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## THE VOLUNTEER

### How do you keep fighting in the face of unimaginable horror?

The Volunteer by Jack Fairweather is the remarkable story of Captain Witold Pilecki, one of the greatest heroes of the Second World War. Largely unknown outside Poland, Fairweather brings his story to life with unparalleled research and compelling story-telling. The Pilecki Institute will be hosting the global launch of The Volunteer in conjunction with Harper Collins.

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### The Greatest Hero

In the summer of 1940, after the German occupation of Poland, an underground operative called Witold Pilecki accepted a mission to infiltrate Auschwitz in order to uncover the fate of thousands of people being deported to a new concentration camp. His mission was to report on Nazi crimes and raise a secret army to stage an uprising.

Once incarcerated, Pilecki witnessed - and himself suffered - the inconceivably sadistic mistreatment of inmates by the Nazis. He set to work gathering a secret network of likeminded Polish prisoners who were determined to fight back through subterfuge. But their first missives about the atrocities, dangerously smuggled to the exiled Polish government in London, seemed to fall on deaf ears, and their plea that the British bomb Auschwitz went unheeded.

In July, 1942, the first Jewish transport to be subjected to a selection for the gas chambers arrived from Slovakia and Auschwitz quickly morphed from a horrendous labor camp to the site of the mass murder of Europe's Jews.

Pilecki gathered intelligence of the Germans' greatest crime, but realized that the best way to make the case for action would be in person - by escaping from the camp. In a feat as daring and unbelievable as his initial voluntary imprisonment, he broke out of the camp and delivered to Warsaw some of the first verification of the Jewish extermination. In doing so, he presented Allied commanders with the opportunity to save hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives. Free from the concentration camp, Pilecki continued to work underground against the Nazis. But, transferring the spirit of resistance against the country's Soviet "liberators" after the war, this unabashed Polish freedom fighter would be betrayed, ultimately meeting the tragic fate he managed to avoid at the Germans' hands.

"I set out to understand what qualities set this Pole apart and what made him risk everything to help his fellow men," says Jack, "How did an ordinary man find the moral capacity to piece together and expose the Nazis' greatest crimes while others turned away?"

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## Pilecki rediscovered

“ Jack Fairweather’s work adds, in crucial ways, to the knowledge of the history of World War II. Witold Pilecki’s life and actions, largely unknown outside Poland, deserve wide recognition and *The Volunteer* provides a superbly written, carefully researched and simply gripping account of one of the twentieth century’s great heroes. It allows international audiences to discover Pilecki as the historical figure of global stature and real-life superhero that he was—a man who voluntarily went undercover to Auschwitz to give witness to the crimes of the German Nazis. Yet, Jack Fairweather’s *The Volunteer* offers more than an engrossing narrative of historical events. What transpires through the pages of his book is the enduring relevance of Pilecki—not just dates and places, but character and integrity. In *The Volunteer*, we find an exceptional account of courage, fortitude and sacrifice. The fact that Fairweather writes as someone from outside Polish culture gives him a perspective which adds to the book’s relevance. In the end, it is the combination of the author’s painstaking reconstruction of the man and his times and the in-depth study of Pilecki’s character that make the book a unique and welcome one, says Prof. Piotr Wilczek, the Ambassador of Poland to the United States.

“ Jack Fairweather does a marvelous job introducing Cpt. Witold Pilecki to a worldwide audience as a universal symbol of courage during the Holocaust. Fairweather’s original research reveals the calculated cynicism of Poland’s allies who chose not to listen to his call for action to bomb Auschwitz from where he smuggled his alarming reports. Pilecki was condemned to death by communist Poland after WW2 and deleted from history. I hope his story will find a global readership and inspire a new generation with the hope that even in mankind’s darkest hour, courage and dignity can prevail.” says Maciej Golubiewski, Consul General of the Republic of Poland in New York.

“ After the War, the communists wanted to obliterate the memory of this Polish war hero. Pilecki was sentenced to death in a show trial and buried at a still unidentified location.” says Dr. Wojciech Kozłowski, Director of the Pilecki Institute – a research center dealing with totalitarian regimes in the 20th century. “This book sheds light on a remarkable man who has remained virtually unknown to the world. With assistance from the Institute, Jack Fairweather gained access to previously hidden diaries, accounts of family members and camp survivors, and recently declassified files. The result is a vivid, movie-like description of Pilecki’s exploits. I’ve read the book at one sitting and I must say that it is an enthralling story of a man who risked his life to change the course of the biggest war in human history”, concludes Wojciech Kozłowski.



**Jack Fairweather**

A graduate of Oxford University and a correspondent for the *Washington Post* and the *Daily Telegraph*, where he was the paper’s Baghdad and Persian Gulf bureau chief. His reporting while an embedded reporter during the Iraq invasion won him the prestigious British Press Award (the British equivalent to the Pulitzer Prize). He now lives in Vermont, writing history books and raising three daughters. The author of *The War of Choice* and *The Good War*.

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“ Superbly written and breathtakingly researched, *The Volunteer* smuggles us into Auschwitz and shows us – as if watching a movie – the story of a Polish agent who infiltrated the infamous camp, organized a rebellion, and then snuck back out. Fairweather has dug up a story of incalculable value and delivered it to us in the most compelling prose I have read in a long time.”

– **Sebastian Junger**, bestselling author of *The Perfect Storm* and *Tribe*

“ Such an amazing story, it would be impossible to believe if it were not so meticulously researched and clearly told. The book succeeds as a page-turner, a remarkable inside-view of the Holocaust, and also as a testament to all that is best in the human spirit.”

– **Mark Bowden**, author of *Black Hawk Down* and *The Last Stone*

“ Jack Fairweather has meticulously chronicled Pilecki’s remarkable journey, one that was lost from history, crafting a book that is as riveting as any page-turner and as profound as any great work of literature as it reveals humanity’s capacity for both courage and savagery.”

– **Elliot Ackerman**, author of *Dark at the Crossing*

“ A riveting account of human heroism in the face of overwhelming odds, and Fairweather’s storytelling is simply masterful.”

– **Jon Lee Anderson**, author of *The Lion’s Grave*

“ Totally gripping ... A fascinating, revelatory and surreal WWII story of almost incredible courage and unspeakable horror – how a Polish resistance fighter helped reveal the secret of the final solution from inside Auschwitz.”

– **Simon Sebag Montefiore**

“ Times of truly monstrous evil bring forth people of remarkable courage, and there is no more extraordinary example of this than the story of Witold Pilecki. Well-researched, well-written and searingly memorable, Jack Fairweather’s book reminds us of the capacity for nobility in the human soul in times of unimaginable peril.”

– **Andrew Roberts**, bestselling author of *Churchill: Walking with Destiny*

“ Witold Pilecki is one of the unsung heroes of World War II. Jack Fairweather has brought Pilecki’s story to life with a rich array of primary sources that reveal his role alerting the world to Auschwitz’s horrors and its transformation from a concentration camp to the epicenter of the Holocaust. In doing so, Fairweather reminds us that the Nazi leadership didn’t start the war with the idea of the Holocaust fully formed – its policy emerged through a series of experiments in mass murder, which Pilecki was able to witness and report on with remarkable courage and tenacity.”

– **Antony Polonsky**, Chief Historian, Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews

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## The Pilecki Institute

The Pilecki Institute is a research center established with the objective of conducting international research into 20th-century history and creating a digital repository of documents from both Polish and foreign archives. The mission of the Institute is to commemorate, document and research the historical experiences of Polish citizens.

We aim to facilitate an interdisciplinary and international reflection on the key issues of this epoch concerning the German and Soviet totalitarian regimes and their aftermath.

[www.instytutpileckiego.pl](http://www.instytutpileckiego.pl)

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The US book launch for *The Volunteer*, published by Harper Collins, will take place in June 2019.

The book is already available for preorder at the [publisher’s website](#).

The author is available for interviews, please contact:

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