

TASK INSTRUCTIONS

The key question: Why didn't Britain bomb the death camps?

Your task: Your task is to create a presentation using our sources on why Britain did not bomb the death camps.

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WHY DIDN'T BRITAIN BOMB THE DEATH CAMPS?

World War 2 saw many terrible events. The war also created many controversies which still rage today. One of the biggest controversies is the mass murder of Jews and other groups in Nazi death camps. Then and now, some critics argued that Britain and its allies did not do enough about these war crimes. Common criticisms are that the Allies should have:

- Bombed the camps
 - Taken revenge actions such as attacking German civilians
 - Negotiated with the Nazis to evacuate their victims
 - Threatened the Nazis that they would be punished for their crimes
 - Tried harder to punish those who carried out the crimes
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Your task

Your task is to create a presentation using our sources on why Britain did not bomb the death camps. Insert a new slide if there is not enough room to say what you have found out. Use or adapt the following plan for your presentation:

- **Slide 1: Title:** Why didn't Britain bomb the death camps?
- **Slide 2: Background**
Comment on Nazi beliefs and actions against the Jews.
- **Slide 3: What did the Allies know?**
Comment on the information the allies have about the camps.
- **Slide 4: What could the Allies have done?**
Comment on the main issues
- **Slide 5: What did the Allies actually do?**
Comment on any steps taken
- **Slide 6: Conclusion**
Did the Allies do enough taking account of the circumstances at the time?

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Extract from a letter to Prime Minister Winston Churchill by a Polish woman living in exile in Britain July 26th 1943

Catalogue ref: FO 371/34550

I am writing to beg you to stop German bestialities in Poland. May I take the liberty of suggesting the two measures by means of which this result could be achieved.

1) To send a force of Allied bombers to destroy the death camps at Treblinka and Majdanek. Those camps have been built and fitted specially for mass executions (gas and steam chambers in which several thousand people can be killed daily), it would take the Germans several months to rebuilt them, during which period many thousands human beings could be saved.

2) Immediate retaliation. I know, this is a method equally strange to the British nation as to any decent minded people, but it is the sole and only one the Germans can and will understand. If they were told that a hundred of their villages will be razed to the ground by the Allied bombers, unless mass murders in Poland or in any other occupied country, are stopped, they would stop. And if they were made to pay with the blood of their own civilians for the crimes they have committed. they would not commit them again. We know that the culprits will be punished when the Allied Nations have won this war, but by that time they will have murdered thousands and thousands more of their victims whose lives could still be saved, if the Germans were made to pay for their crimes now.

What is this source?

This is a letter written by a Polish woman living in London in 1943. After the Germans invaded Poland in 1939 large numbers of Poles were able to escape to Britain. Many served in the Armed Forces.

After the German invasion the Polish leaders who escaped formed the Polish government in exile. This was based in London.

What's the background to this source?

Throughout the 1930s Nazi leader Adolf Hitler carried out two main policies. One was to create a German empire, more "lebensraum" or living space for the Germans. The other main policy was to persecute groups that he saw as inferior races, particularly Jews. In 1939 he invaded Poland and took control of the

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western half. Conditions were bad in 1939 but they would get far worse as the war went on.

A large percentage of the population of Poland was Jewish. At first they were rounded up and put into areas of the big cities called ghettos. Many died here from starvation and disease. Many others were used as slave labour in camps in Poland or back in Germany. From 1942 so many Jews were under Nazi control that the Nazi leaders came up with plans for a 'Final Solution'. This involved building camps that were used to execute millions of Jews and other groups the Nazis regarded as inferior.

It's worth knowing that..

The Poles who were living in Britain were usually well informed about what was happening back in their homeland. Many Poles served in the armed forces or served as agents for British intelligence. See our investigation on the SOE and find out about Christine Granville.

In 1939 the Germans invaded western Poland and the Russians invaded from the east. Hitler later attacked the USSR through Poland in 1941. This made the USSR an ally of Britain but it also made Poland's position very difficult and very complicated. Many Poles regarded the USSR as being as big an enemy as Germany.

See our investigation on the SOE by looking at Western Europe's investigation on the resistance.

How will you use this source?

1. What is concerning the writer of this letter?
2. What does she want the Prime Minister to do?
3. What reasons does she give?
4. What does this letter tell you about the person who wrote it?
5. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?

[Use the Power Point template for your presentation.](#)

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Extracts from a letter written by a representative of the Jewish community in Jerusalem to the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem, November 1942

Catalogue ref: FO 371/36648

CENTRAL AGUDATH ISRAEL
OF ERETZ ISRAEL
JERUSALEM.

Jerusalem, 10th November, 1942.

His Excellency the High Commissioner,
Government House,
Jerusalem.

Your Excellency,

2. The reports reaching us from the vast European prison are most alarming. Even if we may discount some of them and fail to believe the absolute accuracy of reports on barbaric and wicked acts perpetrated on Jews by the Nazis or at their order (e.g. that they use Jews for experimental stations for the manufacture of gas, that they deliver their bodies for the extraction of fats and their bones for the fertilising of fields, that they carry thousands of Jews from one place to another in cattle trucks in order to reduce their number), even so, it is obvious to all civilised nations that Hitler is determined to act on his nefarious boasts which he repeated in his last speech the day before yesterday, to bring about a physical extermination of the whole of European Jewry.

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What is this source?

A Jewish leader living in Jerusalem in 1942 wrote this letter. He was writing to the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem.

In 1942 the British ruled Jerusalem and most of the rest of the Middle East. They took over the running of the area at the end of the First World War in 1918. At this time there was no Jewish state of Israel. Jews and Arabs both lived under British rule.

What's the background to this source?

In 1942 Hitler's armies had carved out a huge empire in Eastern Europe. During their invasions German forces had taken a large number of European Jews prisoner. At first they were forced into ghettos, used in slave labour or simply shot.

From 1942 so many Jews were under Nazi control that the Nazi leaders came up with plans for a 'Final Solution'. This involved building camps that were used to execute millions of Jews and other groups the Nazis regarded as inferior.

It's worth knowing that...

Many Jews tried to escape the Nazis, and many non-Jews helped them. As a result there was a constant stream of information coming back to Allied commanders and Jewish communities about what was happening in Eastern Europe.

The rest of this particular letter requested that the British government should take three actions:

- Increase supplies of food and medical aid
- Allow Jewish refugees to settle in British territories
- Set up a council to represent Jews since there was no Jewish state to represent them

How does this source help us to understand Allied policy toward the camps?

1. What does the writer mean by 'vast European prison'?
2. Do you get the impression that this source is exaggerated or unreliable in any way?



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3. According to this letter, what is happening in Eastern Europe to Jews?
4. If events like this took place today, how would they be reported in the media?
5. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?

Extract from a letter printed in a British newspaper, The Daily Worker, February 1943

Catalogue ref: FO 371/36653
Courtesy of The Morning Star



EASTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: CAMPS**What is this source?**

This letter appeared in *The Times* and was reprinted in another British newspaper called *The Daily Worker*, November 17th 1943.

This newspaper cutting was filed by a British government official in the Foreign Office to help the government judge public opinion on the issue.

What's the background to this source?

In 1942 Hitler's armies had carved out a huge empire in Eastern Europe. During their invasions German forces had taken a large number of European Jews prisoner. At first they were forced into ghettos, used in slave labour or simply shot.

From 1942 so many Jews were under Nazi control that the Nazi leaders came up with plans for a 'Final Solution'. This involved building camps that were used to execute millions of Jews and other groups the Nazis regarded as inferior.

It's worth knowing that...

The Daily Worker was a left wing paper. Although it supported the war effort, it was a paper which was generally more likely to raise issues which the government might find awkward, such as working conditions or in this case the Jews.

There had been a programme of rescuing Jewish children from Nazi territories in the 1930s. It was known as the kindertransport programme. There were also detailed discussions about a possible evacuation programme at this time. However, the USA and British governments believed that they could not spare the manpower and resources for an operation like this when they needed all their resources to fight the war. One government document suggested that the whole campaign in North Africa would have to be abandoned if the evacuation was to go ahead.

How will you use this source?

1. Is there any doubt in this letter about what was happening to the Jews?
2. How would you describe the tone of the letter?

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3. What does the letter want the government to do?
4. Do you think these demands were reasonable in a wartime situation?
5. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?

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A reply from the Foreign Secretary to a request by an MP to take part in a plan to evacuate Jews from Nazi territories, February 1943

Catalogue ref: FO 371/36653

"His Majesty's Government are not prepared to take the initiative in making representations to the Nazi Government in the sense suggested by the honourable Member, which would mean that that Government would allow to depart only those whom it was in ~~its~~ interests to get rid of. Moreover, it must be remembered that there are other victims of Nazi oppression besides the Jews who are equally anxious to escape from the clutches of their oppressors.

As regards the rest of the Question, I regret that I am not at present in a position to add anything to the statement made by the Deputy Prime Minister on the 19th January and to the replies given by me on the 10th February

EASTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: CAMPS**What is this source?**

This is a response to a question by one MP, Mr. W. Brown that the Foreign Secretary would have read out in the House of Commons.

The basic request was to negotiate with the German government for the release of Jews. Similar questions had also been asked by other MPs earlier in 1943.

What's the background to this source?

In 1942 Hitler's armies had carved out a huge empire in Eastern Europe. During their invasions German forces had taken a large number of European Jews prisoner. At first they were forced into ghettos, used in slave labour or simply shot.

There were many demands for the government to take action on the Jewish issue. Some called for an evacuation programme. Others wanted the RAF to bomb the camps (see the starter source to this investigation).

It's worth knowing that...

The decision not to bomb the camps proved highly controversial then and now. There were major difficulties. The location of the camps meant that bombers would have to fly long distances across well-defended German territory. Losses among bomber crews were very high and this mission would probably have resulted in high casualty rates. Another problem was the difficulty of locating the camps and actually hitting them. Wartime bombing was extremely difficult and bombs were often many miles off target.

How will you use this source?

1. What arguments are put forward in this source?
2. Do these arguments seem reasonable to you?
3. Would it be an unfair judgement to say that this source shows that the British government did not care about what was happening to the Jews?
4. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?

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An exchange of notes between Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his Private Secretary about the decision not to bomb the camps 18th & 20th September 1944

Catalogue ref: FO 371/42806

Extract a

Private Secretary 30

Please see minutes on WR 823 attached.

So far as I can discover these plans never were in fact communicated to Air Ministry.

The Minister of State on Sep. 1 (on behalf of S/S) agreed in writing to the S/S for Air that in view of the difficulties of the operation of bombing the camps ^{as} represented by the Air Ministry (they said they had no detailed infⁿ of the topography) the idea of bombing them might be dropped.

We are therefore technically guilty of allowing the Air Ministry to get away with it without having given them (tho' we had it) the infⁿ they asked for as a prerequisite.

In all the circumstances, I think perhaps (tho' I feel a little uneasy about it) we had better let this go by. F.M. 18/9. I

Extract b

Know enough
about this to
form a view.
Surely this
information was
taken into
consideration when
the decision was
taken not to pursue
the matter? <sup>That's the
whole point:
if it was as
if it wasn't.
Pr. 12/19</sup>
Perhaps Service
Liaison Dept could
advise as to
whether this info.
or not makes
any difference to the
A.M. attitude. <sup>Pr. 12/19
20/2</sup>

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What is this source?

This source is a private exchange of notes between the Prime Minister and his private secretary.

Churchill wrote the first part of this note. His Private Secretary (possibly here Jock Colville) wrote the second part.

What's the background to this source?

In 1942 Hitler's armies had carved out a huge empire in Eastern Europe. During their invasions German forces had taken large number of European Jews as prisoners. At first they were forced into ghettos, used in slave labour or simply shot.

There were many demands for the government to take action on the Jewish issue. Some called for an evacuation programme. Others wanted the RAF to bomb the camps (see the opener source to this investigation).

It's worth knowing that...

The decision not to bomb the camps proved highly controversial then and now. There were major difficulties. The location of the camps meant that bombers would have to fly long distances across well-defended German territory. Losses among bomber crews were very high and this mission would probably have resulted in high casualty rates. Another problem was the difficulty of locating the camps and actually hitting them. Wartime bombing was extremely difficult and bombs were often many miles off target.

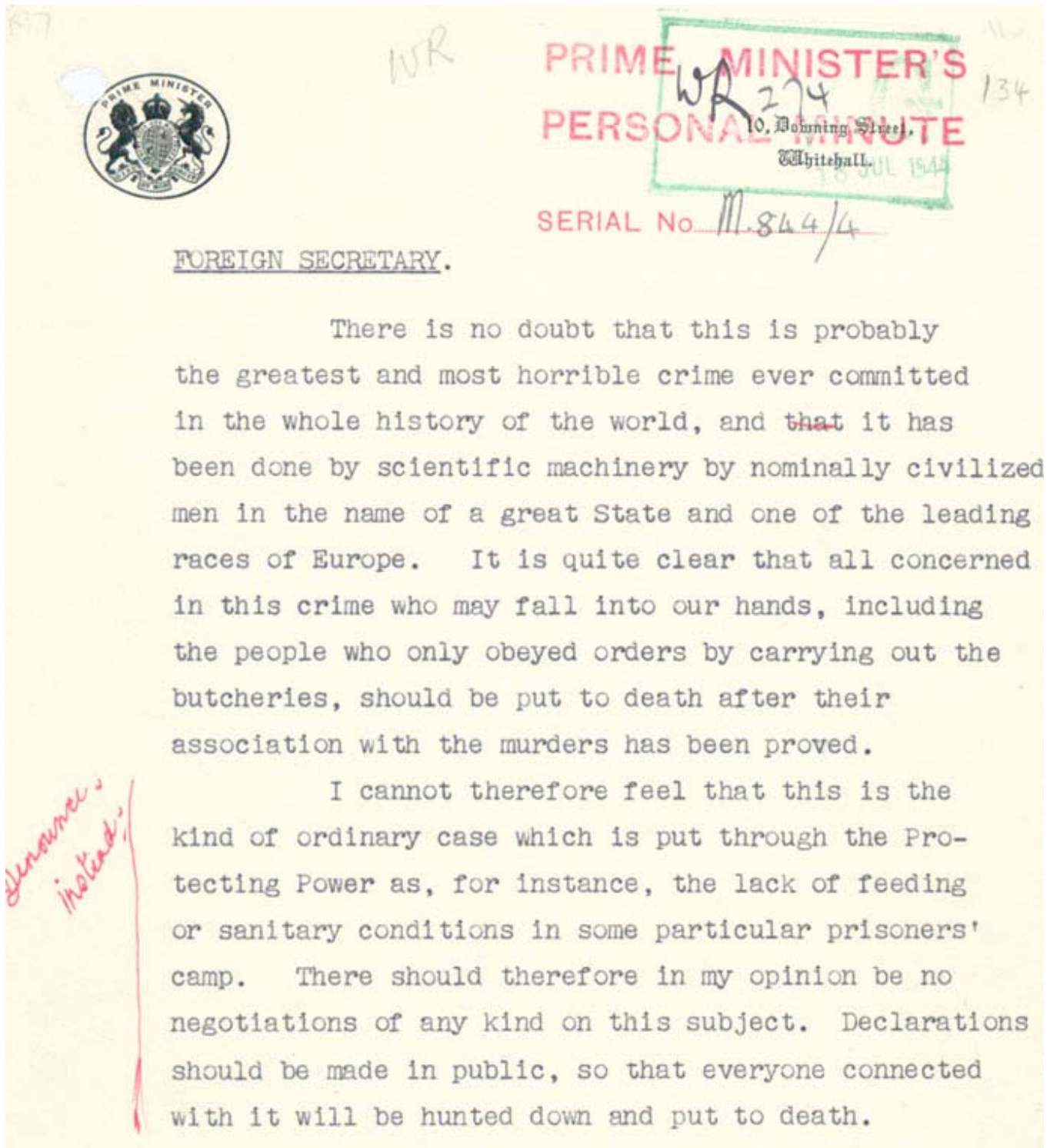
How will you use this source?

1. What information did the Air Ministry ask for in this source?
2. Why did they not get it?
3. Would it be an unfair judgement to say that this source shows that the British government did not care about what was happening to the Jews?
4. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?

EASTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: CAMPS

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's comments to the Foreign Secretary on the actions of Nazi war criminals, July 1944

Catalogue ref: FO 371/42809



EASTERN EUROPE 1939–1945: CAMPS

What is this source?

This is a personal note written by the Prime Minister to the Foreign Secretary dated 11th July 1944.

The note concerned German treatment of Jews in Hungary. Churchill believed that there should be no negotiations of any kind with Germany. Further documents from this time show that the Germans were attempting to bargain over treatment of the Jews in Hungary in order to approach Britain or the USA on the question of a separate peace, not seriously intended, except to threaten relations with the Soviet Government.

What's the background to this source?

It was becoming clear that Germany would lose the war. It was also apparent that horrendous crimes had been committed by the Nazi regime. Churchill was determined that those responsible would be punished.

Churchill had already had discussions with the other Allied leaders (President Roosevelt of the USA and Marshal Stalin of the USSR) in 1943. They were to meet again early in 1945 and agreed that war criminals would be hunted down.

It's worth knowing that...

Churchill was absolutely sincere about hunting down war criminals. It is clear from these comments that he wanted to discourage Germany from carrying out further atrocities.

Behind the scenes, Churchill urged Stalin, the leader of the USSR, to make similar statements. The thinking was that Nazi troops might refuse to murder Jews if they knew they would be caught after the war. There is little evidence to show that this idea had much impact.

How will you use this source?

1. How would you summarise the general tone of this source?
2. According to Churchill, were there any circumstances that could excuse anyone involved in the death camps?
3. Why do you think he wanted such statements to be made public?
4. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?

Statement by a survivor of Belsen concentration camp May 1945

Catalogue ref: WO 235/23

IN THE MATTER OF WAR CRIMES

(24)

AND

ATROCITIES AT BELSEN

DEPOSITION OF MEVROUW NETTIE STOPPELIJAN late of Roldershaat 14, Assen, Holland, sworn before me Major Geoffrey Smallwood, Major (Legal Staff), Judge Advocate General's Office.

1. I am 27 years old and have been in Concentration Camps since October 1942. My only crime was being a Jew. My husband died in a Concentration Camp with me on 10th January 1944. I came to Belsen about January 1945.

6. There was in the Camp a girl we know as Stenia who was a prisoner and acted as Chief of the Camp among the prisoners. She was friendly with all the S.S. women and especially with Volkenrath. She was, I think, about 27 years of age, although it is difficult to tell ages in Camp, very tall, slender and dark haired. She was suffering, I think, from T.B. About the beginning of April she drank something that made her ill but said that she had been poisoned by cakes sent from the kitchen. As a result the chief woman cook, her sister and a kitchen hand were shot. They disappeared and their dresses were sent back to their room which was the custom when women were shot.

7. The chief of the kitchen at No. 1 Camp was a man whose name, I think, was Traur. In the last week before the English came I saw three women ask him for drinking water which was very short in the Camp. They were in a very weak condition. I myself saw him take them one by one and drown them in a large sort of stone tank near the kitchen. They were too weak to resist and he was strong.

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What is this source?

This source is the testimony of a prisoner at the Belsen concentration camp in 1945. She was giving evidence to British officials so that they could prepare cases to prosecute war criminals.

There were literally thousands of statements taken like this from camps all over Germany and Poland.

What's the background to this source?

During the war the Nazis conquered large areas of Eastern Europe and millions of Jews became their prisoners. By 1942 the Nazis had begun a programme of mass murder to execute Jews and other groups such as gypsies.

As the war began to go badly the Nazis emptied their camps in Eastern Europe and brought their prisoners back to camps in Germany, like Belsen. As well as the normal brutal treatment the prisoners also had to face up to starvation and overcrowding.

It's worth knowing that...

Belsen was one of the first camps to be found by Allied troops from Western Europe. It was captured by British troops in April 1945. The guards were taken prisoner in these camps and the prisoners were interviewed as witnesses in war crimes trials. These trials took place in Nuremberg from November 1945 to October 1946.

Today some people deny that there was mass murder in Nazi Germany but the sheer amount of evidence like this discredits such views.

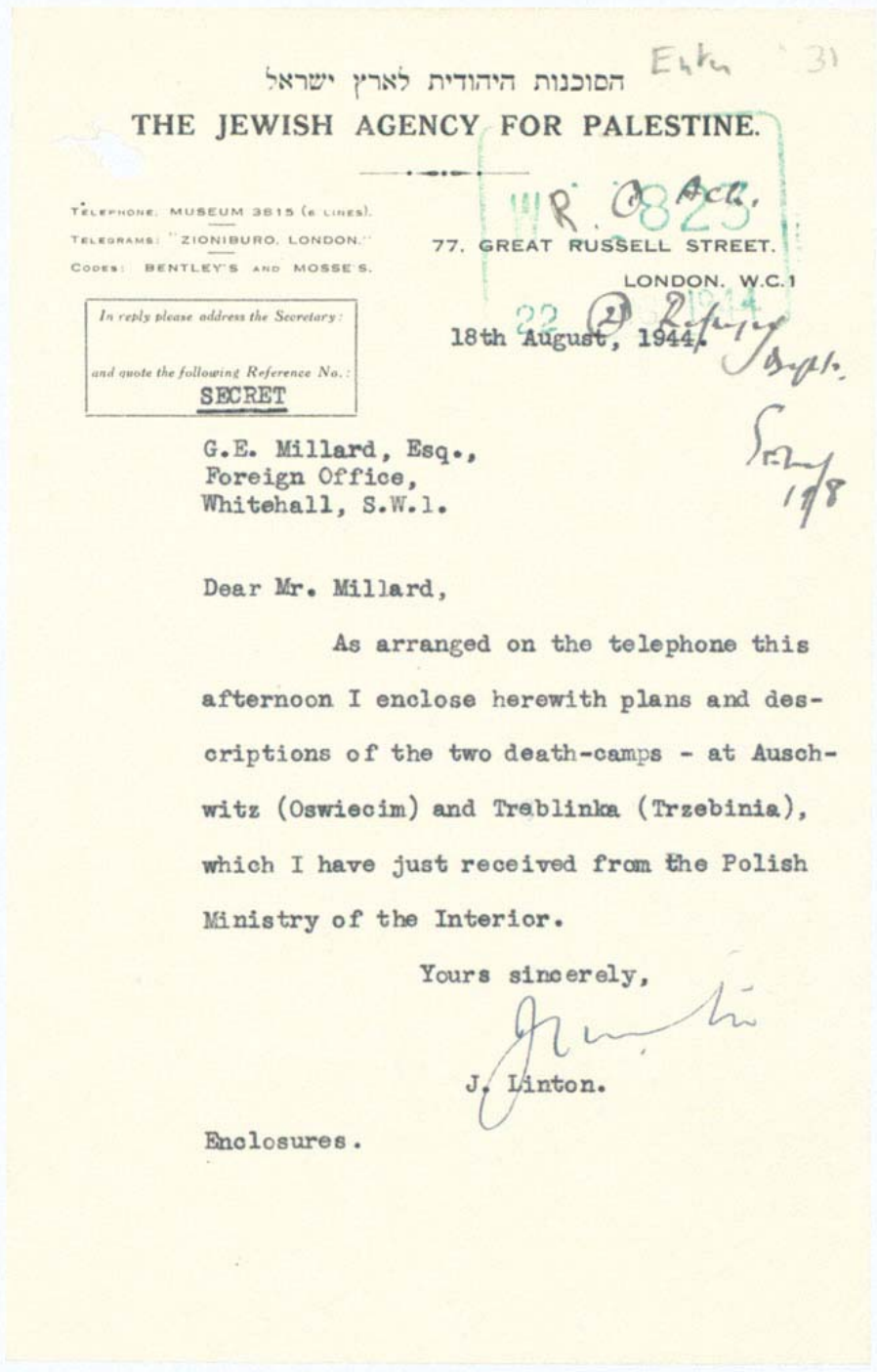
How will you use this source?

1. What happened to the two women cooks?
2. Why do you think the dresses were sent back?
3. Why did Traur kill the two women by drowning rather than any other method?
4. Why would you be likely to believe that this testimony was genuine?
5. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?

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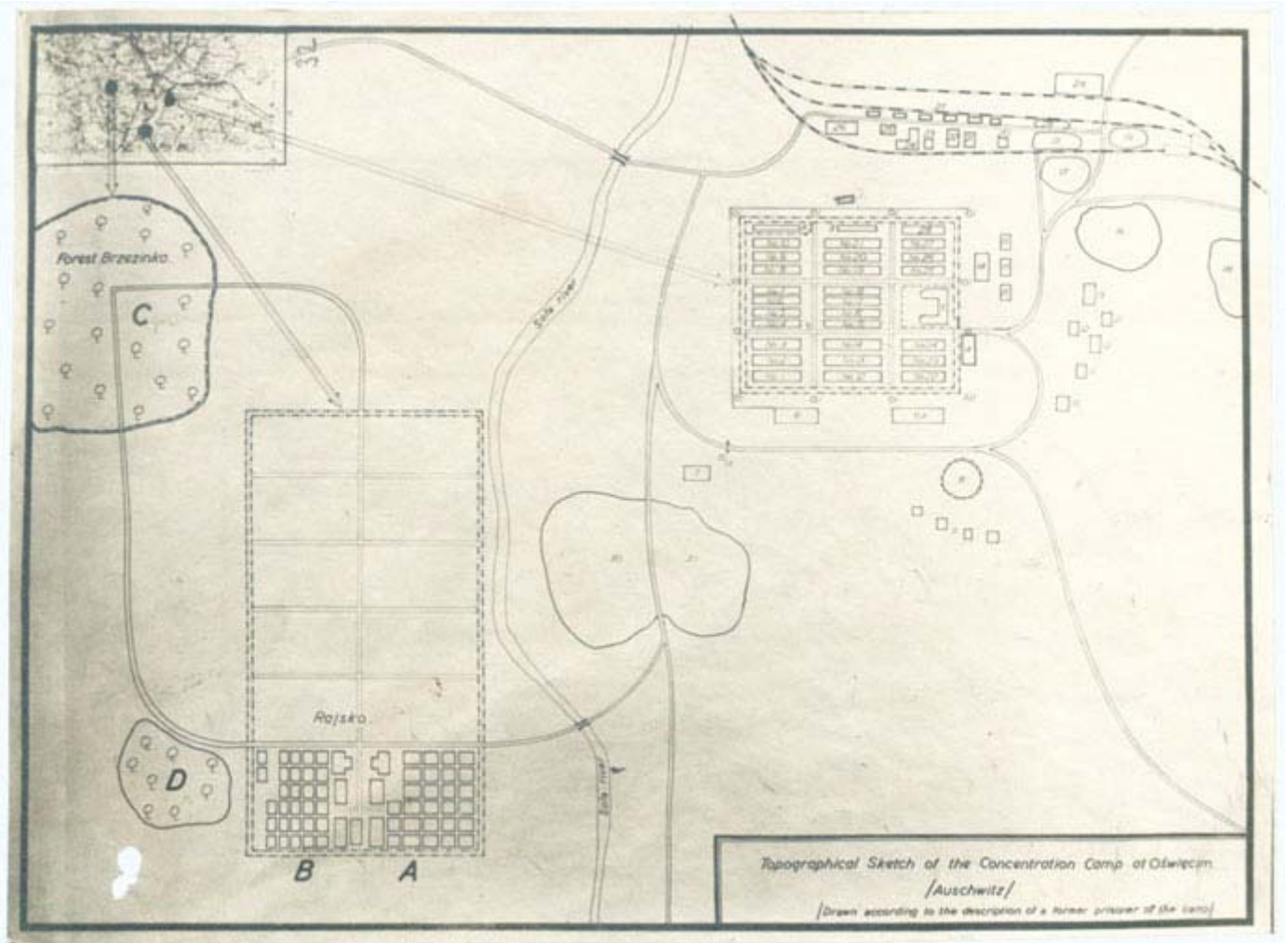
Covering letter from the Jewish Agency for Palestine to the Foreign Office enclosing plans and descriptions of Auschwitz and Treblinka death-camps, August 1944

Catalogue ref: FO 371/42806



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Plan of Auschwitz



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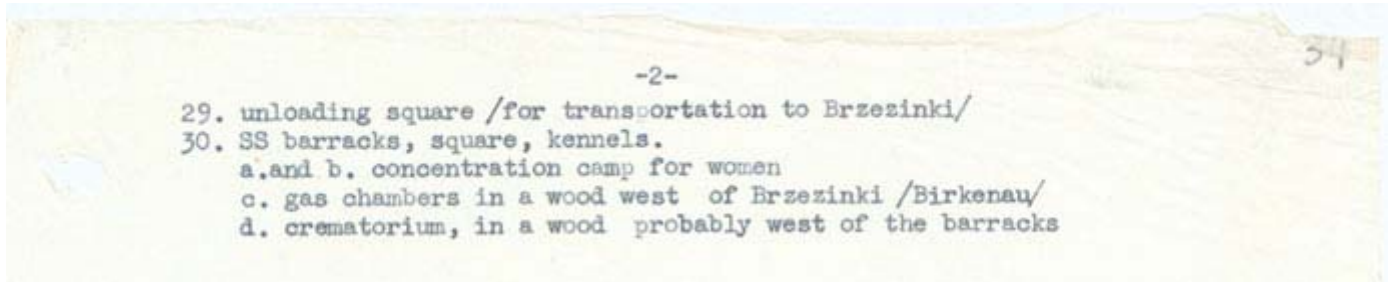
Key to plan of Auschwitz

THE CONCENTRATION CAMP AT OSWIECIM /AUSCHWITZ /

Explanations to the attached plan:

1. Towers, sentries with machine guns /12/
- 1a. Sentry, road gate
2. Amunition damp
3. Canteen
4. Room of the block commander with his little tower for a sentry.
- ~~Block N.1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28~~
- Block N.1. - rooms for internees
- Block N.2. - " " " and washrooms
- Block N.3,4,5, -- Rooms for internees
- Block N.6. --- Museum
- Block N.7,8,9,10,-- lodgings
- Block N.11.---- penal company
- Block N.12 -- lodgings and arrest /bunkers /
- Block N.13 -- N.19 ---- lodgings
- Block N.20 -- special lodging for weak persons and persons unable to work
- Block N.21 -- hospital and surgery
- Block N.22, 23, 24 --lodgings nr. 24 ground floor -- office
- Block N.25 -- lodgings; on the 1-st floor store-room.
- Block N.26-- safe and magazine
- Block N.27 -- clothing dept; and baths
- Block N.28 -- general hospital

5. Kitchen
6. Lodgings for S.S. N.C.O's
- 6a. " " " " and political dept.,
7. lodgins for commandant of the camp.
8. Crematorium
9. ~~houses and buildings~~ administrative buildings
10. slaughter house
11. dairy
12. joinery
13. concrete work shop
14. machine laundry
15. administrative buildings
16. timber warehouse
17. building materials warehouse
18. camp for civilian workers who are not interned at the camp
19. military workshops
20. stores of belongings taken away from the prisoners
21. ~~stores~~ stores of the SS
22. Barrack rooms for the SS
23. offices /
24. SS barack rooms, stores on the ground floor
25. SS kitchen
26. Stores
27. dwelling houses for officers
28. Stables



What is this source?

This is a letter from the Jewish Agency for Palestine to the Foreign Office enclosing plans and descriptions of Auschwitz and Treblinka death-camps. Here is the information that came with the letter regarding the concentration camp at Auschwitz. The resistance movement in occupied Poland would probably have smuggled this information out.

The Jewish Agency for Palestine set was up in 1923 during period of the British Mandate of Palestine. Its role was to represent the Jewish community in Palestine.

What's the background to this source?

In 1942 Hitler's armies had carved out a huge empire in Eastern Europe. During their invasions German forces had taken a large number of European Jews prisoner. At first they were forced into ghettos, used in slave labour or simply shot.

From 1942 so many Jews were under Nazi control that the Nazi leaders came up with plans for a 'Final Solution'. This involved building camps that were used to execute millions of Jews and other groups the Nazis regarded as inferior.

It's worth knowing that...

Many Jews tried to escape the Nazis, and many non-Jews helped them. As a result there was a constant stream of information coming back to Allied commanders and Jewish communities about what was happening in Eastern Europe.

The decision not to bomb the camps proved highly controversial then and now. There were major difficulties. The location of the camps meant that bombers would have to fly long distances across well-defended German territory. Losses among bomber crews were very high and this mission would probably have resulted in high casualty rates. Another problem was the difficulty of

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locating the camps and actually hitting them. Wartime bombing was extremely difficult and bombs were often many miles off target. The Air Ministry had requested information concerning the layout of the camps (see Churchill's note to his Private Secretary).

How will you use this source?

1. What evidence does the plan and its key provide about the concentration camp at Auschwitz?
2. Many historians see the plans for the "Final Solution" as the turning point of WW2. How does this map help to explain this view?
3. Can you use this source to support any part of your presentation?



Learning Curve

WORLD WAR II

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