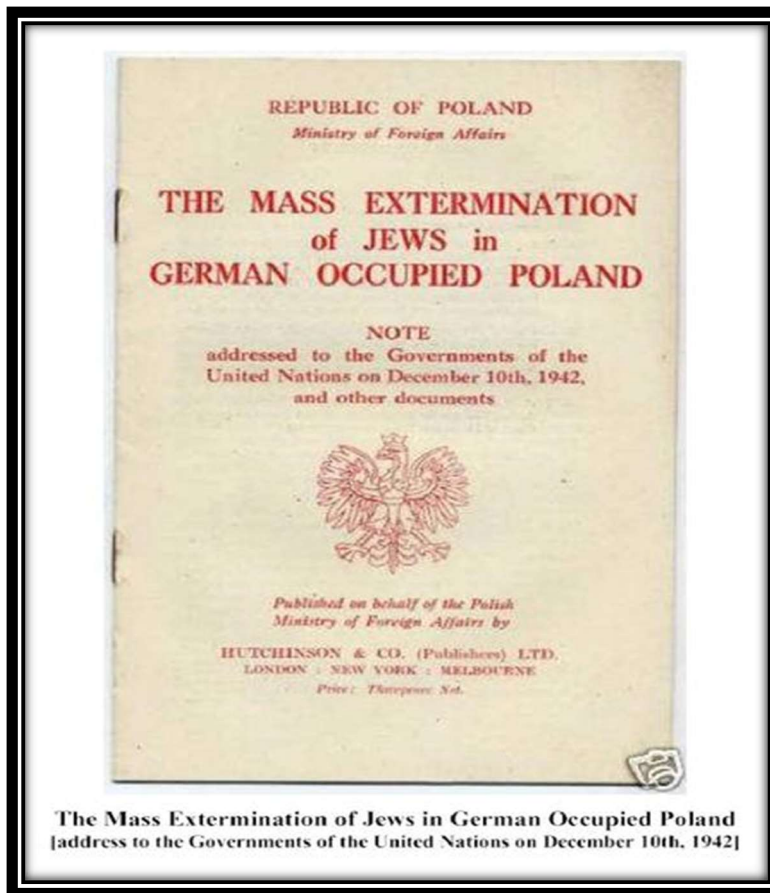
It was a daunting task to remove SS agents because they couldn't be murdered. The organization raised a lice colony—carrying typhus—in the hospital laboratory to infect SS agents. Several of them died that way.

Pilecki also developed a whole plan for an uprising in the camp. In late 1942, Pilecki was convinced that his network—now composed of more than a thousand deported prisoners—could take control of the central camp for a short time. But, he insisted that a collective escape would only be possible with the support of the Polish Underground Army and Allied airdrops.

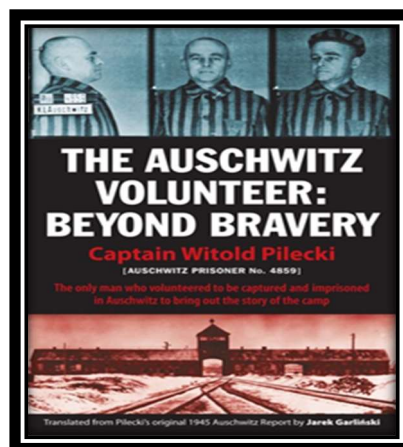
Therefore, he waited for his superiors in Warsaw to give him orders. But nothing came. He didn't know that the Allies had no intention of carrying out any operation on Auschwitz. And he didn't know that the leaders of the Polish resistance in Warsaw considered any release operation suicidal, because the Germans had thousands of men in the region.

Soviet prisoners of war were the victims of the first gassing by Zyklon B, which was made up of poisonous hydrogen cyanide, later used to murder the Jews in 1942. At the time, Pilecki was fortunate enough to be on a work assignment beyond the gates of the camp.

"The men had been so tightly packed that even in death they could not fall over," Pilecki wrote of the murdered inmates.



“The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland”. Evidence presented by The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Countries of the League of Nations, on December 10, 1942



The book about Pilecki's life (The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery) was not published in English until 2012 with the New York Times describing it as "a historical document of the greatest importance." How come it was only translated to French now?

Ursula Hyzy and Patrick Goddard: Pilecki was a "disturbing" character for the Allies, who pretended for a long time not to know what was happening in the camps, and for the Communists, who were responsible for his death in 1948.



In communist Poland, it was forbidden to talk about Pilecki and his children were barred from higher education.

The Auschwitz Volunteer remained in the archives of the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in London [Stadium Polski Podziemne] before being discovered by the historian and former prisoner Józef Garlinski, who wrote *Fighting Auschwitz: The Resistance Movement in the Concentration Camp* in the 1970s.

It was not until after the end of the Cold War that the book was published in Poland.

### ESCAPE

Pilecki's reports, later known as Witold's Report, were a main source of intelligence on Auschwitz for the Western Allies. While he hoped the Allies would drop arms or troops into the camp or that the Home Army would organize an assault, the Gestapo began to seek and kill the resistance's members.

Eventually, after nearly three years, Pilecki reported, "Further stay here might be too dangerous and difficult for me." On the night of 26 April 1943, Pilecki decided to escape. Assigned to a night shift at a camp bakery outside of the perimeter fence, he and two comrades overpowered a guard, cut the phone line and left – taking with them documents stolen from the SS.

"Shots were fired behind us," he wrote. "How fast we were running, it is hard to describe. We were tearing the air into rags with quick movements of our hands.

### AFTER THE WAR

Instead of retiring to write his memoirs, he slipped back into Poland to spy on the postwar Communist government ... but the man who had lived through Nazi internment couldn't pull the same trick on the Reds, who were in the process of rooting out anti-Communist resistance elements.

He was eventually arrested, tried, and killed by the Communist Regime in Poland.

Witold Pilecki was interrogated and tortured by: Col. Jozef Rozanski, Lt. S. Lyszkowski, Lt. Krawczynski, 2nd Lt. J. Kroszel, Lt. Tadeusz Slowianek, 2nd Lt. Eugeniusz Chimczak, and Lt. Stefan Alaborski, all famed for their brutality and inhumane treatment of political prisoners.

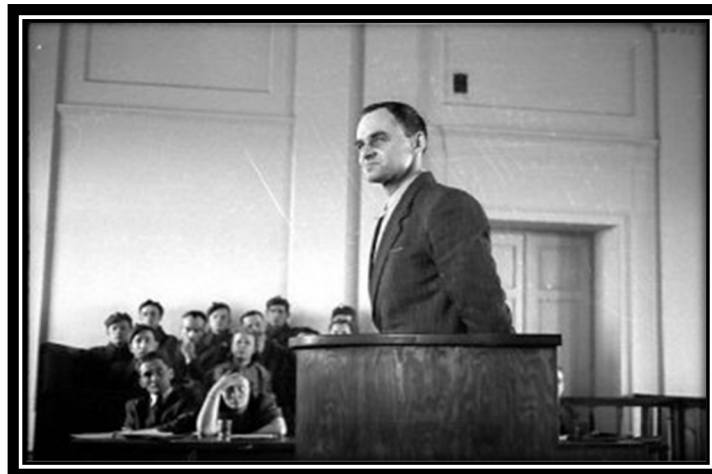
The horror of the interrogations lasted for over six months. Pilecki's interrogations were personally supervised by Colonel Roman Romkowski. Polish Prime Minister (and fellow Auschwitz survivor) Jozef Cyrankiewicz provided testimony against Pilecki in his show trial on espionage and arms charges.

He found communist prison harder to endure than Auschwitz. A fellow inmate described seeing him in prison slumped, unable to raise his head because his collar bones had been broken and his entire body was black and blue as a result of endless beatings.

At his show trial, he was hiding his hands because his fingernails had been ripped out during torture.

Pilecki had told his wife that Auschwitz was child's play in comparison to the horror he had endured at the hands of his communist tormentors.

As the interrogations and beatings continued he told his wife, Maria, at one court session." that the secret security torture had sapped his will to go on. "I can live no longer," he said.



*The show trial of Pilecki, who was sentenced to death and executed in 1948*

"I tried to live my life in such fashion so that in my last hour, I would rather be happy than fearful I found happiness within me, resulting from the realization, that this fight was worth it".

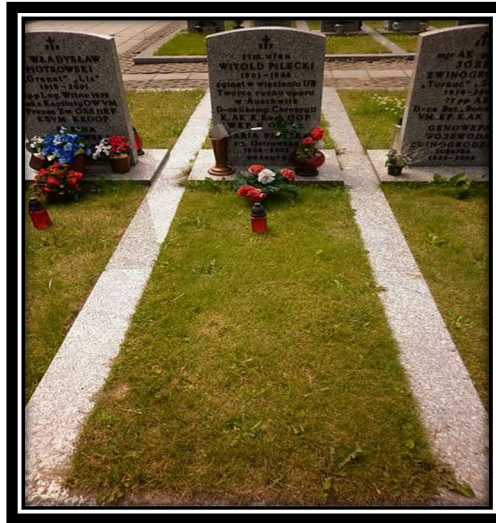
Pilecki was executed on May 25, 1948, at Warsaw's Mokotow Prison just as he had seen so many killed at the Black Wall — **with a single shot to the back of the head. His remains were never returned to his family..**

#### SUMMARY

There's a reason many Americans have never heard the story of Witold Pilecki's infiltration of Auschwitz. The communist regime in Poland censored any mention of his name in the public record — **a ban that remained in place until the fall of the Berlin Wall.**

**Executed in May 1948, he was buried in secrecy, the location of his grave unknown to this day.** The communist authorities also banned any mention of his name, a ban that remained in force until 1989.

**A symbolic gravestone** was erected in his memory at Ostrowa Mazowiecka Cemetery after the fall of Communism in Poland. In 2012, Powazki was partially excavated to find Pilecki's remains.

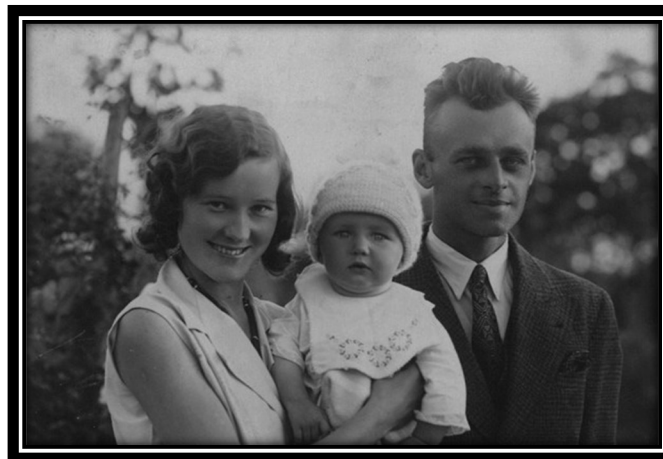


Only since then have documents emerged that reveal his story — and that allowed Bugajski to accurately portray it in his film.

That film ends with an epilogue, as the actor who plays Pilecki, Marek Probosz, walks outside the same prison where Pilecki was executed.

"To our surprise, we see that this is free Poland," Probosz explains. "That you can talk about Pilecki, and no one is going to spit in your face or stab you with a knife."

Today there is a street in Warsaw named after Pilecki. A square might be named after him, too.



*Witold Pilecki and his family*

"Having a beautiful wife and two kids he loved dearly, he decided to leave them behind and go to Auschwitz," Probosz says. "Human beings were the most precious thing for Pilecki, and especially those who were oppressed. He would do anything to liberate them, to help them."

As a result of his deeds, he is considered "one of the greatest wartime heroes". In the foreword to the book *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery* Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland, wrote as follows: "When God created the human being, God had in mind that we should all be like Captain Witold Pilecki, of blessed memory."

In the introduction to that book Norman Davies, a British historian, wrote: "If there was an Allied hero who deserved to be remembered and celebrated, this was a person with few peers"

At the commemoration event of International Holocaust Remembrance Day held in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum on 27 January 2013 Ryszard Schnepf, the Polish Ambassador to the US, described Pilecki as a "diamond among Poland's heroes" and "the highest example of Polish patriotism."



*Auschwitz concentration camp*

Pilecki wrote: "If we say what we feel, it will help people understand what truly happened." Is it because of his proto-gonzo approach that Pilecki wasn't believed for so long? Can we have doubts about the veracity of his writings?

There is no doubt about the veracity of his reports. Other sources and the work of historians at the Auschwitz Museum corroborate it. But there were sometimes a few inaccuracies in facts, on dates for example.

The *Auschwitz Volunteer* is far from a military, administrative tone. Pilecki thought it was really important to describe his feelings. He wanted to expose the truth while remaining neutral and objective. And this is what makes his story so poignant.

"The game which I was now playing in Auschwitz was dangerous. This sentence does not convey the reality; in fact, I had gone far beyond what people in the real world would consider dangerous..."—Captain Witold Pilecki

Witold Pilecki's complete detailed report about Auschwitz which was not translated into English until 2012 is now available in its entire English translation at this link:

#### **THE COMPLETE WITOLD REPORT IN ENGLISH**

<http://witoldsreport.blogspot.com/2008/05/volunteer-for-auschwitz-report-by.html>

#### **COMMENTS ABOUT THE MOVIE "THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN PILECKI"**

Until this 2006 production of *The Death of Captain Pilecki*, written and directed by Ryszard Bugajski, millions of Poles had never heard of the heroic officer who had endured so much in his fight against Nazi Germany, only to be branded a "fascist" by Hitler's partner in crime.

The film is a faithful recreation of his trial, based on the documents that had for so long been kept secret. In Poland, the film was a revelation, watched by millions, while in the United States, it has had regular screenings every year since 2007 though with very limited distribution. While it is a tense drama and a powerful story in its own right, the film is of special interest to anyone studying totalitarian regimes, human rights abuses, and the indomitable will to be free.


The English subtitles are well done though some historical background would be helpful for people not familiar with it. *The Death of Captain Pilecki* illuminates an important chapter in Poland's post-war history, a chapter virtually unknown outside of Poland.

While the Soviet system censored this history, western historians and journalists have no excuse for being ignorant of it. It was merely convenient to omit references to the West's betrayal of a faithful ally.

British historian Michael R.D. Foot noted that "The Foreign Office's betrayal of Poland is the darkest chapter in its history, even if that betrayal was a strategic necessity."



Based on a True Story



**THE DEATH OF CAPTAIN PILECKI**  
by Ryszard Bugajski


Polish American Performing Arts Club  
and Polish Film Festival  
Special Screening in Orange County

**Village Theater (New location)**  
**1140 N Tustin Str, Orange, Ca 92867**

**Saturday, March 24, 2012 @ 7pm**

Proud Sponsors:

**Polka Deli**  
1710 N. TUSTIN STR.  
ORANGE, CA 92865  
TEL/FAX (714) 974-8276



**All Continents Travel**  
1712 N. TUSTIN AVE  
ORANGE, CA 92665  
800-339-8393 714-974-3620

The tragedy of Auschwitz and the suffering of Poles associated with the camp was a subject of another recent film, *Death of Captain Pilecki*, starring Marek Probosz and directed by Ryszard Bugajski. This astounding true story of a WWII hero, a captain in Polish underground Home Army, who decided to get arrested and shipped off to Auschwitz so he could report about the camp to the Allies and create a resistance network within. Arrested in 1940, Pilecki escaped in 1943 and the intelligence he gathered was sent off to England, only to be disregarded as exaggerated. He fought in the Warsaw Uprising and richly deserved the highest state medals awarded to him posthumously in 1995 by the government of democratic Poland. He died in 1948, after being arrested for gathering information about another atrocity, the Soviet gulags.

Witold Pilecki and all others sentenced in the staged trial were rehabilitated on 1 October 1990.

In 2003, the prosecutor, Czesław Łapiński, and several others involved in the trial were charged with complicity in Pilecki's murder. Cyrankiewicz escaped similar proceedings, having died; Łapiński died in 2004 before the trial was concluded.



Pilecki received the Order of Polonia Restitute in 1995. The Order is one of the highest decorations for military and civilian accomplishments.



*In 2006, he received the Order of the White Eagle - the highest decoration a military member or civilian can achieve.*

#### COMMENTS OF SOME POLISH PEOPLE

Captain Pilecki didn't "evaporate" through the chimney of the crematorium in Auschwitz, and he didn't perish in the Warsaw Uprising. He perished for the free Poland, at the hands of Polish communists. His body was buried somewhere, at some unknown garbage refuse site, and this is where the remains of this most extraordinary of heroes rest, as "NN" - Unknown and Unidentified. (pol. "NN" - Polish language acronym for Unknown and Unidentified).

"For years our family lived feeling profoundly wronged and ostracized, because not only was our father taken away from us, but also his good name and his memory were veiled in a poisonous shroud of accusations of treason. It burdened our hearts for a long time" - said Pilecki's son Andrzej.

"The Cavalry Captain, Pilecki, is one of our nation's foremost heroes, whom all military men ought to salute. We are no better than the Germans and Russians, for by our own hands, we were capable of murdering our heroes." (An Excerpt from the defense attorney's argument during Witold Pilecki's rehabilitation proceedings, before the Military Chamber, of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Poland, in 1990.)

#### THE AUSCHWITZ BOMBING DEBATE

(SHOULD WE HAVE OR DID WE DO THE RIGHT THING?)

**186B**



*Auschwitz Main Camp*

The issue of why the Auschwitz concentration camp was not bombed by the Allies during World War II continues to be explored by historians and Holocaust survivors.

Michael Berenbaum has argued that it is not only a historical question but "a moral question emblematic of the Allied response to the plight of the Jews during the Holocaust."<sup>[1]</sup> David Wyman has asked: **"How could it be that the governments of the two great Western democracies knew that a place existed where 2,000 helpless human beings could be killed every 30 minutes, knew that such killings did occur over and over again, and yet did not feel driven to search for some way to wipe such a scourge from the earth?"** During his second visit to the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem in 2008, U.S. President George W. Bush said "We should have bombed it."

Other scholars, such as William Rubinstein, James H. Kitchens, and Richard H. Levy have noted that this argument has no basis and that the idea of bombing Auschwitz or the rail lines leading to it is to a very large extent a post-war invention. The issue was launched in the late 1970s when aerial reconnaissance films, which had never been developed or seen by anybody during the war, were found by Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) analysts to show that U.S. bombers had flown over Auschwitz-Birkenau on their way to and from bombing other targets.

#### **WHY BOMBING WAS NOT CONSIDERED**

**"No proposals to bomb either Auschwitz or the rail lines were made by anyone until May or June 1944"** – wrote historian William Rubinstein, former President of the Jewish Historical Society of England. The first such proposal was made by a Slovak rabbi, Michael Dov Ber Weissmandel, to the Jewish Agency on May 16, 1944. At about the same time, two officials of the Jewish Agency in Palestine separately made similar suggestions. Yitzhak Gruenbaum made his to the U.S. Consul-General in Jerusalem, Lowell C. Pinkerton, and Moshe Shertok made his to George Hall, the British undersecretary of state for foreign affairs. **However, the idea was promptly squashed by the Executive Board of the Jewish Agency.**

On June 11, 1944, the Executive, **with David Ben-Gurion in the chair**, overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to ask the Allies to bomb the railroad lines and the death camps, with Ben-Gurion summing up: **"The view of the board is that we should not ask the Allies to bomb places where there are Jews."**

Shortly thereafter, Benjamin Akzin, a junior official on the War Refugee Board staff made a similar recommendation. It was put in writing in an inter-office memorandum dated June 29 to his superior, a senior staff member, Lawrence S. Lesser. These recommendations **were rejected by leading Jewish organizations.** On June 28, Lesser met with A. Leon Kubowitzki, the head of the Rescue Department of the World Jewish Congress, **flatly opposed the idea.**

On July 1, Kubowitzki followed up with a letter to War Refugee Board Director John W. Pehle, recalling his conversation with Lesser and stating: "The destruction of the death installations cannot be done by bombing from the air, as the first victims would be the Jews who are gathered in these camps, and such a bombing would be a welcome pretext for the Germans to assert that their Jewish victims have been massacred not by their killers, but by the Allied bombers."

When Pehle first discussed the idea with the War Department's John J. McCloy that June, he specifically told McCloy that he was transmitting an idea proposed by others, that he had "several doubts about the matter," and that he was not "at this point at least, requesting the War Department to take any action on this proposal other than to appropriately explore it." Several times thereafter, in the summer and early autumn of 1944, the War Refugee Board relayed to the War Department suggestions by others that Auschwitz and/or the rail lines be bombed. **It repeatedly noted that it was not endorsing any of them.**

Finally, on November 8, 1944, Pehle half-heartedly **changed sides and asked McCloy to bomb the camp.** He said it could help some of the inmates to escape and would be good for the "morale of underground groups." According to Kai Bird, Nahum Goldman, also changed his mind. Sometime that autumn [1944], Goldman went to see McCloy in his Pentagon office and personally raised the bombing issue with him. However, by November 1944, Auschwitz was more or less completely shut down.

Since the controversy exploded in the 1970s, many military experts have looked at the problems involved in bombing Auschwitz and the rail lines and have concluded that it would have been extremely difficult and risky and that the chances of achieving significant results would have been small. It appears reasonable to assume that McCloy was accurate in his early statements that **the idea was never discussed with President Roosevelt.** In his dotage McCloy may have found it expedient to share with FDR the blame heaped on him by Monday-morning quarterbacks and by those who seek to blame somebody in addition to, or even instead of, the Germans for the holocaust.

#### **ALLIED RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS**

From March 1944 onwards, the Allies were in control of the skies over Europe, according to David Wyman. He writes that the 15th U.S. Army Air Force, which was based in Italy, had the range and capability to strike Auschwitz from early May 1944.

Auschwitz was first overflown by an Allied reconnaissance aircraft on April 4, 1944, in a mission to photograph the synthetic oil plant at Monowitz forced labor camp (Auschwitz III).

On July 7, shortly after the U.S. War Department refused requests from Jewish leaders to bomb the railway lines leading to the camps, a force of 452 Fifteenth Air Force bombers flew along and across the five deportation railway lines on their way to bomb oil refineries nearby. Several nearby military targets were also bombed, and one bomb fell into the campgrounds.

Buna-Werke, the I.G. Farben industrial complex located adjacent to the Monowitz forced labor camp (Auschwitz III) located 5 kilometers (3.1 mi) from the Auschwitz I camp was bombed four times. On December 26, 1944, the U.S. 455th Bomb Group bombed Monowitz and targets near Birkenau (Auschwitz II); an SS military hospital was hit and five SS personnel were killed.



The Auschwitz complex was photographed accidentally several times during missions aimed at nearby military targets. However, the photo-analysts knew nothing of Auschwitz and the political and military hierarchy didn't know that photos of Auschwitz existed. For this reason, the photos played no part in the decision whether or not to bomb Auschwitz. **Photo-interpretation expert Dino Brugioni believes that analysts could have easily identified the important buildings in the complex if they had been asked to look.**

**On August 24, 1944, the U.S. Army Air Forces carried out a bombing operation against a factory adjacent to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Despite perfect conditions, 315 prisoners were killed, 525 seriously harmed, and 900 lightly wounded.**

#### **THE ALLIES CONSIDERATION**

In June 1944, John Pehle of the War Refugee Board and Benjamin Akzin, a Zionist activist in America, urged the U.S. Assistant Secretary of War John McCloy to bomb the camps.

McCloy is said to have told his assistant to "kill" the request, as the U.S. Army Air Forces had decided in February 1944 not to bomb anything "to rescue victims of enemy oppression", but to concentrate on military targets.

However, Rubinstein says that Akzin was not involved in discussions between Pehle and McCloy and that Pehle specifically told McCloy that he was transmitting an idea proposed by others, that he had "several doubts about the matter," and that he was not "at this point at least, requesting the War Department to take any action on this proposal other than to appropriately explore it."

On October 4, 1944, the War Department sent (and only this time) **a rescue-oriented bombing proposal to General Spaatz Air Force in England for consideration.** Although Spaatz's officers had read Mann's message reporting the acceleration of extermination activities in the camps in Poland, they could perceive no advantage to the victims in smashing the killing machinery and decided not to bomb Auschwitz.

Nor did they seem to understand, despite Mann's Statement that "the Germans are increasing their extermination activities," that wholesale massacres had already been perpetrated.

The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, did not see the bombing as a solution, given that bombers were inaccurate and would also kill prisoners on the ground. The land war would have to be won first. Bombers were used against German cities and to carpet-bomb the front lines. But according to Martin Gilbert<sup>[17]</sup>, Winston Churchill pushed for the bombing. Concerning the concentration camps, he wrote to his Foreign Secretary on July 11, 1944: "... all concerned in this crime who may fall into our hands, including the people who only obeyed orders by carrying out these butcheries, should be put to death.

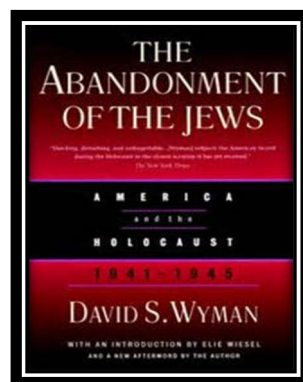
The British Air Ministry was asked to examine the feasibility of bombing the camps and decided not to for "operational reasons", which were not specified in wartime.

In August 1944, 60 tons of supplies were flown to assist the uprising in Warsaw and, considering the dropping accuracy at that time, were to be dropped "into the southwest quarter of Warsaw". **For various reasons, only seven aircraft reached the city.**

A 2004 documentary, Auschwitz: The Forgotten Evidence included interviews with historians William Rubinstein and Richard Overy. It mentioned the Jewish Agency's request to the Allies on 6 July to bomb Auschwitz and showed the aerial reconnaissance photographs.

It then examined the operational and technical feasibility aspects, in two categories: precision bombing by Mosquito-type aircraft, and area bombing by larger aircraft. It considered that precision bombing of railway lines was so common by 1944 that the Germans had specialist teams that could repair damage within hours or days. The inmates' food supplies were assumed to come by rail, and so an unrepaired railway would cause them hardship. Area bombing risked killing too many prisoners.

#### **THE ABANDONMENT OF THE JEWS: AMERICA AND THE HOLOCAUST 1941-1945**



**PLEASE READ THE BELOW STATEMENT BEFORE PROCEEDING**

*Please note that including this book in this article does not represent any personal endorsement of the contents (or opinions) of the book as expressed by the author. It is merely included because other WW2 Historians have identified it as one of the most accurate....but it has also been disputed by some.*

*"There are very few historians who disagree with Wyman's position that more could have been done by the Allies and Neutrals to rescue endangered European Jews" (Quote from the beginning of the book by a reviewer)*

*This is strictly FYI only....to agree or to disagree is your individual choice. This has been and most likely will continue to be one of the most debated subjects of WW2. (JEC)*

The book, published in 1984, is an influential book by David S. Wyman, former Josiah DuBois professor of history at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Wyman is currently the chairman of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies. "The Abandonment of the Jews "has been well received by most (though not all) historians, and has won numerous prizes and widespread recognition, including "the National Jewish Book Award, the Anisfield-Wolf Award, the Present Tense Literary Award, the Stuart Bernath Prize from the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, and the Theodore Saloutos Award of the Immigration History Society, and was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award."

#### EXTRACTS FROM THE BOOK

In the chapter on 'Responsibility,' Wyman has a sub-section titled 'What Might Have Been Done' in which he acknowledges that the possibilities for rescue were "narrowed by the Nazis' determination to wipe out the Jews" and that "War conditions themselves made rescue difficult... most likely it would not have been possible to rescue millions." He contends, however, that "without impeding the war effort, additional tens of thousands -- probably hundreds of thousands -- could have been saved." He then presents a selection of twelve programs that were proposed (among others) during the Holocaust that could have been effective if only they had been tried.

Wyman summarizes his principal findings in the Preface (presented below in edited precis)

#### WHY NOTHING WAS DONE

1. The American State Department and the British Foreign Office had no intention of rescuing a large number of European Jews. On the contrary, they continually feared that Germany or other Axis nations might release tens of thousands of Jews into Allied hands. Any such exodus would have placed intense pressure on Britain to open Palestine and the United States to take in more Jewish refugees ... Consequently, their policies were aimed at obstructing rescue possibilities...
2. Authenticated information that the Nazis were systematically exterminating European Jewry was made public ... in November 1942. President Roosevelt did nothing ... for fourteen months, then moved only because ... political pressures....
3. The War Refugee Board ... received little power, almost no cooperation ... and grossly inadequate funding. (Contributions from Jewish organizations .... covered 90 percent of the WRB's costs)... save approximately 200,000 Jews and at least 20,000 non-Jews.
4. State Department ... policies, only 21,000 refugees were allowed to enter ... during ... war with Germany ... 10 percent of the number who could have been legally admitted...
5. factors hampered (rescue) ... anti-Semitism and anti-immigration attitudes, ... entrenched in Congress; the mass media's failure ... near silence of the Christian churches and almost all of their leadership (with notable exceptions, e.g. the Archbishop of Canterbury, or New York's Archbishop Francis Spellman); indifference ... President's failure ....
6. American Jewish leaders ... failure to assign top priority to the rescue issue.
7. In 1944 the United States ... rejected several appeals to bomb the Auschwitz gas chambers and railroads ... in the very months that ... numerous massive American bombing raids were taking place within fifty miles of Auschwitz. Twice ... bombers struck ... not five miles from the gas chambers.
8. much more could have been done to rescue the Jews, if a real effort had been made .... the reasons repeatedly invoked by government officials for not being able to rescue Jews could have been put aside when it came to other Europeans who needed help.
9. Roosevelt's indifference ... the worst failure of his presidency.
10. the American rescue record was better than that of Great Britain, Russia, or the other Allied nations ... because of the work of the War Refugee Board ... American Jewish organizations ... provided most of the WRB's funding, and the overseas rescue operations of several Jewish organizations.

#### WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN DONE

1. Most important, the War Refugee Board should have been established in 1942. And it should have received adequate government funding and much broader powers.
2. The U.S. government, working through neutral governments or the Vatican, could have pressured Germany to release the Jews....
3. The United States could have applied constant pressure on Axis satellites to release their Jews...
4. Strong pressure needed to be applied to neutral countries near the Axis ... to take Jews in....havens of refuge outside of Europe were essential .... Thus the routes would have remained open and a continuing flow of refugees could have left Axis territory.



5. Locating enough outside havens ... presented difficulties.... a camp existence ... was still preferable to ... death.... other countries used American stinginess as an excuse for not accepting Jews. For instance, in Jerusalem on his 1942 trip around the world, Wendell Wilkie confronted the British leadership with the need to admit large numbers of Jews into Palestine. The British High Commissioner replied that since the United States was not taking Jews in even up to the quota limits, Americans were hardly in a position to criticize
6. Shipping was needed to transport Jews from neutral countries to outside havens... Early in 1943, the United States turned its back on a Romanian proposal to release 70,000 Jews. It was a pivotal failure...
7. A campaign to stimulate and assist escape would have led to a sizable outflow of Jews...
8. Much larger amounts of money should have been transferred to Europe ... facilitating escapes, hiding Jews. ... supplying food ... strengthening Jewish undergrounds, and ... non-Jewish forces.
9. Much more effort should have gone into finding ways to send in food and medical supplies...
10. ... the United States could have applied much more pressure ... on neutral governments, the Vatican, and the International Red Cross to induce them to take earlier and more vigorous action...
11. Some military assistance was possible...
12. Much more publicity about the extermination of the Jews should have been disseminated throughout Europe...

#### **SUMMARY OF DEBATE- FOR OR AGAINST**

The overwhelming majority of professional historians who specialize in World War II and/or the Holocaust have generally endorsed, supported, or have been influenced by Wyman's arguments.

The primary criticisms of "The Abandonment of the Jews" target Wyman's criticisms of President Roosevelt, defend the actions of establishment Jewish organizations, and/or challenge his contention that the Allies could have effectively mitigated the slaughter of Jews by bombing the Auschwitz extermination facilities, a topic often referred to as the Auschwitz bombing debate

The Abandonment of the Jews argues that American (and British) political leaders during the Holocaust, including President Roosevelt, turned down proposals that could have saved hundreds of thousands of European Jews from death in German concentration camps. Wyman documents, for example, how Roosevelt repeatedly refused asylum to Jewish refugees and failed to order the bombing of railway lines leading to Auschwitz

At the same time, most Jewish leaders in America and Palestine did little to pressure these governments to change their policy. Some American newspapers, including the New York Times, are said to have under-reported or buried reports off their front pages, and not just for reasons of anti-Semitism. The Times was owned by Jews, but they may have wanted not to appear as Jewish advocates in their coverage.

According to this and many other sources, the Allies were first made aware of the Holocaust in 1942, It has now been 73 years since then and we continue to see articles that support both the bombing and no action theories put forward. Both sides have valid arguments so I guess it all comes down to.....what do you think?

#### **DISCLAIMER**

PLEASE UNDERSTAND THAT THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN GATHERED FROM WEBSITES THAT APPEAR TO BE AUTHENTIC WITH CORRECT INFORMATION, HOWEVER, I CAN NOT GUARANTEE THAT THE DATA IN THIS ARTICLE IS COMPLETELY ACCURATE AND CORRECT