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# Intelligence, the Polish Resistance, and Government-in-Exile

## The Sabotage of Railways and the Aerial Bombing of Auschwitz (or Lack Thereof)

### Abstract

In 1981, Sir Martin Gilbert published his influential work *Auschwitz and the Allies*, arguing that the West was unaware of the “true nature” of Auschwitz Birkenau until 1944. He wrote about this in the context of whether to bomb railway lines and the camp itself. This did not materialise and has come to symbolise in the popular mind callous indifference to – or even complicity in – the crimes the Nazis committed there. This article contributes to the debate and discipline by focusing on how the Polish resistance, its intelligence operations, and government-in-exile in London provided a constant flow of information from 1942, some of which was made public at the time. Furthermore, this article argues that, on the one hand, the Allies lacked the accurate bombing capability until April 1944. However, on the other hand the viable option of sabotage of railways by the Polish resistance was not even attempted to prevent Jews being taken to their incarceration and death. Could Britain and the Allies, including the Polish resistance, have done more to stop the horrors of Auschwitz? The answer is “yes”.

*The historian Sir Martin Gilbert gave due respect to the topics of the Holocaust and indeed leadership, including that of the British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill. From his research he asked a very fundamental question that was published in The Times newspaper on 27 January 2005 and that was: “[c]ould Britain have done more to stop the horrors of Auschwitz?”<sup>1</sup>*

This article pays tribute to Sir Martin for his prolific and exhaustive work that paved the way for future historians to combine research on the Second World War and the Holocaust. It poses questions based upon and beyond that of Sir Martin. I should note that I am not a historian of either topic, that of the Second World War or the Holocaust. While researching a few decades ago for my doctorate on military intelligence and the procurement of aircraft weapons, I stumbled upon significant material on the topics of bombing Auschwitz and railway sabotage that I will present in this article. In my doctorate, one case was the Tornado aircraft that was procured after the prototype TSR.<sup>2</sup> was cancelled, to replace the Canberra that had replaced the Mosquito for the same roles of reconnaissance and tactical bombing. From that I followed the trail on the Mosquito aircraft that led me down the path of examining the Polish government-in-exile, the military intelligence it provided to the world during the Second World War, aerial bombing, and Polish resistance railway sabotage, and so I gleaned an insight into Auschwitz.

1 Martin Gilbert, “Could Britain Have Done More to Stop the Horrors of Auschwitz?” *The Times*, 27 January 2005, 2.

From this I can offer an answer to Sir Martin's question, but from different sources and different perspectives than the ones he cited. This article thus makes an innovative contribution to the field and, indeed, pays tribute to Sir Martin. The answer I can offer to Sir Martin's one are the conclusions reached in this article and they are clear. These are that the close cooperation and the quantity of intelligence gathered by the Polish resistance that was sent to the Polish government-in-exile in London leaves no doubt whatsoever. They knew throughout the Second World War about the true nature of Auschwitz but not necessarily about the number of victims. There was no lack of data flowing out of Poland. Of the 45,770 intelligence reports from occupied Europe that were processed by the Allies, 48 per cent were from Polish sources.<sup>2</sup>

This intelligence was given in real time and with urgency to Allied forces as early as 1941. There is no evidence that they acted to stop the Nazi's declared intention to annihilate the Jewish nation. A point known at the time of the Second World War was that of capability. There is evidence that the larger Allied forces – the American, British, and Soviets – had limited heavy bombing means at their disposal until April 1944 to bomb Poland. However, even when they were in range, like the Mosquito aircraft from Italy, and had the means to accurately stop the Holocaust in Auschwitz, they were not deployed for this mission.

Notwithstanding the widely debated topic of bombing, there was an alternative means available, especially to the Polish resistance, throughout the Second World War. There is evidence of substantial sabotage to railways in Poland, especially those taking German supplies and forces to the front in the east with the Soviet Union. However, there is no evidence of sabotage to those railways that took Jews to their incarceration and death, or even to slow down or prevent gas being transported to the crematoria. The data indicates that there were approximately 2,900 acts of railway-related sabotage (including smaller incidents) in Poland in the period from 1941 to 1944, but none against railways to the death camps.<sup>3</sup>

This then leads to more questions beyond that of Sir Martin's. For example, why did Britain and the Polish government-in-exile in London not look towards railway sabotage? Indeed, the facts are clear that from the summer of 1942 until the spring of 1944: more than a million Jews were deported to Auschwitz by rail. The origins were France, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Norway, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Poland. Furthermore, did any resistance organisation in these countries seek to find out why only Jews were being taken and to where? Why did the Polish resistance not gather more intelligence on Auschwitz-Birkenau (Auschwitz II), and especially the I. G. Farbenindustrie (dye industry syndicate commonly known as IG Farben) giant fuel and artificial rubber factory in Monowitz-Buna (Auschwitz III)? I am by no means the only researcher to have posed such questions, and others have also contemplated whether bombing Auschwitz would have taken away from the war effort. Was the IG Farben factory a valid war target and, if so, why was it not bombed? If it had been possible, would it have been effective or would it have done more harm than good to bomb the crematoria at Auschwitz, considering that inaccurate bombing might have killed many?<sup>4</sup>

2 Halik Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed: Poland and the Poles in the Second World War* (London: Allan Lane, 2012), 1–13.

3 Kolejnictwopolskie, "History of Railways, Railways During World War II", EU Railways, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://kolejnictwopolskie.pl/en/knowledge/kolejowa-ii-wojna>.

4 Michael J. Neufeld, *The Bombing of Auschwitz: Should the Allies Have Attempted It?* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 1–14.

The evidence examined in this article overwhelmingly leads towards an answer to these questions that considers that Britain and the other allies, and indeed the Polish government-in-exile and the resistance, could have at least attempted to do more but did not. To examine this in more detail, the structure of this article is in sections that present evidence on points emerging from such a view. The first point is that, yes, there was deliberate German deception to keep the secret of Auschwitz's location and purpose hermetically sealed. Yet, as examined in this article, from the onset in 1941 and 1942 and onward, the Polish government-in-exile did inform the world of the plight of the Jews and called for the bombing. Another point is that, yes, Auschwitz did lay beyond the range of Allied heavy bombers from Britain, while disputes with the Soviets resulted in their airfields not being used. The Soviets lacked their own bombing capability. Yet, there is no evidence of any discussion between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union to even attempt to bomb Auschwitz. Even if all the above were to have been declared top secret and no records kept of the debates and decisions to the contrary, the most damning point is that, in April 1944, Auschwitz was in the range of accurate bombing by the Mosquito aircraft that photographed it. However, no bombing mission was attempted.<sup>5</sup>

That leads to voicing a modification of Sir Martin's question to: could the Polish resistance have done more to stop the horrors of Auschwitz, even if the British did not? To be sure, there was close cooperation, and a large quantity of overall intelligence gathered by the Polish resistance was sent to the Polish government-in-exile in London. Evidence on Auschwitz was given by them to the world. Why, then, did they not try to prevent the mass killings? For example, there is evidence of substantial sabotage to railways throughout Europe, but not to those that took Jews to their incarceration and death, or even to slow down or prevent gas from being transported to the crematoria.

The methodology of this article continues by citing primary and secondary sources to examine and expand upon the points raised in this introduction. The article is divided into seven sections that examine Sir Martin Gilbert's problem statement about Auschwitz, the Polish government-in-exile, the British and American (non-)bombing of Auschwitz (II) Birkenau, the Soviet (non-)bombing of Auschwitz, the Mosquito aircraft, intelligence and the Polish resistance, and the (non-)sabotage of railways.

### Sir Martin Gilbert Poses a Problem Statement about Auschwitz

The Auschwitz camp has its origins in providing labour for German industrial and armaments aims. In April 1941, IG Farben began the construction of a huge factory complex to manufacture synthetic rubber and fuel. IG Farben was a corporation formed from several German chemical companies. Prisoner-of-war labour was used to build the factory complex.<sup>6</sup>

As demand for labour increased, additional work camps were started around the factory complex. The main camp was built in October 1942 at the southeastern edge of the factory area and was called "*Dorfrand*" and later the "*Buna Lager*". This became the largest camp, and in 1944 it gained autonomy and operated as Auschwitz III/

5 "Aerial Photographs of Auschwitz", Yad Vashem, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.yadvashem.org/from-our-collections/auschwitz-aerial-photos.html>.

6 IG Farben, "Auschwitz History", IG Farben, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/auschwitz-iii/ig-farben/>.

Monowitz. There were forty-seven Auschwitz sub-camps in total. Penal labour included selections of people from arriving train shipments of Jews from around Europe and numbered over 35,000 in 1944. Other than the Jewish labourers, there were IG Farben civilian workers from Germany and Poland, including apprentices, forced labourers from Croatia, Italy, Poland, Ukraine, and the Soviet Union, and even Nazi Hitler Youth girls from the League of German Girls (*Bund Deutscher Mädel* or BDM) and the War Auxiliary Service Maidens of the *Reich Labour Service* (Kriegshilfsdienst-Maiden of the Reichsarbeitsdienst or RAD).<sup>7</sup>

That meant that, by 1944, there were three locations that used the name “Auschwitz”. The main Auschwitz I death camp, the Birkenau (Auschwitz II) death camp, and the IG Farben giant fuel and artificial rubber factory in Monowitz-Buna (Auschwitz III). Former German President Horst Koehler said that, as the largest Nazi extermination camp, it was home to the worst crime in human history. Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, confessed during his trial after the Second World War that approximately 1.1 million prisoners, mostly Jews, had been killed there.<sup>8</sup>

The IG Farben factory complex (Auschwitz III) eventually measured over three square kilometres in area, with scores of buildings for chemical and fuel production and processing, power plants, and manufacturing machinery. It would certainly have been visible to anyone and, indeed, and the smoke and crematoria smell from Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II, which were no more than six kilometres away, also reached that far. There is photographic evidence that SS leader Heinrich Himmler visited there in July 1942. This was Himmler’s second visit to Auschwitz and, on this occasion, he visited all three Auschwitzes, and even observed a transport of Jews being killed in the gas chamber of Bunker I at Auschwitz II.<sup>9</sup>

It was indeed a large enterprise, which highlights the first problem statement chosen by the author of this article that emerges from Sir Martin’s writings. He argues that the West was unaware of the true nature of Auschwitz II until 1944.<sup>10</sup> He wrote about this in the context of whether to bomb railway lines and the camp itself. This did not materialise and has come to symbolise in the popular mind the callous indifference to – or even complicity in – the crimes the Nazis committed there.<sup>11</sup>

What, then, was the true nature of Auschwitz in the context of the Holocaust as different from the context of the Second World War? In the context of the Second World War, there is documentation that, between 1933 and 1945, Nazi Germany and its allies established more than 44,000 camps and other incarceration sites, including ghettos. The perpetrators used these sites for a range of purposes, including forced labour and the detention of people thought to be enemies of the state. That then refers to the activities originally at Auschwitz I and throughout at Auschwitz III.<sup>12</sup>

In the context of the Holocaust, the true nature of Auschwitz II is that it was also a killing centre, additionally referred to as an extermination camp or death

7 BBC, “Auschwitz: How Death Camp Became Centre of Nazi Holocaust”, BBC, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50743973>.

8 Brent Douglas Dyck, “Why Didn’t Allies Bomb Auschwitz?,” *Warfare History Network*, last modified 25 January 2021. [https://www.realclearhistory.com/2021/01/25/why\\_didnt\\_allies\\_bomb\\_auschwitz\\_657641.html](https://www.realclearhistory.com/2021/01/25/why_didnt_allies_bomb_auschwitz_657641.html).

9 IG Farben, “Auschwitz History”.

10 Martin Gilbert, “The Question of Bombing Auschwitz”, in *The End of the Holocaust*, ed. Michael R. Marrus (Berlin and New York: K. G. Saur, 1989), 249–305.

11 Barbara Rogers, “British Intelligence and the Holocaust: Auschwitz and the Allies Re-examined”, *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 8, no. 1 (1999): 89–106.

12 Raphael Hormann, *Cultural Contact Zone: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Slavery and Its Discourses* (Münster: Waxmann, 2010), 275–291.

camp, designed to carry out genocide. Gas chambers are thought to have started on 26 March 1942 at Auschwitz II, with substantial train loads of imprisoned Jews crossing Europe by rail throughout 1942. These included 300,000 from Poland in May, 23,000 also in May from Austria and Germany, 60,000 from the Netherlands in July, 25,000 from Belgium and 10,000 from Yugoslavia in August, 46,000 Jews from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in October, and 700 from Norway in December. Until November 1944, the camp functioned as a factory for mass murder, receiving transports from all over Europe.<sup>13</sup>

Academic literature after the war informs that, between 1941 and 1945, the Nazis established five killing centres in German-occupied Poland: Chełmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Auschwitz-Birkenau (Auschwitz II). The overwhelming majority of the victims of the killing centres were Jews as part of a policy called the “Final Solution”.<sup>14</sup>

### The Polish Government in Exile

The large area covered by the camps and factory and the diversity of the people there leads to the question of when exactly the mass killing at Auschwitz II started and at what date others beyond the Nazis knew about it. The way to answer these questions is to turn to data given to the world by the Polish government-in-exile in London. A government-in-exile consists of an individual or a group of individuals residing in a foreign state, and who claim supreme authority over either a state in the sense of international law which is still under the control of another national or foreign authority, or a state to be created on the territory of another.

The Polish government-in-exile in London was formed in the aftermath of the invasion of Poland in September 1939, and the subsequent occupation of Poland by Germany, the Soviet Union, and Slovakia. Its president at the time was Władysław Raczkiewicz. Despite being in exile, it continued to exert considerable influence in Poland during the Second World War. This included through the structures of the Polish Underground State and its military arm, the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) resistance.<sup>15</sup>

It provided the Allies with some of the earliest and most accurate accounts of the ongoing plight of Jews.<sup>16</sup> One of which was a first request to the British Royal Air Force (RAF) for the bombing of Auschwitz I that came in January 1941.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps their interest was spurred by the first people to be mass gassed to death there. This was a group of Polish and Soviet prisoners in September 1941. This way of killing had already been tried out in 1939–1941 in Germany, where, within the euthanasia program, more than 70,000 mentally disabled German citizens were murdered. The RAF didn't bomb and after the war intelligence analysed that indicated that construction work began on an additional camp, Auschwitz II in February 1941. The Nazi's not challenged on Auschwitz I had expanded to Auschwitz II that became the site of the huge gas chambers where hundreds of thousands were mur-

13 “Auschwitz-Birkenau”, Holocaust Memorial and Museum, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/auschwitz-calendar/year-1942/>.

14 Nikolaus Wachsmann, *Concentration Camps in Nazi Germany* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), 1–78.

15 Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 14–22.

16 David Engel, *In the Shadow of Auschwitz: The Polish Government-in-exile and the Jews, 1939–1942* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 34–41.

17 Edward B. Westermann, “The Royal Air Force and the Bombing of Auschwitz: First Deliberations, January 1941”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15, no. 1 (2001): 70–85.

dered until November 1944. It was the site of the crematoria where their bodies were burned.<sup>18</sup>

The Polish government-in-exile persisted in their efforts. For example, during 1941 and 1942 Polish leaders such as Raczynski and the courier of the Polish underground movement, Jan Karski, continued to call for bombing by the Allies, but to no avail.<sup>19</sup> There is inference that a definite and detailed picture of activities at Auschwitz II had been provided to the British government from a variety of sources by December 1942, but not the quantitative scale of the mass killings.<sup>20</sup>

This inference of intelligence took the form of a note from Raczynski, sent on 10 December 1942 to the governments of the United Nations. It was the first official denunciation of mass exterminations of civilians in the Second World War and of the Nazi aim of the total extermination of Jews.<sup>21</sup> It was also the first publicly available document singling out the sufferings of European Jews as Jews and not as citizens of their respective countries of origin. This note triggered the Declaration of the Allied Nations of 17 December 1942. There is no evidence of any action taken against the Nazis to prevent or stop the mass killings of civilians, mainly Jews, following the Declaration.<sup>22</sup>

### The British and American (Non-)Bombing of Auschwitz (II) Birkenau

The lack of any Allied attempt to turn the Declaration into action leads to the assumption of and outcry over the Allies' callous indifference to – or even complicity in – the crimes the Nazis committed on Polish soil. However, the picture is not so straight forward: knowing something is amiss is one thing, but being able to tackle it is another. One reason was the inability of American and British heavy bombers to undertake the mission. The range for the Royal Air Force's (RAF) Avro Lancaster, RAF Handley-Page Halifax, or the United States Army Air Forces' (USAAF) B-17, B-24, and B-29 aircraft, for example, was too far from Poland, with their only available bases in the United Kingdom, and the accuracy was appalling. This fact and finding do not diminish the indifference, or even complicity, of the Poles and other Allies in the crimes that the Nazis committed. They could have asked to use Soviet bases that were within range of Poland, but there is no evidence of this having even been considered.

That brings into question air power in the Second World War and, indeed, there was some truth regarding this as well as many myths. The tactics of heavy bombers have their origins well before the Second World War began. Then, the belief was that groups of bombers capable of devastating cities would be a deterrent to war. This led to "the bomber will always get through" phrase used by British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin in his 1932 "A Fear for the Future" speech given to the British parliament. When the Second World War started, added to this was the view that this capability could force an enemy population into fear and surrender. It could be said it did sometimes work: for example, over 2,500 civilians were killed by the German Luft-

18 BBC, "Auschwitz: How Death Camp Became Centre of Nazi Holocaust".

19 Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (New York: Pimlico, 1981), 101.

20 Michael J. Cohen, "Churchill, and Auschwitz: End of Debate?," *Modern Judaism – A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 26, no. 2 (2006): 127–140.

21 Edward Raczynski, "Note of the Foreign Minister Edward Raczynski," Projectin Posterum, 10 December 1942, accessed 1 June 2024, [http://www.projectinposterum.org/docs/mass\\_extermination.htm](http://www.projectinposterum.org/docs/mass_extermination.htm).

22 Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies*, 102.

waffe bombing of Warsaw in 1939, and in part that led to a quick and early Polish surrender.<sup>23</sup>

Hence, throughout the Second World War, the concept of bombing and so the policy and strategy were promoted at all levels in Britain. For example, Professor Frederick Lindemann, the British government's leading scientific adviser in 1942, presented the Dehousing Paper to the Cabinet, showing the effect that the intensive bombing of German cities could produce. It was accepted by the Cabinet as a policy, and RAF Air Marshal Arthur Harris was appointed to carry out the task. It became an important part of the total war policy and strategy waged against Germany.<sup>24</sup>

To this end, then, a large proportion of the industrial production of the United Kingdom was harnessed for the task of creating a vast fleet of heavy bombers. Deterrence, however, is different from precision tactical missions. In practice, there is no evidence to suggest that the bombing effect on German production was more than remarkably small. Furthermore, the RAF and USAAF bombing did not force the German population into fear and to surrender.<sup>25</sup>

Bearing this in context when turning to the feasibility of bombing Auschwitz, the truth was that aerial bombing was terrible and not feasible.<sup>26</sup> To be sure, the factor of distance is indicative of where the Allies bombed, and Poland did not feature. According to the United States Strategic Bombing Survey released after the Second World War in September 1945, between 1939 and 1945, Allied bombers dropped 1,415,745 tons of bombs over Germany (51.1 per cent of the total bomb tonnage dropped by Allied bombers in the European campaign), 570,730 tons over France (20.6 per cent), 379,565 tons over Italy (13.7 per cent), 185,625 tons over Austria, Hungary, and the Balkans (6.7 per cent), and 218,873 tons over other countries (7.9 per cent).<sup>27</sup>

Another factor was accuracy. Even by 1943, after the United States had joined the European war with newer technology, the average circular error for any bomb dropped meant that only 16 per cent of bombs fell within 300 metres of the targeted point. To put it another way, in 1941, American planners determined that it would take 220 bombers just to hit a 100 square metre target from a height of 7,000 metres, and that was not even a 100 per cent probability!<sup>28</sup> Clearly, high-altitude American and British heavy bombers were not suitable, and even if they had been used, they could have killed and wounded many inmates of Auschwitz between 1941 and 1944.

If one were to step into the shoes of the Polish government-in-exile or any of the Allies who knew that bombing was not feasible from Britain, then the questions to be posed are whether there were alternatives and, if so, why they were not used. That leads to examining bombing from the Soviet Union or the sabotage of railways by the Polish resistance. The latter might well even have had an advantage over bombing for another reason. Sabotage could be sustained literally on a nightly basis, whereas bombing either of the crematoria or railways would have been dependent on weather conditions. These two options are examined in the next sections, yet the conclusions are that there is no evidence that the Polish resistance ever attempted sabotage, or

23 Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939–1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 79.

24 Norman Longmate, *The Bombers: The RAF Offensive Against Germany 1939–1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), 131, 393.

25 Alan J. Levine, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940–1945* (New York: Greenwood, 1992), 4–16.

26 Paul Martin, *Invisibles vainqueurs: exploits et sacrifice de l'Armée de l'air en 1939–1940* (Paris: Y. Michelet, 1990), 345.

27 Claudia Baldoli and Andrew Knapp, *Forgotten Blitzes: France and Italy under Allied Air Attack, 1940–1945* (New York: A&C Black, 2012), 2.

28 United States of America, Secretary of War, "The United States Strategic Bombing Survey Summary Report (European War)", ANESI accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.anesi.com/ussbs02.htm>.

that the Polish government-in-exile in London ever proposed this alternative to the Allies, or that the Allies ever contemplated this tactic. There is also no evidence of bombing from Soviet air bases being contemplated.

### The Soviet (Non-)Bombing of Auschwitz

The alternative to mitigate the factor of distance from Britain to Poland could have been Soviet involvement. Soviet airbases were the closest and in range of the whole of Poland. Soviet airfields were in range, as seen from the Soviet bombing in 1942 of targets further afield, including Berlin, Helsinki, Budapest, Bucharest, and the German-occupied Polish cities of Kraków and Warsaw. Theoretically, then, it would have been possible for American and British bombers to have used these to bomb targets in Poland, including Auschwitz.<sup>29</sup>

There was only one documented case of cooperation between the three air forces, and this was from June to September 1944. Operation Frantic was a series of seven shuttle bombing operations in which American aircraft flew from Britain and Italy to Soviet airfields in Ukraine and bombed enroute back to their bases.<sup>30</sup> Britain's RAF did not participate in Operation Frantic. Nazi death camps were not the targets.<sup>31</sup>

There is no clear and definite reason and rationale for the lack of further cooperation between the three air forces, other than that the political relations between the Allies including the Soviets, and Polish government-in-exile were strained. A reason for this was exemplified in April 1943, when the Germans announced that they had discovered at Katyn Wood, near Smolensk, Russia, the mass graves of 10,000 Polish officers. A German investigation proclaimed that this included 4,443 bodies of persons who had been taken prisoner in 1939 and murdered by the Soviets.<sup>32</sup>

Another example is that, during 1943 and 1944, the Allied leaders, particularly Winston Churchill, tried to bring about talks between Soviet leader Joseph Stalin and the Polish government-in-exile regarding the future of Poland independence after the Second World War. However, these efforts broke down over several matters. The government-in-exile's refusal to accept the proposed new Polish borders infuriated the Allies, particularly Churchill.<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding the strained Soviet and Polish relations, this should not theoretically have prevented direct Soviet military action against the Nazi death camps, with or without an American or British request. One reason for this lack of action could have been explained after the Second World War, when Soviet Marshal Vasili Sokolovsky revealed that the Soviets would have gladly launched a strategic bombing offensive against Germany (without mentioning the Holocaust) had they had the capability. Soviet aircraft, such as the U-2, Pe-8, II-2, II-4, Su-2, Tu-2, Yak-2, and Yak-4, were even more inaccurate than their American and British counterparts and their bomb payload was insufficient.<sup>34</sup>

29 Horst Boog and Derry Cook-Radmore, *Germany and the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25–33.

30 Mark Conversino, *Fighting with the Soviets: The Failure of Operation Frantic* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 53–57.

31 John Deane, *The Strange Alliance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1946), 17.

32 Janusz. K. Zawodny, *Death in the Forest* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2016), 51.

33 Anna M. Cienciala, "The Foreign Policy of the Polish Government-in-Exile, 1939–1945: Political and Military Realities Versus Polish Psychological Reality", in *Reflections on Polish Foreign Policy*, eds. John S. Micgiel and Piotr S. Wandycz (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 103–124.

34 Vasily. D. Sokolovsky, *Military Strategy* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 183.



## The Mosquito Aircraft

Adding to the examination over the lack of Allied aerial bombing against the death camps is the progress of the Second World War. For example, by April 1944 the debate on heavy bombers – be they American or British, with direct Soviet involvement or the use of Soviet bases – would have been obsolete. On 4 April 1944, a British-manufactured photographic reconnaissance (PR) version of the Mosquito II aircraft of the South African Air Force 60 Squadron took the first photographic evidence of the mass murdering by gas of civilians, mainly Jews at Auschwitz. The squadron had, since February 1943, been serving with British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery in North Africa. In May 1943, it was sent to Italy to carry out large-scale photographic surveys of parts of Sicily and other Axis-held areas, eventually ranging over the Alps and deep into Austria and Germany.<sup>35</sup>

On 4 April 1944, it flew out of Foggia base in southern Italy to photograph the IG Farben factory in Monowitz (Auschwitz III). The photographs showed rows of people lined up, plus smoking chimneys of the crematoria and other characteristics that could only have led to an analysis concluding that it was a death camp. The South African Mosquito planes further photographed the factory and parts of the camp complex on 31 May, 26 June, 25 August, and 8 September. There was no bombing of Auschwitz despite having such intelligence data.<sup>36</sup>

The Mosquito aircraft had entered service in July 1941 and, by October that year, was photographing enemy harbours with microscopic details in France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway.<sup>37</sup> The pilot would operate the camera himself with a push-button control.<sup>38</sup> As time progressed, the camera was also improved from the Williamson F.24 to the F.52 (1942) and then to the F.63 versions. The F.52, for example, used an image format of 8.5"×7" with magazines up to 500 exposures.<sup>39</sup> The first versions of Mosquito had a range of 4,040 kilometres, and by October 1942 this had been extended to 4,720 kilometres.<sup>40</sup>

At the time, this was not far enough to operate over Poland as the distance from London to Auschwitz II is 2,726 kilometres one way.<sup>41</sup> However, as seen by the photographic mission of 4 April 1944, the progress of the Second World War meant that, by then, Italy was in Allied hands and targets over Poland were in range. While the inaccuracy of American and British heavy bombers was still a relevant factor to be considered, this was not the case for the Mosquito. The Mosquito could be deployed in multiple roles, including bombing. The bomber version could have been used to accurately bomb any target in Auschwitz. The Mosquito had a record of accurate attacks against small targets such as tanks, trains, motor transport, and buildings, as well U-boats (submarines) and other surface ships.<sup>42</sup>

35 "South African Air Force 60 Squadron", South African Air Force, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://www.saairforce.co.za/the-airforce/squadrons/12/60-squadron>.

36 Yad Vashem, "Aerial Photographs of Auschwitz".

37 "Mosquito Guns and Camera", YouTube, accessed 1 June 2024, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmY99s-nA\\_po](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmY99s-nA_po).

38 Roy Conyers Nesbit, *Eyes of the RAF* (Hampshire: Sutton Publishing, 1996), 23–31.

39 "Mosquito Camera," Web Archive, accessed 1 June 2024, [https://web.archive.org/web/20120619010722/http://www.airreccce.co.uk/cameras/raf\\_ww2\\_cameras.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20120619010722/http://www.airreccce.co.uk/cameras/raf_ww2_cameras.html).

40 Martin Bowman, *Mosquito Photo-Reconnaissance Units of World War 2* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1999), 46–51.

41 Phillip Birtles, *De Havilland Mosquito: The Original Multirole Combat Aircraft* (Surrey: Fonthill Media, 2017), 24.

42 David Boyd, "Airborne Rockets Used by the British During WWII", accessed 1 June 2024, [http://www.wwi-equipment.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=98:airborne-rockets-used-by-the-british-during-wwii&catid=44:gunsrockets&Itemid=60](http://www.wwi-equipment.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=98:airborne-rockets-used-by-the-british-during-wwii&catid=44:gunsrockets&Itemid=60).

This bombing accuracy of the Mosquito was demonstrated on 30 January 1943, the tenth anniversary of Hitler being made chancellor of Germany and the Nazis gaining power. That morning, Mosquito aircraft attacked and knocked out the main Berlin broadcasting station while the chief of the German Air Force (Luftwaffe), Command-in-Chief Hermann Göring, was speaking, taking his speech off the air. Its armaments were accurate and deadly. It could carry a cannon gun firing twenty-five shells in twenty seconds or an offensive load of up to 910 kilograms of bombs, or eight RP-3 unguided rockets (with a twenty-seven-kilogram warhead).<sup>43</sup> Another example of its accuracy was seen on 18 February 1944 in the raid on Amiens prison as part of Operation Jericho. It was able to destroy the German guardhouse, breach the exterior walls, and free prisoners by putting holes in the cell-block walls.<sup>44</sup>

The focus of the debate and examination is not then solely one of range, capability, and accuracy. Clearly, by 1944, Auschwitz was within bombing range by the Mosquito, which could have undertaken the mission to destroy the crematoria. The examination needs to point to Allied decision makers and their intentions or lack thereof. To be sure, intelligence sources show that by the time Auschwitz had been liberated on 27 January 1945, the Allies had photographed it at least thirty times. That was not just by the South Africans, but also by the USAAF on 8 July by a F-5 Lightning plane from the 5<sup>th</sup> Photographic Reconnaissance Group operating from Bari, Italy. They also flew over the Auschwitz area on 29 November, 21 December, and finally on 14 January 1945 – only two weeks before the liberation of the camp by the Soviet Army. The photos were stored at the Mediterranean Allied Photo Reconnaissance Wing in Italy, which was commanded by American president Franklin D. Roosevelt's son, Colonel Elliott Roosevelt. Some photos even showed inmates being marched to the gas chambers.<sup>45</sup>

Adding to these photos are other intelligence sources. Also, on 7 April 1944, two escapees from Auschwitz (Walter Rosenberg, aged nineteen, and Fred Wetzler, aged twenty-five) brought eye-witness accounts of Nazi activities there, including the scale of the mass slaughter of Jews.<sup>46</sup> In mid-June 1944, information from the Vrba-Wetzler report arrived in London. They were two Slovakian Jewish prisoners who had escaped Auschwitz and provided eyewitness accounts. Thereafter, there was Swiss press coverage of the report, and some details began appearing in American and British newspapers in June 1944.<sup>47</sup>

That leaves the bottom line of this section showing Auschwitz as being in range of the Allied forces, with the Mosquito aircraft being capable of bombing it, and with both eye-witness accounts and photographic evidence by April 1944. Yet, there are no documents of any intended action by the Allies. It is doubtful if a decision to bomb Auschwitz was ever contemplated. For example, in a memo written in late June 1944 after the D-Day invasion, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the supreme allied commander in Europe, listed the targets that the Allied air forces should bomb in order of importance. First were the Nazi V-1 and V-2 rocket launch sites aimed at

43 John Batchelor and Malcolm Low, *de Havilland Mosquito Manual (Plane Essentials)* (Melbourne: Publishing Solutions, 2008), 7–9.

44 Adam L. K. Wey, "Special Operations by Air Power: Strategic Lessons from World War II", *Air Power History* 64, no.1 (2017): 33–40.

45 Rondall Ricem, "Bombing Auschwitz: US 15<sup>th</sup> Air Force and the Military Aspects of a Possible Attack", *War in History* 6, no.2 (1999): 205–229.

46 Jonathan Freedland, "The Men Who Escaped Auschwitz to Try to Warn the World", *Time Magazine*, 29 December 2021, 76.

47 "Document Feature: Vrba-Wetzler Report and the Auschwitz Protocols", Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.fdrlibrary.org/vrba-wetzler-report>.

Britain, and the factories that the rockets were manufactured in. The next priorities were “a. Aircraft industry; b. Oil; c. Ball bearings; d. Vehicular production”. Bombing Auschwitz was not even a consideration.<sup>48</sup> Added to this is the view of historians that, even if Stalin had been requested to bomb Auschwitz or permit the use of his airfields to do so, he would have refused, not only because of antisemitism, but also due to a complicated shift in the Soviet Union’s nationalities policy.<sup>49</sup>

## Intelligence and the Polish Resistance

The above debate and examination in this article has taken the assumption that the Americans and British only knew the true nature of Auschwitz from April 1944, and that even if they had known about it before, any decision not to bomb it would have been based on the tactical infeasibility of range and accuracy. It has also taken the assumption that there could have been no excuse for not having bombed Auschwitz after April 1944, nor for not having used Soviet airbases. That leads to this section that examines the intelligence surrounding the watershed date of April 1944. It poses the question: was April 1944 the first time that the true nature – the mass killing of Jews – of Auschwitz was revealed? That is the watershed date taken by Sir Martin Gilbert. This article contends the true nature was known well before this.

As a start in sustaining such a view, it must be noted that Polish intelligence was so excellent that it famously smuggled information to the Allies about the Nazis’ secret weapon, the V2 Rocket, and even broke the Nazi secret Enigma code before the Second World War.<sup>50</sup> Further, it is estimated that, in total, some 45,770 intelligence reports from occupied Europe were processed by the Allies, of which 48 per cent were from Polish sources. There was clearly no lack of Polish intelligence capability nor in the quantity and quality of data that it provided to the Allies.<sup>51</sup>

To be sure, when examining the intelligence provided by the Polish resistance and the requests by the government-in-exile for the bombing Auschwitz from 1941, they passed on constant evidence of Nazi Holocaust activities there throughout. Chronologically, there is a list of forty-five reports from the Polish resistance detailing Nazi actions against Jews in Auschwitz that reached the Allies from March 1941.<sup>52</sup>

One of the first reports was from Witold Pilecki, a Polish patriot who volunteered to be imprisoned in Auschwitz. It arose when the Polish resistance wanted to know what had befallen two of Pilecki’s fellow resistance fighters. On 19 September 1940, Pilecki deliberately joined a group of men being arrested by Nazis in Warsaw. His first report from Auschwitz I was sent to the Polish government-in-exile in London in May 1941 through Lieutenant (Res.) Karol Świątorzecki, as he was being released from the camp. They passed it onto the Allies. Pilecki appealed to the Allies to bomb Auschwitz and end the “monstrous torture” that was taking place there. The report was forwarded to the highest levels of the British military. Sir Charles Portal, chief of the British Air Staff, warned that any raids on Auschwitz “avowedly conducted

48 Brent Douglas Dyck, “Why Didn’t Allies Bomb Auschwitz?”, *Warfare History Network*, last modified 25 January 2021. [https://www.realclearhistory.com/2021/01/25/why\\_didnt\\_allies\\_bomb\\_auschwitz\\_657641.html](https://www.realclearhistory.com/2021/01/25/why_didnt_allies_bomb_auschwitz_657641.html).

49 Danny Orbach and Mark Solonin, “Calculated Indifference: The Soviet Union and Requests to Bomb Auschwitz”, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27, no. 1 (2013): 90–113.

50 “Polish Intelligence 1939–1945, Poland in Exile”, Poland in Exile, accessed 1 June 2024, <http://www.poland-inexile.com/intelligence.html>.

51 Kochanski, *The Eagle Unbowed*, 23–33.

52 Rogers, “British Intelligence and the Holocaust”, 89–106.

on account of the Jews would be an asset to enemy propaganda” and declined to act.<sup>53</sup>

Further reports were passed on to his superiors in Warsaw either via inmates working in the laundry department, or through released inmates. These were dated December 1941, January 1942, May 1942, June, and July 1942. From Warsaw, these reports were sent on to Britain through the intelligence cell “Anna” which was based in Sweden. To these were added reports by, for example, Auschwitz escapees Wincenty Gawron and Stefan Bielecki (16 May 1942), and Eugeniusz Bender, Kazimierz Piechowski, and Stanisław Jaster (20 June 1942).<sup>54</sup>

Another detailed report was from Jan Karski (Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations), a courier who risked his life to bring information about the Nazi’s extermination of Jews to the Allies. Karski once said that “[t]he Lord assigned me a role to speak and write during the war when, as it seemed to me, it might help. It did not”. In October 1942, he delivered a report to the Polish government-in-exile in London, but to no avail.<sup>55</sup>

The Polish government-in-exile was not silent. For example, in November 1942, it informed the Allies that tens of thousands of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war were shipped to Auschwitz “for the sole purpose of their immediate extermination in gas chambers”.<sup>56</sup> This news that “trainloads of adults and children [were] taken to great crematoriums” was published in *The New York Times* newspaper.<sup>57</sup>

On 17 December 1942, following this mounting evidence of transportation and mass killing, British foreign secretary Anthony Eden read in the House of Commons the United Nations Declaration, including that the German authorities were “carrying into effect Hitler’s oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe”.<sup>58</sup> Yet, there is no documented evidence of any action being taken to prevent or stop this.

Given this mounting data, some made public, and the political declarations, it is hard to imagine that any intelligence analyst in the Allied forces or the Polish resistance could ever have claimed that the topic did not need further investigation. Following this view, the watershed for intelligence data and knowledge of the true nature of Auschwitz could well have been April 1943. Then, Witold Pilecki, along with Jan Radziej and Edward Ciesielski, escaped from Auschwitz II. Pilecki prepared the most important document, “Report W”, in which he described the situation in the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, including numerous hand-written plans. The intelligence was so detailed that it led the Directorate of Civilian Resistance in Poland to report that people had their prison number tattooed, were being gassed in the chambers, and were being burned in a crematorium. It suggested that over 1.5 million people had been brought to the Auschwitz

53 Gillian Brockell, “The Polish Hero Who Volunteered to Go to Auschwitz – and Warned the World about the Nazi Death Machine”, *The Washington Post*, 26 January 2020, 12.

54 Witold Pilecki, *Report WKL Auschwitz 1940–1943* (Warsaw: Institute of National Remembrance, Pilecki Project Committee, 2023), 1–23.

55 “Jan Karski (Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations)”, Yad Vashem, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/karski.html>.

56 David Cesarani and Sarah Kavanaugh, *Holocaust: Responses to the Persecution and Mass Murder of the Jews* (New York: Psychology Press, 2004), 190.

57 Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, “Document Feature: Vrba-Wetzler Report and the Auschwitz Protocols”.

58 “17 December 1942: Declaration on the Persecution of the Jews”, Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, accessed 1 June 2024, <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/17-december-1942-declaration-on-the-persecution-of-the-jews/#:~:text=The%20then%20Foreign%20Secretary%2C%20Anthony,a%20spontaneous%20moment%20of%20silence.&text=Eden%20read%20to%20the%20House,Jews%20in%20Nazi%20occupied%20Europe.>

camp by March 1943. Most of those people were Jews. Nobody acted on this information.<sup>59</sup>

An important quote from “Report W” to show that by 1943, and not April 1944 as contended by Sir Martin Gilbert, the true nature of Auschwitz was known is:

[i]n Warsaw, on 23 October 1943, through “Jeż” I was able to contact the Deputy of “233” (presumably it was First Lieutenant Colonel Jerzy Uszycki, since July 1942 Head of Signals with the Department V at the Armia Krajowa [AK] Headquarters, Chief of AK Corps of Signals and Deputy Chief of Department V at the AK Headquarters), I presented Auschwitz issues to. Later on, on 29 October 1943, as ordered by the Deputy of “233”, I thoroughly discussed all Auschwitz issues, including planning a military intervention there, with an operations officer “233” – nom de guerre “Zygmunt”, “Wilk”. The response from him was as follows: “After the war I will show you how thick are the Auschwitz files in our archives.” When I suggested that the thickness of these files brings no relief to Auschwitz inmates, “Zygmunt” – “Wilk” responded: “I can assure you that we will contact you as soon as this matter becomes live. Witold.”<sup>60</sup>

Another report, from a Polish agent codenamed Wanda, was given to the American military attaché in London in January 1944. She claimed that “[c]hildren and women are put into cars and lorries and taken to gas chambers.”<sup>61</sup>

Adding to this intelligence data, on 21 March 1944, the Polish Ministry of Information released a report to the Associated Press that could not have been more explicit in stating that “more than 500,000 persons, mostly Jews, had been put to death at a concentration camp” – Auschwitz. The report stated that most had been killed in gas chambers, “but since the supply of gas was limited some persons are not dead when they are thrown into the crematorium.”<sup>62</sup>

This information about Auschwitz that was distributed by the Polish government-in-exile in London to the Allies was in part also published in the *Jewish Chronicle* (New Jersey, United States), the *Polish Jewish Observer* (exile in London), and by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (New York, United States), for instance.<sup>63</sup> More lengthy published reports, with evidence that the Polish government-in-exile in London provided to the Allies on the nature of the internment and extermination of Jews and others, was published. This included, for example: (1) German camps (Auschwitz, Oranienburg, Mauthausen, and Dachau) described in “The Polish White Book” (New York, 1941); (2) Halina Krahelska’s report “Auschwitz Oświęcim, pamiętnik więźnia” (Auschwitz: Diary of a Prisoner: 1942) and (3) “The Mass Extermination of Jews in German Occupied Poland”, a paper issued by the Polish government-in-exile addressed to the United Nations in 1942.<sup>64</sup>

Such details about the constant provision and flow of intelligence data leads to the conclusion that the Allied policymakers, and the Polish government-in-exile

59 Pilecki, *Report WKL Auschwitz 1940–1943*, 25.

60 *Ibid.*, 70.

61 Richard Breitman, “Allied Knowledge of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943–1944”, in *Roosevelt and the Holocaust: How FDR Saved the Jews and Brought Hope to a Nation*, ed. R. L. Beir (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), 175–182.

62 David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York: Plunkett Lake Press, 2019), 67.

63 *Jewish Chronicle*, “Failed to Report the Atrocities”, PressReader, 23 January 2015, <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-jewish-chronicle/20150123/281741267817392>.

64 Enrique Aynat, “Auschwitz and the Exile Government of Poland According to the ‘Polish Fortnightly Review’ 1940–1945”, *The Journal of Historical Review* 11, no. 3 (1991): 281–319.

and resistance in Poland, are guilty. There was no failure in the gathering of intelligence or the presentation of it to the public or to the Allied powers. There was a failure to act, and to pressure and to galvanise against a genocide, the Holocaust. That is not to say that the Polish resistance did not do something against the Nazis. There was some involvement, for example, in the Warsaw Uprising of Jews against the Nazis in 1944.

### Railway (Non-)Sabotage

This article has so far shown a direct link between the Polish resistance, Second World War intelligence, the Polish government-in-exile, and to information on the Holocaust as it was happening in real time. This section turns to consider whether the Polish resistance knew about the Allies' decisions not to bomb, if it should have been the one to act with alternative means, and whether it had the capability to do so. The bottom line is that, while there is no indication that Allied decisions about bombing were ever conveyed to the Polish resistance, there is no reason why they could not have undertaken railway sabotage, for example, as an alternative. There is no indication that this was discussed by the Polish government-in-exile with the Allies.

A point on capability is provided by historian Norman Davies who wrote that "[t]he Polish Home Army was perhaps the most extraordinary of all the world's war-time resistance movements". Its strength lay not only in its numbers but also in the breadth of its operations, which included everything from intelligence gathering and sabotage to full-scale military operations.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore, the historian Gordon L. Rottman noted that "railroad sabotage was one of the most frequent partisan activities in all theatres of the war".<sup>66</sup>

This, then, leads to the observation that sabotaging the railway to Auschwitz was feasible but a notable exception in not having been implemented. There is no evidence to indicate that the railway lines to Auschwitz that brought not only the victims but also supplies, including gas, were in any way targeted by the Polish resistance or considered by the Allies and the Polish government-in-exile at any stage. So, while blame could be levelled at the American, British, and Soviet allies for not bombing Auschwitz, additional blame must be levelled at the Polish resistance for not sabotaging the railways.

Railway sabotage was one of the main tactics used by the resistance to German occupation throughout Europe during the Second World War.<sup>67</sup> In 1993, Marek Ney-Krwawicz counted approximately 2,900 acts of railway-related sabotage in Poland in the period from 1941 to 1944. The total losses suffered by Polish railways included the destruction of 38 per cent of railway lines, 46 per cent of bridges, 50 per cent of tunnels, 37 per cent of railway buildings, 6,000 steam locomotives, and over 60,000 wagons.<sup>68</sup>

The sabotage started in earnest when, on 22 June 1941, the commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces in exile, General Władysław Sikorski, ordered the chief commander of the Union of Armed Struggle (the Polish resistance), General Stefan

65 Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78.

66 Gordon L. Rottman, *World War II Allied Sabotage Devices and Booby Traps* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 88.

67 Krzysztof Komorowski, *Boje polskie 1939–1945: przewodnik encyklopedyczny* (Warsaw: Bellona, 2009), 44.

68 Kolejnictwopolskie, "History of Railways, Railways During World War II".

Grot-Rowecki, to intensify sabotage and subversion activities. The reason was that close to 100 per cent of the German supplies to the Eastern Front lines passed through Polish territories.<sup>69</sup>

At first, this sabotage was uncoordinated and done by individual workers, and included simple delays, misdirecting and misrouting trains, arson, and damage to wagon traction or brakes.<sup>70</sup> This escalated with the pouring of sand into wagon grease tanks, the replacement of address stickers on wagons, and the assignment of double numbers to wagons after repairs. Railway men also provided enormous support in organising the illegal deliveries of foodstuffs to cities, and in conspiring to carry mail, courier mail, or hidiers.<sup>71</sup>

By the summer of 1942, this sabotage was well organised and coordinated, and of daily frequency and intensity. For example, the largest achievement of the Warsaw District Union of Retaliation was Operation *Wieniec* (Garland) on the night of 7 and 8 October 1942, during which the rails surrounding Warsaw were blown up. Operation *Bariera* (Barrier) interrupted railway traffic simultaneously at ninety-two points nationwide. The numbers of attacks thereafter quadrupled or more between 1942 and 1943. For example, Warsaw had 25 acts of railway sabotage attacks in 1942 compared with 138 in 1943. There were several notable acts of railway sabotage outside of Polish territories, such as in Germany and Belarus in 1942.<sup>72</sup>

According to German reports, the Polish resistance carried out approximately 600 attacks on railway infrastructure throughout the country in 1942 and 1943. Krzysztof Komorowski notes that the acts of sabotage intensified, and by 1944 and 1945 there were over 2,000 attacks. By that stage, the Polish Home Army had over 400,000 members.<sup>73</sup>

Despite this intensity and frequency, there is no evidence to show that the railways to Auschwitz were affected. It appears that the Polish railway workers simply carried on, and the Polish resistance did not stop the railway transport of Jews in cattle wagons on a one-way journey from all over Nazi-occupied Europe to be gassed to death at Auschwitz. For example, in the “Shoah Interview with a Polish Railway worker Henryk Gawkowski”, the locomotive conductor at the Treblinka death camp station, Gawkowski, estimates that he transported approximately 18,000 Jews to that death camp without undertaking any sabotage.<sup>74</sup>

Putting into perspective the lack of the Polish resistance’s sabotage of railways to slow down or halt the Holocaust, it should be noted that the rest of Europe was no different. The Flemish village of Boortmeerbeek is notable for being the only place in Europe where a train transport of Jews was stopped by resistance fighters, on 19 April 1943. Out of a train, Transport XX (20), holding 1,631 Jews, the Belgian Resistance Movement helped 17 people to flee, while a further 219 jumped from the wagons. Of the 236 people who escaped, 91 of them were recaptured and put on the next transport to Auschwitz, 25 were killed either while escaping or shortly afterwards, and

69 Komorowski, *Boje polskie 1939–1945*, 45.

70 David T. Zabecki, “Sabotage” in *World War II in Europe*, ed. David T. Zabecki (London: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 1256.

71 Stanisław Kania, *Polska gwara konspiracyjno-partyzancka, 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1986), 130.

72 Komorowski, *Boje polskie 1939–1945*, 47.

73 Richard J. Crampton, *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1994), 197–198.

74 “Henryk Gawkowski and Treblinka Railway Workers”, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Film Digitized Accession Number: 1996.166 RG Number: RG-60.5036 Film ID: 3362, 3363, 3364, 3365, 3366, 3367, 3818, 3743, 3744, 3368, 3370, 3371, 3372, accessed 1 June 2024, [https://collections.ushmm.org/film\\_findings/gaids/RG-60.5036\\_01\\_trl\\_en.pdf](https://collections.ushmm.org/film_findings/gaids/RG-60.5036_01_trl_en.pdf).

120 succeeded in their bid for freedom. This action is a unique fact in the history of the Holocaust. Nowhere else in Nazi-occupied Europe was such an action undertaken on a transport of Jews to a death camp.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

The examination conducted in this article has included sources on the Holocaust and those on the Second World War. It has linked the study of the two historical topics into one, by focusing on intelligence data and the lack of action. This focus on intelligence has determined that the Polish government-in-exile knew throughout the war about the true nature of Auschwitz, and it passed this data on to the Allied powers and the media. Clearly, there was knowledge of what was happening in Auschwitz from the earliest days and throughout the war: the Polish government-in-exile requested action, but the Allies did not act, and nor did the Polish resistance.

A summary of the examination is that, even when the Allies knew about the mass killings of civilians, mainly Jews, at Auschwitz, they did not have the bombing capability – the range and accuracy – until 1944. The option of Soviets airbases was never considered, the Soviets lacked the bombing capability, and there were disputes between the Allies including the Soviets, and the Polish. From April 1944, both aerial reconnaissance and eye-witness accounts provided exact details of the Holocaust, and the Mosquito aircraft could have accurately bombed the crematorium in Auschwitz. There is no evidence that this was considered by the Allied powers. If it had been, then Auschwitz might have ceased to function at least a year earlier. How many thousands of lives could have been saved?

There was a significantly large amount of intelligence gathered by the Polish resistance and supplied to the Polish government-in-exile in London and the Allies and carried by the media. This intelligence data made public after the Second World War substantiates the popular mindset of the callous indifference to, or even complicity in, the crimes that the Nazis committed. This point is exemplified by that of railway sabotage. There is no evidence that this tactic was ever contemplated by the Allies or the Polish resistance with regards to the railways to Auschwitz.

That just leaves one point for the bottom line, that is, from the writings of Sir Martin Gilbert's work on Auschwitz arguing that the West was unaware of the true nature of Auschwitz Birkenau until 1944. From at least 1942, as examined in this paper, one plus one would have equalled two for even the lowest level of intelligence analyst, not to mention more seasoned politicians or military leaders, if they had been interested. For example, necessities such as food, clothing or heating were not being transported to Auschwitz to meet the most basic needs of the number of mainly Jews who were being transported there. Millions of civilians simply disappeared! There were no graves, and the smoke coming from the chimneys of crematoria showed that these were operating. So why did no Polish resistance or Allied intelligence analyst ask what was happening?

Typical of both political and military thinking, and in meetings behind the scenes, then and even today, is the argument and opinion that nothing could be done, or even if something were done that it would be too little, and so nothing was

<sup>75</sup> "Who Stopped the 19 April 1943 Train to Auschwitz?", *Discovering Belgium*, last modified 19 April 2020. <https://www.discoveringbelgium.com/april-19-1943-train-auschwitz/>.



done. Then and now the proposals of optimists, those who argue that something should be done, are rarely even considered. Following such a line of “group think”, bombing by Mosquito aircraft, for example, would not even have been on the agenda. Even if it had been on the agenda, railway sabotage or even an uprising would have been weighed against due concerns for the possible consequences, such as repression against the population at large. Clearly, the order never came to even try.

To conclude, then, it would be fair to concur with Sir Martin Gilbert’s opinion: that Britain – and even more so the Polish resistance – should and could have done more to stop the horrors of Auschwitz. Clearly, the intelligence reports and requests by the Polish government-in-exile from 1941 to 1944, and the aerial reconnaissance and eye-witness accounts from 1944, were ignored. Those guilty are clearly more than the Nazis. How could anyone, especially intelligence analysts, ever claim that they never knew or even never contemplated at least in passing the true nature – the mass killing of civilians – of Auschwitz?

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