"POLISH LEGATION IN BERN. THE UNSPOKEN HISTORY". THE FIRST MONOGRAPH ABOUT THE GROUP LED BY ALEKSANDER ŁADOŚ
"Polish Legation in Bern. The Unspoken History". The First Monograph about the Group Led by Aleksander Ładoś.

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Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

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“The Polish Legation in Bern. The unspoken history” is a new publication that describes the activities of the so-called “Łados group” - a group of Polish diplomats from the war times, who along with activists of Jewish organisations attempted to save the Jews endangered by the Holocaust. Ładoś and his associates forged Latin American documents, smuggled people through the territory of Vichy France, took care of Jewish refugees, and in the last phase of the war assisted Jewish organisations in attempts to buy out Jews from the Nazis. The publication is available in Polish in PDF format.

"The Polish Legation in Bern. The unspoken history" - First Monograph About the Group Led by Aleksander Ładoś

The author of the publication - the first such extensive monographic work on the Ładoś group - is Dr. Danuta Drywa, Holocaust historian and head of the Documentation Department of the Stutthof Museum in Sztutowo. Danuta Drywa is the author of various scientific and public interest publications devoted to the history of KL Stutthof, and exhibitions, including “Jews in Stutthof Concentration Camp” and “Secret Teaching of Polish Women in KL Ravensbrück Concentration Camp.” Her work also includes one of the first articles describing the activities of the Ładoś group.

'Initially, the monograph was only intended to address the assistance provided to Polish citizens of Jewish origin residing in Switzerland by the Polish Legation in Bern. However, research has shown that it is impossible to separate certain matters, that everything is connected and that the activities of the various Polish Refugee Care Committees, which were set up in the countries where Polish citizens were present, would not have been entirely possible if it had not been for the intermediation of the Berne-based Polish Legation with the Polish Government in London,' said Dr. Danuta Drywa.

"The author of the book presented in detail how the Bernese post was deliberately chosen as a tool in the rescue, relief and information activities carried out by the Polish government in London," wrote the director of the Auschwitz Museum, Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywiński in the introduction.

Over the last two years, the Polish embassy in Bern, headed by Ambassador Jakub Kumoch in the years 2016-2020, committed to saving the archival legacy of the group’s activity. Thanks to the joint efforts of the ambassador and the honorary consul in Zurich, Markus Blechner, and the support of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, some of the preserved documents about the group - the so-called Eiss Archive - were transferred to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum Archives in 2018.

'Dr. Danuta Drywa, whose first manuscript of the book was written many years ago, is a research pioneer on Ładoś. Her work is the result of an arduous survey of the Swiss archives. The book also shows that the falsification of Latin American passports was only a fraction of Ładoś’s activity, which rose to become one of the main protagonists of the global diplomatic rescue during the Holocaust,'
said Jakub Kumoch, now Polish ambassador to Turkey.

Ambassador Kumoch also added that “the unspoken history” is, in his opinion, the “perfect subtitle”: ‘The silence of Ładoś places a burden on our studies on the Holocaust and ourselves. There are streets named after Wallenberg all over the country, but not a single Aleksander Ładoś street. By publishing this monograph, the Auschwitz Museum partly rectifies this injustice many years after the death of the Polish ambassador, who during the Holocaust was often referred to by his Jewish colleagues as “Righteous Among the Nations,” - says Kumoch.

The publication is divided into four chapters. The beginning of the book describes the activity of the Polish Legation in Bern from September 1939 to April 1940, when Ładoś’s predecessor, Tytus Komarnicki headed the post. Further chapters cover the period from May 1940, i.e. during the time of Ładoś. The publication also addresses the international activities of the Polish Legation in Bern. The last chapter deals with the Polish Legation as an information centre about the Holocaust.

“Dr. Drywa describes Ładoś in much more detail than previous authors, including myself. While we focused mainly on the phenomenon of Latin American passports, the researcher shows the operation in a much broader perspective. It deals in detail with, among other things, the unprecedented issue of Ładoś’s telegram - information about the Holocaust and the rescue from the Holocaust sent by Jewish organisations using the infrastructure of Polish Legation. Mr Ładoś was the one who permitted the use of Polish cyphers. Some of them bear his notes,” said Jakub Kumoch.

The researcher began working on the publication in autumn 2008 with queries in Swiss archives, including the Schweizerische Bundesarchiv in Bern, Archiv für Zeitgeschichte der ETH Zürich - afz.ethz.ch in Zurich (collections: Historisches Archiv der Schweizerischen Israelische Gemeindebundes, Saly Mayer Archiv-des American Jewish Joint Distribution Committe New York (1939-1950) and Memoiren von Dr Julius Kühl). In addition, she conducted a query in the Library and Archive of the Polish Museum at Rapperswil Castle and met with the author of the book "Poles - Jews - Swiss", Paul Stauffer, who briefly touched upon a number of issues related to the
"Poles - Jews - Swiss", Paul Stauffer, who briefly touched upon a number of issues related to the activities of the Polish Legation in Bern between 1939-1945. In Poland, she primarily examined the collection of the Polish Legation in Bern between 1939-1945, located in the Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw, as well as the materials found in the Military Office of Historical Research in Warsaw.

The so-called Ładoś group was an informal form of cooperation between Polish diplomats from the Polish Legation in Bern and representatives of Jewish organisations for the rescue of European Jews. Under the leadership of Ambassador Aleksander Łados, the group provided forged South American passports, among others Paraguay, Peru, Haiti and Honduras, to protect their holders from being transported to death camps in German-occupied Poland. According to various estimates, a total of 8,000 to 10,000 such documents were issued. Jakub Kumoch and other authors of the recently published "Ładoś’s List" in Polish and English estimate the number of survivors to be between 2 and 3 thousand.

The group consisted of four diplomats from the Polish Legation: Aleksander Ładoś, Konstanty Rokicki, Stefan Ryniewicz and Juliusz Kühl, as well as two representatives of Swiss Jewish communities from Poland: a member of the RELICO Committee (Committee to Aid Jewish War Victims) set up by the World Jewish Congress, Abraham Silberschein, and a representative of Agudat Israel Chaim Eiss.

"Diplomats deserve a particular mention among those rescuing the most vulnerable - European Jews. They were able to issue passports, visas, documents that often helped to avoid deportation to death camps or permitted access to less dangerous zones. Some of the well-known names are Henryk Slawik, Chiune Sugihara or Raoul Wallenberg. Until recently, however, only a few researchers of the history of diplomacy have mentioned the measures taken by Polish diplomats in Switzerland - notably Aleksander Ładoś, Konstanty Rokicki, Juliusz Kühl and Stefan Ryniewicz," - Piotr M. A. Cywiński wrote.

"In the light of recently published documents, the Polish Legation (nowadays: the embassy) in Bern appears to be a kind of missionary post, to which the Polish government in exile specifically entrusted with the task of supporting Polish citizens at risk in various countries of occupied Europe - the vast majority of them Jews. In the longer term, attempts were also made to rescue Jews who were in hiding or ghettos in German-occupied Poland. It is no coincidence that Polish Legation could not exist in conquered or occupied countries, but in Switzerland - a neutral
Poland. It is no coincidence that Polish Legation could not exist in conquered or occupied countries, but in Switzerland - a neutral country, although surrounded by the Third Reich or its allies - was the one that could most fully attempt to organise aid, money, documents and information” - we read in the introduction. ‘As my work shows, the activities of the Polish Legation in Bern in between 1939 and 1945 were carried out in various areas, in various political and social fields, as far as the situation allowed. We must remember that the activities of Polish diplomats were constantly under German observation. The Germans often lodged protests with the Swiss Government, forcing it to intervene and to call on Aleksander Ładoś, to make an explanation,’ added Dr. Drywa.

After the war, Ambassador Aleksander Ładoś, having tried for several years to settle down near Paris, returned to Poland in 1960, seriously and terminally ill. He left behind unfinished memoirs in which he was unable to describe the passport action in depth before his death. Consul Konstantin Rokicki, who fabricated nearly half of all Bernese documents, lived in poverty after the war and died utterly forgotten in Lucerne in 1958.

After the war, Juliusz Kühl resided in Canada where he developed his own business, and towards the end of his days, he moved to Florida. Stefan Ryniewicz emigrated to Argentina after the war, where he was active in the Polish community in Buenos Aires until his death in March 1988. Abraham Silberschein was arrested by the Swiss police in 1943 for his passport activities and released after the intervention of Polish diplomats. He died in Geneva a few years after the war. Chaim Eiss died of a heart attack in November 1943 and was laid to rest at the Orthodox Jewish cemetery near Zurich.

The latter activist left behind an extensive archive, two large parts of which were acquired by the Auschwitz Museum in 2018 and 2020. Extensive research has led to Yad Vashem awarding the title of Righteous Among the Nations to Consul Konstanty Rokicki in Jerusalem in April 2019, and to the commendation of Aleksander Ładosi and Stefan Ryniewicz, mistakenly referred to as “consuls”. However, the decision was opposed by more than 30 people rescued by the Ładoś group and the Rokicki family, which refused to accept the medal.

The incident has led to the reopening of proceedings in the Ładoś and Ryniewicz case. The issue relating to the award of the titles of Righteous Among the Nations to both diplomats is currently in progress, and a prominent Israeli Holocaust historian, Mordecai Paldiel, himself a refugee child in Switzerland under the care of the Polish institution, is actively involved in this process.

The book “Polish Legation in Bern. The unspoken history” was published by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in collaboration with the Auschwitz Museum. The publication is available in Polish in PDF format.
THE LESSONS OF HISTORY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

An important new study on Holocaust denial and social media was recently released by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) based in London. It happened to come on the heels of a major initiative by the Claims Conference to confront online denial through the first Holocaust survivor-driven digital campaign — #NoDenyingIt.

The ISD study’s summary states: “Holocaust denial has long been one of the most insidious conspiracy theories targeting Jewish communities, with its extremist proponents drawn from across the political spectrum, from extreme right-wing to hard left to Islamist. Research has shown that digital platforms have only served to amplify and mainstream this warped strain of thinking in recent years.” The study has three key findings: 1) “Holocaust denial content is readily available across Facebook, Reddit, and Twitter;” 2) “Holocaust denial content is actively recommended through Facebook’s algorithms;” and 3) “shifts in a platform’s terms of service are effective at limiting the spread of Holocaust denial content.” The report notes YouTube was able to reduce Holocaust denial content by modifying its terms of service.

Social media companies have a responsibility not only to free speech and to their shareholders. They have a responsibility to the future.

To carry out that responsibility, they — and all of us — need a better understanding of the past. It’s a warning that complacency is not an option.

Antisemitism has been around for two thousand years, is highly resilient, and is easily adaptable to changing circumstances. Holocaust denial is only one of the latest manifestations of antisemitism, and social media is only the most recent — but also perhaps the most consequential — vehicle for spreading it.

Antisemitism appeared in Europe long before the Middle Ages, but its consequences and lessons throughout history are timely. Rapid change or major events like pandemics led to searches for simple and convenient answers to complex questions, and Jews are thus made scapegoats time and again. Conspiracy theories about alleged Jewish power — Jews worldwide working together to bring the plague, control the economy, invent the Holocaust — were, and continue to be, excellent fodder for the constant needs of the modern world of mass communications.

From the invention of movable type in the 15th century to the mass communications of the late 19th and 20th centuries, information (and disinformation) have helped bring about massive societal changes — reforms and social and economic advancements as well as wars, revolutions, and mass atrocities. The past is a cautionary tale that technological progress is not always moral progress. The mix of human fears and hatreds with mass communications would become a potentially toxic brew with the birth of modern propaganda in connection with new technologies around World War I.

One veteran of that war and a keen observer of the role of propaganda was Adolf Hitler. In Mein Kampf, published in 1925, he demonstrated his interest in human nature: “The art of propaganda lies in understanding the emotional ideas of the great masses and finding the psychologically correct way of gaining the broad masses’ attention and hearts.” His insights help explain why his first position in the Nazi Party was as its director of propaganda.
propaganda. Unlike other German politicians in the democratic Weimar Republic, Hitler was eager to use the latest technologies — sound amplification, airplanes, film, early versions of TV, and most crucially radio, perhaps the smartphone of its day — to advance his message.

Another sentence from Mein Kampf also resonates today: “Propaganda is a terrible weapon in the hands of an expert.” And now, we live in a world in which social media allows everyone to be an expert.

Free speech is vital to a democracy, and one hopes that in the marketplace of ideas “counter-speech” will win out. But history is also a reminder that the unthinkable is possible and of the dangers of wishful thinking and unintended consequences. It often feels like the rapidity of technological change and impact have outstripped our ability to
carefully assess and anticipate it consequences. With antisemitism and racism ongoing problems, all the creativity and innovation that built social media needs to be harnessed to address these issues. And it will require more than talented “techies.”

Historians and other experts in the humanities — the study of what it means to be human — need to be part of this urgent endeavor.

Mark Twain is alleged to have said that “A lie is halfway around the world while the truth is still putting its shoes on.” Regardless of the source, the observation pre-dates the rise of social media by a century. The world always changes, but human nature never does.

_Sara J. Bloomfield is director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum._

_The article was originally published at USHMM Medium page._
On 9 September 2020, Slovakia commemorates the Memorial Day for Victims of the Holocaust and of Racial Violence. Established in 2000 by the Slovak Parliament, the day marks the date in 1941 when the Slovak government issued a decree on the legal status of Jews, the so-called the Jewish Codex. The Codex led to deportations which resulted in the murder of approximately 70,000 Slovak Jews.

On 8 September 2020 a remembrance ceremony at the memorial to the victims of the Holocaust was held in the town of Sereď, jointly organized by local and regional authorities.

The Sereď Holocaust Museum of the Slovak National Museum – Museum of Jewish Culture organized several events related to this Memorial Day as well as to the European Day of Jewish Culture and Heritage. On 6 and 8 September, music concerts of Bruno Walter Chamber Orchestra were performed in Sereď and Bratislava conducted by Jack Martin Händler.

Exhibition openings
The Sereď Holocaust Museum, situated on the site of the former labor and concentration camp in the town of Sereď, prepared an exhibition on anti-Jewish propaganda in wartime Slovak newspapers.

Another exhibition organized by the Slovak National Museum – Museum of Jewish Culture, "Football Under the Swastika: The Story of Leopold 'Jim' Šťastný," opened on 8 September 2020 and shows the pernicious effects of Nazi ideology in football. The exhibition provides an opportunity to compare the development of organized football in Germany and Slovakia before and
after the Nazis came to power. It captures the implementation of racial laws, from the gradual exclusion of "non-Aryans" from organized football to their deportation and murder. This tragic history is told through the story of one man, Leopold "Jim" Šťastný, who was one of the best football players in Slovakia during the interwar period. He survived persecution thanks to dedicated officials, players and fans. Eventually, Šťastný would have to give up his football career, but, unlike the closest members of his family, he would survive.
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Dr. Adam Cyra

The Volunteer: The true story of Witold Pilecki’s secret mission” won the book of the year 2019 at one of the most prestigious literary contests in the UK - the Costa Book Awards.

Fairweather, a native of Wales, in his 40s, was head of the office of the British newspaper “Daily Telegraph” in Baghdad and a videojournalist for the US “Washington Post” in Afghanistan, among others. In his books, he also wrote about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Speaking on the genesis of the book about Pilecki, Fairweather said that his colleague also a war correspondent, who visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum about a decade ago, told him the story of the heroic Cavalry captain. We jointly wrote about the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. He attended the anniversary celebrations in Oświęcim and read about the resistance movement that operated in the camp. The fact that such activity could have been carried out in such a place was something new to me. For me, Auschwitz was a symbol of the ultimate sacrifice and suffering. I found it astonishing to imagine that there was a group of people fighting the German Nazis at the very heart of this greatest evil.

Jack Fairweather and his documentalists worked on the book for nearly three years. I met him in 2016, when he visited the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum for the first time, presenting a plan to write his book. I became his first guide to the extraordinary fate of the Auschwitz volunteer. Over the next few years, I also offered him as much help as possible with my knowledge of the history of Auschwitz and facts from the life of Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki. His documentalists were in regular contact with me, asking dozens of questions to which I tried to answer.

I took a closer interest in his fascinating and heroic figure in 1986 when I wrote the first article about him, which, however, was not published and I had no idea why. A few years later it turned out that all texts about Cavalry Captain Pilecki during the communist period in Poland had to be consulted with the management of the Central Office for the Control of Press, Publications and Performances, based on the censorship regulation drafted on 3 June 1980. Admittedly, the press had published articles about Pilecki before, but as a rule, they were only limited to his underground activity in the camp and the description of his escape; however, there was no mention of the circum-stances surrounding the execution of Pilecki during the post-war Stalinist terror in Poland.

In the spring of 1989, I tried again to present the extraordinary fate of the Cavalry Captain in
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the press, and this time I succeeded. My articles appeared in “Tygodnik Powszechny”, “Stolica” and “Morze i Ziemia”. After these publications, I received a request for contact from Ludmiła Serafińska from Nowy Wiśnicz, where Pilecki sought refuge in the summer of 1943 after he escaped from Auschwitz. The conversation with her provided me with plenty of new information and instructions, encouraging me to look for additional archival material and to reach out to witnesses who knew Pilecki. The result of many years of research efforts was the book “Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki. The Volunteer to Auschwitz”, which was first published in 2000. The second edition extended and supplemented was published in 2014.

In the 1990s, while collecting materials for Witold Pilecki’s biography, I obtained access to all the most important sources and documents related to him, and since then almost no particular discoveries have been made in this area. However, one crucial source remains to be found, which I describe below.

In the 1980s, Polish historians were familiar with Witold Pilecki’s account entitled “W’s Report” (Witold’s Report), which the Cavalry Captain presumably handed over to the Home Army Headquarters in Warsaw as early as the autumn of 1943. It consisted of several dozen typed pages and was stored in the collections of the Central Archive of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (now the Archive of the Polish Left - Branch VI of the Archive of New Files in Warsaw).

I read the report in February 1991. However, it did not have a ‘key’ without which the names
replaced by numbers in the text could not be deciphered. I found the “key” containing the names and corresponding numbers, two months later in the Archives of the State Protection Office in Warsaw.

It was found among the materials confiscated from Pilecki during his arrest, by officers of the Ministry of Public Security in May 1947, and contained a list of more than two hundred names of Auschwitz prisoners, numbered consecutively from eight to over two hundred. Using the data contained in the discovered “key”, one could substitute the numbers in the text of “Witold’s Report” with the first and last names of the prisoners. By doing so, the report was readable again, which enabled me to publish it together with an extensive account of the source and footnotes. This unique text, entitled “Witold’s Report”, was published a quarter of a century ago in the “Bulletin of the Auschwitz Preservation Society” No. 12 in 1991.

In turn, the Polish historian in exile, Józef Garliński, a Home Army officer and former KL Auschwitz prisoner, had found over half a century ago the second comprehensive report on this camp, which Witold Pilecki wrote in Italy in the second half of 1945. It consisted of over a hundred pages of typescript and was kept in the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in London. In it, Pilecki described his stay in Auschwitz and activities in the camp military conspiracy. In the text of the second unique account, Pilecki also used numbers instead of names. Although he compiled a separate “key” with a list of Auschwitz conspirators, it has unfortunately not been found to this day.

Following years of painstaking work, during which Józef Garliński, compared the text of this account with other sources and conducted many conversations on the subject, as well as extensive correspondence with former prisoners of Auschwitz, he reconstructed the partly lost ‘key’ and, based on the above account and reconstruction, wrote a book entitled “Fighting Auschwitz”, published for the first time in London in 1974 with numerous reissues afterwards, including, above all, translation into English.

One of the main characters of Garliński’s book is Pilecki presented in the context of the heroic struggles of the camp conspiracy. The use of his account, which was created just after the war, made the author the first to debunk several myths, insinuations and falsifications in the presentation of the Oświęcim underground.

I reconstructed the aforementioned post-war report by Pilecki, comprehensively and more accurately, having at my disposal the ‘key’ to the previous “Witold’s Report” of 1943. I published it as the second part of my earlier mentioned book “Cavalry Captain Pilecki. The Volunteer to Auschwitz”, which was first published in Poland twenty years ago.

The search for the missing ‘key’ to Cavalry Captain Pilecki’s post-war report is a task that historians are yet to accomplish. The “key” would permit full decoding of this report and further enrich the existing knowledge of the Polish military conspiracy at Auschwitz. Its discovery would be a great success and an important historical find. So far, no one has succeeded, including Jack Fairweather, who, along with his team of documentalists, has also searched for documents related to Pilecki’s underground activities in the camp, in the English, American and Swiss archives.

In September 1940, Witold Pilecki was sent to KL Auschwitz. He voluntarily allowed himself to be captured during a round-up in Warsaw and, upon crossing the camp gate, became number 4859. As an officer of the Polish Army in striped camp uniform, he carried out his perilous mission in Auschwitz, creating a Polish military resistance movement. For the prisoners, whose only purpose until then was to survive, he aroused hope and the will to fight. His reports, sent mainly through prisoners released from the camp or fugitives, were a dramatic call for help. However, despite their terrifying content, no aid was forthcoming from outside the camp wires.

Fairweather’s book is read in great suspense, and one is unable to detach oneself from its content. Particularly revealing are its excerpts, describing the transfer of Pilecki’s reports to the Polish government in London and the Allies
First page of the key to the "W" Report
through couriers, such as the Swede named Sven Norman, or the Polish courier Napoleon Segieda, whose success in transferring these reports to the West is merely incredible. The book also reminds us that the German Nazi Auschwitz camp was, initially a place of massacre almost exclusively for Poles. The main victims were representatives of the Polish intelligentsia and members of the Polish resistance; Poles caught during roundups, as well as a small number of Polish Jews brought here in transports along with Poles. The mass extermination of the Jewish population only began in the gas chambers of Auschwitz II-Birkenau in the spring of 1942. At the same time, Polish transports continued to be sent to the camp to the end of its existence. “The Volunteer” primarily sheds light on the early days of Auschwitz, which is relatively unknown in the West.

Moreover, thanks to Fairweather’s publication, the most recent history of Poland, presenting the resistance of Poles against two criminal totalitarian systems, it will become known to many English-speaking readers, thus showing that the term ‘Polish concentration camps’, which they encounter in their local media, is false.

Jack Fairweather wrote a biography of Witold Pilecki, in which he briefly presents his youth and life in the interwar period at the Borderlands, and how he found himself voluntarily in KL Auschwitz. He attempts to explain the motivation for this deed by presenting what kind of man Witold Pilecki was. The book also contains information on the events that transpired upon his escape from the camp, including the story of his involvement in the Warsaw Uprising and opposition to Communism after the war, for which he ultimately paid with his life. He was sentenced to death during the Stalinist terror in Poland and shot in the Mokotow prison in Warsaw on 25 May 1948.

However, the British writer’s publication mainly tells of a fragment of Witold Pilecki’s life as an Auschwitz prisoner, who reported on Nazi crimes. His objective, as the author stresses, was also to convince the Allies to bomb the camp. The tool intended to accomplish this goal was ‘Witold’s Reports passed on from KL Auschwitz over a period of almost three years, in which he reported on the transformation of the concentration camp intended for the Polish elite into a centre for the mass extermination of Jews, transported to their death from virtually the entire Europe.
The reports by Cavalry Captain Pilecki were certainly not the only source of information on the crimes committed in KL Auschwitz.

Jack Fairweather recalls that in April 1944, two Jews from Slovakia fled from KL Auschwitz, whose accounts also reached the West. However, no mention is made of their names - Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler - and no mention is made of the fact that, following their accounts, a comprehensive report in Slovak and German was compiled, and secretly submitted to the governments of the Allied countries, the World Jewish Congress, the International Red Cross and even the Vatican.

It also fails to mention that a Pole, Jerzy Tabeau, escaped from the camp in November 1943. The Polish underground sent the report from his stay in the camp to the West. In Switzerland, it ended up in the hands of diplomats and a representative of the World Jewish Congress. The so-called Polish Major’s report also reached the governments of the United Kingdom and the United States. A report drawn up by two other Jews, fugitives Czesław Mordowicz and Arnošt Rosin, was also given to the West in 1944. All the documents were published in whole or in part in the Allied countries and Switzerland. A brochure entitled ‘German Extermination Camps - Auschwitz and Birkenau’ was published in November 1944 in Washington. The first part contained the text of Vrba and Wetzler, supplemented by a report by Mordowicz and Rosin, while the second part contained a ‘report by a Polish major’, Jerzy Tabeau.

Jack Fairweather claims that Pilecki failed to convince the Western Allies to bomb the railway line, the crematoria and the gas chambers at KL Auschwitz, and this should have been done to save several thousand Jews from death in the gas chambers of the camp. At the same time, reference is made to the statements made by the Allied leaders, who had a negative opinion of the idea.

The British author writes very cautiously about the stay and camp conspiracy activities of Józef Cyrankiewicz, who was never a member of the underground Military Organisation Union created by Pilecki in KL Auschwitz, and also never met Witold Pilecki personally while in the camp. Cyrankiewicz knew a great deal about his activities in the camp resistance movement, but he remembered him as a prisoner by the name of Tomasz Serafiński, under whose name the Cavalry captain was registered in the camp. All thoughts that Cyrankiewicz is an informer in Auschwitz are rightly repudiated as completely untrue slander.

Fairweather also points out that there are no credible documents that would confirm the exceptionally negative role that Józef Cyrankiewicz was allegedly supposed to have played during Witold Pilecki’s trial in 1948. Undoubtedly, Cyrankiewicz behaved passively in the situation in question; however, there was little he could do to help because requests for pardon were usually handled personally by
President Bolesław Bierut, who rarely exercised his powers of clemency and usually approved previously pronounced death sentences.

The publication under discussion also positively presents Dr Władysław Dering, the pillar of secret activity in the camp hospital, who was active in the military conspiracy of Polish prisoners and was one of the first to enter the underground network of the Military Organisation Union created by Pilecki. In this case, Fairweather did not succumb to the various negative opinions and accusations that were also wrongly made against the doctor after the war.

Thus, the British author considered the opinion of Pilecki, who wrote about Dering as such, to be correct: “I state that while carrying out underground and military work (...) at the Auschwitz concentration camp, I knew Dr Władysław Dering as one of the employees of that organisation in the best possible terms. Dr Dering (...) was sworn in by me in the camp and instructed to control the situation in the local prison hospital (Krankenbau). The work was difficult, but Dr Dering did an excellent job for three years and became one of the pillars of our organisation after taking control of the situation in the hospital. However, out of necessity, he had to maintain a profile that might not appeal to particular people who were not acquainted with our work”.

After Pilecki’s escape from Auschwitz, the Polish underground continued to uphold what Pilecki was so keen to achieve, which is ensure prisoners can take up fights against the SS crew in the camp.

It is a pity Fairweather did not mention in the main text but only in the footnotes that the situation on the ground in the second half of 1944 was monitored by Second Lieutenant Stefan Jasieński, a.k.a. “Urban”, a well-trained soldier, a cichociemny (special-operations paratrooper of the Polish Army in exile) an intelligence officer sent from Great Britain. Before that, he fought in the September campaign, and after its collapse, he made his way to France and England through Hungary. As an officer in England, he was assigned to take a course in parachute jumping.
In March 1943, together with three colleagues, he was parachuted into occupied Poland. In the summer of 1944, that is after Witold Pilecki’s escape, “Urban” was sent to the area near KL Auschwitz, where he made contact with the camp’s conspiratorial Auschwitz Military Council. Consequently, he gained detailed insights into the rules of operation of the camp, the habits of the guards and the status of the SS guard company.

Work carried out in liaison between him, and the Silesian District Command of the Home Army to release as many prisoners as possible was interrupted by a tragic event. At the end of September 1944, Second Lieutenant Jasieński was shot and arrested near the camp by a German military police patrol. He was imprisoned in Auschwitz and died in early January 1945 in unknown circumstances. The failure to mention these events by Fairweather would perhaps also be fascinating for readers of his book.

Furthermore, the author of “The Volunteer” failed to mention that Witold Pilecki’s escape from KL Auschwitz did not stop the activity of the military conspiracy, as shown by the event of 11 October 1943, when 54 prisoners were shot at the Execution Wall. Among them were the leaders of the of Military Organization Union: Lt Col Juliusz Gilewicz, Maj. Zygmunt Bohdanowski-Bończa, Lt Col Teofil Dziama, Jan Mosdorf, Capt. Tadeusz Paolone-Lisowski, and Lt Col Kazimierz Stamirowski. The prisoners were captured thanks to informers in the camp. After the execution, the activity of the Polish military conspiracy was seriously weakened, although it was continued by Bernard Świerczyna, Stanisław Kazuba and Henryk Bartosiewicz. They became part of the Auschwitz Military Council mentioned earlier, which was established in the camp in the summer of 1944 in connection with the arrival of the already mentioned 2nd Lt Stefan Jasieński near the camp. The officer, much like Pilecki, worked actively to undertake actions aimed at liberating prisoners, which, unfortunately, never materialised due to the disproportionate numerical and military advantage of the camp SS crew over the underground partisan units of the Silesia District of the Home Army.
It is very difficult to find any factual errors in the masterfully written biography of the Auschwitz volunteer, but I have nevertheless identified some of them of secondary relevance.

Wilhelm Westrych, who employed Pilecki in the camp carpentry shop, was not a kapo, but a vorarbeiter, or so-called foreman. Never did the prisoners line-up in front of the camp Gestapo room, eager to “sell out their comrades” as a result of their denunciations - as Jack Fairweather uncritically quoted after a former prisoner Konstanty Piekarski. After he escaped from KL Auschwitz, Pilecki did not want to meet a priest in Alwernia, where the fugitives mistakenly found themselves, although they intended to find a priest in Poręba-Żegota.

Bolesław Kuczbara was not a camp dentist, but merely a dental technician. Witold Pilecki, contrary to Tomasz Serafiński, whose name he used in the camp, was not an agricultural engineer. Stanisław Jaster, a fugitive from KL Auschwitz, was never tried by the Special Military Court of the Home Army, although soldiers of the Polish underground most likely killed him. The exact circumstances of Pilecki’s arrest by Security Officers in May 1947 are unknown, and the description of this event in Fairweather’s book is literary fiction. The uniform layout of the bibliography, without any division into archival sources, newspapers, memoirs and diaries and studies, may raise objections. It should also be noted that the bibliography does not mention the meticulously developed book by Stanisław Kobiela entitled “The Escape of Cavalry Capt. Witold Pilecki from Auschwitz to Bochnia and Wiśnicz”, Bochnia 2018, whose author Jack Fairweather met in person shortly before his death.

“The Volunteer” by Jack Fairweather should be considered as non-fiction literature. The book presents authentic characters and events, and their description is based on a richly collected historical material, partly only fictionalised. From the novel, the author has drawn on the technique of narration and fiction of events, with scientific texts, and combines the factual nature of the historical narration, included in wellthoughtout and neatly presented chapters, with plenty of footnotes. They allow the reader to check the authenticity of the presented facts, which is further supported by biographical notes, persons described in it and an extensive bibliography containing studies and source materials in Polish, German and English, and occasionally in Czech and Sorbian.

The whole is enriched with lots of photographs, documents, plans and diagrams, which are over one hundred and twenty in Jack Fairweather’s book. It is written in accessible and vivid language, presenting the camp fate of Witold Pilecki against the background of the German occupation of Poland, combined with the actions of the Polish Underground State, which intended to put an end to the Holocaust.

Translations of the book into such languages as Dutch, Czech, Russian, Lithuanian, Spanish and Portuguese are underway, which gives us hope that thanks to Pilecki’s character described by the talented biographer Jack Fairweather, readers from other countries will get the opportunity to learn more about the history of Auschwitz. The book will be translated into twenty five languages, including Japanese.

This biography of Witold Pilecki has already become an international bestseller on the American and British market. It was written from the viewpoint of a researcher from outside Polish cultural circles, and therefore it is all the more valuable.

The masterful story of the British journalist about Witold Pilecki is also a work of literature, which very suggestively shows the ability of a man in extreme camp conditions to demonstrate courage and dedication.
The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) is offering a limited number of fellowships for Ph.D. and Post Doctoral Candidates Conducting Research on the Holocaust. The application deadline is December 21, 2020* for the Fall 2021 - Summer 2022 Funding Year.

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For application and eligibility information, please visit fellowships.claimscon.org.

For questions, email chavie.brumer@claimscon.org

*PLEASE ALLOW FOR AN EXTRA WEEK IN YOUR APPLICATION PROCESS PLANNING, AS ALL APPLICATIONS MUST GO THROUGH THE FLUXX PORTAL AND REGISTRATION INTO THE PORTAL MAY TAKE A FEW EXTRA DAYS.*
A ONE-OF-A-KIND DIARY
“MAJDANEK 15. I - 17.V.43.”
BY JADWIGA ANKIEWICZ

The State Museum at Majdanek presents its latest publication - “Majdanek 15. I - 17. V. 43 The Diary” - a unique testimony of the camp experience and the only original document entirely written in the German concentration camp. Its author is 16-year-old Jadwiga Ankiewicz, a young, everyday girl whose life and fate are symbolised by the tragic experiences of the young generation of Poles during the Second World War.

During her imprisonment at Majdanek, from January to May 1943, Jadwiga recorded her observations practically day after day. She wrote in a notebook in a single line, with a pencil. She probably had these items on her during the round-up in Warsaw on 15 January 1943. To keep the diary for such a long time in hiding required both great ingenuity and determination from Jadwiga. It was strictly forbidden to have writing instruments behind the wires, and their discovery by the camp authorities entailed the danger of being beaten or even killed. It was also extremely important that none of the inmates disclosed to the supervisors that the girl was keeping records. Jadwiga’s handwriting is small, and the letters are slightly rounded and inclined to the right. It is worth noting that there are no visible signs of haste despite the drastic situation of the writer. The language used by the author is very frugal, sometimes even harsh. Jadwiga did not write too often or effusively about homesickness and loved ones; she did not complain about her situation. It is also interesting that, despite the depressing reality, she did not omit situations which she perceived as humorous. We get to know a teenager, who notwithstanding the war, detached herself from the surrounding reality and was able to report on life behind the wires of the concentration camp. Extracts from the Journal relating to the description of the KL Lublin crew are particularly interesting. Jadwiga

Jedyny taki Dziennik!

Jadwiga Ankiewicz
did not use camp names, but she assessed the female supervisors according to their behaviour, and one may be under the impression that she may even have taken a liking to some of them. She described this hostile world in a different way than those who decided to recount their tragic experiences after many years. At the time of her imprisonment, she was only 16 years old. She described what she observed from the perspective of a young person. However, she focused on events she participated in and the people closest to her at the time, or who had gained her respect and appreciation. The language used by the teenager approximates the text of the Diary more to reportages than to diaries kept by young people.

Jadwiga Ankiewicz was born on 11 January 1926 in Warsaw. Her father Stefan (1899-1944) was a native of Warsaw, and mother Barbara (1892-1979), née Lisiecka, hailed from Kumanów near Kamieniec Podolski. The Ankiewicz family lived in one of the buildings belonging to the then Stefan Batory Royal Polish Male Secondary School, at 6 Myśliwiecka Street. Jadwiga attended the Marszałek Józef Piłsudski Public School No. 105 at 128 Czerniakowska Street. Her favourite subjects were the Polish language and literature, but she was also fascinated by geography lessons. Jadwiga also possessed artistic skills: she organised and directed performances for family celebrations, for which she independently designed and made costumes.

Jadwiga and her one-year older sister were brought up in the spirit of love for the history of the country and tradition. The father, a volunteer in the 1920 fight to defend Warsaw, was a role model for his daughters. Jadwiga was 13 years old when World War II began in 1939. The father was called up in the first days of September. In November, the Germans seized the building of the grammar school, displacing the professors and administrative staff living there. The mother and her two children resided with her family at 90 Czerniakowska Street.

Jadwiga was captured by the Germans during one of the largest street round-ups in Warsaw,
prison in Pawiak. She recalled that moment later on in her diary - We were sure that we were going to Skaryszewska. However, the holes in the tarpaulin revealed something else to us; we saw through them that we were going past the Theatre Square and entering Bielanska Street. Are we perhaps going to Pawiak?

On 17 January, she was transported from Pawiak, along with others, to the concentration camp at Majdanek in Lublin. She arrived there a day after. On her way from the Pawiak prison, Jadwiga threw away the card she had prepared earlier, hoping that it would somehow reach her family. Today, we know it did. For many weeks, family and friends made efforts to determine Jadwiga’s whereabouts. After some time, the teenager contacted her sister Halina and told her where she was. The Diary does not mention much about Jadwiga’s correspondence with her family. It may have been because of the girl’s fear for the safety of her loved ones, should the smuggled notes get into German hands.

In the first weeks of her imprisonment in KL Lublin, Jadwiga, like her colleagues, occasionally performed various cleaning jobs in their barrack and its surroundings. The group of female prisoners from the round-up, which included Ankiewicz, was not entered into the camp records until 24 February 1943. It was then that they were given camp clothing and Jadwiga was assigned the prisoner number - 5322.

Jadwiga became friends with four young girls: Krystyna Gontarska, Maria Turkowska, Janina Nowacka and Mieczysława Strawińska. They were jokingly referred to as ‘majdan’s quintuplets. On 8 March, Jadwiga and her friends commenced work in the camp laundry room, which was located in the so-called I międzypole (inter-field) - an area fenced with barbed wires between prisoner fields I and II. The laundry room was adjacent to the building where the victims’ corpses were stored, and the so-called old crematorium. It was, therefore, a unique point of observation. At that time, the Germans were exterminating Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto in the gas chambers - Today, we know how the Jews were led to the crematorium. They are mostly little
go crazy looking at these pale corpses and faces paralysed by fear. Is it not horrible? They bring a tiny, innocent, unaware child with black eyes and curly hair and in a few hours; they throw a cold, corpse out through the window. What did it do to suffer such a dreadful punishment? Jadwiga worked there until her release from the camp, i.e. 17 May 1943. The teenager, along with others who regained their freedom that day, received money for a ticket and provisions for the road at the headquarters of the Polish Red Cross in Lublin at Niecąta Street. She returned home to Warsaw on the morning train. However, the Majdanek experience has etched into her memory forever - ... and looking at these dozens of barracks, at the thousands of people hanging around them, who are not humans, but numbered striped uniforms, I have the feeling that I am not entirely liberated, after all, part of my heart is down there, at Majdanek.

Regrettably, on 30 January 1944, she was shot dead in unknown circumstances by the Germans in one of Warsaw’s streets. She was just over 17 years old. She was buried on 31 January 1944 at the Bródno Cemetery.

We know what Jadwiga was like thanks to her uncle’s sister Teresa Tobera, née Ankiewicz. The family collection enriched the latest publication with valuable and previously unpublished iconographic material.

The excerpt from the diary is read by Joanna Koziel, a student of Hetman Jan Zamoyski Secondary School in Lublin:

Her uncle’s sister Teresa Tobera tells about Jadwiga Ankiewicz: