

## Answer Key

# Witold Pilecki – The Unsung Hero of WWII Intelligence

## Lesson Plan 1: Under the German Nazi Occupation

*(for homework or in class the previous day)*

### *Activity B*

1. What is the common perception of the initial years of World War II in the countries of Western Europe and the United States?
  2. What did the German and Soviet attacks on Poland in 1939 mean to the Poles?
  3. What was the Warsaw Uprising (August 1, 1944-October 2, 1944)?
  4. What is Witold Pilecki's attitude toward his report?
  5. What did he focus on after escaping the concentration camp?
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1. The beginning of World War II, between September 1939 (German and Soviet attacks on Poland) and Hitler's invasion of the Low Countries in May 1940, is described as the so-called phony war with little military action on the Western Front. After Poland was attacked by Germany on September 1, 1939, Poland's allies, the United Kingdom and France, failed to meet their legal, diplomatic, and military obligations. They did declare war on Germany on September 3, 1939, but no substantial military action followed. This encouraged the Soviet attack on Poland on September 17, 1939 (in line with the secret clause of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact). Because of the slow beginning of World War II and the fact that the initial invasion of the Nazis took place in Eastern Europe, the phony war (in Western Europe) can be perceived as a period of increased hostility, not a war. For the United States, who joined World War II on December 8, 1941, after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the significance of September 1939 can be even more obscure.
  2. The Poles generally perceived that aggression as the "fourth partition of Poland." Previously fueled by the Polish pre-war government propaganda, Poland had high hopes that it could defeat the Germans. But once the Soviets attacked, they lost all hope of victory. Lack of military action on the part of Poland's allies came as a shock and has remained a national trauma today. That shock lingers in official historic narratives and constitutes a point of reference for many Polish officials in their perception of international relations. In terms of battle-preparedness of the Polish populace and their attitude toward the Germans, the Poles were ready and willing to fight. However, their state, reborn only twenty-one years earlier, was targeted by two invasions and collapsed. Polish government officials and part of the military evacuated themselves through Romania, enabling the recreation of the Polish Armed Forces in the West and the Polish government-in-exile first in France and, after the fall of France, in the UK. Those members of the Polish military who stayed in Poland went underground and spontaneously started forming underground resistance organizations. After a while, the Polish government-in-exile managed to gain control over the process, leading to the unification of all the smaller underground outfits under the umbrella organization called the Home Army. Throughout the war, all the Poles—civilians, soldiers, and politicians alike—were fighting and hoping, not only for the destruction of the Nazi German regime, but also for the restoration of Poland and its 1939 borders, including the eastern half of the country annexed by the Soviet Union.

3. The Warsaw Uprising was an armed insurgence organized by the Home Army against the retreating German forces. The aim was to manifest to the world and the Red Army, quickly approaching Warsaw from the east, that there exists an independent Polish Home Army fighting to liberate Poland for the Poles. It enjoyed overwhelming support from the civilian population of the city, who paid the highest price for their struggle. Initially, the Poles were winning, but despite numerous pleas for help from the Polish government-in-exile, the Allied forces did not reinforce the insurgents. As the days went by, it became clear that the Germans were going to crush the modest Polish forces, who were valiant but poorly armed. Hitler decided to make Warsaw an example to the world and was adamant that the German troops keep fighting, erase the city, and eradicate its population from the earth. In the uprising, 16,000 Home Army soldiers were killed, while 6,000 were wounded. In addition, between 150,000 and 200,000 civilians died. After the uprising, retreating Germans were blowing up and burning whole districts of the city. When they finally left, 85% of pre-war Warsaw had been destroyed. Paradoxically enough, the concerns that dissuaded the Home Army Head Command from trying to liberate Auschwitz did not dissuade the Command from starting the uprising in Warsaw. In this way, the insurgents fought within the city borders for 63 days waiting for reinforcement from the outside, which never came. The weak and the sick could not be evacuated, so they died inside the city. A part of them were massacred in the mass executions organized as reprisals against the civilian population of Warsaw by the German troops (notably, the massacre of the Wola District, in which between 30,000 and 65,000 inhabitants of all ages and both sexes were murdered).
4. Witold Pilecki explained in the foreword of his report that the contents were not going to be a dry description of the events—despite the recommendations of the two other co-writers. He believed that including his personal feelings and thoughts in the narrative would increase the reporting value and help him to report on all the abominations he experienced and witnessed in the camp. Indeed, this more literary approach to reporting makes the document more personal and involving, and therefore easier to read. The experience of the concentration camp changed Pilecki's perception of society. He had an impression that most of the problems and aims people tend to focus on in their everyday lives are not serious, e.g., children playing. He appealed to those who would read his report to think more about their own lives and to battle falsity, hypocrisy, and self-interest masked by purported idealism, truth, or service to a higher cause.
5. Pilecki did his best to rally the support for an armed uprising of Auschwitz inmates. However, with time, he realized that this task was impossible due to a lack of external military support as well as medical help and refuge for the liberated prisoners in the event of the uprising's success.

## PSA (Primary Source Activity) [5 minutes]

A | Maps for this task are included on pages 22 and 23 of the Answer Key

B | Ask students about the legal conditions and Nazi laws toward the Polish citizens in those parts of the occupied zone. Were they different or similar to the Soviet policies in the Polish lands annexed by the Soviet Union?

Poland was a testing ground for the new German policies the National Socialist state authorities were planning to introduce in the countries they would conquer in Eastern Europe and possibly further east. The invasion of Poland thus occupies a critical place in the history of Nazi Germany's descent into mass murder and genocide. The evolution of the German military practice of eradicating political and ideological enemies—defined in racial-biological terms by National Socialism—did not begin in 1941 as has commonly been argued; it began in Poland and escalated in 1941 with the outbreak of the *Vernichtungskrieg* [War of Annihilation] against the Soviet Union and the beginning of brutal anti-partisan warfare in the Balkans.

It is important to properly explain the political context of the Nazi German attack on Poland. It is necessary to remember that Poland was overwhelmed by the Germans—not only as a result of German aggression from the west but also as a result of the passivity of her allies, France and the United Kingdom, and the treacherous attack of the Soviet Union from the east on September 17, 1939, when the Polish forces were in the process of regrouping in order to create another defense line near the Dniester River.

In political terms, Poland was divided between the two occupiers as stipulated by the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact. The border between the German occupation zone and the Soviet occupation zone was modified on September 28, 1939, when the two aggressors' armies, one advancing from the west and the other advancing from the east, met. When the USSR switched camps after the German invasion in 1941 and joined the Allies, Poland's government-in-exile found themselves in a very awkward political position. Although Soviet Russia became “the ally of our allies,” according to the term used by the Polish diplomats, its attack on eastern Poland, ensuing aggression toward the Polish military personnel and civilians, and finally incorporation of the eastern Polish provinces into USSR on October 22, 1939, by way of falsified plebiscites fostered skepticism among the Poles towards Stalin and his future plans.

In the German sphere of influence, a part of the occupied Polish lands was incorporated into the Third Reich by Hitler's decree on October 8, 1939. The other part was delineated as a separate administrative unit, called the General Government. In the long run, the lands incorporated into the Third Reich were to be cleared of the Poles, who were supposed to inhabit only the General Government, which was to become a source of primitive labor. Poles and Jews in the lands

directly incorporated into the German state were stripped of all rights and made subject to special laws. They were stripped of their properties, be it real estate or businesses, which were given to the German settlers who started coming to those areas. Poles gained status comparable to the serfs of the olden days with no right to leave their workplace. Their freedom of movement was restricted. Food was being rationed on the subsistence level while the payment of pensions and health insurance was stopped. Poles lost access to education other than a simple primary school, including only basic arithmetic and German language. Speaking Polish in public was forbidden, and Polish places of Catholic worship as well as institutions of higher learning and culture were closed or demolished. Polish Catholic clergy was subject to severe repressions. There was no equality of Poles and Germans before the law, with Poles being severely punished even for minute transgressions of German regulations. The death penalty was meted out frequently and out of proportion to alleged crimes. Forced resettlement of larger groups of population to the General Government was taking place and was stopped only due to increasing demand for skilled industrial labor in the Third Reich as the war continued. The aim was to root out Polishness in the incorporated lands as soon as possible.

### **The General Government was created by a Hitler's Decree of October 12.**

Designed as a gathering place of the Poles at the initial stage of German domination in Europe, the General Government was to become a reservoir of serf labor, doomed to extinction in the long run through biological degradation (hunger, overwork, and a marriage ban) and colonization or resettlement farther to the east as soon as the eastern lands were conquered. The Polish language and some institutions of the Polish state were retained and permitted for the primitive existence of the Poles. Among them were lower courts; a fiscal apparatus; police, city and country administrations; and three banks. Two charitable organizations, the Polish Red Cross and the Central Welfare Council, were allowed to operate. All the institutions of high culture and the Polish newspapers were closed or banned, but small theatres with pornographic elements (imposed by the Germans) as well as the so-called "reptile press" (primitive German propaganda newspapers in Polish targeted at the Polish audience) could function. However, to balance the greater extent of freedom allowed to the Poles in the General Government (General Governorate for the Occupied Polish Region), a terror apparatus was introduced to control them. Out of all the German-occupied lands in Europe, the highest concentration of Gestapo was in the General Government, with functionaries selected from among the most ruthless representatives of that force. The Gestapo was aided by various types of gendarmerie units, military intelligence, and criminal police, as well as a network of paid informants and *Volksdeutsche* (people of German roots, who officially rescinded their Polish nationality in favor of the German one by signing a *Volkslist*, a German legal document).

**The Nazi German and Soviet totalitarian regimes displayed disturbing similarity and turned out to use the same methods.**

The most important similarity was the policy of the extermination of the elite of the Polish nation in order to subjugate the remaining part of the nation more effectively and quickly. The extermination was carried out in a planned manner, with lists of the people to eradicate prepared already before the outbreak of the war. They entailed the nationally conscious and socially active, usually male, members of Polish communities: former participants of national insurgencies and border wars, local militia members, social activists, landowners, teachers and university professors, state and local government administration employees, intelligentsia, and Catholic priests. The families of those victims were next in line for extermination, carried out by way of mass deportations. Both regimes resorted to mass shootings of POWs, treating non-combatants as combatants, reprisals against the civilian population—including taking hostages from among the local population (men, women and children)—executions or mass executions of civilians, and confiscating their property or razing their homes.

At times, the two regimes employed different tactics to achieve the same goal. For instance, the Germans organized Sonderaktion Krakau to arrest all the professors of the Jagiellonian University and the Academy of Mining and Metallurgy at one meeting in Kraków called under a false pretense. Meanwhile, the changes introduced by the Russian and later Ukrainian authorities at the Lwów University of Stefan Batory were gradual and initially unassuming. The arrests among the cadre, when they finally came, took place outside the university at private homes. In general, the Nazi Germans seemed to be more overt, ruthless, and immediate in their actions to eradicate the Polish intelligentsia. The Soviets, in turn, went into more trouble to endow the actions aimed at the persecution of the Poles with a semblance of legality. Large operations targeted at whole segments of the Polish population (i.e., deportations to Siberia) were organized surreptitiously, as surprise was an important factor contributing to their success. At the same time, the scale of the most painful repressions toward the Polish civilians was greater under the Soviet occupation for practical reasons. The Germans were able to deport Poles from the lands incorporated into the Reich to the General Government—that is, still within the borders of former 2nd Polish Republic—while the Russians had at their disposal for deportations and forced labor the deadly and isolated vastness of Siberia.

### **ACTIVITY A** *[15 minutes]*

**A** | Descriptions for this task are included on pages 8–21 of the Answer Key

**B** | Ask students to work together to establish the correct order of daily activities. The schedule of the day is as follows. Descriptions of every point in the schedule are to be found on pages 8–21 of the answer key.

1. Wake-up routine
2. Morning warm beverage

3. Morning room cleaning routine
4. Morning roll-call
5. Morning formation of work units + murderous gymnastics as an alternative to work in a work unit
6. Carrying bricks before midday
7. Lunch and noon roll-call
8. Afternoon work unit formation + murderous gymnastics as an alternative to work in a work unit
9. Carrying bricks before evening roll call
10. Evening roll-call
11. Evening hygiene

### Wake-up routine (from Pilecki's report)

“The gong marked the start of each day, in the summer at 4:20 a.m., in the winter at 5:20 a.m. At that sound, which was an irrevocable order, we had to spring to our feet. We had to fold our blankets quickly, meticulously adjusting the edges. The straw-filled mattresses had to be carried to one end of the room, where the mattress-orderlies collected them in order to stack them into a pile. The blanket had to be returned to the blanket-orderlies upon leaving the room. We finished dressing already in the hallway. Everything was done hastily, in a rush, as ‘Bloody Alois’ [Alois Staller] would burst into the room, wielding a rod and shouting: ‘Fenster auf!’ Also, you had to hurry to stand in a long line to use the lavatory. During the first period there were no lavatories in the blocks. In the morning we had to run to several latrines, where very long queues would form, sometimes a hundred or two-hundred men. There were not enough seats. Inside, a *Kapo* armed with the usual rod would count to five—whoever failed to finish his business at the count of five received blows to the head. Many *Häftlings* [prisoners] fell into the hole. From the latrines we would rush to the few pumps available in the square (there were no *Waschraums* [washrooms] in the blocks during that first period). Several thousand people were supposed to wash there. It was impossible, naturally. You broke through to the pump and drew some water into your billycan. This was one more way designed to eliminate inmates under the guise of caring for hygiene. The same applied to doing unspeakable damage to the bodies of prisoners in latrines by forcing bodily functions on a count of five, as well as the nerve-wracking struggle at the pumps; indeed, the continuous rush and *Laufschritt* [double time], applied everywhere during the first period of the Lager.”

## Morning warm beverage

“From the pumps, everyone rushed to the side for the so-called coffee or tea. The hot liquid, delivered to the rooms in pots, was a rather weak imitation of these beverages. A regular *Häftling* never saw sugar. I noticed that some of the inmates, who had been here for several months, had swollen legs and faces. Physicians whom I asked about that said the swelling was due to excessive liquid intake. Either the kidneys or the heart were beginning to fail—an enormous effort of the body, coupled with the consumption of almost everything in liquid form: coffee, tea, AVO,\* and soup. I resolved to give up liquids that were not beneficial to me and stick to AVO and soups. Generally, you had to keep your whims and desires firmly in check. Some of us refused to give up hot liquids due to the cold. Things were even worse when it came to smoking because, during the first period, *Häftlings* had no money, as they were not allowed to write home at first. We had to wait a long time for that, and it took about three months for the reply to arrive. Whoever was unable to control himself and traded bread for cigarettes was digging his own grave. I knew a good deal of people like that—and they all brought their demise upon themselves. There were no graves. All the corpses were burnt in the newly built crematorium. Therefore, I was in no rush for the hot slurry, while others were pushing and shoving and getting themselves beaten up and kicked in the process. If a *Häftling* with swollen legs grabbed an opportunity to get better work and better food, he would recover, the swelling would go down, but irritating ulcers would form instead, oozing foul fluid and sometimes phlegmon, which was something I had never seen until then. By avoiding liquids, I fortunately managed to save myself from that.”

\* “AVO (*August Vodegel Osnabrück*) – the name of a German family company producing food concentrates. Food distribution for inmates in KL Auschwitz, especially in the camp’s first years, was tantamount to starvation rations. Officially, the prisoners received soup with meat three times a week and vegetable soup four times. In reality, the soup was a watery liquid, usually cooked on leftovers or products that had gone off. ‘Vegetable soup’ consisted of rutabaga with a small addition of barley groats, rye flour, and AVO concentrate. Sometimes the soup was barely the AVO concentrate, way more diluted than the recipe said. AVO soup was sometimes available in the camp canteen (of course, provided that a prisoner had money to buy it at all).”



## **Morning room cleaning routine**

“*Stubendienst* was already emptying the room with the help of his club, as the room had to be cleaned before the roll-call. In the meantime, the straw-filled mattresses and blankets were arranged according to the fashion in the block, and the blocks competed against one another in arranging the ‘bed linen.’ The floor had to be washed as well.”

## Morning roll-call

“The gong for the morning roll-call sounded at 5.45 a.m. At 6.00 a.m. everyone was standing in aligned rows (each block formed ten rows, which made counting easier). Everyone had to be present at the roll-call. If someone happened to be missing—not because he escaped, but, for example, some new arrival naïvely hid away or simply had overslept—and the numbers at the roll-call did not tally with the Lager registers—such a person was found, dragged out into the square, and almost always publicly killed. Sometimes the absentee was a *Häftling* who had hanged himself somewhere in the attic, or ‘went for the wires’\* precisely at the time of the roll-call—in such cases gunshots were ringing out from a sentinel in a watchtower and the prisoner was falling, riddled with bullets. Prisoners ‘went for the wires’ mostly in the morning, before a new day of the ordeal began. It happened less often before night-time, because it was a few-hours respite from the torture.

“The roll-call. We were standing in rows as straight as a wall (I had actually missed well-aligned Polish rows since the war of 1939), aligned with the help of a rod. We were mesmerized by the abhorrent scene that unfolded before us. The rows from Block 13 (according to the old numbering)—the SK (*Strafkompanie*) [penal work unit] were aligned by the block elder Krankenmann [Ernst Krankemann] in a radical manner—with a knife. At that time all the Jews, priests, and some of the Poles with proven infractions were sent to the SK. Krankenmann’s duty was to finish off the *Häftlings*, who were sent to him almost on a daily basis, as quickly as it was possible; this duty was well suited to this man’s character. If someone, by any chance, happened to lean forward a couple of centimetres too much, Krankenmann would stab him in the belly with a knife he kept up his right sleeve. Those, who moved back too much due to excessive caution, were stabbed in the kidneys by the butcher as he ran through the lines. The view of a collapsing man, kicking out his legs and moaning, was enough to evoke Krankenmann’s wrath. He would jump on the man’s chest, kick him in the kidneys, genitals, trying to finish him off as soon as possible—and to silence him.... Sights like these were enough to make us tremble as if electrocuted.

“Back then, I had one thought as I stood side-by-side with my fellow Poles: we were all united by the same wrath, with a desire for revenge. I felt that I was in an environment perfectly suited for getting on with my task, and I discovered a small glimmer of joy inside of me.... A moment later, however, I became frightened of losing my mind—joy, here?—that had to be madness.... I looked closely inward and now I definitely felt joy—mostly because I wanted to start my task, and so I did not break down. This was a psychological turning point for me. In an illness, one could perhaps say that the crisis has been averted. For now, however, I had to fight for my life with a great deal of effort.”

\* “‘To go for the wires’—in concentration camp slang: to decide to die. In the beginning, the fence wires of KL Auschwitz were not electrified. However, a ‘security zone’ was started several metres from the fence, and if any inmates entered that zone, guards on the watchtowers were authorized to shoot them. Often those who could no longer stand the harsh camp conditions and torture deliberately entered the security zone in order to be killed quickly and spared further torment. Later, when the fencing was doubled and the inner fence electrified, inmates died mostly by electrocution rather than by being shot.”

## Morning formation of work units

“The gong after the roll-call meant: ‘*Arbeitskommando formieren!*’ [‘Form the work units!’] Upon that signal, everyone ran to the formed *Kommandos*—work units whichever they thought were better. Back then there was still some chaos with the assignments (unlike later on, when everyone calmly approached the *Kommando* to which he was assigned as a number). The prisoners were running in all directions, crossing each other’s paths, while all the Kapos, block elders, and SS men took advantage of that, trying to trip them up, shove them, hit those who were running or falling with their rods, always kicking where it hurt the most. During those three days which I was to spend in the camp, expelled by Alois [Alois Staller] as punishment, I was working with the wheelbarrows, carrying gravel. Not having any particular *Kommando* in mind and simply not knowing which to join, I stood in one of the ‘fives’ in the ‘hundred,’ chosen for this work. It consisted mostly of fellow inmates from Warsaw. Numbers older than us, which meant people who had been imprisoned before us, those who somehow managed to survive—had already taken some of the more comfortable ‘jobs.’ We—inmates from Warsaw—were being decimated with various kinds of labour, sometimes forced to carry gravel from one pit to another and then back again. I found myself among those carrying gravel for the construction of the crematorium. We were building the crematorium for ourselves. The scaffolding around the chimney was rising higher and higher. With a wheelbarrow filled by *Vorarbeiter*s, toadies with no compassion for us, one had to move quickly, and while moving over wooden boards laid further on—run with the wheelbarrow. Every 15–20 steps there was a Kapo with a rod, hitting passers-by, shouting: ‘*Laufschritt!*’ You pushed the wheelbarrow up slowly. With an empty wheelbarrow, *Laufschritt* was obligatory for the entire length of the route. Muscles, eyes, and wits competed against one another in this struggle for survival. You had to have a lot of strength to push the wheelbarrow, to keep it from falling off the plank. You had to spot and use an opportune moment to take a breath and catch a second wind. This is where I saw how many of us, members of the intelligentsia, failed in those harsh, unforgiving conditions.

“Yes—it was a tough selection we had been going through back then. My past interest in sports and gymnastics turned out to be hugely beneficial for me at that point. An educated middle-class person, looking around helplessly or expecting help for having been a lawyer or an engineer, was always treated with a hard rod. Here, a pot-bellied lawyer or landowner ineptly trying to push the wheelbarrow would fall off the plank into the sand, unable to get it back on track. There, a helpless professor in his glasses or an elderly gentleman, would paint an equally pathetic picture. All those unfit for labour or those exhausted from running with a wheelbarrow were beaten, and if they happened to fall while pushing the wheelbarrow—killed by blows from a rod or a boot. At moments like these, taking advantage of another prisoner’s death, you stood there like an animal, trying to catch some breath, fill your overworked lungs, to calm the rhythm of a fast-beating

heart.... Luckily, we were not expected to pass by our predecessors under this order of the Third Reich.”

## **Lunch and noon roll-call**

“The gong for lunch, which, I think, was welcomed with joy by everyone in the camp, would sound at 11.20 a.m. Between 11.30 a.m. and noon, a roll-call would take place—usually pretty quickly, and from 12.00 p.m. to 1 p.m., it was time for lunch.”

## Afternoon work unit formation

“After lunch, another gong would tell us to return to our *Arbeitskommandos* and further torture would commence until the gong signaling the evening roll-call. I was working ‘with the wheelbarrows’ for three days. On the third day, after lunch, it seemed to me that I would never make it to the next gong. I was already exhausted, and I understood that once there was no one else weaker than me left for killing, it would be my turn to die. ‘Bloody Alois’ [Alois Staller], who was fond of supervising our work in the block as far as orderliness and tidiness were concerned, graciously took us back to the block after these three penal days out in the open, saying: ‘Now you know what work at the Lager means. *Paßt auf!* [Pay attention!] with work in the block, lest I throw you outdoors for good.’ As far as I was concerned, he carried out his threat pretty quickly. I did not apply the methods he required and which *Kazik* [identity unknown] advised me to use against the inmates, and I was thrown out of the block with a bang, which I will describe below.”

## Murderous gymnastics as an alternative to work in a work unit

“I saw that there was a company of prisoners who were not included in the working *Kommandos*. At that time, unassigned prisoners (there were not that many *Kommandos*, the camp was still under construction) were made to exercise in the square. There were no Kapos or SS men to be seen in their proximity at that moment, as they were busy with forming *Arbeitskommandos*. I ran up to them and took my place in a circle ‘for gymnastics.’ I used to like gymnastics, but since Auschwitz my liking for it seems to have diminished. From 6.00 a.m., often for several hours on end, we had to stand in the freezing air. With no caps or socks, wearing nothing but thin drills, in this hilly climate, in the fall of 1940, on what were almost always foggy mornings, we would stand there, shivering from cold. Our legs and arms, sticking out from often too short trousers and sleeves would turn blue. They kept us standing still. We were supposed to remain there and freeze. The cold was finishing us off. The passing Kapos and block elders (often with Alois [Alois Staller] among them) would stop, laughing, and, with suggestive gestures imitating evaporation, saying:

“...und das Leben fliiiiieegt ... Ha! Ha!’ When the mists would finally lift, the sun would shine through and it would get a little warmer and lunch would seem to be getting closer, a horde of Kapos would start the ‘gymnastics’ with us—which could easily be called harsh punitive exercises.

“For that kind of gymnastics, there was far too much time until lunch. ‘*Hüpfen! Rollen! Tanzen! Kniebeugen!!* [Hop! Roll! Dance! Squat!] One ‘*hüpfen*’ was enough to finish one off! It was impossible to leap like a frog around the giant square—and not just because of the clogs, as we were holding them in our hands, and not because of tearing off the skin of our soles from jumping on gravel until they started to bleed, but because no muscles were strong enough for a feat such as this. My sports training from years ago was saving me again. Here, again, feeble intellectuals out of shape, unable to hop even for a short distance, were meeting their end. Here, again, the rod was falling upon the heads of those who were stumbling every couple of steps. Again, beating and merciless extermination. And, yet again, like an animal, a man would exploit a moment of respite and catch his breath whenever a horde with rods started assaulting some new victim. After lunch—part two. Collecting the corpses and taking the half-dead to the infirmary, where they were finished off by the evening. There were two rollers ‘working’ in the square right next to us. They were, allegedly, levelling out the ground. Their true purpose, however, was the extermination of the people who were pulling them. Priests, with some other Polish prisoners, up to 20–25 people, were harnessed into the first, smaller one. The second, bigger one, had about 50 Jews harnessed to it. Krankenmann [Ernst Krankemann] and some other Kapo were standing on the shafts, and the combined weight of their bodies made the shafts heavier, pressing them into the necks and arms of the prisoners pulling the rollers. From time to time a Kapo or



Krankenmann, the block elder, would bring down their rods on someone's head with philosophical detachment, hitting this or that draft animal—prisoner[—]with such force that they either killed them on the spot or sent them, stunned, under the roller, hitting the rest of the prisoners to prevent them from stopping. Every day a great number of corpses was pulled out by their legs from that little carcass factory to be laid in rows and counted during the roll-call. In the evening Krankenmann, walking about the square with his hands behind his back, would look with a smile of satisfaction at the former prisoners, finally lying in peace. I had been doing 'gymnastics,' called the 'circle of death,' for two days. Hop! Roll! Dance! Squat! (hop—in a crouching position, making frog-like leaps around the roll-call square). On the third day, while standing in the circle, I was wondering about the percentage of prisoners physically weaker and less fit than me, trying to calculate how much longer I could count on my own strength, when suddenly, my situation changed."

## Carrying bricks before midday and evening roll-call

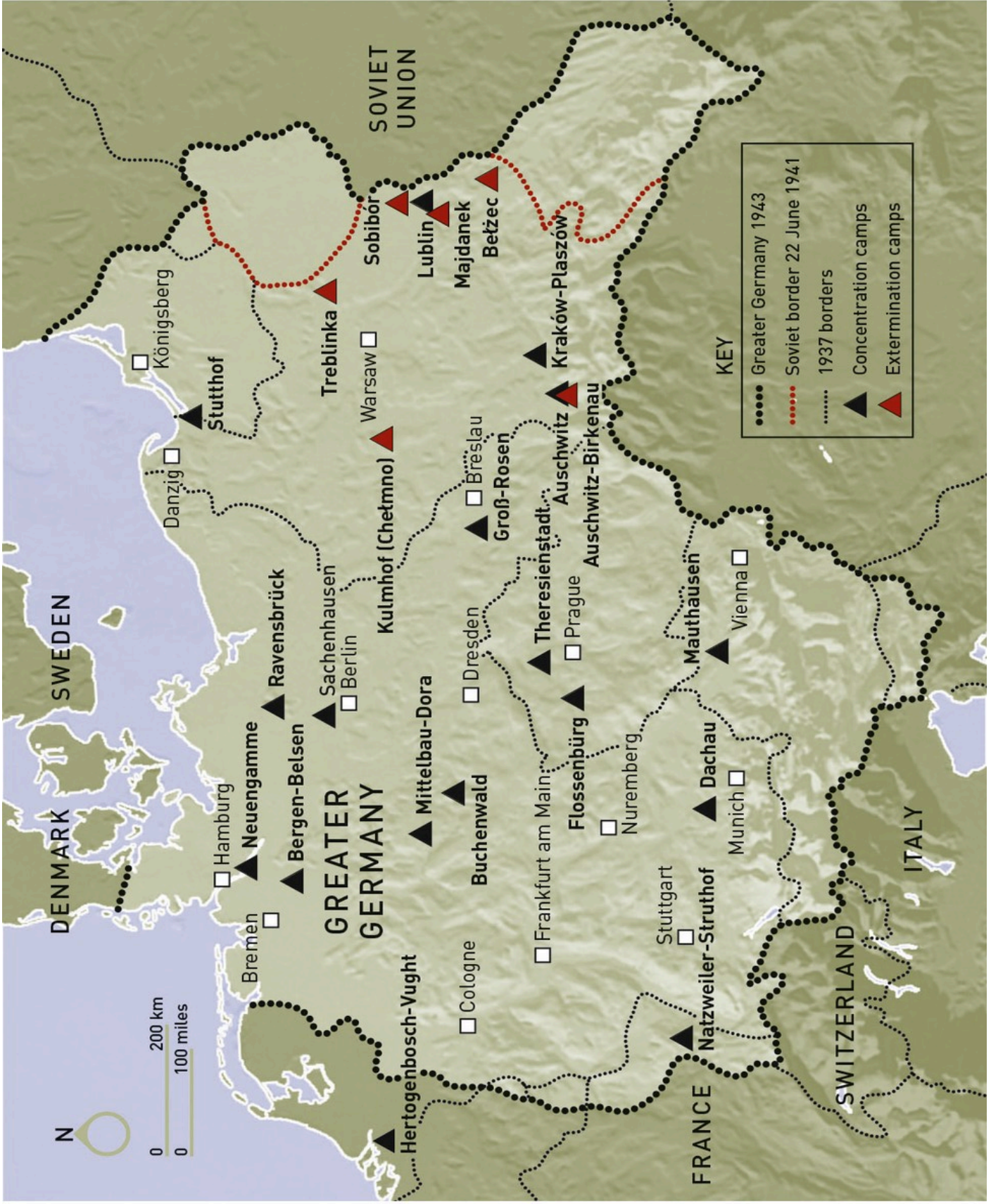
“Upon our return to the Lager for the midday and evening roll-calls, twice a day, we had to carry bricks. For the first two days each of us carried seven bricks, then, for a couple of days—six, and in the end, the standard was set at five bricks. When we arrived at the camp, there were six two-story barracks and fourteen one-story barracks behind the fences. On the roll-call square, eight new multi-story blocks were being built, and all the one-story blocks were transformed into multi-story ones by means of a superstructure. All of the materials (bricks, iron, lime) were being carried into the camp by us over a distance of several kilometres and before the construction was completed, thousands of *Häftlings* had died. Working in Michał’s ‘twenty’ saved us a lot of strength. Good old Michał, who, guarding our safety, standing outside the house, caught a cold, then got pneumonia and ended up in the infirmary. He died in December. When he left us for the *Krankenbau*, it was still November—since then they got tough with us as with all the other ‘twenties’ and ‘hundreds.’ And so the ordeal began anew, no holds barred. We were unloading the freight trains, shunted off onto the sidings. Iron, glass, bricks, pipes, drains. All the materials, necessary for developing the camp, were sent to us. The wagons had to be unloaded quickly, and so, under the threat of a rod, we were rushing, carrying, tripping over and falling under the weight of an I-beam or a rail. Even those who did not fall were exhausting their reserves of strength, seemingly aggregated at some point back in the past. Each day they were more and more surprised that they [were] still alive, walking, when we had been pushed far beyond the threshold of what the strongest human can endure. Yes, on one hand, a strange kind of contempt was born here, contempt for those who had to be considered human due to their physical form and, simultaneously, for the rest of humanity, but at the same time, recognition for the strange wonder of human nature was forming, which had such a strong spirit, seemingly, something akin to immortality. Although dozens of corpses, each of which the four of us would drag on our way to the roll-call in the Lager, seemed to deny this.”

## Evening roll-call

“Once, during the evening roll-call, on a particularly cold and wet day, when it was both raining and snowing, we heard a shrill siren, a menacing portent of a ‘stand-still roll-call.’ Two prisoners were declared missing. A punitive roll-call was ordered until the two fugitives, who must have hidden somewhere in *Industriehof II*, were found. The Kapos, the dogs, and a few hundred prisoners were sent out in search, which lasted for a long time. Snow, rain, exhaustion, poor clothing, it was all a great bane for us on that day. Finally, a gong declared that the fugitives were found. Only the inert corpses of those poor souls returned to the camp. One of the scoundrels, mad at the escapees for prolonging the working day, stabbed one of them from behind with a thin stake, skewering him through the kidneys and the stomach. Four scoundrels brought the prisoner back to the Lager unconscious, with a blue distorted face. Yes, an attempt at absconding was completely pointless and it was an act of great selfishness as well, because, for thousands of our fellow inmates, it meant suffering the ‘stand-still roll-call’ out in the biting cold. Over a hundred of them froze to death, having lost their will to live. They were taken to the infirmary, where they died overnight. Sometimes, even when no one had run away, and the weather was nasty, we were kept at the roll-call for a long time, for several hours, under the false pretext that the numbers did not add up right. The authorities were somewhere indoors, as if to do the regular calculations—and we were being ‘weather-conditioned’ by cold or rain and snow, with the obligation to keep standing on one and the same spot, motionless. We had to fight with all our might, flexing and releasing our muscles to produce some warmth and save our lives. At the roll-calls, the block elder would report to an SS man—a *Blockführer*. After having received all the reports from several blocks, he would go up to the lectern of the *Rapportführer*, that is, SS-Obersturmführer102 Palitzsch [Gerhard Palitzsch].”

## Evening hygiene

“(There were no *Waschraums* in the blocks during that first period). Several thousand people were supposed to wash there. It was impossible, naturally. You broke through to the pump and drew some water into your billycan. Your feet had to be clean for the night, though. During the evening inspections, when the *Stubendiensts* would make their quantity reports on the *Häftlings* lying on the straw-filled mattresses, the block elders would simultaneously check the cleanliness of our feet. We had to put our feet out from under the blankets to make our soles visible. If the foot was not clean enough, or the block elder deemed it to be insufficiently so, the offender was seated on a stool and administered 10–20 blows with a rod. This was one more way designed to eliminate inmates under the guise of caring for hygiene.”





## ACTIVITY B

Anna Pawełczyńska, a well-known Polish sociologist and a former Auschwitz Concentration Camp inmate herself, analyzed the correlation between values and violence in Auschwitz. She pointed to the fact that the isolated world of a Nazi German concentration camp reflected some general tendencies applying also to the Nazi German state. She remarks that after 1933, “humanist values gradually ceased to operate as the basic frame of reference,” making the German government, administration, and society function as an organized crime syndicate, a mafia. Instead of the traditional value system, other values had been elevated, such as strength and superiority of strong over the weak as well as the superiority of the German nation and race. This replacement of values—combined with the new rules of conduct derived from the instrumental German national values—had gained absolute status in the Third Reich. In this way, obedience turned into blind obedience, respect for strength turned into brutality, and recognition of racial and national superiority started to entail necessity of extermination of the “inferior” groups. Society-wide acceptance of the authority of brute force turned the Nazi-German state and its society into a powerful criminal gang. Pawełczyńska enumerated five criteria, which allow for such its definition:

- (1) Nazi activity violated principles of international law, rejecting codes that formed the basis of relations between states.
- (2) Nazi power was not bound by any rules in relation to the people subject to it.
- (3) Adherents to the Nazi program of genocide erased and destroyed the traces of crimes they committed, thereby revealing an awareness of their activity.
- (4) In occupied countries, Nazi activity was unequivocally perceived as criminal activity, contrary to moral law and to what is right.
- (5) In the minds of concentration camp prisoners, the system inflicted upon them was unequivocally perceived as an organized, criminal system.