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Prisoner Resistance in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald Concentration Camps

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Prisoner Resistance in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald Concentration Camps

by

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Abstract

A great deal has been written about the Holocaust and about resistance organizations that formed in the concentration camps. Much of this literature, however, tends to focus on the contributions of a particular group of prisoners rather than on the many groups that came together to form these organizations. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the resistance organizations in Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps using firsthand accounts and to come to a conclusion on how cooperation between different groups of prisoners affected the overall effectiveness of these resistance organizations.

Key Terms: Holocaust, World War II, Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Concentration Camps, Resistance

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Camp was a proving ground of character. Some slithered into a moral swamp. Others chiseled themselves into a character of finest crystal. We were cut with a sharp instrument. Its blade bit painfully into our bodies, yet, in our souls, it found fields to till.¹

So wrote Captain Witold Pilecki, a member of the Polish resistance who volunteered for a nearly suicidal mission: being deliberately captured in a street roundup and sent to Auschwitz, where he would gather information to send to the Polish resistance outside the camp and set up a resistance organization inside the camp. Pilecki's organization, however, was not the only resistance organization in the concentration camp system, or even in the only one in Auschwitz. Numerous organizations like Pilecki's were formed in the concentration camps, often established among members of the same nationality or political party. How these organizations interacted with each other, whether they cooperated or insisted upon working alone, and whether they helped or hindered each other, varied wildly from camp to camp and organization to organization.

There were a great many factors contributing to the success or failure of prisoner resistance organizations, of course, but the relationships between different prisoner groups was one of the most important ones. When prisoners mistrusted each other or

¹ Witold Pilecki, *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery*, trans. Jarek Garliński (Los Angeles, CA: Aquila Polonica Ltd., 2012), 50.

were unwilling to cooperate with other groups of prisoners, the scale of operations that could be undertaken was limited, and the camp administration was more easily able to turn the different groups of prisoners against each other. However, when they were more concerned with the well-being of the camp as a whole rather than political calculation or the betterment of one particular group, they were more able to cooperate with each other, and this cooperation paid off with greater results than any group could have achieved individually.

Resistance organizations in the concentration camps had a significant impact on the operations of the camps themselves, on the lives of the people there, and, in some cases, on the war itself. In addition to working to save as many individual lives as possible, resistance organizations sought to gain influence over the camp administration, to organize sabotage in factories, to collect and send information to the outside world, and to prepare for the eventual liberation of the camps. No one group could have managed this on its own; successful resistance required organization and coordination between a huge variety of extremely disparate groups of people, many of whom were used to seeing each other only as enemies. The resistance in Buchenwald was usually able to overcome the camp administration's attempts to turn different groups of prisoners against each other, whereas the groups involved in the resistance in Auschwitz often had more difficulty trusting and working with other groups. Nationalities in Auschwitz had been played against each other from the day the camp opened, whereas Buchenwald had been built before the war, and as a result, a system to help new prisoners and some level of solidarity had been built up before other nationalities arrived.

Review of Literature

There is a considerable amount of literature discussing the Holocaust, particularly the concentration camps, and much of this literature discusses the organizations formed for the purpose of resistance in the concentration camps. However, while most sources about the Holocaust contain some information on the different groups of prisoners present in the concentration camps, there is less literature which focuses primarily on the interactions between prisoner groups, and ultimately, there does not seem to be any literature that directly discusses the ways that group interactions affected the overall effectiveness of resistance movements in the concentration camps.

Auschwitz:

In a report written for the Polish military a few months after the end of the war, Captain Witold Pilecki recounted his experiences in Auschwitz. He discussed his work in forming a resistance organization, recruiting first those people he already knew he could trust, then others from his country, and finally expanding to work with people from other countries as they began to arrive in the camp. Over time, his organization was able to infiltrate significant work details to expand their reach, send information about the camp to the Polish government in exile, and form a military organization in the camp. Although Pilecki escaped the camp in 1943, his organization continued to operate throughout the history of Auschwitz. Pilecki's 1945 report was eventually translated into English and published as *The Auschwitz Volunteer: Beyond Bravery*, and is one of the main sources of information on the resistance organizations in Auschwitz. Another source is *Fighting Auschwitz: The Resistance Movement in the Concentration Camp*, which thoroughly discusses the formation and actions of the various resistance organizations in Auschwitz

throughout the history of the camp. Additionally, Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum's book, *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, provides detailed information on the organization and day to day running of Auschwitz, as well as some discussion of the impact of resistance organizations on the camp.

Auschwitz Concentration Camp was opened in August of 1940. Located in Nazi-occupied Poland, the camp was initially intended only for Polish prisoners. The first transports of prisoners to the camp consisted of Polish citizens—both Jewish and non-Jewish—who had been arrested for anything from resistance activities to having been randomly picked up in a street roundup and shipped off to the camp without ever having been charged with a crime. The only non-Poles in the camp at first were a group of thirty German criminal prisoners who had been brought to Auschwitz specifically to be placed in positions of authority over the Polish prisoners.²

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the prisoners were initially hopeful that this would lead to Germany's defeat and their liberation, but these hopeful feelings faded as the German army continued its advance toward Moscow and the first starving Soviet prisoners of war arrived in the camp, most of whom were killed almost immediately. Not long after this, the first sub-camps were built around factories nearby, as well as the first gas chambers and crematoriums to aid in the extermination of the Jewish prisoners from around Europe that had begun to arrive.³

The camp administration always did its best to use preexisting tensions between nationalities and the uneven power levels of various groups to drive wedges between

² Józef Garliński. *Fighting Auschwitz: The Resistance Movement in the Concentration Camp*. (London: Julian Friedmann Publishers Ltd., 1975). 24-26.

³ Garliński, 81, 86.

groups of prisoners, weaken any sort of solidarity between different groups, and limit the potential effectiveness of any prisoner resistance. For example, the camp's system of marking different categories of prisoners with different colored triangles was often used to limit cooperation between certain prisoners.⁴ The language barrier was also an important factor that the camp administration exploited to limit communications between prisoners and make them feel more isolated.

While tensions and prejudices did develop between different groups, several resistance organizations were formed, including an international organization that combined several of the preexisting smaller organizations. These organizations operated until the camp was liberated by Soviet troops in January of 1945.

Although there were many resistance organizations in Auschwitz, most of them had similar goals and used similar methods, focusing on the prisoner hospital and the records office as major centers of resistance. The function of the hospitals in resistance should, for the most part, be obvious, although medical treatment of prisoners was often more difficult than it sounded. Hospital facilities were overcrowded and medical supplies were nearly nonexistent; most medicine had to be smuggled in or acquired from the guards using theft or bribery and, more often than not, nurses had to make do without proper medicine at all.⁵ Prisoners working in the records offices, meanwhile, were often required by the camp administration to do things such as organizing lists of prisoners for labor placements and transports to other camps. They were able to use their position to

⁴ Anna Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz: A Sociological Analysis*, trans. Catherine S. Leach (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1979), 85-87.

⁵ Roger A. Ritvo and Diane M. Plotkin, *Sisters in Sorrow: Voices of Care in the Holocaust* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 155-156.

get rid of informers, to keep resistance workers from being shipped off to certain death, and to place resistance workers in better positions.⁶ Finally, throughout the history of resistance in Auschwitz, there was always a particular emphasis placed on getting information on the camp to the outside world.

Buchenwald:

The main primary source on the resistance in Buchenwald Concentration Camp is *The Buchenwald Report*, which was originally a collection of reports prepared by former prisoners working with an American intelligence team shortly after the liberation of the concentration camp. *The Buchenwald Report* was translated from the original German and published in 1995 by David A. Hackett. It contains numerous reports written by individuals, various national organizations which had formed within the camp, and multinational committees of former prisoners assembled for this purpose. In addition to providing detailed information about conditions in the camp and about important individuals and incidents in the camp's history, the reports discuss the work of resistance organizations and provide a report from each national resistance group about their organization and the relationships between their national group and others.

Buchenwald Concentration Camp opened in July of 1937. As the war had not yet started at this time, the only prisoners were Germans and Austrians. Classification of prisoners as either political prisoners or professional criminals was the main division in the Buchenwald population from the camp's founding until late 1939. As a result, while

⁶ David A. Hackett, ed. *The Buchenwald Report* (San Francisco, CA: Westview Press, 1995), 297-299.

the camp administration was able to set political prisoners and criminals against each other, prisoners within those separate categories had a lot in common: a shared language, closely related cultural identities, and, in many cases, shared political views.⁷ Because of these many similarities, it did not take long for a resistance organization to form. After the start of the war, though, prisoners of other nationalities arrived in the camp. The German prisoners often used their relatively privileged positions in camp to help prisoners of other nationalities get into better positions, quickly earning their trust in the process.⁸ Because the German resistance was willing to help new arrivals of other nationalities get into better positions, rather than trying to look out only for their own interests at the expense of other groups, there were fewer tensions between German and non-German prisoners in Buchenwald than there were in Auschwitz.⁹ While German prisoners in Auschwitz were frequently mistrusted, the German and Austrian prisoners in Buchenwald were frequently the main leaders of resistance. Initially, each nationality had its own resistance organization, although these national organizations cooperated frequently. In 1943, an international resistance organization was formed in Buchenwald.¹⁰

The resistance organizations in both camps used similar methods, although the Buchenwald resistance placed a greater emphasis on sabotage in factories making armaments and other items essential to the German war effort. Unlike the Auschwitz

⁷ Christian Goeschel and Nikolaus Wachsmann, "Before Auschwitz: The Formation of the Nazi Concentration Camps: 1933-9," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45 no. 3 (2010): 515-534.

⁸ Hackett, 50.

⁹ Christopher Burney, *The Dungeon Democracy* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, Inc., 1946), 15, 21-22.

¹⁰ Hackett, 213.

resistance, the Buchenwald resistance was generally far less focused on getting messages to the outside world. The resistance organizations of both camps emphasized the bribery and coercion of the camp's guards and administration. In Buchenwald in particular, prisoners were frequently able to bribe guards to do what the prisoners wanted.

On April 11, 1945, American forces arrived at Buchenwald, liberating the camp with the help of the camp's resistance organization, which had by this point managed to acquire weapons and organize a camp police force for this purpose.

Methods

For this thesis, I examined how interactions between different groups of prisoners, particularly prisoners of different nationalities, affected the resistance organizations that were formed in Auschwitz and Buchenwald Concentration Camps. I chose these two concentration camps because, although both camps had large, organized, and well-documented resistance organizations that often used very similar methods, resistance in Buchenwald Concentration Camp was in many ways considerably more effective than resistance in Auschwitz. I examined reports from both camps and compared relationships between different groups of prisoners in each camp, the organization of resistance groups that were formed, and how much success these groups had in their efforts to gain influence in the camp and protect other prisoners. I tracked the interactions between groups of prisoners throughout the history of Auschwitz and Buchenwald as well as the formation and accomplishments of organized resistance groups throughout the history of these camps. I then used this information to put together a more complete picture of how the interactions between various prisoner groups affected the overall effectiveness of resistance organizations in the camps.

Chapter 2: Resistance Organizations

The first instances of resistance in both Auschwitz and Buchenwald were small-scale and spontaneous—words of encouragement to other prisoners or individuals helping their friends get into better positions in camp. In both camps, it was not long before groups of prisoners began to work together in order to increase their chances of survival and to resist the camp authorities more effectively than any one person could manage alone. However, the circumstances in which Auschwitz and Buchenwald were founded and the ways that these two camps were structured meant that the resistance organizations in these camps were set up completely differently from each other. While the general methods employed by these organizations were similar, they evolved in very different ways, and, because of this and the differences in how the groups in the camps perceived each other, the results achieved by these resistance organizations were very different.

When Buchenwald Concentration Camp opened, the war had not yet started. Prisoners were initially only German, with Austrian prisoners arriving a little over a year after the founding of the camp, Czechoslovakian prisoners arriving not long after, and prisoners of other nationalities arriving as their countries were conquered by the German army. Resistance among the prisoners evolved early on in the history of the camp, with German communist prisoners playing a particularly significant role in the establishment of a resistance organization.¹¹ One of the first tasks of this organization was to break the power of the “greens,” the professional criminal prisoners favored by the camp

¹¹ Hackett, 83.

administration for positions of authority. This would open up opportunities for other prisoners, particularly those in the political prisoner category to which most of the resistance belonged, to get into more desirable positions in camp. These positions included positions of leadership in work details, placement in easier and less dangerous work details, and assignment to the camp's records office in particular. Once this was accomplished, it became far easier to get additional members of the resistance into those positions that would better enable them to help the resistance.

When prisoners of other nationalities began to arrive in the camp, they quickly began to form resistance organizations of their own. Although these organizations remained separate for some time, they were aware of each other's existence and cooperated with each other frequently, helping each other when they could and collaborating on major projects to expand the scope of the results. For example, various resistance organizations worked together to organize sabotage of war production. In 1943, an international resistance organization was formed. This organization was able to coordinate larger, camp-wide projects and facilitate easier communication between the different national resistance groups.

Resistance at Buchenwald covered an impressive variety of activities, most prominently work in the hospital and in the labor records office. The hospital was useful not only for providing medical care to prisoners in need—although this work was made extremely difficult by the lack of medical supplies and inadequate facilities—but also for more proactive resistance activities such as the protection of prisoners designated for death transports and the elimination of dangerous informers.¹² Meanwhile, the labor

¹² Hackett, 211.

records office dealt with the entire internal administration of the camp, which made it a vitally important center of resistance. Prisoners who worked in the labor records office were able to ensure that members of the resistance organizations were given jobs that could most benefit the resistance, such as having a resistance member transferred from a construction work detail to a position in the hospital. They also ensured that only those most willing and capable of sabotaging war production would be sent to work in factories outside the camp, particularly those factories which produced materials for the war.¹³

Another vital role played by the prisoners who worked in the records office was removing resistance members from the lists of prisoners designated for dangerous work or death transports, which workers in the labor records office were required to draw up. In addition to these two major hubs of resistance work, the resistance organizations were involved in a number of other activities. For example, they organized groups to help new arrivals and convinced the camp administration to allow the formation of a camp fire department, medical corps, and even a camp police force made up of prisoners, which ultimately allowed the prisoners to take an active part in the liberation of the camp.¹⁴

While the Buchenwald resistance was not always a unified international body, the consistently high level of cooperation between the national resistance groups in the camp was a significant contributing factor to the considerable success of the camp's resistance in a wide array of areas.

The Auschwitz resistance did not have quite the same level of success as the Buchenwald resistance, although it did have several significant achievements. Of course,

¹³ Hackett, 38.

¹⁴ Hackett, 50.

the different situation in the camp was a major factor affecting the success of the resistance organization. Auschwitz Concentration Camp was opened after the outbreak of war and was located in captured Polish territory. From the start, conditions in Auschwitz were far harsher than they were in Buchenwald, which required members of the resistance to devote more of their efforts to staying alive, leaving them with less time and energy remaining for resistance activities. Additionally, when the camp was opened in January of 1940, thirty handpicked German prisoners were brought from the camp at Sachsenhausen to take positions of authority in the camp, while the rest of the camp population was Polish. The fact that authority positions were decided by nationality at first made it difficult for Polish prisoners to get into better positions in the camp. This arrangement was also a key part of the camp administration's "divide and conquer" strategy, in which they played the nationalities against each other to control the camp's massive population. This strategy became more significant when prisoners of other nationalities began to arrive. As a rule, anyone placed in a position of authority over others would be a member of a different nationality in order to create negative perceptions of members of other nationalities and therefore make it more difficult for prisoners to organize any international resistance. An international resistance group was eventually organized despite this, but there was far more opposition to the idea of cooperating with prisoners of other nationalities in Auschwitz than there was in Buchenwald.

Initial resistance in Auschwitz took the form of a few organizations that were largely formed along political lines. The most prominent of these organizations was ZOW (Zurajek Organizacji Wojskowych—The Union of Military Organization), founded

by Witold Pilecki. ZOW was organized into groups of five men, who would not know each other as members of the resistance, united only through their leader. Members of this group of five would recruit their own “fives” and so on.¹⁵ At around the same time as Pilecki was organizing ZOW, Stanisław Dubois organized the Fighting Organization of the PPS from his contacts in the PPS (the Polish Socialist Party), a number of whom were already in Auschwitz. The Fighting Organization of the PPS was organized similarly to ZOW. Numerous other groups were formed as well, usually by military men, although many of these groups ended up eventually merging with the larger organizations.¹⁶

The population of Auschwitz was almost entirely Polish at the time that these organizations were formed. It was not until the German invasion of Russia that prisoners of other nationalities began to be brought to camp—first Soviet prisoners of war and Soviet civilians, then civilians from other countries. Eventually, in 1943, an international resistance organization known as Battle Group Auschwitz was formed, under the leadership of two Polish prisoners and two Austrian prisoners. However, unlike in Buchenwald, many members of other resistance organizations argued against the forming of this international organization, and because the majority of the camp had difficulty trusting German and Austrian prisoners, even some of those who joined Battle Group Auschwitz argued against the inclusion of prisoners from German-speaking countries.¹⁷

Resistance in Auschwitz was organized around many of the same locations in camp as the Buchenwald resistance, namely the hospital and the labor assignment office.

¹⁵ Garliński 35.

¹⁶ Garliński 40-42.

¹⁷ Yisrael Gutman and Michel Berenbaum, eds. *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 490.

In addition, as the camp was located in Polish territory, the civilians who lived near the camp were eager to help the prisoners as much as they could. From the start, resistance groups worked to make contact with civilians, who helped supply the prisoners with as much food as they could manage, despite being on starvation rations themselves, as well as helping to provide contact with the Polish Underground State, the national resistance organization. Through this and other methods of contact, the camp's resistance organizations were able to send information about conditions in the camp as well as information relevant to the war, to the outside world, particularly to the Polish government in exile, located in London. Initially, the resistance groups actively discouraged escapes, as camp policy was for ten randomly chosen prisoners to be killed for every successful escape.¹⁸ When this policy was later ended (due to the camp administration's fear of Allied reprisals) the resistance began to help organize escapes as well, working with local civilians and the Polish resistance organization outside the camp to give escaping prisoners the best chance of getting to safety.¹⁹

¹⁸ Pilecki, 126.

¹⁹ Gutman and Berenbaum, 503-505.

Chapter 3: Group Relations

While the resistance organizations in Buchenwald and Auschwitz used some of the same methods, they differed in the ways that they were first organized. This was because of the different relationships between the various groups that made up the camp populations. While the location of Auschwitz made it easier for the resistance there to work with civilians in the areas around the camp, the circumstances surrounding the opening of Buchenwald meant that the prisoners inside the camp had an easier time working with each other.

When Buchenwald was first opened, the population was exclusively German, and the main conflict between prisoner groups was the conflict between the political prisoners and the professional criminals who were initially favored by the camp administration for all positions of authority in the camp. This struggle against the “greens” was an ongoing struggle throughout the history of the camp. It was particularly significant early on because before any members of the resistance (almost all of whom were political prisoners) could get into positions from which they could more effectively operate, they first had to break the power of the professional criminals, who dominated positions of authority in the camp until 1938.²⁰ The resistance slowly gained ground in the struggle and began to work its way into positions of authority. However, the power of the

²⁰Prisoners' categories were denoted by a colored triangle worn on their uniform, red for political prisoners and green for professional criminals. However, these categories were often deliberately misleading (for example, people who had been convicted of resistance activities could be classified as criminals) and while most of the resistance was recruited from the political prisoners, there were resistance members from the criminal category as well. When the struggle against the criminals is referred to, it should be understood as being a struggle against those criminals favored by the camp administration and who worked against the other prisoners, not against the category as a whole.

criminals was ultimately broken when the network of corruption between the more powerful criminals and the SS guards grew so extensive that the administration saw it as a danger. In order to retain control of the camp, the administration began to favor the political prisoners for positions of authority. They were less likely to become corrupt and in many cases, due to their political work before being imprisoned, proved to be better functionaries than the criminals had been.²¹ After this, most of the prisoners in prominent positions in camp were political prisoners. This struggle against the professional criminals continued throughout the history of the camp, particularly in 1942 when the professional criminals attempted a coup by making it look like a number of the prominent political prisoners had been listening to the radio illegally, which led to many of them being removed from their positions and put in the punishment company. However, the situation was resolved when a political prisoner was able to find the radio that the criminals had been using to get the news that they were reporting had come from the political prisoners.²²

The first non-German prisoners to be brought to the camp were Austrians, who were imprisoned after their country was annexed by Germany. They first organized their own resistance group, but soon joined with the German resistance.²³ When prisoners of other nationalities arrived, the camp administration, which could only speak German, favored the German and Austrian prisoners, intending to use them against the others. Many positions in the camp, such as the camp police force, which functioned as an executive organ for the resistance, were initially only open to German prisoners.

²¹ Hackett, 248.

²² Hackett, 256.

²³ Hackett, 294.

However, rather than allowing themselves to be corrupted by this preferential treatment, the majority of the Germans and Austrians used their privileged position in camp to help prisoners of other nationalities get into better positions as well.²⁴ In addition to the benefit that this provided to the other resistance organizations, this also led to good relations between the German prisoners and the prisoners of other nationalities. When committees from the different national groups were writing up reports on their experiences in *The Buchenwald Report*, several groups made a point of mentioning that the German resistance should “never be placed on the same level as the [Nazis]”, as they had been fighting against the Nazis longer than any of the other groups had.²⁵

As a rule, the Jewish prisoners were given the lowest positions and worst work assignments by the camp administration and were frequently abused by the camp guards. Unlike in many concentration camps, where Jewish prisoners became easy targets for guards and other prisoners alike, their treatment by the Buchenwald guards led to numerous acts of solidarity. In his report on the history of the Jews in Buchenwald, included in *The Buchenwald Report*, Emil Carlebach states that by the end of 1942, there was very little anti-Semitism from the other prisoners.²⁶

Polish prisoners were brought to Buchenwald beginning in 1939, and were in many cases treated as badly as the Jewish prisoners—for example, after the “crime” of friendship with Poles was invented in November of 1939, anyone who treated a Polish prisoner humanely could be harshly punished for it. The Polish prisoners in Buchenwald received less sympathy from the rest of the camp than many other groups did, but they

²⁴ Hackett, 50.

²⁵ Hackett, 288.

²⁶ Hackett, 165.

were respected for their toughness. They had a reputation as being defiant and proud, but often reluctant to form friendships with the other prisoners.²⁷ Perhaps understandably, given that the occupation of Poland was particularly brutal, the Polish prisoners were initially reluctant to work with the German prisoners' resistance, but they eventually decided to trust them, as the German resistance proved itself willing to help them.

Polish prisoners who were transferred to Buchenwald from Auschwitz developed a bad reputation in camp when they tried to take power from the well-respected German prisoner resistance. They failed, but their attempt to seize power led to all of the Polish prisoners being mistrusted for a long time, although the Polish prisoners who cooperated with the other resistance organizations were eventually able to salvage their people's reputation and position in camp.²⁸

Russian prisoners were another group treated particularly badly, only slightly better than the Poles and Jews. The first group of them to arrive was a group of Soviet prisoners of war, who were brought to the camp in autumn of 1941. The only thing to distinguish them from the rest of the prisoners was a sign declaring their section of the camp to be a prisoner of war camp. These prisoners were treated particularly harshly and eventually were all systematically murdered. Beginning early the next year, Soviet civilians were brought to the camp as well. They were treated terribly by the camp administration and guards but received a great deal of sympathy from the other prisoners. It was not long before they formed a resistance organization of their own, which, after

²⁷ Burney, 111.

²⁸ Hackett, 90.

about a year of operation, began to do joint work with other nations' resistance organizations.

There were, of course, other nations represented at Buchenwald as well—prisoners came from over thirty nations in total. The groups mentioned above were the most numerous and the most prominent in the camp, but were by no means the only nationalities present or the only ones who took part in the camp's resistance organizations. Membership in the camp's resistance was open to prisoners of any nationality as long as they were willing and proved themselves trustworthy.

Overall, while there were conflicts and negative stereotypes which occasionally caused problems, the prisoners of different nationalities in Buchenwald were able to cooperate with each other relatively well, and there were several camp-wide displays of solidarity which show that it was not only those prisoners involved in the resistance organizations who had relatively good relations with other groups.

In Auschwitz, there was far less cooperation between different groups than there was in Buchenwald. This is largely because of the circumstances surrounding the different groups' arrival in the camp. Whereas Buchenwald started out with only German prisoners, Auschwitz was initially a camp for Polish prisoners. German prisoners were brought in to serve as camp functionaries, but all other prisoners in the camp were Polish, which meant that the initial resistance organizations in the camp were Polish organizations. While these organizations were divided along political lines, they all shared the same hatred of the invaders and the same desire for freedom for their country. Generally, these organizations coexisted relatively well, and, while the major groups operated separately for the most part, they did eventually form a joint political

committee, described by Pilecki as being comprised of people who worked well together but “would have been at each other’s throats in parliament,” and the organizations occasionally collaborated on individual projects.²⁹ Because the camp was situated in Polish territory, the Polish prisoners had an easier time making contact with people outside the camp and consequently were more able to acquire resources and assistance from the outside. (This is one advantage the prisoners in Auschwitz had that was not present in Buchenwald, where the surrounding population spoke the same language as the group of prisoners who made up the majority of the camp, but was less inclined to help them, having been told that the prisoners were all dangerous criminals.) That they spoke the local language and generally had some idea of the local geography also gave the Polish prisoners in Auschwitz an advantage when they attempted to escape, whereas foreigners who attempted to escape were more likely to stand out and get caught.

Soviet prisoners of war were the next group to arrive. Like in Buchenwald, they were treated particularly badly, kept in a hastily constructed area with a sign designating it as a prisoner of war camp. The camp administration announced that any prisoners who spoke Russian could get a position of authority in the prisoner of war camp. As it was well known that this opportunity would require participation in the murder of the prisoners of war, the other prisoners scorned those who took advantage of it.³⁰ Almost all of the prisoners of war were murdered within a few months, save for a few who were willing to take on the job of murdering other prisoners.

²⁹ Garliński, 72-76; Pilecki, 139.

³⁰ Pilecki, 135.

The camp administration's policy was to keep the different groups of prisoners from forming close ties or organizing into an international resistance. To accomplish this, they ensured that any group of prisoners from one nationality would have prisoners of a different nationality in charge of them. These prisoners were all but required to abuse their power—at one point, Witold Pilecki was placed in charge of a barracks room, only to be removed from his position and punished a few days later for refusing to force particularly sick prisoners to go to work.³¹ There were a few prisoner functionaries who were generally benevolent toward their charges, but most were not, as prisoners who were chosen for these positions were often the most brutal the camp administration could find.³² By placing prisoners of one nationality in charge of prisoners of a different nationality and encouraging those in charge to abuse their power, the camp administration made sure that prisoners had as bad an impression of other groups as possible, discouraging solidarity and making it more difficult for prisoners to trust each other. The camp administration also used other measures to break any ties between the prisoners. For example, they set up a box where prisoners could leave letters on conversations they overheard, with a reward offered for information that turned out to be useful. Fortunately, the resistance was generally able to get to this box first and remove denunciations that could be dangerous.³³ However, this system still encouraged prisoners to inform on each other and made trust more difficult overall.

After the arrival and subsequent murder of the Soviet prisoners of war in 1941, civilians from the Soviet Union began to arrive. They were not all murdered like the first

³¹ Pilecki, 38.

³² Pawełczyńska, 44.

³³ Pilecki, 159-160.

group of prisoners of war were, but they were treated far worse than most other groups in camp, save for the Jewish prisoners and the Poles, the two groups above them on the Nazis' list for extermination. It did not take long for the Russian prisoners to form their own resistance organizations, which were generally organized around their members' geographic origins. After a while, these groups began to form contacts with the Polish resistance groups.³⁴ Interestingly, Polish prisoners in Buchenwald were generally seen as antagonistic throughout the war toward both Germany (although not necessarily toward the German prisoners in the camp) and the Soviet Union, but Polish prisoners in Auschwitz were described as hating both nations equally only until the German invasion of the Soviet Union. At this point, the entire camp desired a Russian victory despite "age old grudges and grievances against Russia...and every political calculation."³⁵ When prisoners from the Soviet Union arrived in camp and began to form their own resistance organizations, Pilecki describes peoples' feelings toward them as complicated and varying depending on their political leanings. However, the Polish prisoners in Auschwitz generally got along better with the Soviet prisoners than those in Buchenwald did, even though there was more overall solidarity in Buchenwald.³⁶

While Auschwitz was intended as a death camp from the start, it initially did not possess the capabilities for the mass murder for which it later became known. It was not until early 1942 that the gas chambers were constructed.³⁷ At around the same time, mass transports of Jews from other countries began to be sent to Auschwitz. Not all of them

³⁴ Pawełczyńska, 90.

³⁵ Garliński, 69.

³⁶ Pilecki, 35.

³⁷ Garliński, 85.

were murdered immediately upon arrival; as the extermination of Jews from certain countries had been prioritized, some were allowed to live in the camp for a short time, although almost all were murdered within a few months of their arrival. May 1942 marked the first time that a whole transport of prisoners was murdered immediately upon arrival. Prisoners from these transports, as part of an action to remove all Jews first from German territory and then from other European territories, were initially all ordered to be murdered according to an established priority list. However, as the war went on, some of these Jews were allowed to live because Germany needed as many workers as possible.³⁸

Within the camp, Jewish prisoners who were involved in resistance organizations would most frequently join preexisting resistance groups according to their nationalities. They were in far more danger than other prisoners were, as they were treated worse than other groups and were far more likely to be arbitrarily killed. While the resistance organizations tried to help the Jewish prisoners as much as they could, they were still an easy target for abuse and there was far more anti-Semitism from prisoners in Auschwitz than there was in Buchenwald.³⁹

German and Austrian prisoners in Auschwitz were generally perceived far more negatively than their counterparts in Buchenwald. From the start, they had a bad reputation, due to the initial prisoner functionaries being Germans. Their reputation in the camp did slowly improve over time, but, unlike in Buchenwald where they were generally seen as being different from and better than the Nazis, prisoners in Auschwitz tended to see them as being, if not the enemy, then at least too close to being the enemy

³⁸ Garliński, 84-86.

³⁹ Gutman and Berenbaum, 22.

to be wholly trusted. For example, when an international resistance was being formed, many prisoners, particularly Poles, were reluctant to work with German and Austrian prisoners because they spoke the same language as the camp administration and guards, and German and Austrian prisoners were often described as being arrogant and seeking preferential treatment.⁴⁰ Despite this, German and Austrian prisoners contributed significantly to the resistance because they had the easiest time getting into positions of authority from which they could help other prisoners, and, when an international resistance was formed, Austrian prisoners in particular were among its leadership.

There were far more nationalities represented in Auschwitz than just these groups, of course. Other national groups had their own resistance organizations, and many individuals from other countries contributed greatly to the camp's resistance efforts, but the groups discussed here were by far the largest and most prominent, and little information about most of the other national resistance groups has been preserved.

⁴⁰ Gutman and Berenbaum, 22, 490.

Chapter 4: Resistance Accomplishments

The Buchenwald resistance primarily worked in the camp hospital and in the labor records office, as well as organizing sabotage in factories producing materials for the war and working to influence the camp administration. In addition to these areas, the resistance also created other, smaller departments as new situations arose.

Initially, all orderlies in the camp hospital were professional criminals, but, after the camp's resistance managed to replace them, the hospital became the resistance's main base of operations. Although the camp administration figured out that there was resistance work going on in the hospital, leading to the deaths of two of the resistance leaders and the hospital staff being generally mistrusted by the camp administration and guards, the hospital remained the resistance's main base throughout the war.⁴¹ Due to the resistance's takeover of the hospital, they were able to admit healthy prisoners who were threatened with death transports into the hospital to keep them safe and work to protect those who were sentenced to death. For example, in a liquidation action against Jewish prisoners in 1943, when a number of Jews were transferred to the hospital and scheduled to receive lethal injections, the hospital staff was able to help save several of the intended victims. Similarly, in 1944, workers in the hospital, who were required to examine prisoners who had been chosen for transports, managed to remove five hundred people from the lists for a transport to a liquidation camp.⁴²

In addition to providing medical care and protecting prisoners from death transports, the hospital also listed healthy prisoners as being too sick to work in cases

⁴¹ Hackett, 211-212.

⁴² Hackett, 166-167, 213.

where this could protect them and sabotaged work in factories by keeping essential workers in the hospital and away from their jobs.⁴³ The prisoners even managed to build an illegal operating room using materials stolen from work details and the SS infirmary. Those involved in the construction were compensated with meals ordered for prisoners who had died several months before and whose deaths the hospital workers had not reported yet.⁴⁴ The camp hospital was initially entirely German, but was one of the many places which the German resistance helped open up to non-German prisoners, and, by the end of the camp's existence, it was staffed by prisoners of all nationalities, working to protect the camp as a whole, rather than focusing on any one nationality.

The labor records office was the second major focus area of the camp's resistance. It was responsible for the internal administration of the camp, and its duties included keeping files on the entire camp population and dealing with details such as work assignments and lists for transports to other camps. Fortunately, the office was run entirely by prisoners, and the nature of the work made it easy for the prisoners who worked in the records office to bring others into more useful positions. The records office, like the hospital, was initially a work detail for Germans only, but as other nationalities arrived, positions were quickly opened up to these new prisoners.

The records office had a number of important functions in the camp resistance, from giving weaker prisoners easier work details to getting rid of informers and collaborators, who were picked out by national resistance groups and sent to subsidiary camps or less desirable work details where they could do less damage. This was carried

⁴³ Hackett, 213.

⁴⁴ Hackett, 62, 211.

out by a special department within the records office.⁴⁵ The records office was also responsible for removing those people who were needed for resistance work from the lists for transports to other camps, as well as drawing up the lists of those who would be sent to work in external work details and factories producing materials for the war. When drawing up the lists for external work details, resistance members were sent to organize sabotage, and in factories, particularly armament factories, the records office workers made sure to send only those who would do everything they could to sabotage the war industry. This sabotage was accomplished through deliberately slow work, producing goods of as low a quality as possible, and the deliberate damaging of factory machines. Additionally, factory resources were used to produce commodities for the resistance whenever possible.⁴⁶ As there were usually not production quotas at Buchenwald, prisoners did as little work as possible. *The Buchenwald Report* estimates that a fifth of the work force of Buchenwald, working at a normal pace, could have accomplished two or three times as much work in these factories as the work details of Buchenwald did.⁴⁷

Among the other resistance details was a department whose job it was to illegally listen in on foreign broadcasts using a radio built by the camp electrician detail, as well as collecting information from newspapers, any civilian workers they could make contact with, and new arrivals. This information was passed on throughout the resistance organization in order to counteract Nazi propaganda.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Hackett, 167, 298.

⁴⁶ Hackett, 298, 308.

⁴⁷ Hackett, 50.

⁴⁸ Hackett 261.

One of the departments that most demonstrated the solidarity among the prisoners was the camp laundry department, the workers of which voluntarily gave up their Sunday afternoons, which were ordinarily designated as free time, to ensure that the rest of the camp could have clean clothes for the week. Additionally, the guards in this department frequently tried to play the prisoners in this department off against each other in order to find out about political activity, but were never able to get information from anyone in the department, no matter their interrogation tactics.⁴⁹

In a similar vein, Buchenwald was notable among concentration camps for its more equal distribution of food rations among the prisoners. On several occasions, large numbers of prisoners actively risked punishment to ensure that others did not go without food. Once, when all Jewish prisoners were locked in their barracks without food or drink for five days, non-Jewish prisoners would sneak to the Jewish blocks to bring supplies to them.⁵⁰ Later, during a period in which food was withheld from all the camp's Jewish prisoners as punishment for alleged offenses and given as a supplement to work details favored by the camp administration (generally those which were primarily made up of German prisoners), most who received these supplements returned the food to the Jewish prisoners, despite the risk of punishment if they were caught.⁵¹ In both of these cases, large groups of prisoners risked punishment to help provide for other prisoners in need, regardless of nationality. While displays of solidarity were not unique to Buchenwald, and there were plenty of instances of prisoners in other camps risking punishment and

⁴⁹ Hackett, 182-183.

⁵⁰ Hackett, 252.

⁵¹ Hackett, 166.

giving up their own resources to help others, the scale of these occurrences in Buchenwald was unusual.

Another unusual and particularly impressive aspect of resistance in Buchenwald was the camp police force, made up of prisoners, which was created in 1943, an organization which only existed in Buchenwald.⁵² When the camp administration was finally persuaded to allow its creation, after a great deal of work on the part of the resistance, membership was open only to Germans, as the camp administration trusted them more than other prisoners. Participation in the camp police was eventually opened up to non-German prisoners through the efforts of its initial members who emphasized the variety of languages spoken in the camp and the need for the camp's police to have members who could speak languages other than German in order to be most effective.⁵³ The official purpose of the camp police force was to maintain order in the camp and ease the workload of the camp guards. While it did serve this purpose, the police force was also intended to keep the guards and administration out of the camp as much as possible, function as an executive organ of the international resistance, and help protect the prisoners in the last months of the camp's existence. Whenever the camp police caught someone committing an offense, they would turn the person over to their national organization, rather than reporting them to the camp guards, and they maintained order in the camp without resorting to the violent methods employed by the guards.⁵⁴ In this way, the camp police force was an extremely useful tool of the prisoners. In addition, at the time of the camp's liberation, the camp police force, as well as the medical corps and

⁵² Hackett, 50, 257.

⁵³ Hackett, 257-258.

⁵⁴ Hackett, 258.

firefighting details (which were created later), proved extremely helpful in protecting the prisoners from being sent on transports to other camps and even helped the American forces in the fighting at the time of liberation of the camp.⁵⁵

The resistance in Auschwitz focused around similar areas, namely the hospital and the labor assignment office, while also setting up contacts around the camp and working to get information out and, eventually, to organize escapes. However, the resistance organizations in Auschwitz were generally far more concerned with secrecy than the Buchenwald resistance organizations—a key feature of their organization was that members would have only as much information and would know only as many people as were strictly necessary to complete a task. This was to ensure that if one member of the resistance were to be caught, they would not be able to betray anyone else, as it was frequently emphasized that no matter how good someone's intentions were, nobody could know for sure that they would not break under torture.⁵⁶ Membership in a resistance organization was generally initially limited to those people who the founder of the organization already knew and trusted from before their arrival at the camp. Over time, the group would gradually begin to recruit other prisoners in the same national group, generally with similar political ideals, and eventually members of other national groups who had proven themselves trustworthy might be invited to join. Even the Polish resistance hesitantly accepted certain Germans who had proved themselves trustworthy, generally by using their position to help resistance members before being made aware that there was an actual organization, although this was done quite reluctantly at first.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Hackett, 328-329, 333-334.

⁵⁶ Pilecki, 37; Garliński, 39-40.

⁵⁷ Pilecki, 93.

An interesting aspect of the Auschwitz resistance is the emphasis placed on the development of a military organization that would be capable of taking over and liberating the camp. Captain Witold Pilecki in particular discusses the establishment of a military branch of his organization. According to his 1945 report, his organization was capable of taking over the camp at any point from 1942 on, although it would not attempt to do so without an order from the Polish Home Army, as the resistance would not be able to keep control of the camp for any length of time without outside help.⁵⁸ The Home Army, meanwhile, did consider the prospect, but concluded that it lacked the necessary strength to hold the camp long enough to evacuate all or even most of the prisoners, and the many thousands of prisoners who could not be evacuated in time would likely be massacred.⁵⁹

While the Auschwitz resistance was unfortunately less capable of a successful general uprising than its leaders hoped, it had more success in other areas. As in Buchenwald, the hospital was the main base of operations for the resistance, and almost all of the prisoners who worked in the hospital were in some way involved in a resistance organization. The hospital in Auschwitz served similar purposes to the hospital in Buchenwald—healing of prisoners, a relatively safe haven for those who needed to be hidden, a center for the falsification and alteration of certain records, and a convenient way to get rid of informers without arousing suspicion. The hospital was run by a German criminal prisoner named Hans Bock, who was “proof of the fact that one should not generalize.”⁶⁰ Bock used the privileges he was given due to his nationality to get any

⁵⁸ Pilecki, 230-231.

⁵⁹ Pilecki, xliii.

⁶⁰ Garliński, 49.

doctors in camp into positions in the hospital even though officially Poles were forbidden from working as doctors. He treated those who worked in the hospital well, and did his best to protect those in the hospital from the camp administration and guards. While he could not prevent the camp administration from making selections of prisoners in the hospital to be sent to the gas chambers or conducting unethical medical experiments, he was generally successful in his efforts to keep informers from getting positions in the hospital.⁶¹ Additionally, the resistance was able to use the selections for the gas chambers to get rid of informers by listing them as being sicker than they really were.

The labor assignment office was the second main hub of resistance activity. It served a similar function to the labor records office in Buchenwald, and, as in Buchenwald, it was run by prisoners, although there was closer supervision of the activities of the labor assignment office in Auschwitz than there was of the labor records office in Buchenwald. The prisoners who worked in the labor assignment office were able to help place members of the resistance into positions where they would be the most useful, as well as keeping them out of the more dangerous work details. The initial goal was to get resistance members into key positions in every significant, influential, and (relatively) safe work detail. This would ensure that the resistance would control all of the most important work details. The labor assignment office was vital to accomplishing this goal because its backing was required to get into and remain in a good work detail.⁶² By placing its members into positions of authority, resistance groups were, in the later period of the war, able to influence conditions in the camp.⁶³

⁶¹ Garliński, 50-52.

⁶² Garliński, 57-59.

⁶³ Gutman and Berenbaum, 23.

Initially, all important jobs were given to professional criminal prisoners—as in Buchenwald, the camp administration favored the professional criminals because they were generally easier to corrupt and turn against the other prisoners, and accordingly, they were given the jobs that gave them power to abuse. But as the camp’s population expanded dramatically as the war went on, the camp administration began to allow the appointing of political prisoners to more important positions of authority and responsibility, as it became clear that the political prisoners were generally better at the organizing of such a large camp than the professional criminals were.⁶⁴

One of the major focuses of the Auschwitz resistance organizations, particularly Pilecki’s organization, was getting information on the camp to the rest of the world. To do this, the prisoners did their best to make contact with people who lived in the surrounding areas. This was generally done by prisoners in work parties that went outside the camp. Although speaking with local civilians was strictly forbidden and harsh punishments were threatened, attempts to make contact were frequently successful simply because the increasing camp population meant that there were so many prisoners that it became impossible for the guards to supervise work parties closely enough to prevent this.⁶⁵ When contact was made, the local population, which was almost entirely Polish, was sympathetic to the prisoners’ plight and did whatever they could to help them, providing food, medical supplies, and information about the outside world, as well as working to help escaping prisoners. An organization was set up in the area around the camp to provide aid to prisoners, and, through this organization, the prisoners were able

⁶⁴ Garliński, 27-28.

⁶⁵ Garliński, 43.

to get some messages and, on one occasion, a stack of German cypher keys, to the outside world.⁶⁶ Later, reports and messages were also carried by escaping prisoners, but initially, due to the camp administration's policy of murdering ten prisoners for every escape, the resistance discouraged escape attempts. When this policy was later cancelled in late 1942, various national resistance groups began to organize escapes. Between the escaped prisoners and the contacts with the local population and Polish resistance outside the camp, the camp resistance was able to send out fairly regular reports on the situation in the camp. One particularly significant instance of this is the report of the camp administration's plan to destroy the camp with an aerial bombardment when Soviet forces began to approach. This report from Battle Group Auschwitz made its way to London in September of 1944 through the Polish resistance in Krakow. The report was then published in England, which is speculated to be one of the reasons that the plan was ultimately never carried out.⁶⁷

As the war went on, resistance activities in Auschwitz continued. When the situation began to become disadvantageous to the German army and it began to become clear that the camp would be liberated, the resistance was more easily able to influence demoralized individual guards and certain members of the camp administration. They were able to get these individuals to help them in various ways such as giving warning of selections for the gas chambers or helping prisoners gain access to materials they needed.⁶⁸ The camp resistance organizations prepared to fight to liberate the camp should the camp administration decide to destroy the camp and all of its prisoners as the Red

⁶⁶ Pilecki, 169.

⁶⁷ Gutman and Berenbaum, 495.

⁶⁸ Garliński, 205-206.

Army approached. Ultimately, however, the camp administration chose to send the prisoners off in transports to other camps, and when the Red Army arrived, only a few doctors and those unable to walk remained in the camp.

Chapter 5: Comparisons and Conclusion

Despite their often similar methods, the resistance organizations in Auschwitz and Buchenwald ultimately achieved results on completely different scales. While the various resistance organizations in both camps achieved some level of success, the resistance in Buchenwald simply had much more success. While the Auschwitz resistance worked to gain enough influence in the labor assignment office to place its agents into better positions in more ideal work details, the Buchenwald resistance all but ran the entire internal administration of the camp with limited supervision. They even managed to bring about the creation of a camp police force to keep the guards out of the camp as much as possible. While the Auschwitz resistance gained influence in the hospital and struggled to come up with any medical supplies, the Buchenwald resistance acquired the necessary supplies through bribery of guards and occasionally outright theft, and even managed the incredibly audacious objective of constructing an illegal operating room.

Certainly the different circumstances in the camps were responsible for a considerable part of the differences in achievements. Prisoners in Auschwitz had harsher conditions to contend with and, as a result, had to devote more of their efforts to keeping themselves alive in order to continue to fight, whereas conditions in Buchenwald, while certainly bad, were at least better than those in Auschwitz. However, the different circumstances were not the only factor in the effectiveness of the camps' resistance organizations. The interactions between the different prisoner groups were another significant factor in the effectiveness of the resistance organizations these groups formed. In Buchenwald, from the time that new groups of prisoners arrived, they were helped by those already in the camp, both from their own country and from others. The prisoners

who had managed to get into those positions most conducive to resistance activities used their positions to help other prisoners, both those who were members of their resistance group as well as members of other national groups. Even before there was an international resistance formed, the various national resistance organizations in Buchenwald cooperated with each other. When members of one group in Buchenwald gained an advantage or privilege, such as the German prisoners' exclusive opportunity to join the camp police force, they used it for the good of the camp and worked to get the same treatment for members of other groups. Similarly, when one group was treated particularly badly, the others worked to help that group, such as the spontaneous organization of food for the Russian prisoners of war or the return of the food that was taken from the Jewish prisoners and distributed to other work details. In both cases, large groups of prisoners risked punishment (and in the former case, the entire camp *was* punished) to help others at their own expense, and in both cases, these actions were not planned by the larger resistance organizations. In the former case, a considerable portion of the camp acted spontaneously, and in the latter case, several work details decided amongst themselves to act and many individuals decided to act on their own without consulting others. These actions, and others like them, demonstrate the widespread feelings of solidarity among the prisoners in Buchenwald, even between groups that would ordinarily have been antagonistic. While there were negative stereotypes in the camp, and some groups got along better than others, the majority of prisoners were more concerned with the good of the camp overall than with grudges against particular groups.

Solidarity did, of course, exist in Auschwitz as well, and there were many cases of prisoners helping others against their own self-interest. However, Auschwitz lacked the

camp-wide solidarity expressed by the prisoners of Buchenwald, and, while resistance organizations could be tightly-knit groups and could even have strong ties with other resistance organizations, there was also a considerable amount of friction between certain organizations. For example, communist and non-communist organizations in Auschwitz might have collaborated at times, but political calculations prevented them from becoming particularly close, whereas in Buchenwald, resistance organizations cooperated closely regardless of their members' political views, and communist and non-communists worked closely together both in the same organizations and between organizations. Additionally, negative national stereotypes were generally more prevalent and more likely to get in the way of cooperation between resistance groups in Auschwitz. For example, as mentioned previously, many Poles were reluctant to work with German and Austrian prisoners, even those they knew were opposed to Nazism and already involved in resistance activities.

While both camps formed an international resistance organization, these organizations did not have the same level of success. The various national resistance groups at Buchenwald accomplished plenty on their own and only became more effective when they formed an international resistance. In Auschwitz, however, not all of the resistance groups were willing to merge with international resistance organizations, and, while they cooperated on some matters, Battle Group Auschwitz never received the same level of support that the Buchenwald international resistance did. As a result, it was never as successful; in fact, it was the primarily Polish resistance organizations that made up the majority of the camp's resistance and had the most overall success, rather than the international resistance. This was due in large part to the fact that, even though there were

multiple Polish resistance groups which were divided along political lines, they worked together with each other much better than with the international resistance which, in many cases, was not trusted as much as the other national resistance organizations.

In conclusion, although the efforts and accomplishments of the resistance organizations in both Auschwitz and Buchenwald Concentration Camps are admirable, the greater levels of cooperation and solidarity between prisoners of different nationalities and categories in Buchenwald led to the resistance organizations there having more overall success than those in Auschwitz. There were numerous resistance organizations in both camps—generally organized along national lines in Buchenwald and along both national and political lines in Auschwitz—and in both camps, several of these organizations merged into an international organization in order to be more effective. However, in Auschwitz, there was more mistrust between different groups of prisoners, due in large part to the camp administrations' efforts to divide and conquer prisoners by playing different national groups against each other. This mistrust as well as other political calculations and concerns caused the groups to have far more trouble working together than in Buchenwald, where the resistance organizations were more inclined to trust each other and work closely together with the understanding that the good of the camp was more important than their political goals and backgrounds. While both resistance organizations achieved impressive results, particularly considering the conditions they had to contend with, the better group relations that existed in Buchenwald led to greater success for the resistance organizations there when compared to their counterparts in Auschwitz.

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