47 (08/2021)

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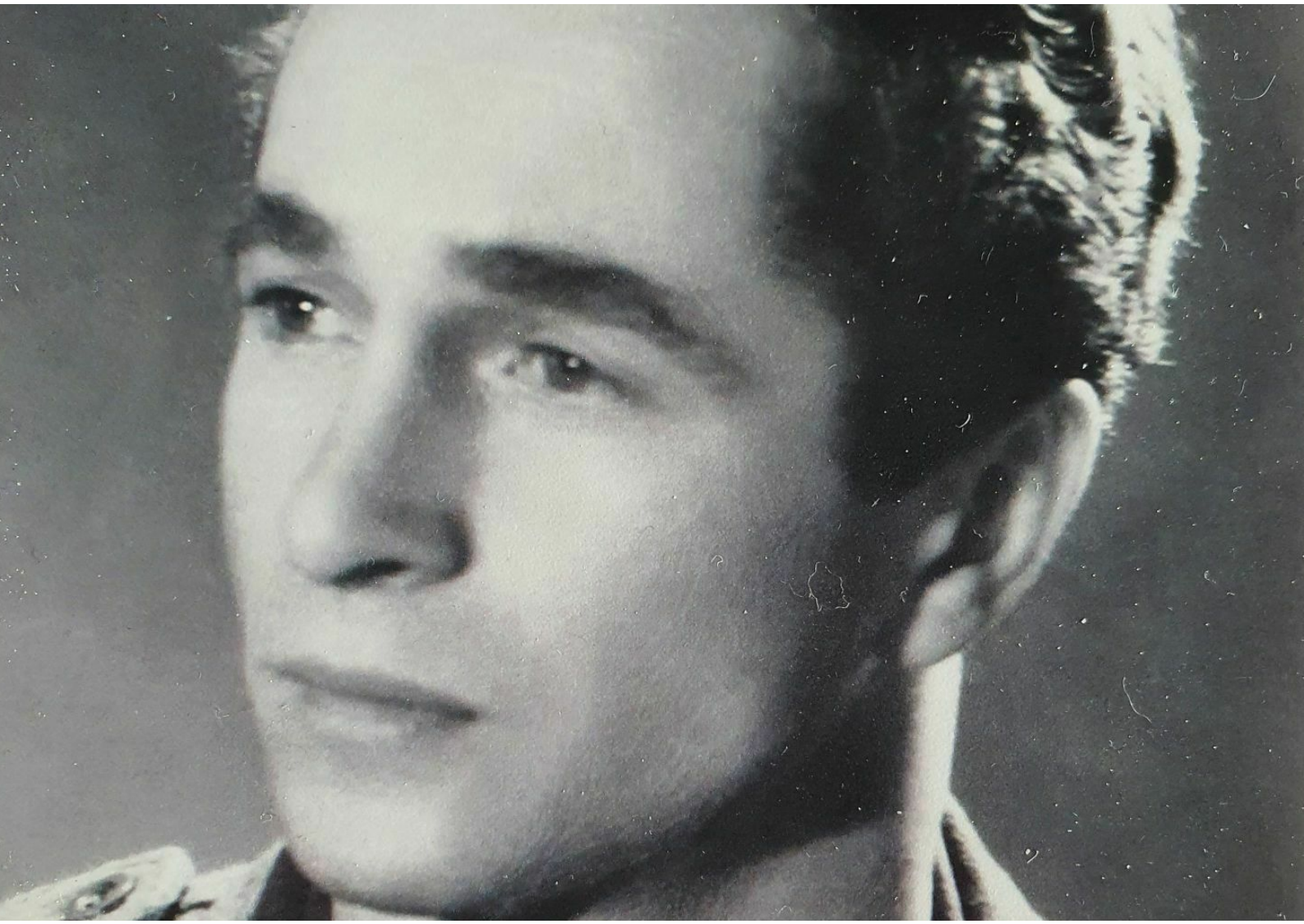

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Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

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Dr Wanda Witek-Malicka, Research Centre of the Auschwitz Memorial

THE CHAMPION OF AUSCHWITZ, A FILM BY MACIEJ BARCZEWSKI HISTORICAL REVIEW

Maciej Barczewski's film titled "The Champion of Auschwitz" was screened last December during the 45th Polish Film Festival in Gdynia. Its cinema premiere took place on August 27.

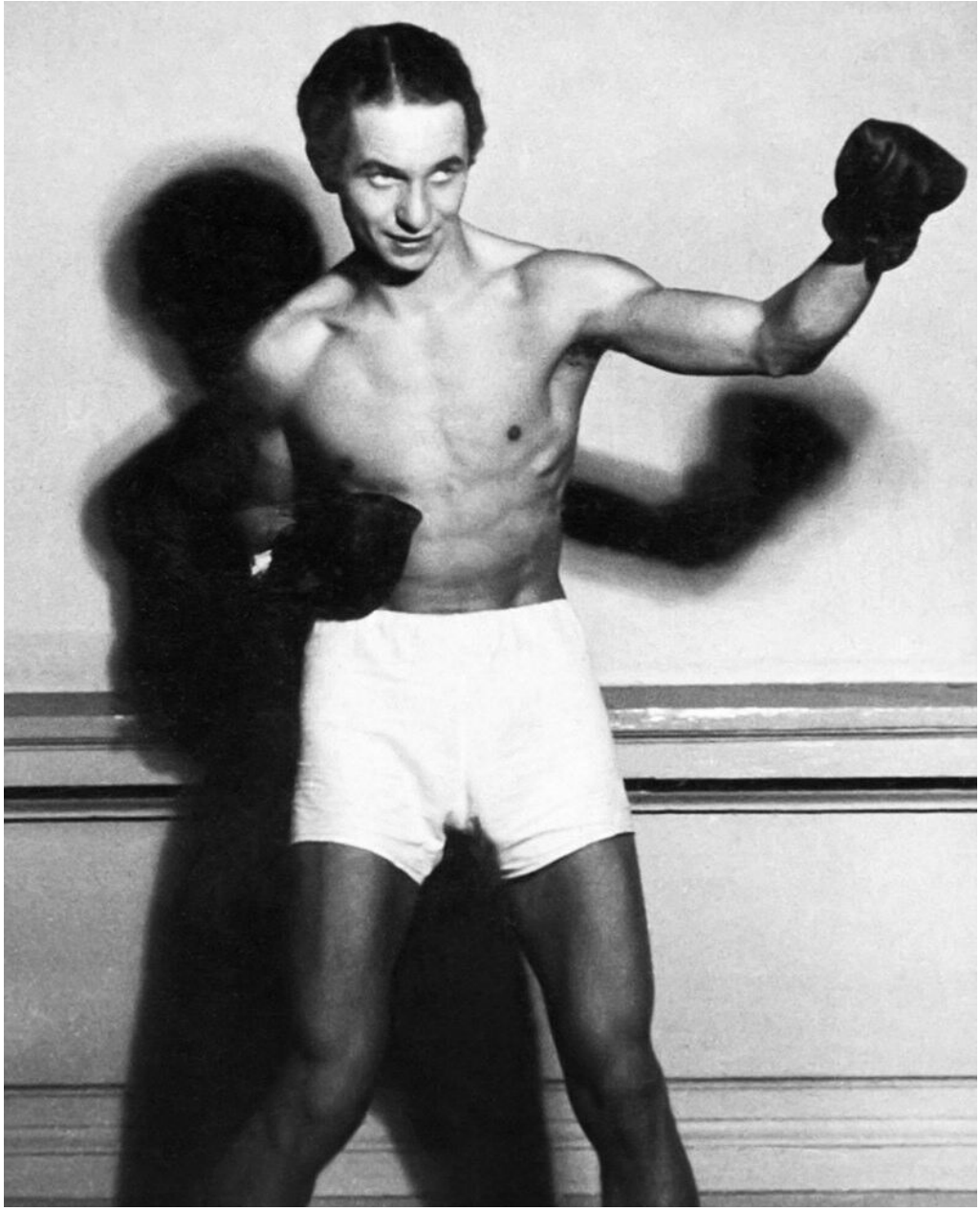
According to information in the opening credits, The Champion is a film inspired by real events, precisely the fate of Tadeusz Pietrzykowski, a pre-war Polish boxer and one of the first inmates of KL Auschwitz, who became a teacher, coach and physical education instructor after the war. It is hard to determine what kind of film genre we are actually dealing with. Reviewers describe it as a "sports drama", a "biographical film", or a "historical drama". The filmmakers themselves describe it on the Facebook fan page dedicated to the film as "a drama based on real events" and "a story about a real person", though the director does not shy away from using the term "historical cinema" in interviews. Accordingly, although it is not a documentary film, viewers may feel that they are being presented with a historically accurate, credible and reliable picture. Therefore, this article will examine the compatibility of the picture created by Barczewski with Tadeusz Pietrzykowski's biography and the realities of camp life as a KL Auschwitz prisoner.

Tadeusz Pietrzykowski (called Teddy) was born on the 8th of April 1917 in Warsaw. He took up boxing as a secondary school pupil, which did not always meet with his teachers' approval. As a boxer, I did not have an easy life at school, which I had to change several times - Pietrzykowski recalled years later. He trained at various clubs in Warsaw. One of his coaches, and perhaps the one who had the greatest impact on his sporting development and personality, was the legendary Feliks Stamm - then an instructor, boxing referee and a former boxer who became an independent coach of the Polish boxing team in 1936. Under his guidance, Teddy won the Polish vice-champion and Warsaw champion titles in the bantamweight division before the war.

At the outbreak of war, Pietrzykowski fought in defence of Warsaw. Shortly after the capitulation, in November 1939, he was sworn in and joined the underground organisation. He wanted to cross the border and join the Polish Army under formation in France. However, his expedition failed. He was arrested in Hungary and placed under arrest. On 14 June 1940, he was transferred to the Auschwitz camp and marked as number 77. He was one of the first 728 prisoners of the camp.

At Auschwitz, he initially performed arduous physical work outdoors, including backfilling the ground for the barrack square and working in the mowing squad. Finally, with the help of the Kupiec brothers, he found work in the camp carpentry shop but was quickly expelled in the autumn of 1940, after he was caught smuggling potatoes from the camp pigsty. He was sent to the Porąbek work squad in charge of building a recreation centre for the SS in Międzybrodzie Bialskie. The work was gruelling and aggravated by the mountainous terrain and unfavourable weather conditions at that time of year. Afraid of losing all his strength, Pietrzykowski faked an accident, which resulted in him being taken to the prison hospital in the main camp with a leg injury. Despite the injury, he was declared fit for work and assigned to so-called light labour - doing cleaning work around the camp seven days a week. In this way, he endured the winter of 1940/1941.

Pietrzykowski's first boxing fight in Auschwitz came in March 1941, against the German kapo Walter Dünning, whom as Pietrzykowski mentioned, had won the welterweight championship in professional boxing in Germany before the war (Bogacka suggests that the information about the sporting



at the railway station. All of this was conducive to conspiratorial activities. Working as an animal caretaker provided the opportunity to acquire additional food, which Pietrzykowski used to help his fellow camp prisoners, as noted by Pilecki in his report: The bran, was covertly delivered to me by my friend 21 [Tadeusz Pietrzykowski], who worked on the calves [...], and I added it to the soup that was brought to our carpenter's shop [...]. Whenever my friend 21 managed to bring more bran, I would pour a handful directly into my mouth, slowly grind the dry bran into small pieces, and swallow them together with the chaff.

In the summer of 1942, Pietrzykowski was taken ill with typhus. In his account, he claims that he was deliberately infected as part of an experiment conducted by an SS doctor, who gave him an injection after one of the fights. Personally, I didn't know anything about it, and I was unaware of what kind of injection I had received. I thought it might have been a booster shot - he recalled. However, it must be remembered that this happened when a typhus epidemic was spreading rapidly among the prisoners of Auschwitz, so it is difficult to say whether Pietrzykowski's assumptions are correct. In any case, he spent several weeks in the prison hospital, where he struggled with the illness under the care of his fellow prisoners. He owes his survival to them. On learning of the planned selection, his friends took Pietrzykowski out of the hospital and hid him in one of the prisoner blocks. Later, they also arranged for him to be transferred to work in the SS clinic, where he first served as a cleaner and later as an orderly. The job enabled Pietrzykowski to return to conspiratorial activities, thanks in part to the help of Maria Stromberger, a nurse employed at the SS-Revier, who provided medication to the prisoner hospital. Pietrzykowski worked at the SS clinic until the end of his stay in KL Auschwitz in the spring of 1943 when he was transferred as part of the mass deportation of Poles to other concentration camps to KL Neuengamme, where he continued his boxing fights. In March 1945, he was evacuated with a large group of prisoners by rail to Bergen-Belsen. The train carrying the prisoners got caught in the middle of an air raid during a stop at one of the stations. Pietrzykowski was fortunate to be one of the few survivors .

Tadeusz Pietrzykowski regained his freedom on 15 April 1945 at Bergen-Belsen. Immediately after liberation, he joined a group exposing camp criminals who tried to hide in the area as civilians. Later, he went to Lubeck and joined General Stanislaw Maczek's armoured division. He slowly recovered and got back into shape by organizing sports activities for the soldiers. He then returned to the ring, winning the division title.

In the autumn of 1946, he returned to his native Warsaw. He tried to reconnect with the sporting community but soon developed severe health problems that doomed his chances of returning to professional boxing. In 1947 he testified as a witness in the trial of Rudolf Höss before the Supreme National Tribunal.

In 1950, Pietrzykowski graduated from the Physical Education Academy and began working as a youth coach, educator and physical education teacher. He continued in these roles until his retirement. He was married three times, and these unions produced three children - two daughters and a son.

After the war, he never renounced his concentration camp history. In addition to sports trophies, he reverently kept camp memorabilia and the memory of his most important colleagues of the time. He carved the numbers of six colleagues on the wall of a room in his flat, where he created a mini-exhibition documenting his most important life experiences. These were the numbers of the brothers Emil and Stefan Baranski, Witold Pilecki, Władysław Rządkowski, Eugeniusz Niedojadło and Bolesław Kupiec. After his retirement, he was active in the Society for the Protection of Auschwitz and the War Veterans Association. He maintained contact with the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, in whose archives he deposited his account and secret notes sent from the camp to his mother. The most important biographical information about Tadeusz Pietrzykowski presented above is available to the public. His fate is not only documented in the archives and accounts of prisoners who remembered the small but indomitable camp boxer but also in numerous publications, including press articles by Adam Cyra, Marta Bogacka's work, Kłodziński and Ryn's text on the pathology of sport in the Auschwitz concentration camp, and many others . They

form a broad base that allows the filmmakers to reconstruct Pietrzykowski's biography credibly and reviewers to reliably verify the story presented in Barczewski's work, inspired by Pietrzykowski's biography.

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The first few scenes of The Champion are impressive, even though they are not overly dynamic. This spontaneous appreciation is mainly due to the set design, which is undoubtedly one of the film's strongest points. A viewer, who only knows the camp from pictures in history books, will be certain that the action takes place in KL Auschwitz. At first glance, the camp gate, buildings and the courtyard of block 11 look as they have been perpetuated in the public consciousness. The interiors of the residential blocks, workshops, stables and SS infirmary credibly depict the realities of the time, and their furnishings are appropriate to the place and time. The shabby walls and ascetic furnishings, consisting only of wooden stools and mattresses, faithfully reflect the interior appearance of the shacks. It is also commendable that the filmmakers noticed and recreated, at least on a basic level, the change in living conditions throughout the film – initially, the prisoners sleep on straw and pallets, but later scenes show three-tier wooden bunks. In terms of scenography, the workplaces also exude realism. It is convincingly illustrated that the prisoners, even when performing the most arduous and dangerous physical work, generally use the simplest hand tools, such as shovels, hammers, wheelbarrows, wooden carriers, and carts harnessed to people instead of draught animals. There is no doubt that those responsible for this aspect reached out to the sources and performed their job diligently. Also, the costumes and appearance of the film's inmates show that those responsible did some solid research. The striped uniforms are worn, dirty, and mismatched in size to the prisoner's physique - the sleeves of Teddy's oversized top reach halfway down his arms. There is a distinct difference between the clothes of ordinary prisoners and those of the German functionaries. An attentive viewer will note some seemingly insignificant details and small but meaningful gestures that highlight the problem of access to clothing. One example is the scene in which Teddy enters the stables for the first time, notices shoes on a shelf; takes one in his hand

All photos from "The Champion" in the article: Robert Pałka

the scene in which Teddy enters the stables for the first time, notices shoes on a shelf; takes one in his hand and smiles faintly - for the viewer, it is a clear indication that shoes are something to pay attention to (yet the film fails to depict prisoners walking barefoot, and in typical camp clogs). Former prisoners emphasize that good footwear in the camp was an indicator of a prisoner's position and impacted their chances of survival by protecting them from injury and disease.

There are more such details in Barczewski's picture. In the documentary film depicting, among other things, work on the set of The Champion , one can see, for instance, that the actors had their teeth painted to ensure they were not too white (indeed, most of the inmates had no opportunity to take care of their oral hygiene for months) - such trifles contribute to the credibility of the film. Only in some cases do attempts to relate something through specifics prove misguided. As an example, in one of the first scenes set in the quarry, we see the protagonist tucking a large piece of paper between his shirt and striped uniform while guards in long coats walk in the distance. From survivors' accounts, we know that, in the autumn and winter, prisoners doing construction work outdoors often wore cement sacks under their striped shirts as additional protection against the cold (which, by the way, was prohibited). However, Pietrzykowski arrived in Auschwitz in mid-June. In the first months of his stay in the camp, the prisoners were not troubled by the cold but, on the contrary, by the unbearable heat, and after a day's work in the open air, sunstroke rather than colds were commonplace. This anguish, characteristic of Pietrzykowski's early days in the camp, was not reflected in the film.

In several subsequent scenes, we see SS men in long coats and Kapos dressed in thick jumpers and jackets with sheepskin collars, even though the context and story suggest it is late spring or summer. Arguably, this choice of costumes was directly related to the prevailing conditions on the set. Shooting began in autumn 2019 and was completed in early 2020. Looking at the end result, one can say that it was a mistake to accumulate in a short autumn and winter period the shooting of a film whose action begins in the early summer of 1940 and covers almost three

he shooting of a film whose action begins in the early summer of 1940 and covers almost three years (until the spring of 1943), and in which many scenes take place outdoors. It causes disorientation, and grasping the passage of time and the dating of successive events - which is particularly important for a historical film - requires a great deal of concentration from the viewer and prior knowledge of the story they are following on the screen; and even so, this is not always possible. Perhaps the epidemiological situation made it imperative not to devote more time to the production and shoot it in autumn and winter; nevertheless, the film would undoubtedly have benefited from a better representation of the passage of time through a clearly discernible change of seasons. Astonishingly, the obvious attention to detail in the sets and costumes is accompanied by serious misrepresentations of the topography of Auschwitz in 1940 and beyond. It is all the more so since the site has been preserved in an almost unchanged form since the war. Naturally, in some cases, this lack of a faithful reproduction could be explained by objective reasons, such as the lack of resources or the possibility of creating a set design that would faithfully reflect the camp's surroundings, among other things. Unfortunately, however, it seems that in several cases, this is the result of insufficient knowledge, lack of care and deliberate action. Perhaps the filmmakers are not fully aware of the consequences of such visual simplification of Auschwitz. They can be illustrated by the example of how the public perception (which is also reflected in the film - The Champion) shapes the image of Auschwitz's surroundings and its relation to the town on the outskirts of which it was established.

In one of the opening scenes portraying the prisoners' work during the camp's construction, the main character longingly gazes into the distance while coiling barbed wire around insulators. There, beyond the fence, stretches a vast meadow, and in the distance, against the background of the sky, are densely growing trees. This nostalgic image is probably intended to express the prisoner's longing for freedom. The viewer should be aware, however, that the empty space here is only a metaphor. In reality, the camp was not set in a remote area surrounded by forest. The wooden barracks of the former resettlement station, later adapted

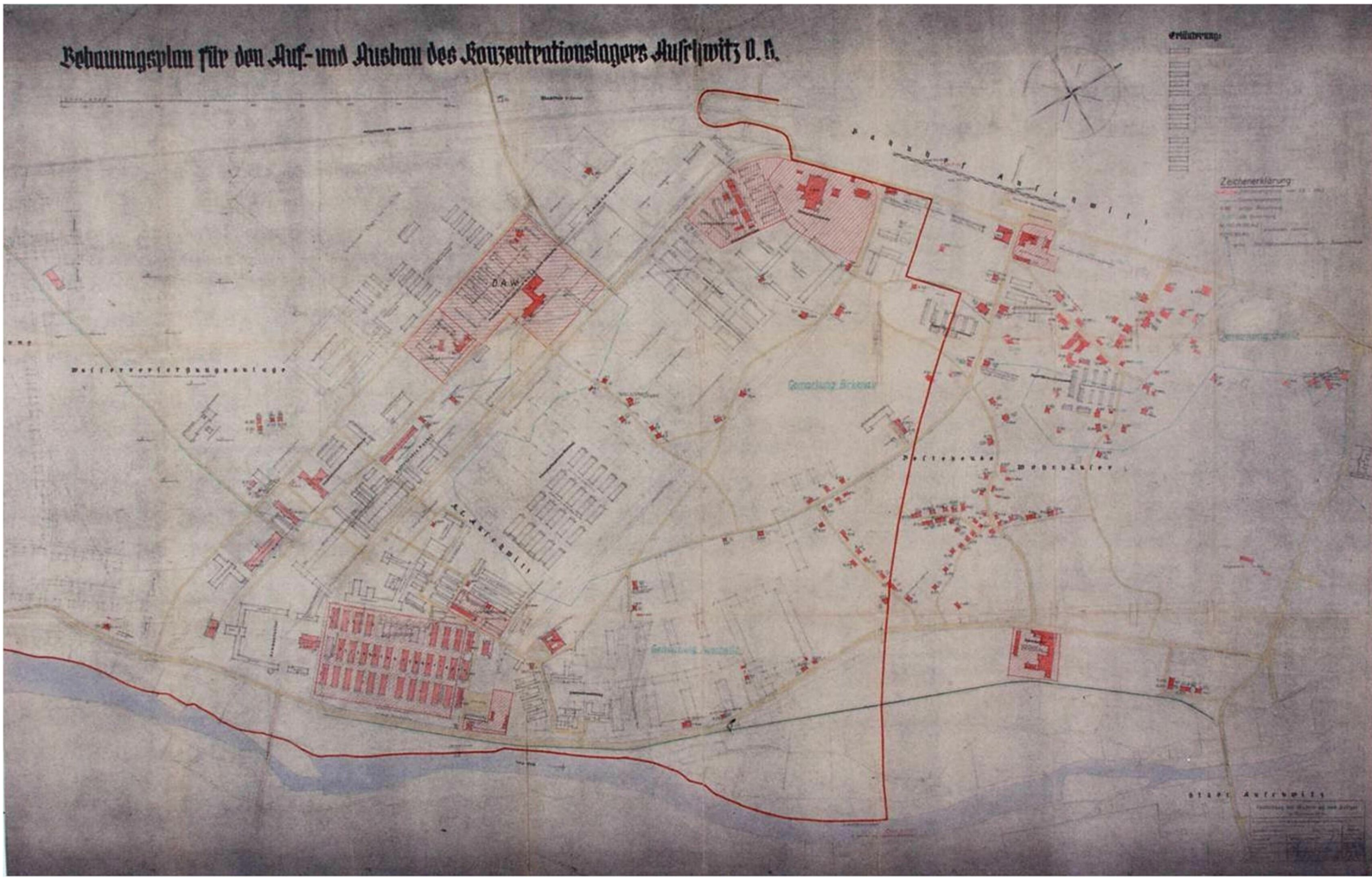
surrounded by forest. The wooden barracks of the former resettlement station, later adapted for camp purposes (they housed various types of workshops), were located in close proximity behind the gate with the Arbeit Macht Frei inscription - some of them, located closest to the camp, have survived to the present day. The camp was surrounded by various buildings - on one side by the magnificent building of the so-called, old theatre, on the opposite side by buildings adapted to the needs of the SS hospital, the commandant's and administrative offices, and in the slightly further distance by private houses belonging to Poles living in the Zasole district.

Understandably, the filmmakers will not build the camp and its surroundings from scratch for the sake of a single film. It is the viewer who should be aware that the cinematic image employs simplifications. Conversely, the filmmakers should be mindful that some of these simplifications perpetuate erroneous stereotypes and may impede education. Visitors to today's memorial site feel disoriented and surprised to see how densely built-up the area immediately adjacent to the former camp is. Many of the buildings date from the time of Auschwitz, but there is no shortage of pre-war buildings either. It is often a challenge for the guides to deal with the mistaken image of Auschwitz as a place created in the middle of nowhere, far from human settlements.

Barczewski's film also depicts the crematorium's surroundings in a completely distorted manner, which is difficult to understand given that its current state of preservation faithfully reflects its appearance from the period of the Auschwitz camp's operation. The vast meadow seen in the film is, in reality, the SS hospital building, and right behind it, the fences and buildings of the concentration camp. On the opposite side and to the rear of the crematorium building were the wooden barracks, and the so-called Höss villa, a two-story house occupied by the commandant's family, stood a little farther away. Most importantly, crematorium I was located outside the camp fence and not between the residential blocks, as depicted in the film. It is difficult to explain the reasons for the incorrect placement of Crematorium I in the movie. However, it must be noted that the correct location of the crematorium on the camp's map and the reconstruction of its immediate surroundings are crucial for understanding the course of events related to the mass extermination and its impact on the camp's prisoners.

Minor stumbles and major misrepresentations in the placement of objects within the camp are plentiful in the film. To those not involved in guiding visitors around the premises of KL Auschwitz, it may seem an insignificant detail. In reality, however, it has its consequences. A film, in which the image is the primary source of message and carrier of information, can create certain visual images in the viewer. A viewer familiar with such a suggestive representation of Auschwitz, as Barczewski proposes in his film, will instinctively use it as a point of reference during a visit to the museum. Museum guides often have to deal with such misconceptions and sometimes even with the disappointment of visitors who, having formed their image of the camp based entirely on pop culture representations, find it difficult to revise their thinking when they encounter the authentic site. For a film that seeks to be recognized as a historical or biographical film, it is crucial to maintain as close a connection as possible to the narrated story. In an interview, the director talks about the challenge of finding a compromise between factual accuracy and the prerequisites of film production. The final effect is a derivative of a certain feeling and sensitivity on the filmmaker's part and thorough factual preparation. Undoubtedly, it is worth appreciating the attempt by the creators of The Champion to acquaint themselves with the subject matter, both in its biographical, sporting and historical aspects. Some of the crew members spent several days at the Auschwitz site to learn and understand its history. In an interview with Katarzyna Oklińska, the director states: I have gathered everything I could about the Auschwitz camp. I've read and seen everything I could on the subject. Without prejudice to the question of whether it is possible to grasp everything that has been made public about Auschwitz in the scientific, literary and cinematic scope, this bold assertion places the director, who is also the screenwriter, in a position of total liability for the credibility of the facts he presents to the viewer.

Certainly, the adaptation of history for the purposes of a film involves a certain degree of restriction and simplification and the introduction of fictional plots. However, the line



restriction and simplification and the introduction of fictional plots. However, the line between simplifying a real story and trivialising it is very thin. Overstepping this line impoverishes and blurs the story rather than portraying it. Reducing a multifaceted biography to a single element and limiting complex phenomena to the simplest explanations can make a story inauthentic. A narrative constructed as such distances rather than approximates knowledge of the events that inspired the proposed image (film or literature). In addition to the necessity of compressing the story to fit it into time-limited film work, there is the issue of adapting the message to the potential viewer. The viewer's presumed competence and level of knowledge determine the language and complexity of the message.

The Champion was created to appeal to the mass audience. For it to be well received by the public at large, the story presented had to correspond in some way with social consciousness; it cannot grossly deviate from certain well-established stereotypes and ways of thinking about Auschwitz. Accordingly, the film uses classic patterns and symbols that conform to some widely-held camp canon; however, their portrayal is not always appropriate. It is not only a matter of misinterpreting and simplifying these symbols but also of some important historical facts being wholly ignored in the film and others being misrepresented. Significant irregularities can be found primarily in the relationships within the prisoner community and relations between SS men and between prisoners and the camp authorities. The characters crucial to the plot are portrayed as one-dimensional and lacking the personality of their protagonists, which is especially true of Teddy and Rapportführer Gerhard. Finally, many of the camp phenomena and characters appear at the wrong historical time. As evident from interviews with the filmmakers, these mistakes are not always the result of insufficient knowledge or failure to reach the sources, but sometimes a conscious decision.

As an example, the director points out that the appearance of KL Auschwitz was deliberately approximated to the contemporary appearance . When depicting the arrival of the first transport

approximated to the contemporary appearance . When depicting the arrival of the first transport of prisoners - of which Pietrzykowski was also a passenger - it omitted the fact that the transport was not located initially within the camp, but in the buildings of the former tobacco monopoly, several hundred metres away, which has no fundamental significance to the viewer's understanding of the fate of the first prisoners. By retaining the similarity of the buildings created for the film purpose, the viewer is aware of the location of the action from the very beginning, which in this case is precisely in line with maintaining factual accuracy - moving the action to the building mentioned above, whose appearance is not iconic - could be misleading. Unfortunately, the director followed the same path - in terms of approximating the film representation to the image established in the popular consciousness - when presenting the extermination of Jews at KL Auschwitz. As the director argues, not everyone is aware that the first mass transports of Jews to the camp did not occur until after two years of its operation; the general opinion is that it had been going on from the very beginning . The scene of the Jews marching to the gas chamber and being murdered with Zyklon B gas appears as early as the seventeenth minute of the film. Although Barczewski's film does not give the viewer any specific dates, knowledge of the camp's history and Pietrzykowski's biography and observation of the unfolding events in the movie allow one to estimate the approximate time of the plot. Thus, the scene mentioned above of the murder of the Jews probably takes place in the autumn of 1940, which is a serious factual error. The first attempts to use Zyklon B to kill people occurred a year later.

At this point, one can ask the question – is the role of a historical film to pay homage to popular beliefs and consolidate erroneous patterns of thinking, or on the contrary - to overcome common misconceptions in favour of disseminating facts? In other words, when seeking a compromise between authentic history and the requirements of the cinematic image, should the filmmakers approximate the narrative to popular belief or rather popular belief closer

to knowledge? It is a dilemma present at every stage of fact-inspired film-making, and making the right decisions depends on the intention and sensitivity of the filmmakers.

Judging from the following selected examples of inaccuracies and factual misrepresentations found in The Champion, the reader can determine how successful Barczewski is in finding the right balance between reality and the laws of filmmaking and whether the film is more likely to convey knowledge or distort the authentic story of Tadeusz Pietrzykowski.
The film is inspired above all by the memoirs of Tadeusz Pietrzykowski; however, it is questionable whether any other sources were consulted at the scriptwriting stage. The filmmakers offered the viewer a subjective image of the camp as seen through the eyes of the main protagonist. The consistent maintenance of such a viewpoint could be seen as sufficient justification for limiting the source base exclusively to the witness's memory records. At the same time, however, such a singular perspective should be associated with maintaining the greatest possible reliability in presenting the main character's fate and his feelings, actions, and motivations. In contrast, the filmmaker's approach to the biography of the protagonist is characterised by a great deal of freedom, even irreverence. The primary manifestation of this approach is the trivialisation of Tadeusz Pietrzykowski's camp story almost exclusively to his sporting activities. The film Teddy is one-dimensional, both in terms of personality and actions undertaken in the camp. Furthermore, Pietrzykowski's biography is not only simplified but also misrepresented in certain areas. Consequently, the film's storyline prevents the viewer from understanding the sequence of events and personal motivations that led Pietrzykowski to Auschwitz and then to the boxing ring, as well as the circumstances that ultimately prompted him to abandon his sporting career after liberation to work with young people.

The protagonist is introduced at the moment of his admission to the Auschwitz concentration camp. In a flashback, we see a boxing practice in the garden and Tadeusz being arrested by the Gestapo in his (as the viewer presumes) house. The reasons for his capture are not indicated; thus, the viewer does not even have the slightest suspicion that he is a pre-war boxer and a soldier who fought in the September Campaign and was an active member of the Resistance sworn in early as November 1939.

At the outbreak of war, Pietrzykowski's family occupied a flat in one of Warsaw's tenement blocks, not a house or a mansion surrounded by a garden. His arrest did not take place there. In the spring of 1940, Pietrzykowski left for Zakopane, intending to illegally cross the border to join the Polish Army under formation in France. Hungarian military police captured him and Tadeusz Kasprzycki near the Yugoslavian border. Before being sent to Auschwitz, he survived detentions and brutal interrogations in prisons in Rożniawa (then Hungarian territory), Muszyna and Nowy Sącz, among others.

As mentioned earlier, he also joined the underground organization in the camp. For some unknown reason, the motif of the camp's conspiratorial activity and personal acquaintance and cooperation with Pilecki was almost entirely omitted in the film (except for a short scene), when Teddy gives medicine to a prisoner employed in the prison infirmary). And yet, as Pietrzykowski recounts, although boxing was the main goal in the beginning, in later years it became only a cover, a springboard for what had to be done. And what had to be done; what was germinating in each of us was charity work for fellow prisoners, which eventually led to the organisation of an underground fight in the camp. As part of this activity, Pietrzykowski established contacts with the civilian population - he recalls the railwaymen of Oświęcim, through whom, for example, medicine for the prisoners was delivered to the camp. He was also an intermediary in conveying information and Pilecki's orders. He also passed on valuables lifted by prisoners who, due to their work, had access to the property of the victims of mass extermination – thus, the money, gold, and jewellery obtained were used to bribe SS men and win their favour. After securing employment at the SS infirmary and establishing closer contact with Maria Stromberger (who is personified in the film as Maria), Pietrzykowski stole medical supplies and transferred them to the prisoner hospital.

Pietrzykowski's camp biography is filled with many acquaintances who were active members of the conspiracy, people of merit in terms of prisoner self-help, and more. Besides Pilecki,

these included the Kupiec brothers from Poronin, Stanisław Barański (no. 132), Edward Pyś (no. 379), Bronisław Czech (no. 349), and many others, whose names he recalled multiple times in his account, indicating the role they played in his camp life. Pietrzykowski stresses in his account that thanks to the Kupiec brothers' patronage (my camp friends - as he emphasizes), he was assigned to a good, relatively safe carpentry commando, despite lacking the necessary skills and knowledge for the job.

He credits his fellow inmates, including Pilecki, with helping him survive the typhus epidemic. When he was down with fever and semi-conscious, he was devotedly cared for by the prisoners employed in the camp hospital, including Stanisław Kłodziński, Stanisław Głowa and Jan Pierzchała, among and others. At that time, selections were conducted regularly at the prison hospital, during which prisoners deemed unfit for work and unpromising were sentenced to death. Pietrzykowski again avoided sentencing thanks to a chain of support from his fellow prisoners. A day before the planned selection, Pilecki and the Baranski brothers turned up at the hospital. They led Pietrzykowski - still too weak to walk on his own - out of the hospital and hid him in the block. They also arranged for him to be transferred to work in the SS infirmary and initially helped with the cleaning work while gradually returning to full strength during the crucial period of convalescence from typhus. These are just a few examples of the friendly support Pietrzykowski experienced in the camp, which directly affected his survival.

One of the significant figures in Pietrzykowski's camp life was Fr Maximilian Kolbe, whom he first met in the spring of 1941 and subsequently on a fairly regular basis. This is also not mentioned in the film.

In Barczewski's film, Pietrzykowski's involvement in the network of relationships is hardly reflected. The main character seems to be completely alienated. He maintains virtually no close relations with anyone apart from the under-age prisoner Janek. He receives no direct support from anyone but helps others by generously sharing the food rewards from victories in fights. This image of a lonely hero is utterly inconsistent with the authentic character and contradictory to what the social relations inside the camp really looked like.

In an interview for the portal Trójmiasto.pl, Barczewski states that The Champion is a film that combines the story of an extraordinary man with a reflection on the loneliness of survival . The motif of Pietrzykowski's lonely struggle for life appears in interviews with the director and in conversations with Piotr Głowacki, who plays the leading role. If this was indeed the premise behind the creation of the story of the camp boxer, then it is sad to say that the film was based entirely on the wrong assumption. In the concentration camp, loneliness took away the chances of survival and survival was closely associated with participation in networks of social relations, which resulted from collective efforts, the effect of greater or lesser involvement of fellow inmates and inclusion in the prisoners' self-help chains. Of course, personal qualities such as courage, fortitude, resilience and good physical condition made survival easier but insufficient in themselves. Only cooperation, participation in the exchange of tangible goods (food, warm clothing) and services (help in securing a good commando, care in case of illness), and symbolic values (psychological support) gave the prisoner a real chance of survival, as evidenced by the memoirs of former prisoners. Anyone who survived their stay in KL Auschwitz owes it to the comprehensive assistance received in moments of crisis from their closest companions. This issue is ignored, even rejected, in Barczewski's film and replaced with the unrealistic archetype of the lone warrior.

The elements of Tadeusz Pietrzykowski's biography presented in the film are factually correct only on the most general level.
One of the key action locations in the film is the quarry where the main character works in the first days of his incarceration. Here, the viewer is confronted with images consistent with the stereotype of camp reality, such as strenuous physical labour, mistreatment of working prisoners by the Kapos who guard them, or the sight of emaciated corpses disorderly lying on the sides. It is at this quarry that Pietrzykowski's first boxing fight with a German functionary is staged. However, there is no quarry in Oświęcim or its immediate vicinity. It is a feature characteristic of the experience of Gross-Rosen or Mauthausen-Gusen prisoners, but certainly not of Auschwitz. It is also difficult to explain why the

or Mauthausen-Gusen prisoners, but certainly not of Auschwitz. It is also difficult to explain why the scenes in the quarry take place after dark. The marching out of the prisoner commandos working in the open air beyond the camp gates only took place after dawn, and their return before dusk, to prevent the prisoners from escaping.

Another misrepresentation is the incomprehensible and difficult to justify presence of the main character in the SS infirmary after one of his first bouts (in the first half of 1941). The prisoners were in no way treated or their wounds attended to in the SS hospital, and certainly not by any Kapo, who was, after all, a mere inmate of the camp. Therefore, the scene in which Walter sends Teddy back to nurse Maria after the first fight to have his wound dressed is contrary to the realities of the camp. Indeed, Pietrzykowski did have contact with the SS hospital staff, albeit not as a patient, but as an employee from mid-1942. It is difficult to explain why the filmmakers abandoned a credible, factual depiction of Pietrzykowski's contacts with the SS infirmary staff in favour of a narrative that falsified the reality of the camp.

The manner in which Pietrzykowski's work in Landwirtschaft Tierpfleger is portrayed significantly distorts the camp's reality. Factually, it is one of the film's weakest points, and the irregularities here are countless. Firstly, the rooms were located in a different place than shown in the film, and Pietrzykowski was employed in a barn for cows and calves, not in the stables; he did not care for the horses or the commandant's mare (Pietrzykowski's account shows that Władysław Rzętkowski looked after it). A far more serious error is that, for some unknown reason, Teddy has been portrayed as an independent and uncontrolled worker in these stables, which is not true. Other than the fact that the Tierpfleger Kommando consisted of a larger number of workers (some of whom Pietrzykowski mentions in his account), it also had its vorarbeiter, kapo (this function was performed by the German criminal prisoner no. 19 Johan Lechenich) and SS-Kommandoführer who, according to Pietrzykowski's account, was assigned a special room.
The complex prisoner authority system is not

assigned a special room.The complex prisoner authority system is not reflected in the film, and apart from a few iconic characters of German Kapos, there are no lower-level functionary prisoners. Thus Pietrzykowski again appears as a lonely island, seemingly detached from the prisoner community and the camp's formal structures.

It is difficult to explain how the children Teddy treats with bread and milk ended up in the camp stable. In reality, they couldn't have been there. This scene is completely inauthentic. The prisoners in the film enjoy a great deal of freedom; no strict daily schedule constantly monitored their activities. Throughout his stay in the camp, Teddy does not participate in roll-calls, moves around completely freely and at all times between the stables, the SS hospital and the prisoners' hospital.

Serious historical misrepresentations can also be identified in the following sequence of events (from the thirteenth minute of the film), in which Teddy, accused of stealing apples from the Rapportführer's house, is escorted with two prisoners (one of whom is the juvenile Janek) to the courtyard of block 11, to the so-called execution wall (or wall of death), where executions are carried out. The Rapportführer murders the convicts with a shot to the forehead using a firearm. Teddy and Janek miraculously avoid being shot, the Rapportführer commutes their punishment to 25 lashes and time in the penal company (so-called SK). The entire scene is a deviation from the biography of the main character, and a grave distortion of historical facts. In reality, Pietrzykowski was caught lifting potatoes in the autumn of 1940 and consequently sentenced to the lash. He was not sent to the penal company for the offence. The most severe consequence that actually affected Pietrzykowski was that he was thrown out of the camp carpentry shop and transferred to SS-Hütte Porombka, a tough commando tasked with building a rest home for the SS in Porąbka.

The film Teddy and Janek return to work in the quarry after receiving their flogging punishment. They do not have markings on their striped uniforms typical of SK prisoners (black dots sewn next to the prisoner number), and nothing

uniforms typical of SK prisoners (black dots sewn next to the prisoner number), and nothing indicates any difference in how they were treated. Consequently, the filmmakers do not illustrate what the penal company is and, based on what rules prisoners are incarcerated there, leaving the viewer with the impression that the protagonist's stay there has been omitted. The introduction of this thread is entirely unnecessary, especially since it is not elaborated on in the subsequent scenes.

Major factual errors occur in the scene of the execution in the courtyard of block 11. These events take place before Pietrzykowski's first camp fight, shortly after his arrival at the camp, that is, at some point in the autumn of 1940. Then, prisoners were not executed in the square between blocks 10 and 11. Executions took place in the gravel pit beyond the confines of the camp. The execution wall was non-existent at the time; it was only constructed a year later, shortly before the first execution in the courtyard of block 11 on 11 November 1941. Another issue is that the prisoners were shot naked, not in striped uniforms as shown in the film, and they were shot in the back of the head, not in the face.

It should be noted that death by firing squad was administered formally, and once passed, even the Rapportführer had no authority to reverse or substitute it for another. He also could not feign an escape attempt for prisoners brought before the firing squad; this would have been illogical, especially in the courtyard of block 11, which was enclosed on all four sides. Accordingly, if he wanted to murder prisoners outside the formal procedure and accuse them of trying to escape, he could have done so at their place of work or on the way from the carpentry shop to the camp. It was also impossible to arbitrarily grant clemency to one prisoner and randomly assign another to take their place, just to ensure the number of prisoners tallied, since criminal reports and death sentences were compiled individually (by name) for each prisoner. Once the enforcement of a sentence became a formal matter, it was carried out following the procedures. The dialogue between SS men about the number of reports written and the increase in the rate that an SS man was to receive for shooting prisoners is, therefore, utterly inauthentic given the knowledge on the formal procedures in force at the camp. All the more so, since no surviving camp documentation has so far indicated that SS men received additional remuneration for shooting a prisoner. Contrary to popular belief, the camp was not a place where the SS men exercised total discretion in the killing of prisoners - this would have led to chaos in the prisoner records.

Another puzzling aspect of the scene in question is a chest of personal effects placed near the execution site, from which the Rapportführer pulls out a chain watch and a plush toy. We see these items later in one of the scenes in the Rapportführer's house when the entire family sits down to dinner together. Perhaps the filmmakers intended to symbolically show the plundering of the camp victims' property by members of the SS crew. Although this undoubtedly took place, its depiction in the film is utterly misconceived. The viewer is baffled about how this chest ended up in the courtyard of block 11 and to whom its contents belonged. The items include a leather briefcase, umbrellas, clothes, and a toy, i. e., "civilian" items that were not the property of the camp prisoners (prisoners' personal belongings were deposited and returned, for example, when they were released from the camp).

The characters of two boys, Julek and the juvenile prisoner Janek, are important in the film. Julek, a few years old, appears on screen for only a few seconds in flashbacks. At the moment of Teddy's arrest, he looks nervously around the house and calls out to the boy by name. This episode is enough to leave an imprint on the viewer's memory and highlight that Teddy and Julek certainly share a close bond. Julek's story lacks any continuity; however, in later parts of the film, one of the clearly emphasised motifs is Teddy's particular concern for the fate of children. This theme is particularly pronounced in the relationship between the protagonist and Janek, and culminates in the final scene when Pietrzykowski, a camp survivor, works as a coach/educator teaching sport to children in the post-war reality.

Who, then, is Julek - the character who appears to the viewer as crucial to Pietrzykowski's motivation? Unfortunately, the filmmakers remain vague on this matter. Owing to the age difference, the viewer's first natural association is a father-son relationship. This assumption reflected in some reviews is also confirmed by the director, who, speaking about Janek’s role in Teddy's biographical film, states: One may

the director, who, speaking about Janek's role in Teddy's biographical film, states: One may interpret it as a practical breakthrough in his [Pietrzykowski's - W.W.-M.] behaviour when he encounters an individual, a sort of child substitute, the main character's son, who makes him come out of his shell, solely focused on survival . In reality, however, Pietrzykowski did not have any children before the war. Julek was the name of a brother who was only five years younger than Tadeusz; Juliusz Sylwin Pietrzykowski was born in 1922, so he was a seventeen-year-old young man when the war broke out. Thus, Pietrzykowski's film personality as the children's guardian was built on another false assumption. As Bogacka rightly notes, Pietrzykowski once vowed to himself in the Nazi concentration camp hell that if he survived, he would devote his entire life to young people - so that they would never have to fight for their lives or starve ; however, this motivation did not stem from the personal loss of a child. It is also worth noting that Pietrzykowski made efforts to return to the ring after the war. Unfortunately, the stay in the camp strained his condition and the severe health problems that surfaced in 1946 ruled out his chances of returning to a professional boxing career forever. Pietrzykowski's later work with young people was something that gave him plenty of joy and satisfaction. He devoted himself to his teaching work with passion and commitment. He liked his pupils, and they reciprocated by showing him respect and affection. All in all, however, it must be remembered that such an end to Pietrzykowski's sporting career, although noble and extremely valuable, is also a great loss, the necessity to forego that which gave meaning to his life for years.

Barczewski offers the viewer a Hollywood-style happy ending, which is a simplification that undermines the authentic experience of the survivors of KL Auschwitz and other concentration camps. Many of the survivors struggled to the end of their lives with the consequences of the incarceration, which manifested in various areas of their lives - affecting their physical and mental health (KZ-syndrome is closely related to post-traumatic stress disorder), their emotions and interpersonal relations, their ability to work, and consequently their economic situation. Pietrzykowski found fulfilment in his work as a teacher; however, the concern for children's fate was based on an entirely different premise than the one suggested in the film. Also, his choice of career path had a more complex rationale. The explanation offered by Barczewski simplifies Pietrzykowski's motivations and decisions, concealing the profundity of his camp tragedy. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to consider such an immeasurable and difficult to grasp issue as the protagonist's needs, desires, and personality or character. Nevertheless, when analysing memoir sources, including Pietrzykowski's and those of people who came into contact with him in the camp, one can see a drastic diminution of this character and deprivation of traits that come to the fore when analysing camp accounts. Obviously, at twenty-something, Teddy was undoubtedly typified by a certain youthful exuberance and impetuosity, independence and self-confidence that sometimes manifested as insolence and non-conformism. It is evidenced both by Pietrzykowski's self-reflections and biography. As a young boy, he had to change schools several times because of his love of sport, which did not appeal to his teachers. Such a life path did not sit well with loved ones either, but young Tadeusz pursued his passion, regardless. He became a boxer, even though this occupation did not bring the financial stability that the family so desperately needed after his father's death. Pietrzykowski's character can also be inferred from his reaction to the news that the final bout of the Warsaw bantamweight championships (in 1936) had been cancelled. He was scheduled to fight Antoni Czortek for the title, but Czortek got injured, so the match was cancelled, and the title went unawarded. "Teddy" cursed and declared he would quit boxing - it was reported in the press at the time , which is proof of his emotional and impulsive character. Later on, even in Auschwitz, Pietrzykowski did not lose his haughtiness. He was rebellious and unafraid of bold challenges. After his boxing talent had been revealed, Teddy asked a guard for permission to spar with a functionary, whom he then beat up for bullying another prisoner. He was irritated by the humble and merciful attitude of Kolbe, who curbed his impulsive urges. Successive victories strengthened his boldness - they gave me vain self-confidence: I was not afraid of anyone or anything. I was so cocky that I would mock the SS men and even play pranks on them . A good example was the idea to assassinate Commandant Höss, which, although may have been naive and unlikely to succeed, was devised and acted out by Pietrzykowski and

may have been naive and unlikely to succeed, was devised and acted out by Pietrzykowski and his colleague, Władysław Rzętkowski. If the plan had come to light, both prisoners would have been sentenced to death, which they must have been aware of. It should also be recalled that Pietrzykowski was not forced into his first fight in the camp as depicted in the film - he went into it of his own free will. He was aware of his poor condition and how much he could lose but also understood how much he stood to gain. He saw an opportunity that, despite the risks, he was not willing to waste. I heard warnings all around coupled with taps on the head: "Hey you, he's going to kill you; he's going to eat you." But there was no time to think. One obsessive thought accompanied me all the time: they give you bread for fighting. I was hungry. My colleagues were hungry. Fighting gave you a chance to attain a position in the camp community; you had to prove yourself. The fight was such an opportunity for me. As a non-specialist, I had no other chance of becoming useful in the camp - and only people with a specific profession had a better chance of surviving . This excerpt says a lot about Pietrzykowski's character, demonstrating both an awareness of his position and his courage (perhaps even bravado) and willingness to take risks.

The film Teddy is entirely different and acts differently - he withdraws, calculates, ducks and dodges both in the ring and in his everyday behaviour. When asked by a prisoner working at the camp hospital if he would agree to move medicines, he replies that he cannot expose himself at the moment - in reality, however, he had no hesitation in engaging in underground and self-help activities. The beautiful and glorious moments of his camp life were omitted in the film, and all his activity was reduced to sport, which made him a flat and uninteresting character compared to the original. The film is salvaged by Piotr Głowacki's excellent acting, appreciated by almost all critics after the Gdynia Festival and even made a huge impression on the ordinary viewer. It is undoubtedly one of the film's strongest points. However, the choice of episodes from Pietrzykowski's camp life and how they are portrayed give viewers the impression that they are following the fate of an over-matured, over-pragmatic and over-cautious young sportsman rather than a brave and lively young man on the verge of adulthood, ready to fight the occupying forces. The film Teddy does not have the imagination and character of a twenty-two-year-old as he was then, but the seriousness, wisdom and experience of Głowacki, who plays the role.

The choice of episodes from Pietrzykowski's biography for the film is puzzling. Justifying the necessity of introducing fictional plots into historical films, Barczewski states in one of his interviews that facts kill the drama in cinema . Knowing the facts from Tadeusz Pietrzykowski's biography and seeing which facts were utilised for cinema purposes, all one can do is fundamentally disagree with this statement. Pietrzykowski's experiences in Auschwitz lack neither drama, unexpected twists and turns, nor meetings with colourful, unusual and exceptional characters. It is difficult to see how the removal of Witold Pilecki or Maksymilian Kolbe from the narrative about Pietrzykowski can be explained. Perhaps, the only difficulty involved is the need to cast characters generally regarded today as monumental heroes in a supporting role.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to refute the idea that a more extensive use of Pietrzykowski's life story, while probably complicating the otherwise simple plot, would have only benefited the film. Meanwhile, instead of drawing on events that took place during Pietrzykowski's stay in the camp, with his involvement or that he witnessed, the filmmakers decided to use characters and incidents that, although authentic, have no connection to Teddy's story and which, when adapted for the narrative, required serious historical misrepresentations. The most notable example is the film's depiction of the extermination of Jews with Zyklon B as if it had already taken place in 1940, in the gas chamber of crematorium I of the main camp.

Unfortunately, this is not the only example. One may have major reservations regarding the scene in which an SS man is shot by Helcia, an underage prisoner being led to her death. The very character of Helcia and her introduction to the plot of the film is full of inaccuracies. The girl appears for the first time in the scene where Sister Maria attends to Pietrzykowski's wounds in the SS quarters after one of his first fights, which places it somewhere in the first half of 1941. During this period, Auschwitz housed exclusively male prisoners. The women's camp was set up at the end of March 1942, first at the main camp, and after a few months, it was moved to Birkenau. In the film, Helcia stays in the main camp the entire time, and is surprisingly, the only female prisoner portrayed in the film as if there were no other women in Auschwitz. An attentive viewer can decipher the number on Helcia's striped uniform - 26947. In reality, this was the camp number of the fourteen-year-old Czesława Kwoka, brought to Auschwitz in December 1942 in a transport of displaced civilians from the Zamość region. She survived only a few months in the camp and died in March 1943. She only stayed at Birkenau, not the main camp, and had no connection to Pietrzykowski's story.

The movie Helcia dies - as one can deduce from the narrative - in late autumn of 1942 or early 1943. It is impossible to list all the film's irregularities, as it is entirely unbelievable and almost wholly devoid of any connection with reality. The scene was inspired by the events of October 1943, when SS-Oberscharführer Josef Schillinger was shot while on duty and SS-Unterscharführer Wilhelm Emmerich was wounded in the leg (not Rapportführer Palitzsch in the arm, as depicted in the film). It did not take

place at crematorium I in the main camp, but at Birkenau, in crematorium II, and the attack was not carried out by a Polish political prisoner, but by a Jewish woman brought to the camp in a transport headed straight from the ramp to the gas chamber. It is difficult to comprehend why the director decided to introduce this incident into the story of Tadeusz Pietrzykowski, who left the Birkenau camp and Auschwitz in the spring of 1943, six months before the events in question. It seems to have been included in the film, not for the educational effect or to familiarise viewers with the story - which has been completely distorted - but to build up tension and play on viewers' emotions.

Furthermore, the marginal details that form the context for this event have been exaggerated and falsified. First, female prisoners at Auschwitz were kept in a women's camp separate from the men's, and the casual contacts depicted in the film (e.g., when Helcia, employed in the SS infirmary, comes unescorted and to the stable where Teddy works for no apparent reason) is inconceivable in the camp. Moreover, if a female prisoner had been caught "smuggling food for Poles" (this statement itself is rather vague), a female overseer or a functionary prisoner could impose an ad hoc punishment, i.e., beat the offender even with a fatal outcome. She could also submit a penalty report, as a result of which one of the statutory punishments would be carried out, but the death penalty was not imposed for this sort of offence. It is also impossible for a female prisoner caught stealing to be led to the crematorium and immediately included in the group of Jews heading towards it.

The entire scene takes place after dusk when it is dark outside. Janek and the other prisoners are witnesses to Helcia being led to the gas chamber, whereas, in reality, we know the prisoners were subjected to the blockschpera (prohibition on leaving the blocks) during major scheduled executions either at the execution wall or the gas chamber. Seeing the girl's death, Janek runs to Teddy, who is in the stable at the time, although, as has already been pointed out, the prisoners had to return to the camp for roll call before dark, and Janek could not freely go outside the camp fence. Once the shooting starts, the guards close the gate, even though it should have been closed long ago after dark. Practically, the entire episode was built on such irregularities, which indicate that the creators, although familiar with some fragments of the camp's history and certain details of its appearance, did not apply their cognitive efforts on understanding the daily routine and rules of its operation.

Nevertheless, the greatest reservations toward the film are the series of events that followed the murder of the film Helcia. Janek is arrested without any explanation whatsoever as to why. The viewer learns about the boy's imprisonment in the camp from a later scene of Pietrzykowski's conversation with the commandant. It is an astonishing scene in that it portrays how Teddy, a prisoner in the camp, imposes conditions on the commandant. Knowing the camp’s reality and the relationship between prisoners and the SS crew, it is difficult to imagine that the conversation could have proceeded in such a manner. Following the conversation with the commandant, Pietrzykowski engages in an uneven fight with a boxer called Hammerschlag. From this point onwards, the events take on a drama typical of Hollywood film productions. The historical authenticity of the events is completely lost in the subsequent scenes full of pathos and exaltation. The point here is not to misrepresent Pietrzykowski's actual biography but to create a picture utterly detached from the realities of the camp by presenting a sequence of events that could never have taken place in Auschwitz.

The fact that the film bout between Teddy and Hammerschlag takes place in Auschwitz and not Neuengamme Concentration Camp, as in reality, is the least glaring misrepresentation, and one that is for some reasons justified. The reluctance of the filmmakers to move the action to successive concentration camps where Pietrzykowski was imprisoned is even understandable given how much effort and expense it would have taken to recreate a faithful image of the grounds of KL Neuengamme and KL Bergen-Belsen. Nonetheless, the historically discordant location of this fight is a trifle compared to the series of improbabilities that ensue in the sequel to the culminating scenes of the film.

Hammerschlag (German for hammer blow), or to be exact, Schally Hottenbach, the German fighter who won the title of world vice-champion at welterweight , was not an SS man but a prisoner of the Neuengamme camp, which is a significant difference. Lageraltester Bruno Brodniewicz, criminal prisoner number 1, could not have shot Janek. While the Rapportführer hesitates to follow

criminal prisoner number 1, could not have shot Janek. While the Rapportführer hesitates to follow the commandant's order and fire a shot, the viewer can notice in the background the moment in which one of the guards hands Brodniewicz a rifle - such an event was unthinkable. Although the German functionaries were an extremely significant factor in the repressive apparatus and regarded by the survivors as an integral part of the camp authority, they were nonetheless prisoners. No member of the SS crew could give his weapon to a prisoner.

After losing the fight, Pietrzykowski is hanged on a post between the camp blocks, opposite the crematorium. The film makes it look as if the crematorium was built in the middle of the camp, at the assembly square, which is a grave misrepresentation. Undoubtedly, the relocation of the crematorium to the heart of the camp was a thoughtful and deliberate move by the director - it is a very distinctive building that cannot be mistaken for any other and still exists to this day. The idea of showing it as the central point on the Auschwitz film set is wholly misplaced and evokes a deep feeling of Barczewski's misunderstanding of history.

It should be stressed that shortly before leaving the camp (early 1943), Pietrzykowski could not have witnessed the unfolding scenes while serving his sentence. For starters, during this period, the transports of Jews were directed to Birkenau, and the gas chamber in crematorium number I was again used as a morgue. Secondly, the Jews directly referred to Auschwitz to die in the gas chamber in crematorium I, never walked between the blocks, or even entered the close premises of the camp. The prisoners could not see the processions of convicts headed for the gas chamber, except for those who passed the crematorium on their way to work or were employed in the workshops located near the road leading to it. The crematorium building was separated from the nearest prisoner block (number 22) by a barbwire fence and the SS hospital, which effectively blocked the prisoners' view of the events that transpired there. Furthermore, the crematorium building was surrounded by a concrete wall following the creation of the first gas chamber.

According to Pietrzykowski's account, he did indeed witness a group of Jews being led to the gas chamber I, but under completely different circumstances - it occurred while he was still working in the Tierpfleger commando. A Blocksperre was ordered (a prohibition on leaving the blocks), and the prisoners of Pietrzykowski's commando were ordered to lie face down inside the barn. He climbed into a manger fixed to the barrack window and watched the group march towards crematorium I while hiding in the hay .
The film also misrepresents punishment by the post. It was not executed at the barrack square or between the blocks, but usually in the attic or courtyard of block 11. The prisoner was hanged from a post for one hour on each occasion (for longer sentences, they were hanged several times at intervals). The severity of the punishment consisted in tying the hands crossed behind the back (not raised as shown in the film) and then hanging the prisoner so that the feet did not provide any support. The pain caused by the twisting of the hands was so severe that prisoners generally lost consciousness quickly. The SS man on guard would pour water on the unconscious prisoners, thus restoring consciousness and aggravating their suffering. The consequence of this punishment was usually the severing of the tendons of the arms, making it impossible to move the hands, which in turn rendered the prisoner incapable of working, let alone boxing. An account of the course and consequences of this method can be found, among others, in Jerzy Bielecki's book:

[...] [Blockführer] ordered that the hands be crossed backwards, and then he wrapped the chain around the wrists, clenching them painfully and securing the link with wire. [...] I couldn't contain the pain when he suddenly pulled the chain upwards, attaching it to a hook hammered into the beam. [...] - Pull your legs up! [...] - he screamed, kicking the stool with his foot and knocking it out from under me. [...] A terrible pain like the stabs of a hundred daggers penetrated my shoulder blades, the joints of my wrists and elbows. My jerked back arms pressed my head against my chest, squeezing a string of blue veins across my forehead and making it difficult to breathe. I felt I couldn't bear it, that I would suffocate. [...] Although my eyelids were clenched, red spots twinkled in front of my eyes. [...] I only wished I wouldn't lose consciousness and suffocate for lack of air. [...] Suddenly, I was terrified to find that I no longer felt any pain at all. A dull sense of torpor encompassed the

terrified to find that I no longer felt any pain at all. A dull sense of torpor encompassed the entire body. Only somewhere inside my chest did I feel a burning sensation. My heart was pounding irregularly at a crazy pace under my ribs. [...] The SS man helped me down from the stool and began to untangle the chain. When he took it off, my hands sagged inertly next to my body as though they were dangling foreign objects. The amused SS man lifted one of my hands, then let it go freely. Like a belly stuffed with sand, the raised hand fell heavily downwards. The one-hour pole penalty has taken away all the power in them.

Bielecki goes on to say that for several days afterwards, his hands were still not fully functional; they ached, often went numb, and he lost feeling in them. Consequently, he was unable to work and thus exposed to harassment from the Kapo. He survived by scrimshanking (i. e., hiding) in the workplace, which was very risky - if caught, he ran the risk of another punishment or abuse from a kapo. Thus, the consequences of the post punishment were as life-threatening as serving it.

The film Teddy is sent back to work after completing his sentence. He does not participate in the roll-call - this daily, wearisome aspect of camp life is not included in Barczewski's film - and he does not wait for the whole commando to march out, but walks out alone beyond the barbed wire, wearing only trousers and no prisoner top. From this point on, the film embarks on an absolute whirl of absurdity. On his way to the stables, the film Teddy passes by smoking ditches containing partially incinerated corpses. Resignedly, he lies down at the bottom of one of the ditches. Shortly after, he notices a partially burnt wooden sculpture of an angel that he had seen Janek give to Helcia. Teddy takes the figure in his hand and ascends from the ashes, ready to fight Hammerschlag.

This scene, all of which is the product of the director's imagination, is inauthentic. The incinerator piles were located at the rear of the Birkenau camp, not right behind the main camp fence. This area was secluded and inaccessible to prisoners not involved in the burning of corpses. No commandos heading out to work passed anywhere near the piles, and no one could get

could get close to them, let alone go inside. Not to mention the fact that it is impossible to lie down in a smoky, and presumably still hot, fire pit and come out of it without burning your skin. The victims had to undress and leave all their personal belongings before entering the gas chamber, so finding the figurine among the ashes was also unlikely.

Perhaps the whole scene was intended to be very symbolic, metaphorical, but unfortunately, the juxtaposition of intense, naturalistic images of the Holocaust with the absurd, inauthentic context of the situation produced a somewhat surreal and grotesque effect.

The same can be said of the fight scene between the film Teddy and Hammerschlag. It is unrealistic and dramatised in a truly Hollywood style. Knowing the consequences of punishment by the post, it is evident that Pietrzykowski would not have been able to engage in hand-to-hand combat after serving it. It is also difficult to assume that a man who had been severely beaten and deliberately poisoned with narcotics the previous day and who had not slept through the night in such murderous conditions, weakened and in pain; a man who had not eaten or drunk for several hours would have had any chance of defeating a professional opponent who outweighed him by several weight categories and who was in excellent physical shape. It is also highly contestable that after receiving one of the several powerful blows to the head as depicted on screen, he would have been able to rise from the canvas and knock his opponent down with two punches. This absurd exaggeration and contrived heroism create a tawdry impression.

The scene creates a logical and factual inconsistency. Pietrzykowski repeatedly said that his incredible agility and technical skills - his ability to evade and throw unexpected punches - were what gave him a chance in battles against bigger and stronger opponents. He often stressed that tactics, not strength, gave him the upper hand and helped him win duels. Hence, the scene where he fights Hammerschlag with his guard down and literally holds out his jaw for punches is ridiculous. Pietrzykowski may have been inclined to bravado, but he was an experienced sportsman, aware of his abilities.

The film history of Tadeusz Pietrzykowski ends with a scene of him leaving KL Auschwitz. All puffy after the last fight, the lonely hero

walks towards the camp gate, and is greeted with admiring and sorrowful glances from the prisoners, who stop their work, take off their hats, and, standing at attention, respectfully bow their heads in farewell to the Champ. Teddy gets on the back of a lorry, but before it drives off, he sends one last glance in the direction of the camp. A scene imbued as much with sentimental drama as with a lack of realism.

In reality, Pietrzykowski did not leave Auschwitz alone, in a transport explicitly organised for him at the request of Lagerführer Neuengamme; in fact, his influence on Pietrzykowski's transfer alone raises some doubts. Based on the available information, social visits by concentration camp staff members to other concentration camps were out of the question. If such visits took place, they were primarily for business, not entertainment, as depicted in the film. There is no evidence in the documents to suggest that the Lagerführer of any of the camps came to Auschwitz to select prisoners fit for work. If such a selection were to occur, logic dictates that an SS doctor would instead have been sent to make the selection. The Auschwitz authorities were responsible for completing and transferring the transport to another camp.

In the spring of 1943, a top-down WVHA order led to the transfer of 6 thousand Poles from Auschwitz to camps in the interiors of the Reich. Eventually, about 5,000 prisoners were transported by rail in mass transports. Pietrzykowski was one of the thousands of prisoners transferred from Auschwitz, and as he recounts, some of his close camp colleagues also ended up in Neuengamme. There was, therefore, no question of personal transport on the open back of a lorry. However, if prisoners were transported in this way, it was only over short distances. In such cases, armed escorts sat next to the prisoners as they climbed down from the lorry's platform. The prisoners were handcuffed, sometimes tied one to another, and the tarpaulin was usually closed to prevent them from observing the area - all in an attempt to prevent them from escaping. Understandably, the filmmakers intended to highlight, above all, the fate of the protagonist, but in doing so, they completely ignored the fact that he was part of the prisoner community and shared his dramatic camp fate with thousands of other inmates.

The most distinctive character in the film, apart from the protagonist, is Rapportführer Gerhard, whose historical counterpart is SS-Hauptscharführer Gerhard Palitzsch. Although the character played by Grzegorz Małecki is undoubtedly evocative and interesting, it should be noted that he is characteristically far removed from the Rapportführer we know from the accounts of former prisoners and even camp crew members.
Palitzsch was one of the camp's greatest and most ruthless executioners. He executed prisoners, supervised selections carried out among the camp inmates, and participated in the first attempts at murdering prisoners with Zyklon B, and later in the mass extermination of the Jews. In the memories of the survivors, he went down as an unpredictable, degenerate sadist who reportedly liked to brag about how many people he had shot personally at the execution wall. Whenever he was enraged, he tortured the inmates. He was capable of kicking people into unconsciousness for the slightest offence. He instilled fear in the prisoners and resentment among the SS crew. Commander Höss, who had no sympathy or respect for Palitzsch, accused him of stubbornness, malice, laziness and called him "a negative type in every respect" . SS-Rottenführer Pery Broad, a member of the camp's Gestapo, ranked Palitzsch among "the greatest butchers of the previous war" while accusing him of cynicism, double standards, and intimacy with Jewish women, as well as appropriating valuables from the property of victims of mass extermination. The only partially positive account of Palitzsch was given by Helena Kłysowa, a Polish woman who was assigned to work in his house at the age of 19. She learned from conversations with prisoners how Palitzsch treated them in the camp. I couldn't believe it - she recalls - He was the best man at home. He also treated me well. He loved his children insanely.

The film Rapportführer is a mature, composed and cautious man. He is interested in art and literature (German, of course) and treats prisoners in a measured and neutral manner, without apparent contempt, and probably never raises his voice. His statements are always measured and businesslike. Analogous to the role of Teddy played by Głowacki, it seems that the actor transferred too much of his maturity and seriousness to the character, thus losing the youthful mentality, enthusiasm and

twenty-seven-year-old Gerhard Palitzsch. The Rapportführer portrayed in the film gives the impression of a man who despises primitive aggression, never raises his hand against prisoners and refers to boxing as "the sport of louts" (he prefers a more elegant activity for his son - horse riding). It is true that he executes the condemned in the courtyard of block 11 and supervises the march of the Jews to the gas chamber; however, he performs these activities without any particular enthusiasm - not like a man who considers it a source of pride, but as a solid craftsman, perhaps even a stickler, who knows his duties and, although at times they may seem unpleasant, tries to carry out his tasks as best as possible. Character-wise, he is more reminiscent of Dr Josef Mengele we know from prisoners' accounts - a cultured, reserved, enlightened intellectual who unemotionally murders and inflicts suffering purely out of a sense of professional duty and a higher idea. His crimes seem to be the result of cold calculation and a sense of duty rather than the consequence of a lack of inhibition, uncontrollable rage or sadistic urges. The film Gerhard has more of the reflective, introverted psychopath than the impulsive, heartless sadist that the survivors say Rapportführer Palitzsch was in reality.
The only blemish on the diligent stickler's reputation is that he appropriates the victims' property and enters false information in documents to receive a higher remuneration (the previously mentioned and absurd dialogue on settlement for shooting prisoners) - but he does this openly, in the presence and with the cooperation of other SS men, giving the impression that such practices were commonplace in the camp, ethically unquestionable and condoned by those in authority, which is not true.

The Rapportführer's biography and terms of service at KL Auschwitz have been almost entirely misrepresented, distorted or exaggerated. An example of a minor and perhaps insignificant error is the incorrect marking of the rank of SS-Hauptscharführer on his uniform. Palitzsch was only promoted in the autumn of 1941, having previously held the position of SS-Scharführer, so in the first scene in which he appears, he should have one star on his tab, not two. The error probably stems from the fact that those responsible for the costumes did not rely on documentation but on a more readily available photograph of Gerhard Palitzsch in uniform, which clearly shows such a designation.

The housing conditions of the Rapportführer and his family have been depicted in a completely inauthentic way. The manor house, furnished in palace style and surrounded by greenery, only reflects the director's imagination and has nothing to do with historical reality. The luxurious interior of the Rapportführer's film home is filled with chic wooden furniture, elegant carpets, a marble fireplace and tasteful accessories - sculptures, flowers and trinkets. The house seems very large. In addition to the glazed exit to the impressive-looking porch, the spacious hall has at least four more doors to other rooms. A wooden staircase with a decorative balustrade leads to the first floor. In a conversation with the lady of the house, the viewer learns of plans to create a tailor's workshop in a room in the mansard.

In reality, the accommodation conditions for SS men on duty at KL Auschwitz were more modest. Given the realities of the war, they were undoubtedly comfortable but far from the luxuries depicted in The Champion.

Palitzsch and his family occupied one of the houses left by the displaced Poles. It was neither as sumptuously furnished, large, or picturesquely situated as depicted in Barczewski's work. Klysowa recalls in her account: It was a one-storey house. There were two rooms on the ground floor and one room and a kitchen on the upper floor. The room upstairs was furnished as a bedroom, where the Palitzschs slept with their daughter . It was one of the many typical Polish houses of the inter-war period and not some opulent estate. Palitzsch occupied it with his wife Luisa and three-year-old daughter Helga. Palitzshe's wife died of typhus in the summer of 1942, not his son, who was born during the war.

The film Rudi is an entirely fictional character. It is difficult to conjecture why the director chose to misrepresent Palitzsch's family history; however, one can easily point out its consequences on how this character is perceived. Through Rudi, the viewer gets to know the warm, caring, affectionate and caring nature of the Rapportführer. In addition to his beauty, childish charm and exemplary

He is intentionally portrayed as a great boxingenthusiast cheering on Teddy - linking him to the protagonist's story in this way draws the viewer's attention and stirs emotions all the more intensely. The death of the Rapportführer's wife, which is presented in an unsympathetic manner as utterly contemptuous of the prisoners, could give the viewer the impression of just punishment. However, the death of a good and innocent child evokes compassion and arouses pity. Rudi's character serves as a pretext to show the best qualities of the Rapportführer and to depict him as an understanding, and good father, which, admittedly, he might have been after his duty hours, as indicated by Kłysowa's account . Nevertheless, it is unjustified and inconsistent with historical knowledge to extend such an image and transfer the characteristics of Gerhard, the father and husband, to the Rapportführer, the camp functionary. This is precisely what happens in Barczewski's film. Ultimately, it is the Rapportführer who saves the lives of Teddy and Janek at the execution wall - overturning the sentence he had previously passed, which may still give the viewer the impression of a merciful, perhaps even benevolent man. He delays carrying out the commandant's order as if hesitating whether to shoot Janek (which he ultimately does not do, as Lagerältesrer Bruno willingly substitutes him). Finally, in the last scene he appears, he sits down opposite Teddy and talks to him as equals; he confides in him about recurring nightmares, asks him what his plans are "when it's all over", and gives the prisoner a very personal memento - a scrapbook containing photographs and newspaper cuttings on boxing pasted by his tragically deceased son. Therefore, not only does the film fail to portray the ruthless, demoralised torturer and brutal murderer known from history, but to cap it all, the final scene serves the viewer the pathetic image of a grieving father and a repentant executioner, aware of the impending failure of the system that he is part of, and the defeat he has suffered in the struggle for his own soul.

This confused, morally ambiguous character attracts more attention than the protagonist. The gradual loss of conviction as to the rightness of the actions he must undertake at Auschwitz, the apparent internal struggles seem to be the starting point for some kind of internal metamorphosis. The director unnecessarily succumbed to the trend, very evident in contemporary pop culture exploring the subject of KL Auschwitz, which portray SS men as good. It is disturbing and seems extremely inappropriate

inappropriate in relation to this particular historical figure. Gerhard Palitzsch aroused dislike and fear, while the Rapportführer evokes curiosity, sometimes even kindness, and the favour of the viewer, who begins to cheer him on, believing that he may complete his moral metamorphosis. In comparison with the authentic image of Palitzsch - indisputably one of the camp's greatest criminals who is not just a passive executioner but also an instigator of several murders - such a film representation must evoke dissonance and raise questions about the relativisation of evil and redefinition of the concepts of executioner and victim.
It is all the more disturbing that so far, pop culture has not produced any such suggestive image of Rapportführer Gerhard Palitzsch. Admittedly, the distinct characterization and unambiguously negative evaluation of his activity in KL Auschwitz emerges from the memoirs of witnesses, primarily former prisoners, and partly from the testimonies of other SS men who served in KL Auschwitz, as well as from the literature on the subject. However, these are texts read mainly by professionals and history enthusiasts, and therefore do not have the power to shape popular perceptions and general social knowledge as a film intended for a mass audience. His character has never been so emphasised and highlighted in any previous film. Consequently, in the absence of competing pop-cultural representations, it has the potential to become one of the most common and thus the most important for creating Gerhard Palitzsch's stereotype. The good thing is that Barczewski decided to present Palitzsch both as a camp functionary and as a father and husband because this duality carries some truth about camp functionaries. It's terrible, however, that instead of separating these two parallel worlds and relying more on the sources to highlight Palitzsch's authentic criminal activity, he offered the viewer a distorted, whitewashed and easy to read cliché which, given the limited public knowledge about Gerhard Palitzsch's role and activity in Auschwitz, may become a point of reference and even a basis for the popular image it creates in the general consciousness.

When viewed from this perspective, the film can do great harm to memory and education. The criminal, a man who zealously played a part in the deaths of hundreds of people, is likely to be remembered through the film as someone full of moral doubts, composed and reflective, even remorseful, and above all, as the good father of a tragically deceased child.

The film's Rapportführer is the most inauthentic character in The Champion; however, one can also notice minor or significant irregularities in the other characters. The camp commandant (played by Marcin Bosak) is presented in a rather one-dimensional, almost caricatured way - he is referred to in the film as "Herr Kommandant", while in the closing credits, he is misleadingly described as Lagerführer (a separate, lower-ranking position) - an uncomplicated individual, devoid of any empathy, capable only of feeling primitive satisfaction at the thought of defeating and humiliating his opponents. The viewer may get the impression that the commandant's greatest concern in the largest concentration and extermination camp was providing entertainment for the SS men and ultimately conquering the Polish boxer, a prisoner of that camp.

The film's undeniable merit is that the characters speak their national languages with great attention to accent. The Rapportführer's or Commandant's German is natural and very fluent compared, for example, to Teddy's, for whom German was a language learned at school - the differences in pronunciation and accent are clearly audible. However, it is not clear why nurse Maria, who personifies the Austrian nurse Maria Stromberger on screen, does not simply speak German but a strange mixture of Polish and German. It is also worth noting that the character of Maria appears in the film after one of Teddy's first fights (spring 1941). In reality, Maria Stromberger began working at the SS infirmary at Auschwitz a year and a half later, in October 1942. She also had the opportunity then to meet Pietrzykowski, who had been working there since mid-1942.

Attempting to highlight the nationality of the screen characters through language, the filmmakers, unfortunately, failed to take into account the fact that from mid-1941, Auschwitz gradually became an international camp. In addition to Polish and German, the prisoner community spoke Russian, Czech, Slovakian, French and many other languages. The Jews brought to the mass extermination also spoke various European languages, while in Barczewski's painting, only Polish and German can be heard. The Jews brought for mass extermination also spoke different European languages, whereas only Polish and German could be heard in Barczewski's film.

Undoubtedly one of the dilemmas faced by the creators of feature films (and other pop culture representations of the subject of KL Auschwitz) is creating credible characters of the camp prisoners on the screen. The most problematic issue is the use of numbers, the fundamental symbol of the prisoner alongside the striped uniform. There is an individual camp story behind all the numbers, which makes their use in a semi-fictional work controversial and problematic in the ethical sense. The fictional prisoner depicted on the screen ceases to be anonymous after being labelled with a specific number. Moreover, the prisoner number and its associated signs (triangle, letter) carry a range of information - they tell us about the nationality of a particular prisoner, the reason and the time of their incarceration in the camp.

Looking at the numbers on the actors' striped uniforms in the first scenes of the film, one gets the impression that the filmmakers, aware of these nuances, made an effort to retain the credibility of the secondary and tertiary characters as well. The numbers on the striped uniforms of most of the actors are blurred or only fragmentarily visible, making it impossible for the viewer to relate the on-screen characters to the fates of authentic people. The numbers of Polish prisoners from the first transport, which are clear, belong to unidentified persons. The Rotmistrz in the film (played by Marian Dziędziel) bears number 73 - the number of a prisoner whose personal details remain unknown. The same is true for the number of the prisoner named Klimko, played by Rafał Zawierucha (no. 161) - historians have also not been able to attribute it to a specific person. On the other hand, number 223, worn by the film Janek (played by Jan Szydłowski), was probably that of Marian Dziedzinowicz (or Dziedziniewicz), a middle-school student who died in Auschwitz in 1941 (determined only based on former prisoners' recollections, as there is no confirmation in documents). These examples would indicate that the filmmakers approached the issue of prisoner numbers with due care. Unfortunately, this conjecture recedes when confronted with further fragments of the film that fail to avoid serious errors in the numbering

of actual characters, such as Kapo Ernst (no. 5) and Kapo Walter (no. 14).

The number 5 in KL Auschwitz was assigned to Hans Bock, who served first as Blockältester and then as Lagerältester of the Haftlingskrankenbau (the older prisoner hospital, located in block 20). The most famous kapo named Ernst, on the other hand, was Ernst Krankemann, who arrived at Auschwitz in August 1940 from Sachsenhausen and was marked with the number 3210. He served as kapo of the penal company, among others. The survivors remember him as one of the most ruthless executioners who abused and murdered the camp prisoners. In July 1943, he was part of a transport of prisoners sent to the euthanasia facility in Sonnenstein, where they were murdered with carbon monoxide. Accordingly, none of the stories mentioned above corresponds to the film character of Kapo Ernst.

The film Walter, whose original was Walter Dünning, a pre-war German boxer that served as a Kapo in Auschwitz, was erroneously marked with the number 14. In reality, this number was given to Jansen Winnant, a bricklayer by trade, who became the Oberkapo of the bricklayers' Kommando in Auschwitz. Based on surviving camp documents, it has not been possible to establish the number of Walter Dünning at Auschwitz. He arrived at the camp in August od 1941 and received number between 3188-3287.

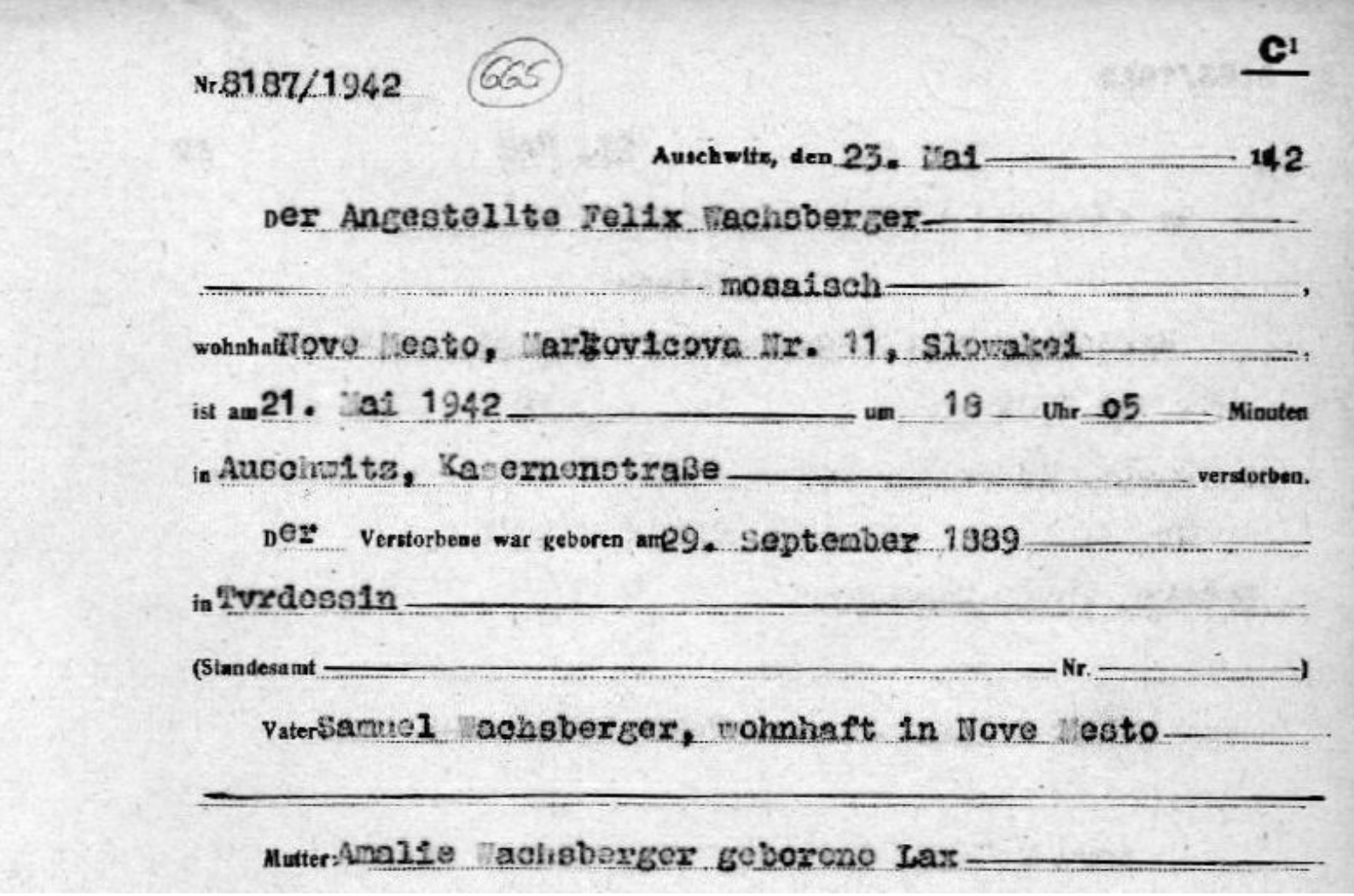
In the forty-second minute of the film, the figure of a bearded giant, a prisoner marked with a black triangle (the category "asocials") and number 31504, appears to fight Teddy. He eventually loses the fight, and in one of the subsequent scenes, his body, deposited on a wooden cart among other corpses, is taken outside the camp. Despite the tragic fate that ultimately befalls him, this character - with some kind of feral aggression, furiously attacks the protagonist in the ring - and thus evokes neither pity nor compassion due to the camp's victims, but rather fear and aversion in the viewer. Who then is prisoner number 31504? The filmmakers do not bother to explain, but an apparent inconsistency emerges when confronted with archival documents.

The number 31504, registered on 19 April 1942, belonged to Felix Wachsberger, a fifty-three-year-old Slovak Jew and office worker who barely survived a month in the camp (he died on 21 May 1942). He obviously had nothing to do with the character portrayed in the film. Here, the filmmakers used the camp number completely unreflectively, disregarding the fact that there is a completely different story behind it than the one presented on screen. It leads one to assume that the marking with numbers of the film Calvary Captain, Klimko and Janek may be a coincidence rather than a genuine concern for the identity of the victims.

In concluding the discussions on how KL Auschwitz prisoners are portrayed in Barczewski's film, one should pay attention to the small depicted in the film. In reality, however, the camp was overcrowded. Surviving fragments of documents show that the number of prisoners in the camp exceeded 11,000 on the first day of March 1942. On the first day of May the same year, there were more than 14,000 prisoners. Meanwhile, the film's Auschwitz appears in almost all scenes as a deserted place, with isolated characters in striped uniforms wandering around. It is absolutely bizarre to juxtapose the commandant's words, who, while planning Teddy's fight with Hammerschlag, orders that Every prisoner is supposed to see it, with the later image of a ring surrounded by no more than a few dozen men in striped uniforms. It completely fails to reflect the historical realities of Auschwitz and creates yet another misconception.

SUMMARY

Summing up, the attention given to the visual aspect of the film is undoubtedly noticeable and deserving of recognition. Equally notable is the effort invested in the physical and athletic conditioning of Glowacki, who plays the leading role. Unfortunately, equal attention was not accorded to the factual content, which, as one might assume, is of fundamental importance for a historical film. Although the filmmakers tried to familiarise themselves with Tadeusz Pietrzykowski and Auschwitz's history, they failed to reconstruct it authentically and credibly in the film. They did not avoid simplifications that trivialise Pietrzykowski's biography through



Nr. 8187/1942 (665) C¹

Auschwitz, den 23. Mai 1942

Der Angestellte Felix Wachsberger

mosaisch,

wohnhaft Nove Mesto, Markovicova Nr. 11, Slowakei,

ist am 21. Mai 1942 um 18 Uhr 05 Minuten

in Auschwitz, Kasernenstraße verstorben.

Der Verstorbene war geboren am 29. September 1889

in Tvrdosin

(Standesamt Nr.)

Vater Samuel Wachsberger, wohnhaft in Nove Mesto

Mutter: Amalie Wachsberger geborene Lax

minor misstatements and factual inaccuracies, as well as grave factual errors that are crucial and unacceptable in the context of teaching about Auschwitz. Many images and phenomena portrayed in the film are indeed reproductions of contemporary stereotypes and popular beliefs, distant from the perspective of people who participated in those events and from the objective knowledge accumulated over the post-war years. What the makers of The Champion lack is a broad understanding of the realities of the camp, which can only be obtained through reliable and in-depth acquaintance with memoirs and literature on the subject. Something it seems the creators did not fully realise.

To make matters worse, some of the misrepresentations seem deliberate, aimed solely at stirring up emotions. In interviews, the filmmakers - Barczewski and Głowacki - flaunt their knowledge of Auschwitz history, which is not reflected in the picture ultimately offered to the viewer. As an example, the gruesome phenomena described earlier are depicted inappropriately for the time or place in question. It is unfortunate, given that the events specific to the period of Pietrzykowski's stay in the camp are by no means less significant or dramatic. An analysis of the transports of Polish political prisoners deported to Auschwitz between June 1940 and spring 1943 reveals that, in many cases, 50-70% of them died in the first weeks of incarceration, and often, none of the new arrivals, especially those deported in autumn and winter, survived this period. Out of the 50 deportees to Auschwitz from the Montelupich prison on 26 June 1941, only four survived, while 54 of the 63 transported on 29 July 1941 from the Tarnów prison died in Auschwitz - half of them in the first two months. Of the 141 prisoners brought from Częstochowa on 30 January 1942, 122 died, most before the arrival of spring, while nine of the 171 brought on 20 February 1942 lived to see the liberation.

One could list countless examples of these dramatic statistics illustrating the death rate among Polish political prisoners deported to Auschwitz in the first years of its existence. They contrast starkly with the picture presented in Barczewski's film, in which only a few Polish prisoners die (most of them as a result of punishment for some offence). The viewer may

punishment for some offence). The viewer may be under the mistaken impression that the blind extermination involved only Jews, while the political inmates, as long as they were punitive, submissive and diligent in their work and did not commit any offence in the camp, had a pretty good chance of survival, which is not true.
In his review, Łukasz Muszyński described Barczewski's work as another heart-warming story inspired by authentic events . The structure of the film, particularly its ending, seems to confirm that such was the filmmakers' intention. Ultimately, the main character - who embodies goodness, morality and the principles of fair play - wins in an uneven fight with evil personified by Germans, representatives of the camp authorities. He rises from the very bottom of suffering and defeats an SS man in the ring, thus depriving the commandant of the opportunity to enjoy the expected defeat and humiliation of a Polish boxer. He gains respect and the title of champion. The sense of satisfaction he deprived his enemies of becomes shared by his fellow fighters. Pietrzykowski's presence in the camp and his triumph change everyone. Even the Rapportführer seems to have thought and understood something deeply, thanks to his acquaintance with Teddy. Thus, the victory has a moral as well as a sporting significance. Teddy survived this ordeal and returned to life after the war to fulfil his dream of raising the next generation of athletes.

It is another contemporary image that allows one to deceptively believe that the sun just comes out once the war is over, and people joyfully welcome their long-lost loved ones and return to their jobs, to their pre-war lives and work for the sake of a bright future. Such a narrative leaves no room for the authenticity of the post-war dramas. It says nothing about how people counted their losses, licked their wounds, struggled with trauma, searched for and said goodbye to their loved ones after the war, or how they tried to recover from their grief, navigate the new political realities, bear the burden of difficult experiences and survive a reality which only brought misery, fear and uncertainty for many. A happy ending in relation to war, and even more so to the camp experience, is an illusion.
So, is Maciej Barczewski's film worth seeing? Do the factual errors presented in this text invalidate its value? That's a difficult question, especially for a researcher whose profession places factuality, objectivity and reliability in the foreground, which is the complete opposite of artistic work. A scholar may bridle at the notion that the art of cinema should prioritise the construction of a film as an independent work of fiction, treating the historical background as a side issue . They may feel an inner discord at seeing the disregard for authenticity in cultural products and a nonchalant approach to facts. They are entitled to a negative assessment of such practices. Ultimately, however, they have no choice but to accept that art has its rights and cannot expect the creator of a work of art to restrict their imagination and abandon its interpretation in favour of strict adherence to sources. After all, that is what science serves to achieve. Artistic freedom is essential to the cultural process and must not be reduced to documenting or imposing a framework of factual correctness. Inevitably, there must be a conflict here between fiction and reality, between the memory of history and its artistic interpretation. Science is supposed to understand and

remember, while art is supposed to move. And since it is impossible to change the assumptions and purposes of art, it seems somewhat reasonable to act didactically in order to change the way viewers think about a historical film (literary work, painting, etc.). Such is the purpose of this review - not to discourage people from seeing The Champion, but to remind them that it is not a biographical film in the strict sense of the word, and even less a documentary as the filmmakers honestly emphasise in interviews.

It is merely inspired by real events. It should be treated as such by the viewer - not as a picture upon which one can build knowledge about the fate of Tadeusz Pietrzykowski and the realities of KL Auschwitz, but as an inspiration to seek this knowledge independently, not on the level of art, but in historical sources and scientific creations, with full consent that the story one discovers as a result of this search will turn out to be far more complex and different from that portrayed in the film.

Going back to the question - is this film worth seeing? Firstly, it is worth it for the excellent cinematography by Witold Płóciennik; secondly, for the already acclaimed set design, costumes, and props. Thirdly, for the superb cast, including Marcin Czarnik as Kapo Bruno and Marian Dziędziel's episode as Calvary Captain, and particularly for the acting and physical metamorphosis of Piotr Głowacki. Nevertheless, the film is worth seeing to awaken the desire to learn more about Tadeusz Pietrzykowski and attempt to acquire reliable knowledge about Pietrzykowski. Moreover, it may also provide information about the history of the camp and its first prisoners and the underground and sporting activities carried out behind the wires.

Collective of the Museum of Romani Culture

HODONÍN: INTERSECTING TRAGEDIES

The checkered history of the site of the former "Gypsy Camp" at Hodonín in the Blansko district is commemorated by the new permanent exhibition at the Hodonín u Kunštátu Memorial to the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti in Moravia.

The central subject of the exhibition, entitled Tábor Hodonín u Kunštátu: Průsečík tragických osudů 1940–1950. Střední Evropa [Hodonín u Kunštátu Camp: Intersecting Tragedies 1940–1950. Central Europe] is the 1942-1943 period, when the camp de facto fulfilled the function of a concentration camp. As the title indicates, the topic of the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti is not the only one the exhibition covers. The postwar fate of the camp facility, when it became a place to temporarily house German-speaking persons intended for evacuation from Czechoslovakia, after which it became a forced labor camp for opponents of the communist regime and then served for decades as a recreation facility – all this is also covered by the exhibition. "The exhibition texts have been produced in both Czech and English," adds Jana Horváthová, director of the Museum of Romani Culture which administers the memorial, the employees of which have contributed to creating the exhibition.

The exhibition is divided among two buildings – visitors will find the main part in the Information Center, which is a new building, where the fate of the Roma and Sinti in Czechoslovakia will be conveyed to them through information panels and photographs supplemented by audiovisual technology. It begins by introducing the context of the birth of Czechoslovakia and the position of Romani and Sinti people in a state influenced by "antigypsyist" legislation, official procedures, and public sentiment. The exhibition further presents the development of the measures targeting Romani and Sinti people during the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The greatest attention and the largest amount of space in the exhibition is dedicated to what was called the "Gypsy Camp" at Hodonín u Kunštátu which was, along with a parallel camp at Lety u Písku that is better known to the public, a location of imprisonment, suffering and death, and that then became a launching point for the transport of hundreds of Romani children, men and women to the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp. The shocking everyday living conditions during their imprisonment are revealed by period photographs, documents, and especially by the memories of eyewitnesses, most of whom are former prisoners. The exhibition includes a separate room with audiovisual equipment where visitors can play audio and video recordings of selected memories as recounted by eyewitnesses, categorized by theme. The exhibition itself also covers the transports of the Hodonín prisoners to Auschwitz and their fates in other concentration camps run by the Nazis. The closing passage of the exhibition at the Information Center familiarizes visitors with the postwar fate of the camp grounds. Part of the exhibition is also dedicated to how Romani and Sinti survivors came to terms with their wartime experiences in the context of a society where the historical subject of the racially-motivated persecution and genocide of the Roma and Sinti during the Second Word war was rather suppressed – to this day the phrase "the unknown Holocaust" is still sometimes used to refer to it. The exhibition at the Information Center also includes a timeline comparing events involving the camp facility at Hodonín u Kunštátu with other events happening on the territory of the Czech lands, Czechoslovakia, and Europe from 1918 to the present.

The second part of the exhibition is located in the reconstructed Prisoners' Barracks – the

building that used to house the prisoners. "Here visitors can see a replica of the bunks for the prisoners, including listening spots where audio recordings of the eyewitnesses' memories of the 'Gypsy Camp' can be heard," Horváthová said. In addition, there are panels augmenting the information from the exhibition in the Information Center about different aspects of daily life in the camp, from the shocking hygiene conditions to the insufficient diet to the burial of the victims in mass graves near the camp.

It was far from easy to create the memorial and open a permanent exhibition at the site. "The idea to buy out what used to be a recreation facility in Hodonín and to build the memorial to the Holocaust of the Roma there was not easy to see through to the end. Later, a similar process was undertaken with the pig farm at Lety," said Michael Kocáb, who was Czech Human Rights and National Minorities Minister when the recreation facility was purchased. In 2009, thanks to long-lasting efforts by the Museum of Romani Culture and Romani activists, the state did buy out the grounds. By Government resolution, in 2011 the National Pedagogical Museum and Library of J. A. Comenius (a contributory organization of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport) was entrusted with building the memorial to house an exhibition that would familiarize visitors with the checkered history of this location in the context of Czech, or rather, Czechoslovak and European history. A crucial subject covered by the exhibition was to be the 1942–1943 period when the so-called "Gypsy Camp" existed at that place. Most of the exhibition dedicated to that period and, at a more general level, to the Holocaust of the Roma and Sinti during the Second World War was, under the guidance of the director of the National Pedagogical Museum and Library of J. A. Comenius, Markéta Pánková, created by Museum of Romani Culture staffers Jana Horváthová and Michal Schuster. Others who

Museum of Romani Culture staffers Jana Horváthová and Michal Schuster. Others who contributed to creating the exhibition were Jiří Cajthaml, Jiří Kocian, Jiří Paděvět, Eva Semotanová and Jan Šimek, while the architectural and artistic design were provided by Jaroslav Obst. Through a 2017 Government resolution, the administration of the still-uncompleted exhibition and facility was handed over to the Museum of Romani Culture at the beginning of 2018, where Jana Horváthová, Veronika Kolaříková, Anna Míšková and Dušan Slačka began its adjustment and completion.

Visitors were able to tour the exhibition for the first time ever during its grand opening on 15 July 2021. "Many of my forebears did not live to see a memorial like this. I want to thank everybody who contributed to building it. We no longer have to sneak into this place under cover of darkness, as we once did, to light candles here," commented Rudolf Murka, whose father survived "Hodonínek", as eyewitnesses nicknamed the camp.

Short-term exhibitions are also shown in other spaces at the memorial. Currently there is an exhibition of drawings by Helga Weissová-Hošková, made when she was a teenager imprisoned in the Ghetto at Theresienstadt, which has been installed in the Guards' Barracks. In that same building visitors can see an exhibition of the submissions to the second annual Karel Holomek and Emílie Machálková Competition, where the Holocaust of the Roma is the subject. The winning installation, "Head of Nemtudomka" is located in the reverential section of the memorial between the administration building of the former camp and the linden tree. It was created by Jakub Brázda, a student of the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. "The motif of the sculpture is a hero from the fairytale about Nemtudomka. I longed to render this character in sculpture immediately after reading the fairytale. One reason is that this hero is able to wear a snakeskin, and I have been exploring the transformation of human beings into snakes for some time," Brázda said of his piece.

The permanent exhibition, the short-term exhibits, and the entire memorial are open Wednesday through Sunday between 9:00 and 17:00.

Łukasz Lipiński

COMMEMORATION OF THE 77TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIQUIDATION OF THE ROMA CAMP IN AUSCHWITZ.

On the night of August 2/3, 1944, in Auschwitz II-Birkenau the Germans liquidated the so-called family camp for Gypsies (Zigeunerfamilienlager). About 4,300 children, women and men, the last Roma prisoners of the camp, were murdered in gas chambers. Today, August 2 is celebrated in Poland as the Sinti and Roma Genocide Remebrance Day.

The ceremony was attended by representatives of state authorities, ambassadors, representatives of local authorities, cultural institutions and museums. During the celebrations, Director Cywiński presented Romani Rose with the "Light of Remembrance", the highest award at the Memorial, which is awarded to people who have contributed most to education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust.

Several hundred people met at the monument commemorating the extermination of Roma and Sinti people on the site of the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Wreaths were laid and homage was paid.

"Today, more than 76 years after Europe's liberation from National Socialism, the voices of those who can bear witness gradually fade away. That is why it is up to us, subsequent generations, to keep their heritage alive and to ensure that Auschwitz will never be forgotten," said Romani Rose, chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma.

"Auschwitz is a conscience that appeals to all of us to raise our voices against murderous racism that is raging again today and many people are dying because of it. Memory is not about passing the blame on to today's generation, but about a shared responsibility for the future of all of us. [...] By educating and constantly commemorating the atrocities of World War II, Nazi terror and the Holocaust, it is up to us to revive the vision of a united and peaceful Europe, and preserve the future of future generations," he added.

Werner Friedrich shared his story with those gathered during the celebrations. "It is a great honour and responsibility for me to be one of the last witnesses to speak here today," he said. "My sister had to go through the torments of the concentration camps, like many of our relatives. She was lucky not to be herded into a gas chamber right away. My mother told me that I cried day and night because my beloved sister Loni was no longer there. [...] Many of my relatives, such as my father's and mother's brothers and sisters, were herded into gas chambers and burned, along with their innocent little children. My father and mother never saw or talked to their siblings again," said Werner Friedrich.

Concluding his speech, he appealed. "I would like to address young people, the coming generation from East and West, South and North. You who have come today for this European Sinti and Roma Holocaust Remembrance Day. I ask that you fight against racism wherever you come into contact with it, so that such commemoration days will no longer be needed in the future. Despite my terrible childhood experiences, I still believe, even after 84 years without hatred in my heart, in the good of people," he emphasized.

During his speech, Piotr M. A. Cywiński, PhD, Director of Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, pointed out that although three generations have passed since then, a lot of bad

of bad things are still happening. Therefore, he paid attention to the role and importance of education. "We believe in education very much. This is our human experience. A child learns from its mistakes and failures, and thus grows to maturity. And we want to think that thanks to its work we are also slowly maturing. We know very well that education alone is not enough, but we know that it is a foundation of what can help us mature," noted the director of the Memorial.

Handing Romani Rose the highest educational award of the Museum, he emphasized: "No one in Europe has done more for education about the extermination of Roma and Sinti than Romani Rose, who is here with us. [...] There will be no better place than this place, there will be no better day than today, to express my gratitude to Mr. Romani Rose on behalf of everyone, giving him our Light of Remembrance."

So far, the "Light of Remembrance" has been awarded to: Professor Władysław Bartoszewski, Krystyna Oleksy, Avner Shalev, Serge Klarsfeld, Sara J. Bloomfield and Luis Ferreiro.

The letter from the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki to the participants of the celebrations was read by Włodzimierz Bernacki, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Education and Science.

"We pay tribute to all the Roma victims of World War II. We do so in the belief that our duty to the world is to record these dramatic events in our collective memory and pass them on to future generations. The extermination of the Roma is a tragic chapter of this heritage, often unspoken of. We all have a duty to uphold the memory of the Roma victims of World War II, and to ensure that it fully returns to the pages of history; that the knowledge of the Roma extermination would become common. The lesson on the Roma chapter of the Nazi genocide cannot be forgotten," wrote Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki.

"On the 77th anniversary of the liquidation of the Roma camp, here in the largest Sinti and Roma cemetery known as "Roma Golgotha", we once again undertake the commitment that we will do everything to ensure that times of contempt never return. We will guard with all our strength what is most precious to us - peace and an attitude of respect towards others. Today, bowing our heads over the ashes of the murdered, we jointly say the words: "We remember and we will remember"," we read in the Prime Minister's letter.

Roman Kwiatkowski, president of the Roma Association in Poland, emphasized the individual tragedy of the victims hidden behind large numbers. "Half a million victims is not a dead record, a statistic of the cruellest war in

the world. It's half a million broken dreams and plans, half a million human stories, none of which have been told to the end. Today we are trying to make them remain in our memory at least," he said.

"The years of extermination have taught us, however, that there cannot be a morality that grants rights only to the elect, that limits them on the basis of race, language, nationality, denomination or orientation. Therefore, we emphasize every year as citizens of our countries, as citizens of a united Europe: the Roma must enjoy a position that is equal to others before the law. This is not a privilege; it is a fundamental right of every human being," appealed Roman Kwiatkowski.

The Nazis regarded the Roma as a "hostile element", "by inheritance" conditioned by a propensity to commit crimes and anti-social behaviour. From 1933, alongside Jews, they became the target of racist persecution: first by registration, depriving them of the right to practice certain professions, prohibiting mixed marriages, then forced labour, and finally imprisonment in concentration camps. After the outbreak of World War II, a decision was made to relocate German Roma to occupied Poland. The German police authorities began to arrest and execute Roma in the occupied territories, including those at the rear of the eastern front, where they were massively murdered together with Jews by the so-called Einsatzkommando.

On the order of Heinrich Himmler to send them to Auschwitz, from 1943 the Sinti and Roma, mainly from Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland, were deported there. In total, the Germans deported about 23,000 Roma to Auschwitz, of which 2,000 were murdered without being entered into the camp records. 21,000 people were registered in the camp, of which about 19,000 died - they died of starvation and diseases, and were murdered in gas chambers at the time of the liquidation of the "Gypsy camp".

In block 13, at Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, there is an exhibition commemorating the extermination of the Roma and Sinti, which shows the extraordinary dimension of the Nazi genocide committed against the Roma in Nazi-occupied Europe. In the former Birkenau camp, in sector BIIe, there is a monument commemorating the victims of the Roma nationality.

A special internet lesson devoted to the history of the deportation and extermination of the Roma and Sinti in the Auschwitz camp.


DIKH
BISTER
In the memory of all Holocaust victims

Karen Pollock (Holocaust Educational Trust) in:
Jewish News UK

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL BY PARLIAMENT WILL BE WARNING AGAINST HATRED

The Westminister Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre will remind generations of the dangers of hatred, says Karen Pollock, Chief Executive of the Holocaust Education Trust.
In living memory, the unimaginable happened. Jewish people in their millions were identified and segregated. They were stripped of their businesses, their homes, even their citizenship.

They were rounded up, deported, and forced into ghettos and camps. And then, in purpose-built extermination camps, in ravines, and in forests across Europe, six million Jewish men, women and children were murdered.

As Jews, we grew up hearing the stories of the Holocaust. We knew people who had tattoos on their arms. We knew that the Holocaust was something that happened to people like us, our family.

But today, that knowledge goes beyond our community. In schools the length and breadth of the country, British students from all faiths and none learn about the Holocaust.

They hear the testimony of Holocaust survivors, they visit the sites where it happened, they learn the story of the Kindertransport, and they explore the allied forces' decision not to bomb the train tracks leading to Auschwitz. The Holocaust is British history and has become part of this country's narrative.

Today, we can have faith that this willingness to learn, understand and remember will continue and grow. The UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre will be built at the very heart of our democracy, it will forever stand as a warning from history and as a reminder of what happened when hatred and antisemitism went unchecked.

When we can no longer hear the testimonies of the eyewitnesses, when we can no longer be awestruck by their unimaginable stories of survival, when we can no longer almost touch history, this memorial will stand to remind generations to come of this stain on world history, this seminal moment in British history, and this central moment in Jewish history.

Britain's Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre will stand in the shadow of Parliament. A Parliament that made decisions that shaped the Second World War. It will forever have a central place in our city – a place to pause, reflect, and challenge, a place where we can come together to reflect upon our shared humanity.

A place where the very human stories of the Holocaust will be told. A place where the Jewish community can caome together to mourn.

A place where people from around the world will learn about this abominable part of human history. A place that will tell our nation's story and stand forever as a warning of what can happen when liberal democracy fails.

Today, as a nation, we say that we will remember.

Karen Pollock MBE is Chief Executive of the Holocaust Educational Trust

Przemysław Batorski, Jewish Historical Institute

"THIS PLACE MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN". SUMMARY OF 78TH-ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION OF UPRISING AT TREBLINKA II EXTERMINATION CAMP

On 2 August, at the German Nazi extermination camp Treblinka II museum, ceremonies were held to commemorate the 1943 prisoner revolt. The celebrations were attended by state and local government officials and members of the diplomatic corps, including Ada Willenberg, widow of Samuel Willenberg, the last participant in the Treblinka uprising who died in 2016.

"Where are our artists today; where are the talented and the educated, experts from various professions and fields? Where are the simple folks and the cultivated, the festive and the everyday Jewish men and women who roamed the Jewish streets of Polish towns with such vigour and temperament, laboured and lived until their last breath, without special permission to exist?" - questioned Rachela Auerbach, who recorded the account of Abram Krzepicki, a refugee from Treblinka in 1942. Her words were quoted by Monika Krawczyk, director of the Jewish Historical Institute, in her speech. Commemoration of the 78th anniversary of the uprising at the Treblinka II extermination camp. Pic. Alicja Szulc, Grzegorz Kwolek (ŻIH)

- More than 800,000 people died on approximately 17 hectares of this land. It is an imaginable number. The Germans brought Jews here mainly from occupied Poland and Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Yugoslavia, the USSR, Germany, and Austria. The Roma and Sinti from Poland and Germany were also sent here. - Monika Krawczyk emphasised.

The letter from Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki was read by Edward Kopówka, PhD, director of the Treblinka Museum:
"Treblinka is a symbolic site. Jews from occupied Poland and Europe were brought here. The cruel extermination industry claimed the lives of thousands of victims every day (...). Those still alive decided on an uprising which, although destined to fail, saved their humanity and offered a chance of escape to at least a few. Thanks to this heroic uprising, about 70 people survived and could give testimony after the war," the Prime Minister wrote.

"The scale and monstrosity of the crime are beyond the capacity of human perception, which is why it was planned and executed in complete isolation. The Treblinka I labour camp was situated 2 kilometres from the death camp, which was hidden from the human eye. Therefore, the brave, determined people decided to organise an uprising - as a dramatic outcry of defiance. A voice that has been heard," wrote Minister of Culture, National Heritage and Sport, Professor Piotr Gliński.

Małgorzata Kidawa-Błońska, Deputy Speaker of the Polish Parliament, recalled the figure of Samuel Willenberg. - When he spoke about the rebellion, I perceived it differently. His story showed how these people, the few who managed to survive the revolt, were lonely after escaping from the camp; they were like hunted animals that had to hide, but they had a great will to fight and survive. By the way, Samuel also survived the Warsaw Uprising and the entire occupation.
"We are procuring new weapons and machine guns. Rudolf Masaryk finds himself on the roof

All photos in the article: Alicja Szulc

and shoots the frightened Germans. Amid the roar of gunshots, we hear his voice: "This is for my wife and my child, who never saw the world" - the account of the insurgent Stanislaw Kon was recalled by Tal Ben Ari Yaalon, chargé d'affaires of the Israeli Embassy. - The Treblinka Uprising teaches us an important lesson that values such as freedom, equality and life must be fought for and that we must do so not only for ourselves but for the good of us all.

- Germany, my country, brought immeasurable suffering to Poland, your country, between 1939 and 1945. The Germans murdered nearly six million Poles, half of whom were of the Mosaic faith. A further three million Jews from all over Europe fell victim to German racist madness and hatred, which became a veritable death factory on this very site. Every individual human fate has the same value - said Robert von Rimscha, Minister Counsellor for Cultural Affairs at the German Embassy.

- If all the victims of Treblinka could stand along the entire length of this road in a tight row one after the other, there would not be enough room for them. It is hard to imagine and impossible to describe the scale of suffering and death - noted Jarosław Nowak, Plenipotentiary of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Contacts with the Jewish Diaspora.

- We must not forget what happened at Treblinka and other extermination sites. When the last witnesses of those terrible events depart this life, when people who remember those times are gone, we will be obliged to carry on the story, warning and memory - said Aldona Machnowska-Góra, deputy mayor of Warsaw.
- The stories are deeply saddening. Unfortunately, there are hardly any first-hand accounts of these stories anymore. Virtually no one will give a first-hand account of it anymore. My mother stayed at Treblinka, and nearly all my family died at Treblinka. For me, this place is sacred. It is the largest cemetery there can be - said Ada Willenberg, Holocaust survivor and widow of Samuel Willenberg, the last insurgent

from Treblinka who died in 2016.

- I hope that when we, the last witnesses of this crime, are gone, you will still come here because this place must not be forgotten.
At the end of the ceremony, the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich and representatives of the Christian faith recited prayers. Wreaths were laid, and candles lit.
The German Nazi death camp Treblinka II was opened on 23 July 1942.

- On that day, the first transports of Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto arrived at the camp.
For almost a year and a half, transports from central Poland and other countries of occupied Europe arrived at the camp. Every day the Germans murdered around 5-10 thousand people in the gas chambers using flue gas from a tank engine.

The Germans destroyed the entire camp area in 1943. Pic. Alicja Szulc
On 2 August 1943, at about 16:00, the prisoners' commenced a revolt, attacking the German and Ukrainian guards and setting fire to the camp buildings. Of the more than 700 participants of the revolt, about 200 managed to escape beyond the camp's borders, and nearly 100 of them survived the war.

Treblinka is the largest cemetery for Polish Jews and one of the largest cemeteries for Polish citizens. Approximately 900,000 Jews were murdered at the camp, mainly from Warsaw, Bialystok, Mazovia and Podlasie, Slovakia, Greece, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, including an estimated 2,000 Roma. We only know the names of about 45,000 of those murdered.

Treblinka M

Memorial. The concrete blocks represent the approximate line of the tracks used by the death trains. The entire camp area was destroyed by the Germans in 1943. Photo: Alicja Szulc

Francine Wolfisz, Jewish News UK

THE FACES OF SURVIVAL: POIGNANT PORTRAITS SHOW LIFE AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

A new exhibition featuring the works of 13 photographers - including the Duchess of Cambridge and The Sun's royal photographer Arthur Edwards - opens at the Imperial War Museum.

Even from a distance, the beaming smiles spread across 21 faces, four generations and ages spanning from a few months to 91 years shine out in this beautifully captured portrait of Zigi Shipper's family. But look closer and the picture evokes even more meaning when one considers nonagenarian Zigi was just a child when he endured the Holocaust – and none of these individuals would be here today had he not survived.

The image, taken by Arthur Edwards, is one of 13 new works by contemporary photographers featuring in a new exhibition at the Imperial War Museum (IWM), which opens next week.

Generations: Portraits of Holocaust Survivors – which includes two images taken by the Duchess of Cambridge – presents moving individual and family portraits of survivors who made the UK their home after experiencing unimaginable loss and trauma.

The exhibition has been organised by the IWM in partnership with Jewish News, the Royal Photographic Society, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and Dangoor Education.

It is the culmination of a project initiated by Jewish News with the Duchess of Cambridge last year.

Speaking about the exhibition, Arthur – who has spent nearly 50 years as The Sun's royal photographer – says he was aware of the poignancy of the task, especially when he heard about Zigi's experiences during the Second World War.

Born in 1930, Zigi was 12 when he was forced to move into Lodz Ghetto and 14 when he was put onto a cattle truck to Auschwitz-Birkenau, before being transported weeks later to Stutthof concentration camp near Danzig.

In the final months of the war, Zigi was sent on a death march, arriving in Neustadt, Germany, before finally being liberated by British troops on 3 May 1945.

Two years later, he arrived in the UK, where he married Jeannette and raised a family. The couple were married for 66 years until Jeannette's death last July.

"Taking the photograph of Zigi really made me think about the Holocaust," says Arthur, who accompanied the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge on their trip to Stutthof in 2017. "To be aged 14 and going on a death march – can you imagine? Surviving just that alone would have been enough."

Zigi wanted not only his survival, but also his love for life as the main focus of the image, prompting Arthur, 80, to ask the family to wear colourful clothes.

"I wanted that summer feeling in the picture," he explains. "He's a happy, joyful man, smiling all the time. A man who had a terrible, terrible childhood, but has a wonderful life in England and a family who loves him."

Bringing the whole family together presented issues for Arthur: Covid restrictions meant each family had to arrive at 20-minute intervals, so he had to keep reconfiguring the lighting and background over a two-hour period.
A graphic artist then pieced together the


Generations
PORTRAITS OF
HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

individual photographs Arthur took and also included a contributed photo from one of Zigi's granddaughters who lives in Spain.

"I was so pleased with how it turned out," reflects Arthur. "I got a huge print, framed it and presented it to Zigi, along with around 100 pictures for the family as a keepsake. It was a joyful job to do, a real labour of love."

Photo: IWM

Generations: Portraits of Holocaust Survivors
runs from 6 August to 7 January, 2022
at the Imperial War Museum London

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PUBLISHER

Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Paweł Sawicki

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Agnieszka Juskowiak-Sawicka

EDITED BY

Bartosz Bartyzel
Imogen Dalziel
Marek Lach
Łukasz Lipiński

CONTACT

memoria@auschwitz.org