

Who is the most tragic figure in history?

Witold Pilecki



While maybe not THE most tragic, you'd be hard pressed to find a man as deserving of a happy ending and received anything but.

Pilecki was a cavalry officer in the Polish military, and would co-found the resistance organisation the Secret Polish Army, or TAP, after Poland's annexation in 1939. Eventually rumours of Auschwitz, the most infamous of the Nazi death camps, would reach the TAP.

It was decided they needed to get an agent inside the camp, to uncover what was going on there. Pilecki volunteered. He allowed himself to be captured during a Gestapo sweep in 1940, and was sent to Auschwitz.

There he would set up a resistance movement of sorts, providing aid and care for the suffering inmates. He'd also write up reports detailing all the atrocities he'd seen.

He'd stay there, avoiding discovery and death, for TWO AND A HALF YEARS. Two and a half years in the home to the most systematic genocide in history. Pretty damn impressive.

He'd escape, and rejoin his comrades in the TAP. Notably participating in the Warsaw Uprising.

After the Soviet takeover of Poland, Pilecki remained loyal to the Polish Government-in-exile based in London. He believed his loyalty would result in his execution by the communists, and wrote up 'Pilecki's Report'. This report would form the basis of the Allied understanding of the Holocaust, and if I remember correctly was referenced in the Nuremberg trials. Although I could definitely be wrong there.

He was arrested in 1947 by the Polish Ministry of Public Security for aiding "foreign imperialism". He was subjected to torture and a show trial, resulting in his execution in 1948.



Witold Pilecki at his trial, looking like a total badass

Knowledge of Pilecki was suppressed by the communist government until 1989, when his story began to be told.

Now there are streets, monuments and institutions in Poland named after him. He's included amongst the busts of great Poles in Jordan Park, alongside those such as Marie Curie. He was awarded the Order of the White Eagle in 2006, the highest Polish award. He was also posthumously promoted to Colonel in 2013.

Pilecki was one of the most heroic and courageous men in history, described by Poland's chief Rabbi as "of blessed memory", and was paid back for his courage with a bullet to the head.

Like I said before, maybe he wasn't the most tragic figure in history. But he still deserved a whole lot better than he got.

Rest in peace Pilecki, you will not be forgotten, dignum laude virum Musa vetat Pilecki Witold Pilceki mori!!!