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**JACK FAIRWEATHER, “THE VOLUNTEER:
ONE MAN, AN UNDERGROUND ARMY,
AND THE SECRET MISSION TO DESTROY
AUSCHWITZ”, HARPERCOLLINS PUBLISHERS,
NEW YORK 2019, PP. 505, ISBN 978-0-06-256141-1.**

One man, an underground army, and the secret dogged mission to destroy Auschwitz tells the story of a Polish resistance fighter’s deliberate infiltration of Auschwitz to sabotage the camp from inside, and his struggles up until his death. He defied the odds of suppression as he attempted to warn the Allies about the Nazi’s plan for a “final solution” before it was too late.

Jack Fairweather is a British journalist and author. He was born in Wales and schooled in Oxford University. He was a war correspondent for British troops during the 2003 invasion of Iraq. In one of those days, as Jack and his friend Matt Mc Allester struggled to make sense of what they had witnessed in the wars and putting it in a proper report, Jack came to hear about Witold Pilecki for the first time. He got intrigued as to why someone would risk everything to help his fellow man. He was equally struck by how little was known about Witold’s mission to warn the Western Allies of the Nazi’s crimes. Following Jack’s writing on *The Volunteer*, he was nominated for Costa Book Award 2019 and shortlisted for Biography Award.

The book “*The Volunteer*” is both a historical and biographical book that was written by Jack Fairweather and published by HarperCollins Publishers, New York

in 2019. It tells the history of the holocaust and gives an account of the untold sacrifice how Witold Pilecki, an average man with no great record of military service, staked his life to reveal Nazi's greatest crimes when others would rather choose to hide. The book is somewhat provocative, suggesting the tragic defeat of Pilecki's mission had been caused not in Auschwitz or Berlin, but in London and Washington. The book consists of four parts. Includes acknowledgments, short biography people mentioned in the book, notes, select bibliography and index. The publication is enriched by sixteen maps and a large number of black and white photos.

Fairweather revealed that Poland had been one of the most pluralistic and tolerant societies in Europe for much of its history. However, the country had re-emerged in 1918 after 123 years of partition had struggled to forge an identity: one which nationalists and church leaders called for a more narrow definition of "Polishness" which would be based on ethnicity and Catholicism.

According to Fairweather, Hitler believed the German people were in an undeserving positing to struggle wealth with other races, especially the Jews. After Poland had been captured, Witold arrived at Ostrów Mazowiecka and learned about the brutal new racial order the Nazi had imposed on the town. The Germans had rounded up about seven hundred locals and separated the group into ethnic Poles and Jews. Most Catholics were quickly released, but the Jews were selected for hard labor. Adding to Poland, the Nazi leadership also developed plans for an extension to colonize the rest of Eastern Europe, which after enslavement they would be murdered immediately or worked to death as laborers. Fairweather identified the secret program to be called "the Final Solution" and Auschwitz was a test case for future colonial rule.

Witold displayed patriotism for Poland countless times both against the German occupation and the Soviets. One of Witold's overwhelming sacrifice was to volunteer to be the undergrounds eyes in Auschwitz. Fairweather wrote, "Although Witold told Jan he needed time to think over the mission of secret spy. Yet, in his later, Witold made no mention of fear for his own safety. Understandably he must have worried about his family, after all going to Auschwitz meant abandoning and potentially exposing his family to German seizure and likely brutal retaliation if discovered." But then he let himself to be captured, once more choosing country over family.

Witold was a resilient man. Fairweather wrote, "The truth was unavoidable: Witold knew that Poland had lost its independence once again, and that the question facing him and indeed every Pole was whether to surrender or to keep on fighting, knowing that to do so was futile. Witold could never accept the first option". Despite his depreciating condition as a prisoner, Witold had remained unbent. Fairweather quoted him, "How would it have looked if just once I had

complained that I felt bad... or that I was weak... and that I was so overwhelmed with work that I was looking for anything to save myself? It was obvious then I would be unable to inspire anyone else to require anything from them”.

Witold was a man of trust and had exercised such traits of trusting people and making people trust him in the course of recruiting more people into his secret army in the camp. Fairweather wrote, “nationality, language, culture were considered in a group, but Witold’s network highly relied on a more basic quality which was trust. To Witold, recruitment meant placing his life in the hands of his recruits, and vice versa. That view required ultimate team work that the recruits appeared surprised by Witold’s confidence in them”.

The camp authorities occasionally set prisoners free, after families paid a hefty bribe or pulled the right strings in Warsaw. The Germans made them swear to secrecy about what they had witnessed in Auschwitz, and threatened to be brought back should they divulge. In most cases that was enough to ensure compliance. By the time Karol was due to be released, Witold took stock of the underground’s achievements: expansion of the organization and its ability to sustain lives, the smuggling network, and Dering’s radio listening post. Witold also included an oral report which he had Karol memorize: more than fifty thousand prisoners had entered Auschwitz since it began operation, but in less than a year just about eight thousand five hundred were still alive; Security in the camp had also tightened. Even the barbed wire across the fences had been added with double lines and electrified around the perimeter; a harsh punishment for escapes had been ordered. Ten escape prisoners were chosen randomly to starve to death. Adding to the message, Witold had also sent his family a message that under no circumstances were they to try to free him.

Since Churchill understood that the Nazi campaign against the Jews was murderous and unprecedented in scale, Fairweather was of the opinion he failed to identify it as genocidal, while the U.S. State Department stuck to its quotas for migrants from Europe. What’s more, neither leader considered that the murder of Jews demanded a direct response such as targeted military action of the kind Sikorski demanded, or humanitarian assistance for the thousands seeking to flee Europe.

Although it wasn’t clear why Rowecki failed to identify Auschwitz’s new role as a Jewish death camp, Fairweather was of the view he was certainly frustrated by the lack of response to his efforts to draw attention to the massacres. “The whole world is silent while (we) are witnessing the rapid mass murder of several million people”, Rowecki had complained to London in September. He may have calculated that given the West’s apparent disinterest in Jewish affairs he needed to focus on the plight of ethnic Poles, whom the Nazis might target next.

Two Slovak Jewish prisoners who had escaped from the camp reported, while hiding in Slovakia, about the operation of the gas chambers in Birkenau and the

impending destruction of Hungarian Jews. The report was moved to Switzerland, where it was publicized and sent to Allied capitals. Fairweather opined that this report has been credited for capturing the attention of Western leaders, but the intelligence Witold had smuggled out of Auschwitz laid the ground work for its acceptance.

Witold proved his nobility and selflessness over and over again. Even though he had escaped the Auschwitz camp he kept emphasizing the need to strike quickly against the camp. Fairweather wrote, "Witold asked Mozden to organize three vehicles that could carry about a dozen men and assorted weapons to Auschwitz camp for an immediate attack. The invasion plan was to dress as SS men to gain passage into the camp and then cause a riot capable of causing a riot. Witold knew it was a suicide mission, but felt he owed it to the people he had left behind". Fairweather also recorded that Witold later received a letter from Stefan which he was disappointed about, there was no mention of an uprising. Instead, Stefan had written that the underground headquarters in Warsaw was very willing to grant him an award for his underground work. Witold threw the letter away in disgust. He didn't want a medal of award, he wanted action.

Witold told his family he will be back in two days. But as Fairweather analyzed, he could hardly have been sure as he rode off on horseback to confront the most powerful military in Europe. Hitler commanded an army of 3.7 million men, almost twice the number of Poland's, with two thousand more tanks and almost ten times the number of fighter planes and bombers. Also, no natural features separated the two countries at the border. Poland's best hope was on its allies, the British and French. With the hope they would attack from the West while Poland pressed in from the East, exposing Germany to a war on two fronts.

Hitler's terrifying racial vision for the country had come into focus once he claimed Poland. Fairweather wrote that in September, Hitler had ordered Western Poland annexed to the Reich and over five million Catholic Poles and Jews expelled to make way for German settlers. The remaining territory, which included Warsaw and Krakow, was to become a German colony. He had also made his former lawyer, Hans Frank, the administrator for the "General Government for the Occupied Polish Territories" and had given him orders to exploit it ruthlessly and impose a brutal racial hierarchy. To tackle the Jewish race physically, Frank issued orders for Jews to be concentrated in cities and deported to a camp. This was following his adherence to the deputy head of SS, Reinhard Heydrich, who had advised him that the Jewish problem would have to be dealt with incrementally.

Given that Hitler's forces had swept into Luxemburg and the low countries, routed the British at Dunkirk, and swept into Paris, it soon became glaring that Germany was about to exact a definite defeat on the French. Governor Frank, believing he no longer had to worry about negative reports covered by the foreign

media, ordered mass round ups of military age men. Some hundreds of them were shot in the woods, and a thousands more were taken to concentration camps in Germany.

As narrated by Fairweather, Witold had felt the horrors of hunger as warned by Dering. He had also felt the torture of working his life out. He had been in a situation where he skipped thoughts and in some cases be unconsciousness, but he somehow managed to keep living. One of those days, in hunger, he had caught sight of the smoke emanating from the chimney in the crematorium, and he finally made sense of the ironical meaning of the iron letters over the camp gate: *work sets you free*; that is, working the body to death through which the soul is set free, and the body sent to the crematorium.

In uncovering the tragic outcome of Witold's mission, Fairweather revealed that its ultimate defeat originated not in Auschwitz or Berlin, but in London and Washington. In the course of the book, he severally stressed where the British refused to take major actions against the Germans while Nazi crime grew worse. He also recorded America's reserves on entering the war.

Having gone through witold Pilecki's history as narrated by Fairweather, human beings were the most precious thing for Witold, and especially those that were oppressed. He would do anything to liberate them, to help them. His patriotism had first led him to volunteer into Auschwitz, but his humanity had willingly kept him there even to his own detriment he planned on returning free those he had left behind. His ideology of doing the needful did eventually cost him his life.

The story of the volunteer, Witold, was told in a well-chronicled and coherent writing by Fairweather. As if seeing events unfold in real time, the book records a well-researched story with pictures for validity. The book is recommended to all, for the world to come to appreciate the selfless sacrifice of Witold Pilecki and accept his heroism. This infamous sacrifice should not be forgotten but should be a blueprint and another reminder of how selfless people can be towards people, how humane one can be for another, and the need for unity especially in the face of unspeakable horrors and overwhelming odds.

The book is specially recommended to historians to appreciate that not all ethnic Poles stood with the Nazis in the cleansing of Jews, but many ethnic Poles had even lost their lives in the account of resisting the racial and genocidal crimes of the Nazis during the holocaust.