

DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL

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SHOULD THE ALLIES HAVE BOMBED AUSCHWITZ?

**THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF
THE BACHELOR OF ARTS (HON)**

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25/05/2016

ABSTRACT

Auschwitz concentration camp is synonymous with the intolerable suffering and persecution of people from different race, nationality, and cultures that culminated in the biggest mass murder in history. For decades historians and military experts have debated and explored whether the Allied forces of World War Two should have attempted to bomb Auschwitz gas chambers or the railroads leading to the camp. The bombings some say would have saved countless lives or at least would have disrupted the systematic killings that occurred on a daily basis. The other side of the argument was it was impractical and would serve no great lasting purpose and many Allied lives would be lost in the attempt to bomb Auschwitz. The decision whether to bomb Auschwitz was complex because there were many aspects to consider such as the moral, political and practical implications of undertaking such a drastic plan that would undoubtedly incur the loss of life for innocent civilians. The decision at that particular time was not to bomb Auschwitz. Would the decision not to bomb Auschwitz be the same from today's viewpoint? This paper will address the arguments for and against the bombing of Auschwitz concentration camp. Different perspectives will be offered up on the argument to bomb the camp from military experts and historians from both time zones. It is important to note that this paper will not look to apportion blame to any person or Allied nation for decisions made. The blame for what happened at Auschwitz was solely laid at the hands of Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist German Workers Party the Nazi Party.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Now as I enter the final hurdle of my Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Degree and submit my final thesis, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my lecturers over the last three years for all their help and dedication, I will be forever grateful to you all. A special word of thanks must go to Dr. Paul Hollywood and Dr. Mícheál Ó Fathartaigh for their invaluable help and assistance in preparation for this thesis, your support, understanding and dedication to helping me achieve my potential will never be forgotten.

I would also like to thank all my fellow students for their wonderful friendship and support during our years at Dublin Business School. I wish you all the best of luck for your future lives.

To Dublin Business School and its entire staff thank you so much for making my time at DBS an enjoyable experience.

I would also like to thank Tomi Reichental, a survivor of the Bergen-Belson camp for his expert knowledge and assistance in my research for my thesis. I would also like to thank Laura and Aideen from the Holocaust Education Trust Ireland for all their help and assistance.

Finally, I would like to thank the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland, especially my tour guide Piotr. I will never forget my visit there, it was a very emotional experience and invaluable to my research for this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The Allied forces of the Second World War had received information of a concentration camp located in Oświęcim, a southern town in Poland. This camp soon became to be known as the site of the biggest mass murder in history, its very name 'Auschwitz' symbolises fear, horror and outrage for all of humanity past and present.

A decision had to be made by the Allied forces on the course of action to be taken to stop Auschwitz from operating the death camp. This decision was whether or not Auschwitz should be bombed. If the Allied forces bomb Auschwitz, thousands of innocent people imprisoned in the camp will no doubt perish. Who has the right to make such a decision when all these lives are at stake? If one inmate decides 'no I don't want to die, I want to survive and tell my story', then could the bombing of Auschwitz be perceived as attempted murder by the Allies? On the other side of the argument if an inmate wanted the Allied forces to bomb the camp to put an end to their woeful lives, would this be consistent with euthanasia, assisted suicide? Maybe the Allied forces purposely turned a blind eye to the fate of the inmates, more notably the Jewish population. Both Britain and the United States stopped mass immigration by the Jews, even though both countries knew of the Jewish persecution from the Nazi government; the Jews are not our problem. Would the bombing of Auschwitz give the Nazis a platform to use as propaganda; it was the Allies that killed all of the Jews.

The Allied forces did indeed bomb cities in Nazi Germany such as Dresden and Hamburg; even atomic bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima

and Nagasaki. Thousands of civilians died in these air raids and the Allied forces knew that the loss of innocent civilian life would be high. So why were the Allied forces so concerned about civilian casualties in Auschwitz, the answer is that German and Japanese civilians were at the time considered as enemies of the British and US and could be subjected to collateral damage. The Jews were not at war with the Allied forces so their plight had to be taken into consideration. Most of the deaths had already taken place at Auschwitz before the Allies had received information of the full extent to the atrocities. The war was nearly at an end so maybe the best chance of survival from the Allied point of view was liberation.

A saying that is often used when a nation carries out a bombing where civilians will, unfortunately, be killed is 'it was done for the greater good' that is to say it was done for the benefit of the public, of more people than oneself. This saying is used all too often, especially in modern day conflict to hide a multitude of sin. There has to be every avenue explored before such drastic measures can be taken such as bombing innocent civilians. As it turned out the Allies did not bomb Auschwitz, but could the Allies have done more to help the plight of the inmates? Or more importantly, should the Allies have done more to help their plight. The site of Auschwitz still stands today in near perfect condition. On display are the many artefacts from this time in history. This site is here because the Allies did not bomb Auschwitz; the preservation of this site is the best form of remembrance for all who were killed there, and as a reminder to stop this from ever happening again.

CHAPTER 1: AUSCHWITZ THE CAMP

Before you try to analyse the question should the Allies have attempted to bomb Auschwitz, you first have to understand what the camp stood for and what type of atrocities occurred in the camp. Auschwitz-Birkenau was a concentration camp built in 1940 in the town of Oświęcim, Poland about 50 kilometres from the city of Kraków by the Nazis. The camp became the largest of all the Nazi camps in Europe; the site had a total radius of 40 square kilometres. Auschwitz was originally built to house Polish Prisoners of war and later to accommodate the influx of mass arrests and subsequent incarceration of Polish civilians, existing prisons had started to overflow from these arrests, and so a new site was needed to incarcerate enemies of the German state. It was the SS who founded Auschwitz and they would subsequently go on to run and govern all matters concerning the camp. The camp was built on the outskirts of the town and was ideal for its isolation from the outside world. Originally, the site was an abandoned Polish army barracks of about 20 buildings. Auschwitz was divided into three main parts. Auschwitz One was the main camp and also the site of horrific medical experiments. Auschwitz-Birkenau two had the largest population of inmates and also became the main killing centre, by the use of the gas chambers. Auschwitz Three was used to house forced slave labour at the nearby Buna synthetic rubber works factory located on the outskirts of the small town of Monowice.

All the camps served three same purposes; the first was to incarcerate all enemies of the German state and those who would hinder the German occupation forces of Poland. Secondly, to supply forced labour for the German

war efforts. Finally, and more heinous to provide a structured killing centre for targeted cultures and races that Nazi Germany deemed sub-human and in need of extermination. It was also a fact that these camps became a very lucrative business for the Nazis, they immediately stole all of the inmate's valuables and with the forced labour the Nazis generated 60 million Reich marks, equivalent to 160 million Euros in today's money. In total, the camp had five gas chambers and crematorium and it is estimated that over 1.1 million people were killed in the camps. During its peak, Auschwitz camp was sending 6,000 people per day to the gas chambers. The victims of these gas chambers ranged from Jews, Poles, Gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, and the mentally and physically handicapped. All of these victims were transported to Auschwitz by means of the railroad system, as many as 120 people would be cramped into a single train boxcar for a journey that took on average four days. The site of Auschwitz was chosen specifically for its excellent railroad system, which was the centre crossroads for many Polish cities, which enabled transportation of inmates from all over Europe. On arrival, the detainees would go through a sorting process. Those that were deemed fit to work entered the camp and those that were deemed unfit would be sent to the gas chambers immediately and killed by the SS with the use of Zyklon B poison gas, this horrifically included children and the elderly. The SS would trick the inmates into believing they would be undergoing delousing in the chambers and they would even go to the extent of using music and planting beautiful flower beds around the chambers to keep the inmates calm and compliant. This would make the killings go much smoother and assist with making the killing process more effective. A very ominous sign met the inmates when they entered Auschwitz 'Arbeit Macht Frei,' translated to 'Work

Makes You Free' this was to give the inmates a false sense of hope that work could secure their freedom. To sum up Auschwitz is to describe it as a purposely-built camp to perfect mass extermination of humans and their systematic disposal. It was not until 1945 that the Soviet Army liberated Auschwitz, what the Soviets found would horrify the world for years to come. When the SS abandoned Auschwitz they left behind mounds of corpses rotting out in the open, approximately 7,500 thousand sick and emaciated detainees had been left behind but at least now they could tell their story.

Camp commandant Rudolf Höss, for the most part, oversaw the camp. Höss arrived at the camp with orders to carry out the 'Final Solution' the extermination of all Jews in Europe. It is a shocking thought that Rudolf Höss would oversee the murders of up to 6,000 people per day, including women and children and then would go home to a normal loving family life only 50 metres away from one of the gas chambers. Höss was captured in 1946 and tried for war crimes in Nuremberg. After receiving a death sentence, Höss was handed over to the Polish authorities and fittingly was taken back to Auschwitz. Höss was hanged between the gas chamber and the house where he lived with a purpose-built gallows especially made for him. To this day, the gallows still remain on the site of Auschwitz. Days before his sentence was carried out, Rudolf Höss wrote a letter to the state prosecutor where it seemed he accepted his guilt of war crimes. Höss wrote in the letter 'my conscience compels me to make the following declaration. In the solitude of my prison cell, I have come to the bitter recognition that I have sinned gravely against humanity. As Commandant of Auschwitz, I was responsible for carrying out part of the cruel plans of the 'Third

Reich' for human destruction. In so doing I have inflicted terrible wounds on humanity. I caused unspeakable suffering for the Polish people in particular. I am to pay for this with my life. May the Lord God forgive one day what I have done.'¹

The gallows that Rudolf Höss was hanged on, is the only preserved relic on the Auschwitz site that gives off an aura of justice, no one will stand here with any sense of sadness.

The Atrocities

The biggest atrocity carried out in Auschwitz was obviously the systematic gassing of over a million innocent people. As soon as the detainees arrived in the rail cars they would be separated from their families, men to one side and women and children to the other side. The Nazis then decided who was fit for work; those not selected for work would then be marched towards the gas chambers stripped naked and their heads would then be shaved so the hair could be used to line the inside of boots of the German army. This process was also designed to humiliate and remove any dignity the detainees would have. After entering the showers SS guards would drop Zyklon B pellets through a vent in the roof. It would take approximately 15 minutes for all the screaming of the men, women and children to end, then the SS guards would know they were all dead. Fellow inmates known as the Sonderkommando would then remove the bodies from the chambers and then extract any gold teeth they could find. The final stage was that the bodies would then be brought to the nearby crematoria and all the bodies would be incinerated. On average the inmates arriving by train

¹ World War II Database: Rudolf Höss
(http://ww2db.com/person_bio.php?person_id=608) (25 Apr. 2016).

to Auschwitz and not selected for work would be dead within three to four hours. Filip Muller a member of the Sonderkommando recalled later 'they fell out. People fell out like blocks of stone, like rocks falling out of a truck. But near the Zyklon B gas, there was a void. There was no one where the gas crystals went in, an empty space. Probably the victims realised that the gas worked strongest there. The people were battered – they struggled and fought in the darkness. They were covered in excrement, in blood, from ears and noses.'²

Those that escaped immediate death from the gas chambers would lead an unbearable daily life in Auschwitz. The average day for an inmate would start with roll call; an inmate could stand in line for up to four hours in flimsy clothing in harsh weather conditions such as rain and snow. It would not be unusual for some of the seriously sick or weak inmates to die in these roll calls. After roll call, the inmates would receive a very small ration of bread for breakfast; this ration would be no more than 10 ounces. Immediately after breakfast the inmates would all be subjected to at least 12 hours hard laborious work. When work was over the inmates would undergo another roll call, which again could take up to four hours. Finally, the inmates would receive another meal of bread and maybe a rotten piece of salami. The bunkers in which the inmates slept had no heating or running water, the inmates had to sleep on wooden mattresses with up to 10 people on each mattress. If you take into consideration the average temperatures in December for that region of Poland would be -3°, people living in that area

² Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team: Auschwitz Concentration Camp (<http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/othercamps/auschwitzgaschambers.html>) (26 Apr. 2016).

would all wear heavy clothing and would still feel the cold. One cannot imagine how the inmates must have felt in their meager clothing in these harsh conditions. It would be common to wake up and find the person sleeping next to you would have died during the night. These bunkers would be infected with insects and rats; the inmates themselves would be covered in lice and all of them would be on the brink of starvation. The inmates feared to report themselves sick for work, they knew that unfit for work meant an immediate trip to the gas chamber and imminent death. As soon as the inmates entered the concentration camp they quickly realised what lay in front of them. Karl Fritzsche the camp director of Auschwitz would frequently deliver a speech to new prisoner arrivals in the camp and would say 'you have not come to a sanatorium, but to a German concentration camp and there is only one way out, through the crematorium chimney.'³ Irene Fogel Weiss was a survivor of the Auschwitz camp, she later recalled in an interview with the *Guardian* newspaper the sense of despair felt by inmates, 'when I was in Auschwitz I thought: 'this is not actually on earth'. It was a system of masters and slaves, gods, and sub-humans and I thought to myself: no one knows about it.'⁴

The most sinister of the atrocities carried out in Auschwitz were the medical experiments; these experiments were carried out under the supervision of the head physician, Josef Mengele. All of the medical experiments carried out in the camp were in strict violation of medical ethics and nearly all were carried out

³ Teresa Świebocki and Henryk Świebocki, *Auschwitz: the residence of death* (Oświęcim, 2015), p. 10.

⁴ The Guardian: Tales from Auschwitz: survivor stories (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/26/tales-from-auschwitz-survivor-stories>) (27 Apr. 2016).

with no anesthetic for the patient. Experiments such as the forced sterilisation of women would be carried out. These sterilisation procedures if successful would enable the Third Reich to implement this procedure on the women of all conquered nations to stop their capacity to reproduce non-Aryan children through scientific methods. Many of these women would die from complications from the procedure or shockingly they would be put to death on purpose so the bodies could immediately be autopsied. Many experiments were carried out on twins, especially children. The experiments on twins would consist of injecting one twin with a disease such as typhus and wait for their subsequent death. Later, the other twin would be killed and then the doctors would compare their bodies to the results. Other experiments would consist of injecting substances into the eyes of the twins to see could they change the colour of the twin's eyes, the procedures would nearly always incur immense pain for the patients.

Punishments for the prisoners would be of an extreme nature; the most common would be flogging. The reasons for these flogging could be for the most trivial matters such as not tipping your cap to an SS guard correctly or for working too slow. One of the most excruciating punishments was that of the punishment post. Prisoners would be tied up by the wrists with their arms behind their backs until the shoulder joints would inevitably break, the pain would be horrific. Many prisoners would face death by a bullet to the back of the head at the notorious wall of death, to this day the death wall remains at the site of Auschwitz. Every day inmates would be hanged and left out in the open in full view of all the other inmates. This method was used to install fear into the inmates to obey all rules in the camp. Before the gas chambers came into full use another method of death

was by a needle laced with a substance called phenol. This method was used on inmates who were sick and would not recover quickly enough to resume work. 'The doomed men waited for death in a corridor separated from the room by a heavy curtain. They were led in one by one and told to sit on a stool. Then a prisoner functionary behind them pulled their arms back, forcing their chests forward. An SS orderly plunged a long needle directly into the heart muscle. Death followed within a few seconds.'⁵

Auschwitz One even had a prison within a prison; these prisons would be reserved for inmates selected for extreme torture methods or for inmates to receive a slow cruel death penalty. These special cells were located in the famous Block 11 in Auschwitz One and consisted of the standing cells and the starvation cells. An inmate selected for the death penalty would be placed in the darkened starvation cell and callously left there until they simply starved to death. The standing cell was constructed to measure 90 x 90 cm and up to four inmates would be placed in this cell at any one time, because of its size they would be forced to stand the whole time of the sentence, up to five to ten nights. Many would die during this sentence, the others upon release would be sent back to work details. Any type of revolt would prove to be futile in the camp and would be quickly suppressed by the SS guards with swift retribution. If one inmate tried to escape at least ten would be executed as a reprisal. A preferred method of escaping life in the camp would be by means of suicide, throwing oneself on the

⁵ Piotr M. A. Cywiński, Jacek Lachendro and Piotr Setkiewicz, *Auschwitz from A to Z: an illustrated history* (Oświęcim, 2013), p. 122.

electric fence was chosen by many inmates. It is inconceivable that a nation as civilised as Germany at that time in history could carry out such atrocities to mankind. To carry out these atrocities Adolf Hitler founded a special army unit known as the SS and they operated with complete and utter obedience to Hitler and his ideals. The SS would simply become Hitler's killing squads. The SS did not operate within the moral boundaries that you would associate with army regiments. Historian and former British army officer Adrian Weale wrote a book called *The SS: A New History*, in the book 'Weale dismisses the myth that the Waffen-SS were ordinary soldiers and deals briskly with the counter-myth that they were the only part of the German armed forces that committed atrocities against defenceless civilians and prisoners of war.'⁶

Today the site of Auschwitz – Birkenau is a memorial and museum preserved in near perfect condition. All of the people who visit the site of Auschwitz come away from it with many emotions such as shock, horror and sadness. The site has an unmistakable aura all through its confines; the best primary source of information one can get for this essay is to walk in the footsteps of its inhabitants. At this site, you will see mounds of original artifacts such as hair, clothing, shoes, spectacles and original documentation of the inmates and the camp's operations. The torture blocks and punishment blocks still stand today, the SS guard towers and electric fences still surround the whole site. The living quarters of the inmates are preserved today as the Soviets found them on the day of the camp's liberation. Photographs are displayed throughout the camp of

⁶ NewStatesman: the SS: a new history (<http://www.newstatesman.com/books/2010/08/history-himmler-hitler-germany>) (19 May 2016).

the detainees. Ominously one of the gas chambers and crematorium remain at Auschwitz One, situated right beside the gallows where Rudolf Höss was hanged. Over 1 million people visit the Auschwitz memorial and museum every year, they come here to reflect and remember all of its innocent victims. It truly is a memorable site for its historical importance.

CHAPTER 2: ALLIED KNOWLEDGE

To this very day, no one can give a definitive time to when the Allied nations became aware of the full extent of the atrocities being carried out in Auschwitz. The first indications that Auschwitz may have been something more than a slave labour camp arose in 1942, British intelligence intercepted radio communications between Auschwitz radio operators and the German high command. These radio messages reported large numbers of deaths occurring each day of the inmates incarcerated at Auschwitz. At first, the deaths were reported in the hundreds, this quickly escalated to the thousands each day. These radio messages only reported that something sinister might be happening at Auschwitz, there was no concrete evidence to suggest mass murders taking place. The problem the Allies faced was that reports about the atrocities carried out in Auschwitz were all based on rumour and innuendo; the Allies needed first-hand testimony.

Witold Pilecki was a heroic Polish soldier who submitted a daring plan to his superiors to volunteer himself to be captured by the German authorities and subsequently become incarcerated at Auschwitz. The plan was devised so Pilecki could gather intelligence on the atrocities being carried out by the SS and also plan a possible uprising by the inmates. Witold Pilecki was imprisoned in Auschwitz for a total of 945 days before he escaped in 1943. Pilecki filed a first-hand witness report to the Polish Home Army about the atrocities carried out in the camp including the gas chambers deaths and experiments carried out on the inmates. The Home Army after reading the report decided that they did not have the numbers necessary to carry out an assault on the camp and the Russian Red

Army had no great desire to help the cause of the Polish nation. This report did not filter through to the British and US intelligence agencies until 1944.

What many consider being the primary source of British and US knowledge concerning Auschwitz was the Vrba-Wetzler report. Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler were two Slovak Jews who escaped Auschwitz on April 7, 1944. Both men hoped to warn other Jews about the gassing and burning of bodies at Auschwitz and to incite rebellion amongst the Jews to fight against boarding the deportation trains. Eventually, after 15 days the men crossed the border into Czechoslovakia and made contact with the Jewish Council Headquarters in Zilina. The men then proceeded to tell their story to the council about the gassing and burning of inmates and the numbers involved. The Jewish council in disbelief of Vrba and Wetzler's story asked the men to name some of the Jews they met in the camp from Czechoslovakia so they could check the deportation records and confirm the men's story, the records concurred. The Jewish council asked the men to dictate all the evidence they could remember about Auschwitz and the Nazi camp operators. The report was 40 pages in total and included sketches of the camp layout including the gas chambers locations. After its translation, the report was sent to British and US authorities in Switzerland, the Vatican, and Jewish council communities in Europe. *The Chicago Sun newspaper* subsequently published a story from the report and stated in one extract, 'so revolting and diabolical are the German atrocities that the minds of civilised people find it

difficult to believe that they have actually taken place.’⁷ The BBC World Service broadcast the report in June 1944. It was out in the open, the Allies were faced with the task, what should they have done? Germany had occupied Hungary and was in the process of starting to deport Jews to Auschwitz concentration camp, on information received by the Allies. Could any of those Hungarian Jews be saved from the fate that awaited them?

Aerial Intelligence and Capability

The Buna synthetic rubber works factory was located in Auschwitz Three, about 7km from Auschwitz One. A German company called I.G Farben ran the factory and would use the slave labour of the inmates from the main Auschwitz camps. The factory produced synthetic rubber and synthetic oil that would be used to assist the German war effort; hence, the factory became a legitimate target for Allied bombing. The US Air Force first bombed the factory in 1943 with low altitude bombers; in August 1944, the factory was in the range of US heavy bombers from a US airbase in Foggia, Italy. The factory came under attack by bombing missions four times; 770 tons of bombs were dropped on the factory and I.G Farben would eventually have to stop production because of intensive damage inflicted by the air raids. On one particular occasion, a bomb was accidentally dropped on one of the sub-camps of Auschwitz, killing approximately 124 inmates. This showed for the first time the Allies could definitely have reached the camps of Auschwitz to carry out a strategic bombing. In all of these bombing raids, aerial photographs would have been taken but it was not until

⁷ The Chicago Sun: (http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/wrb/wrb0131.pdf) (19 May 2016).

the end of the war that photographs depicting images of Auschwitz and the gas chambers would come to light, 'the photos were discovered in the Defense Intelligence Archives by two CIA photo analysts in 1978.'⁸ It is hard to imagine that these photographs could be overlooked by Allied intelligence in 1944 if the intelligence sources could have identified the Auschwitz camps in these photographs it may have altered the decision on what action to take concerning the bombing. So why was Auschwitz not identified by Allied intelligence in the pictures? The main reasons were; photographic intelligence operatives were simply not asked to look for any such concentration camps, Auschwitz was not deemed a priority for research from intelligence departments. Operatives were mostly trained to look for factories, airfields or heavy gun installations. Also at that period in time there was no precedence to look for such camps, did they really exist? The quality of the photograph and the magnification techniques would also be in no comparison to today's technology.

Let there be no mistake that the Allies had the capability and aircraft to bomb Auschwitz but it was the practicality of the mission that gave the Allies much concern. As early as March 1944, the Allied air forces had complete supremacy in the skies. The main concern for the air force was heavy German anti-aircraft guns from land. If the Allied forces chose to bomb Auschwitz they had two options open to them; low flying target bombing by fast Mosquito bombers or large area bombing by heavy planes such as B25 bombers. Both options were available to the Allies from the Foggia air base in Italy. One major concern was

⁸ Jewish Virtual Library: aerial photos of Birkenau (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/aerial1.html>) (29 Apr. 2016).

that any bombing to be precise would have to be carried out in daylight hours; this would make the aircraft more visible to German heavy artillery. To carry out these missions the bomber aircraft would also need a fighter aircraft escort, again the fighter aircraft was available to the Allies. It is very obvious that the Allies had the capabilities to carry out these missions but the practicality would be a very different issue. It seemed that the Allies had more pressing issues to deal with first concerning the war. It is very surprising to note that although there was plenty of discussion on the Auschwitz bombing issue between the Allies, no documentation was ever produced after the war on any intent or plan to bomb Auschwitz. One letter pertaining to the bombing of Auschwitz was sent from John J. McCloy the US Assistant Secretary of War to A. Leon Kubowitzki Head of the Rescue Department for the World Jewish Congress, McCloy wrote 'after a study it became apparent that such an operation could be executed only by the diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations elsewhere and would, in any case, be of such doubtful efficacy that it would not warrant the use of our resources. There has been considerable opinion to the effect that such an effort, even if practicable, might provoke even more vindictive action by the Germans.'⁹ This letter seemed to have paved the way for the general consensus of the Allied forces regarding Auschwitz.

⁹ American Jewish Archives: disrupting the Nazi machine (<http://americanjewisharchives.org/exhibits/aje/details.php?id=584>) (1 May 2016).

CHAPTER3: REASONS TO BOMB

The most obvious reason to bomb Auschwitz was to try to put an end to the murder of the prisoners in Auschwitz by use of the gas chambers and crematoria. However, it is widely considered that the vast majority of these murders had already taken place before the Allies had received definitive information on what was taking place inside Auschwitz. One pressing reason to bomb Auschwitz was the imminent deportation of the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz and a new-frenzied burst to kill as many Hungarian Jews as possible. German authorities had started the process of deportation in May 1944 around the same time as the Vrba-Wetzler report came to the attention of the Allies. The Allies knew what possibly faced these Hungarian Jews from details of the Vrba-Wetzler report, so surely they must do some sort of military intervention to save as many as possible. Realistically, the Allies could not just carpet bomb the camp because thousands of prisoners would surely die in the air raid, world opinion and Jewish councils could easily blame the Allies for a form of legalised murder and showing a complete indifference to the Jewish plight.

One option that was frequently suggested was to bomb the railroad tracks leading to the camp. Many people believed this would disrupt the killing process or at least slow it down. It is very easy to say this was a valid option but one has to consider in 1944 the air force could not pinpoint a bomb as accurately as they could in this day and age. If the railroad tracks had been bombed by the Allies, it would have been relatively easy for the German forces to rebuild those tracks very quickly with the use of slave labour. The German forces also could simply divert the trains to other nearby camps because of the excellent rail structure in

the area; the SS did not care what happened to the prisoners inside the rail cars and would not think twice of leaving them an extra day or two without food or water inside the rail cars. When you take into context how many valuable aircraft would be lost and also the loss of the lives of the aircrew from German anti-aircraft guns in return for a short halting of the deportations, you can objectively understand the Allied viewpoint on declining this type of mission. It seemed the common theme for all appeals from the outside world to bomb Auschwitz would receive the same response from the Allied high command. The best and most efficient way to save the prisoners would have been to defeat the German army as quickly as possible by diverting all military power to that ultimate goal. One such letter that followed those guidelines was sent to John W. Pehle, the Director of the War Refugee Board from John J. McCloy, the Assistant Secretary of War. Mr Pehle was appealing to Mr McCloy to authorise the bombing of Auschwitz after receiving a copy of the Vrba-Wetzler report. Mr McCloy responded in the letter 'at the present critical stage of the war in Europe our strategic air forces are engaged in the destruction of industrial target systems vital to the dwindling war potential of the enemy, from which they should not be diverted. The positive solution to this problem is the earliest possible victory over Germany, to which end we should exert our entire means.'¹⁰

As previously mentioned any attempt to disrupt the killing process by bombing railroads would seem in futile. The SS could divert the trains to other nearby

¹⁰ Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum, *The Bombing of Auschwitz: should the Allies have attempted it?* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2003), p. 280.

death camps such as Treblinka, Sobibor, Belzec, Majdanek and Chelmno. Also, the SS could send trains back to German concentration camps such as Bergen-Belsen. The SS did not only rely on gassing as a means of extermination, during the holocaust over 1 million Jews would be shot to death and it was very easy to revert back to that method if the gas chambers were temporally out of action. Even if bombing gas chambers at Auschwitz could be done with precision, the SS had many options at other camps open to them to continue the killings. It is important also to remember that the food in the camps was transported in by rail and any disruption to this would only enhance the starvation suffered by the inmates. The use of radio was a help to the plight of the prisoners of Auschwitz. A plan was devised by the SS to destroy Auschwitz and murder all the prisoners in an attempt to hide the evidence of the atrocities committed by the SS. BBC radio announced on air that it had details of that plan and anyone trying to implement the plan would be held accountable after the war. Radio announcements such as these stopped the plan coming into effect because the SS inside the camp knew that the defeat of the German army was imminent and they now tried to distance themselves from the atrocities. After receiving the detailed information from the Vrba-Metzler report that included the names of the SS perpetrators inside Auschwitz, you feel that the Allies should have at least sent one plane over Auschwitz at high altitude to avoid German guns and drop thousands of leaflets to inform the SS guards that war crimes would be brought against them for perpetrating in these crimes. This action would have made the guards have second thoughts to their actions and could possibly have saved lives; it would also send a message of hope to the inmates and let them know liberation was shortly to come. Maybe a reason for not dropping leaflets on Auschwitz was that

the Allies did not want to turn the issues of war to a supposed Jewish problem. This would only have fuelled Nazi propaganda to prove Germany was at war because of the Jews influence on the outside world. It is obvious that the best assistance that could have been given to the Jews from their persecution by the Nazis was to open the borders for Jewish emigration to other countries to ensure their safety. Unfortunately, for the Jewish community, this was not an option available to most. In 1939 under pressure from the Arab States the British government closed the borders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and the Yemen to restrict Jewish immigration. 'The Jewish leaders felt betrayed. In their hour of greatest need, as they saw it, the door of safety had been slammed in their faces.'¹¹The Jewish Agency in Jerusalem was strongly opposed to the bombing of Auschwitz. In fact, on June 11, 1944, the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem, during a meeting chaired by David Ben-Gurion voted against requesting that Auschwitz should be bombed. Their reasoning: "It is forbidden for us to take responsibility for a bombing that could very well cause the death of even one Jew." At the time, the Jewish Agency mistakenly believed Auschwitz was a slave labour camp.¹² The vote was 11 to 1 against bombing.

¹¹ Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (London, 2001), p. 21.

¹² Jewish Virtual Library: could the Allies have bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau? (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Holocaust/bombau.html>) (15 May 2016).

CHAPTER 4: MORAL ISSUES

The main reason given to bomb Auschwitz was to disrupt the killing process by putting the gas chambers out of action. Yes, many would have died but it could halt the killings temporarily and saved a few thousand. This action would be perceived as killing for the greater good, not the greater good of the innocent prisoners who would be killed. The moral issue here is could it be justified in a civilised society? To justify this the Allies would have to be certain the people they were about to drop the bombs on were going to die anyway, the Allies could never be 100% certain of this especially up until 1944. Another consideration for the Allies would have been that they had landed in occupied France and had perceived that the end of the war was shortly to come. Every single life inside the camp counts and every life saved at Auschwitz also counted, it should be the prisoners themselves who should make the decision on the right to live. One of the reasons the camp was not bombed was because Allied commanders found it hard to believe the prisoners would prefer to be killed in a bombing to their life in the camp. To lessen the death toll, the Allies considered bombing during the day because most of the inmates would be outside the camp on forced labour work details; thousands though would still remain in the camp. If a prisoner really wanted to put an end to their life they would have had options easily available to them such as throwing themselves on the electric fence or stepping over the boundary line where they would be immediately shot. The prisoners of Auschwitz endured such horrific conditions to survive as best they could, they did not want to die. It is for this reason many people would strongly disagree with killing for the greater good, it is morally wrong. No one has the right to make this kind of decision because history has to take its own course. Yes, of

course, everything in one's power should have been done to help the plight of those prisoners such as defeating the German army as quickly as possible to put an end to the crimes and bring those who committed the offences to trial. It is well known that SS killing squads killed thousands of innocent civilians in the last few weeks of the war. If the Allies had diverted attention to bombing Auschwitz and not on the quick defeat of the German army how many more people would have been killed by delaying the end of the war another few weeks?

The problem with killing for the greater good is that it has now become acceptable; the world powers in this modern day can use this quote as an excuse when civilians are killed in air raids such as in the Middle East. Just think of how many times, when you have switched on the television and the news, is reporting on bombings in towns and cities all over the world where innocent people are being killed for the greater good, or is it for oil? An article was published in the online Huffington post by the columnist H.A. Goodman, about how Israel's bombing of Gaza was morally reprehensible for the deaths of innocent civilians in the air raids. Goodman said 'the bottom line is that a democracy must never adopt the tactics of terror organisations; justifying civilian deaths for short-term tactical victories'.¹³ Even though Goodman supported Israel he was a firm believer that innocent people should not be victims of bombing raids to achieve certain goals. Many historians had the same view as Goodman when it came to bombing Auschwitz. This chapter deals with the moral issues of taking the lives

¹³ Huffpost Politics: bombing Palestine is morally reprehensible (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/h-a-goodman/i-support-israel-but-bomb_b_5646780.html) (15 May 2016).

of innocent prisoners, but let us not forget the amazing will to live that these prisoners had to survive these terrible conditions and then go on to tell their stories to the world of what Auschwitz was and symbolised.

Political Issues

The political issues of whether Auschwitz should have been bombed by the Western Allies started long before the Vrba-Wetzler report came to the attention of the Allied intelligence services. Germany had made its intent quite clear regarding the so-called Jewish problem; remove all Jews from Europe by any means possible. Nazi Germany started its campaign of Jewish persecution as soon as Adolf Hitler became German Chancellor in 1933. Very quickly Jewish communities realised that their only chance to escape persecution would be by means of immigration to lands offering safe havens. Unfortunately for the Jews, Britain and the US reacted with an indifference to their plight. Britain came under pressure to open up Palestine for refugees as a possible homeland for the Jews. Arab state leaders strongly opposed the resettlement of Jewish communities in Arab states and forced the British to implement the White Paper of 1939. This paper came about through fears of an Arab revolt due to the fact Britain was trying to create a homeland for the Jews in the Arab states. The White Paper of 1939 effectively put a limit on the number of Jews that could immigrate to Palestine, only 10,000 Jews per year could immigrate with a maximum of 75,000. The US policy on Jewish immigration was no better. The US allowed approximately 95,000 refugees asylum, for a country the size of the US this number seemed paltry. The US was undergoing a period of economic depression and simply turned a blind eye to the Jewish plight and made excuses

that it could not sustain the influx of these refugees. It was also concerned about homeland security; the Jews could be coerced into becoming German agents. The other excuse both countries made was that ships could not be diverted for the rescue missions of the refugees because this would have a detrimental effect on the war effort. This excuse of hampering the war effort came up as the standard excuse when the Allies preferred not to act. The US did set up the War Refugee Board in 1944 under the direction of President Roosevelt, but it was underfunded and received very little co-operation to achieve any significant goals. When the War Refugee Board was set up and news of the Vrba-Wetzler report came to light, the US relaxed its immigration policy for the Jews. It was little too late for the Jews, as most in need of safe havens had already been killed in places such as Auschwitz. The other concern of Britain and the US would have been that the Jewish communities had no way to support themselves. The German authorities would have already stripped these people of their money and valuables; in essence, the refugees would have been penniless. Though no country would admit it, there seemed to be elements of anti-Semitism and nativism towards the Jews, Britain and the US were both worried that the Jews would change or ruin cultural values already installed in those countries. The immigration policies of Britain and the US undoubtedly added to the heavy loss of life to the Jewish communities of Europe. Some people would say the Allies were hypocritical in their stance of not acting for the plight of the Jews in Auschwitz; the Allies did drop supplies into Warsaw to support the Polish uprising, even though this was only for morale purposes. The reason the Allies carried out the morale-boosting air drops was because Poland after the war would still be a country with an economy, natural resources, and an army. They

had something to offer the Western Allies. On the other hand, the Jews had nothing to offer, no country, economy, natural resources or army, from a political point they had nothing to offer. There were occasions when the Nazis tried to use refugees as bargaining tools for resources. One such example was when Adolf Eichmann the Chief of the Gestapo in Hungary tried to exchange 1 million Jews for 10,000 trucks supposedly for civilian use on the Eastern front. Joel Brand a leading Hungarian Zionist attended this meeting with Adolf Eichmann and later recalled part of the conversation. Eichmann callously said to Brand 'I am prepared to sell you all the Jews. I am also prepared to have them all annihilated. It is as you wish.'¹⁴ This offer was commonly referred to as the blood for goods deal. The offer was rejected out of hand by the Allies who believed it to be a trick and quite rightly refused to negotiate with the Nazis. If the Allies made deals with the Nazis using the Jews as bargaining chips where would it end?

Retribution

There was one other option open to the Allies, send a clear message to the Nazi camp operators that the bombings of German cities such as Dresden were in retribution for the atrocities carried out in Nazi death camps in the East. If the Allies chose to use this tactic they would have to make sure they did not say it was because of what was happening to the Jews. The Allies had to be careful not to mention this retribution was because of the Jewish plight. The German propaganda machine would have seized the chance to say the war was being fought because of Jewish influence and that German cities were being bombed

¹⁴ Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (London, 2001), p. 201.

because of the Jews. The advantages of announcing these bombing raids were in retribution for the atrocities of the death camps was that these cities were already prioritised as military targets and the cities were within the range of both the US Air Force and the British Royal Air Force. It also would have let the German civilian population know what was happening in the death camps in the East. The retributive bombing of German cities in retaliation of camps such as Auschwitz may also have opened up a better dialogue with the German high command to stop imminent murders of the prisoners in Auschwitz. The Allies would never have taken that course of action because if the Nazis agreed to stop the atrocities in the camps in exchange to halt the bombing of German cities, it would mean to a certain extent Germany would be dictating Allied air strategy. It certainly seemed a good idea to utilise that tactic but then the focus of the war would have changed to a Jewish conflict and the Nazis could use this to their advantage, especially in the surrender terms. The Germans had to surrender unconditionally to the Allies when Berlin was taken, but in 1944, the Germans could have struck a better surrender deal by using the Jewish plight as a bargaining tool. They may even have negotiated a pardon for the perpetrators of those crimes. The Allies never put the plan of retribution air raids into effect; it would mean the Allies would have lost the moral high ground and they were not prepared to do that. The Allies did bomb German cities during the war and innocent German civilians were killed in the crossfire. If the Allies had said these bombings were for retribution and not for military objectives it would have been perceived as a needless slaughter of the civilian population. 'The Jews would be liberated like everyone else through a quick victory. Nothing would be allowed

to interfere with that goal. It was almost unpatriotic to suggest that the final solution was a special case that required a special response.¹⁵

¹⁵ Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum, *The Bombing of Auschwitz: should the Allies have attempted it?* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2003), p. 203.

CHAPTER 5: THE HISTORIAN DEBATE

Many historians over the years have debated whether the Allies should have bombed Auschwitz, none more so than American historian David Wyman who was in favour of a bombing mission of some sort. In 1984, David Wyman wrote his book *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945*. In his book, Wyman was very critical of the Allied response to the bombing of Auschwitz. Wyman cited factors such as the British and the US indifference to the Jews, especially the immigration policy. Wyman also noted that the Jewish leaders of that particular time did not prioritise any rescue mission for the Auschwitz prisoners. David Wyman offered different bombing strategies for the camp and rail lines in his book. All the strategies offered by Wyman evolved around what type of aircraft could be used for these missions, such as the British Mosquito bombers that were considered more precise than contemporary bomber aircraft. Wyman states that if the Allies had reacted to the situation in Auschwitz and indeed attempted to bomb that, 'most likely it would not have been possible to rescue millions, however, without impeding the war effort, additional tens of thousands, probably hundreds of thousands, could have been saved.'¹⁶ David Wyman's arguments over the bombing of Auschwitz were seen by many historians as misleading. Wyman was not a military expert and played on the fact that people would accept his argument due to the moral obligation that the Allies should have attempted some response to the inmate's plight in the camp.

¹⁶ Ronnie S. Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust: its meaning and history* (London, 2006), p. 211.

Another in favour of a bombing mission was British historian Martin Gilbert who wrote the book *Auschwitz and the Allies*, published in 2001. In his book, Gilbert concurs with the findings of David Wyman but emphasises that one of the reasons the Allies did not respond with force to Auschwitz was that the Allies were still very sceptical and disbelieving of the atrocities carried out in Auschwitz. Gilbert insists that the Allies could have acted much earlier to the atrocities in Auschwitz due to aerial photography obtained by the Allies. Gilbert in his book does not blame the operative's viewing the aerial photographs for missing the images of the camp and subsequently not reporting their existence. He does, however, blame the high command of the intelligence services of both the US and Britain for not instructing photographic personnel to look for these camp installations after receiving vital information from Auschwitz escapees such as Vrba and Wetzler. Martin Gilbert was also a biographer of Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister during WW2. Gilbert noted in his book *Auschwitz and the Allies*, that Winston Churchill himself was personally in favour of the bombing of Auschwitz. In a memorandum to British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Winston Churchill said 'get anything out of the Air Force you can, and invoke me if necessary.'¹⁷ After this statement from Winston Churchill, you would imagine the Royal Air Force would have devised a plan to attack Auschwitz, it would be proved later that the British government gave very little cooperation to the air ministry after hand written notes from Winston Churchill and his private secretary later emerged. The letters stated that officials did not pass on relevant details of Auschwitz to the air ministry so everyone should have dropped the idea of any bombing mission, or as Churchill put it in his letter 'in all

¹⁷ Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (London, 2001), p. 270.

the circumstances I think perhaps, though I feel a little uneasy about it, we had better let this go by.’¹⁸ Churchill would later, be advised by his military commanders that the bombing of Auschwitz would not achieve any military objectives in ending the war. Martin Gilbert apportioned much of the blame not to bomb Auschwitz on the War Refugee Board; he thought that they lacked any power or influence. Martin Gilbert was also critical of the Allies in his book and said ‘the failures, shared by the Allies, were those of imagination, of response, of intelligence, of piecing together and evaluating what was known, of co-ordination, of initiative, and even at times of sympathy.’¹⁹ Initially, the Jewish Agency was not in favour of bombing any Nazi concentration camps because of fears of killing any innocent Jews in the air raids. The Jewish Agency subsequently reversed its opinion after learning Auschwitz was indeed a death camp in 1944 and urged President Roosevelt to sanction the bombing of the camp and rail tracks leading to the camp.

Military commanders from both the US and Britain would be against any bombing missions of Auschwitz and would always cite that it would deflect much needed military resources away from achieving a quick defeat of the German army. The Allied commanders would also point out that the loss of life for the aircrews and aircraft would be too much to bear at this important time in the war effort. A. Leon Kubowitzki, Head of the Rescue Department for the World Jewish Congress also was against bombing the camps at Auschwitz. Kubowitzki

¹⁸ Jewish Virtual Library: Churchill’s decision to not bomb the concentration camps (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/UK/churchill0944.html>) (15 May 2016).

¹⁹ Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (London, 2001), p. 341.

expressed his feelings in a letter to J.W. Pehle, the Director of the War Refugee Board when suggesting methods of slowing down the killing process at Auschwitz. In the letter Kubowitzki suggests, 'the destruction of the death installations cannot be done by bombing from the air, as the first victims would be the Jews who are gathered in these camps, and such a bombing would be a welcome pretext for the Germans to assert that their Jewish victims have been massacred not by their killers, but by the Allied bombings.'²⁰ It was obvious here that Kubowitzki was also worried of the possible German propaganda machine using the bombing of the camps to their own advantage. Kubowitzki also wrote of his preference to liberating the prisoners of the camp 'we want these installations to be destroyed either by Russian paratroopers or by the Polish underground attacking in force.'²¹ Kubowitzki suggested these proposals to a Mr. Ernest Frischer of the Czechoslovak State Council in a letter dated August 1944.

American holocaust historian Lucy Dawidowicz believed that the bombing of Auschwitz was out of the realms of capabilities for the Allies, the Jews were inaccessible to the Allies. Dawidowicz always believed that the immigration policies of Britain and the US could have saved thousands of Jews. Dawidowicz agreed with many historians that killing innocent Jews in air raids would be morally wrong, she was quoted as saying 'if we had gone ahead with the bombing, I'm not at all sure that young people today wouldn't be screaming mass

²⁰ Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum, *The Bombing of Auschwitz: should the Allies have attempted it?* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2003), p. 259.

²¹ FDR Library: (http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/wrb/wrb0992.pdf) (15 May 2016).

murderers.’²² With all the arguments for and against the bombing, it is easy to forget the most important viewpoint, the views of the Auschwitz inmates themselves. The prisoners of Auschwitz had suffered and endured so many horrors in the camp that they became indifferent to the thoughts of death. The inmates of the camp wanted to survive their captivity at all costs to eventually tell their story, but death could also have been perceived as a means of escape to the inmates and put an end to their pitiful existence. The inmates would have welcomed bombs being dropped on the camps, but more so to kill Germans. A very poignant quote is that of Elie Wiesel a survivor of Auschwitz. Wiesel was a prisoner in Auschwitz Three working in the I.G. Farben plant. On the day the Allies did bomb the I.G. Farben plant, Wiesel would later recall in his memoirs ‘we were no longer afraid of death, at any rate, not of that death. Every bomb filled us with joy and gave us new confidence in life.’²³ This statement from Weisel gives you a sense of how the prisoners no longer feared death, they had already endured the worst life could offer. In research for this thesis, Tomi Reichental was contacted for his opinion on the bombing of concentration camps. Tomi Reichental was a Slovakian Jew who was imprisoned at the Bergen-Belson camp in 1944. Tomi Reichental survived his imprisonment and now resides in Ireland and gives talks to schools all across Ireland about his time in Bergen-Belson. Mr. Reichental believes the Allies should have attempted to bomb the gas chambers and rail tracks leading to the camps, as the inmates already in the gas chambers would be killed anyhow. Mr. Reichental raises a valid point

²² The Harvard Crimson: honorable or criminal? (<http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1983/4/30/honorable-or-criminal-pwhen-the-kennedy/?page=>) (15 May 2016).

²³ Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum, *The Bombing of Auschwitz: should the Allies have attempted it?* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2003), p. xi.

about the Allied excuse of diverting resources for the war effort, Mr. Reichental says 'when the Allied bomber planes could not drop their bombs on nearby factory targets close to Auschwitz because of weather conditions, they had to drop their bombs in open fields so they could land the planes. The bombers could have dropped these bombs on the gas chambers or rail lines instead of wasting the bombs in the fields.'²⁴ Mr. Reichental does believe that dropping bombs directly on the camp would have been a tragedy because the inmates did want to survive at all costs. In concluding his interview Mr. Reichental says 'my conclusion is that the British just didn't care, it was a terrible blunder and the moral issue was only a good way to avoid taking blame for the continued slaughter in Auschwitz.'²⁵ Tomi Reichental in this statement believes that the British government showed a complete indifference to the plight of the Jews and their subsequent persecution from the Third Reich. The British government would make up excuses not to act on moral grounds; they could now wash their hands of the Jewish problem and subsequently absolve themselves from any blame for what happened to the Jews in Auschwitz. Tomi Reichental survived his captivity at Bergen-Belsen and now admirably, is able to tell his story to the youth of today in the hope of putting an end to all types of persecution across the globe. This would not have been possible if the Allied forces adopted an indiscriminate bombing campaign of all Nazi death camps. There would have been no survivors of the camps due to the bombings, and no one would have been left to tell their stories of what really happened in these camps.

²⁴ Interview with Tomi Reichental, Holocaust survivor, of County Kildare (11 May 2016).

²⁵ Interview with Tomi Reichental, Holocaust survivor, of County Kildare (11 May 2016).

All of the historians and military experts make very valid points to their arguments on the Auschwitz bombing debate. It is a debate based on capabilities, politics and moral issues. The decision in 1944 was not to bomb Auschwitz; this decision was based more on the moral issues than the political or practical issues, it is morally wrong to kill innocent people to achieve an objective.

Historians who argued the case not to bomb Auschwitz would base their arguments over good versus evil, Allies versus the Third Reich. The Allies should not sink to the level of the Third Reich and kill innocent people. The historians who argued the case for bombing Auschwitz would blame the decision not to bomb on the Allied indifference to the Jewish plight. Both arguments have justification; history would show that not bombing Auschwitz in 1944 was the best decision at that time. The vast majority of the killings had already taken place before 1944, any indiscriminate bombing campaigns would only add to the large numbers of deaths at Auschwitz. One common theme that all the historians could agree on was that the Allies could have attempted some sort of strategic bombings such as bridges and rail lines. Even if the German forces could repair these bridges and rail lines it would have shown solidarity towards the inmates of Auschwitz and recognition of their plight.

CHAPTER 6: TODAY'S VIEW

Imagine that it happened again today, a camp that would commit genocide all over again in some remote part of the world. Would other nations stand by and permit these crimes against humanity? 'On March 24, 1999, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) commenced air strikes against Yugoslavia with the bombing of Serbian military positions in the Yugoslav province of Kosovo. The NATO offensive came in response to a new wave of ethnic cleansing launched by Serbian forces against the Kosovar Albanians on March 20.'²⁶ This bombing was in response to reports of ethnic cleansing being carried out in Kosovo by Serbian armed forces against Albanians. Many reports of rapes, murders, and mass graves were emerging due to the conflict. Disturbingly, photographs emerged from the conflict of detention camps in Bosnia located at Omarska. These photographs were 'eerily evoking memories and images of the horror of the holocaust fifty years earlier'²⁷ and chillingly reminiscent of the photographs taken of inmates behind the barbed wire at Auschwitz. A group called the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation was set up by a group of countries including Britain the US and Germany. NATO agreed to bomb Serbian locations in Kosovo to end the conflict and stop all genocide. The reason NATO did this was that it could bomb any location that they deemed a military priority with pinpoint accuracy. The NATO bombing intervention subsequently brought an end to this conflict when peacekeeping forces moved into Kosovo. In today's modern warfare,

²⁶ History: NATO bombs Yugoslavia
(<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/nato-bombs-yugoslavia>) (16 May 2016).

²⁷ World Without Genocide: Bosnian Genocide
(<http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/genocides-and-conflicts/bosnian-genocide>) (16 May 2016).

countries like Britain and the US can drop laser-guided bombs via satellite technology. They can even drop bombs by use of unmanned drones. These attacks can be made from anywhere in the world and would be aided by expert reconnaissance and information from satellites. Because of such technology in today's warfare, civilian deaths would always be kept to the bare minimum. Had modern day technology been available to the Allies in 1944, it would have been a reasonable assumption to assume that the Allies would have attacked Auschwitz by air with precision bombing. However, even though the numbers would be relatively small, innocent civilians would still possibly be killed. Another important factor to note is that countries today such as, Britain and the US, will not go out and deliberately bomb targets when they have direct knowledge that they would kill prisoners or hostages held by terrorist forces, this tactic was the same view as in 1944. The tactics available to modern day military forces is to combine air, land and sea operations directly to the target and try to rescue prisoners and only kill the perpetrators.

The debate about whether Auschwitz should have been bombed by the Allies was explored in detail by a group of historians and military experts in 1993 at a conference held in honour of the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. From this conference, Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum obtained the core texts for his book *The Bombing of Auschwitz: Should the Allies Have Attempted It*. Interestingly, all of the contributors agree that the camp could not have been bombed before 1944 and most contributors agreed that the argument for the bombing was because of a moral obligation to act. One of the military experts, James H. Kitchens argued strongly against any

bombing because of the moral issue in killing inmates. He said at the conference 'would it be moral to kill a minimum of several hundred internees in trying to save others, with no assurance of success, and if so, what tragic ratio would have been acceptable? Ultimately, this is a philosophical or theological dilemma, not a historical one, and it is not the historian's duty to resolve.'²⁸ Kitchens believed that the bombing issue should be decided on military tactics and capabilities and not on moral pressure. On the opposite side of the debate at the conference was the filmmaker and theologian Stuart G. Erdheim who believed that the Allies did not bomb Auschwitz because of military capability but instead it was due to indifference, indecision, and anti-Semitism. Erdheim used a quote from Doris Kearns Goodwin, a Roosevelt historian who was talking about President Roosevelt's indecision to bomb Auschwitz ' FDR somehow missed seeing how big an issue it was, with the kind of political will and moral courage the Allies exhibited in other missions throughout the war, it was plain that the failure to bomb Birkenau, the site of mankind's greatest abomination, was missed opportunity of monumental proportions.'²⁹ The final outcome of the conference was that all those against the bombing of Auschwitz were seen to have put forward a stronger case not to bomb because of military tactics and priorities. Moral issues should not come into play for military decision-making. Most of the participants at this conference did agree to the idea of some sort of attack on Auschwitz as a gesture of protest. If the Allies would have diverted even one plane from the I.G.Farben plant bombings and did indeed drop bombs as a

²⁸ Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum, *The Bombing of Auschwitz: should the Allies have attempted it?* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2003), p. 99.

²⁹ Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum, *The Bombing of Auschwitz: should the Allies have attempted it?* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2003), p.156.

gesture of protest, it would have sent a message to the SS guards, we know what you are doing and you will be held accountable for all of your war crimes. It would be a fair assumption to believe that the decision not to bomb Auschwitz camp directly would have been the same view today. Modern British and US warfare tactics still hold the belief that it is morally wrong to knowingly bomb innocent prisoners or hostages, this belief has stood the test of time as demonstrated in the Allied decision not to bomb Auschwitz in 1944. Unfortunately, that is not the same case for the innocent civilians of other nations that get killed by British and US bombs in the so-called War on Terror campaign.

Hindsight

Malcolm X was an American human rights activist, he was quoted once as saying 'do not be in a hurry to condemn because he doesn't do what you do or think as you think or as fast. There was a time when you didn't know what you know today.'³⁰ This quote is very appropriate for debates on the Auschwitz bombing issue that still takes place years after the event. The definition of hindsight is the understanding of a situation or event only after it has happened. It is very simple to evaluate a situation and make a decision after it has happened. The world leaders at that particular time such as President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill did not have luxury and would have had to make decisions such as bombing Auschwitz under terrible pressure. You also have to take into

³⁰ Malcolm X: quotes
(<http://malcolmx.com/quotes/>) (17 May 2016).

consideration that their decisions would have an impact on innocent prisoners being killed. When a historian or military expert re-evaluates decisions from history, they do not have the burden that their opinion could possibly kill people, remember those lives are already lost. Information available to military commanders in 1944 would also be incomplete, unlike today when the full facts are now available and ready to dissect.

In April 1944, Allied leaders received credible knowledge of the atrocities taking place at Auschwitz from the Vrba-Wetzler report. After receiving this information, requests were made to the Allies to bomb the Auschwitz camp and the rail lines from Jewish agencies. The Allied leaders at that time had already put into motion plans for the June D-Day landings in Normandy and expected a swift push forward into German occupied territory. So one of the reasons the requests for bombing Auschwitz was turned down was that the Allies needed all military attention focused on the invasion. The Allied commanders thought they could quickly achieve the defeat the German army and subsequently liberate all these camps at the earliest possible stage. No one expected that it would take two months for the Allied troops to gain the upper hand over German defences and commence their push to Germany. This delay in liberating the camps would have meant that thousands of prisoners in Auschwitz would be gassed during these months. The historians and military experts of today now know about the D-Day invasion setback, so in hindsight, it is easy for them to say that the military should have taken action at an earlier stage to save the lives of the prisoners gassed during these two months. Another reason the liberation of Auschwitz took longer than it should have was that no one had anticipated the lack of

support from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union instead hindered relief operations, 'the Soviet government refused to allow the western Allies to use Soviet air bases to airlift supplies to the beleaguered Poles.'³¹ Much was also made of the fact that the Allies could have protested to Adolf Hitler and the German government to immediately stop the killing process at Auschwitz or be held accountable for these crimes. Adolf Hitler would never entertain this course of action. Historians would later realise this when details of Hitler's final testament, written the day before his death became public. In his testament 'Hitler concludes with a call for merciless resistance to international Jewry, which, he warns, is a grave danger for all humanity.'³²

Had the Allies bombed Auschwitz in 1944, and the raid turned out to be a complete failure due to thousand's of inmates being killed by misplaced bombs, which was not uncommon during Allied air raids in 1944, historians and military experts would now be debating the fact that the Allies added to the persecution, indifference and suffering of the Jews because of their merciless air raid tactics. 'At 3 p.m. on January 27, Soviet troops reached Auschwitz. They found 648 corpses and 7,600 survivors, 1,200 survivors in Auschwitz main camp, 5,800 at Birkenau, including four thousand women, and 650 survivors at Monowitz.'³³ That was 7,600 prisoners that had the right to survive and tell their story. Many of these people would now go on to have children and start new family generations of their own, all because the Allies did not bomb Auschwitz.

³¹ Britannica: Warsaw Uprising (<http://www.britannica.com/event/Warsaw-Uprising>) (17 May 2016).

³² Institute for Historical Review: Hitler's Testament (<http://ihr.org/other/hitlertestament.html>) (17 May 2016).

³³ Martin Gilbert, *Auschwitz and the Allies* (London, 2001), p. 337.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt the Allies had the capability to bomb Auschwitz in 1944 from Foggia air base in southern Italy. The proof of this is that the Allies did indeed drop bombs on the I.G. Farben plant that was only 7km from the main Auschwitz camp. The obvious problem was that precision bombing in 1944 was no way near the capabilities of today. If the Allies did attempt to bomb the gas chambers of Auschwitz many innocent prisoners would have been killed. Another factor was to bomb the rail lines leading to Auschwitz, but this would need continuous air attacks because the lines could be repaired very quickly. Tomi Reichental had a very good solution for this. Instead of the Allies wasting their unused bombs from aborted missions due to the weather, they could have bombed the bridges near Auschwitz. It would take far more time to rebuild these bridges and this could have slowed down the killing process and saved lives.

The decision not to bomb the camps has stood the test of time according to most historians and military experts. It is morally wrong to drop bombs knowing that innocent people will die in the process. The prisoners wanted to survive at all costs; Tomi Reichental makes this very point in this thesis. The only way to save people in the camps, especially the Jews was to defeat the German army as quickly as possible and put an end to Nazism. The Allies could have attempted to attack the gas chambers and SS barracks with the use of Soviet fighter jets. These planes would not drop bombs but specifically attack SS guard's barracks and send a message to the SS that the world knows what you have done and you will be held accountable. An attack of this nature would also have sent a message to the inmates of the camp that we know you are there and we are coming for you.

Unfortunately for the inmates, Auschwitz was located in Poland and the Soviets showed a great indifference to the Polish plight as proved in the Warsaw uprising.

All arguments to bomb the camp seemed to come from a moral obligation to do something. These arguments, however, were based on a need to react and not to reason the future implications. Many people will argue that lives could have been saved if the Allies had bombed Auschwitz. The truth is that these lives could have been saved before Auschwitz came into existence if it was not for the British and US policies on Jewish immigration when the Jews were being persecuted. This was the only blame that can be afforded to the Allied nations in the Auschwitz bombing debate.

If the Allied nations had the aerial capabilities of today's air forces, there would be no doubt that they would attack the gas chambers by use of laser guided bombs. These types of attacks could be so precise that the inmates living quarters could be avoided and the killing of innocent prisoners would be at a minimum. Historians who called for Auschwitz to be bombed in 1944 were looking at the bombing debate from modern day capabilities. There was no such thing as precision bombing in 1944; most of the bombs actually never hit the intended target. Eventually, Auschwitz would be liberated and people would survive their horrific ordeals. The Allied bombs would not be the cause of the inmate's deaths, the blame for these deaths lays firmly at the hands of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. Survivors of these despicable camps such as Tomi

Reichental will now live on and tell their stories of what really happened in the camps so it can never happen again.

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