



The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery

Witold Pilecki , Jarek Garlinski (Translator) , Michael Schudrich (Foreword)

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In 1940, the Polish Underground wanted to know what was happening inside the recently opened Auschwitz concentration camp. Polish army officer Witold Pilecki volunteered to be arrested by the Germans and reported from inside the camp. His intelligence reports, smuggled out in 1941, were among the first eyewitness accounts of Auschwitz atrocities: the extermination of Soviet POWs, its function as a camp for Polish political prisoners, and the final solution for Jews. Pilecki received brutal treatment until he escaped in April 1943; soon after, he wrote a brief report. This book is the first English translation of a 1945 expanded version. In the foreword, Poland's chief rabbi states, If heeded, Pilecki's early warnings might have changed the course of history. Pilecki's story was suppressed for half a century after his 1948 arrest by the Polish Communist regime as a Western spy. He was executed and expunged from Polish history. Pilecki writes in staccato style but also interjects his observations on humankind's lack of progress: We have strayed, my friends, we have strayed dreadfully... we are a whole level of hell worse than animals! These remarkable revelations are amplified by 40 b&w photos, illus., and maps"

The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery Details

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From Reader Review The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery for online ebook

Barbaraleah says

This is perhaps, the most amazing book I have read on the Holocaust. Captain Witold Pilecki VOLUNTEERED to go to Auschwitz to organize rebellion and to ensure the world knew what atrocities were being perpetrated. Captain Pilecki is the definition of a hero. A must read!

Margaret says

Did anybody know? Did anybody try to tell the world? Yes. The answer is "yes." Based upon reports Pilecki wrote, this work takes you inside the death camp and details the inner workings of the Nazi atrocities and how some were able to survive the brutality and horror, creating a network of resistance and support. Pilecki details both the depravity and the selflessness that can be contained within human beings. Not a book for the younger reader, but one that could supplement a study of World War II or European history for the high school or college student.

Michael says

Witold Pilecki, married middle age father, volunteers to get himself arrested and sent to Auschwitz (September 1940) to be able to gather information for the Polish Underground & help organize the resistance within the camp.

This book is the English translation of his 1945 written report to the Polish High Command. Murdered by Russian Communists in 1948 his name was effectively purged from Polish history until after the fall of the Soviet Union.

This relatively unknown (in English at least) first hand report of Auschwitz deserves to be as famous as the works of Anne Frank, Primo Levi, etc.

Rupert Dreyfus says

I read the English edition a couple of years ago before visiting Auschwitz. You can get it online somewhere. I asked my guide about Pilecki and she was surprised I knew who he was because hardly anyone outside of Poland is aware of him. This is already beginning to change.

World War II is full of incredible, harrowing tales and this one is the most amazing story I know of. In a nutshell Pilecki was a member of the Secret Polish Army. With them he volunteered to get inside Auschwitz and came up with a plan to achieve this. His mission was to get inside using fake documents (I believe he was actually a Catholic), gather evidence of what was going on, organise a resistance, and then escape. This

is when nobody was aware of what exactly was going on inside Auschwitz and people thought it to be a standard prison camp. Regardless Pilecki took this mission on and managed to get inside. He then spent some years there, fighting for his life and witnessing some of the most inhumane acts imaginable. He came close to dying numerous times.

While inside Pilecki was key to organising a resistance movement and even managed to report to the Polish Government which was in exile in Britain. If I remember rightly he did this with makeshift radio equipment. He finally devised an elaborate 'all or nothing' escape plan with two other inmates and pulled it off, making his way to Warsaw.

He wrote this very report which documents the day to day struggles inside Auschwitz. Be warned; it's heart breaking in parts. He later got it to the Polish authorities in Britain. However, they didn't believe what was going on and so they didn't act upon the information.

I should mention that this story should not be confused with The Man Who Broke into Auschwitz which is a different story altogether (large parts of which seem rather dubious). This story is historical fact:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/24/boo...>

Pilecki was posthumously awarded the Polish Government's highest decoration known as the Order of the White Eagle. He was later executed by the communists in the 1950s on spurious grounds.

Everyone should read this and visit Auschwitz at least once in their lives.

RIP Pilecki.

Linda says

This book stands alone among the many accounts I've read of life and death in Auschwitz. Captain Pilecki did not intend it as a book, but as a military, intelligence report to the Polish Underground. It is a factual recounting of his life, observations, and work in Auschwitz in its earlier years. He tried not to editorialize, but as he stated, "We were not made out of...stone, though it sometimes seemed as if even a stone would have broken out in a sweat." Sometime his horror and his commentary had to spill out.

It is unique in that most other accounts I have read are of the later years, and all other people giving account were there as victims. Captain Pilecki volunteered by assuming another's name and getting picked up in a sweep. He was able to help organize a resistance within the camp that helped him and many others survive. With brutality and death all around him, he managed to maintain enough strength and perspective to increase the chances for prisoners' survival in the present and to continually prepare for the liberation he hoped would come from his fellow Poles.

Terri Lynn says

This book is very easy to read because the writer Witold Pilecki used such clear writing since he was not writing a book but instead was writing a series of reports which have been gathered into this book . It is also

one of the hardest books too read that I have ever picked up because he was writing so clearly about the day to day realities of Auschwitz, a place run by subhuman monsters with no code of ethics and no respect for other people.

This is a unique piece of history from the 20th century. Witold Pilecki was a decent, honorable man in the Polish military who literally walked into a Nazi roundup in Warsaw, Poland deliberately as part of the underground mission to smuggle out intelligence about this new and horrible concentration camp and to build a resistance movement and organization among the prisoners. Witold Pilecki walked the walk.

Beginning fall 1941, he smuggled intelligence reports out to the Allies, and witnessed the horrors such as wholesale slaughter of women and children, the building of the gas chambers, and the painful extermination of prisoners from both genders, all ages, all religions, all income levels, all nationalities.

Imagine seeing people killed by driving planks of wood through their guts. People killed by putting a shovel in their throat and standing in the shovel. People killed by driving a huge needle into their hearts. People sent into a gas chamber thinking they were there for a shower only to find poisonous gas being spewed into the room instead of water, gas that slowly suffocated them to death in panic and agony. There were medical experiments where women had so much radiation burns to their ovaries and uterus, they were burned to death internally. Imagine seeing all of this day by day for years.

Pilecki himself pondered this and wrote about how hard it was for those who did manage to get out to live normal lives. If you have seen what these people saw, how can you ever have patience with a teen girl who thinks it is the end of the world if she can't have a party or someone whining about prices of food (if you had only had a bit of bread and broth daily for years while being expected to do hard labor in subfreezing temperatures) or even whining about ordinary aches and pains in light of the horrors faced by inmates at Auschwitz and the other counts. Frankly, I would be ashamed to complain about anything at all after reading this book. Nothing that could happen to me could even begin to be something I could pity myself over after seeing what these people went through.

As a long time animal rescuer, I have to note that in the United States in the 21st century, the public animal control agencies and shelters murder innocent and defenseless dogs and cats by the very same methods used in Auschwitz- heartstick (stab in the heart with no anesthesia then throw on a pile of the dying to suffer in agony and die) and suffocation to death in panic and agony in gas chambers. We acknowledge that this is cruel and inhumane treatment yet subject animals to it daily for the crime of being unwanted by a human. We have not moved one inch past Auschwitz and we are no better than the cruel Nazis who subjected its prisoners to this treatment as long as we stand by and allow such a thing.

This was a report written to Pilecki's superiors in the Polish Army and they had asked for a clear and dispassionate report but as he said, he is human and dealing with heartbreaking cruelty and abuse. No normal human can be indifferent to such a thing.

Pilecki survived Auschwitz, in fact, he escaped, but he died too soon because the Soviets were just as bad as the Nazis and treated people the same way. He died as he had lived- trying to fight for the right and for justice. Prisoner 4859 (Pilecki) is my idea of a real man, my idea of a real hero. He went voluntarily where no one made him go and he made a difference.

I had to wait to read this book. Interlibrary loan would not send it since it was "too new" so I had to talk my local library into buying it and then wait for them to get it. It was well worth the wait.

The black and white photos included bring the people and places of the book to life.

A lifechanging read. Do read it. You will learn more about history and you will learn more about being human. I only wish I could give it 10 stars.

Antonio Rosato says

"Cosa può dire oggi l'umanità, quella stessa umanità che vuole mostrare un progresso culturale e personale e collocare il XX secolo molto più in alto dei secoli passati? Possiamo noi, dal XX secolo, guardare negli occhi i nostri progenitori e... assurdo... dimostrare di avere raggiunto un livello culturale più elevato? Ai giorni nostri un gruppo armato, rinunciando al 'velo' del passato, distrugge non solo un esercito nemico, ma intere nazioni e società inermi, usando i più recenti ritrovati della tecnica. Progresso della civiltà... certo! Progresso culturale? Non scherziamo. Ci siamo smarriti, amici miei, drammaticamente smarriti".

Libro documento che è molto simile a "Se questo è un uomo / La tregua". Ma, mentre il capolavoro di Primo Levi è una narrazione della sua permanenza (passatemi il termine) all'interno del campo di concentramento di Auschwitz e della conseguente odissea in giro per l'Europa subito dopo la liberazione, questo è una testimonianza "in presa diretta" degli orrori visti e subiti da Witold Pilecki sempre all'interno del famigerato campo di concentramento. Tuttavia c'è una sostanziale differenza: Levi ad Auschwitz ci finì dopo essere stato catturato, Pilecki ci finì... volontariamente! Ebbene sì, sembra una cosa strana ed assurda, ma è la pura verità: Witold Pilecki, militare polacco, ha il compito di introdursi nel campo di concentramento (e per questo, durante un rastrellamento a Varsavia, si fa deliberatamente arrestare) e creare una fitta rete clandestina di prigionieri per prendere, appena sarebbe arrivato il via libera all'operazione, il controllo di Auschwitz... Purtroppo la storia ci ha già insegnato che quell'ordine non sarebbe mai arrivato!

Come ho detto prima, questo libro non è un romanzo ma è il rapporto, scritto in prima persona (una volta evaso e tornato libero) da Witold Pilecki, di tutto ciò che lui stesso ha visto, fatto e subito durante la sua prigionia ad Auschwitz. Tutto quanto vi è scritto è davvero sconvolgente, terribile e... nudo e crudo!

Libro che io vi consiglio senz'altro di leggere (per me andrebbe fatto girare anche nelle scuole) se amate i libri storici o i saggi; ma anche, e soprattutto... per non dimenticare!

[<http://rosatoeu.blogspot.it/2017/06/r...>]

Jason says

I had never heard of Witold Pilecki, it's not something I was taught about at school. I've mentioned him to my friends and nobody had heard of him. I work at a school and mentioned him to the history teacher, she didn't know the name either. I find that quite shocking, one of the biggest heroes from WW2 and he is unknown by many.

Pilecki volunteered to get arrested and sent to Auschwitz and report back the goings on in there. He succeeded on gaining access and whilst there he built up an resistance network of over 150 prisoners. They kept themselves alive, they helped who they could, either with food, jobs or escape. They managed to create a radio and they also sent many reports to Warsaw describing what was happening and how many people were murdered. They managed all this while faced everyday with the possibility of death. Eventually things became too hot for Pilecki and after 2 1/2 years in Auschwitz he decided it was time to escape. The scenes

described are predictably brutal but still it makes you ill just reading about what the victims went through.

When I finished the book I made the mistake of googling Pilecki to see how he enjoyed living his hero's life after the war, amazingly soon after the war he was arrested by the Stalinist Secret Police and executed. It took many many years before he finally got the recognition he deserved.

Brilliant book that everybody should check out.

Blog review here. <https://felcherman.wordpress.com/2018...>

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

Polish army officer Witold Pilecki went 'undercover' into Auschwitz. His account of what happened inside this most infamous of death camps will haunt you for the rest of your life.

Gabriella | The Novel Nook says

This should be required reading in every history class. Detailed, thorough, and absolutely amazing.

Lewis Weinstein says

UPDATE 1/28/19 ... one of the great pleasures in writing historical fiction is the opportunity to mix real and fictional characters. Deep in the woods near Auschwitz, my character Anna Gorska is about to meet Witold Pilecki, who has just escaped. I don't know what I'm going to write, but if I can capture anything close to the excitement I'm feeling about this encounter, I think it'll be worth reading.

This is an incredible story ... all the more so since it is true ... Witold Pilecki purposely joined a roundup in Warsaw in order to get inside Auschwitz. His objectives were to send out information about the camp and to prepare to take over the camp when the time came in the form of an order to parachute in arms or troops. He accomplished the first objective, but of course the Allies never attacked Auschwitz. Pilecki remained in Auschwitz from 1940 until April 1943 when he escaped.

a few excerpts ...

... In November 1940, I sent my first report to High Command in Warsaw through Second Lieutenant 6 [Tadeusz Burski] who had worked in Intelligence and who had been bought out of Auschwitz.

... I discovered a way to send letters to my family writing in Polish. A young friend of mine [name unknown], going to work in the town, had managed to make contact with the locals through whom I sent two letters to my family. My letters were sent on to [Home Army] High Command.

... A number of escape attempts led the camp authorities to decide to apply collective responsibility and

(starting in the spring of '41) ten inmates were shot for each successful escapee. The selection of ten men to die for one escapee was a difficult moment for the camp.

... "I have been inside for two years and seven months. I have had a job to do here. Lately I have had no instructions. Now the Germans have shipped out our best people with whom I've been working. I would have to start from scratch. I can see no further point in staying here. Therefore, I'm going to leave." ... can one pick and choose when one wants to come to Auschwitz and when one wants to leave?" I replied: "One can."

... (April 1943) ... Over the course of a night we were meant to finish five batches. We were to put the bread in the ovens five times and then take it out five times. ... We were going to try to escape from the bakery after the second batch, for after the first one it would be too soon. Meanwhile the first, second, third and fourth batches came and went, and we still could not leave the bakery. ... the cards would have to fall so that at one given moment we would be near the door and out of the line of vision of both the SS men and the other bakers. ... Opportunities came and then went.

Uwe Hook says

"When God created the human being, God had in mind that we all should be like Captain Witold Pilecki.

"The Auschwitz Volunteer" is the single most extraordinary tale of heroism you will ever read.

To say that Witold Pilecki was a "man's man" is to understate the case considerably. We don't have words to adequately convey the kind of heroism Pilecki displayed. Language is a common possession and Pilecki was entirely uncommon. Witold Pilecki is one of the greatest heroes our species has produced. You're going to come away from this book wondering why Hollywood has not yet celebrated him. In fact that is a very good question to ask, and the answer reveals much about how stereotypes of Brute Polaks have been used to distort history.

"The Auschwitz Volunteer" belongs on the very short shelf of the classics of Holocaust literature, next to Anne Frank's "Diary of a Young Girl," Elie Wiesel's "Night," Primo Levi's "The Drowned and the Saved" and Tadeusz Borowski's "This Way to the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen." Most people, including most teaching courses on the Holocaust at US universities, have never heard of Witold Pilecki. This is a scandal, one Polonia is duty-bound to correct. "The Auschwitz Volunteer" must be on the core syllabus of Holocaust study.

Many readers who should read this book will shrink from it. I want to assure readers that, the entire time you are reading, you know you are in the hands of a heroically good man who endured everything he endured because he was committed to a higher cause: serving humanity, his country, and his God. Indeed, in describing events in 1943, when he had been in Auschwitz since 1940, Pilecki wrote, "Above all, I was a believer." Pilecki described how his belief in God, and his commitment to service to Poland, got him through. Pilecki is proof that as low as humanity has sunk, the light shone in the darkness. When humanity scoured the depths of depravity, it also reached the heights of heroism. In this, Witold Pilecki is like Jan Karski, Maximilian Kolbe, Irena Sendler and thousands of other heroes, who, knowing the risk they were undertaking, defied Nazism.

Captain Witold Pilecki was a forty-something officer in the underground Polish resistance movement during

World War II. He was in what would eventually coalesce into the Armia Krajowa, or Home Army. Pilecki came from a long history of Polish resistance: his grandfather had been exiled to Siberia, and Pilecki formed resistance groups as a youth, and fought against the Russians in 1920, being twice decorated. He fought again when the German Nazis invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and again against the Russian Soviets when they invaded Poland on September 17, 1939. When open, armed struggle became impossible, Pilecki co-founded a group that eventually would become part of the Home Army.

In 1940, Pilecki volunteered to be imprisoned in Auschwitz. He did so to serve his country, and humanity. Pilecki was a prisoner in Auschwitz from 1940-43. The entire time he was there, he organized prisoners, gathered information, and planned to work for the Nazi defeat.

Pilecki's report is an eyewitness, journalistic account of everyday life in a concentration camp. The material is highly disturbing, of course, but it is also fascinating. Pilecki describes the tortures the Nazis and their minions resorted to, but he also describes moments when he felt happy because he was able to overcome some obstacle, including the spiritual obstacle of the temptation to succumb to despair. These moments truly are examples of the arguments about human nature that Viktor Frankl, another Auschwitz prisoner, made in his classic, "Man's Search for Meaning."

One objective fact follows another in Pilecki's account: accounts of torture and mass murder, how Auschwitz handled its mail, sewerage, and lice infestations. How male barbers reacted to shaving the bodies of women. How prisoners being sent to their deaths greeted their former comrades they passed on the way to execution.

Pilecki's report was written in 1945, before the world had assimilated the Holocaust, before that word was even widely used, before accurate tallies of the dead had been drawn up, before powerful forces began to dictate the approved World War II narrative. His report was written for military and humanitarian purposes. His style is journalistic. He strives to provide the facts, in an unemotional manner.

His humanity seeps through nevertheless. As Pilecki himself put it, "They have told me, 'The more you stick to the bare facts, the more valuable it all will be.' Well, here I go. But we were not made of stone. It sometimes seemed as if even a stone would have broken out in a sweat."

The book is not crafted to provide the rising suspense, climax, and denouement one gets from reading a modern American bestseller. There is no Hollywood ending.

All these features of Pilecki's report, which some will assess as drawbacks, are actually the great strengths of the book. Pilecki's writing is utterly raw. He writes as someone who is confronted with atrocity first-hand would write, before he had been to grief counseling, before he had been through the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder workshop, before a committee of academics went over his document with a fine-toothed comb in order to make sure that his treatment of demographics and statistics and religions and ethnicities meets the current guidelines of Political Correctness. This is what the Holocaust looked like to an Auschwitz prisoner, on the ground, watching it happen. This is not Hollywood's or even American academia's Holocaust.

The language is smooth and appropriately idiomatic. Garlinski is himself the son of an Auschwitz survivor. The book contains much supportive material to aid the reader. There are maps, many photographs of Pilecki and his family before, during and after the war, his underground comrades, his fellow prisoners and his Nazi tormentors, and Auschwitz.

Greta says

<https://pilecki.ipn.gov.pl/rpe>

Orion says

The Auschwitz Volunteer is a newly available English translation of a report written by Witold Pilecki, a Polish military officer, in the late summer of 1945 about the 3 years he spent inside the Auschwitz concentration camp from 1940-1943. Auschwitz was young then: Pilecki was on the second transport of prisoners to what had been a Polish cavalry base converted by the Germans into a camp for Polish prisoners. When the first transport was sent, Pilecki volunteered to infiltrate the prison, organize resistance, and send out reports. His was the second group of prisoners to arrive.

As a military report this work is extremely well written. Advised to "stick to bare facts without any kind of commentary," he has created a memoir that reveals not only the horror of Auschwitz, but also the soul of this brave man. Through his eyes, we see the infamous camp develop and grow. We learn how he and others survived and organized, preparing for a revolt that never became a reality.

Right after writing this Polish narrative of World War II, Pilecki went back to Poland to carry out intelligence operations for the Allies and the Polish government in exile. Rather than becoming a war hero, he was arrested in May 1947, convicted of activities against the state, and killed by the Polish communist government. After decades of silence and ostracism, this important memoir has finally become available in English.

Eva Leger says

Definitely worth reading. I borrowed this from the library and was horrified to find halfway through the book that someone had torn out a page. It was a page with a full page photograph, that much I could tell, and it's more of that someone would actually do that to a book - any book - than anything I "missed".

Regardless, the photos are amazing, as with any book of this nature. I just stare at the faces and try to imagine what they could have been thinking at that exact moment.

Pilecki's writing is a lot like that - only he gives you the insider knowledge in a lot of instances as to what he, and some others, were thinking at various times.

I can't begin to imagine doing the things Pilecki willingly did. When I think of Pilecki, and men and women like him, I realize that the men and women of today, including myself, are hardly capable of dealing with anything.

Several layout maps are included, along with multiple appendices. Appendix 1 is a glossary of terms, 2 is a list of positions and ranks, 3 is the people and places Pilecki mentions throughout the book, and so on.

Basically, the information included within is formatted in such a way that if anything can't be seen right off the bat all you have to do is flip a few pages and you can easily find anything. Appendix 4 is an approximate timeline of Pilecki's movements and actions as told in his report. The index is nothing if not thorough. There are even 21 discussion questions in the back of the book.

The translator's introductory note and the publisher's note tell about the way Pilecki's report was turned into the book and it's worth reading. I agree with everything they did and did not to, as to changes, and am in awe

of how they managed to bring this about in the manner they did.

The publisher's note includes a brief but interesting little lesson on the Polish language which helped me immensely when learning how certain names are pronounced. For instance, Witold Pilecki is pronounced VEE-told pee-LETS-kee. I appreciated this addition more than I can say. There is also a list of selected highlights from Pilecki's report included in the beginning of the book.

It's most definitely worth reading in my opinion. Personal accounts are among the most important when it comes to the Holocaust and World War II and I'm thankful for each and every single one.
