## Answer Key Witold Pilecki, the Unsung Hero of WWII Intelligence Lesson Plan 2: Under the Soviets

#### CREATE THE CONTEXT

[for homework or in class the previous day]

B | Have students read and answer (or think about) the following questions.

1. What was the significance of the three wartime conferences of the allies in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam?

The world after World War II was shaped by wartime conferences of three allies: the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. These conferences were the Conference in Tehran (November 28–December 1, 1943), the Conference in Yalta (February 4–11, 1945) and the Conference in Potsdam (July 17–August 2, 1945). For the United States and Britain, as Jan Karski puts it, the attitude toward Poland was "a byproduct of their relations with the Soviet Union." This meant, unfortunately, that the interests of Poland would be sacrificed for the sake of the Soviet interests. The Allies disregarded the devoted service to the Allied cause of the Polish Armed Forces in the West, the Home Army in Poland, and the Home Army intelligence services throughout Europe. Initially, in political negotiations among the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, Polish matters were given some consideration—Poland was, after all, in the Allied camp too, and her people fought valiantly against Germany on all fronts. With time, however, it became clear that the interests of Poland were irreconcilable with Stalin's plans. After Washington and London's rapprochement with Moscow, there remained two main areas of contention: the future shape of Poland's eastern border (changed after September 17, 1939) and the fate of the missing 22,000 Polish POWs that the Soviets arrested and dispatched to the east after the invasion of Poland. The more the Allies needed Soviet support, the less important Polish affairs became. The tragic death of the charismatic leader of the Polish government-in-exile, General Władysław Sikorski, in an airplane crash on July 4, 1943, further undermined the Polish negotiation position. By the time the Tehran Conference took place, the matter of Poland's eastern border had been virtually decided without the Polish government's consent. The border was to be moved to the west, to the line proposed in 1919 by Lord Curzon (with slight modifications) when the provisions of the Versailles Treaty were being discussed. The losses in the east, almost half of Poland's territory, were to be compensated with a swath of German land along the Polish pre-war western border—but its shape was only roughly defined as extending to the Oder River with Opole (Oppeln) and including East Prussia. The Yalta conference elaborated on the Tehran decisions and introduced new concessions regarding Poland. Namely, Stalin demanded the presence of Communist representatives in the Polish government after the war. To the Poles, it was obvious that it was a first step to the introduction of an entirely Communist-controlled government.

However, Roosevelt and Churchill were hoping that a proviso in the Yalta agreement on the necessary organization of "free and unfettered" elections in Poland would safeguard civil liberties there. By the time the conference in Potsdam took place, the Polish government-in-exile had lost the recognition of Great Britain and the United States in favor of the Provisional Government of National Unity created by the Communists in Poland. It was a Soviet-backed puppet government whose members had been virtually unknown to the Polish populace. Its undeniable advantage, though, was that its members were already on the spot—within the territory of Poland. Diplomatically speaking, accepting Stalin's methods of conducting politics by way of faîts accomplis was the least complicated solution.

- 2. How did they change the territory of Poland, and what did these changes mean for citizens of the pre-war Polish republic?
  The border was to be moved to the west, to the line proposed in 1919 by Lord Curzon (with slight modifications) when the provisions of the Versailles Treaty were being discussed. The losses in the east, almost half of Poland's territory, were to be compensated with a swath of German land along the Polish pre-war western border—but its shape was only roughly defined as extending to the Oder River with Opole (Oppeln) and including East Prussia. To the citizens of the zone annexed by USSR, these changes meant that they would forever remain citizens of respective USSR republics.
- 3. Could Poles be happy with those changes?

  The Poles fighting both underground in Poland and abroad with other allied armies proves that they were determined to regain their country. The Warsaw Uprising in 1944 additionally proved that the Poles feared and dreaded the possibility of the Red Army entering Poland and establishing a Soviet-dependent political order there.
- 4. How did Pilecki modify his operational methods to adjust to the new political situation? Witold was very cautious. His new organization had a very loose and informal structure. He realized he needed to adjust his work methods to the new circumstances, especially since the methods of operation of the Home Army intelligence had become at least partly known to the Communists throughout the years of war. At times, his contacts did not even know they were providing information for a clandestine organization. There was no formal pledge of allegiance to the organization. No sabotage or military actions were undertaken. The network served the purpose of gathering open-source information on the progressing communization of Poland and finding ways to oppose it. In his clemency plea directed to the President of Communist Poland, Bolesław Bierut, Captain Pilecki emphasized that he did not consider the gathering of generally available information spying. To him, it was just informing his military unit about the state of the matters at home in the hope that, at some point, the politicians on both sides of the border would come to some sort of understanding. His closest collaborators were Maria Szelągowska, Makary Sieradzki (a former TAP soldier), and Tadeusz Płużański (a former TAP soldier,

whom Pilecki also persuaded to become his liaison with the Polish 2nd Corps in Italy). Throughout 1946, by means of the network of contacts of Pilecki, Szelągowska and Płużański, information was trickling in to Pilecki. He gathered news about the true condition of the Polish economy, the decisions of Communist authorities of Poland, and their fight against whatever and whoever was left of the Polish underground. Subsequently, Pilecki would dispatch the news in reports with comments to General Anders's forces abroad.

#### 5. Was he optimistic about the future?

That last stage of Pilecki's activity is overshadowed by gloom. But some of these dark changes had taken place earlier. In the brief period that divided his escape from the camp and the Warsaw Uprising, he lived in Warsaw and visited his family in Ostrowia Mazowiecka often. From that period, his daughter remembers him as more distant than before. He showed symptoms of anxiety, which is typical for former inmates of concentration camps (concentration camp syndrome). She remembers him furtively eating bread crusts he had started to carry around in his pockets. After his return to Poland in December 1945, he was initially optimistic about his work. However, his letter to Maria Szelagowska from June 1946 suggests that he started to doubt if his superiors had a clear plan for what needed to be achieved and if they were concerned about the difficulties they may inadvertently create for him as an intelligence operator in the home country. Nevertheless, he was determined to stay in Poland. For two months, he avoided meeting with General Anders's liaison, sent in June 1946 with an order for Pilecki to leave Poland and return to the Polish 2nd Corps (he knew the content of the order from Tadeusz Płużański, who was serving in the Polish 2nd Corps). Witold's wife, in a conversation with the scholar Adam Cyra in 1990, said she discussed leaving Poland with her husband, but she was not willing to leave everything behind. Pilecki's opinion on the matter was clear too. He believed it was his duty to stay in Poland.

6. Why did Pilecki's investigator, Col. Różański, hide Pilecki's report?

The answer to this question can only be speculation. Hiding the report that told of Witold's valiant past allowed the Soviet-instructed military court functionaries to spin the trial in line with the instructions from their superiors. Różański was widely known in Warsaw as a ruthless, psychotic investigator who was able to make his victims reveal information through torture or manipulation. A political intrigue related to power struggles in the Communist party is another possible reason, but this aspect was not explored in the Pilecki paper due to lack of substantial evidence.

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

A | The translation of the poem Pilecki wrote to the principal investigator to explain his situation.

Written at the Ministry of Public Security May 14, 1947

For Mr. Col. Różański Although my skin was unblemished - my soul Has been eaten by leprosy – but leaving the body alone Walking the streets I carried – the plague within me ... Unbeknownst to a friend, who insisted on me Joining him and his wife for an afternoon tea, He endangered himself with his all family -So I sat there – a cup in my hand – (avoiding their eyes When asked about my profession, mentioning Writing, painting or sculpting as my occupation) -'Twas enough for me to enter to spread a germ to their home Seemingly non-existent – the dark token of my gratitude In exchange for the food, shared so gladly, I could break their lives, send them to a dungeon. One of my friends opened to me his whole heart because I met him in hell and helped him survive in spite of "vernichtungs" there sparing no human life. But by devil's doing I was to betray the trust Of that kindest man just to give certain thing [sic] for a woman sent from the outer of here. That is why in this very petition I would like to request To be the sole sentenced to all punishments. For even if I am to lose my life in this way -I would much rather do so than continue to live Wounded at heart.

A letter written in the form of a poem by Witold Pilecki on May 14, 1947, to the head of the Department of Investigations of the Ministry of Public Security, Col. Józef Różański.

Ala Pare Puriownka Rózanskiego. Na skove wige gradki - wewnetry tred miare Co waxavī mi sig w dubaz - nie Eywige sig etalew 2 min chodrage po misicie - witas whorten zarare... Precistry znajony nic o typu use wiedstat, Le proszige: with do nas, do by de ware Miai do Cie" - narazar ne sam, lo golym siedrian 2 mini pijge, lub 2 jego marzonco, - herbatz - (a no zapytanne: golzne teraz pracuje? Starrajec sie warek swoj golzies wlejnie w markate monitelu, re pisza, lub vzerbie, maluje, A samply two city jur barrey who sitem, Co svoycie is chajer to posornym meloycie, 21 em page - 2a serce- ( Zem jack tam i filem) Mogt wtració do lochu i stamac im rycie Moj jeden jorg acrel, co tyle weigz sercent Mat dla mine - gayé is prente z nim varent siobrate I tam golive "vernichtungs"-wwag wijstrich winiera Uchronic vol smierci apjaros zolotarem. Mige Levas tan bardes serdecause poddhodnil On do mnie - z ufusicie. Lece sprankę szatana Catoriera zarenego - jam w serce modzit, ly dac cos da tamiej, co etamited przystana Statego-viec hisre niniejsne hetycje
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Napisare u M. M. P. dura 14. v. 1947.

**B** | Discuss why he might have chosen poetry to communicate with the investigator and why he wanted to take all the blame himself.

Pilecki might have chosen the poetic form because he felt he was better able to explain his stance through poetry. It was not the only letter he wrote to Różański on the topic, but it was the only one in verse, so he might have been trying various means of written persuasion. After all, Pilecki was also an artist, and we have evidence from the past (his poem on the Sukurcze Estate) that he expressed his feelings toward the matters that were important to him through poetry.

Possible reasons to take all the blame as based on the poem:

- He felt guilty that he implicated others through his work because some of his
  collaborators did not know that he was clandestinely dispatching the information he
  obtained from them.
- 2. He felt guilty that he deceived them.
- 3. He wanted to be the sole person punished for his own wrongdoings.
- 4. He wanted to take their blame on himself to save their lives.
- 5. He would rather die than live knowing that others were killed because of his deeds.

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

A | Prior to class, duplicate translations of **two clemency pleas**—one written by Pilecki and one by his wife. You will need one set for every two students as they will work in pairs. The material is on the next four pages.

#### Witold Pilecki's clemency plea – translation and the scan of the original letter

To

The President of

The Polish Republic

#### Warsaw, Belweder

All my life I have worked for Poland. After my grandfather was deported by the Tsarist government to Siberia as a result of the Insurrection of 1863 and his property was confiscated, the remnants of the real estate owned by women of my family were divided. I received 37 ½ hectares of arable land with meadows. I was not only growing crops, but I also worked on the awakening of the people. I organized and led a Farming Circle, Volunteer Fire Brigade and Dairy Cooperative for 12 years (Krupa village near Lida). I organized and led mounted militia of the Lida county for 7 years. With this unit, as a reserve ensign of the mounted unit of the 19th Infantry Division I went to the front in August 1939. Since that moment for a number of years I served under orders of senior Polish officers, to whose units I had been assigned by order. After the defeat of Piotrków, I was given an order by General Piekarski to organize a mounted unit of the 41st Infantry Division. I do so [sic] in Włodawa on September 13-16, 1939. With this unit I remain in the woods after the Division was scattered until November 17, 1939, destroying 7 tanks, two planes on an improvised airfield and one in the air (German planes). Seeing little consequence of such mode of fighting against the Germans, I switch to another one. On November 2, 1939, me and my colleagues, we rename this unit Secret Polish Army, in which I initially work as the chief of staff, and later as the chief inspector. The moment Col. Rowecki (General "Grot") has revealed General Sikorski's authorization to unify all the units I decide myself and force my superior – Major Włodarkiewicz – as well to forgo our own ambitions and serve under orders of General Grot. I am promoted to lieutenant. As a result of a briefing with General Grot, the need to start conspiratorial work in concentration camps, and my candidacy being put forward by Major Włodarkiewicz – I decide to accept the task, I receive the order and I join the second Warsaw Roundup on September 19, 1940. – In this way I found myself in Auschwitz. There I create and lead until my departure Military Organization in Auschwitz (two typewritten reports on that work, one 26-page-long and another 105-page-long are at the disposal of Col. Różański in the Ministry of Public Security). In Auschwitz, I was in touch with Stanisław Dubois, who introduced to me his deputy, Konstanty Jagiełło. In spring 1943 – 7 ½ transports of Poles were dispatched to other camps. This made me decide to leave the camp by way of an escape (26/27 April 1943). In Warsaw, after a couple of months I was promoted to captain and assigned to the Directorate of Diversion of the Head Command (material from that work is available in the Ministry of Security in the T-4 envelope.) At the same time, I am organizing help for the former Auschwitz inmates and their families. In the Warsaw Housing Cooperative in 16-18 Krasińskiego Street, I transferred monthly allowances until the start of the uprising to the Mother of Konstanty Jagiełło, Barbara Abramow, the Palinskis, Mrs. Kidawska and others. A few months before the uprising, I am assigned to the NIE organization. When the uprising broke out, I disobeyed my orders for the first time. I had been forbidden by order to take part in the rising. I took part in it unofficially – as a recruit. On the last day of the uprising, I head the 2nd Corps of 1st Platoon of the Chrobry II Battalion the Platoon which for 63 days has not lost even a foot of land to the Germans fighting with weapons taken in battle from the Germans. I was disappointed at the chaotic way the leadership handled the political

matters and later the capitulation. A part of the weapons, out of which for two items I fought with my own hands, I hid in a cache, not wanting to surrender it to the Germans. In a POW camp in Murnau, I checked in with my superiors to ask what to do next ... as I disobeyed the vow I had pledged to the NIE organization and took part in the uprising - always bearing in mind - as suggested by the propaganda abroad that Poland is occupied by the Armed Forces.... Prompted by an order, I joined the 2nd Corps, and later was dispatched to Poland with an order to transfer information to the 2nd Corps. After I arrived in Poland, my infatuation started to pass, but not immediately. I found out that my country was now appealing to me with a more and more comprehensible language with every passing week. I did not initiate underground work, I did not seek contact with either legal opposition (Polish People's Party) or illegal opposition of Freedom and Independence or National Armed Forces. The only instance of weapons' relocation was prompted by the need for its technical maintenance - especially those weapons that I wrestled in battle from the enemy myself. I felt burdened with the order to transfer information to the 2nd Corps. To buy time I started to send reports calming the 2nd Corps that I started the work. I would have finished at that but for a coincidence, when the courier dispatched from the 2nd Corps, Płużanski, found me, because he knew how to find me by other means than the fictitious way through an announcement in the entrance lobby of a building which I no longer visited - the contact mode I had devised to mislead the 2nd Corps about my whereabouts. In spite of information that there is an order for me and my remuneration for the military service – I avoid picking them up for three months and only the arrival of another courier forces me to do so. The situation developed then in such a way that I would either have had to go abroad or provide any materials, because I could not bring myself to go to the Security Services and surrender – not for my own sake but not to endanger my colleagues. Here begins the activity for which I am accused, and although in my own judgment I was not responsible for the activities of the courier, at the same time I understand that I should not have done - what I did. Never has a thought come to my mind that my activities could be considered espionage, because I was not working for a foreign power, but for my Polish military unit and I have always hoped that the Polish government and the émigrés' lobby will finally somehow come to an agreement. Much as I have long lost the sentiment for and the faith in the émigré circles and much as I understand that it could change the situation in my favor, I could not decide to publicly accuse those milieux either during the court trial or whenever else. My reasoning was that an officer who besmirches his home unit – shall deserve universal contempt – even of his very investigating officers. Upon my arrest - I took positive attitude towards my investigators and revealed myself the location of the archive which contained all the materials that implicated me in this case. For the last year no circumstance took place which would prove that I said anything untrue or misled the investigating officers.

All the circumstances described above allow me to request you, Mr. President, to use the prerogative of clemency, which the President possesses –

Witold Pilecki

7 Maja 1948 r

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#### Witold Pilecki's wife clemency plea:

No date

By Maria Pilecka

To you, Mr. President, as a man [...] knowing all the pain, traumas and doubts of all the Poles, I and my children address our heartfelt plea to use your presidential clemency prerogative towards our husband and father, Witold Pilecki, who has been sentenced to death.

For a long time, the hope of the future peaceful life with him was what kept us alive. We had not only love for him but also a devotion. He loved Poland with a love beyond all else.

Until 1944, the fight for the liberation of the nation had filled his life. He worked clandestinely by way of the order of his superiors, he left for Auschwitz in order to organize a resistance organization there against German bestiality, to save human life. Having escaped from the camp, he devoted himself entirely to the pro-independence work, finalized by his participation in the Warsaw Uprising. We remained separated for nine years. All those deeds gave us strength to persevere and hope for the future life together [...] We beg [...] for mercy for our father and husband.

B | Ask students to work together to establish the main points of defense cited in the pleas:

#### **Captain Witold Pilecki's arguments:**

- 1. I love Poland beyond all else.
- 2. All my life I worked for Poland
- 3. I contributed a lot of time and effort to ameliorate the living conditions of the rural community at my home estate ("awakennieng of the people"; Farming Circle, Volunteer Fire Brigade and Dairy Cooperative for 12 years [Krupa village near Lida]). I organized and led mounted militia of the Lida county for 7 years.)
- 4. I defended Poland first through regular military service, then through clandestine activity. As a soldier I have always been fulfilling the legal orders of my superiors to the best of my judgment and conscience.
- 5. I volunteered for the Auschwitz concentration camp to build an underground intelligence organization there. Details of that activity have been revealed to Colonel Różanski.
- 6. After escape from Auschwitz, I continued clandestine military service and was helping the families of Auschwitz inmates.
- 7. I participated in the uprising against the Germans (Warsaw uprising 1944).
- 8. I considered my work for the 2nd Polish Corps the continuation of my legitimate military service.
- 9. The importance of the intelligence work for the 2nd Polish Corps is downplayed as an unpleasant burden and is presented as slow, reluctant, and ineffective.
- 10. Whatever information I provided to the Corps, I did so with reluctance and after long delay.
- 11. I was hoping that the two power centers—the one abroad and the one in Poland—would finally come to an agreement.
- 12. Even though I hid the arms from the Warsaw Uprising, I did so out of sentiment. I was not planning on using them. I moved them only for the sake of conservation.
- 13. I could not bring myself to accuse any military milieux out of persuasion that it is against military ethics and an officer's honor.
- 14. I cooperated with the investigators.

#### His wife's arguments:

- 1. He loved Poland beyond all else.
- 2. Until 1944 he tirelessly fought for the liberation of his nation (clandestine work, volunteering for Auschwitz, Warsaw Uprising).
- 3. He is a dear husband and father to us. We love him and admire him.
- 4. For a long time, we have been making sacrifices as a family because of his work for Poland.
- 5. The hope for a future together in peaceful times kept us (Pilecki's wife and the children) alive for a long time.

### **ACTIVITY** B [15 minutes]

B | Refer to **the excerpts with Pawełczyńska's classification** from the Pilecki paper. Give the students a few minutes to come up with the examples from Captain Witold Pilecki's trial that illustrate every characteristic point listed by Pawełczyńska.

Examples of answers below:

One may wonder: Why is it that a man who survived the Auschwitz concentration camp could perish in a prison of a Communist country? After all, fascism/Nazism and Communism are often juxtaposed, with Communism being presented, and praised, as the force of good countering the evils of "the Nazis." However, a different conclusion may be drawn when comparing Pawełczyńska's classification of the Nazi German government with the Communist system. Characteristics of Pilecki's trial, which was organized by the Soviet-infiltrated Communist administration to teach the Polish society a lesson, show similarities with the Nazi regime:

- "(1) Nazi activity violated principles of international law, rejecting codes that formed the basis of relations between states"—so did Communist Poland. For instance, they violated these principles by kidnapping suspects in the territory of other countries (the kidnapping of Tadeusz Bejt) or establishing a military court system dependent on a power center outside Poland (i.e., Moscow);
- **"(2) Nazi power was not bound by any rules in relation to the people subject to it"**—this is abundantly evidenced by the Communists' use of torture in the interrogation so they could fabricate accusations on which to base a predetermined death sentence;
- "(3) Adherents of the Nazi program of genocide erased and destroyed the traces of crimes they committed, thereby revealing an awareness of their activity"—Communist authorities did not inform the families of the sentenced prisoners about their executions, the bodies of the murdered were buried in secret, and news about a prisoner's fate was shrouded in mystery enforced by institutionalized censorship;
- "(4) In occupied countries Nazi activity was unequivocally perceived as criminal activity, contrary to moral law and to what is right"—the activity of the Communist authorities and the Communist Party was perceived as such by a part of Polish society, which had refused to be intimidated, at least internally. This is revealed by the so-called internal emigration, characterized by the detachment from the surrounding reality and the focus on family affairs. When the terror subsided, public discontent with Communist power erupted in the form of street civil protest (1968, 1970, 1976, 1980);
- "(5) In the minds of concentration camp prisoners, the system inflicted upon them was unequivocally perceived as an organized, criminal system"—so was the Communist system.

In the initial phase of Stalinization in Poland, armed resistance against the Soviet authorities was eliminated, but the opposition towards "the Ruskies" (Russians) simmered under the surface, always ready to erupt in another series of public protests.

#### IMMEDIATE ASSESSMENT

B | Read and analyze how the newspaper titles from that period set the stage for a show trial (copies of excerpts below).

# Cień watażki A

nad procesem grupy szpiegowskiej

Osk. Pilecki zeznaje, że o de Sztrema otrzymał wiele materiałów wywiadowczyci iego pióra Krajowy Prze

The shadow of the warmongering Anders behind the trial of an espionage ring in Warsaw

# - Danuta -

Rezultat: zdrada kraju | WIN i zórganizowania przer

Intelligence operation - Danuta - dollars/ The result - betrayal of the country



Spies before the court – the chief of Anders' espionage outfit testifies

#### Korespondencia cowaniem zajął się Płużańs bandami terrorystycznym Oskarżony wyjaśnia, że od zawierała opinie podziemia (Czwarty dzień procesu) tuacji w kraju oraz pewne raty nod adresem ośrodków

Anders' correspondence with terrorist bands (fourth day of the trial)