

Lest We Forget

**Memory of
Totalitarianism
in Europe**

**A READER FOR OLDER SECONDARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS ANYWHERE IN EUROPE**

EDITED BY GILLIAN PURVES



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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book was created as a joint project of institutions and organisations working together in the Platform of European Memory and Conscience. The Platform of European Memory and Conscience is a non-profit interest association of public and private legal entities – of national memory institutions, archives, museums, memorials and non-governmental organisations dealing with the legacy of Europe’s totalitarian past. It was founded in Prague in 2011, and endorsed by the 2009 resolution of the European Parliament on European Conscience and Totalitarianism and by the EU Council in 2011. As of May 2013 it has 37 members from 13 EU Member States, Moldova, Ukraine and Canada.

The aim of the project partners has been to create a reader which would rouse the interest of today’s young Europeans in the recent history of Europe, which was forcibly divided until just a generation ago. To this end, the partners have created a selection of 30 remarkable life stories of people affected by totalitarianism from 16 European countries. They are stories of brave people who resisted totalitarianism, many of whom perished, and of those who were lucky to survive totalitarian crimes. They are stories of children, students and adults, of women and men, of people from different walks of life – peasants, workers, teachers, medical doctors, engineers, writers, artists, politicians, military men, resistance fighters, and priests. They are stories of people of different faiths and cultures – Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Roma, Muslims, and atheists. They are all stories of sadness over the immense suffering inflicted by the fanatic masterminds, supporters and helpers of totalitarianism on their fellow human beings. But at the same time, they also celebrate the love of freedom, human dignity, resilience, courage, faith and the upholding of basic human values.

In this unique collection you will find a variety of narrative styles, including testimonies in the first person. You will encounter a variety of languages, cultures and cultural backgrounds. Short introductions for each country should help students to understand the stories in their historical context. Info boxes in the text explain some facts and topics of general knowledge. Additional audio-visual materials have been stored on the accompanying DVD. Please note that although care has been taken to avoid unnecessary brutality, due to the inevitable descriptions of violence this book is meant for older teenagers (age group 16 and older).

It is our hope that this reader will contribute toward furthering the respect and understanding among European citizens across the former East-West divide and toward deepening the integration of a free and democratic Europe. We hope that it will serve as a useful tool for supplementing history education in European

classrooms, helping to teach about the horrors of totalitarianism and about the essential importance of promoting democracy, human rights, European values and the rule of law in all of Europe.

We dedicate this international reader to the memory of those countless millions of innocent Europeans who fell victim to totalitarianism, those who resisted and those who fought to restore a free, democratic society.

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COMING TO TERMS WITH TOTALITARIANISM ON THE EUROPEAN LEVEL.

European conscience and totalitarianism.

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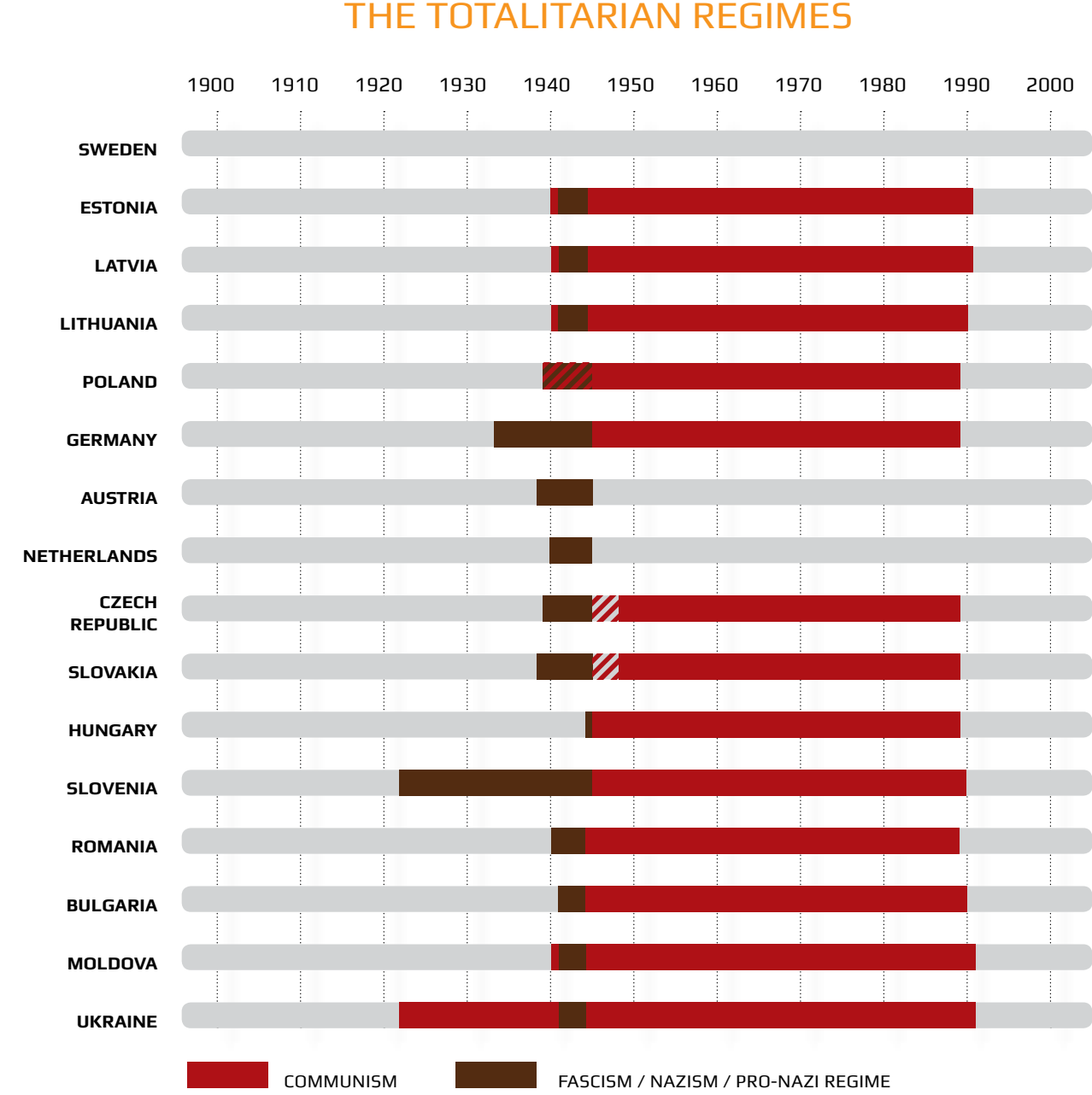
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THE TRAGIC MEMORY OF EUROPE'S TOTALITARIAN REGIMES

Europe experienced two great tragedies in the 20th century. The first was the war of 1914-1918, waged by countries with ancient civilisations and high cultures. Stirred by violent nationalism they became embroiled in a furious conflict that lasted four long years and caused the death in combat of millions of soldiers. We may argue that wars date back to the oldest days of antiquity – just remember Homer's account of the Trojan War – and that during World War I, the laws of war were for the most part respected: prisoners of war were not murdered, civilians were not massacred, and each country could honour its dead. In addition, the conflict led to the collapse of four large European empires, which permitted many nations to establish an independent existence in secure borders as well as democratic and parliamentary systems of varying degrees of intensity.

By contrast, the years 1920-1930 saw the emergence of a political phenomenon unprecedented in history: totalitarianism, which led to the greatest tragedy that Europe had ever known and whose memory today still leaves deep traces in each of our countries.

Totalitarianism was born in Russia following the putsch organised in Saint Petersburg on 7 November 1917 by the Bolsheviks, an extremist revolutionary party led by Vladimir Lenin. We can date its emergence to 18 January 1918, when the Bolsheviks violently dispersed the first freely elected constituent assembly in Russia, which had been chosen by more than 40 million voters. This new regime was imposed by dictatorship, terror and civil war, laying the foundation of the totalitarian system: the triple monopoly of one party regarding political power, the world of ideas and the means of production and distribution of material goods; a triple monopoly that could only be imposed by utilising mass terror as a method of government and which claimed to be revolutionising society and creating a "new man."

Lenin died in January 1924 and Soviet power was soon taken over by Joseph Stalin, who broadened and systematised the totalitarian principles established by Lenin. After a devastating civil war between 1918 and 1922 which led to millions of deaths, from 1929 onwards Stalin reinvigorated the totalitarian dynamics by means of a forced collectivisation of agriculture which culminated in a gigantic famine organised by the government in 1932-1933 against the Ukrainian peasantry, leading to the death by hunger of several million people in a few months. Ukrainians call this the Holodomor, a term equivalent to the Shoah for the Jews. In parallel, Stalin created a vast system of concentration camps called the Gulag, and in 1936-1938 he launched the Great Terror, aimed both at social categories and at national minorities, which killed more than 700,000 people.

The Communist totalitarian model was rapidly copied by two other totalitarian leaders: Benito Mussolini in Italy starting in 1922 and Adolf Hitler in Germany in 1933. Nevertheless, the Fascist and Nazi dictators did not give the full criminal dimension to their totalitarian nature until 1939. It was the alliance between Hitler and Stalin in August-September 1939 which triggered World War II, leading to the second great European tragedy of the 20th century, which surpassed the first one beyond any comparison.

Poland was the first victim of the murderous outburst by the Nazi and Communist regimes. They not only destroyed the Polish state in a matter of weeks, but contrived to exterminate the Polish elites, as testified on the one hand by the camp at Auschwitz, which the Nazis set up in 1940 to imprison and murder the Polish resistance, and on the other by the massacre of Polish officers at Katyń by Stalin's political police in the spring of 1940. From the outset, the war gave the totalitarian powers the opportunity to engage in secret massacres of civilians and collective deportations aimed at population groups defined according to ideological criteria: racial for the Nazis – aimed specifically at Jews imprisoned in ghettos, and social for the Communists – aimed at the economic elites deported with their families in the USSR. With the triumph of Hitler's and Stalin's armies between September 1939 and June 1940, the worst could be feared for a moment: from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Arctic Ocean to the Mediterranean, the ancient civilisation of Europe, the cradle of Christianity and democracy, was in danger of being crushed between two gigantic totalitarian systems.

The rupture of the totalitarian alliance and Germany's attack on the USSR on 22 June 1941 inaugurated the most extreme phase of mass murder. In July 1941 the Nazis began the "final solution of the Jewish question", the systematic killing of Soviet Jews, before extending the massacre to all of Europe in a genocide that left more than five million dead and resulted in the virtual disappearance of the Jewish world in Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, the Nazis also waged an extermination war against the Slavs, starting by letting several million Soviet prisoners starve to death, in contravention of all the laws of war. Not to be outdone, the Soviet regime kept few prisoners, and in 1944 and 1945 it deported entire peoples from the south of Russia – Chechens, Crimean Tatars and others – and expelled the entire German population from East Prussia.

This extreme violence seemed to bring the war of the 20th century back to the barbarous level of the wars of antiquity, when the vanquished were systematically slaughtered or thrown into slavery and when whole cities and nations vanished entirely. What an odd "progress of civilisation", which has left indelible marks and scars still felt today across all of Europe. That is why it is so important for young generations, born in a unified and peaceful Europe, to understand these issues of memory and history.

Of course, the military defeat of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and the public and official condemnation of the Nazi regime and its crimes at the Nuremberg Trials in 1945-1946 permitted the tragic memory of the victims to

be expressed and mourning to take place. In December 1948, under the leadership of Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who coined the word "genocide", the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning this mass crime and recognising the unique nature of the Shoah. Today, with the exception of a few deniers and marginal neo-Nazi groups, nobody in Europe upholds a glorious memory of Nazism or Fascism.

In contrast, since the pre-war times and mainly from 1945 to the 1980s, Europe has known a powerful glorifying memory of Communism, based on the significant contribution of the Red Army to the defeat of Nazi Germany, on the Communist parties' participation in the anti-Fascist resistance after 22 June 1941, and finally on the myth of the Soviet "liberation" of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 1944-1945. This "liberation" translated into the Sovietisation or Communisation of twelve previously independent European countries upon which Communist totalitarian dictatorships were imposed. After 1945, a powerful glorifying memory of Communism developed in the USSR and in the various "people's democracies", as well as in Western Europe under the influence of powerful Communist parties – in particular in France and Italy – deftly mixing the victory over Nazism and the triumph of the Communist political and social model.

We had to wait for November 1989 – the fall of the Berlin Wall and all Communist regimes in Eastern Europe – and then for December 1991 and the collapse of the USSR for this glorious memory of Communism to start withering away under the triple effect of the regained freedom of speech of the innumerable victims of the Communist regimes, the opening of the Communist archives, and the work of historians. The publication of the Black Book of Communism (the first attempt at an overall assessment of the crimes of the Communist regimes) in November 1997 and its translation into most European languages was accompanied by countless public debates which greatly promoted the public exposure of the tragic memory of Communism. On this occasion everyone was able to judge the distance that separated the memories of the 20th century in Western Europe and Eastern Europe, the halves of Europe separated by the Iron Curtain since 1945-1946, which are beginning to reunite since 1989-1991.

One would think that the fall of Communism and the reunification of Europe would favour a common endeavour regarding the history and memory of "our Europe" and "the other Europe". However, more than twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Europe is confronted by the persistence of three very distinct forms of memory of Communism, in particular regarding World War II. A large part of Central and Eastern Europe, in particular the Baltic states and the western part of Ukraine, preserve a tragic memory of Communism, marked by the invasion of the Red Army, mass terror and forty-five years of dictatorship, censorship and imprisonment.

In contrast, Western Europe, which has enjoyed peace and prosperity since 1945 thanks to American protection, often cultivates a glorious memory of Communism based on the memory of what François Furet has called the

“universal appeal of the October revolution”, on the anti-Fascism of the 1930s (the Popular Front, the Spanish Civil War, etc.) and on the active participation of Communists in the resistance to the Nazi and Fascist occupations after 22 June 1941. For half a century, powerful Communist propaganda has worked to install an exaggerated memory of antifascism for which the Communists claimed a monopoly, as well as an amnesia of the Soviet-Nazi alliance and more generally of the totalitarian dimension of the Communist regimes. The violent polemics which followed in France and in all of Europe after the publication of the Black Book of Communism unexpectedly revealed this phenomenon.

As for Russia, it is caught in a torn memory, tragic and glorious at the same time. On the one hand, the traces of memory of terror, the Gulag and dictatorship affect the entire society, one part of which belongs to the category of victims and the other part to the category of the government and the executioners, and sometimes to both. On the other hand, the post-Communist power is engaged in the reconstruction of a Russian identity based on the memory of the “Great Patriotic War” and the 1945 victory over Nazi Germany, concealing the mass crimes of the civil war and of the 1930s just as deftly as those who, in 1939-1941 and then in 1944-1953, presided over the annexation and Sovietisation of many nations which has been openly claimed a “liberation” by President Vladimir Putin.

In the meantime, an important step on the road to reunifying the memories was accomplished on 25 January 2006, when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, chaired by the Swedish Member of Parliament Göran Lindblad, adopted a resolution condemning the crimes of the Communist regimes. However, it is symptomatic that a large number of deputies voted against the resolution, which testifies about the difficulty of recognising the tragic memory of the innumerable victims of the Communist regimes.

The European Parliament followed with its resolution of 2 April 2009 On European Conscience and Totalitarianism in which an overwhelming majority of the Parliament put forward 17 points aimed at an honest appraisal and coming to terms with the common European legacy of totalitarianism.

There was another positive sign on 14 October 2009, when the European Parliament organised an official conference in Brussels on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the German-Soviet pacts of 23 August and 28 September 1939, which led to the outbreak of World War II. In a symbolic sign of reconciliation, the conference was chaired by the Pole Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament, with the participation of his predecessor in this post, the German Hans-Gert Pöttering, as well as the first president of a non-Communist Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis, and the former prime minister of Estonia, Mart Laar, as well as many historians. And so, from 1939 to 1989, a joyful anniversary – the fall of the Wall – has not overshadowed another, much more tragic one.

Today, most European countries have been politically, legally and economically reunified in the bosom of the European Union. But we are still far away from a common European memory which would include to the same extent the tragedies caused by the two great totalitarian systems – Nazi and Communist. That is why the initiative undertaken by the Platform of European Memory and Conscience is so important and so valuable – to publish a book for all European youth, in various languages, which recalls the names of the men and women from different European countries who risked their lives to resist totalitarian oppression and to preserve the great ideals of the best of what Europe has to offer to the world: tolerance, freedom of thought, rejection of extremism, and the culture of democracy and parliamentary government, which alone can ensure domestic and international peace. Young generations must be made aware of the privilege which their grandparents did not benefit from: life in a reunified, peaceful and democratic Europe. They must understand that preserving this privilege implies a daily struggle. Nothing can ever be taken for granted...

Stéphane Courtois

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SWEDEN



A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY

Sweden remained neutral in WWI and WWII. During the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1939-1940, to maintain its neutrality, Sweden rejected the pleas of Finland for military intervention, but thousands of Swedish volunteers fought in Finland against the Soviet Union. Sweden supplied iron ore, steel and machinery parts to Germany during WWII, but simultaneously supported the Norwegian resistance and in 1943 helped to save Danish Jews from deportation to concentration camps.

Sweden became a haven for refugees from Denmark and Norway when they were occupied by Germany. A lot of Finnish children lived in Sweden during the war. In 1944-1945 tens of thousands of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians fled to Sweden to escape the Soviet occupation.

After WWII, Sweden continued with its neutrality policy, staying outside NATO and joining the EU only after the end of the Cold War, from 1 January 1995. Sweden has constantly received refugees escaping violations of human rights in different regions of the world and still does so to this day.

RAOUL WALLENBERG was born into a wealthy Swedish family on 4 August 1912. His father died three months before Raoul was born. Raoul lived with his mother and grandmother during his early years. His mother Maj remarried in 1918 and had two more children who grew up with Raoul as close siblings. Young Raoul received an eclectic education in France and the United States of America and spent time working in South Africa and Palestine. In 1944 Raoul found himself in a unique position to help Hungarian Jews to escape the Nazi death machine. In an operation that involved the Swedish embassy in Budapest and the American War Refugee Board he endeavoured to save as many of Hungary's remaining Jews as possible. The operation saved tens of thousands of lives, possibly as many as 100,000. In mid-January 1945 Wallenberg was abducted by the Soviets and never seen again.



Raoul Wallenberg
NINA LAGERGREN'S PRIVATE COLLECTION, PHOTO:
KARL GABOR

Raoul Wallenberg

A Tale of Great Courage

written by Penny Schreiber¹

Raoul Wallenberg was born into two prominent Swedish families of early twentieth-century Stockholm. His father, also named Raoul Wallenberg, was a young naval officer when he married Maj Wising, the daughter of a celebrated neurologist, in late 1911. Their promising union turned into early tragedy. Cancer took over the young naval officer and he died three months before his son was born.

Raoul Wallenberg was born on 4 August 1912, in the Victorian comfort of his grandmother's summer home in Kapptsa, near Stockholm. Raoul lived with his mother and grandmother during his early years.

The Wallenberg family was very distinguished both in Sweden and around the world. Raoul's father was an officer in the Swedish navy and his paternal grandfather, Gustav, was the Ambassador to the Swedish embassy in Japan. Raoul's uncles, Jacob and Marcus Wallenberg, were successful bankers and founded the Enskilda Bank in Sweden. Other Wallenbergs were diplomats and bishops of the Lutheran Church. His mother also came from a prestigious family. Her father, Per, was Sweden's first professor of neurology. Maj's great grandfather was a Jew named Benedicks who settled in Sweden and became a jeweller and eventually the financial advisor to the king.

Maj remarried in 1918, when Wallenberg was 6 years old, to Frederick von Dardel who soon rose to be the administrator of Sweden's largest hospital, the Karolinska. The von Dardels had two children, Nina and Guy, who grew up with Raoul as close siblings.

Wallenberg was very attached to both his mother and stepfather, who from the time he was young allowed him unusual freedom. Wallenberg's paternal grandfather, Gustav Wallenberg, was his mentor and confidant. A well-travelled Swedish diplomat, Gustav wanted to keep Raoul free from the narrow concerns of the Swedish bourgeoisie and transform him into a citizen of the world.

Wallenberg's grandfather took care of his education while he was growing up, having in his mind that he would carry on the tradition of his family as highly respected bankers, diplomats and politicians. In 1930, Raoul Wallenberg graduated from secondary school with top grades in Russian and drawing. He immediately went on to complete his nine months of compulsory military training. Following his service,

¹ Abridged; reproduced with kind permission of the Wallenberg Committee, University of Michigan

Gustav Wallenberg sent him to France for a year at the University of Poitiers to perfect his French. He was already proficient in English, German and Russian.

Then, in 1931, Wallenberg decided to follow the tradition established by other men in his family: he pursued a college education in the United States.

COLLEGE LIFE

Gustav Wallenberg admired the drive and practicality of Americans, and he wanted his artistic grandson to pursue his chosen field of study – architecture – in America. Ruling out the Ivy League as too snobbish, he and Raoul chose the University of Michigan, both for its highly regarded school of architecture and for its reputation as a public university that attracted talented students who could not afford the more prestigious eastern schools.

When Raoul wanted to apply to the Stockholm School of Economics, Gustaf unfathomably said no, insisting on sending his grandson abroad instead. Gustaf Wallenberg did not hide his obscure motives. He feared that the cunning women of Stockholm would ruin his investment project. He warned his grandson in harsh language against allowing himself to be snared by the “hyenas” and “getting stuck with a family” before they were finished with their plan. Contempt is too mild a word to use to describe Gustaf Wallenberg’s view of women. “Lured by the charm of the young woman you shall never forget that a woman’s beauty is nothing more than fat that has been more or less well distributed beneath the skin,” he once wrote to his grandson.

Excerpt from an article written by Ingrid Carlberg for the Dagens Nyheter newspaper.

“I am very impressed by America,” Raoul wrote to his grandfather two years after his arrival here. “The people are natural and good natured, hospitable and easy to get along with.” Wallenberg’s sister, Nina Lagergren, described him as an “anti-snob” who “loved reading and Chaplin and the Marx Brothers.” He ate hot dogs, wore sneakers, and preferred to be called “Rudy.” Another classmate, Frederick Graham, recalled for Lillian Stafford, in a 1985 article for the Michigan Alumnus, that Wallenberg wouldn’t join a fraternity because “it would isolate him from a certain strata of students.”

During school holidays, Wallenberg hitchhiked around the United States, Canada and Mexico. In a letter to his grandfather at the end of his first summer here, he offered a lengthy explanation of why he preferred to hitchhike. “When you travel like a hobo, everything’s different. You have to be on the alert the whole time. You’re in close contact with new people every day. Hitchhiking gives you training in diplomacy and tact.”

In February 1935 Wallenberg completed his B.A. in architecture. He graduated with honours and won the American Institute of Architects silver medal, given to the student with the highest scholastic standing.

EXPERIENCE IN BUSINESS

After leaving university, Wallenberg lived and worked in South Africa for six months, then went to Palestine, where he worked as an apprentice to a friend of his grandfather, a Jewish banker from Holland. Gustav was still hopeful that his grandson’s future lay in the family’s financial empire.

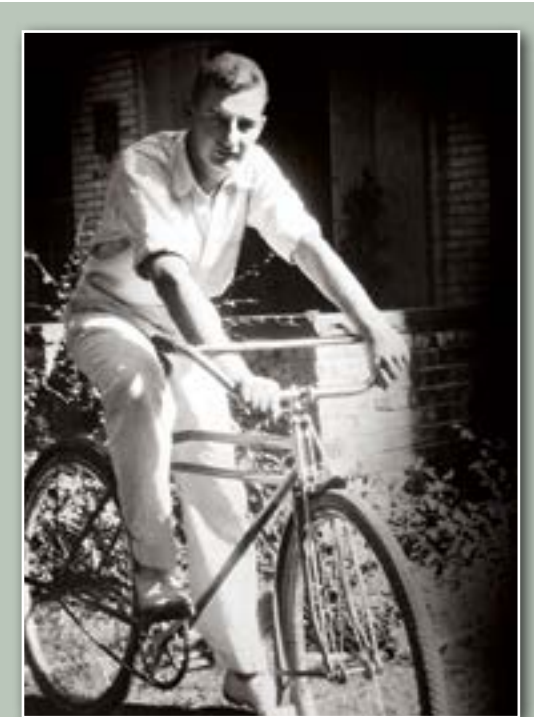
In her book, *Wallenberg: Missing Hero*, Hungarian-born journalist Kati Marton notes that this apprenticeship turned out to be an education of a different sort. Once-prosperous middle-class Jews from German cities were pouring into Palestine, “reduced to ragged beggars by the Nuremberg laws.”

Raoul met many Jewish refugees at the kosher boarding house where he was staying and through his Dutch mentor. He heard their stories of being stripped of all rights by the German Reich and transformed into “nonpersons”. Marton believes “the impression this humbled segment of humanity made on him was to be permanent.”

In the spring of 1937, Gustav Wallenberg died suddenly. Raoul lost not only his surrogate father but also the mentor who had shaped his fledgling career. With his grandfather’s death, Kati Marton writes, “in a society that still required sponsors, Raoul Wallenberg, groomed for success, had none.” For the next four years, Wallenberg floundered. His American degree did not qualify him to work as an architect in Sweden. He started two businesses, but neither was successful.

He remained profoundly concerned about the Jews in Nazi Germany, maintaining contact with refugees who had escaped to Sweden and anonymously providing a food subsidy for one needy family.

In 1941, Jacob Wallenberg, Raoul’s uncle and godfather, set him up in Stockholm with Kálmán Lauer,



Raoul Wallenberg, approx. 23 years old
NINA LAGERGREN'S PRIVATE COLLECTION, PHOTO: KARL GABOR

a Hungarian who ran an export-import firm trading between Stockholm and Central Europe. As a Jew, Lauer was finding it increasingly difficult to travel to Hungary, the main market for his specialty foods. Raoul Wallenberg took over the firm's foreign division. His amazing ability to learn languages made him invaluable to Lauer, and he began traveling frequently to Budapest, a city he quickly grew to love.

BUDAPEST AND HEROISM

Budapest's Jewish population was under siege. By the spring of 1944, every other major Jewish community in Europe had been decimated, and Adolf Eichmann had come to Hungary determined to complete Hitler's "Final Solution" before the war ended. He was briskly dispatching 10,000 to 12,000 Jews to the gas chambers every day.



Wallenberg's Hungarian driving license from 1944
FROM NINA LAGERGREN'S PRIVATE COLLECTION, PHOTO: KARL GABOR

Belatedly, the American government was trying to stop him. That spring, President Roosevelt sent Iver Olsen to Stockholm as an official representative of the American War Refugee Board.

Olsen was looking for a man willing to walk into the jaws of the Nazi death machine, someone who spoke both Hungarian and German, someone with an independent spirit who would not need much oversight or direction. One of the people Olsen met in Stockholm was Kálmán Lauer. Lauer immediately recommended his young business partner, Raoul Wallenberg. For Wallenberg, Olsen's offer was irresistible, an opportunity to accomplish something truly important. He agreed to go to Hungary, arriving by train in July 1944.

Wallenberg was technically attached to the Swedish embassy in Budapest, although at his insistence he was not subject to the usual restrictions imposed upon diplomats. His efforts over the next six months were daring, shrewd, remarkably inventive and immensely courageous.

In Budapest, Wallenberg quickly established an office and "hired" 400 Jewish volunteers to run it. He immediately ordered his staff to remove the yellow stars they wore to mark them as Jews, telling them, "You are now under Swedish diplomatic protection." His mission to save what remained of the Hungarian Jewish population was under way.

Wallenberg invented a special Swedish passport, the Schutzpass. It was a colourful, imposing, official-looking document. With permission from no one, he announced that it granted the holder immunity

from deportation to the death camps. Wallenberg distributed his Schutzpass to Jews indiscriminately. The Schutzpass alone is credited with saving 20,000 Jewish lives.

Using his American funds, Wallenberg scoured the city for buildings to rent. He eventually found thirty-two, which he declared to be "extraterritorial buildings" protected by Swedish diplomatic immunity. In an architecture class at the University of Michigan, Wallenberg had received a grade of "excellent" for designing a low-cost housing project that could fit 4,500 people in sixteen city blocks. In Budapest he found a way "to place 35,000 people in buildings designed for fewer than 5,000."

Wallenberg's "safe houses" saved thousands of Jewish lives, including those of a University of Michigan professor, Andrew Nagy, and his mother. Nagy, then fourteen years old, will always remember Christmas Eve 1944, when the residents of the safe house next door to his were rousted from their beds, marched to the Danube River, and shot by the Nazis. Jews were frequently tied together three in a row on the bank of the Danube. The middle person was shot, sending all three into the freezing water to drown. A woman from Wallenberg's office recalled an occasion when Wallenberg heard that Hungarian Nazis were shooting women and children at the river. He asked his staff who could swim. "We went – it was a cold night – and jumped into the Danube – the water was icy cold." They saved fifty or sixty people.

In Budapest Wallenberg worked constantly, sleeping only four hours a night. He was an inspiration to the Swiss and Swedish neutrals working on similar humanitarian missions, to the Red Cross, and to those who worked at his side. But perhaps even more important was his ability to revive hope in those who believed they were doomed.

Wallenberg was well known to the Nazis, whom he bribed, manipulated, confronted and harassed tirelessly. Eichmann referred to him as "Jewdog Wallenberg." As late autumn turned to winter, Wallenberg's life was increasingly in danger. One day his car was blown up. He began sleeping in a different place each night.

With Soviet troops approaching, the Nazis stepped up their attacks on Budapest's Jewish population. In the last days of the occupation, German troops, along with Hungarian Nazis, assembled around the Jewish ghetto in preparation for a massacre. When he learned of the plan, Wallenberg confronted the Nazi commander, persuading him that if he allowed the attack on the ghetto to go forward, Wallenberg would see that he was hanged for crimes against humanity after the war. The frightened Nazi, who knew Hitler was about to be defeated, called off the assault. The lives of 70,000 Jews were saved.

The threat did not end with the Nazi retreat. As the Germans began to flee Budapest, Hungarian Nazis ruled the streets, killing Jews at random. The once-beautiful city had become a terrifying hellhole.

For two months, Wallenberg had heard Soviet guns on the outskirts of Budapest. Knowing that the army would soon be moving into the city, he began practicing his primitive Russian. He hoped to meet with Soviet leaders to begin planning the rehabilitation of Budapest's shattered society.

On a mid-January morning in 1945, twenty Soviets arrived at Wallenberg's door. Speaking haltingly in Russian, Wallenberg explained his mission to rescue the Jews and asked to be taken to the highest Soviet authorities. He spent that night at Russian headquarters in Budapest. The next day he returned home with an escort to pick up his belongings. Friends described him as calm but with an edge in his voice, assuring them he would be back in about a week. Wallenberg's friends and family never saw him again.

DISAPPEARANCE AND UNKNOWN FATE

Why was Wallenberg arrested by the Soviets? One reason might have been that Iver Olsen, the American who recruited him, was also an agent for the U.S. Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the CIA. The Soviets were well aware of this and very paranoid. A Soviet spy who had infiltrated the Red Cross in Budapest had observed Wallenberg closely. He found Wallenberg's humanitarian motives simply incomprehensible. He concluded that Wallenberg was a double agent, working for the Americans and the Germans. The Soviets did not want to deal with such a dangerous unknown when they marched in to occupy Budapest.

Wallenberg trusted the Communists only slightly more than the Nazis. But he allowed himself to fall into their hands because he hoped that the Soviets would allow him to stay in Hungary to take part in the post-war revitalization of its society.

At the time he was abducted, Wallenberg's heroism was unknown to the world at large. Sweden is Russia's near neighbour and the Swedish government was far more interested in maintaining good relations with the Soviet Union than in finding out what had happened to a Swedish citizen employed by the United States. In April 1945, Averell Harriman, acting on behalf of the U.S. State Department, offered the Swedish government American help in making inquiries about Wallenberg's fate. His offer was curtly declined. It was not until June 1946, under pressure from the Swedish public and the Foreign Office, that the Swedish minister to Moscow finally requested an interview with Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin to discuss Wallenberg. Though the Swedish Foreign Office had evidence that Wallenberg was imprisoned in Moscow, the minister volunteered that he personally believed that the great humanitarian had been killed in Budapest. Offered an easy out, Stalin did not disagree.

That conspiracy of silence continued for eleven years. Wallenberg's immediate family never gave up hope of locating him and from the moment he disappeared pressed their case relentlessly. It was only in 1957, during the political thaw following Stalin's death, that the Soviets broke their official silence on Wallenberg's fate. They admitted that he had survived the war, and even that Stalin had been holding him prisoner at the time of the 1946 meeting with the Swedish minister. But they claimed that Wallenberg – a healthy thirty-two-year-old man at the time he was abducted – had died in prison of a heart attack two years later. That remained the official line until the autumn of 2000.

For thirty-five years, Wallenberg's story remained unknown outside Sweden. It was not until 1980 that Elenore Lester, in a now-famous article for the New York Times Magazine, brought Wallenberg's story to the attention of the world. The following year, President Reagan made Raoul Wallenberg an honorary citizen of the United States – an honour previously extended only to Winston Churchill.

The delayed recognition of Wallenberg's achievement has made the mystery of his fate all the more poignant. Despite Russia's attempt to close the case, those working on behalf of Wallenberg's legacy continue to press for information about him. Evidence that he was alive during many of the last fifty-six years is compelling and impossible to dismiss. Only reports in the international media of Wallenberg sightings by former Soviet prisoners in the Gulag kept the case before the Swedish public.

In 2000 the American Jewish Committee published a pamphlet by William Korey that meticulously summarizes the history of the Wallenberg case. Near the end of this frustrating and depressing tale, Korey explains how the Russian-Swedish commission established in 1990 at the behest of Guy von Dardel, Wallenberg's half-brother, to scour Russian prison archives for information on Wallenberg was thwarted by constantly changing Russian politics and the ultimate impossibility of gaining access to key KGB files.

Korey believes that the American government could yet make a difference. "The fate of Wallenberg has been discussed between the United States and Russia at lower diplomatic levels and largely in the context of the Helsinki process, which is designed to inform the public of gross human rights violations, not to produce an immediate substantive result," Korey writes. "America's unique 'honorary citizen' deserves more."

In April 2001 the Raoul Wallenberg Committee of the United States published an eight-page "Chronology of the Raoul Wallenberg Case". Included in this chronology are details of every reported sighting of Wallenberg and encounter with him in Russia by his fellow prisoners since 1945. The last was in a prison camp 150 miles from Moscow in 1987.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century it seems an indisputable fact that the Russian government continues to



A Schutz-Pass

NINA LAGERGREN'S PRIVATE COLLECTION, PHOTO: KARL GABOR

stand between the world and the truth about what happened to Raoul Wallenberg after 17 January 1945.

As the final chapter on Wallenberg's fate continues to be written, recognition of what he achieved in Hungary continues to grow. In Israel, he is honoured at Yad Vashem – Jerusalem's memorial to Holocaust victims – as the most outstanding of the "Righteous Gentiles."

In 1985, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick, speaking on the fortieth anniversary of Raoul Wallenberg's arrest, said Wallenberg "has become more than a man, more even than a hero. He symbolizes a central conflict of our age, which is the determination to remain human and caring and free in the face of tyranny. What Raoul Wallenberg represented in Budapest was nothing less than the conscience of the civilized world."

CLUES ABOUT WALLENBERG

written by Ingrid Carlberg

1945: On 17 January a warrant for Raoul Wallenberg's arrest is issued. He is brought to Moscow's Lubyanka prison where he arrives on 6 February.

1947: In a diplomatic note to Sweden the Soviet Union claims that Raoul Wallenberg "does not exist in the Soviet Union," and that "he is unknown to us."

1957: After convincing reports from German prisoner-of-war witnesses the Soviet Union admits that Raoul Wallenberg has been held in the Soviet Union. He is now reported to have died from a heart attack on 17 July 1947.

1989: Raoul Wallenberg's half-brother and half-sister are invited to Moscow, where the KGB hands over a wooden box containing, among other things, their brother's diplomatic passport, address book and calendar from 1944.

2009: The archives of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) releases a statement that a certain "prisoner number 7" interrogated on 22 and 23 July 1947, "very likely" was Raoul Wallenberg. In spite of this, the official Russian policy is still the same as in 1957 – that Raoul Wallenberg died from a heart attack on 17 July 1947.

● FURTHER READING: There Is a Room Waiting for You Here, the Story of Raoul Wallenberg, by Ingrid Carlberg, Norstedts förlag, Sweden, May 2012.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE INSTITUTE FOR INFORMATION ON CRIMES OF COMMUNISM

ESTONIA



Estonia proclaimed independence in February 1918 after the disintegration of Tsarist Russia and succeeded in defending it against Soviet Russia in the war fought in 1918-1920.

COMMUNIST OCCUPATION

According to the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 Estonia was assigned to the Soviet "sphere of influence" and was occupied by the Soviet Union in June 1940. Forcible sovietisation together with political arrests began immediately. The first Soviet year culminated with mass deportation of about 10,000 men, women and children in June 1941. More than 30,000 Estonian men were mobilised to the Red Army in the summer of 1941 before Germany occupied Estonia from July to October 1941.

NAZI OCCUPATION

Under German occupation up to 8,000 Estonian citizens and residents, including all 1,000 Jews remaining in Estonia, were executed by the Nazis and their local collaborators. Up to 70,000 men, most of them mobilised, served in various units of German armed forces, including the Estonian SS Division.

COMMUNIST OCCUPATION

The Red Army occupied the country again in the autumn of 1944 and an additional 20,000 Estonians were mobilised before the spring of 1945. The Soviet repressions continued from 1944. A mass deportation of 20,000 individuals was carried out in March 1949. After the deportation the active armed resistance of "forest brothers" faded away. After Stalin's death the political arrests eased up, but the regime remained oppressive until the end of the 1980s. Estonia regained its independence after the "Singing Revolution", in August 1991.

ENN SARV was born into the family of a medical doctor in 1921. He was a member of the Estonian national resistance during the Soviet and also the Nazi occupations. He was one of the young activists who supported politicians seeking a “third way”

between the Soviets and the Nazis. He was imprisoned by both regimes between 1944 and 1956 and was sent to the Gulag. After his release he managed to finish his academic studies and to gain success in his professional life. After Estonia regained its independence in the summer of 1991 he became an influential opinion leader. He died in March 2008. His published works on Estonian legal continuity are constantly quoted by scholars.



SARV FAMILY
COLLECTION

Enn Sarv

Fighting against Two Totalitarianisms

written by Toomas Hiio

ENN SARV – BACKGROUND AND YOUTH ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR II

Enn Sarv was born into the family of a medical doctor. His father Nikolai (1884–1950) belonged to the first generation of Estonians with a university degree. During his studies at the University of Tartu before World War I he became a member of the oldest Estonian national student fraternity, the Estonian Student Society. After participating in World War I and the Estonian War of Independence he served as a city doctor in Tallinn in 1920–40. In 1920 he married Elfriede Stalinski, the daughter of a Polish non-commissioned officer of the Tsarist Army, who stayed in Tallinn after the end of his service. Enn was their first son.

Enn in turn was a member of the first generation of Estonians whose full school curriculum was taught in Estonian (in the 1890s the language of instruction in the gymnasiums¹ and at the University of Tartu was changed from German to Russian. The University of Tartu had been an Estonian university since 1919). He was an excellent graduate of one of the best secondary schools in Estonia, with fluent German and French; Latin and Greek were also on the curriculum. In the last school year he participated in a competition organised by the French Legation in Tallinn and was awarded a two-week scholarship to France in the summer of 1939. Visiting Europe on the eve of World War II, especially his return through Berlin, which was caught up in a fever of war preparations, left a strong impression on him. As one of the best secondary school graduates in Estonia, a representative of the Catholic Church in Estonia, knowing him through his familiar contacts with the tiny Catholic community in Estonia, offered him a scholarship for studies at the Vatican. Enn declined the offer. He was baptized to the Lutheran faith, but the main burden for him, as he later said, was the condition of celibacy for Catholic priests. So he began his studies at the Faculty of Law of the University of Tartu in the autumn of 1939 and also became a member of the Estonian Student Society like his father.

¹ Secondary schools comparable to British grammar schools

Many students at the University of Tartu were displeased with some features of the Estonian authoritarian regime, especially the restrictions in public life, though mild in comparison to other authoritarian countries in Eastern Europe. Many members of the Estonian Student Society were strong supporters of Jaan Tõnisson (1868–1941, executed by the Soviets), the leader of democratic opposition and honorary member of the fraternity. Enn Sarv also subscribed to Tõnisson’s political views, which one could describe as national and democratic, until his own death. Students expressed their opposition mainly in the course of celebrations and other events, performing sketches that mocked the leading politicians and public figures, including the leadership of the university. They endlessly discussed the political issues and political choices of their country just like students everywhere are doing today too.

War had already begun. The situation of Estonia, like other Eastern European states between Germany and the Soviet Union, was menacing, even hopeless. The rapid defeat of Poland in September was a shock. In October 1939, Estonia had to accept the demands of the Soviet Union under the threat of military aggression, and a non-aggression agreement was signed. The Soviet military bases were located in Estonia together with 25,000 Red Army soldiers. When the Winter War² between the Soviet Union and Finland began, Estonia had to stay neutral due to the agreement with the Soviets, and it has since been felt as shameful by Estonians. The Finns were the most closely related nation to Estonians; Finnish volunteers came to fight for Estonian independence 20 years earlier. Moreover, Estonia’s neutrality was gravely violated by the Soviets – their Air Force used Estonian airfields for bombing Finland.

FIRST SOVIET OCCUPATION

In June 1940 the Soviet Union began with the final takeover of the Baltic countries. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were forced to accept the Soviet ultimatums with demands for the changes of the governments. The Red Army occupied the Baltic states. The Soviets tried to present the occupation as a result of internal developments, a so-called “socialist revolution” according to Marxist-Leninist dogmatic theory. Therefore the members of the new government, hand-picked by the Soviet representatives but nominated by President Päts, were mostly public figures who were already known for their leftist sympathies. The task force of the Soviet secret police, which came to Estonia together with the Soviet troops, immediately began to make political arrests.

Three weeks after the final occupation the “elections” were organised by the Soviets, on the same weekend in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Deceptively based on the former legislation, the elections in Estonia were however planned to proceed in the Soviet way, with a single candidate in each electoral district; and all

² November 1939 – March 1940

candidates were chosen by the Soviet emissaries with the help of their local collaborators. The Estonian national movement tried to thwart the plan of the Soviets. They set up a candidate of their own in each electoral district. Enn Sarv participated in finding people who were willing to run in the elections against the candidates of the Soviets. He maintained contact with them and fulfilled other practical tasks. It was dangerous – the Soviet secret police controlled the whole society and many national activists were arrested. A few days before the “elections” the highest Soviet emissary in Estonia, Andrei Zhdanov, a member of Stalin’s inner circle, ordered the cancellation of all national candidates; the elections were carried through in the Soviet manner with falsified results of more than 90% supporting voices for the candidates of the Soviets. Most of the national candidates were arrested afterwards and sent to the Gulag. Nevertheless, the campaign represented the first joint action against Sovietisation, consolidating the anti-Soviet circles in Estonia and supported largely by the population.

During a year of the Soviet occupation Estonian statehood was destroyed, private ownership and land ownership abolished, thousands of Estonians were arrested for political reasons and up to ten thousand Estonians – men, women and children – were deported to the Soviet Union during a mass deportation in June 1941, similar to deportations also carried out in Latvia and Lithuania.

GERMAN OCCUPATION – THE FIRST IMPRISONMENT

German troops started to occupy Estonia in July 1941. Estonians, though historically anti-German (and these feelings were strengthened by the German occupation of 1918), greeted the advancing Wehrmacht units as liberators. A year of Soviet repressions had changed a lot in the people’s minds. Fundamental discussions on Estonia’s future began immediately among the few Estonian politicians

THE GULAG SYSTEM

● Gulag is an acronym for the Russian term *Glavnoye upravleniye ispravitelno-trudovykh lagerey i koloniy* – Chief Directorate of Labour Camps. It was the name of the department of the People’s Commissariat (i.e. ministry) of Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union responsible for prison camps. The acronym Gulag became synonymous with Soviet political terror and was on a par with the German concentration camps in terms of the response it provoked. Most of the prison camps were established in distant eastern and northern areas of the Soviet Union with the purpose of exploiting the labour craft of the prisoners in climatically harsh conditions. The sentences were long – often 10 years, and after WWII even up to 25 years. Often the internal rule in the camps was in the hands of professional criminals. Political prisoners and criminals, and also men and women, were separated to different camps only at the end of the 1940s. Millions of prisoners perished in the Gulag due to the violence, insufficient medical treatment and food, and heavy and dangerous work. The first Gulag camps were founded in 1918. Most of the surviving political prisoners were released during the second half of the 1950s after the death of Stalin.



Enn Sarv with his wife Karin and first son Laur in Vorkuta, 1954

SARV FAMILY COLLECTION

who had survived the Soviet repressions. Public servants and politicians of the authoritarian period of President Päts, but also the former right-radicals, constituted the manpower for so-called Estonian self-administration during German occupation. The initial hope of the population, that the Germans would restore Estonian independence, soon faded. The members of the former democratic opposition began to look for a “third way” between the Soviets and Nazis. The Atlantic Charter, signed by President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill in August 1941, promising restoration of the freedom of all occupied nations after WWII, became the cornerstone for their hopes.

Enn Sarv managed to avoid mobilisation to the Red Army before the retreat of the Soviets in 1941. During German occupation he continued his studies and worked simultaneously in the newsroom of a Tallinn-based radio station. He was one of the young activists who supported the “third way” politicians. They intermediated information from Estonia via Finland and Sweden to the former Estonian diplomatic representatives who were positioned abroad (in Sweden, Finland, and Great Britain),

who in turn tried to distribute information about Estonia and Estonian objectives among the diplomats of the Western Allies. Among other things, Enn Sarv and his friends distributed leaflets and underground newspapers, and aided the escape of around three thousand Estonian men to Finland to avoid the German mobilisations, which began in the spring of 1943. These men joined the Finnish army, where an Estonian regiment was formed.

In February 1944, a National Committee of the Republic of Estonia was created, an underground executive body of the Estonian state with an elected board. The National Committee succeeded in bringing together most of the surviving Estonian politicians whose objective was the restoration of Estonian statehood after the end of the war and the international recognition of it. Enn Sarv was one of the young activists of the National Committee, fulfilling communication and information tasks. He was also the author of a number of underground information bulletins about the situation in Estonia, which were secretly sent to the Estonian representatives in Finland and Sweden.

The German Security Service, the SD, with its Estonian collaborators, had been keeping an eye on the activities of the Estonian national underground for a long time. In April 1944 several hundred people, including Enn Sarv, who were active in the national underground, were arrested by the SD. Sarv was under investigation until the retreat of the Germans from Estonia in September 1944. Many absurd things gained importance

under totalitarian regimes. Enn Sarv was initially investigated not for his nationalist activities, but for his alleged Jewish background, due to his Polish mother and “non-Estonian look,” and his detailed genealogy was compiled by the SD. During the last days of the German retreat in September 1944 many prisoners were simply released by the Estonian prison guards. But some of them, including Enn Sarv, were transferred to the Stutthof concentration camp in Poland. He managed to survive in the camp, and the evacuation death march from the camp in the winter of 1945, already infected with typhus, and was finally liberated by the Soviet Red Army together with other inmates, who had been left to die in the barracks specially designated for those infected with typhus.

The situation of the former concentration camp inmates, although liberated by the Soviets, continued to be dangerous. They were screened by the Soviet secret police, some were arrested, and some were forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union. Enn Sarv kept himself close to a former Russian concentration camp inmate and, somewhere in Poland, together with this fellow, Enn joined as “a volunteer to the Red Army cavalry of Marshal Rokossovsky,” as he later recounted with ironic pride. He was, due to typhus, too weak to remount his horse unaided, but somehow he managed his service.

SECOND IMPRISONMENT AND THE GULAG YEARS

Enn Sarv was demobilised from the Red Army in October 1945; he returned to Estonia and continued his interrupted studies at the sovietised University of Tartu. However, in January 1946 he was arrested by the Soviet secret police for his participation in the national opposition during the Soviet occupation in 1940–41 and the German occupation, was sentenced to 7 years in the Gulag for espionage and served his time in the Vorkuta camp. His father was deported with other family members in the course of the mass deportation of March 1949 from Baltic countries; he died the following year in a forced settlement in Eastern Siberia. Enn Sarv was released from the camp in 1953, after Stalin’s death, but did not get permission to return to Estonia. He worked for four years as a mining engineer in Vorkuta with the status of a so-called forced settler. His girlfriend followed him to Vorkuta in 1953, they married there and their first son was born in 1954. During 1955–60 he was matriculated as a so-called “distant student” of mining industry at the Leningrad³ Polytechnical Institute. In 1957 he was released from forced settlement and returned to Estonia. He earned his living as a freelance translator (Russian, German, French); among other things he translated, together with the later Estonian president Lennart Meri⁴, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn’s book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* into Estonian.

³ Today St. Petersburg

⁴ 1929–2006; he was deported to Siberia with his parents in 1941–46

During 1961–1964 Enn Sarv studied mathematics at the University of Tartu and graduated cum laude. According to the Soviet legislation, only individuals younger than 35 years of age could study as full-time students; for the rest there was the option of being a so-called “distant student” with the obligation to also have a full-time job. Enn Sarv went to the rector of the university and referred to a statement of the Soviet leadership, made after the death of Stalin, that all former Gulag prisoners, who were released and whose civic rights were restored, had the right to return to their last occupation before their arrest. Enn Sarv was a student at the time of his arrest and he asserted his right to continue his studies. He got permission to do so.

Despite the formal restoration of civic rights the released political prisoners had to overcome numerous burdens in their personal and professional life. The very fact that somebody had been arrested or deported for political reasons made the authorities suspicious, and not only in respect of the person herself or himself, but also in respect of their children. Some professions and places of work were closed to them, they were not allowed to live in certain regions (depending on their punishment), they faced major problems when they wanted to take a trip abroad, etc. But the Soviet Union was already infected with resentment. The rules never again became as harsh as they were during Stalinist times. A more or less normal life, of course only within the terms and rules of life behind the iron curtain, was possible even for former political prisoners.

From 1965 to 1988 Enn Sarv worked as a computing engineer and department head in the institutions of the Academy of Science of the Estonian SSR⁵.

OPINION LEADER IN FREE ESTONIA

From the beginning of the movement for regaining of independence in 1987 and until his death Enn Sarv was an active member of various civic organisations of former repressed people (Union of Former Political Prisoners, Union of National and Democratic Forces, among others). He was among the translators of the Black Book of Communism by Stéphane Courtois into Estonian (published in 2000). Right up until his death he wrote many articles, mostly on the rights of repressed people and on the topic of Estonian legal continuity. He also participated in drafting of some legal acts of the Republic of Estonia, among them the Persons Repressed by Occupying Powers Act (2003).

The research and affirmation of the concept of Estonian legal continuity became his last life’s work. The United States and many other Western countries never recognized the takeover of the Baltic countries by the Soviet Union. On 23 July 1940 the U.S. Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles published a statement

⁵ Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic

in which the Government of the United States condemned the “annihilation of political independence and territorial integrity” of the three Baltic States. It was the beginning of so-called non-recognition policy. During the whole period of occupations in 1940–1991 Estonia had its own foreign representations and passports, issued by them and recognized by the leading Western countries as travel documents. An exile government was set up in Sweden after World War II.

In 1991 Estonian independence was restored on the principle of legal continuity. On that basis, Estonian statehood was not born due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, but today’s Estonia is an identical state to the Republic of Estonia, founded in 1918. It is important not only in the sense of legal theory, international law and national identity, but also for some very practical reasons. Estonian citizenship policy and ownership legislation is based on this concept. It was very helpful in avoiding the influence of the population changes (caused due to the influx of hundreds of thousands of labourers from the “old” Soviet Union since the end of 1940s) on the Estonian policy. Only individuals who themselves or whose parents were Estonian citizens in June 1940 could automatically restore or obtain their Estonian citizenship; all others had to apply for naturalization. There was no private property in the Soviet Union, to say nothing of land ownership. Therefore the ownership reform was easy to carry out based on the principle of restoring the ownership rights of 1940. Despite heated public discussions on these topics in the 1990s the policies were carried through with success.

Enn Sarv concluded his analysis on Estonian legal continuity in a study published in 1997. Its title could be translated into English as “No one can withstand the law – Estonian objectives and international law”. He wrote an introductory article for the publication of the documents of the National Committee of the Republic of Estonia and Estonian Government in Exile (2004). His correspondence with Heinrich Mark, the last Prime Minister of the Estonian Government in Exile in 1990–1992, was published in 2012.

Enn Sarv died in March 2008. He was awarded the highest national decoration of Estonia, the Order of the National Coat of Arms. His works on Estonian legal continuity are constantly quoted by scholars.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE ESTONIAN INSTITUTE
OF HISTORICAL MEMORY



Independence Day reception of the President of Estonia, 24 February 2008
L-R: Epp Sarv, granddaughter of Enn Sarv; Enn Sarv; Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of Estonia; Mrs. Evelin Ilves, aide-de-camp of the President

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF ESTONIA

HEINZ DROSIHN was an SS man and the warden of the Ereda concentration camp in Estonia. When a transport of Czech and German Jewish women arrived at the camp he fell in love with one of the Czech prisoners, INGE SYLTENOVÁ. She exerted incredible influence on him, forcing him to change his former brutal attitude towards the prisoners, and she managed to ensure better treatment for them. Their love affair lasted three months. In February 1944, when his superiors found out about the relationship, Heinz was replaced by a new warden and he disappeared. Inge escaped three days later. The two fugitives were unfortunately not able to pull off their plan of fleeing from Estonia to Scandinavia together. They were quickly caught and executed in February or March of 1944, though some say they committed suicide together.

ARCHIVE
OF LUKÁŠ PŘIBYLARCHIVE
OF LUKÁŠ PŘIBYL

Inge Syltenová and Heinz Drosihn

A Love Story

written by Meelis Maripuu

ESTONIA IN THE CLUTCHES OF WORLD WAR II

On the eve of World War II, Estonia was in the immediate sphere of influence of two of Europe's major powers, the Soviet Union and Germany. However, the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed on 23 August 1939 left Estonia decidedly in the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Using its relationship with Germany as a factual ally in the war's first phase, the Soviet Union occupied Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in June of 1940 by threatening those countries with war at the same time as the world's attention was focused on Hitler's campaign in France. A new stage of WWII began on 22 June 1941 when war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union. German forces advanced eastward according to the plan of Operation Barbarossa and, among others, captured the territories of the Baltic countries. German forces invaded Estonian territory in July of 1941, managing to capture all of Estonia in the space of three and a half weeks.

The Soviet terror that had ruled in Estonia for a year and sent thousands of people to their deaths was quickly replaced by the terror of the National Socialist regime. German Einsatzgruppe subunits advanced in the rear area behind the

THE MOLOTOV-RIBBENTROP PACT (HITLER-STALIN PACT)

● This Non-Aggression Treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union, signed on 23 August 1939 by the ministers of foreign affairs Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav Molotov, was a precondition for the beginning of WWII by Nazi Germany. The pact ensured the non-involvement of the Soviet Union in a war in Europe.

The treaty contained a secret protocol, which divided the regions of Eastern Europe into "spheres of influence". According to the protocol and later amendments to it the Soviet Union accepted Germany's interest in the Western part of Poland and Germany accepted the Soviet interest in the eastern part of Poland, and in Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Romanian Bessarabia.

War broke out in September 1939. Poland was divided according to the protocol. In the Winter War of 1939-1940 the Soviet Union failed to defeat Finland. In the summer of 1940 the Baltic states and Bessarabia were occupied by the Soviet Union.

The territorial changes in Eastern Europe (except Finland), foreseen by the secret protocol, remained in force until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which recognised the existence of the secret protocol only in 1989.

front line to settle accounts with the regime's political and racial enemies. Sonderkommando 1a arrived in Estonia with lists already prepared ahead of time of the first individuals who were to be arrested: among them were political leaders of the Republic of Estonia as well as leading figures from the period of Soviet occupation. For the most part, it was too late to find those people because the Soviet regime had already arrested the leading figures from the Republic of Estonia and sent them eastward, while Communist figures themselves had mostly fled to the Soviet Union together with the Red Army.

REPRESSIONS BY THE GERMAN AUTHORITIES

Extensive repressions coordinated by the German Security Police (SiPo) and the Security Service (SD) nevertheless began in Estonia. Nearly 19,000 people were arrested in Estonia over the course of the first year of the German occupation. About 7,500 of those arrested people were released within that same year,

over 5,500 were sent to concentration camps, and over 5,500 were executed, including all of the approximately 1,000 remaining Estonian Jews. Estonia was declared to be the first and only country free of Jews in January of 1942 at the Wannsee Conference, which later became infamous. Three quarters of Estonia's approximately 4,000 Jews had fled in advance of the front line to the Soviet Union. Only a few of those who stayed behind managed to conceal themselves. Over the entire duration of the German occupation in 1941–1944, the German Security Police arrested and detained an estimated 21,000 to 25,000 people in Estonia for shorter or longer periods, of whom 8,000 were executed.

The arrested people were mostly local residents who were accused of political or other offences (activity harmful to the wartime economy, speculation or other such activity, and to a lesser extent criminal offences). A total of 17 different prison facilities and temporary concentration camps, the staff of which were enlisted

from among the Estonian population, were put into operation in subordination to the police to keep the arrested individuals imprisoned. Reorganisation was carried out in the summer of 1942 when four detention centres were named labour and correctional camps (Arbeits- und Erziehungslager); the remainder were

THE WANNSEE CONFERENCE

● The Wannsee Conference was a secret meeting of 15 senior Third Reich officials of the State Security, Intelligence, Government, Nazi Party and Occupied Territories with the purpose of deciding the "final solution to the Jewish question". The conference was held in the small town of Wannsee near Berlin on 20 January 1942 and was chaired by Reinhard Heydrich, Chief of the Reich Main Security Office and simultaneously the Deputy Protector of Bohemia and Moravia, and by recording secretary Adolf Eichmann, one of the major organisers of the Holocaust. At the meeting different aspects of the policy towards the Jews were discussed but also the methods and forms of the "final solution of the Jewish question in Europe". The minutes of the meeting were found in 1947 and published as evidence of planning of the annihilation of the Jews by the Nazis.

INFO BOX

named police detention centres (Polizeiliche Haftanstalt). Local residents for the most part served their sentences in local detention centres. Prisoners were not sent en masse to concentration camps in Germany before the spring of 1944, when the danger of the Red Army once more invading Estonia emerged. What has been described above nevertheless forms just one chapter of the repressive policy that the German occupying authorities organised on Estonian territory and it was mainly limited to the first year of German occupation.

JEWES FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES IN ESTONIA

Jews brought from foreign countries to Estonia form a separate chapter. Three echelons of Jews were sent to the German SiPo and SD in Estonia as one-time undertakings. About a thousand Czech Jews from the Terezín (Theresienstadt) ghetto were the first to arrive in early September of 1942, and at the end of the same month, the second echelon arrived consisting of about a thousand Jews from Frankfurt and Berlin. About 400 to 500 younger people were selected from among the arrivals at the railway station and sent to the Jägala camp in Northern Estonia. The remainder, a total of about 1,600 people, were executed on the day of arrival at the Kalevi-Liiva military artillery range near the camp. Of the approximately 2,000 Jews who were brought to Estonia in September of 1942, 74 people are known to have survived the war.

As late as June of 1944, when the Germans faced the threat of being driven out of Estonia, about 300 French Jews ended up there. They were part of the so-called Convoy No. 73 who had been sent east for execution from the Drancy concentration camp near Paris. Most of the echelons from Drancy were sent to territories in Poland, yet a smaller portion of a transport sent to Lithuania arrived in Estonia. Some of the prisoners had already died on the way due to thirst and heat. Periodic selections were carried out over the course of the following 2-3 months among the prisoners who reached Tallinn and the weaker individuals were executed. In September of 1944 when prisons and camps were evacuated as the front approached, 34 French Jews who were still alive arrived in the Stutthof camp from Estonia.

Large-scale death camps were not established in Estonia as was done on Polish territory, yet there was no escape from forced labour camps. Germany's military failure on the Eastern Front left it without the Caucasian oil they had hoped for, and the ever-increasing shortage of gasoline and oil made Estonia's oil shale chemical industry the most important wartime economic enterprise in the Baltic countries. In order to satisfy the manpower needs of the oil shale industry, the Vaivara concentration camp was established in Estonia in the summer of 1943 under the orders of SS-Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler together with a network of up to 20 field camps subordinated to the Vaivara camp. The Vaivara network remained the only camp in Estonia that was under the jurisdiction of the SS Main Economic and Administrative Department (SS Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt).

The administration of the camps consisted of SS leaders sent to Estonia, headed by camp commandant SS-Hauptsturmführer Hans Aumeier, who had served in concentration camps since 1939. He arrived in Estonia from Auschwitz, where he had been the commandant of the preventive imprisonment camp. Upon departing from Estonia, he continued his service later in Norway. Aumeier was hanged in Montelupich prison in Krakow in 1948 together with 20 other war criminals who had served in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Police battalion subunits formed of Estonians and Russians, and Germans in the service of the Todt Organisation were used as camp guards. Manpower consisting of Jews was gathered into the new camp primarily from ghettos located in Lithuania and Latvia, altogether about 10,000 over the course of the one year that the camp operated. This was first and foremost a forced labour camp and prisoners who had become incapable of work were sent out of Estonia under the pretext of “convalescence”, including to Auschwitz, where they were probably executed.

The situation changed at the end of the summer of 1944 when the Germans were incapable of evacuating all of the prisoners in the face of the Red Army offensive. The Germans set about executing the prisoners on the spot. The best-known example of such action is the execution of nearly 2,000 Jews on 19 September 1944 in the Klooga camp, which was the last camp in operation at that time.

Approximately 12,500 Jews were brought to Estonia from foreign countries during the years of the German occupation. An estimated 7,500 to 7,800 of them either perished or were executed in Estonia. Approximately 4,600 prisoners were again taken from Estonia to other camps towards the end of the war. About 100 Jews had survived in Estonia when the German forces retreated.

THE DEGENERATION OF HUMANENESS⁶

Inge Syltenová was a young Czech Jewish woman whom the German authorities deported to Estonia in September of 1942 together with about a thousand fellow unfortunates from the seeming security of the Terezín ghetto. They arrived in Estonia with mixed feelings and without any certain knowledge of what awaited them. They believed that they had been brought to Estonia to work, even when older people and families with small children were separated from the younger people and carted away by bus – supposedly to a camp with better living conditions before the approaching autumn. In reality, their worldly sojourn came to an end a few kilometres away in the sand dunes of the Kalevi-Liiva artillery range. Inge and her couple of hundred companions were settled in the Jägala camp, where they remained for several months at the mercy of police officials enlisted from among the Estonian population. They refused to believe the

⁶ The story is based on an article by Lukáš Příbyl called „Die Geschichte des Theresienstädter Transports 'Be' nach Estland“, published in Terezin Studies and Documents (8/2001). A documentary called “Forgotten Transports to Estonia“ was produced by the same author on this topic in 2009. See www.forgottentransports.com.

fate of their executed companions even when local residents who had seen the bodies of the victims told them about it.

Ending up in a camp was the next step after leaving the ghetto in the downward spiral of degeneration of their life circumstances. The situation was contradictory. They still managed to retain a part of their human dignity; they were allowed to wear their own clothes, their workload was light (primarily sorting the clothes and personal belongings of executed prisoners), and due to lax supervision they also left the camp territory from time to time to gather berries and such from the woods and to obtain additional food from Estonians living nearby. Yet much depended on the whims of the guards and primarily of the camp administration. Camp commandant Aleksander Laak executed ill and uncooperative prisoners according to his whims, including prisoners who had been forced to be his lovers.

As the next step, Inge and her surviving companions were sent to Tallinn’s central prison. Life shut up in damp prison cells and hard, physical labour on construction sites in the city and at the seaport was yet another step on the path of degeneration of their condition. Nevertheless, the women still retained the opportunity to take care of their personal hygiene to some extent in the cells, even to use nightclothes and to go to work wearing their own personal clothes without even having to wear the yellow Star of David. It was even easier to come into contact with people from outside the prison system when working on jobs in Tallinn: Estonians and Germans, and Dutch sailors who tried to bring relief to the everyday living conditions of the prisoners in spite of the circumstances. At first glance, it seems altogether unbelievable that by ignoring the rules for the local male workers, some of the young ladies even managed to go from the places where they worked into the city escorted by guards to visit and dine with their new acquaintances or even to visit the hairdresser.

In mid-October of 1943, those Czech and German Jewish women from the Jägala camp who were still alive were sent onward to the Vaivara forced labour camp network under SS command in Northeastern Estonia. This was nevertheless a real shock to the morale and a physical shock too for the women who had already experienced life in the ghetto and in the camps. It was their first real concentration camp. Living



Jewish women from the transport performing forced labour at the Tallinn port

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and working conditions became vastly harsher compared to their previous experiences. The young women had to perform hard physical labour daily in snow and freezing cold, coerced by the SS guards. There were no possibilities to obtain food from outside the camp because food was in short supply. That industrial area was full of Jews and prisoners of war who were all convicts subject to forced labour, and all of them were prepared to seize even the slightest chance to forage for food.

The Czech and German Jewish women nevertheless differed conspicuously from the mass of Jews primarily of Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian origin. They stuck together and tried to support each other in every way possible. They were physically still in relatively good shape, they tried to maintain cleanliness and still wore their clean, decent personal clothing. On average, they most likely came from higher-class social groups and since they knew German they could freely communicate with camp staff. This created a situation where the Germans who worked in the factory and sporadically even some of the camp staff regarded them more as their equals and less as “inferior” Jews, which was also reflected in their behaviour and intercommunication with the prisoners.

GUARDIAN ANGEL

Inge Syltenová was placed in Ereda, a Vaivara branch camp, along with other Czech and German Jewish women. Here, human relations within the camp developed in an utterly unforeseen manner. The rather young prisoner Inge Syltenová caught the eye of Ereda camp warden SS-Unterscharführer Heinz Drosihn at the railway station when the new internees arrived. From that moment, their lives took an

entirely new course, though they themselves did not perceive it right away. Until then, camp warden Drosihn had not distinguished himself in any positive sense in the eyes of the camp inmates. He had been an “ordinary brutal SS man”. Inge was ill when she arrived at her new camp and was initially placed in the camp’s sickbay. The camp warden visited her right away, expressing his concern over whether the young lady was cold.

It is impossible for us to know nowadays what Inge initially thought of that kind of attention from Drosihn. It could have brought to mind the time she spent at the Jägala camp

when its camp warden Aleksander Laak selected “lovers” for himself from among the prisoners and later executed them. In any case, Inge decided to use the camp warden’s interest in her to stand up for the common interests of the prisoners. The young lady replied that she felt no colder than the rest of the prisoners and would not accept the blanket offered to her until the others were also given blankets. She behaved the same way regarding food, but that was only the beginning. The special relationship between Inge and the camp warden was for the most part public knowledge within the camp from the beginning and it quickly became ever more incredible. Inge moved into the camp warden’s living quarters and formally became his personal cook, although another prisoner fulfilled the cook’s duties.

The fact that a female prisoner used the camp warden’s interest in her to wrangle better living conditions or preferential treatment for herself and her companions is not particularly astonishing. Inge, however, acquired unprecedented influence over Drosihn, demonstrating it publicly. Inge quickly became the guardian angel for the entire camp, intervening in situations that appeared to be inconceivable in ordinary camp life at that time. For instance, she openly snatched a whip from the camp warden’s hands when he had wanted to punish a prisoner with it and forbade the man from behaving like that in the future. The camp warden, who had earlier readily used the whip to punish prisoners, really did obey her. Prisoners returning from a work site located far from the camp were once caught in a snowstorm and some of them were unable to make it back to the camp under their own power. Inge saved their lives (at least that time) when she insisted that the camp warden send horse-drawn sleighs to fetch the prisoners left on the road.

ESCAPE AND CAPTURE

It soon became clear to bystanders that the relationship between Inge and Drosihn was something considerably more than the camp warden’s use of a female prisoner according to his whims. The camp warden’s cook witnessed how just a couple of weeks after the beginning of their acquaintance, Drosihn had ripped the epaulets off his uniform and said that he no longer wanted to be in the SS. In reality, he naturally continued to fulfil his official duties, living a peculiar double life that other German officials, employees of the Todt Organisation that came in contact with the camp, and so on, also noticed as bystanders. It is astonishing that this kind of relatively public double life could last about three months before the leadership of the Vaivara camp intervened. Erich Scharfetter, who was known among the prisoners as a particular sadist, was appointed the new temporary warden of the Ereda camp. The leadership arrived with the new camp warden in February of 1944 for an inspection, apparently on the basis of someone’s denunciation. Drosihn was not at the camp at the time. Inge, who did not go to work with the other prisoners, was found in altogether luxurious living conditions for a prisoner. She was beaten and interrogated. A short while later, Drosihn appeared briefly in the camp, yet apparently realising the situation, he left immediately without



Inge with her brother Peer, mother Melanie and sister Ruth, 1939

ARCHIVE OF LUKÁŠ PŘIBYL

saying a word. The prisoners denied seeing Drosihn when the new camp warden questioned them and he was never seen again. Three days later, Inge also disappeared from the camp. Her long-time companion Gisela Danzigerová, who had served as Drosihn's cook, had helped her. She and another young prisoner had dug a tunnel under the wire fence that surrounded the camp and Inge escaped through it.

Interrogations of the other prisoners continued at the camp. They knew that Inge and Drosihn had escaped together yet they did not know where the fugitives were hiding. According to the cook Gisela Danzigerová, who had seen the cohabitation of the unusual couple more closely than anyone else, the young people were in love and while living in the camp they had completely forgotten where they were. The plan they had devised for fleeing from Estonia to Scandinavia was rather unrealistic at that moment, yet not entirely infeasible because boats did secretly travel the routes to Finland and Sweden during the shipping season. Trustworthy connections with local residents on the coast were needed to find someone to take them across. A few Germans had found such an opportunity. Yet under winter conditions, the frozen 80 kilometre wide Gulf of Finland had to be crossed by foot or on skis. There were a few people among the local residents who had succeeded in escaping in that way, but neither of the characters in our story was apparently ready for that. They would have had to count on successfully hiding themselves and then look for a chance to flee after the ice broke up in the sea in the spring.

The fugitives were caught relatively quickly yet the precise circumstances of their capture are not known. It is likely that the loving couple committed suicide at the last moment, though there are also reports that they were shot immediately after being caught. The SS men buried the corpses in the woods nearby and the exact spot is unknown, but not the story itself.

This, at first glance incredible, story has been passed down to us primarily through the vivid memories of Inge's fellow prisoners. The self-sacrifice of one SS man, his reversion to his humane values and seeing those values in the prisoner standing before him could not, of course, change the system. That was merely a brief interlude and Inge's companions continued along the path of degeneration of their condition. The situation of the survivors became even worse after their evacuation from Estonia in the summer of 1944 to the Stutthof concentration camp, yet they had experienced the strength that mutual assistance and a feeling of belonging had given them. Perhaps Inge initially saw the relationship with Heinz as simply an opportunity to improve her own situation and that of her companions in the camp, yet the relationship unquestionably developed into mutual love. It became living proof for everyone around them that both SS men and Jews are human beings above all with their strengths and weaknesses, and that life is never black and white.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE ESTONIAN INSTITUTE OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

LATVIA



Latvian independence was proclaimed in November 1918. Latvia fought for its independence against Soviet Russia and German volunteer units in 1918-1920.

COMMUNIST OCCUPATION

According to the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 Latvia was assigned to the Soviet "sphere of influence" and was occupied by the Soviet Union in June 1940. Forcible sovietisation together with political arrests began immediately; in June 1941 more than 15,000 individuals were deported.

NAZI OCCUPATION

The Wehrmacht occupied Latvia in June and July 1941. The Latvian capital Riga became a centre of Reichskommissariat Ostland, which included Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and Belarus. Under German occupation tens of thousands of Latvian citizens and residents, including more than 60,000 Latvian Jews, were executed by the Nazis and their local collaborators. More than 100,000 men, most of them mobilised, served in various German units, including two Latvian SS-Divisions.

COMMUNIST OCCUPATION

Latvia was re-occupied by the Soviets from the summer of 1944. The Soviets started political repressions immediately, which peaked with the mass deportation of more than 40,000 individuals in March 1949. After the deportation the active armed resistance of "forest brothers" faded away. After Stalin's death the political arrests eased up, but the regime remained oppressive until the end of the 1980s. The pro-independence Latvian Popular Front won the elections in 1990 and Latvia regained independence in August 1991.

EDWARD ANDERS (formerly Eduards Alperovičs) was born in Liepāja, Latvia, in 1926, into a Jewish family. His father Adolfs worked as a grain exporter. Edward and his mother Erika survived the Holocaust by falsely claiming

that she was an Aryan foundling raised by Jewish parents, but his father, brother and many other relatives perished. Edward and Erika managed to maintain this bluff for two years, keeping themselves in a semi-legal limbo, constantly afraid of being found out. When the Red Army re-entered Latvia in 1944 Edward and his mother fled to

Germany, and subsequently emigrated to the U.S. in 1949. Edward eventually became a professor of chemistry and an acclaimed specialist in the field of meteorite chemistry. He is now retired and lives in California.



EDWARD ANDERS

Edward Anders

Eluding the Holocaust

written by Edward Anders (formerly Eduards Alperovičs)

cursive text by Valters Nollendorfs

“Geht,” said the German policeman to fifteen-year-old Eduards and his older brother Georgs standing in the crowded prison yard, “go.” That word saved them from sharing the fate of 2,749 Jews from the Latvian port city of Liepāja, who were murdered by Nazi executioners in the following days. Their father Adolfs Alperovičs had been shot a few days earlier. It had been his idea to save his family by inventing the story that his wife Erika was a German foundling and thus the two boys were only half Jewish. It helped that neither the mother nor the boys looked “Jewish” by Nazi standards. It also helped that those Latvians who knew the truth helped them to hide it and those who did not, never found it out. Georgs died of typhoid fever and diphtheria. Erika and Eduards were the only family members to elude the Holocaust. This is the story of Eduards Alperovičs, now known as Edward Anders. The English versions of the names are used in the story.

Early Sunday morning, 22 June 1941, we were awakened by repeated explosions. The radio told us the reason: Nazi Germany had attacked the USSR!

We were delighted. A year before, the USSR had occupied and annexed Latvia, turning our free country into a colony of the Soviet police state. People were arrested in the dead of night, to be killed or deported to Siberia. Houses and businesses were confiscated – not only my father’s export business but even tiny artisan shops. Living space was rationed, forcing many families to take in lodgers. Only 8 days earlier, on 14 June 1941, the Soviet secret police had deported more than 15,000 people to the Gulag or perpetual exile in Siberia. We, too, were ordered to pack our bags and wait to be picked up. Luckily our lodger, a young Latvian worker, had become a major in the Soviet Border Guard, and after some joking around agreed to take us off the list.

We knew of Hitler’s anti-Semitism and should have been very worried. But we trusted the Germans. Much of Latvia had been ruled by German nobles for centuries, German was widely spoken by educated people, and in World War I Western Latvia had been occupied by disciplined, civilized German troops for three years. After a year of Soviet rule, we thought Germany would be the lesser evil. So did Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. Nobody expected a Holocaust; at most there might be forced labour and loss of some civil rights.

DEADLY 1941

German troops captured my home town of Liepāja on 29 June, a week after the start of the war. Much of the centre of town was destroyed. Streets had turned into charred ruins, pockmarked by bomb craters and sprinkled with broken glass.

Within hours things became very harsh. Unbeknownst to us, Hitler had decided in early 1941 to kill all Jews in the Soviet Union during his invasion. This was to be done by special murder squads – four teams, Einsatzgruppen, of about 600-900 men each trained for the “Final Solution” that followed hard on the heels of the army. They organized pogroms and executions staged to look like spontaneous revenge actions by local inhabitants against their “Jewish-Bolshevik oppressors”. Einsatzgruppe A was assigned to the Baltic states, and one of its teams arrived in Liepāja on the first day of the occupation. It promptly shot a few Jews, including my cousin Alya, and organized a Latvian volunteer “Self-Defence” force to root out Communists and serve as auxiliary police.

The Nazis immediately took control of the Latvian press, blaming Jews for all the evils of the Soviet occupation. Many Latvians, especially those who had personally known Jews, rejected this propaganda. But a minority believed at least some of it – especially that Jews were responsible for the Soviet deportations, torture, and murders – and became hostile toward Jews.

The German Navy Commandant issued a set of rules for Jews, ordering them to wear yellow patches on their chests and backs, imposing a curfew, banning them from beaches, parks, footpaths, and public transportation, and requiring men of ages 16–60 to report daily on the Firehouse Square for forced labour.



First day of occupation of Liepāja, 1941

USHMM PHOTO ARCHIVES

Jews were seized every day, tormented, and taken away. Eyewitnesses soon reported that they had been taken to a park or the beach, ordered to dig their own graves, and shot. A few Jews tried to save their lives by hastily converting to Christianity, but that did not help.

In this desperate situation my father Adolf came up with a plan for saving at least his wife and two sons, taking advantage of our Aryan appearance. My mother Erika was to claim that she was not the biological child of her Jewish parents but a Christian foundling left on their doorstep. That would make my brother George and me half-Jews: second-class citizens but

exempt from most of the Nazi rules for Jews.

Had we known that the war would last another four years, we never would have had the courage to try my father’s plan. Too many people in our small town of 60,000 inhabitants would know that the story was a lie. As it turned out, people who knew didn’t want to hurt us and people who wanted to hurt us did not know.

Now we had to persuade the Nazis of our story. Luckily, in the 1930s, Erika had been corresponding with a Christian sect, the Rosicrucian Fellowship in California, about her health and problems with her mother-in-law. For her health? They sent her recipes for celery salad, etc. Regarding her mother-in-law? They suggested turning the other cheek and trusting in Jesus Christ. This could now help to prove her Christian orientation.

After rehearsing the foundling tale, Erika and George went to the German Security Service (SD). Aided by her good looks, charm, and acting talent, she persuaded the SD chief to exempt us from the rules for Jews. Passes issued by the SD saved us from arrest and execution. We got them not a day too soon, as mass murders of Jewish men occurred daily, culminating in a major manhunt on 22–25 July during which 1,100 men were killed.

George and I were able to keep our summer jobs, but when they ended we were not allowed to resume school and could not find a job. Our father Adolf worked as a farmhand on a secluded farm, which kept him safe during manhunts, but after the harvest the farmer had no further use for him. Now Adolf had to report for work on the Firehouse Square, but that was very dangerous for prominent Jews because of the killings. So he decided to hide in our apartment. We set up a hiding place in the pantry behind a stack of firewood. Each time the doorbell rang, he was to climb over the wood and hide.

But it was to no avail. The janitor in the basement had heard my father’s voice and reported him to the police. On 2 December, as I came home at noon from another fruitless job search, I heard the sound of firewood tumbling to the floor and a German yelling at Adolf. He replied “But I am no criminal”. They were the last words I heard him utter. Nine policemen led by a German sergeant had searched the apartment and were about to give up when one of them had the idea of looking behind the firewood.



The Grinfeld family and others being led to the execution site on 15 December 1941, the terrible fate that Edward Anders and his brother narrowly escaped when they were told to “go” that very morning. Right to left: Ruben-Aron Grinfeld (15) in the dark shirt, his mother, Ita-Beile (38) and sisters, Ester-Liebe (13) and Cilla (9, only her leg and skirt are visible)

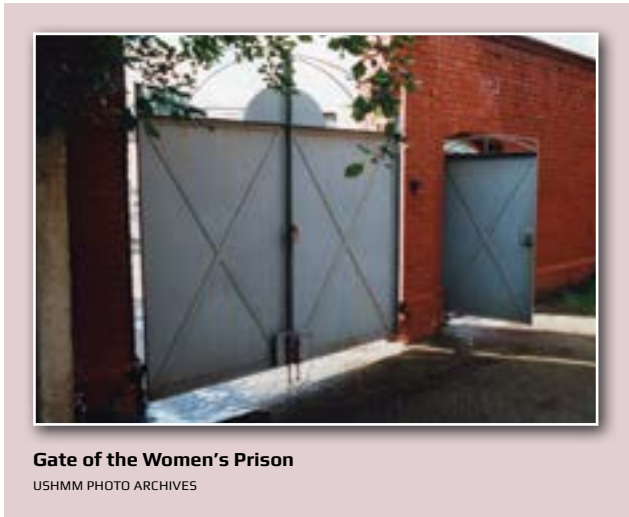
USHMM PHOTO ARCHIVES

WE THOUGHT WE WERE ORPHANS

The police took both my parents away. George and I thought that we were now orphans, but a week later the door opened and Erika walked in, looking ashen faced. She had been released but was told that Adolf would be shot.

As it turned out, he would have been killed six days later anyway. The Head of the SS Heinrich Himmler had ordered a speedup of the Holocaust in the Baltic states, so after 25,000 Riga Jews were killed in late November and early December, Liepāja was next.

At 4 a.m. on 15 December I was awakened by the light going on in my bedroom. Two Latvian policemen stood in the room, rifles over their shoulders. They told George and me to get dressed and follow them. Knowing that we were headed for a mass grave, we protested and showed our passes, but this talisman had suddenly lost its power. Yet the police would not take Erika, who demanded to go with us.



It took us about 2½ hours to reach the town's Women's Prison, only 10 blocks away. Every block or so we had to stop, facing the wall. A few of the rifle-armed policemen stayed behind to guard us, while the others entered the houses to round up Jewish families, mainly women and children.

We kept talking to the policemen guarding us, protesting that our passes exempted us from such arrests. One young policeman became very angry, cursed us and asked the sergeant to let him shoot us on the spot as a warning. We did not hear the sergeant's reply, but it calmed the young man down for the time being.

We were among the last to arrive at the jail and were ordered to line up near the gate, facing the wall. It was still quite dark at this time, but the yard was brightly lit by floodlights. Some 500 Jews were gathered there, listening attentively as a German policeman conducted the roll call. He had already reached the letter K by the time we arrived.

A few minutes later, several of the Latvian policemen who had arrested us approached, led by a German policeman. Explaining why we had protested against our arrest we told him that our mother was German and showed him our passes. He stared at us for a very long 5 seconds, probably running

through his checklist of Jewish racial characteristics, and then dismissed us with the single word "geht" (go), while motioning to the gatekeeper to let us out.

The gate opened, we stepped out on the street, and nearly bumped into our mother. Thinking us dead, she was trying to get into the jail to share our fate. We had been perfectly calm during the 3½ hours since our arrest, though we knew where we were headed. But now that we were free, we got a good case of the shivers.

For three days, the victims were marched or driven in small groups to the former Latvian army target range Šķēde, 11 km north of the prison, where 2,749 Jews were shot according to the official German count.

We had eluded death thanks to the momentary whim of a German policeman. Fortunately we did not know that the war would last another 1,240 days. As we were to discover, survival required several miracles, plenty of luck, and the right decision at critical moments – by instinct, chance, or wits.

PLAYING FOR TIME

Soon after the December massacre the SD confiscated our passes and told us to resolve our status with the office of the German District Commissioner for Kurzeme¹. The official handling such matters, Mr. Buttgerit, gave us a 3-month pass on the condition that my mother (1) divorce my father, (2) get two affidavits confirming her foundling story from people who had known it long before the war, and (3) locate a baptismal certificate proving her Christian origin. Thus began our life "in 90-day instalments".

The divorce was simple, as my father had been murdered a month previously. The affidavits were mercifully easy, as two brave and compassionate Latvian women – Herta Kārklīņš and Sofija Ziverts – agreed to write fanciful stories supporting our claim. Neither of them took money although they knew that they were risking their lives.

The baptismal certificate was more difficult. Buttgerit thought that the Baltic German church books were moved to an archive in Poznań (Posen) in 1939-41 when most Baltic Germans (also sometimes referred to as German Balts) were resettled in the formerly Polish area. Mail took 4-6 weeks each way in early 1942, so by the time our 3 months were up, we merely had a letter saying that the church records were not at the first address we had written to. Mr. Buttgerit gave us a 3-month extension, but when we again had nothing definite to show him, he grudgingly extended our pass by 3 months, warning us that this was the last time.

Soon we learned that the records were in the Vital Records Office in Riga, but it was closed for the

¹ Courland, a historical region of Latvia

time being. Doubting whether Buttgereit would extend our exemption, we began to close our accounts with the world as the 3-month deadline approached.

However, when my mother and brother went to Buttgereit's office on the appointed day, they learned that he had been transferred. His successor, Mr. Pusill, knew none of the background, and so Erika, aided by George, told the story in a positive light and got another extension.

This tactic worked at least once more, when Pusill, too, was transferred. Meanwhile, the Vital Records Office had reopened, and in the summer of 1943, we found that not only one but two girls had been baptized Erika in the 3 months before my mother's birthday (alleged to be the day she was found by her "adoptive" parents). But the new man at the Gebietskomissar's² office, Gutschmidt, was smart enough to realize that such a search, especially since she herself was conducting it, could go on forever. In late 1943 he refused to renew our passes.

We waited for the sword of Damocles to fall, wondering whether the police would arrest us at work or at home, and if the latter, by day or by night. But nothing whatsoever happened. For reasons unknown to us, perhaps not wanting to have blood on his hands, Gutschmidt had not notified the Security Service. And the local anti-Semites who had repeatedly denounced us to the police in 1941–42 seemed to have given up, thinking that we had connections in the highest places – according to one rumour we heard, none other than Hermann Göring's staff!

Why Reichsmarschall Göring – who was second only to Hitler – of all people? What may have started this rumour was that Erika worked as a part-time file clerk in a tiny 4-person office, grandiloquently called: Ostland Eisenhandelsgesellschaft GmbH der Reichswerke "Hermann Göring". The Ostland Iron Trading Company Ltd. of the "Hermann Göring" Reich Works was merely a purchasing office channelling the production of the local wire factory to a giant industrial complex in Germany named after Göring. But an average Latvian seeing Erika going in and out of a building with this sign would choke on the big German words, and might conclude that she had a direct connection to Göring. I would have liked to thank the person who started the Göring rumour, as I could not have invented a better one myself.

As their military situation worsened during 1942-43, the Germans became more willing to accept help from disdained ethnic groups. Hitler had said in July 1941 that between Germany and the Urals only Germans were to bear arms. That rule was bent already in late 1941, when Himmler began to establish "Latvian Volunteer Police Battalions". Most of their members were draftees, but the word "volunteer" circumvented the Hague Convention, which forbids conscription of civilians in occupied areas. In February 1943, soon after Stalingrad, Hitler ordered the formation of a "Latvian SS Volunteer Legion", with the term "volunteer" again serving as a fig leaf.

² District Commissioner's

In November 1943, George was drafted into the 20th Latvian Police Battalion. As a "half-Jew," he was assigned to a "labour company" of racial dregs, such as Roma, Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Poles. Five weeks later the German liaison officer of the battalion determined that half-Jews were not eligible to serve in units affiliated with the German police and discharged George. He returned home but came down with typhoid fever and diphtheria, and died. That blow hit us harder than the death of our remaining 24 relatives in 1941. Now there were only my mother Erika and myself.

GETTING TO THE WEST

The German military situation continued to get worse. The Western Allies landed in Normandy on 6 June 1944, and the Soviets began their summer offensive on 23 June. The Red Army crossed the Latvian border on 18 July. Now the war was advancing into our back yard.

With the Soviets again on Latvian soil, the Germans offered to let trustworthy refugees seek "temporary" asylum in Germany, until the expected "final victory". I recognized this as our only opportunity to be liberated by the Western Allies, because there was no chance that the Americans or British would get to Liepāja before the Red Army. One year under Stalin had been enough!

Prospective refugees had to get political clearance to make sure that only trustworthy people with a clean record entered Germany. However, we no longer had a pass exempting us from the laws against Jews, and I had no passport, though I was required to have one since I had turned 16 in 1942. Nonetheless, we applied.

Apparently the left hand did not know what the right hand was doing, so we got our clearances. My clearance was overridden by a rubber stamp saying that as a male between 16 and 60 I was not allowed to leave. But at least we were now able to apply for my mother.

Some time before, I had partly "Aryanised" Erika's passport by erasing her Hebrew middle name Rachel with sodium hypochlorite. The reagent bleached the ink but also changed the pale blue background. So I spread the hypochlorite over the entire lower right corner to make it look like a coffee spill. Though I knew that my classmate George Spektor and his family had been shot in 1941 for similar doctoring, I gave it no further thought, being a typically insouciant teenager. That still left my mother's



Edward and his wife Joan on Edward's 80th birthday, 2006

EDWARD ANDERS



double maiden name (Šeftelovics-Leventals), of which the first part looked very Jewish or Slavic, and the second part probably Jewish to a Latvian but less so to a German who might not recognize it as the Latvian spelling of the very Jewish “Löwenthal”. But further doctoring was beyond my modest forging skills.

At the Gebietskomissar’s office I picked out the densest of four clerks, crossed over to her line, and easily persuaded her to omit “Šeftelovics” and write “Volksdeutsche” (ethnic German) for ethnicity. Her boss who was to sign the document reprimanded her for writing “Volksdeutsche,” although Erika was not duly registered. But, his fury spent, he failed to notice that the girl also had omitted Šeftelovics. Now we had a suitably Aryanised ID for Erika.

In early October, the ban on departure of men was briefly lifted, and we promptly applied for passage. We left on 15 October 1944 with about 2,000 other refugees on a flea-infested freighter to Gdansk. On arrival, German Customs stamped our IDs with the Nazi eagle, thus legitimizing my dubious substitute for a passport: an unofficial ID from a correspondence school in Potsdam.

A train took us to Stargard, Pomerania, where we were placed in a transient camp. I came down with diphtheria – a stroke of good luck as I later realized. Three weeks later we checked into a hotel, and as I filled out the police registration form, I came to the question of whether I was a half or quarter Jew. Taught by my father to tell the truth, I was about to write “yes” when it suddenly struck me that nobody knew me here. I wrote “German,” tore up all documents referring to our Jewish background, and flushed them down the toilet.

A few days later we took a train to Komotau (Chomutov³) in the Sudetenland, where the family of a former lodger – a railroad official called Fischer – had invited us to stay with them. We were welcome as long as our Latvian bacon lasted. After that, posing as ethnic German refugees, we received a room in an apartment.

Soon I got sick with myocarditis – a common complication when adults get diphtheria – and spent 2 months in hospital. The State Employment Office sent me notices to report for work as an armed guard for slave labourers and prisoners of war. As long as I was in the hospital, I could avoid the weekly summonses, but once I was discharged, I had to report to the Employment Office’s doctor. After a few

³ Now in the Czech Republic [editor’s note]

knee-bends, my pulse shot up to 200, which persuaded the doctor to excuse me from work until 15 May 1945. Conveniently, the war ended on 8 May 1945.

Only 2% of the Jews in Latvia survived the Nazi occupation. About 90% were shot in 1941, sparing mainly essential craftsmen and their families. Further selections eliminated old people, children under 12, and other “useless” Jews, leaving only a remainder of around 4% who were deported to German concentration camps in the autumn of 1944. Brutally harsh conditions in the camps and during death marches left only the hardest 1.5% alive by the end of the war, along with 0.5% who were hidden by compassionate Latvians.

One lesson I learned in World War II is not to make invidious generalizations about any ethnic or religious group but to judge people as individuals. I met enough decent, noble and brave Latvians, Germans and Russians during the war to become immunized against prejudice.

Edward, and his mother Erika, emigrated from Germany to the United States in 1949. He changed his last name to Anders, and eventually became a professor of chemistry and an acclaimed scientific specialist in the esoteric field of meteorite chemistry. He is now retired and lives in California.

● Abridged and adapted from the author’s book *Amidst Latvians during the Holocaust*. Riga: Occupation Museum of Latvia, 2011. (ISBN 978-9984-9931-8-8).

CONTRIBUTED BY THE OCCUPATION MUSEUM ASSOCIATION OF LATVIA

Eleven-year-old BENITA PLEZERE was deported with her family from Latvia to the Omsk region of Siberia in 1949 because her father was deemed to be a “kulak” (an independent landowner). She drew pictures of the deportation, of the train ride to Siberia and her life there and sent them as postcards to her aunt in Riga.

Her aunt kept them and now they are a treasured possession of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia. Benita later provided a description of the pictures. After Stalin’s death, Benita and her family were allowed to return from what was supposed to be life-long banishment. In

2007, Benita and her eleven-year-old granddaughter, who also likes to draw, met Queen Elizabeth in the Museum where some of her pictures are featured among the exhibits.



PRIVATE COLLECTION OF
BENITA PLEZERE- EGLITE

Benita Plezere-Eglīte

Suddenly – Siberia

pictures and narration by Benita Plezere-Eglīte
adaptation and cursive text by Valters Nollendorfs

It is the twenty-fifth day of March in 1949, the first day of the spring holiday for schoolchildren in the little country village of Annenieki in western Latvia. It is a day to sleep in. When eleven-year-old schoolgirl Nita awakens, she sees armed men who order her family to pack up and leave. No explanations: hurry, hurry. By truck to the assembly area, then on to the station; all aboard on freight cars. No tickets, no formalities, no facilities. The train moves on and on eastward away from home towards the unknown. Through the Ural Mountains, eastward on and on, and suddenly – Siberia.

Nita’s father is a farmer, her mother a schoolteacher. She has an older brother and sister, both schoolchildren. They live at the schoolhouse when they are sent away. They are among more than 44,000 Latvians ordered to be deported by the Soviet government to Siberia from Latvia. Thirty-three trainloads – never to return. Why? They are people who do not like the Soviet occupation of their country and the harsh rule: farmers who do not want to give up their family farms, people who support the Latvian “Forest Brethren” fighting against the foreign regime to regain their independence. The Soviet Union is in charge: what the Communist government in Moscow orders, the Communist Soviet Latvian government in Latvia obeys. The Soviet Army follows orders and sends in troops to round up people. For over 44,000 Latvians, suddenly – Siberia.

Little Nita likes to draw. She draws and colours pictures of what happens to her and her family on the way to and in Siberia and sends her drawings as postcards to her godmother in Latvia. When the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin dies in 1953, the order never to return is lifted, and in 1956 the family is allowed to return to Latvia, but not to Annenieki. Nita has grown up to be Benita; nothing is the same as it was before.

This is little Nita Plezere’s story as told by grown-up Benita Eglite in 1993.

It was the first day of our school holidays: we were all still sleeping. It was early morning. When we woke up, we saw oriental-looking men with rifles. We were given only twenty minutes to get dressed and to take something with us. We were upset, couldn’t do anything, but they just kept saying: hurry, hurry, don’t just sit there, get moving. So we each grabbed what was closest at hand and went out to their truck. Father had been in the barn milking the cow, and he came carrying milk, the cat still on his shoulder. He had seen the truck in the yard and understood: they are coming to get us.



Early morning. A truck pulls up at the Annenieki school where we live. Father is going to the barn.

MUSEUM OF THE OCCUPATION OF LATVIA

you are on the list, maybe it's best you don't stay home on that day. Her husband was a chekist – a KGB man. But then she either got scared or changed her mind and had said: “No, no, sleep soundly at home, nothing will happen.” We didn't believe that we had anything to fear. Our parents worked hard, raised their children, did not dabble in politics. We were not afraid and stayed at home. But it turned out that our names were on the list.

They took us to the Biksti railroad station. A long train was there with many, many wagons. There were

people from the entire area – old people, young ones, infants. At first we were told that we would not go far – only to the border of Latvia. But after we passed Bērzupe, the last station in Latvia, the train just kept going and going. Stations came one after another, all called kipyatok – boiled water, we thought. We rode on and on monotonously until we passed the Ural Mountains. Then the scenery became indescribably beautiful. An old woman, who had died on the train, was tied into a sheet and thrown into the Irtysh River when the train passed over a bridge.

The train was unloaded in Omsk, the capital of the Omsk Region, some 4,300 km from Latvia. The people were loaded on trucks and driven south to their

place of permanent resettlement in the steppes of the Odessky District, on the border of today's Kazakhstan.

There were flatlands, only the steppe, no trees. When it snowed, the snow was deep and remained for a long time. We cut pieces of ice and used them as windows. We burned straw and dried cow manure for heat. We did not have any documents or passports. Adults had to register every week. When the locals realized that we were not monsters, we were allowed to register less frequently – only once a month. Our parents were summoned to the KGB – the Soviet secret police – and interrogated. We children did not realize it. My mother, for example, had been a member of the Latvian Home Guard. The KGB man called for her, made her stand facing the wall, clicked his revolver and ordered her to confess. “But I had nothing to say. I was always teaching children in the same school, never killed nor robbed anyone,” my mother told me later.

The city of Omsk was 100 kilometres from the village of Odesskoye where we were located. Later we were allowed to travel to Omsk. There was no public transportation. We went to the main road and waited until someone offered a ride. We were lucky that we could stay in this central village. The kolkhoz – collective farm – chairmen came from the area villages and, like at a slave market, selected the strongest workers without children. That is why our family remained.

There was a clinic, a kolkhoz centre and a secondary school. There were some officers' children in the school. They had travelled more and were more tolerant of the foreigners than the locals. For those who had been taken to other villages the conditions were much worse. The local people were unfriendly, suspicious and uneducated. There were no schools, or only the first four grades. The daughters of my mother's colleague remained uneducated because they were too old for fourth grade.



The train is unloaded at the Omsk railroad station, and we are again loaded on trucks.

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We are nearing the Bērzupe railroad station, the last one in Latvia

MUSEUM OF THE OCCUPATION OF LATVIA



The Odesskoye village school.

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The kolkhoz poultry farm.
MUSEUM OF THE OCCUPATION OF LATVIA

and half the potatoes were rotten. The rotten ones were thrown away; the rest were planted. Later Mother was assigned to a poultry farm. An eye disease had spread there. The kolkhoz sold off the dead hens. My mother had always liked hens. She started caring for and healing them. The hen population grew. Mother delivered the eggs conscientiously and kept everything clean. We helped her. Turkeys and geese were added to the farm. Usually they don't survive there, but we knew how to care for them, and they lived.

Mother eventually got a certificate from the doctor saying that she could not do heavy work. She

wanted to teach, but was told that the school had no position for her. She was assigned to the office, and people there were surprised that she could write well without errors and do mathematical calculations. That was unusual. Mother's boss was a Kazakh – he was the main bookkeeper. He was semi-educated and had learned bookkeeping. But he didn't know much. When he saw that my mother knew more, he let her do all the work. Nevertheless, he was the boss.

Father had to do the heaviest work on the collective farm. There were no horses, probably

because of the extreme climate, only oxen. That is where we got to know about life on a collective farm. Latvians were hard workers, and they didn't steal. The locals were accustomed to a different style: they used little sacks of stolen grain to buy drinks. They only grew things that didn't need ploughing or hoeing – potatoes or cabbage. Latvians started growing flowers, which was a miracle for the locals: how does it all grow and blossom? A Latvian agronomist planted an apple orchard with frost-resistant species.

Many of the other deported Latvians came to visit Father – teachers and other educated people. Ostensibly they came to play music. My father played the bass and the rest other instruments. But actually everyone listened to the radio and said: “no, no, they will free us soon.” The British and the Americans would come and free Latvia. Everything is just for the time being, the hope was: “no, no, not for long, it's only temporary.” We refused to put down roots in Siberia – the school, the kolkhoz, everything was just for now.

We were given bread that we had not seen before: it looked pretty and rose high above the pan when baked. Russian women knew how to bake it. But it was very bitter because the wheat fields were full of wormwood. The seeds were the same weight as wheat, so they could not be separated by winnowing. The



Our shack above a cellar.
MUSEUM OF THE OCCUPATION OF LATVIA

SOVIET DEPORTATIONS

- Deportation is the forced transfer of a part of the population as a punitive measure.

In the Soviet Union deportations were carried out from the beginning of the 1920s until the death of Stalin. Ethnic groups or whole nations were deported from defined regions; groups such as Cossacks, Germans, Poles, Koreans and Chechens, among others. Another reason for deportation was being considered a “social enemy” – the kulaks (wealthy peasants), “counter-revolutionaries and nationalists”, members of some religious congregations, etc. After WWII thousands were also deported from Eastern Europe under Soviet control.

Whole families were deported and usually for their whole lives. They were transported to the distant eastern (Siberia and Central Asia) and northern locations of the Soviet Union. One purpose was for the use of their labour in forestry, agriculture, etc. They had to live in special settlements under supervision of the State Security officials.

The total number of Soviet deportees is estimated at 6 million and the death rate was high. Surviving deportees could return to their homeland after Stalin's death, but they and their children were treated in some aspects as second-class citizens until the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Latvians suggested that school children should go and weed out the wormwood while it was still in blossom. The locals were amazed: how come the bread is no longer bitter? Actually, there weren't any real Russians here, mainly Ukrainians and Germans from the Volga region. But they all spoke Russian. The grandmothers still spoke their native languages, but the young people were hiding their native language: they avoided it, did not use it and eventually forgot it.

Our first abode was a shack above a cellar. Our furnishings: a stove, a bed of straw, a barrel for a table. We children did our homework on boxes in which we had received packages from Latvia in the mail. Mice merrily scurried thought the straw. Romantic...

Our home was a zemlyanka, an earthen hut, half buried underground. We bought it out of necessity, because there was nowhere else to live. Father added a stall in which we kept a cow, a pig and chickens. We convinced ourselves that it was only temporary... not to become fond of it all. We hoped that Latvia would become free and we would be freed as well. Letters went back and forth written in a veiled language.

Gradually, they let us leave. A family unexpectedly got permission to leave early in 1956. Then we all became anxious: why hadn't we received permission? I had finished high school and wanted to continue my studies. Mother's sisters, my aunts, lived in Latvia's capital city Riga. I thought I could live with them and study in Latvia. But I was told in Omsk that I had come with my family and could only leave with my family. So I enrolled at the University of Omsk, but in October we were allowed to leave. We tried to sell everything in a hurry, including the cow. We hastened to buy train tickets. We slaughtered the pig and cooked the meat

for the trip, but we had to throw most of it away because we hadn't allowed the meat to cool properly. We were so excited that we left half of our belongings just so that we could get away, get away sooner. There were very few Latvians who chose to stay. The ones who did stay mostly did so because they had married locals.

Latvia, however, was not really expecting us. My parents feared going back to their farm. There were rumours that we would be taken again and sent back – there had been such cases. Our aunt Olga Plezere lived in Vidzeme, in Northern Latvia, and we went straight to her. We three children went to study in Riga. Our parents did go back to see the farm. It had been destroyed. Our friendly neighbours were no longer there. Our farmland now belonged to a kolkhoz. No one lived in the house. Its wooden parts had been used for firewood and only the foundations remained.



Benita and her granddaughter Estere Litvinska meeting Queen Elizabeth II of England
EMBASSY OF THE UNITED KINGDOM IN LATVIA

Nita's drawings, safely hidden away, saw daylight again in 1989, when Latvia was breaking free from the Soviet Union. Now they can be seen in the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia in Riga. When Queen Elizabeth II of England visited Latvia and the Museum in 2007, she saw the drawings. Benita was invited to meet Her Majesty. She brought her eleven-year-old granddaughter, who also likes to draw – two generations later and far from Siberia.

● Adapted from *Ar bērnu acīm* (Through the Eyes of a Child), published with the kind permission of Benita Plezere-Eglīte by the Latvia during 50 years of Occupation Foundation in co-operation with the National Oral History Project of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Latvian Academy of Sciences, Riga, 1996.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE OCCUPATION MUSEUM ASSOCIATION OF LATVIA

LITHUANIA

Lithuanian independence was proclaimed in February 1918. Polish troops captured the Vilnius Region in October 1920. In 1923 Lithuanians captured Memel (Klaipėda) in Eastern Prussia.

COMMUNIST OCCUPATION

In March 1939 Germany reoccupied Klaipėda. According to the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 Lithuania was assigned to the German “sphere of influence”, but later transferred to the Soviet one. After the defeat of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union in September 1939 the Soviet Union transferred the Vilnius Region to Lithuania. The Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in June 1940. Forcible sovietisation and political arrests began immediately and culminated in the deportation of more than 17,000 individuals in June 1941.

NAZI OCCUPATION

The Wehrmacht occupied Lithuania in June 1941. During German occupation thousands of Lithuanian citizens and residents, including about 190,000 Lithuanian Jews, were annihilated by the Nazis and their local collaborators. Partisan units, also the Polish Armia Krajowa, Jewish and Soviet-supported red partisans fought against the Germans. Thousands of Lithuanians also served in various military units formed by the Germans.

COMMUNIST OCCUPATION

The Red Army captured Lithuania in the summer of 1944. The fierce guerrilla warfare of Lithuanian partisans against the Soviets continued until the 1950s. In May 1948 up to 50,000 Lithuanians were deported, in March 1949 about 25,000. After Stalin’s death the political arrests eased up, but the regime remained oppressive until the end of the 1980s. The democratic movement Sąjūdis won the elections in 1990 and Lithuanian statehood was restored in August 1991.



JUOZAS LUKŠA was born on 10 August 1921 into a farming family in a village in southern Lithuania. He had three brothers. He studied architecture at a university in the capital city Kaunas. After Lithuania became incorporated

into the Soviet Union in 1940, Juozas abandoned his studies to join the anti-Soviet resistance movement. During the subsequent Nazi occupation he joined the anti-Nazi resistance movement. In 1947 he crossed the Iron Curtain to seek support for Lithuanian independence abroad and to make contacts with Lithuanians in

exile. While in France he wrote a book called *Fighters for Freedom*, about the Lithuanian partisans, and he met and married his wife. In 1950, motivated by love for his country and remembering his oath of allegiance to his brothers in arms he parachuted back into Lithuania. He was betrayed and killed by Soviet security forces in 1951.



THE MUSEUM
OF GENOCIDE
VICTIMS

Juozas Lukša

The Life of a Partisan

written by Darius Juodis

EARLY YEARS

The future partisan, Juozas Albinas Lukša, was born on 10 August 1921 into the farming family of Simanas and Ona Lukša in the village of Juodbūdis in the Veiveriai administrative district in Marijampolė County. The future freedom fighter spent his childhood in this village. Juozas had three brothers: Jurgis, Antanas and Stasys. Juozas attended the primary school of the nearby village of Mozūriškės and graduated from the pro-gymnasium¹ of Veiveriai. He continued his studies in Kaunas, which was the capital of Lithuania at that time, at the Aušra Gymnasium for boys. In 1940, he graduated from the gymnasium and in the same year, entered the Faculty of Architecture at Vytautas Magnus University.

The year 1940 was a particularly significant year in the history of Lithuania. In 1939, as a result of secret agreements between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, the Republic of Lithuania, like the other two Baltic states, Latvia and Estonia, fell under the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union. The two aggressors divided Poland and then started their activities against the Baltic states. In 1939, Red Army military bases were set up in these states and in June 1940, after the USSR had delivered ultimatums, additional forces were deployed and this was the final nail in the coffin for these countries. The fateful day for Lithuania was 15 June 1940. When the Soviets came to power, they tried to produce a semblance of legality and acted quickly so that the Lithuanian people would not be able to understand the rapid development of events.

In August 1940, Lithuania formally and ostensibly voluntarily, was incorporated into the USSR and the destruction of the symbols of statehood proceeded. These activities encouraged Lithuanians to join the resistance movement; underground organisations were established and increasing numbers of people became involved in anti-Soviet activities, including Juozas Lukša.

¹ Lower secondary school [editor's note]

In March 1941, Lukša joined the underground organisation called the Lithuanian Activist Front, where he took an oath. Waiting for the fateful moment to act, members of the organisation distributed anti-Soviet leaflets. Later, when Lukša was arrested he told the interrogator “the purpose of the organisation was to create a ‘free Lithuania’”.

In June 1941, their group of underground activists was discovered. The Soviet security service uncovered and arrested Lukša’s fellow activists and on 5 (or 6) June arrested Lukša. He was imprisoned in Kaunas Hard Labour Prison and interrogated in order to obtain evidence about what the Soviets called “counter-revolutionary” activity. Inevitably, imprisonment in labour camps awaited all those who were detained. However, Soviet plans in Lithuania were interrupted by the Soviet-German war that broke out on 22 June 1941. When the war operations started, some prisoners managed to break down their cell doors and escape successfully. Some of the prisoners, however, were not so lucky. Before the escape, some of the prisoners were driven out of Kaunas and shot by the NKVD. Lukša was among the lucky ones who managed to get away. On 23 June, he returned to his home village.

NAZI OCCUPATION

The attacking German troops occupied the territory of Lithuania within a week. The Nazi occupation began. All hopes of restoring statehood, which had been nurtured during the anti-Soviet uprising in June 1941, faded. The Nazi government did not recognise the Provisional Government of Lithuania and did not intend to restore independence to Lithuania. For them, this was just a “vital space” in which there was no place for Lithuanians. In the first days of the Nazi occupation, repressions by the new occupation force started, including the killing of Jews in various locations in Lithuania.

While the university remained open (the Nazis later closed it), Lukša continued his architecture studies. The brutal actions of the Nazis called for resistance. The unarmed anti-Nazi underground began to form. Lukša rejoined the Lithuanian Front underground organisation. The underground activities included dissemination of underground publications, production of counterfeit documents, boycotting the measures taken by the occupation authorities, etc. When the Nazi war machine started to crumble in the East, preparations for armed struggle against the advancing Soviet army began.

RETURN OF THE RED ARMY

In the summer of 1944, the Red Army returned to Lithuania. This period saw the emergence of organised spontaneous partisan warfare against the Soviet authorities. Large partisan units were established in the forests. Resistance was further fuelled by Soviet repressions and the forced mobilisation

of Lithuanian men into the Red Army. It was expected that the Western allies would support the struggle against Soviet power, because it was understood that after the defeat of Nazi Germany a conflict would undoubtedly arise between the winners.

The entire Lukša family eventually joined the anti-Soviet resistance movement. At the beginning of 1945, Juozas’s brother Jurgis was arrested, but they managed to get him out of jail. At first, Juozas Lukša tried to continue his studies and work at the university but then he became more actively involved in the underground work. On 10 February 1945, he joined the underground organisation, the Lithuanian Liberation Council (LIT), whose aim was to establish a political centre to lead the anti-Soviet underground and to coordinate its actions. When the Soviet security uncovered this organisation and arrested some of its members, in June 1945, Lukša joined the Lithuanian Partisan Movement (LPS). The LPS underground organisation had similar goals to the LIT. On the instruction of this organisation, Lukša had to make contact with partisans.

At that time, individual partisan units looked for contacts and tried to set up joint structures. On 15 August 1945, the Tauras Military District was founded and gradually united the partisans of Suvalkija, an ethnographic region of Lithuania. Juozas Lukša came from this region, so he contacted freedom fighters of this unit. After meetings with the partisan commanders Zigmas Drunga (alias Mykolas Jonas) and Juozas Stravinskas (alias Žiedas) and others, Lukša was tasked with setting up a brigade in Kaunas. Later he mentioned that the actual date of that meeting was 20 August 1945. In November 1945, however, together with his brother Stasys, he was forced to leave the city of Kaunas and to start his life as a partisan. Subsequently, he joined the Tauras Military District, Geležinis Vilkas Brigade of partisans and was immediately appointed the head of the Press and Propaganda Section. In cooperation with other fighters, he began to publish the newspaper Kovos Keliu (On the Road of Struggle). Partisans realised that in addition to the armed struggle, information warfare was very important. The underground partisan publications had to offset the Soviet propaganda, to inform people about the situation in Lithuania and abroad, and to maintain the hope of freedom. Some newspaper editions had print runs of hundreds of copies.



Juozas Lukša (far left) with partisans/troopers after his return to Lithuania. Kazlų Rūda forest. October 1950

THE MUSEUM OF GENOCIDE VICTIMS

This activity was accompanied by persecution from and collisions with the enemy. In 1944–1945, the Soviet authorities, with the assistance of internal troops, announced the process of legalisation (in order to lure fighters from the forests, thus allegedly releasing them from their guilt) and therefore destroyed large partisan units. In 1946, the partisans had to choose a different strategy. They embarked on an even greater conspiracy and acted in small groups. In turn, the Soviet security forces stepped up the pressure and plotted new plans. Juozas Lukša, who became a partisan at that time, had to act in these circumstances. Due to conspiracy, he had to change his nicknames. One of his first aliases was Vytis.

It was none-the-less difficult to publish the underground press. Publishers constantly perished while distributors were arrested. Understanding the situation, Lukša later wrote, “Fellow Lithuanians, treasure the underground press, because it costs blood”. There was a constant shortage of materials (paper, ink, typewriters, etc.) too. Acquisition of materials was also associated with risk.

THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE

Despite losses, the partisans continued their unification work. In 1946, Jonas Deksnys (alias Alfonsas, Hektoras), and Vytautas Staneika (alias Meškis) returned to Lithuania from the West. They also wanted the partisan movement to be united and tried to build ties with the West. Although they did not have a clear mandate from the Lithuanian émigré organisations, they took the initiative, especially the ambitious Jonas Deksnys (Alfonsas, Hektoras). Soviet security also got involved in this activity by infiltrating their skilled agent, Juozas Markulis (alias Erelis) (MGB agent Ažuolas), supposedly representing the Vienybė Committee in Vilnius (although this committee was destroyed by security forces in the spring of that year).

On 6 June, in the presence of the above persons, partisan Lukša and others, the General Democratic Resistance Movement (BDPS) and the Supreme Committee for the Restoration of Lithuania (VLAK) were founded. Lukša, as a representative of the Lithuanian Front, together with others, signed declarations regarding the establishment of both organisations. VLAK was to lead the fight for the liberation of the entire country and BDPS was to conduct political work. Soon after, the Supreme Headquarters of the Armed Forces (VGPŠ) was established to lead the partisans.

The said agent, Ažuolas, who had considerable freedom of action and suggested measures of action to Soviet security, was in leadership positions in these organisations. His proposals regarding armed resistance were similar to those of Alfonsas (Hektoras), who defined the idea of passive resistance. In essence this meant that the partisans were to cease active operations, opt for legalisation and wait for the war between the Soviets and the West. In this case, the goal of the Soviet state security, MGB, was to destroy the resistance movement, under the guise of unifying the underground.

THE MEANINGS BEHIND NAMES GIVEN TO PARTISAN INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS

Tauras	Bull
Žiedas	Ring/blossom
Geležinis Vilkas	Iron wolf
Vytis	Knight
Meškis	Bear
Erelis	Eagle
Ažuolas	Oak
Vienybė	Unity
Birutė	A 14th century Lithuanian duchess
Skirmantas	A 12th century Lithuanian duke
Kęstutis	14th century Grand Duke of Lithuania
Mažytis	Tiny (this partisan was actually very tall)
Vytautas	15th century Grand Duke of Lithuania
Daumantas	13th century Grand Duke of Lithuania
Sakalas	Falcon
Vanagas	Hawk
Litas	The currency of independent Lithuania

To achieve these goals, the partisans were allowed to operate unhindered for some time. Soon, Alfonsas (Hektoras) went to Erelis in Vilnius and fell under his influence. In the autumn of 1946, Lukša also moved to Vilnius to establish the BDPS and VGPŠ with others. The MGB included its other agents in this game. Soviet security tried to take control of events and convene a meeting of partisan commanders. The MGB even allowed Alfonsas, accompanied by people from the MGB, to leave the country, expecting to control him abroad. Nevertheless, when the meeting of all partisans was approaching (in January 1947), Lukša with his companions uncovered MGB agent Ažuolas. This happened in December 1946 and Lukša together with other companions managed to leave Vilnius in time and postpone the date of the meeting.

Substantial efforts were made to warn the partisans of other commands of the threat, but not all of them at the time believed it. Partisans of the Tauras Military district decided to establish a new BDPS Presidium and a new VGPŠ. They also decided to send their own representatives to the West and to take over the communication channel with the West controlled by the MGB. Juozas Lukša was one such representative.



Juozas Lukša and Nijolė Bražėnaitė-Lukšienė in the surroundings of Tübingen on their honeymoon. July 1950
THE MUSEUM OF GENOCIDE VICTIMS

The commanders of the Tauras Military District also decided that the centre of underground activities should be established in the city of Kaunas. This would allow the struggle to move from the country to the city and help to maintain contact with partisans of other areas. Therefore, on 12 January 1947, the Birutė Brigade was founded and Lukša was appointed its commander. Lukša's alias at the time was Skirmantas and shortly after he was awarded the rank of Junior Warrant Officer. At the same time he was getting ready to go to the West. Jurgis Krikščiūnas from the Dainava Military District became his companion on his trip to the West.

At the end of April or the beginning of May 1947, both partisans, with the help of local partisans, crossed the Soviet-Polish border, which was guarded by Soviet border services. At that time, Lukša's alias was Kęstutis. Knowing only a few contact points, both partisan envoys managed to reach Gdynia successfully. It was almost by accident that they met Alfonsas (Hektoras) there. They informed him of the MGB provocations and the overall situation. They also wrote and passed on a letter addressed to the head of the Lithuanian diplomatic service in exile, Stasys Lozoraitis, and others. However, they did not get any real help and had to return to Lithuania.

In June, they fought their way back to Lithuania and soon reached the Commander of the Tauras Military District to report on the execution of their task. Since they had no specific tasks from abroad, they began to get ready for another sortie. On 15 August, Lukša was awarded the rank of partisan Warrant Officer and was appointed head of the Tauras Military District Intelligence Section. Three months later he was awarded the rank of Master Sergeant. In the same year, Lukša suffered personal tragedies. His brothers Jurgis and Stasys perished and his brother Antanas was arrested. Unable to bear the grief, his father became ill and died and his mother had to leave her home and go into hiding.

A SORTIE TO THE WEST TO SEEK SUPPORT

As mentioned above, after the first sortie to the West, preparations started for the second one. This time Lukša had the powers of the BDPS Presidium. It was also decided that it would be safer to cross the

Polish border in Kaliningrad Oblast. This time, Lukša was accompanied by partisan Kazimieras Pyplys (Mažytis), a veteran of many skirmishes. They used the aliases Skrajūnas and Audronis, respectively. On 15 December 1947, with the help of other partisans, they reached Poland. This time they were carrying many documents, including the memorandum for the United Nations, an appeal to Pope Pius XII and other documents to demonstrate the situation in Lithuania. In Gdynia they met up with Alfonsas (Hektoras) and in early February 1948 they left for Sweden by ship.

Abroad, the partisan envoys faced fragmentation of the Lithuanian emigrants. There were many discussions about who was able, and who could legitimately represent the country abroad. There were also conflicts with Alfonsas (Hektoras) who believed he represented the underground forces abroad. Still, Lukša managed to get in touch with the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (VLIK) (headed by Mykolas Krupavičius), an émigré organisation. On 12 July 1948 in Baden-Baden (Germany), a decision was made that in Lithuania the fight for liberation was represented by the partisans, and abroad by VLIK. Lukša then continued to seek support for national resistance. In order to gain experience, in 1948, he started studies at the French intelligence school and in 1949, at the U.S. intelligence school. At the same time, he was preparing for his return to Lithuania. His companion Audronis returned to Lithuania in 1949 with other companions.

Even though Lithuanian partisans were experiencing losses, they continued their unification work. Western Lithuania became the centre of these activities. Jonas Žemaitis (alias Vytautas), a partisan commander, took this initiative. In 1949, at the meeting of partisan representatives, the supreme authority – the Movement for the Struggle for Freedom of Lithuania (LLKS) – was established and Vytautas was elected the commander of the movement. Vytautas knew that Lukša was abroad and appointed him head of the Political Section of the Public Unit of the LLKS and also a representative of the LLKS abroad.



Juozas Lukša (first on the right) with leaders of the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania. West Germany, 1948
THE MUSEUM OF GENOCIDE VICTIMS

² The original Lithuanian title *Partizanai už geležinės uždangos* translates as *Partisans behind the Iron Curtain*. It was first published in 1950. The book was published in English in 1975 with the title *Fighters for Freedom*. [editor's note]

While abroad, Lukša prepared the book *Fighters for Freedom*² under the pseudonym of Daumantas. He also met his future wife Nijolė Bražėnaitė and married her on 23 July 1950. After living together for just a week, Lukša had to leave her to further prepare for the return to Lithuania. He realised what was waiting for him. In a letter to his wife he wrote: “It is possible that I will turn into the dust of our bloody homeland.”

On 3 October 1950, Lukša, together with paratroopers Benediktas Trumpys (alias Rytis) and Klemensas Širvys (alias Sakalas), returned to Lithuania. They brought some documents and a little financial support for armed resistance. Shortly after they contacted the partisans. Lukša went to work at the Headquarters of the LLKS Defence Forces (under Commander Adolfas Ramanauskas, alias Vanagas) under the alias Mykolaitis. On 25 November 1950, Lukša was appointed head of the Intelligence Unit of the LLKS High Command. In the same year, he was awarded the 1st Class Freedom Struggle Cross (with swords) and the honorary title of Freedom Fighter Valiant Man. These were the top partisan awards. In May 1951, he moved to work at the Headquarters of the partisans of the Southern Lithuania Region (under Commander Sergijus Staniškis, alias Litas).

AMBUSH

At that time, Soviet security forces took control of many areas and the situation of partisans was gradually getting worse; deaths became commonplace. The paratroopers managed to pass a few radiograms to the West, but as a result of persecutions the radio transmitter was lost. The Soviet security forces learned that Lukša had returned to Lithuania and started various operational manoeuvres. They also learned that another group of paratroopers were to arrive (two paratroopers Julijonas Būtėnas, alias Stėvė, and Jonas Kukauskas, alias Gardenis, arrived in April 1951). Soviet security developed a scheme whereby paratroopers from the West allegedly arrived, but in fact these were MGB agents who began looking to make contact with Lukša. Correspondence with Lukša started through messengers. But Lukša asked questions that fake paratroopers could not have known the answers to. So the operation looked set to end fruitlessly for the MGB.

However, during another MGB operation, a real paratrooper, Gardenis, was captured while the other paratrooper perished. So the MGB quickly included the captured paratrooper, whom they managed to recruit, into the operational game and the paratrooper knew how to answer Lukša’s questions. Throughout the summer of 1951, Lukša carefully tested his comrade and finally agreed to meet him. Soviet forces also prepared for the meeting. Agent storm troopers were prepared to conduct the arrest of Lukša and employed the interior army to encircle the fighter. On 4 September, Lukša was ambushed and killed in the village of Pabartupis, Kaunas District. His burial place remains unknown. MGB evaluated the operation as a failure, because the partisan was not taken alive.

The Republic of Lithuania greatly appreciated Lukša’s special qualities and efforts. By a decree of 20 November 1997 of the President of Lithuania, Lukša was awarded the 1st Class Order of Vytis Cross – the highest military award; on 22 December 1999, he was granted the status of Volunteer Soldier; and by order of 15 January 1998 of the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, he was awarded the rank of Major (posthumously).

The memoirs of Juozas Lukša have been published many times abroad and in Lithuania. They have also been translated into English, Swedish and German.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE GENOCIDE AND RESISTANCE RESEARCH CENTRE OF LITHUANIA

JULIANA ZARCHI was born in Kaunas, Lithuania, in 1938, to a German mother and Lithuanian father of Jewish origin. Her father was killed during the Nazi occupation. As a half-Jew, 3-year-old Juliana was separated from her

German mother and had to live in the Kaunas Jewish ghetto. After she escaped the ghetto, Juliana's mother and grandmother kept her hidden in their apartment for the remainder of the Nazi occupation. When the Soviet Army moved into Kaunas in 1944, the Zarchi family eagerly awaited them as liberators. However, the Soviets initiated

a purge of ethnic Germans, and the mother and daughter were forcibly resettled in Tajikistan in Central Asia. They were not released from exile until 1961. They returned to Kaunas, where Juliana still lives to this day. Her mother died in 1991, having never been allowed to return to Germany, her beloved homeland.



FAMILY COLLECTION
OF JULIANA ZARCHI

Juliana Zarchi

A Young Life Disrupted

written by Vilma Juozevičiūtė

Juliana Zarchi's destiny is a perfect example of how the totalitarian dictatorships dominant in Europe in the 20th century disrupted and destroyed people's lives. Born into a family in which the parents were of different nationalities, Juliana was persecuted as a child by the Nazi regime for being half Jewish and by the Soviet regime for being half German.

Juliana Zarchi's father, Mausha (Mauša) Zarchi, was born in 1902 in Lithuania into a Jewish family living in the town of Ukmergė. After graduating from the gymnasium, the young man left Lithuania and studied philosophy, history, and political economics in Germany and Switzerland. In 1928, he defended his PhD dissertation at the University of Basel.

From 1928 to 1936, he worked as the head of a division of an advertising company in Düsseldorf, where he met Gerta Urchs, who worked as a secretary and was four years younger than he was. Their acquaintance soon grew into love. However, because of the racist legislation existing in Germany at that time, Mausha and Gerta could not get married: a Jewish man could not marry an Aryan German woman. Since Mausha had Lithuanian citizenship, they decided to get married in Lithuania, which was independent at that time and where there were no racist restrictions on people of different nationalities. Nevertheless, Lithuania did not have an institution for civil marriages in those days; marriages were registered by religious communities only. Therefore, after arriving in Lithuania, Catholic Gerta converted to Judaism and married Mausha in a synagogue in 1934. Having married a Lithuanian citizen, Gerta also received Lithuanian citizenship.

As a foreigner, Mausha could only work and live in Germany until 1937. In 1937, his work permit was not extended and so Hitler's regime forced the young family to leave Germany. They settled in Lithuania. Dr. Mausha Zarchi found employment working for Jewish newspapers that were published in Kaunas. He also worked as an advertising specialist in various companies. Meanwhile, Gerta was a housewife.

EARLY LIFE

On 10 May 1938, a girl named Juliana was born into the Zarchi family. Soon after her birth, her grandmother, Margarete Urchs, arrived in Lithuania from Düsseldorf. She helped raise little Juliana and



Little Juliana with her father,
Kaunas, 1939
FAMILY COLLECTION OF JULIANA ZARCHI

lived with her daughter’s family until she died in 1945.

Juliana grew up surrounded by love and care, and her early childhood was bright and sunny. Unfortunately, that did not last long.

In 1940, in accordance with the secret protocols of the agreements signed by the USSR and Germany in 1939, Lithuania was occupied by its eastern neighbour, the Soviet Union. The occupation brought the first bereavements to the Zarchi family.

As mentioned before, Dr. Mausha Zarchi originated from the town of Ukmergė. Many of his relatives lived there: his father, brothers and a sister with their families, and aunts and uncles with their families. His eldest sister, Chwola Koltun, ran a bookshop together with her husband Uriasz. First, the Soviet authorities nationalised their property, and in June of 1941, when the first mass deportations started in Lithuania, they were sent to Siberia. The husband was separated from the family and was imprisoned in a labour camp. Meanwhile Chwola and her daughter Eta found themselves in Altai. One year later, in the summer of 1942, almost half of all the Lithuanian deportees were taken from Altai to the Laptev Sea in the north of Yakutia, where the conditions were so harsh that people were practically assured to die. Chwola and her daughter were among those condemned to this fate. During transit Eta fell ill and died of a fever. Chwola also died in exile in Yakutia. After the exile of Chwola’s family, only her son Benjamin remained in Lithuania. He studied in Kaunas and lived with his uncle, Mausha Zarchi.

In fact, Chwola was not the first from the large Zarchi family to suffer at the hands of the Soviet regime. Dr. Mausha Zarchi’s youngest brother, Salomon, captivated by the idea of creating an autonomous socialist Jewish republic in the Far East near the Chinese border – Birobijan – left in the middle of the 1930s. Unfortunately, during the years of the Great Purge he was arrested, and in 1937 or 1938 he died in a Soviet labour camp.

A FAMILY SEPARATED

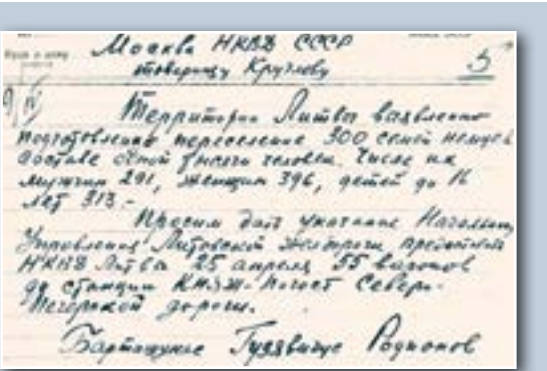
On 22 June 1941, barely a week after the terrible mass deportations, the war between the USSR and Germany began. When the units of the Wehrmacht³ began to rapidly push forward into the territory of Lithuania, Dr. Mausha Zarchi, intuitively anticipating that hard and dismal times were coming for the Jews, decided to retreat. He decided to leave his family – his wife, daughter and mother-in-law – in Kaunas. He thought that as

³ The unified armed forces of Germany from 1935 to 1945 [editor’s note]

Germans they would be safer if they stayed at home in their cosy and comfortable flat on Vytautas Avenue. Only his nephew, Benjamin, a student, left with him. Throughout the entire period of Nazi occupation, Gerta Zarchi was hoping that her husband had managed to retreat to the Soviet Union. Only after the return of some of his friends to Lithuania did she discover that her husband had not left Lithuania at all; after being separated from his friends and colleagues from the Jewish newspaper, he went to Ukmergė where his relatives lived. He most probably died with all the others who were shot not far from Ukmergė in the Pivonija Forest, in a place where Jews were massacred and where 6,000 people were killed in Nazi times from 18 August to 5 September 1941.

After her husband left, Gerta Zarchi, her mother and daughter remained alone in a country that was foreign to them. Her husband’s relatives had been killed and they had no other relatives or friends. They could not even speak Lithuanian. Living with Mausha, Gerta had felt safe and protected, but now she had to take care of everything herself. Soon, disaster struck: it turned out that her 3-year-old golden-haired daughter Juliana, as a half-Jew, had to be settled in a Jewish ghetto on the outskirts of the town, in Vilijampolė. It was impossible to overtly disobey this law. Therefore, Gerta was determined to settle in the ghetto together with her daughter. She was stopped by an acquaintance called Franz Vocolka. “If all of us go to the ghetto, who will save us from there?” he said. Franz Vocolka was originally an ethnic Czech from Austria, but for the past twenty years he had lived and worked in Kaunas at the Spindulys printing-house. His wife, Feiga, was Jewish and had to move to the ghetto together with their children. Therefore, it was decided that she would take care of little Juliana. Thus, for some time, the girl lived separately from her mother. Meanwhile, Gerta would often go to the ghetto to see her daughter at least from a distance.

It was very dangerous for children to live in a ghetto; since they did not work and were not useful to the occupying authorities, they could be killed during any commonplace decimation of Jews. So Franz Vocolka was determined to rescue her from there as soon as possible. Mr. Vocolka contributed to helping many people to escape; as a graphics specialist, he could skilfully falsify documents for many Jews in hiding. He also kept in touch with other rescuers of Jews from the ghetto. It was this man who took charge of taking first little Juliana and later the entire his family secretly from the ghetto. Juliana does not remember much, but she knows from her mother’s stories that there was a plan to take the little girl from the ghetto secretly and she was supposed to be taken to two Polish women who lived in Kaunas and hid



A phonogram from Lithuania to Sergei Kruglov, Deputy Commissar of the Interior of the USSR, on the preparations for the deportation of German families. 300 families were scheduled for deportation, including 291 men, 396 women, and 313 children up to 16 years old. Vilnius, 9 April 1945.

LITHUANIAN SPECIAL ARCHIVES

Jews. But Juliana’s mother feared being separated from her child again and she decided to hide her at home. Since she had few acquaintances, she was rarely visited. Juliana was hidden in the kitchen or in a small room next to it. Juliana spent almost the entire period of Nazi occupation hidden in her house and only at the very end was taken to a community of Carmelite sisters in Kaunas, where she learned the Lithuanian language.

SENT INTO EXILE

Meanwhile, the course of the war between the USSR and Germany kept changing. The Germans retreated from Lithuania after fierce battles. On 1 August 1944, the Soviet Army moved into Kaunas. Gerta Zarchi eagerly awaited them as liberators. She hoped that she would no longer have to hide or fear for her daughter’s life and that huge relief would come. Unfortunately, her hopes were in vain. The Soviet authorities intended to settle accounts with everyone who had fought against them or helped the Germans in any other ways during the war. In accordance with secret resolutions, all persons of German nationality or who were closely related to people of German nationality had to be exiled to the far regions of the USSR. When the war was still going on, on 7 February 1945, Vasyli Chernyshov, Deputy Commissar of the Interior of the USSR, signed a secret order stating that all residents of German nationality had to be moved from Lithuania once and for all and relocated in the Komi Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, where they were to be employed in the manufacture of wood products.

According to the records of Germans living in every district, including families of mixed nationalities, around 1,000 people, or 300 families, had to be exiled. The deportations started in April 1945. People from 14 different districts and the city of Kaunas were exiled. Juliana and her mother Gerta were among the 63 families that were exiled from Kaunas. Juliana’s grandmother Margarete Urchs was also included on the list of people to be exiled, but she died in January 1945. Nobody cared that the family had suffered severely during the years of Nazi occupation; they had lost their father and husband, and little Juliana herself was confined to a ghetto and had narrowly escaped death (during the Nazi occupation, around 195,000, or 95 per cent, of Jewish people were killed in Lithuania).

Knowing no Lithuanian or Russian and brought to the area for collecting deportees with a little daughter, Juliana’s mother was lost and confused. However, in such a hopeless situation, fate sent a few kind people who helped her speak to the Russians and who became faithful friends and assisted in sharing their great troubles and small joys in remote exile.

Crowded into cattle wagons, people were kept there for several days until deportees from all of the districts had been brought. The group from Kaunas set off on 3 May 1945. However, they were taken to Tajikistan rather than Komi. At the last minute it was decided to use the industrious Germans for “the construction of Communism” not in the Far North, but in Central Asia.

The difficult and exhausting trip took a whole month. It was hot and stuffy in the enclosed space, and the people were short of water. On the way to the place of exile, on 10 May, Juliana turned seven years old. When the group arrived in Stalinabad (now Dushanbe), the capital of Tajikistan, a long trip by truck awaited them. The deportees were taken to the village of Uyaly in the valley of the Vakhsh River via a mountain pass. The valley on the border with Afghanistan was known for producing cotton, also known as “white gold”. The climate was hot and damp and was especially suitable for the Egyptian type of cotton. This type of cotton has long thin fibres and matures at various times, so it was picked manually without using any machines. There was a dearth of workmen in the valley, which is why deportees from Lithuania and later more ethnic Germans from Ukraine were brought. The Soviet system saw the deportees as a cheap labour force.

When the deportees from Lithuania were brought, as Juliana recalls, “merchants” (the managers of the surrounding collective farms) came and chose workers. It reminded her of the slave markets of ancient and colonial times described in textbooks. First, the strongest were selected and taken away, and families with small children or grandparents had to wait for their turn for a long time. Juliana’s mother’s posture and clothes gave her away as a city dweller who was not used to doing hard physical work. Therefore, Juliana and her mother went to a manager of a collective farm who came last and had no choice.

Deportees were settled in small windowless houses made of straw and clay, called kubitkas. It was extremely hard to work in the cotton fields under the sun when it was 50 degrees. However, the deportees from Lithuania had no other choice. They could be imprisoned for “absenteeism” (avoidance of work), and their health and even life had little value. Heat and disease killed the deportees one by one. They were sick with malaria, fever, dysentery, and other serious diseases. They suffered famine and had to eat watermelon rinds and turtles to avoid starving. About 300 deportees who could not bear the harsh conditions of exile died the very first winter of 1945-1946.

A RARE STROKE OF LUCK

Juliana and her mother could also have suffered the same sad fate. “This big German woman with a child will die first,” the people would say. Working in the cotton fields was too hard for Gerta Zarchi;



Juliana (second from the right) with other students in Stalinabad, Tadjikistan, 1950s.

FAMILY COLLECTION OF JULIANA ZARCHI

she did not have the physical strength to work with a big hoe. However, for once they had some good fortune. A company was looking for tailors who had their own sewing machines, and Juliana's mother had brought her sewing machine with her. She had received the machine as a gift when she was working in an advertising company in Düsseldorf and took part in creating an advertising campaign. Although she was not a very good seamstress, she applied for the job at the company. In this way she left the collective farm and moved to Kuibyshevsk.

When it became apparent that she was a poor seamstress and that her sewing machine was more suitable for embroidery than for sewing quilted jackets, Gerta Zarchi had to do other jobs: protect the fields of honeydew melons and watermelons from jackals, weave cotton, and make carpets from straw. She did everything she could to stay in Kuibyshevsk and not to return to the collective farm and cotton fields. When she would run out of food, she would exchange or sell her jewellery or other valuable items.

Although at the beginning the locals distrusted the deportees and avoided communicating with them or would even throw stones at them, that did not last long. They soon made acquaintances and started communicating. The relations between deportees from Lithuania and the German families from Russia that were exiled to Tajikistan were also good. Juliana befriended the children of the neighbouring Lithuanians and Germans so that they were like brothers and sisters; they shared everything.

When September came, Juliana started school. Since she knew no Russian, it was hard for her because she could not understand the teacher. Besides, she became ill with measles. The illness was severe. The feverish, weak girl could only lie on the clay barracks floor. There were few doctors, the methods of treatment

were inappropriate, and she almost died of a weak heart. When she eventually recovered, she did not continue with school but attended the kindergarten. She learned a little Russian and the following autumn, when she was eight, she started school once more. There was not much time for learning. Every year the entire school had to pick cotton from September through December. Little children were sent to collect the bits that the adults had missed. Students also had to go to the collective farm to pick cotton. The most important thing was to make the appointed quotas.

While Juliana was sick, her mother Gerta met a doctor of German origin. She was also a deportee but from Ukraine. Her new acquaintance helped Gerta to get a job at a health centre. At first Gerta scrubbed



Juliana and her mother in exile in Tadzhikistan, 1952.

FAMILY COLLECTION OF JULIANA ZARCHI

the floor. Later, when she had learned some Russian, she worked at the reception desk, and because there was a shortage of medical personnel, she also gave injections to the sick. Some time later she got a job in a hospital as a nurse in the Department of Infectious Diseases. In this way, by doing several jobs, she could support herself and her daughter. The hard work, hot climate and painful experiences made the pretty, elegant woman age before her time, and her face became deeply lined.

When Stalin died in 1953, the conditions in exile eased. Up to that time, deportees had to report to the office of the commandant of the NKVD every month and could not change their place of residence or leave the settlement without special permission. Nevertheless, even after the death of Stalin, they could not return to Lithuania. For Juliana and her mother, exile did not end until 1961.

After graduating from school, Juliana dreamed of studying medicine. Unfortunately, special quotas were in place to study medicine, and she as a deportee was not accepted. She was however lucky to speak German fluently and was therefore able to enrol at the Stalinabad Pedagogical Institute to study German philology.

JULIANA RETURNS TO LITHUANIA

In 1962, having finished her studies and having been released from exile, Juliana decided to visit her friends in Lithuania, namely, the family of Helene Czapski-Holzman in Kaunas. Juliana and her mother had been very close with this family during the war years. The painter Helene Czapski-Holzman was also a German, and her husband Max Holzman was a Jew. During the Nazi occupation, Max Holzman and his eldest daughter Maria were killed. Helene, who helped to save many Jews herself, became very close to Gerta Zarchi, who shared a similar fate. Helene and her daughter Margarete supported Gerta Zarchi even when she was deported (in fact, since Helene and her daughter were German, in 1945, they were about to be deported too, but at the last minute, people whom she had saved during the Nazi occupation managed somehow to get a permit for them to stay in Lithuania). Helene cordially welcomed Juliana to come and visit her. When Juliana arrived in Lithuania, Helene helped her to find a job and start a new life there.

In 1963, after spending 18 years in Tajikistan, Juliana's mother also returned to Kaunas. In fact, Gerta Zarchi desperately wanted to return to her homeland, Germany, but the applications she filed were rejected; the Soviet authorities did not give her permission to leave for Germany. The pain of losing her homeland tortured her until she died in 1991.

After her mother's death, Juliana was left alone, the sole remaining survivor from the formerly large, warm and vibrant Zarchi family.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE GENOCIDE AND RESISTANCE RESEARCH CENTRE OF LITHUANIA

POLAND



Polish statehood was restored after WWI. Poland defeated the Soviet Union in the war of 1919-1920 and signed non-aggression treaties with the Soviet Union and Germany in the 1930s.

NAZI OCCUPATION

According to the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 23 August 1939 Poland was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union. It was attacked by both countries in September 1939. In June 1941, after the war began between Germany and the Soviet Union, the whole of pre-war Poland was occupied by the Germans. During the war about six million Polish citizens and residents perished, three million Jews among them. More than 20,000 Polish officers and civil servants, captured by the Soviets in 1939, were executed during the massacre of Katyń in 1940. Major extermination camps, mainly for Jews, were created in former Poland by the Nazis. In spring 1943 the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was crushed by the Germans. Polish resistance began immediately upon occupation. The most spectacular act of the Polish Underground State and the Home Army (Armia Krajowa) was the Warsaw Uprising in August 1944.

COMMUNIST REGIME

The Polish government-in-exile was located in London since 1940. After liberation of the Eastern part of Poland by the Red Army the Soviets cancelled their recognition of the Polish government and set up a pro-Soviet government in July 1944. During 1944-1948, supported by the Soviet Union, power in Poland fell into the hands of Communists through mass terror, electoral fraud and propaganda. A Soviet-type society was built up, and political repressions especially against the Armia Krajowa members began. Significant protests against Communist power took place in 1970 in Gdańsk, and in 1980, when the free trade union movement Solidarność (Solidarity) was founded. The anti-Communist movement was crushed for a while by introducing of martial law in 1981. From 1989 Poland was transformed into a democratic society.

WITOLD PILECKI was born on 13 May 1901 in Olonets in northern Russia into a Polish family originally from the Nowogródek region. In 1910, Witold moved with his family to Vilnius, Lithuania, where he attended a trade school and, in 1913, he joined an underground boy scouts organization. During

WWI he was a “soldier-student”, alternating between periods of study and active combat. He participated in the Polish-Soviet war of 1919-1920. In 1931 he married his wife Maria and they had a son and a daughter. As a cavalry officer he fought the Germans in WWII and then went underground.

In 1940 he volunteered for an assignment to infiltrate the Auschwitz concentration camp to gather information and organize a Polish resistance movement there. He successfully completed his mission and escaped from the camp in 1943. A Captain during the Warsaw Uprising, he was captured by the Germans, then liberated by the Americans. The Polish Communist secret police arrested him in 1947 and charged him with espionage. He was sentenced to death and executed in 1948.



COLLECTION OF THE
INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE

Witold Pilecki

The Man who Volunteered for Auschwitz

written by Jacek Pawłowicz

An unwavering soldier, a cursed soldier, a soldier of the “lost Republic of Poland”, the last cavalry man of the Republic of Poland, a volunteer for Auschwitz and one of the six most courageous members of the European resistance movement during World War II – Witold Pilecki.

He is a symbol of a Poland that was irreversibly destroyed in almost every respect by its occupiers: the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. He belonged to the generation whose main desire was for Poland to regain independence and which worked for Poland’s greatness afterwards. That generation was raised on the still-living tradition of national uprisings and was shaped by the motto: “GOD – HONOUR – FATHERLAND.”

FAMILY HISTORY AND EARLY YEARS

Witold Pilecki was born on 13 May 1901 in Olonets in northern Russia but the Polish Pilecki family was originally from the Nowogródek region¹. As an act of repression for Witold’s grandfather’s (Józef Pilecki) participation in the 1863 January Uprising the tsarist authorities confiscated almost all of the family’s land. Consequently, the Pileckis dispersed throughout the Russian Empire trying to earn a living. A graduate of the Forestry Institute in Petersburg, Witold’s father Julian accepted a forester position in Karelia in the north of Russia. He moved to Olonets, where he met and married Ludwika Osiecimska. It was there where Witold was born as one of five children of the Pileckis. In an attempt to avoid their children’s Russification, in 1910 the Pileckis decided to move to Vilnius². Unfortunately, for financial reasons Julian Pilecki had to stay in Olonets and continue his work as a senior inspector in the State Forest Administration. Ludwika and the children went to Vilnius without him. After their arrival Witold went to a trade school, where in 1913 he joined an underground boy scouts organization.

¹ In present-day Belarus [editor’s note]

² At that time a Polish city but now the capital of Lithuania [editor’s note]

A SOLDIER/STUDENT AND THE POLISH-SOVIET WAR

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 surprised the Pileckis while they were on vacation in the spa town of Druskininkai. Since Vilnius was endangered by the German army Ludwika could not get to her husband, who was still in Olonets. Instead she went to her mother who was living in Hawryłkovo in the Mogilev region³. The children continued their education in the schools of the city of Orel, where Witold founded his first boy scouts troop.

Despite the on-going war, the family led a peaceful life until the beginning of 1918, when the Bolshevik revolution started in the Mogilev region. Instigated by the Bolshevik agitators, the peasants began to plunder land estates and murder their owners. Fearing for her children's lives, Ludwika Pilecka returned with them to Vilnius, where she stayed for a few weeks. Penniless, she went to the run-down Sukurcze estate near Lida owned by her mother-in-law Flawia Pilecka. It was the only family estate that the tsarist authorities did not confiscate as it had been registered under the name of Domejko – Witold's grandmother's maiden name.

In the autumn of 1918 Witold Pilecki returned to Vilnius, which was under German occupation. He became a student of the Joachim Lelewel junior high school and joined the underground Polish Military Organization (Polska Organizacja Wojskowa, POW). But he was not meant to continue his education. While the Poles in the centre of the country celebrated their newly regained independence, those domiciled on the eastern frontier continued the armed struggle for freedom. On 20 December 1918 Witold discontinued his education and enlisted, along with a group of boy scouts, with the Vilnius Self-Defence detachments organized by Gen. Władysław Wejtko. They took over the city on New Year's Eve in 1918. He fought against Communist sabotage and then defended Vilnius against the charging Bolshevik army. An experienced scout and boy scout instructor, he commanded the defence of the barricade at the Gate of Dawn.

Unfortunately, during the night from 5 to 6 January 1919 the Vilnius Self-Defence detachments were forced to retreat from the city. Witold Pilecki, however, did not lay down his arms and joined a Vilnius Self-Defence cavalry detachment commanded by brothers Władysław and Jerzy (renowned as "Łupaszka") Dąmbrowski. He fought with that detachment until the autumn of 1919. He participated in almost all major battles the detachment fought, against alternately the Germans, Belarusians, Ukrainians and Bolsheviks, and he also took part in the capture of, among others, Brest, Lida, Baranowicze and Minsk.

A soldier/student, Witold Pilecki was demobilized on 1 October 1919 and he returned to Vilnius, where he continued his education at the Joachim Lelewel junior high school. He also resumed his scouting activity and founded the 8th Vilnius Boy Scouts Team whose members were mostly young demobilized soldiers.

³ In present-day Belarus [editor's note]

He did not get to be a student for long that time either. With the new Bolshevik threat coming from the east, Witold Pilecki enlisted with the army in July 1920. That time he was assigned to the 1st Vilnius Boy Scouts Company of the 201st infantry regiment and sent to defend Grodno.

Faced with the advancing Bolshevik army, he reached Warsaw with his detachment, where by chance met his previous commander Łupaszka. That legendary "raider" and his brother were forming the 211th Voluntary Niemen Uhlan Regiment, which Witold joined on 12 August 1920. As an Uhlan of the 3rd platoon of the 2nd squadron he fought for example at Płock, Mława, Chorzele, Druskininkai, Stołbce and Kojdanów, where he was when the Polish-Soviet war ended.

A resident of Vilnius, in October 1920 he participated with his regiment in Gen. Lucjan Żeligowski's Vilnius campaign to regain for Poland the territories the Bolsheviks handed over to Lithuania in August 1920.

After the end of the campaign, on 1 January 1921, first class Uhlan Witold Pilecki was released from the army to continue his education and he once again resumed his scouting activity.

In February 1921 Witold joined the National Security Union (Związek Bezpieczeństwa Kraju, ZBK), where he did a non-commissioned officer's training course and became a commandant-instructor of a ZBK

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE SOVIET UNION, BOLSHEVIKS – KPSS

● The Communist Party of the Soviet Union, KPSS (Komunisticheskaya partiya sovyetskovo soyuza) was a radical left-wing political party whose beginnings date back to the early 20th century and the gradual splitting of the social democratic party in tsarist Russia. The radicals around Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (original name Ulyanov) became organisationally independent at the party congress in Prague in 1912, when they adopted the name Social Democratic Workers' Party (Bolsheviks). The name of the party changed several times over the following decades. The fundamental principles of its agenda included dictatorship of the proletariat, revolutionary terror, social demagoguery and anti-religious orientation. The party structure had a military character. The Communists traditionally rejected not only the tsarist regime, but also the model of parliamentary liberal democracy. In November 1917 the Bolsheviks took advantage of the fact that the Russian government was weakened after the fall of the tsarist regime to start a violent revolution in St. Petersburg. In January 1918 they dispersed the Constitutive Assembly in which they had a majority. After winning the civil war and after the failure of foreign interventions they gradually expanded their power into other parts of the former tsarist empire. After Lenin's death in 1924 Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (original name Dzhugashvili) rose to the leadership of the party. His name became synonymous with totalitarian rule and mass terror. After the fall of Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchov in 1964 Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev became the leader of the KPSS. During his rule, Soviet influence in the world reached its peak. At the same time, the regime fell into a deep economic crisis. Nevertheless, membership of the Bolshevik party grew steadily over the years; in 1917 it had 40,000 members, at the end of the 1930s the number was approximately 1.5 million, peaking at 19 million members in the early 1990s. In 1985 Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachov took over the KPSS leadership. He reacted to the ongoing problems with reforms. The unexpected result of those reforms was the collapse of the Soviet bloc and eventually also of the Soviet Union. After an attempted violent coup in the summer of 1991 by some members of the party leadership, the KPSS was banned. One of its acting successors is the Communist party of the Russian Federation.

branch in Nowe Świąciany. In May that year he passed the high school finals before the Examination Board for Former Soldiers (Komisja Egzaminacyjna dla Byłych Wojskowych) in Vilnius. By that time he was fluent in three foreign languages: French, German and Russian.

He began to study at the Stefan Batory University as an extraordinary student of the Fine Arts School. Unfortunately, he had to discontinue his studies and find gainful employment due to a lack of money, the serious illness of his father, who had been released from a Bolshevik prison, and the fact that the Sukurcze estate (on which his parents and younger siblings lived) was in debt because of the war and dishonest lessees.

Initially, he worked as a secretary of the Union of Farmers' Associations of the Vilnius Region (Związek Kółek Rolniczych Ziemi Wileńskiej) and then as a secretary of the prosecuting magistrate of the 2nd Judicial District in Vilnius. At that time he began correspondence studies at the Agriculture Faculty of the University in Poznań.

A SOMEWHAT CIVILIAN PERIOD

During that whole period he undertook efforts to regain the Sukurcze estate. He moved to the rundown family estate and began to modernize it. He specialized in clover seed and dairy production.

But he missed the army. In 1925 he underwent training in the 26th Wielkopolski Uhlan Regiment stationed in Baranovichi. In 1926 he was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant of the reserve as of 1923. Almost every year he did military training in the 26th Uhlan Regiment and from 1931 in the Cavalry Training Centre (Centrum Wyszkozenia Kawalerii) in Grudziądz.

At the turn of 1929 and 1930 Witold met his future wife Maria Ostrowska – a young teacher at an elementary school in the village of Krupa. They got married on 7 April 1931 and moved to Sukurcze, where their son Andrzej was born in 1932, followed a year later by their daughter Zofia.

He not only worked at his estate but was also becoming more and more socially active. He was the head of the Voluntary Fire Brigade and a chairman of a dairy. He also set up a farmers' association with the locals and helped those in need. In April 1932 he organized the Mounted "Krakus" Military Training³ in the Lida district, which became subordinated to the 19th Division of the Infantry of the Polish Army.

In 1937 he was awarded the Silver Cross of Merit (Srebrny Krzyż Zasługi) for his social work.

Despite having a lot on his mind he also found time to write poetry and to paint. Two of his paintings have survived in the parish church in Krupa.

³ Krakusi – mounted military training for high school students in pre-war Poland [translator's note]

WORLD WAR II

In mid-1939 Poland ordered mobilization in case of a war with Germany. On 26 August 1939 the mobilization of the cavalry of the 19th Infantry Division began. Reserve 2nd Lt Witold Pilecki organized a mobilization point in the village of Krupa as soon as he got the news and soon afterwards he and his subordinates joined the unit.

The 19th Infantry Division of the "Prusy" [Prussia] Army reached the concentration area near Piotrków on 4 September 1939 and began to prepare for defence. The next day the German XVI Armoured Corps conducted an offensive forcing the Polish units to retreat towards Tomaszów Mazowiecki. The Germans destroyed the squadron of Lida Uhlans commanded by 2nd Lt Pilecki during the heavy fighting at Wolborz. The dispersed soldiers with Pilecki among them crossed the Vistula River and joined the 41st Infantry Division which was being recreated near Włodawa. At that time Witold was made deputy to division cavalry commander Maj. Jan Włodarkiewicz. The Division was destroyed on 22 September 1939 after heavy fighting. But Witold Pilecki did not lay down his arms. He continued to fight with his Uhlans in a partisan detachment until as late as 17 October 1939.

While Pilecki was fighting the German Army, his closest family in Sukurcze found themselves under Soviet occupation. To avoid arrest by the NKVD, his wife and children went into hiding in the local area. Maria managed to cross the German-Soviet border to get to her parents living in Ostrów Mazowiecka⁵ in April 1940 and at the end of that month 2nd Lt Witold Pilecki met with his family for the first time since the outbreak of the war.

After his arrival in Warsaw, which was under German occupation, Pilecki re-established contact with Maj. Jan Włodarkiewicz and they began to create an underground organization to continue the struggle for independence. On 9 November 1939 during a meeting in Eleonora Ostrowska's apartment (Pilecki's



Maria Ostrowska and Witold Pilecki on their wedding day, 7 April 1931

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⁵ Her hometown in northeastern Poland [editor's note]

sister-in-law) a decision was made to found an underground military organization – the Underground Polish Army (Tajna Armia Polska, TAP). The following day its members took an oath before Father Jan Zieja.

In Warsaw Witold Pilecki was hiding under the assumed name of Tomasz Serafiński. Serafiński was not a fictional figure, but a reserve lieutenant who had participated in the defence of Warsaw. Severely wounded after the capital's capitulation, he was not taken captive but was in hiding in a conspiratorial apartment. In December 1939 Serafiński was transferred to a different apartment and he left his documents behind. Pilecki found them when he moved in there after him. Convinced that their owner had died due to sustained injuries, Pilecki simply changed the photos in the documents and began to use them.

A VOLUNTEER TO AUSCHWITZ

The arrests among the TAP soldiers, the growing number of prisoners of the German concentration camp at Auschwitz and its spreading ill repute induced the TAP command to conduct an intelligence operation in the camp.

2nd Lt Witold Pilecki volunteered to undertake the mission with the knowledge of Armed Combat Union (Związek Walki Zbrojnej, ZWZ) Commander-in-Chief Gen. Stefan Rowecki (alias Grot). Pilecki let the Germans arrest him as Tomasz Serafiński in a roundup in the Warsaw district of Żoliborz on 19 September 1940.

He arrived in the Auschwitz concentration camp with a transport of 1,705 people (the so-called second Warsaw

transport) on the night of 21/22 September 1940. His camp number was 4859.

The very first moments after the unloading of the cars convinced him that the camp was “hell on earth.” The prisoners formed a column and were forcibly marched to the camp. They were hit on the way to the camp and dogs were set on them. To terrorize the prisoners one of them was shot during the march for his alleged escape attempt. Then the SS guards shot 10 more prisoners, claiming them jointly responsible for that act of rebellion. Fortunately, on that terrifying night Witold Pilecki only lost two teeth. A fragment of the report he wrote after his escape states: “They knocked out the first two of my

teeth because I had the plate with my camp number in my hand and not in my teeth as the Bademeister⁶ wanted that day. I got hit in the jaw with a heavy bar. Two teeth fell out. There was some blood.”

In October 1940 Pilecki sent the first message from Auschwitz describing the conditions in the camp. A few weeks later the message was transferred to ZWZ Commander-in-Chief Gen. Stefan Rowecki (Grot), who then ordered for the message to be sent to London through the “Anna” dead-letter box⁷ in Stockholm. The message reached its destination on 18 March 1941.

During that time Witold Pilecki was already organizing an underground Union of Military Organization (Związek Organizacji Wojskowej, ZOW) in the camp. These were the aims he specified: “to keep the fellow prisoners’ spirits up by delivering and spreading news from the outside, to organize additional food rations and clothing for the prisoners if possible, to transfer information to the outside and – on top of all that – to prepare our own detachments to take control over the camp when a need arises, when there is an order to drop weapons or live force (paratroop) here.” The contacts established thanks to the TAP soldiers who had been arrested earlier and who had been in Auschwitz longer, particularly doctor Władysław Dering, soon brought the desired effects. The first so-called “five” was established already in the autumn of 1940 and it consisted almost exclusively of TAP soldiers. After some time the structure had its people in all kommandos⁸ of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau. In mid-1942 the organization already had about 600 prisoners, over 100 of whom swore their oaths to Pilecki.

The information from the camp was gradually transferred in reports to the High Command of the Home Army in Warsaw.

As a sign of appreciation of Witold Pilecki’s activity in Auschwitz, Home Army Commander-in-Chief Gen. Stefan Rowecki (Grot) promoted him to the rank of lieutenant on 11 November 1941.

In the spring of 1943 the camp Gestapo began arrests among the conspirators. Consequently, Lt. Pilecki escaped during the night from 26 to 27 April 1943 with Jan Redzej (who had been in the camp under the false name of Jan Retko; camp number 5430) and Edward Ciesielski (camp number 12969). This is how he summed up his stay in Auschwitz after his escape: “on the way out I had a few teeth fewer than at the moment of my arrival there and I had a broken breastbone so I paid a very low price for such a period spent in that sanatorium.”

Pilecki escaped mostly to personally report on the situation in the camp to the High Command of the Home Army and to obtain his superiors’ consent to prepare a military operation to release the prisoners.

⁶ Bath foreman [translator’s note]

⁷ A method used to pass items between two individuals using a specified secret location. It means the individuals are not required to meet directly. [editor’s note]

⁸ Work details [editor’s note]



Pilecki with his wife and children, Ostrów Mazowiecka, 1934

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He reached Warsaw only on 22 September 1943 after a period of hiding in Bochnia and Nowy Wiśnicz, where he met the real Tomasz Serafiński, who at that time was a deputy of a local and Cracow Home Army commander.

In the capital Pilecki became an active underground member under the false name of Roman Jezierski. He then went to Ostrów Mazowiecka, where he reunited with his wife. From that moment on he saw her quite often but he met with his children only a few times. During one of those visits he told them his motto: “Love your homeland. Love your holy faith and the tradition of your Nation. Grow up to be men of honour, always faithful to your highest values, to which you need to devote your entire life.”

After his escape Witold Pilecki took a keen interest in the events in Auschwitz but the command did not approve of his project to attack the camp.

On 19 February 1944 Home Army Commander-in-Chief Gen. Tadeusz Komorowski (alias Bór) promoted Lt. Witold Pilecki to the rank of rotmistrz (equivalent of Captain)⁹ as of 11 November 1943 for his heroic activity in Auschwitz.

THE WARSAW UPRISING AND WORKING FOR THE POLISH ARMED FORCES IN THE WEST

As it was certain that the occupation of Poland would change from German to Soviet the Home Army command began to create a new underground organization codenamed “NIE” (Niepodległość – Independence). That cadre military organization was to continue the pro-independence struggle after the Red Army’s capture of the Polish territories. Pilecki (new name and code name: Witold Smoliński and T-IV respectively) was also assigned to participate in those organizational efforts, which, however, were interrupted by the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising.

He fought in the Warsaw district of Wola near Towarowa, Pańska, Miedziana and Źelazna Streets and Starynkiewicza Square. The area he defended came to be known as “Witold’s Redoubt”¹⁰; it was one of the partisan redoubts that were defended the longest and it never fell into German hands.

After the fall of the Uprising, on 5 October 1944 Rtm. Witold Pilecki and the “Chrobry II” unit soldiers ended up in the camp in Ożarów, from where they were transported to the POW camp in Lamsdorf (Łambinowice near Opole) and then to the officers’ POW [Oflag] in Murnau. His POW number was 101892.

After the American Army liberated the camp on 28 April 1945 Rtm. Witold Pilecki remained there for a while preparing for his departure to the Polish II Corps commanded by Gen. Władysław Anders,

⁹ Pilecki’s rank virtually became integral to his name, thus he is typically referred to as rotmistrz Pilecki, often abbreviated as “rtm”

¹⁰ “Witold’s Redoubt” sounds similar to “Ordon’s Redoubt” made popular by Adam Mickiewicz’s eponymous poem on heroic resistance [translator’s note]

which was stationed in Italy. He left Murnau on 9 July 1945 with a group of officers and reported for duty just two days later.

At that time he was stationed in San Gregorio, where he spoke twice with Gen. Anders and once with Gen. Tadeusz Pełczyński. He became an intelligence officer of Department II of the Polish II Corps and was preparing for a transfer to Poland. His task was to organize a spy ring to collect any information about the situation in the country.

On 22 October 1945 he set off for Poland as Roman Jezierski. He travelled via Rome, Bologna, Bremen, Regensburg and Prague accompanied by Maria Szelałowska (alias Rysia) and Bolesław Niewiarowski. He reached Warsaw on 8 December 1945.

He gradually set up some contacts. He created his own network of collaborators and informers selected from among former TAP soldiers and Auschwitz underground members. He obtained confidential information on the operation of the NKVD and the Security Office (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB), the intensification of terror, the activity of the pro-independence military underground, rigged elections and the economic cooperation between Poland and Soviet Russia. The reports were sent to the staff of the Polish II Corps in Italy.

In June 1946 Captain Jadwiga Mierzejewska (Danuta) gave him the order of Gen. Władysław Anders to immediately emigrate to the West to avoid arrest.

It was the only order that Rtm. Witold Pilecki did not obey.

He did not want to leave the country for two reasons. He had nobody to take over the activity he had started and he did not want to abandon his family.

But the noose around him was getting tighter and tighter.

ARREST BY POLISH COMMUNIST SECRET POLICE

The UB functionaries arrested Pilecki on 8 May 1947 (or possibly on 5 May). He was immediately subjected to an exceptionally cruel interrogation personally supervised by Col. Józef Różański – the director of the Investigation Department of the Ministry of Public Security (Ministerstwo Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, MBP). During one of the breaks in the hearing exhausted Pilecki whispered to his wife: “Auschwitz was nothing compared to this.”

Some of the charges brought against Pilecki: “during the period from July 1945 to 8 December 1945 in Italy and from then on until the day of his arrest, that is until 8 May 1947, on the Polish territory he acted to the detriment of the Polish State as a paid resident agent of foreign intelligence directed by the staff of Ander’s II Corps and by Anders’ order he organized a spy ring on the Polish territory recruiting the following to work as informers: Tadeusz Szturm de Sztrem, Makary Sieradzki,

Witold Różycki, Stanisława Skłodowska, Antoni Czajkowski and others; he maintained constant personal organizational contact with the enumerated and directed their activity giving them instructions and orders, he collected in conspiratorial apartments in Warsaw...information and documents which were a state and military secret obtained by political, military and economic intelligence... From November 1946 until his arrest on 8 May 1947 in Warsaw he worked in collaboration with the members of the spy ring... – Tadeusz Płużański, Leszek Kuchciński and Wacław Alchimowicz – preparing a violent assassination of the Ministry of Public Security functionaries.”

Rtm. Witold Pilecki denied the espionage charge in his testimony before the court, stating: “I was not a resident agent but just a Polish officer. I had only been obeying my orders until the arrest. I was not aware that I was guilty of espionage and I ask Your Honour to take this into consideration while passing the sentence.”¹¹ The sentence was announced at noon on 15 March 1948. Rtm. Witold Pilecki, Maria Szelągowska and Tadeusz Płużański were sentenced to death; Makary Sieradzki got life imprisonment, while the others were to spend many years in prison.

Pilecki petitioned the Communist President of Poland Bolesław Bierut for a pardon. “I have worked for the benefit of Poland my whole life. ...it never occurred to me that my activity was espionage for I did not act for the benefit of a foreign power; I sent information to my parent Polish detachment.”

The other convicts sentenced to death and their defenders followed Pilecki’s example. Bolesław Bierut changed Maria Szelągowska’s and Tadeusz Płużański’s death sentences to life imprisonment but he did not pardon Rtm. Witold Pilecki.

The sentence was executed on 25 May 1948 in the prison at Rakowiecka Street No. 37 in Warsaw. The executioner was Staff Sgt. Śmietański. This is how, many years later, Father Jan Stępień – fellow Mokotów prison inmate – described the last moments of the “volunteer for Auschwitz”: “I will never forget that sight. Two convicts were being escorted. The first one to come was Witold Pilecki. His mouth was gagged with a white band. Two guards were carrying him by the arms. His feet were barely touching the ground. I do not know whether he was conscious. He seemed to be totally out cold.”

The memory of Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki did not die despite many efforts of the Communists, and his values were not forgotten.

After Poland had regained independence in 1989 many towns and cities in Poland named their schools, streets, housing estates and parks in honour of this extraordinary man.

Plaques that commemorate the “volunteer to Auschwitz” can be seen on the walls of many sanctuaries and churches in Poland. The place from where Witold Pilecki voluntarily departed to “hell on earth” on 19 September 1940 has also been commemorated.

On 1 October 1990 Rtm. Witold Pilecki and the other convicts were fully exonerated – the disgraceful and criminal sentence of 1948 was fully waived. In July 2006 Polish President Lech Kaczyński posthumously awarded Rtm. Witold Pilecki the Order of the White Eagle for his merit and commitment to the homeland and on 7 May 2008 the Polish Senate passed a resolution to re-establish popular memory of the heroic Rotmistrz Witold Pilecki in Poland.

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¹¹ In the Polish legal tradition, which has no jury trial, the verdict and the sentence are passed by the judge or judges [translator’s note]

DANUTA SIEDZIK was born on 3 September 1928 in the village of Guszczewino in north-eastern Poland. She had two sisters. Her father Wacław was a forester. In 1940 he was arrested by the Soviets and deported, never to return home. After Wacław's arrest the family was forced to leave the forester's lodge they had been living in. Danuta's mother Eugenia joined the Home Army, a Polish resistance movement. She was arrested and executed by the Gestapo in 1943. Danuta, in turn, joined the Home Army. Following the Red Army's entry into Poland she became a paramedic in an anti-Communist resistance unit. She was arrested by the Communist secret police in June 1946. In a show trial she was falsely accused of murdering secret police functionaries and giving orders to other soldiers. She was sentenced to death and executed by firing squad before she had reached 18 years of age.



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Danuta "Inka" Siedzik

A Brave Young Life

written by Dr hab. Grzegorz Berendt

The German invasion soon followed by the Soviet one changed the lives of millions of citizens of the Second Polish Republic¹². The war involved a new generation of young people raised in reborn Poland. They learned in school about war, struggles, and sacrifice for the country and for the nation. They heard about it from their relatives and veterans of the pro-independence struggle during family meetings, numerous patriotic celebrations and in youth and Church organizations. But in 1939 and during the years that followed they faced challenges, dramatic events, and choices whose character they could not imagine. Tens of thousands of them passed the test that life put before them.

Danuta Siedzik, daughter of Wacław and Eugenia née Tymińska, belonged to the generation of young people brought up in an atmosphere of affirmation of independence and pride in their own state. Danuta was born on 3 September 1928 in the village of Guszczewino in the Bielsk Podlaski district in the Podlasie region. Her father was a forester. He had been deported for his anti-tsarist activity, which he started during his studies at the Saint Petersburg University of Technology. He did not return to independent Poland until 1926 and soon married Eugenia. The next year their first daughter Wiesława was born, followed by Danuta and Irena in 1928 and 1931, respectively. The whole family lived in the Olchówka forester's lodge near Narewka. The atmosphere in the house was permeated with patriotism thanks to the efforts of both the parents and grandparents.

SOVIET OCCUPATION

After 17 September 1939 the Siedziks' homeland fell under Soviet occupation so their first painful experiences were the Bolshevik repressions. Wacław was arrested on 10 February 1940 and endured a brutal investigation. Then he performed backbreaking labour in a gold mine. After Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski had signed a treaty with the Soviet government on 30 July 1941 (Sikorski-Mayski Agreement) Wacław Siedzik regained his freedom, together with tens of thousands of Polish citizens released from

¹² Poland between WWI and WWII

camps and prisons. He managed to get to a Polish army centre in the USSR. After a few months he left that “inhuman land” and went to Persia with the first transports of troops and civilians. Unfortunately, the period of deportation had exhausted him and he passed away in Teheran in June 1943. The family learned about all that only after the war.

After her husband’s arrest Eugenia and her daughters were forced to leave the forester’s lodge. In April 1940 Eugenia settled in the village of Narewka and she was there in June 1941 when the Germans invaded the USSR. She became an active member of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK). Unfortunately, the Gestapo was informed about it. Arrested in 1943, she was tortured during the investigation. She came down with typhus and ended up in the prison hospital. In September 1943, Eugenia was executed somewhere in a forest near the city of Białystok, orphaning her adolescent daughters, who were cared for by their relatives.

In December 1943 Wiesława and Danuta joined the Home Army. A year or so later they were sent on a paramedic training course. They became active members of the AK underground network headed by forester Stanisław Wołoncej (alias Konus) from Narewka. In October 1944 Danuta, who was just 16, had become a clerk in the forest inspectorate in Narewka. Months passed, filled with work and underground activity.

The fact that the German army was pushed out of Poland did not mean that the country regained independence. Planning to create a new dependent state with a new regime in Poland, the Soviets began to “liquidate” the people and the milieus that did not accept the new state of affairs. The Soviets’ supporters were Communists who had belonged to the political and military structures subordinated to Moscow before 1945. They were to become the core of the cadres of the new state. Fairly soon they recruited thousands of careerists, who joined the ruling party – the Polish Workers’ Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR). The scale and the intensity of terror against the anti-Soviet and pro-independence milieus had a twofold effect. After the hecatomb of World War II most Poles adopted a strategy of survival under the new regime: they defied it mostly through support of legal opposition parties. On the other hand, thousands of soldiers of the underground continued their activity and maintained combat readiness. They could not accept the lawlessness and impunity of the Soviet forces stationed in Poland, and they did not recognize the authority of the Communist puppet government. It seemed that there was still a chance to regain sovereignty.

The 5th Vilnius Brigade of the underground Home Army (sometimes called the “Death Brigade”) was commanded by a pre-war career officer Maj. Zygmunt Szendzielarz (alias Łupaszko). It fought in the Vilnius region against the Germans and Lithuanian nationalists, and then against the Soviets. In July 1944 the commander decided to transfer the remaining forces to the Polish territory within the new borders. By the end of that summer the detachment had reached Podlasie. Other detachments of unwavering soldiers were also fighting there.

BECOMING “INKA”

Danuta Siedzikówna joined the brigade in dramatic circumstances in May 1945. The Office of Public Security (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, UBP) had arrested all employees of the forest inspectorate in Narewka on suspicion of collaboration with the pro-independence underground. While they were being transported to Białystok, near Hajnówka, the convoy was attacked by soldiers from a patrol commanded by “Konus.” The youngest of the Siedzik sisters – Irena – witnessed that event. Having nothing to lose, Danuta joined the 5th Vilnius Brigade of the Home Army. She became a paramedic in the squadron commanded by 1st Lt. Marian Pluciński (alias Mściśław). Her underground pseudonym “Inka” was an allusion to the name of her dear friend.

After a few months Maj. Szendzielarz ordered that the detachment be disbanded. The last concentration of all forces took place on 7 September 1945 in the Stoczek forester’s house in the Poświętne commune. Only a few soldiers remained in the forest. Inka was among those who had to return to legal life. She went to the junior high school in Nierosno in the Dąbrowa Białostocka commune. According to her later documents, she completed two years of secondary education. In August 1945 the Provisional Government of National Unity (Tymczasowy Rząd Jedności Narodowej) proclaimed an amnesty. Inka did not, however, decide to reveal her contacts with the underground

to the Communist authorities. Fearing exposure by the Security Office (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB) she consequently accepted help from Stefan Obuchowicz – her father-in-law and a forester by occupation – who found her a job in the Miłomłyn forest inspectorate near Ostróda. She began to work there in January 1946. She proved her identity with a document probably issued by the Municipal Board in Białystok. According to the document she was Danuta Ina Zalewska born on 3 September 1928 in Wołkowysk. It also stated that at the end of the war she performed forced labour in Prussia, from where she returned in 1945. As we can see, some of Danuta Siedzik’s data, including her first name and date of birth, were retained.

Inka did not work in Miłomłyn for long because at the end of February she renewed her contact with the detachment, which in the meantime had begun to transfer its forces to the Olsztyn province. A plan to



In the Żelazny (Iron) Squadron, Summer 1946
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initiate partisan activity in the Gdańsk province emerged. It was a bold enterprise considering the fact that the detachment members knew neither that area nor its population. They were to be helped by the repatriates from the north-eastern frontier, who had begun to settle in Pomerania in the spring of 1945. The underground also considered using sea ports as channels of communication with Poles in the West who had been deported due to their pro-independence stance.

AFTER WORLD WAR II

For the first years after the war the population in the Gdańsk province cities changed on a mass scale. Germans were being deported, and their place was taken by Poles coming from other regions of post-war Poland and from the territories of the Second Republic of Poland that had been incorporated into the USSR. Tens of thousands of people settled in Gdańsk Pomerania, West Pomerania and Warmia and Masuria. It was a fortunate circumstance for those who had to leave the area where they were known. Consequently, pro-independence underground members could move to Gdańsk, Sopot or other district cities and towns. While some ended their underground activity and tried to live as civilians, others kept on fighting. Those connected with the 5th Vilnius Brigade of the Home Army arrived in Pomerania in 1945. They set up a network of contact points, which were to be a point of support for the detachment.

The population changes were less radical in the Gdańsk Pomerania countryside than in its towns and cities. Germans were deported from the rural areas too, but most of their inhabitants were Polish. The Home Army was in a difficult position as it had not enjoyed mass support in that area. The most important anti-German underground organization in the Gdańsk region (Pomerania) was the “Pomeranian Griffin” Underground Military Organization (Tajna Organizacja Wojskowa “Gryf Pomorski”). The organizational structure of the “Pomeranian Griffin” was relatively dense and during 1942-1945 it also had armed underground groups in forests. It ceased to operate in March 1945 as its commanders thought further struggle impossible. One of them called on the soldiers to engage in the reconstruction of the country.

Paradoxically, the behaviour of the Red Army soldiers, the NKVD, Warsaw government representatives, and especially of the functionaries of the Security Office and PPR activists, aided those who wished to fight against the Soviets and the Communist regime in Pomerania. Red Army soldiers behaved like victors on a conquered territory. They committed crimes against the civilian population not only during the frontline operations but also for many months afterwards. And the crimes were not only against the German minority but also against the local Polish majority. Rapes, robberies and even murders were common. Some representatives of the new regime, who knew little about the reality of the German occupation on the territories incorporated into the Reich, treated the Poles who lived there and who had been on the Volksliste as hated ethnic Germans and renegades who had – as people

of German origin – provided help to the occupier. At the beginning of the new regime the Kashubians and Kociewie inhabitants (local Slavic peoples) were often called Germans or aborigines in the UBP district superintendents’ reports. By definition they were treated as groups that could not be trusted. The functionaries abused the law and the locals disliked them.

The first stage of the organization of the new AK structures in Pomerania was the transfer of the staff of the Vilnius AK Region that took place in October 1945. After a few weeks the soldiers of the 5th Vilnius Brigade of the AK and their commander also came to Pomerania. When Maj. Szendzielarz’s soldiers arrived in the Gdańsk province they were the only partisan detachment there. It had just 40-60 partisans in a state of combat readiness. In order to continue their activity they had to earn the trust of the local population and convince it that they strived for Poland’s independence. Otherwise they would not find safe hideouts or get the information they needed to fight and to avoid manhunts organized by the Polish and Soviet bezpieka¹³. But it was far from easy. Fearing provocation, the local population initially did not trust any strangers. But throughout the six months when the squadrons of Maj. “Łupaszka” operated in southern Kaszuby, Kociewie and Powiśle (in the Gdańsk region) they had constant or temporary support of about 200 people: farmers, forest service workers and Polish State Railway employees.

Inka re-joined the detachment at the beginning of March 1946. She was assigned to the squadron commanded by Zdzisław Badocha (alias Żelazny) and became a paramedic. The operation of the squadrons of Maj. Łupaszka in the Gdańsk province was very daring. They were highly mobile – from February 1946 they sometimes drove requisitioned army cars to get to the site of their actions against the Security Office (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB) and the NKVD. The soldiers disarmed Citizens’ Militia (Milicja Obywatelska, MO) stations and punished its functionaries whom they knew to be Communist lackeys harmful to the local population. Other MO functionaries were not harmed. Overzealous PPR members and informers were lashed. The population was informed about the real aims and nature of the Soviets’ presence in Poland and about the character of the Communist regime. The resources to buy food and other necessary everyday products were obtained

THE DEUTSCHE VOLKSLISTE (GERMAN PEOPLE’S LIST)

After the attack on Poland and the occupation of a part of its territory, Reich Governor of Wartheland Arthur Greiser issued a decree on 28 October 1939 according to which the local members of the German minority could apply for German citizenship. Those interested in being included on the Deutsche Volksliste were to be divided into four groups according to their origin, language skills and membership of political organisations. Based on that, they were to receive graded rights and privileges, including different food rations. A similar approach came into practice later on in other occupied territories, especially in Ukraine and France.

INFO BOX

¹³ Office of Public Security

through expropriation actions. Łupaszka’s subordinates operated in relatively small groups of usually about 20 soldiers. These were called squadrons and had young commanders: Zdzisław Badocha (alias Żelazny), Olgierd Christa (alias Leszek) and Leon Smoleński (alias Zeus). Other tasks were performed by the group commanded by Feliks Salamonowicz (alias Zagończyk).

As a member of Żelazny’s squadron, Danuta “Inka” Siedzik participated for example in the train action at the Tleń station in the Świecie district conducted on 4 May 1946, after which the squadron moved to the Tuchola district. The most spectacular action took place on 19 May, when the squadron destroyed the staff of seven MO stations and two UB (Communist secret police) posts in the Kościerzyna and Starogard Gdański districts. On 23 May the squadron clashed with an MO unit near the village of Podjazdy in the Kościerzyna district. One MO functionary and one UB activist were killed, while three MO functionaries were wounded. Later one of them accused Siedzik of firing a pistol at him and taking some of the military equipment. In turn, on 10 June Danuta participated with the squadron in a skirmish near the village of Tulice in the Sztum district. Żelazny got wounded. Having defeated the MO and UB functionaries, 1st Lt. Olgierd Christa “Leszek” ordered the partisans to execute two UB functionaries. Later on that incident too was used against Inka. One of the last actions she participated in as a Żelazny squadron paramedic was the ambush at the Bąk railway station in the Czersk district on 24 June. The partisans stopped a Gdynia – Katowice train to look for Soviets. Five Soviets were apprehended and shot. Inka was ordered to watch the station employees so that they would not try to warn the MO or UB. At the beginning of May Żelazny ordered that she be given a 6.35 calibre Mauser.

Henryk Wojczyński (alias Mercedes) – one of few soldiers with a driving license – was her boyfriend during the detachment’s operation in Pomerania. His precious skill came in handy when the detachment had to get to its new accommodation and action sites.

Female messengers, who carried orders necessary to coordinate the operation of individual squadrons, played a vital role. It is easy to imagine how difficult a task it was for those women, who were unfamiliar with the Gdańsk region as they were from other regions of Poland. They contacted Kashubians, who spoke their own language, and Kociewie inhabitants, who had their own dialect. The local people knew perfectly well that they were dealing with newcomers. Inka coped well with these everyday problems. Obeying her superior’s orders, she reached the indicated places and people.

CAPTURE AND TRIAL

Siedzik’s last mission was a journey to Malbork and Olsztyn ordered by the deputy of Żelazny – 1st Lt. Leszek (Żelazny had already died). The paramedic was to obtain medication that the detachment badly needed. She set out to Gdańsk on 13 February. A few people she knew lived there including her

close relatives: sister Irena and uncle Bruno Tymiński – a Gdańsk University of Technology student. Inka stayed at the Mikołajewski sisters’ apartment in Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz at Wróblewskiego No. 7. The Mikołajewski sisters were from Vilnius. The evening and night from 19 to 20 July passed in a joyful atmosphere, filled with conversations and singing. But the house was under surveillance. Early in the morning UB functionaries entered the apartment and arrested Inka. It might not have been possible had it not been for the betrayal by paramedic and messenger Regina Żychlińska-Modras. Having been captured, Regina had decided to cooperate with the bezpieka. She had given a detailed testimony on the detachment and exposed many people.

The decision to put “Ina Zalewska” in the Gdańsk detention centre issued on 20 July by public prosecutor doctor of law Cpt. Adolf Brunicki has survived. The documents of 31 July already feature Danuta’s real surname.

The investigating officers from the Provincial Public Security Office (Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, WUBP) in Gdańsk wanted Siedzik to testify about the activity of the detachment commanded by Maj. “Łupaszka” and its helpers. She was threatened, tortured and humiliated.

Andrzej Stawicki, Gdańsk WUBP investigating officer, prepared the indictment eleven days after the arrest. On 31 July he asked for the death penalty. The trial was to take place in the Regional Military Court in Gdańsk. The main charges were: alleged armed attack on an MO functionary Longin Ratajczak during the skirmish near the village of Podjazdy and encouraging the killing of the UB functionaries during the action in Tulice. Another charge was illegal possession of a firearm.

On 2 August 1946 Józef Bik (head of the Gdańsk WUBP Investigation Section) sent a letter to the District Military Prosecutor in Sopot. It says a lot about the methods used by the regime at that time. Bik moved for a summary trial: “Simultaneously, I request for the Chief Justice to be informed that the date of the hearing is to be 3 August 1946 as the witnesses have been summoned to the hearing on that day via telephone messages.”

The judge read out the indictment prepared by the WUBP during that first and as it turned out the last hearing. Inka had no opportunity to read the document in advance. She pleaded innocent of shooting at the MO functionary and of the abetment in killing the UB functionary. Then the testimonies of the absent witnesses for the prosecution were read out and the present witnesses gave theirs. Almost all of them testified against her. She did not deny that she had been in the detachment nor that she had illegally possessed a firearm for a few weeks. The questions asked by the attorney suggest that he tried to base the line of defence on the claim that his client had joined the detachment under coercion, had had no military training and had not participated in military operations. Siedzik herself confessed to only one military operation and that was watching the telegraph room at the Bąk railway station.

The witnesses for the prosecution gave their testimonies which were then read out. Next, the public prosecutor filed a motion to consider the charges as proven and to sentence the accused to death. The described proceedings took just two hours. At 6 p.m. the judges retired to deliberate on the verdict, which they announced half an hour later. It was in line with what the public prosecutor had moved for – Inka was sentenced to death, permanent loss of public and honorary civil rights and forfeiture of her property. The hearing ended at 6.45 p.m. That short investigation and one hearing in court were enough to declare the minor guilty of the acts, only one of which she pled guilty to. It must be stressed that Danuta Siedzik was the only woman sentenced to death by the Gdańsk Military District Court. The reasons for the bitter hatred of the Stalinist court murderers remain unknown.

The court-appointed attorney asked the President of the National State Council Bolesław Bierut for a pardon. The attorney pointed out that the convict was a minor and orphan and that she had stayed in the detachment at her fiancé's insistence. The convict did not sign the plea. Bierut turned it down on 19 August 1946. Danuta awaited the execution of the sentence in the detention centre on Kurkowa Street behind the Provincial Regional Court in Gdańsk.

Her relatives received a secret message smuggled out of the detention centre. She wrote: "I am sad that I have to die. Tell my grandma that I did the right thing."

The date of the execution was fixed for 28 August 1946. Danuta Siedzik was still a minor. We know about her last moments from a testimony of Father Marian Prusak, who was summoned to administer the last rites to her. Siedzik did not die alone. Another unwavering soldier – Feliks Selmanowicz, alias Zagończyk – was executed with her. He was a pre-war professional soldier, fought in the 1939 defence of Poland and served in Polish pro-independence underground detachments during the whole occupation.

The two convicts were taken to the basement of the said detention centre. Prosecutor Maj. Wiktor Suchocki and physician Cpt. Mieczysław Rulkowski were present. The sentence was to be executed by a few soldiers with machine guns under the command of 2nd Lt. Franciszek Sawicki. A few UB functionaries stood behind the firing squad and abused the convicts verbally. A moment before their death the unwavering soldiers shouted at their executors: "Long live Poland!" Inka added: "Long live Łupaszka!" The order was given and shots were fired. Zagończyk and Inka did not die immediately. The commander of the firing squad finished them off with pistol shots.

The soldiers of Maj. "Łupaszka" fought in Pomerania until the end of November 1946 and then dispersed around Poland. Some of them, including the major, fell into the hands of the UB.

On 10 June 1991 the 4th Penal Division of the Provincial Court in Gdańsk issued a decision revoking the verdict passed half a century earlier by the Gdańsk WSR. In the sovereign Republic of Poland the court deemed it null and void as Danuta Siedzik had fought for Polish independence.

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GERMANY

After the defeat in WWI, Germany suffered in the world economic crisis beginning in 1929 and the radical right and radical left political parties won strong public support during elections.

NAZI REGIME

In March 1939 Germany reoccupied Klaipėda. According to the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 Lithuania was assigned to the German "sphere of influence", but later transferred to the Soviet one. After the defeat of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union in September 1939 the Soviet Union transferred the Vilnius Region to Lithuania. The Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in June 1940. Forcible sovietisation and political arrests began immediately and culminated in the deportation of more than 17,000 individuals in June 1941.

COMMUNIST REGIME IN EAST GERMANY

After WWII, Germany was divided into occupation zones of the Soviet Union, USA, UK and France, respectively. In the Soviet zone, the Social Democrats were merged with the Communists, and the resulting party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) won half the votes in the elections of 1946 and the majority in rigged elections of 1949. On 7 October 1949, the totalitarian German Democratic Republic was founded. A worker's uprising in 1953 was crushed by the Soviet

army. A wall was built through the divided city of Berlin in 1961 to prevent the escape of Germans to the West. In 1989, an exodus of citizens through Hungary and the embassy in Prague occurred, followed by large demonstrations, leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989. Free elections were held in March 1990 and on 3 October 1990 East Germany was reunified with the Federal Republic of Germany.



MARGARETE BLANK was born on 21 February 1901 in Kiev, which at that time belonged to the Russian Empire. Her parents were Baltic Germans. Her mother was a dentist and her father an engineer. The family moved to Germany in 1919 and Margarete became a German citizen in 1924. She studied medicine and received her doctoral title from the Medical Faculty of Leipzig University in 1932. Margarete was a dedicated doctor and always put her patients first. She was denounced by a fellow physician in 1944 for her doubts about Germany's "final victory" in WWII. She was sentenced to death for the crime of "corruption of the military force" and was executed on 8 February 1945 in Dresden. The SED regime later stylised her as an "anti-fascist fighter", which she was not. She was an independent person with a humane belief.



SAXON STATE ARCHIVES,
STATE ARCHIVE LEIPZIG

Margarete Blank

A Portrait

written by Dr. Birgit Sack

At two minutes past six on the evening of 8 February 1945, the physician Margarete Blank was executed by guillotine in the courtyard of the building of the District Court on Munich Square in Dresden. Together with her, another eleven women and men died on this last execution day at this site during the National Socialist dictatorship. After that, the bomb attacks on Dresden destroyed the guillotine and the justice buildings on Munich Square so badly that the killing machinery could not continue. More than 1,300 people had fallen victim to it between 1933 and 1945 on Munich Square.

Who was Margarete Blank and why did she have to die?

YOUTH AND TRAINING

Margarete Blank was born on 21 February 1901 in Kiev, which then belonged to the Russian Empire, as a daughter of a dentist and an engineer. Her parents were Baltic Germans. They were descendants of German immigrants who settled in the Baltic Sea provinces of the Russian Empire. Margarete and both her older siblings received a middle-class protestant upbringing; accomplishment and striving for advancement played an important role in the family.

After attending school in Kiev, Margarete Blank began to study at the local women's college. Toward the end of World War I she worked as an interpreter for the German army's administrative offices. German armed forces had marched into Kiev under the 1918 Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Russia, in order to force the Russian government to hand over the Ukraine to the German Reich. After the end of World War I, the German troops withdrew from Kiev. Urged by their parents, Margarete and her sister Eleonore left their homeland with the German troops in the winter of 1918/1919. A new civil war between the Ukrainians striving for a sovereign state and the Russian population had broken out. The Blank sisters first went to Kolberg (Eastern Pomerania)¹; they took private lessons and graduated from the local grammar school. Then they moved to Leipzig. Their decision to move to the Saxon trade

¹ Today Kołobrzeg in Poland, a seaside resort not far from the German border

fair town was probably made due to the fact that their brother Herbert, a lawyer, had settled there as an interpreter.

Professionally, Margarete Blank followed in her mother's footsteps and enrolled to study medicine at Leipzig University in May 1921. Her brother supported her financially. On 23 July 1923 Margarete passed her intermediate medical examination with the overall grade "excellent". After completing ten semesters of study she passed her state examinations, again earning top grades. Margarete served her mandatory practical year at a gynaecological polyclinic in Leipzig. Four years after her intermediate exam, she received her medical license. She then spent four months as a medical trainee at the Department for Internal Medicine at the University Clinic in Leipzig. Eight months at the Surgery Department followed. Margarete then worked for another year at the same clinic as a physician intern. In order to support herself and her sister who was studying at the time she helped out in the offices of practicing physicians who found that she covered for them very well. A medical doctor wrote in 1928: "She is skilful, reliable and well educated, in surgery, obstetrics as well as internal medicine. She was invariably very popular with the patients."

At the end of the 1920s the young physician started writing her doctoral thesis under the supervision of Henry Ernest Sigerist (1891-1957) who had been the Head of the Institute for Medical History at Leipzig University since 1925. Finally, in 1932, Margarete received her doctoral title from the Medical Faculty of Leipzig University. In her dissertation she translated and commented on a medical history which had been recorded in longer written elaborations by the Dutch physician Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738).

A DEDICATED COMMUNITY PHYSICIAN

While composing her doctoral thesis Margarete Blank worked on establishing her livelihood. She had already gathered the necessary professional experience, which was a precondition for settling down as a general practitioner. In the autumn of 1928 she bought a piece of land outside Leipzig and had a small wooden house built on it. By the end of January 1929 she and her sister moved into the house in the village of Panitzsch. In November 1929 the Panitzsch local council gave their consent to the permanent residence of Margarete Blank as the first official physician in the community. Until then, it was a medical doctor from neighbouring Borsdorf who had handled the medical care of the schoolchildren in Panitzsch and who had provided first aid in the event of accidents. Still, to be able to equip her office and to be able to earn her living, Margarete had to continue working as a cover physician for others. Around this time, her sister abandoned her studies and continued working as a receptionist and housekeeper in Margarete's household and office. From the end of 1929, this household also included the orientalist Dr. Siegfried Behrsing,

the future husband of Eleonore Blank. He too was a Baltic German. Other Russian Germans too formed the leftist-intellectual circle of the sisters' friends.

Margarete Blank did not spend much time tending to her friendships and family ties. And after Eleonore and Siegfried Behrsing moved to Berlin at the end of the 1930s, she lived a secluded life. She always put her job first.

Shortly after the beginning of the National Socialist dictatorship Margarete got to experience the rigorous procedure of the new rulers against the racially "different". A new decree in April 1933 demanded that all established physicians prove their "Aryan" background. In July 1933 the Official Physicians' Association of Leipzig cancelled Margarete Blank's license because she could not present the required documents. In the autumn of the same year however, upon an appeal by Margarete, the decision was revoked. It was conceded that she could not provide an "Aryan proof" due to the Russian German origin of her family and that there was no indication of "non-Aryan" descent.

In 1938 the physician came under scrutiny by the regime once again. This time her political stance was on trial. The occasion was a written complaint by Margarete Blank to her professional representatives, the Leipzig regional office of the Official Physicians' Association of Germany. She wrote that "in cases of accidents, suicide attempts and similar ailments occurring in the village, not I as the resident physician, but another physician living elsewhere is being called." This procedure was not customary. Normally, the resident physician would be consulted in such cases. At first the Official Physicians' Association intervened with the mayor of Panitzsch in favour of Margarete Blank's just cause. However when the mayor expressed doubts to the Association about her loyalty toward the regime, the Association distanced itself from the physician too. She should have "perhaps done better not to rant so much about the few missed cases." The mayor had reported that Margarete Blank neither used the Hitler salute nor attended party meetings. On top of that her sister had had contacts with the Communist Party in the past. This incident obviously did not have direct political consequences for the physician who belonged neither to the National Socialist German Association of Physicians nor to the NSDAP. It shows however that actively demonstrated loyalty toward the National Socialist regime was a precondition to be able to protect one's justified professional interests.



Margarete Blank (first from left), Eleonore Blank and a friend of the sisters, after 1930

SAXON STATE ARCHIVES, STATE ARCHIVE LEIPZIG

NATIONAL SOCIALIST GERMAN WORKERS' PARTY (NSDAP)

● The National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei – NSDAP) was an extreme right-wing political party that existed in the years 1920-1945 in Germany. The fundamental principles of its agenda included extreme nationalism, radical anti-Semitism, social demagoguery, criticism of representative democracy and rejection of Marxism. The NSDAP made use of post-WWI radicalism and the difficult economic situation. The party structure had a military character and was based on the leader principle. The NSDAP was established in February 1920 by re-naming the German Workers' Party (Deutsche Arbeiterpartei – DAP) which had been established a year earlier in Munich. In July 1920, Adolf Hitler rose to the top of the NSDAP where he gradually established a leadership position. The party proceeded to create paramilitary units (Sturmabteilung – the SA, and Schutzstaffeln der NSDAP – the SS), which it used for intimidating opponents. In 1923 it carried out an unsuccessful coup attempt in Munich and it was disbanded for two years. At the end of the 1920s, its importance started to rise sharply after the outbreak of the economic crisis. In the elections of 1930 it became the second strongest party. In 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor and the NSDAP soon became the only legal party. It had a totalitarian character. Its membership reached 3.9 million people by the end of 1933. After WWII, the NSDAP was banned and classified as a criminal organisation. Its representatives were tried at the Nuremberg trials.

INFO BOX

ARREST

Less than a year before the end of World War II, on 14 July 1944, however, the Gestapo², Leipzig state police department, arrested Margarete Blank as a “Bolshevik spy and agent.” The arrest which had already been ordered was postponed by a day because the physician was needed for the treatment of patients with diphtheria.

Why was she arrested? A Dr. Werner Benne who was mobilized to the Eastern front in Russia as a superior medical officer denounced her to the Gestapo during his home leave. The reason for the denunciation by her colleague was pro-Russian and regime-critical statements made by Margarete to his wife Erika who informed her husband about them in a letter to the front. These statements occurred while Margarete paid a home visit to tend to the children of the couple who were ill with whooping cough. According to the later testimony of Margarete Blank in court, both women came to talk about her Russian origin. Erika Benne asked her for more information about the country and the people. It would be impossible to reconstruct exactly what Margarete Blank said. Obviously she openly expressed her conviction about the Russians as a peace-loving, nationally aware people. According to Margarete Blank, the Germans themselves were to be blamed for the bombings of the German cities. Furthermore, she predicted the approaching end of the Nazi regime.

Werner Benne who used his home leave to denounce Margarete Blank thus accepted and approved that she would be persecuted for political reasons. This kind of denunciation of disliked behaviour from within the personal circles of the denounced people was very often the first trigger for investigations.

² Secret State Police, Geheime Staatspolizei shortened to Gestapo

During the National Socialist dictatorship it was very common and it fostered a general climate of mistrust. Many informers used denunciation to settle their private accounts. They acted on envy or revenge. Societal pressure also played a role. Werner Benne, who only slightly knew Margarete Blank, or perhaps not at all, very probably acted on political conviction. Loyalty toward the Nazi regime motivated him to carry out his sinister act. Maybe he also belonged to those “believing” followers of Hitler who did not want to accept the approaching doom of the regime and who denounced people circulating assessments of the situation that were critical of the regime because they could not stand this “truth”.

After Werner Benne denounced Margarete Blank to the Gestapo, the NSDAP local group leader in Panitzsch picked up further investigations. The leader of the local Nazi Women's Association Frieda Schnabel proceeded to inform him that three of Margarete Blank's patients had told her about the physician's England-friendly and Russia-friendly statements in the years 1940 and 1942. These three women later appeared in front of the People's Court (Volksgerichtshof) together with Erika Benne as witnesses of the prosecution against Margarete Blank.

After her arrest, Margarete Blank was transferred from the Leipzig police prison to the interrogation prison on Leipzig's Moltke Street. During this time, the first thing she tried to do was to secure the medical care for her patients and to organise her personal affairs. She petitioned the Official Physicians' Association from the Leipzig prison to keep her medical practice running. Her patients could “in no case be permanently taken care of sufficiently by the overburdened neighbouring colleagues.” Although she did not feel “responsible for the consequences of her non-availability” she kindly asked them to “reduce the damage to the population as much as possible.” However, contrary to Margarete Blank's plea the Association did not advocate her release from prison but instead allotted her medical office permanently to another physician.

The request to support her release from prison shows that she clearly did not expect a death sentence. In October 1944 she was transferred from Leipzig to the Dresden interrogation prison on Georg Bähr Street, as her trial was to take place in the court building adjacent to the prison.

PROSECUTION

The instruments for Margarete Blank's criminal prosecution were contained in the extraordinary wartime penal law decree of 17 August 1938. It



Margarete Blank's office, around 1930
STATE ARCHIVE LEIPZIG



Margarete Blank, ca. 1940
FRIENDS OF THE DR. MARGARETE BLANK HOUSE PANITZSCH
MEMORIAL

pertained to the statutory offence of “corruption of the military force”. According to article 5 of this decree which was used to sentence Margarete Blank, persons were to be condemned to death who “publicly attempted to corrupt or to paralyse the will of the German or allied people to self-assertion with power”. The very vague formulations are characteristic. They made it possible to classify a large number of statements as “corrupting”. In addition, a very unusually wide interpretation of the term “public” was used. In the indictment it was insinuated that “considering her level of education” she should have expected her statements would be forwarded to third persons, meaning that she had expressed herself “publicly”.

On 15 December 1944, the 6th Senate of the People’s Court, sitting in the courtroom of the Dresden District Court on Munich Square, sentenced Margarete Blank to death and permanent loss of civil rights for “heavily corrupting statements” toward a “German woman whose husband is on the battlefield”. The judges acknowledged that Margarete Blank was a “recognised competent physician” who “selflessly helped the population during terror attacks”. However her “spiteful treason of the German people during its toughest fight

for destiny” annulled “all merits of the accused” and demanded her “exclusion from the German people’s community”.

Even before issuing the extraordinary wartime penal law decree the National Socialist government punished statements against the regime as criminal offences. Very shortly after Hitler’s seizure of power the regime penalised “untrue” claims which allegedly harmed the Reich or the government by means of a so-called treachery decree of March 1933. Anybody could be brought to court just for telling a joke or for spreading a rumour.

With the beginning of the war, voiced critical opinions became more frequently prosecuted based on the new decree as “corruption of the military force”. In contrast to “treachery”, they were often punished with execution. The sentencing of Margarete Blank to the highest penalty for critical statements made in a one-on-one conversation was no exception. Margarete’s words fell after the defeat at Stalingrad in 1943, at a time when a victorious outcome of the war for the German Reich had become increasingly improbable. At this time, the fight of the regime was focused particularly against the so-called “defeatists”. The term

was coined during World War I in France. It describes the systematic fostering of dejection, resignation and doubts about the military victory in one’s own ranks. The extinguishing of critical voices was supposed to ward off doubts and insecurities existing even among the convinced National Socialists about the “final victory”. At the same time, against a background of military defeats, intensifying bombings and the loss of close relatives, more and more people were making critical or pessimistic statements.

The majority of political denunciations were punished by party authorities and the Gestapo without involving the judiciary. Only some of the complaints were forwarded to the prosecutor. Why did Margarete Blank end up in court? Two reasons were probably decisive. It was already known about Margarete Blank that she was hostile to the National Socialist regime. This was recorded at the end of the 1930s. Additionally, her position as a physician came into account. As such she was one of the educated people in the village whose opinion was listened to.

FACING DEATH

After receiving the death sentence Margarete Blank was placed in one of the death cells in the women’s wing of the Dresden prison. She shared it with the Czech resistance fighter Anna Pollertová (1899-1944). According to recollections of Eleonore Behrsing, during visits she kept lamenting the fate of her cell mate who “was condemned completely innocently because she only acted out of love for her homeland and who definitely must be helped”.

Facing death, it was especially painful for Margarete Blank that she was not able to practice her profession, which had fulfilled her. At the beginning of January 1945 she told her former receptionist: “When I come into the doctor’s room here [in the prison], it gets me for a moment. You will understand.”

After the sentence, the Reich Ministry of Justice initiated the obligatory clemency procedure. The pleas for mercy from Eleonore Behrsing, also on behalf of the patients, and from a neighbour however were unsuccessful. On 17 January 1945 the Reich Minister of Justice ordered the “execution of the sentence by the authority of the Führer”.


On the day of her execution, 8 February 1945, Margarete Blank thanked her brother in a farewell letter for his support during her studies. In this way he had “helped her to have a fulfilling, truly happy life”. She asked for forgiveness for having sometimes placed her duty toward her sick patients above tending to family relations.

About three weeks after her execution Margarete Blank was buried in St John’s Cemetery in Dresden. After the end of the war her remains were transferred to Leipzig. She found her last repose in a grove of honour in Leipzig’s Southern Cemetery together with “outstanding fighters against Fascism” and “merited anti-Fascists and functionaries of the construction of socialism in the GDR.”

AFTERMATH

In the course of the prosecution of National Socialist crimes after 1945 in the Soviet occupation zone Margarete Blank’s trial was re-examined by the state prosecutor. Since the informer Werner Benne had been declared missing, his wife Erika Benne and the former leader of the Nazi Women’s Association Frieda Schnabel had to face charges in the Leipzig District Court in 1946. The trial ended in a sentence of both the accused as “accomplices in the commission of a crime against humanity” with high prison sentences – ten years for Erika Benne and twelve years for Frieda Schnabel. Control Council Directive No. 38 of October 1945 was the legal foundation for the punishment. It was issued by the Allied Control Council which was instated by the occupation forces after the end of the war as the highest governing authority in Germany. Among other things, the Directive prescribed the punishment of National Socialists and war criminals.

Erika Benne was accused of passing Margarete Blank’s statements on to her husband. The court saw Frieda Schnabel’s guilt in the fact that she provided incriminating witness accounts without having been obliged to do so. In order to present the act as particularly reprehensible, both women were additionally unfavourably charged based on “the personality of the physician who fell victim to the judicial murder... whose high ethical and professional values stand above any doubt”.



Sentence of the People’s Court against Margarete Blank of 15 December 1944, condemning her to death
FEDERAL ARCHIVE, R 3001/159050

lacking sufficient individual guilt, weighed in her offices in the organisations of the NSDAP to be able to punish her this severely. Moreover, we cannot ignore the politically driven propagandistic exploitation of the proceedings as an element in the punishment. In contemporary trial reports both the accused are referred to as “murderers of humanity”. From the point of view of the state prosecutor, the proceedings against the politically and morally undoubtedly superior physician were excellently suited to demonstrate the readiness of the new political forces to relentlessly settle accounts with Hitler’s Fascism.

The SED regime later stylised Margarete Blank as an “anti-Fascist resistance fighter”, in order to be able to integrate her into their concept of history. The regime used the term “anti-Fascist resistance fighter” to describe Communists who, allegedly organised and led by German exile Communists from the Soviet Union, fought the National Socialist dictatorship. The GDR positioned itself in the tradition of Communist resistance fighters from which it derived its claim to power. Other groups and forms of resistance and defiance were hardly acknowledged.

During the National Socialist dictatorship people were politically persecuted, sentenced and executed not only because they resisted the regime in an active and organised manner. Many people were persecuted merely for their beliefs. Margarete Blank was one of them, a professionally accomplished physician who dedicated herself to her patients far beyond the usual standards, putting herself last. Toward the regime however, she was willing to exhibit only a minimum of formal loyalty. She was only a member of the National Socialist People’s Welfare, but not of the NSDAP or the National Socialist German Association of Physicians. Others, such as the informer Werner Benne who supported and contributed to the regime, were ready to denounce different-minded people out of loyalty toward the regime. That his behaviour was at all possible was enabled by a societal climate in which alleged or real opponents were segregated and hitherto valid ethical norms and conventions were hollowed out or overlaid with ideology.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE SAXON MEMORIAL FOUNDATION FOR THE REMEMBRANCE OF VICTIMS OF POLITICAL TYRANNY

HEINZ BRANDT was born on 16 August 1909 in what was then the Prussian city of Posen (today's Poznań, Poland) into a German Jewish family. His mother was a schoolteacher and his father was a writer and art critic. In 1926, Heinz moved to Berlin. In 1928

he became a member of the Communist Youth Organization and of the Berlin Red student group, and in 1931 a member of the Communist Party of Germany. He was imprisoned under the National Socialist regime from 1934 to 1945. Following political disagreements and threats of expulsion from the Communist

Party, he escaped to West Germany in 1958. In 1961 he was kidnapped by the East German State Security and taken to East Berlin. He was sentenced to 13 years in prison and spent two years in solitary confinement until 1964 when he was released to the West after an international campaign. He continued to work for his ideal of a better society. Heinz Brandt died on 8 January 1986 in Frankfurt am Main.



PRIVATE COLLECTION
OF STEFAN BRANDT

Heinz Brandt

In Resistance against National Socialism and Stalinism

written by Bert Pampel and Siegfried Reiprich

Heinz Brandt was one of many people who were persecuted for their political conviction and resistance both by the National Socialists and by the Communists. He survived the National Socialist prisons and camps Luckau, Brandenburg, Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz and Buchenwald. Later on, in the GDR, he was imprisoned in the jails of the Ministry for State Security in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen and Bautzen. Despite all adversities and life's lessons he remained an advocate of a human, democratic socialist society until his death.

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

Heinz Brandt was born on 16 August 1909 in what was then the Prussian city of Posen (today's Poznań, Poland). His mother Gertrude Brandt (1879-1943) worked as a nursery school teacher and schoolteacher. She taught him, as he wrote later, "to swim against the current. Not to parrot the people who believed everything that came 'from above'. Only stupidities, lies and crime could be expected from above." His father Georg Brandt (1874-1940) was a writer and art critic.

His grandfather, Rabbi Ludwig Krause, a well-known Talmud scholar and great-uncle of the later psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, influenced him strongly too. He imparted upon him a humane, radical and revolutionary idea of Judaism: "Not to be a slave and not to enslave anyone..." In his autobiography *A dream which cannot be kidnapped* (Ein Traum, der nicht entführbar ist), he opens a chapter with a quotation from Manès Sperber's *Being Jewish* (Etre juif), which was to become his life's guideline: "I have never encountered an idea which would overwhelm me more and determine my path so much as the idea that this world cannot remain the way it is, that it can become completely different and that it will do so." Together with his younger sister Lili and brothers Richard and Wolfgang he grew up in a cosmopolitan, educated middle-class liberal home where Catholics, Protestants and Jews met in mutual tolerance and harmony. In Posen, Brandt witnessed the outbreak of World War I, which turned into a dramatic experience and led to his realisation that the world needed to be changed. His childhood experiences developed his hunger for information, a particular pride in

knowledge which those in power tried to suppress, a disdain for people who merely repeat others' words and an indignation over withholding and falsifying of information.

In 1926, Heinz Brandt moved to Berlin. He attended the Friedrichswerder higher secondary school from which he graduated in 1928. After finishing school he began his studies of political economy in Berlin but was expelled from the Berlin University because of a term of imprisonment. As an editor of the newspapers "School Struggle" and "Red Students" he had for political reasons been handed down a monetary fine, which he did not pay but served a prison term instead.

The experience of the world economic crisis strengthened Heinz Brandt's conviction that the social situation had to be changed radically. In 1928, he became a member of the Communist Youth Organization and of the Berlin Red student group, and in 1931 a member of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). Everything seemed clear to him then; his Communist world view was firmly grounded. He was convinced of the idea of a classless society, of the liberation of humanity from exploitation, oppression and war: "There was no doubt, everything fit in place, we were on the right path."

Soon enough however he started having doubts, because the activities of the KPD stopped being consistent with his ideals and goals. He criticized the partial "hand-in-hand policy" of the Stalinist KPD with the National Socialists against the Weimar Republic, demonstrated for instance during the 1931 referendum against the social democratic Prussian government and during the Berlin strike of the transportation workers in November 1932. He became a member of the illegal faction called the "Reconcilers" (Versöhnler), leaning toward Bukharin and Trotsky, which sought the replacement of the KPD leader Ernst Thälmann and collaboration with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), in order to prevent the seizure of power by the National Socialists.

Because of his affiliation with this group, which was labelled hostile to the party, he was relieved of his party offices – he had been responsible for political propaganda for some time. His comrade and friend among the "Reconcilers" Heinrich Süßkind (party name Kurt Heinrich) later fell victim to the Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union, and his fellow campaigner Anka Vikova was murdered by the National Socialists.

PERSECUTION DURING NATIONAL SOCIALISM

Heinz Brandt characterised the transfer of power to Hitler on 30 January 1933 as a severe defeat of the workers' movement and the Stalinist course in Germany. In contrast to many others, he had no illusions about the approaching rule of terror. On 13 March 1933 the SA, a paramilitary unit of the National Socialists, abducted him to a torture cellar in Berlin-Weißensee. He was badly maltreated there but released afterwards. It did not deter him from becoming involved against the National Socialists as a co-publisher of the illegal Communist factory newspaper "The Siemens Loudspeaker" (Siemens-Lautsprecher) in the period thereafter.

On 4 December 1934 he was arrested and on 15 March 1935 he was sentenced on charges of "preparation of high treason" to six years in jail which he served in the Luckau and Brandenburg prisons. In the Brandenburg prison, the Communist inmates got into heated discussions about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Heinz Brandt criticised the treaty as a betrayal of socialism, comparable to the 1914 approval of war loans by the German Social Democrats which had secured the necessary financing for the outbreak of World War I. The continuing disputes in prison between the Stalinist Party Communists and the "Reconcilers" led to a revocation of their mutual solidarity as prisoners of the National Socialists. In Brandenburg Heinz Brandt also learned that his parents and his younger brother Wolfgang had been deported to the vicinity of the town of Lublin as Jews from Posen. The living conditions there were catastrophic for Jews. His father fell ill and died of pneumonia in January 1940 and his brother Wolfgang died in 1942. His mother was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943.

Unlike the others accused together with him in the 1935 trial, Heinz Brandt was not released after serving his prison term on 8 December 1940. Instead, he was sent into "preventive custody" in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in February 1941. Both in prison and in the concentration camp he met comrades who had been delivered to the National Socialists by Stalin from the Soviet Union where they had sought refuge. This was a shattering experience for him: "Everything began spinning in front of my eyes. The world I had been dreaming of was nowhere to be found. I had believed until then that the New had risen already, flinging the door to Humanism open, but all I saw now was darkness". Only much later did Heinz Brandt learn that his brother Richard had fallen victim to the Stalinist terror in the Soviet Union too and that his sister Lili was living in banishment in Siberia. Brandt's recognition of a partial analogy between Fascism and Stalinism, despite their different social and ideological roots, was thus founded on his own bitter life's experience.

In October 1942 all Jewish prisoners were taken from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp to the Auschwitz concentration camp and Heinz Brandt ended up in the Budy subcamp. He survived only thanks to

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

● This term is used to describe the federal German state which existed between the collapse of the empire and the declaration of the republic in November 1918 and the rise of the Nazis to power in 1933. The name is derived from the German town of Weimar where the newly elected Parliament convened in February 1919. The Weimar Republic was considered the successor to the defeated monarchy by the victorious allies (the conditions of the reparations were laid down by the Treaty of Versailles). The circumstances of this new republic's creation, combined with the subsequent world economic crisis and the turning away of the majority of society of the period from the principles of representative democracy, negatively influenced its stability and led to its fall. The political system of the Weimar Republic was significantly weakened by the activity of two extremist mass political parties, the Communists and the Nazis, whose representatives utilised the nostalgia for a firm ruling hand in different ways. On the other hand, the Weimar Republic is associated with a flourishing of culture, especially in Berlin.

fortunate circumstances and help from friends. In the camp, he continued his resistance against the National Socialists in an illegal group. Together with others, he wrote secret messages which were smuggled out with the help of Polish civilian workers and which were meant to inform the public in the West about the genocide. After the dissolution of the Auschwitz concentration camp in January 1945 he was sent on a death march on foot and by cattle wagon to the Buchenwald concentration camp where he arrived half-dead on 23 January 1945. He survived only thanks to the support of other political prisoners who supplied him with additional food. On 11 April 1945, as the American troops came within earshot and the camp SS started to flee, he took part in the uprising of the International Camp Committee upon which the prisoners took over control of the camp.

In his autobiography, Heinz Brandt sums up his fate of persecution under National Socialism between 4 December 1934 and 11 April 1945 – 3,778 nights – from a deeply personal and human point of view, which makes it unmistakably clear what this time meant for him: “Each of these nights was a night without love. At the age of 25, I was sent to prison – at the age of 35, I am leaving the concentration camp. I have spent ten years without a girl, lived ten years without the tender arms of a woman, and they were the years in which the youth, the man yearns the most fiercely for love, for sexual deliverance.”

PERSECUTION IN THE GDR

Immediately after liberation from the concentration camp Heinz Brandt made his way to Berlin together with three friends. On the way, they were briefly held in custody in a cellar by Soviet troops

– together with captured SS men. Later he learned that they were lucky because other Jewish prisoners released from the Buchenwald concentration camp were deported as “American spies” to the Soviet special camp Sachsenhausen, which was now being run by the Soviet secret police. Already at an early stage – in the summer of 1946 – a former comrade from the days of the Weimar Republic tried to convince him to move to West Germany, because sooner or later the Stalinist German Communists in East Germany would declare him an enemy. But Heinz stayed in Berlin, he worked for the city administration and with other former concentration camp prisoners he founded the Berlin Main Commission “Victims of Fascism”. On 1 December 1945 he became head of the press department of the KPD in Berlin

and later secretary of the Berlin district leadership of the SED responsible for political propaganda. After a marriage which survived just a year and ended in divorce in 1947, he married again in June 1949. The marriage with Annelie(se) lasted until his death. They had two children.

In April 1946, the KPD and SPD were united to form the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). For Brandt at that time it was not a forced union, as it was seen by its critics then and as it is overwhelmingly seen by historians today, but a logical step and a lesson drawn from the split of the workers’ movement in the Weimar Republic. Very soon however the Communists, who had emigrated to the Soviet Union during the National Socialist dictatorship and had survived Stalin’s purges by demonstrating unconditional loyalty to him, eliminated democracy within the party and turned the SED into a Stalinist cadre party. Whoever stood in their way was imprisoned. The Stalinist show trials against “Titoists”, “Agents” and “Cosmopolitans” at the beginning of the 1950s, especially the Slánský trial in Czechoslovakia, worried Heinz Brandt, because many of the people now facing trials had, like himself, belonged to the “Reconcilers” in the 1930s. It became even more dangerous for him when Jewish members of the SED were to be screened as potential class enemies at the beginning of 1953. However, Stalin’s death – Brandt believed it was a “palace revolution”³ – reduced the danger at first. Brandt hoped for a replacement of SED chief Walter Ulbricht, Stalin’s regent in the GDR, and for a new democratic beginning. All hopes disintegrated however; Ulbricht did not fall with Stalin, he remained in office.

On 16 June 1953, construction workers marched in East Berlin to the seat of the government, to present their demand for a repeal of increased work norms. Many thousands of people joined them spontaneously and expanded the demands in economics to political ones: “We want to be free people and not slaves”, “Free elections”, and “Pointy-beard must go”. That was bearded SED chief Walter Ulbricht’s popular nickname. The hurried retraction of the increased work norms based on a request by Heinz Brandt to the SED politburo could not stop the burgeoning uprising any more. “The workers rose against the state of workers and peasants”. Overnight, the Berlin rebellion developed into a nationwide people’s uprising. However, Soviet tanks stifled it on 17 June 1953. Brandt considered the people’s uprising of 17 June 1953 in the GDR, which had surprised him too, a tragedy. He did sympathise with the insurgents, however, in his opinion they had irrevocably annulled the hope for societal change with their action because, as a result, the hardliners in the Communist Party asserted themselves, whereas the “reformists” in Moscow and East Berlin lost their office, freedom or even their lives. In August 1953, as a result of the purges, Brandt was released from his leadership position in the party and deployed to a department for the West Berlin work of the SED. In 1954 they transferred him to the “Economy” publishing house (Die Wirtschaft) where he became editor-in-chief.

³ A coup d’état by those already in positions of power



Heinz Brandt (left) at an IG-Metall press conference after his release in 1964

PRIVATE COLLECTION OF STEFAN BRANDT

ESCAPE AND KIDNAPPING BY THE STASI

The revelations about Stalin's crimes at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in Moscow in February 1956, the defeat of the Hungarian and Polish reformers and the renewed reinforcement of Ulbricht's position of power resulted in a definitive turning away from Soviet Communism. Heinz Brandt demanded consequences also within the SED, among other things the replacement of Walter Ulbricht and of the Minister of Justice Hilde Benjamin. In 1956 he established contact with the "Eastern office" of the SPD in West Germany and reported to them about the opposition trends in the GDR. In September 1958 he escaped to West Berlin with his wife and children, after receiving a warning about a threat of expulsion from the party followed by an arrest. In 1959, Brandt moved to Frankfurt am Main and became an editor of the trade union magazine Metall (Metal). Later on, he joined the SPD.

The State Security, the secret police of the Communist SED, immediately started preparing measures against the "traitor". On 16 June 1961 he was forcibly kidnapped from West Berlin into the Eastern part of the city, upon direct orders by the Minister of State Security Erich Mielke, after a new acquaintance secretly administered him a narcotic substance. The man who played a significant role in this was Hans Beyerlein, a friend and neighbour of the Brandt family in Frankfurt am Main. The clerk in the department for the workers' council members and persons of trust of the IG Metall company worked for the State Security of the GDR.

In the remand prison of the Ministry of State Security in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Brandt was interrogated for months. They offered to free him if he would admit his political mistakes and declare that he

had returned to the GDR of his own free will. But Heinz Brandt refused. On 10 May 1962 he was sentenced to 13 years in jail in a secret trial at the Supreme Court of the GDR, together with two other former SED-comrades who had been persecuted already during the time of National Socialism, on the grounds of alleged "grave espionage in coincidence with state-threatening propaganda and agitation in a severe instance". Between 27 July 1962 and 20 May 1964 Brandt was imprisoned in solitary confinement in the special prison of the State Security in Bautzen. His imprisonment in a solitary cell created a heavy mental strain. He repeatedly had severe nightmares in the cell in Bautzen about his concentration camp imprisonment.

His release on 23 May 1964 was achieved largely thanks to an international solidarity campaign in which trade unions, the British philosopher Bertrand Russell, Amnesty International, as well as the International Camp Committees of Auschwitz and Buchenwald participated.



Heinz Brandt, 1973
PRIVATE COLLECTION OF STEFAN BRANDT

BACK IN THE WEST

After his release Brandt continued working until his retirement as an editor of the IG-Metall newspaper. In 1967 his autobiographical life account "A dream which cannot be kidnapped. My journey between East and West" (Ein Traum, der nicht entführbar ist. Mein Weg zwischen Ost und West) was published by Paul List Verlag, Munich. Brandt continued campaigning for a democratic socialism, criticising the left for its positive attitude toward the Soviet Union. He also criticized the left anti-Fascism: "only those who defend fundamental rights and human dignity, democracy and freedom everywhere can be trustworthy anti-National Socialists". Brandt sought a "third way" between Western capitalism and the Communist system, classifying the latter also clearly as a system of exploitation. As early as in 1961 he was involved in activities against nuclear energy and militarization, later he participated in sit-in blockades in Gorleben and he collaborated in the foundation of the party "The Greens" (Die Grünen). However, because it took too much of an uncritical stance toward Communism, both the past and the present, and because it developed into a "leftist cadre party" in his opinion, he soon quit the party. The onetime Communist idealist and later party Communist who adored a Utopian vision grew into a dedicated but realistic socialist: *"We advocate something which may not succeed, which can go wrong. We act although we know that success is questionable and because we know that – if at all – success can be achieved only by this acting of ours. We do not have more than one chance and it is up to us whether we use it."* Once again we seem to hear Heinz Brandt when he quotes Manès Sperber with the words: *"I am an old revolutionary who has remained true to the hopes which he has had to bury."*

Heinz Brandt died on 8 January 1986 in Frankfurt am Main. By Brandt's request, there is no gravesite for him, just as there is none for his parents murdered by the National Socialists or for his brother murdered by Stalin's henchmen.

Since 17 June 1999, a grammar school in Berlin-Weißensee has borne his name. On the former border strip of the Berlin Wall, on the outskirts of the Pankow-Park industrial zone, a street was named after him.

All verbatim quotes have been taken from Brandt's life account Ein Traum, der nicht entführbar ist. Mein Weg zwischen Ost und West, extended edition, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 1985.

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CONTRIBUTED BY THE SAXON MEMORIAL FOUNDATION FOR THE REMEMBRANCE OF VICTIMS OF POLITICAL TYRANNY

AUSTRIA



The Austro-Hungarian Empire was defeated in WWI and on its former territory the states of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Austria were founded. Austrian union with Germany was forbidden according to one of the Versailles' treaties of 1919.

NAZI REGIME

Austria was not able to stabilize its society and in 1933 Chancellor Dollfuß established an authoritarian regime. In 1934, he was killed in an attempted Nazi coup. In 1936, Chancellor Schuschnigg accepted an agreement with Germany, adopting members of the Nazi party into his government. Germany annexed Austria on 13 March 1938 (so-called Anschluss). Jews were dispossessed and persecuted. Austrians fought in WWII in the German Armed Forces as German citizens.

After the defeat of the Third Reich, Austria was divided into occupation zones of the Soviet Union, USA, UK and France. Social democrat Karl Renner established a provisional government in April 1945 with the support of the Soviets. Austria remained under the formal occupation of the Allies until 1955. Austria declared itself permanently neutral, did not join NATO and became a member of the European Union only after the end of the Cold War in 1995.

ALMA ROSÉ was born on 3 November 1906 in Vienna into a Jewish family with a musical tradition. Alma's father Arnold was a concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and the head of the band Rose Quartet.

Her uncle was the renowned composer Gustav Mahler. She herself was a gifted violinist, performing with her own ladies' orchestra in Vienna in the 1930s. Her first husband was Czech violinist Váša Příhoda. In 1942, she married a Dutchman. In 1943, while attempting to flee through France to Switzerland, to evade Nazi persecution of Jews, Alma Rosé was arrested and sent to

the concentration camp at Auschwitz. She directed the women's orchestra of prisoners at Auschwitz, earning great respect from the camp authorities and at the same time enabling better living conditions for her musicians and their survival. Alma Rosé died in the concentration camp on 4 April 1944, probably from food poisoning.



AUSTRIAN
NATIONAL
LIBRARY

Alma Rosé

Häftlingsfrau Nr. 50831

written by Łukasz Martyniak

Alma Rosé was born on 3 November 1906 in Vienna into a Jewish family, which retained lively musical traditions. Alma's father Arnold was a concertmaster of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and the head of the band Rose Quartet. Alma owed him her musical education and further career, which she launched under his wings. Her first husband was Váša Příhoda, who was a renowned European violinist. In the 1930s, Alma was the leader of the band Die Wiener Walzermädeln, which enjoyed considerable renown in Europe.

After the Nazis took over the Austrian state, Alma emigrated to England. When Hitler's army raided Western Europe in 1940 she was in Holland. In March 1942, she married the Dutchman Constant van Leeuwen Boomkamp. She hoped that the marriage would protect her from repressions enacted by the occupying forces against Jewish citizens. But she was proved wrong and had to resort to fleeing through France to Switzerland. The planned escape failed – she was arrested in Dijon and transported on 12 January 1943 to the Drancy internment camp near Paris.

AUSCHWITZ

On 18 July 1943, Alma shared the fate of thousands of Jews and was sent east to Auschwitz, which took two days to reach (she was listed in the transport register as Obna Vanleeuwen). She was one of a thousand Jews brought to the camp in the same transport. Upon arrival the newcomers were separated into groups. The SS soldiers listed 369 men and 191 women as able to work. The remaining 440 people were sent to the gas chambers and murdered there. Alma was lucky enough to belong to the “able to work” group. She was registered as Häftlingsfrau¹ number 50831 and imprisoned in Block 10 on the premises of the main camp Auschwitz I. The block earned a bad reputation in the camp, since it was there that the Nazi doctor Prof. Carl Clauberg pursued his atrocious sterilisation experiments on women.

While in the block, Alma was recognised by one of her fellow female prisoners. Thanks to the efforts of the head of the block, it was possible to secretly acquire a violin for her, so she could perform for the

¹ Female prisoner

prisoners in the evenings. The situation could not be kept secret for long and the news about her musical talent reached the SS soldiers. It provided a reason to move her to the camp in Brzezinka (Auschwitz II Birkenau), where, in August, she was assigned the role of bandmaster and conductor of the women’s prisoner orchestra.

WORK WITH THE WOMEN’S ORCHESTRA

The women’s orchestra had been founded in the Auschwitz concentration camp already before Alma arrived in Birkenau, i.e. in April 1943. It was initiated by the camp authorities in cooperation with the women’s camp supervisor Marie Mandel, who was notorious for her cruelty. The first prisoner to head the band was Polish woman Zofia Czajkowska, a music teacher by profession. The orchestra, which she ran in the initial period, comprised 30 prisoners, mainly amateurs, 14 of whom were Jewish. The vast majority of them could not claim any musical experience. The main task of the newly-founded orchestra was to play for prisoner labour kommandos when they left for work in the morning and came back in the evening. The orchestra also played for ill prisoners at the camp hospital.

Soon after assuming leadership of the orchestra, Alma embarked on its reorganisation. Her efforts led to an increase in the number of prisoner orchestra members. Thus, at the turn of 1943 and 1944, the orchestra numbered over 40 prisoners (30 instrumentalists, 6 singers, 4-6 musical note copyists and 4 assistants). By mid-1944, its ranks had already swelled to almost 50 prisoners, mainly Jewish. A position in the camp orchestra was regarded by prisoners as providing far greater potential for survival than work in other kommandos. The orchestra members were not forced to do hard physical labour, and recruitment was carried out during roll calls as well as by spotting candidates among newcomers to the camp. The final verdict on admittance to the orchestra was pronounced by the conductor herself, having “examined” a candidate.

In the initial period of the orchestra’s operation, its musical equipment was acquired from the prisoner members of the men’s orchestra at the main camp Auschwitz I. No sooner had Alma taken up her position as the director of the women’s orchestra than the majority of instruments started being replaced with much better ones. Musical scores and other auxiliary materials were no longer supplied exclusively by the men’s orchestra of the main camp, but directly by the camp authorities. Alma submitted requests for necessary equipment. As the new conductor she enjoyed much broader authorisations: the camp authorities assigned a separate block for her orchestra, which was complete with a rehearsal hall besides the residential section. Apart from the necessary equipment like stands or rostra, the hall also contained appropriate storage cabinets for instruments and musical scores. A stove was installed to protect instruments from humidity and a wooden floor was laid in the hall. Under Alma Rosé, the women’s orchestra became a valued kommando for the camp authorities, and the conductor herself commanded their great esteem. Zofia

Cykowiak, a former prisoner of Auschwitz and member of the orchestra, recalls:

“... *The Commandants would often come to our block during rehearsals to listen to Alma play. Her repertoire comprised many solo pieces with the orchestra. Much to their satisfaction, they invited their guests and clearly ‘prided themselves’ on the women’s orchestra, and especially a violinist of such class... It was striking how she was able to build a distance between herself and the authorities. Bearing in mind the general conditions in the camp, she was treated with exceptional courtesy, even respect. She was addressed as Mrs (Frau) Alma – which was utterly unprecedented...*”

As soon as she took over as director of the camp orchestra, Alma imposed relatively harsh discipline upon herself and other members of the group.

The prisoners – female members of the orchestra – constantly mastered their skills under her baton. Alma’s standards were high. She did not tolerate any mistakes during rehearsals, which extended to long hours. The orchestra members often had to perform the erroneous pieces until they finally reached the level that satisfied Alma. She would also sometimes lose her temper and punish her fellow prisoners. Even though corporal punishment was commonplace at the camp, Alma would never resort to it, and the usual penalty for some misdemeanour was scouring the floor of the rehearsal hall.

Prisoner Manca Švalbová, Alma’s friend at the camp, recalls:

“*She trained the girls and the group’s level rose every single day. Alma worked from dawn to dusk... and practised, practised. It’s still not played at the proper pace... this sound has to be clean, that voice has too little temperament to it. Once more, once more.*”

PURSUIT OF PERFECTION

The continuous arduous rehearsals often led to prisoners’ severe fatigue. There were cases when tired female prisoners collapsed and passed out. Alma’s intervention led to the camp authorities allowing

901	Uella	Jacques	19.1.34	Kind	1981
902	Telia	Selma	1.7.35	Wine	1979
903	Wepora	Albert	14.1.38	Felsenarbeiter	1980
904	Wepora	Karol	198	Schneider	1982
905	Werra	Gottli	8.1.35	Wine	1978
906	Werra	Michael	15.3.39	Arbeiter	1977
907	Wegara	Chaskiel	19.3.31	Seilungsmeister	1988
908	Weger	Gedste	9.3.15	Medizin	1985
909	Wewillsh	Lydia	8.10.17	Wine	1988
910	Wuchman	Abraham	4.11.25	Lederarbeiter	1988
911	Wury	Yvonne	25.2.33	Sekretärin	1989
912	Wyer	Joseph	3.4.36	Schneider	1983
913	Wolkevat	Michael	20.10.32	Marktschendl.	1988
914	Wann	Joseph	1908	Orthopäde	1982
915	Van Gelderen	Isarus	11.11.18	Sticht	1981
916	Vanleeuwen	Obba	8.11.36	Seilungsmeister	1980
917	Van Lee	Adrienne	30.6.76	Wine	1983
918	Vidal	Cedéste	6.3.37	Kind	1988
919	Vidal	Wolma	2.6.37	Wine	1986
920	Vidal	Freder	3.1.37	Postbeamter	1984
921	Vidal	Sacha	10.1.23	Kind	1987
922	Vlayne	Bernard	11.8.30	Jeweller	1986
923	Vlayne	Jacques	2.2.18	Steinbauer	1986
924	Villard	Liba	25.10.35	Wine	1989

Obba Vanleeuwen (Alma Rosé) listed as number 916 in the transport register

ARCHIVE OF THE AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU STATE MUSEUM IN OŚWIĘCIM

the prisoners an hour's break during the day. They spent the time resting on beds, and sporadically even taking walks outside the camp grounds.

In the initial period, Alma's pursuit of perfection did not meet with understanding on the part of some inmates. It can be stated with certainty that they were unable to accept her working methods. We might assume that they harboured resentment of her punishing them for mistakes while playing.

In the eyes of the prisoners of Birkenau – witnesses of tragic events, for whom every day at the camp was about the constant struggle for survival, with ubiquitous death around them – being passionate about their assigned task was simply absurd. Hence, they might not have seen the point of striving for perfection when playing musical pieces.

Alma herself worked extremely hard conducting daytime rehearsals with the band. Her enormous involvement in music, which she committed herself to in Birkenau, inevitably lends itself to explanation as an escape from the cruel realm of the camp. In the evening, after the roll call, she practised alone. She often spent the nights drawing up musical scores to prepare them for copyists in the morning. In appreciation of her engagement, the camp authorities made an exception and allowed her to light a lamp in her chamber while she worked at night. Under Alma's leadership, the orchestra's skills constantly improved. She was very precise and professional when working on various musical pieces, among others, marches, music for entertainment but also classical pieces. The repertoire comprised fragments of pieces by Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Lehar, Ravel, Rossini, Sarasate, Verdi, Schubert, the Strausses and others. Helena

Tichauer evaluated Alma's approach as follows:

“She achieved something that she otherwise wouldn't have been able to achieve in normal life. She made something out of nothing. It was Alma's genius that catapulted a group of amateurs to an acceptable level of musical performance. ...I remember the times when Alma would shout in French at a particularly clumsy girl, who kept making mistakes. But Alma never threw her out of the block, which would have amounted to a death sentence, because that girl... wouldn't have survived anywhere else in Birkenau.”

With time, Alma started to command great respect from the orchestra members as well as



A page from a musical score used at Auschwitz concentration camp by the camp orchestra
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fascination with her musical talent. It became clear to them that her enormous effort had led to a rise in the level of the band's performance, which also increased their chances of surviving the camp. Zofia Cykowiak recalls:

“... We were fascinated by Alma's playing. We felt that the music that she came to practise there was her entire world, where she sheltered herself with zeal, even though it was a tragedy for her to practise that music in that inhumane realm. I know it directly from her. She confided to me one evening when we were watching a transport of Jewish women selected from the camp for execution in the gas chambers, therefore fully aware of their fate. They were transported on uncovered trucks, naked. They were screaming. During those actions, strict 'Lagersperre' was in force, in other words a ban on leaving the blocks. But I would sometimes steal away from the block and observe and experience those actions in its shadow. I met Alma there once. She told me then that she would hate to die in such an inhumane way...”

Helen Scheps stated:

“Alma saved our lives because she knew how to turn us into an orchestra. If Alma hadn't been there, we wouldn't be here.”

It can be assumed that the level represented by the orchestra, which commanded the satisfaction of the camp authorities, as well as Alma's skills and unique personality, ushered in a considerable improvement in the living conditions of the orchestra members. They were not obliged to do strenuous labour in other working kommandos or to participate in general camp roll calls. They were counted every morning inside the block where they lived. They received the same food as prisoners from other kommandos but were treated to extra portions of bread or margarine, marmalade or liverwurst somewhat more often. Like other prisoners, they received the striped camp attire, however, when they played, especially during Sunday and holiday concerts, they wore white blouses, navy skirts and blue headscarves. What is more, the camp authorities allowed them to possess their own underwear and to use the bathhouse, washing room and toilet available only for prisoners of German nationality. The members profited from the situation that emerged in the women's orchestra under Alma's lead in yet another way – they were not exposed to constant beating, harassment and abuse by wardens or SS soldiers. They stood a significantly higher chance of survival than women working in other kommandos.

In the memories of the former prisoners, Alma appears as a person with a certain reserve towards the band, who was usually introverted but polite to her fellow prisoners. She led a rather lonesome life, preserving a sense of humanity towards others regardless of the circumstances. Zofia Cykowiak recalls:

“... Alma was a righteous woman with a great culture of the mind and the heart. I had a chance to experience it myself because I maintained closer contact with her. It started with my intervention with her regarding a certain Polish woman, my friend at the camp. A severe conflict broke out between us, which happened as a result of a misunderstanding. Before we managed to sort it out, Alma could have expelled that

woman from the band, with potentially fatal consequences (penitentiary kommando). But she didn't. And more than once she later tolerated the outbursts of irritation of that prisoner, understanding the tragedy she was living through, having received a message that her three brothers were killed at Auschwitz..."

ALMA'S PASSING

Alma Rosé died at the camp at the beginning of April 1944 for reasons that do not lend themselves to exhaustive explanation. As late as on 2 April, she was still able to take part in a "reception" organised on the birthday of Alsa Schmidt – who acted at the camp as the forewoman of the clothing warehouse for prisoners. She returned from the party suffering from severe pains and dizziness, as well as chest pains. Spasms and vomiting occurred after a certain time. The next day – 3 April, Alma was taken to the hospital block. The doctors suspected meningitis. A sample of her cerebrospinal fluid was taken for examination. Yet, the analysis at the SS Hygiene Institute did not confirm the diagnosis. Further attempts at treatment pursued at the camp hospital did not lead to an improvement in her condition. She passed away at night on 4 April 1944.



Alma's sudden death prompted a flurry of suspicions. It was hypothesised that she had been deliberately poisoned, or that she died because of intoxication with methyl alcohol or food past the expiry date during the mentioned "reception".

After Alma's death, members of the orchestra were allowed to visit the camp hospital to bid her a final farewell. That event was unprecedented in the history of the camp. Similarly, the manner of dealing with the body was utterly exceptional. As Zofia Cykowska recalls:

"She was lying in front of the hospital block on joined stools covered with a white sheet... A lot of tiny livid marks could be seen on her face and hands. Someone had laid a bouquet of herbs on the cloth. Such a 'funeral' was unprecedented at the concentration camp."

Such handling of Alma's body bears testimony to the way the camp authorities approached her. Bożena Kaczyńska delivers a very moving statement about Alma's death:

"I could not believe that such a musical talent had gone forever, who became liberated amid pain and misery. Orpheus, who tamed wild beasts with music, had gone to the Land of Shadows. A musical genius of the epoch had ceased to exist."

After Alma's death, her function was assumed by another prisoner, also a member of the women's orchestra, Sonia Winogradowa, who played the piano. In the months to follow, the orchestra continued to perform marches for working kommandos and music for SS soldiers. In the course of time, the camp authorities reduced the rehearsal hours of the orchestra and the prisoners were forced to perform extra tasks related mainly to sewing and repairing camp underwear. The history of the women's orchestra came to an end when its Jewish members were transported to the Bergen-Belsen camp, where they lived to see their liberation.

● FURTHER READING: R. Newman, K. Kirtley, Alma Rosé. Vienna To Auschwitz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). J. Lachendro, 'Alma Rosé – ucieczka w muzykę', in Człowiek wobec totalitaryzmu. Od prostych recept do 'Ostatecznego Rozwiązania', ed. by A.Bartuś (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, 2012). Z. Cykowiak, 'Kobięca orkiestra w oświęcimskim obozie', Pro Memoria, No. 5, 1996. Memories and accounts by Zofia Cykowiak, Helena Niwińska, Bożena Kaczyńska and Hanna Palarczyk stored in the archive of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (PMA-B) in Oświęcim.

CONTRIBUTED BY AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU MEMORIAL AND STATE MUSEUM

NETHERLANDS



NAZI OCCUPATION

On 10 May 1940, Germany attacked the Netherlands despite its neutrality and occupied it by the end of the month. The occupation regime was set up in the form of a civilian government, Reichskommissariat Niederlande, headed by an Austrian, Arthur Seyss-Inquart. During the occupation about 75% of the Jewish population of the country was exterminated.

There was significant Dutch collaboration with the Nazis, as well as a resistance movement. The only legal political party during the occupation was the National Socialist Movement (NSB), which played an important role in local administration. Volunteer Dutch Waffen-SS units fought at the Eastern Front. Part of the country was liberated in the second half of 1944. The population in the western part of the Netherlands suffered a famine in the winter of 1944-1945 caused by a blockade. On 5 May 1945, the entire country was liberated by Allied Forces.

MARINUS SOETERS was born on 6 March 1923 in Oosterhout, in the Netherlands. At the beginning of the war he was 18 years old and working at a factory. Soon after the German invasion in May 1940 Marinus turned down a request to join and become a leader of the youth association of the Nazi party. In 1942 he was sent to do forced labour at the Krupp weapons factory in Essen, Germany. Conditions were treacherous. He managed to escape and returned to the Netherlands, where he had to hide at a farm near his home. In 1943 he was sent back to Essen and escaped a second time. He was betrayed and sent to the concentration camp at Amersfoort, before being sent back to Germany to work in ammunition plants. He was liberated by Polish troops in March 1945. He went on to have a family and was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder in the 1980s. He died on 30 April 2004.



SOETERS FAMILY COLLECTION

Marinus Soeters

Wartime Memories

written by Marinus Soeters

My name is Marinus and I was born on 6 March 1923 in Oosterhout, in the province of North Brabant in the Netherlands. I have lived there my whole life. When war broke out, I was 18 years old and of course I was afraid of what would happen. Nobody could have foreseen that so much suffering would be caused by the Germans, who brutally took everything they wanted, including people. Especially later on in the war they dropped their masks and revealed what they were really made of.

Soon after the invasion in May 1940, Dutch forced labourers were deployed for various types of heavy and dangerous work in the German war industry. At that time, I worked in the Vandra cardboard factory in Oosterhout. The factory had come to a standstill after the war broke out and for a period of six weeks everyone had to stay at home and wait for a call to resume work again. When the call came, everyone was happy that they could return to work and it was as if nothing had happened. On 8 October 1940, I was sworn in as an assistant youth leader of the Catholic Central Youth Guard of the diocese of Breda. In that capacity, I was soon approached by a Mr van Geel, a contractor from Oosterhout and a member of the NSB (National Socialist Union). He asked me if I wanted to be a youth leader in the National Socialist youth association. I did not respond to these requests and tried to ignore the increasing pressure that was exerted on me. In my naivety I thought that things would blow over. Unfortunately that was not the case. I am convinced that my refusal to join a Nazi organization was the reason why I was later selected to report for work in Germany.

In August 1942, three people from our factory were selected to report to the employment office in Oosterhout. Johan van Gool, myself and another boy, whose name I have forgotten, were physically inspected in the NSB building on Janstraat in Oosterhout. I arrived there as sick as a dog and deathly pale. I was under the impression that I could not be accepted. I had done everything possible to look as sick as I could. I felt really sick. I went to the inspection assuming I would be rejected. Once there, it soon became clear to me that I was not the only one who had had that idea. Everyone who was called for looked like he could fall down dead on the spot. Of course we were all approved and received a free passport to travel to Germany.

PUT TO WORK IN ESSEN

On 10 September 1942, I was forcibly put on a train to be sent to work at the Krupp works in Essen. I was housed in the Fabrikslager – the factory warehouse. Incidentally, there were very few Dutch people, but many Poles and Russians. The conditions under which we had to work were very harsh and dangerous. The accommodation (barracks) and the food were bad. The working day began at 7.00 a.m. and ended at 7.00 p.m.

I was employed in a factory where pressurized hot steam was forced through pipes. People were injured and killed quite regularly because the pipes used to explode every now and then, causing hot steam to escape. This was how the only Dutchman I had regular contact with lost his life. He was a man from Groningen whose name I have forgotten. He was hit by a blast of hot steam when a pipe burst. The pressure of the steam jolted him several metres into the air. In addition, the heat in the factory was

almost unbearable. And on top of all that, there was heavy bombing by the Allied Forces in the Ruhr area, so as to disrupt the German war effort as much as possible. I still remember the bombing of 9 and 10 December 1942 very well. Afterwards I heard that over 1,200 aircraft were involved in that bombardment.

TWO THWARTED ESCAPES

Shortly after the bombing, I made an attempt to escape and managed to board a train leaving Essen full of soldiers' girls (girls to entertain the soldiers). To my surprise, I reached Den Bosch, but I ran out of luck there. At the train station in Den Bosch I was plucked off the train by members of the SS and handed over to the stationmaster, who was obligated to transfer me to the authorities. This man probably did not have the heart to turn me in, but at the same time he did not want to miss the chance to earn a bit of extra cash. After making a contribution of 32 marks for the Winter Relief I was allowed to travel further.

COMPANIES' USE OF SLAVE LABOUR DURING WWII

During the war a lot of German, but also Dutch, Danish, Italian and other private companies and enterprises, and also simple farmers, used the labour of prisoners of war, political prisoners, and forced or semi-voluntary foreign workers from occupied countries in various forms. From Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and occupied Russian lands several millions of so-called eastern labourers (Ostarbeiter) were rounded up and deported to Germany during the war. From occupied European countries the "foreign workers" were mostly recruited or forced to go to Germany through being given limited choices, dictated by occupation authorities. During the all-out war beginning in February 1943 more and more German men were mobilised to the army and their workplaces were filled with forced labourers of different status. They had to live in special camps, their food was insufficient, and working days sometimes 12 and more hours long. They were treated as lower-class human beings with very few rights and often their relations with the German population were prohibited. In addition to that, a lot of them fell victim to the Allied strategic bombing raids against important German industrial centres and objects of infrastructure. After WWII Federal Germany and German enterprises paid compensations to the different victim groups, forced labourers among them.

INFO BOX

After arriving in Oosterhout I had to find a safe place to hide. I succeeded in doing so on the seventh day after my escape. I was given a hiding place in a farmhouse in the village of Rijen, close to Oosterhout. In this way I was able to maintain regular contact with my family. They were regularly searched by the Germans, asking if they knew where I was. Eventually they became worn down. My parents were told that if I did not sign up, my father would be transported to Germany, to take my place in the Krupp factory. So I was forced to report again and in May 1943 I was sent to work in Essen for the second time.

After another heavy bombardment with many casualties I fled again. On my way home I was arrested by two German soldiers in a truck. They intended to hand me over to the German authorities in Kleve. Knowing what was waiting for me after a second escape I jumped from the truck when we were driving in the dark and I crossed the border on foot. Back in Oosterhout I returned to my old hiding place. Somebody probably betrayed me there because during a raid I was arrested and taken to the SD prison in Breda. I was detained there for six weeks in a cell with 200 prisoners awaiting further transport. Eventually, I was taken, together with several other young men, including one called Rinus Smit, to the Polizeiliches Durchgangslager Amersfoort (Police Transit Camp Amersfoort).

THE POLICE TRANSIT CAMP IN AMERSFOORT

I do not know exactly when I arrived there, but when I piece everything together, I think it must have been sometime in late August. That time comprised only a small part of my wanderings, but it was undoubtedly one of the hardest and most shocking experiences I have been through. I'm not sure of the duration of my stay in the Amersfoort camp. I think it must have been about three months. On arrival we had to register for our camp number and clothing. I was quite nervous and therefore restless, which the guard did not like. Because of this he gave me a thrashing with a long thin stick. That was my first experience at the camp in Amersfoort.

I do not know which barracks I was in and I also forget my camp number. But, there are still some people that I can remember. I remember the two men who were in my barracks clearest of all: Ben van den Berg from Utrecht and a barber who cut the prisoners' hair, a certain Mr Peters from Nijmegen. Later on, Peters was picked up by the Germans and shot. I can't remember the date, but I remember that it was the day after he had cut my hair. De Jong is another name that comes to my mind. He was a prisoner who was also a camp monitor.

The work was hard, the days were long and the food poor and scarce. The morning call was at 6.00 a.m. Then we had to stand in rows, a process that was always accompanied by a certain number of blows and strikes. If, during the roll-call procedure, when the prisoners' numbers were called, one number was absent or one did not reply in time, the whole group got a beating. At 7.00 a.m. we marched to Amersfoort

Heath to fell trees. I was working in an outside command called the Holzschillkommando. The commander of that group was Willie Lages.

In the evening the whole column went back to the camp and rushed to have a wash. If you were lucky you could also have something to drink. Then there was another call, at which we had to stand side by side with four other people and had to empty our pockets. The contents of our pockets had to be placed on the ground, after which we had to take four steps back. Then some of the guards walked by to see if there was anything special among the contents. If there was food or anything else of interest found in your pockets, the most horrible punishment followed. You got caned on your upper and lower back and usually also had to spend two days in the “Rose Garden”. Over there you had to do “gramophone” rotations. With one finger in your ear and another finger in the sand, you had to walk in circles constantly, with a guard checking that you did it right. This ritual was repeated over and over again, for two whole days. It was extremely difficult to sustain.

During the nights you had to catch lice and control your feet. Your feet had to be sticking out of bed when someone walked past. If this was not done to the liking of the guard, another beating with a stick followed. During this process you had to count aloud the number of strokes you received. I remember a fellow prisoner who had soiled himself due to sudden diarrhoea. He was forced to crawl naked in circles on the moor.

Once, during a call with Kotälla (the sadistic camp commander) I forgot to salute and call my camp number; I was attacked by his dog. As a punishment I had to stay in the Rose Garden for two days. There I was, circling around my finger, which had to be inserted in the sand. Two days outside without a roof over your head, in the wind, with no food and sometimes a sip of water.

IG FARBEN IN NEUSS AND DORMAGEN

After this period of about three months I was transported to IG Farben in Neuss¹, together with about 30 other prisoners. It was very cold at that time. We arrived in a camp where many different nationalities were put to work. The majority of the prisoners however were Russians and other people from the East. Fleeing was impossible, because some twenty people fired from a train at everything that moved along the railway track. I did not have any luggage, because I had worn all the clothes that I had, to prevent them from being stolen.

At IG Farben I had to polish the rough mortar shells by sandblasting them, 100 pieces per hour. This was dangerous and hard work, carried out with no protective clothing or mask. Because my health

progressively deteriorated and I frequently fainted during my work, the camp doctor ensured that I got another job and I was tasked with loading the mortar shells. The conditions were very bad there too. The bombings were very fierce. The whole plant was demolished by the bombing that took place in the winter of 1943-1944, during which phosphorus bombs and chain bombs were used.

An image that I will never forget is the image of a little girl who was playing on top of a shelter during the alarm prior to the bombing. Panic erupted after the air raid started, with many people trying to reach the shelters on the outskirts of the camp. In this state of chaos, it was not possible to reach the girl and carry her to the shelter. The shelter received a direct hit and many people in it were killed. I was in the crater with three men, trying to avoid the flying debris. After the bombing it became clear that nobody had taken the girl into the shelter and that she had been hit by flying shrapnel and debris and was dead. The remaining prisoners were herded together and put on a transport.

I went to Dormagen, along with a Frisian called van Veer. There I was again at an IG Farben plant. This complex lay along a major railroad and was thus the target of daily intensive bombing. Sleep was virtually impossible because of the noise of the trains and falling bombs. My job was to clean transport trains with an ammonia solution, without wearing any protective clothing of course.

My health continued to deteriorate and at one point I had to give up working. I spent two weeks ill in bed, which was a disaster, because a person who did not work could not eat. The camaraderie of fellow prisoners helped me through. Sometimes I got a piece of bread and a little water, until I was strong enough to work again.

LIBERATION

On 6 March 1945, we were liberated by Polish troops and we all had to leave Dormagen. I wandered around the area for a fortnight with some other men, trying to find some shelter from the events unfolding



Marinus Soeters (back row, far left) in a group of young Catholic Guards, just before the war
SOETERS FAMILY COLLECTION

¹ The factory meant is probably Rheinmetall. Rheinmetall is sometimes described as an affiliate of IG Farben during WW II. Rheinmetall in Neuss produced ammunition for artillery. [editor's note]

around us. A friendly bartender sometimes gave us food. When we deemed it safe, we started the journey home. Along the way, we were picked up by a British truck and we again had to go to a camp, where we had to hand over all our supplies. After about 2 weeks we were allowed to leave and make our way home by train and bus.

Back at home nobody showed much interest in my wartime experiences. You were expected not to complain, and to just get on with quickly finding work, to help feed the family. This is the story of my complications during the war, which I could finally tell only after much insistence from my son.

ABOUT DAD

written by Sion Soeters

After coming home from Germany my dad found work in a tannery and met my mum. They were married in 1950 and had two children. A daughter was born in 1952 and a son (me) was born in 1958. Dad eventually became manager of the tannery and he worked there until he fell ill in 1980.



Marinus Soeters during a tour on the site of former camp Amersfoort, 19 January 2004

SOETERS FAMILY COLLECTION

As long as I can remember dad was an insomniac. As a child when I was in bed I sometimes woke up because I heard him scream and moan. We never talked about this, because we were convinced that we would contribute to his misery if we did. The war was always present in our house.

Dad became seriously ill in the second half of the 1970s and went in and out of hospital. In 1979 he was diagnosed as schizophrenic and received treatment for this condition. He had to stop working in 1980. Further examination proved he wasn't a schizophrenic but he was diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

He applied for the status of "civilian war victim" and was awarded a small pension due to this recognition in the early 1990s. He was also recognized as a "civilian war victim" by the German government and was awarded Wiedergutmachung².

In 2001, I accompanied him to the site of the former concentration camp at Amersfoort. This was his first return to

² Reparations that the German government agreed to pay to survivors of the Holocaust, and to people who were victims of Nazi forced labour [editor's note]

this place where he had suffered so much. After that visit he told me his whole story as far as he could remember. It was the first time I had ever heard him speak more than one sentence about the war.

After that visit he seemed much better and healthier. He had found other people who had met the same fate as he did.

Dad died suddenly due to a heart attack on 30 April 2004. He is greatly missed and koninginndag (Queen's Day) isn't a festive day for us. He was cremated on 4 May (on our National Day of Commemoration of the Dead of WWII).

As someone said at his funeral, Marinus was liberated a day earlier than the rest of the Netherlands (5 May).

CONTRIBUTED BY THE FOUNDATION HISTORY OF TOTALITARIAN REGIMES AND THEIR VICTIMS

CZECH REPUBLIC



The Republic of Czechoslovakia was founded after WWI from the Czech and Slovak regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Bohemia, Moravia, Austrian Silesia, Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia). In the second half of the 1930s Czechoslovakia was the only democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

NAZI OCCUPATION

After the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938, Germany annexed the northern, western and southern regions of Bohemia and Moravia (Sudetenland). On 14 March 1939, Slovakia declared independence and on 15 March 1939 Germany invaded the rest of the country, establishing the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. In the Protectorate Jews, Roma and political opponents were persecuted and killed. Many members of the pre-war military fought in Allied armies, on the Western and the Eastern fronts. The Western Allies liberated the western part of the country in the first days of May 1945. The Soviet army arrived in Prague on 9 May 1945.

COMMUNIST REGIME IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In March 1945, the Czechoslovak exile government and the Communist party signed a government programme in Moscow which, among other things, banned the largest pre-war conservative political party. Czechoslovakian statehood was restored, but Ruthenia was annexed by the Soviet Union in June 1945. In 1946, the Communists won in restricted elections. On 25 February 1948, a Communist coup d'état followed. A period of softening of Communist policies, known as the Prague Spring, was crushed by a military invasion of the Warsaw Pact countries on 21 August 1968. The regime fell in the Velvet Revolution started by a student demonstration on 17 November 1989; free elections were held in June 1990.

On 1 January 1993 Czechoslovakia separated peacefully into the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia.

MILADA HORÁKOVÁ was born on 25 December 1901 in Prague. Around the outbreak of World War I, Milada's sister and brother both died during one week. The birth of another child, Milada's little sister Věra, brought some brightness back into the family's lives. Milada studied law in Prague.

She became a prominent personality of public life, advocate of women's rights and a democratic politician. After the German occupation she joined the underground resistance movement. She was arrested by the Gestapo in 1940 and sentenced to death for "agitation" against the regime, but was pardoned. After 1945 she was elected a Member of Parliament but resigned following the Communist coup in February 1948.

In 1949 she was arrested and charged for allegedly attempting to overthrow the Communist regime. A show trial was staged against her and twelve other personalities of political life ("Milada Horáková and Co."). Milada Horáková was one of four who were sentenced to death and hanged in Prague on 27 June 1950. This day is commemorated as the memorial day of the victims of Communism in the Czech Republic.



ARCHIVE OF THE MILADA HORÁKOVÁ CLUB

Milada Horáková

A Woman Who Remained True to Her Conviction

written by Zora Dvořáková

The time was drawing close. In less than sixty hours, her life would end. They placed her in the old hospital in Prague's Pankrác Prison. They led her to the death cell, a small empty chamber with a table and chair. They kept guarding the room constantly, but they allowed her to write letters to the people nearest and dearest to her in the last moments of her life.

As she wrote the opening line *"My ever so dear, ever so good papa,"* she felt she had her eighty-one year old father in front of her. In character, intellectual propensity and emotional involvement they were very similar to one another. It was he, a lifelong supporter of the humanistic and democratic principles of the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic T. G. Masaryk, who guided his daughter's thinking, her view of life and her political orientation in this spirit.

She always remained loyal to these principles; therefore it was natural for her to join the resistance after the German occupation of the rest of former Czechoslovakia, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. However, she was arrested, she found herself in a German court in Dresden and, for the first time, she faced the threat of the death penalty. That time she escaped it.

Several years later however it was a Communist court which managed to send her to the execution site. Even then, she remained faithful to the principles which she believed in, not hesitating to say, in her last speech before the seat of judgement: "... I dwell upon my belief, because I have relied upon the stance and information from people whom I regarded as authorities, in the first place both Presidents of the Czechoslovak Republic T. G. Masaryk and Dr. Edvard Beneš, who influenced me throughout my entire life." For the Communist court her statement was infuriating and it was kept secret throughout the entire Communist totalitarian era.

HER FATHER'S DAUGHTER

Her mutual understanding with her father was very deep. Although both were rational and intellectually independent, she was additionally endowed with great sensitivity, a quality which she probably inherited from her mother, a fragile and emotional woman who died prematurely. She displayed

a sort of protective care for her mother. In her formative years, she and her parents went through a family tragedy, losing Milada’s siblings, a sister and a little brother, during one week, which led to her mother having a nervous breakdown. It was in the difficult times around the outbreak of World War I. Only the birth of another child, her sister Věra, brought more brightness into their lives.

It must have been this experience which showed Milada how life can be cruel and reckless and which incited in her a determination to help those who were suffering and in need. She saw her life’s task in it and she thought she could best fulfil it by studying medicine. However it was her father again who directed her otherwise. He convinced her that as a lawyer specialised in the social and humanitarian field she would be able to efficiently support and be of use to those who needed such help and care.

Her father always stood by her; he supported her urge to study and to be publicly active. He himself was used to acting as a free citizen. Many a time Milada’s mother was worried when her father left home to take part in different demonstrations. In this too he was a role model for Milada and it is no wonder that he stood by her in the spring of 1918 too, when she was expelled from the grammar school she had been attending. Some police informer had denounced her for handing out flowers to protesters at a rally against the continuation of the war. Luckily, they let her finish her studies at another secondary school on Slezská Street, which she joined in the autumn of 1918. However, when she was charged by the Communist court, the Communist propaganda started spreading an absurd fabrication that she had been a dubious character already in her youth because she had been expelled from her grammar school for participating in the tearing down of the Marian Column¹ on the Old Town Square in Prague on 3 November 1918. Although the reality was quite different and the times did not match up, it was said that it was Milada who threw the rope around the Virgin Mary’s neck.

As she wrote her last letter to her father, she felt deep sorrow over the burden she was laying on his shoulders, but even now she pleaded for him to stay, to prevail and to tell her daughter Jana all that she had not managed to about their family and kin. With the girl growing up knowing where she came from and where she belonged, a continuity would be secured, and uninterrupted existence, and both of them would live on in her young life.

Between finishing the letter to her father and the first lines which she started writing to her husband, some thirty-six hours had elapsed. In that time, she wrote several other letters: to her sister Věra and her husband, to her husband’s mother, her female friends from Sadská², to the housekeeper who kept her household in good order and finally to her young daughter Jana – a letter full of love and worried advice, because she was aware that she was about to leave an adolescent girl behind.

¹ A religious monument dedicated to the Virgin Mary [translator’s note]

² A place East of Prague [translator’s note]

FAREWELL TO MY HUSBAND

When she started writing a letter to her husband Bohuslav, their twenty-three years spent together came to her mind. She met him as a student of the Faculty of Law. At that time, he was already an engineer of agriculture who later earned a doctorate in technical sciences. He worked for the Czechoslovak Radio station where he had his own agricultural programme. They shared a deep emotional relationship in which Bohuslav showed great understanding for the work and public activities of his wife. He always put her interests first. In her letter, Milada acknowledges that he never held her back in her flight. She fulfilled her desire to help and be beneficial to the needy as a lawyer employed at the Central Social Office of the Capital City of Prague. She worked selflessly for the Czechoslovak Red Cross. But that was not enough to satisfy her idea of being useful to the common good. As a modern young woman living in the time after World War I, when women’s rights were gaining ground significantly, she got involved in the women’s movement. She admired the activities of the founder of the Women’s National Council, Senator Františka Plamínková, and she became her collaborator. She served as a CEO of the Women’s National Council, also heading its legal department.

Of the spectrum of political parties, she felt closest to the National Socialist Party of Edvard Beneš. She became a member of it as early as during the time of the First Republic³.

Milada was very lucky in life in that the two men who accompanied her on her life’s journey – her father and her husband – had full understanding for her and all her activities. Her husband was by her side through good times and bad. After the German occupation they both joined the resistance movement, the Political Headquarters and the Petitions Committee Věrní zůstaneme (“Loyal we shall stand”). They were then arrested together during their summer holidays on 2 August 1940 in the village of Horní Bradlo near Nasavrky⁴ where the Gestapo came to fetch them. They only saw each other briefly in the Small Fortress



**Milada Horáková at a public meeting in
Český Krumlov, 1947**

SECURITY SERVICES ARCHIVE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

³ The name of the Czechoslovak National socialist party is misleading. It was a centre-left democratic party and had nothing in common with Adolf Hitler’s National Socialist Democratic Workers’ Party NSDAP in Germany. The term First Republic in Czechoslovakia is used to describe the period between 1918, the foundation of Czechoslovakia after WWI, and the Munich agreement of 1938, based on which Hitler annexed Czechoslovakia’s border regions with German-speaking population. [translator’s note]

⁴ A place in Eastern Bohemia [translator’s note]

in Terezín⁵ and then in 1944 after the sentence of the Volksgericht (People`s Court) in Dresden, when she received an eight-year prison term and he a five-year one.

Milada was afraid that the war would destroy their family; however, luckily that did not happen. At that time, she promised her loved ones that she would only devote herself to them, that she would make up for what she had been neglecting until then. But the post-war happenings drew her into the turmoil of events again. She felt obliged to continue the work of Františka Plamínková who was executed during the war. When the Council of Czechoslovak Women was formed, she became its chairwoman.

She saw how it was necessary to help those returning from concentration camps and prisons. Therefore

she did not hesitate to become one of the five deputy chairs of the Union of Liberated Political Prisoners. And finally, in a discussion with President Beneš, she gave in to his persuading that it was necessary to have people like her in public life and that she should accept a deputy`s mandate in the Provisional National Assembly. Her mandate was confirmed in the elections of 1946 when she ran for the district of České Budějovice⁶, and she became a deputy for the National Socialist Party in the Constituent National Assembly.

Her husband experienced this hectic lifestyle by her side. He always supported her and she felt sincere gratitude and love for him.

He had introduced another dimension into her life. He came from a strongly evangelical family and Milada, a Catholic until then, converted to Protestantism. She reflected a lot on issues of faith and religion and during the adversities which she experienced in the Nazi and Communist prisons, she found strength in her faith in God.

When she was asked to express her final wish before her execution, she wanted to know what had happened to her husband. She was very eager to know his fate. After her arrest she suspected that he had escaped; however she did not know for sure whether they had arrested him too, or even if he was still alive. They told her that they knew nothing about him, although they were aware that he had fled into exile. By



Milada Horáková's sister Věra, husband Bohuslav and daughter Jana

SECURITY SERVICES ARCHIVE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

⁵ Terezín, a former garrison town North of Prague, was the site of a prison (the Small Fortress), a Jewish ghetto and concentration camp during WWII [translator's note]

⁶ A large city in South Bohemia [translator's note]

fostering this uncertainty, they multiplied her suffering. So she wrote to him in her letter: “... *I don't even know whether you are among the living and if it will ever be possible for you to read these words. That is the greatest pain in my heart, that I don't know anything about you and that I have no certainty, not even a sad one, and there are perhaps only a few hours more of my life left.*”

As she was writing the letters to her loved ones in the death cell, the horrible experiences which she was exposed to in the Nazi interrogation chambers and prisons came back to her mind. She thought such things would never recur in her life – and yet within just a few years they did, when the Communist State Security arrested her and subjected her to endless interrogations.

DEVOTION TO PUBLIC WORK

However this suffering which she endured did not leave its mark on her letters. She speaks about love, about beautiful human relationships, about life which was to have a perspective and which was full of understanding and kindness. What she wants is that (figuratively speaking) her accounts be settled; she wants to leave the world without any debts. She begs her loved ones to forgive her for the pain she is causing them. She is more concerned about them, their suffering, she implores them to protect Jana and to continue living. In her letters, there is nothing of the complicated and tense moments of her public activities, or of the atrocious absurdities which she had to go through after her arrest by the State Security.

Those several post-war years during which she was a deputy and stood at the helm of the Council of Czechoslovak Women were an extremely dramatic period during which the signals of approaching Communist totalitarianism were appearing with growing intensity. As a politician of democratic convictions she kept getting into clashes and conflicts with Communist deputies and authors. They watched her activities on the Council of Czechoslovak Women with great animosity because she managed to lead the women's movement in a non-partisan spirit, while the Communists strived to gain control over it and to merge it into the so-called National Front. And because the Council of Czechoslovak Women was linked to similar foreign organisations, they observed these international contacts of hers with great suspicion. Over time, they tried to win her over. She had authority, she had a clean slate from the past, she had a charismatic influence on people. She was gifted with an excellent rhetoric talent. Such a person was supposed to be on their side. Instead, she infuriated them with her unflinching criticism in Parliament and on various public occasions.

In Parliament, she worked on the Committee for Constitutional Law and on the Foreign Affairs Committee, which again broadened her manifold contacts. Thanks to that she was always perfectly well informed. It was not possible to make her believe any stories or lies. Abroad, she took part in different conferences and international meetings. That increased the suspicions against her. Long before February 1948 she was followed by the State Security.

Soon after the war she lost her initial illusions about the Soviet Union. A recollection of her statement is available: “...*Stalin is interested in a similar curtailment of Czechoslovak statehood and a similar enslavement of the Czechoslovak people as Hitler. This needs to be countered from the very beginning. By systematic strengthening and broadening of friendly contacts with the West we must in time create a counterweight there to Stalin’s intentions toward Czechoslovakia.*” In public speeches she kept returning to the idea that even if we politically lean on the Soviet Union, we must execute our own politics. The cooperation with the Soviet Union must be balanced with friendly contacts toward the West.

Although her relationships with people used to be very kind and her face was usually adorned with a smile, she was neither naive nor gullible. She was capable of attacking her own party lines when she found out, shortly before February 1948, that some important functionaries of the National Socialist Party had started to collaborate with the Communists in return for promised favours.

After the onset of Communist totalitarianism in February 1948, Milada Horáková wanted to lay down her deputy’s mandate immediately. She wanted to do so in a speech in Parliament in which she would give reasons why she could not support the Communist government. Her fellow party members and her husband dissuaded her from doing so. The society was besieged by fear; the Communists had immediately started to arrest their political opponents. Representatives of democratic parties were fleeing into exile.

Milada resigned her deputy’s mandate on 10 March 1948, in the wake of the tragic and unexplained death of the minister of foreign affairs Jan Masaryk. By then some organisations of which she was an honorary member had already begun to renounce her, out of fear. The doors of the Council of Czechoslovak Women closed on her, although she was still its chairwoman. Both she and her husband were left without employment until after some time she managed to find a regular administrative position.

However, she was convinced that the Communist totalitarianism could not last long. Resistance was starting to form against it, based on the experiences of the anti-Nazi resistance. It was necessary to help those affected. To help those who wanted to escape across the border. It was necessary to work out new concepts and procedures for the future change of regime. The domestic resistance had to be connected through an information channel with representatives of the foreign resistance.

A so-called “political six” recruited from members of the National Socialist Party started fulfilling these tasks, and Milada had her irreplaceable position in it. It was she who elaborated news for the foreign resistance and who received news from them. She considered going abroad but reasoned that it was more important for now to stay at home. She supported the idea that it would be good to combine the resistance forces of all democratic parties. This was discussed at a meeting in Vinoř in September 1948, but no agreement was reached. However this meeting was deemed proof of existence of such a subversive centre by the State Security and the Communist judiciary.

ARREST AND TRIAL

When they arrested Milada Horáková on 27 September 1949, they had no convincing proof against her. But these were the times of Stalin’s course of intensified class struggle. As a part of the preparations for “monster trials”, Soviet experts started to work in Czechoslovakia. The trial labelled “Leadership of the saboteur conspiracy against the republic: Milada Horáková and co.” became such an artificially orchestrated monster trial which inflicted terror on society. According to the Soviet example, the questions and answers in the interrogation protocols were coined by the interrogators. The facts were manipulated and shifted into non-existent contexts by them. The accused were forced to learn the protocols by heart and to respond in court accordingly.

During the court proceedings which began on 31 May and ended on 8 June 1950, Milada Horáková tried several times to abandon the imposed procedure and to speak of her own will. She was not defending herself; she rather explained her stance and her actions. Altogether, thirteen accused people were sentenced, four of whom received the death sentence. The remaining punishments ranged from life imprisonment to fifteen years.

When she finished writing her tenth letter in the death cell, it was the afternoon of 26 June 1950. They fulfilled her wish to send an evangelical priest whom she had asked for. And then they led her into an underground corridor where she was to meet her daughter Jana and her sister Věra with her husband. Thus they fulfilled another of her last wishes. This meeting meant a lot to her; it brought peace to her soul. They did not allow her to kiss her daughter but it was Jana who signalled to her that Aunt Věra was expecting a child. She was struck by the notion of exchanging her life for the life of a baby which was about to come into the world as a sort of passing on of the torch, and she perceived this as an immense relief and a way of coming to terms with her own fate. This is what she confessed in her last (eleventh) letter written at half past two on the morning of her execution.

On Tuesday 27 June 1950 she was escorted to the execution site, as the last of the group of four condemned to death. Her life was severed at five forty-five a.m.

Today, Milada Horáková is perceived as a symbol of anti-Communist resistance. Her fate remains a warning legacy for the present and the future. At the cost of her life, she walked the road of righteousness. She believed in the truthfulness of the biblical verse which says: “In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality.”

CONTRIBUTED BY THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF TOTALITARIAN REGIMES



JOSEF BRYKS was born on 18 March 1916 near the town of Olomouc. He graduated from a military academy. After the German occupation on 15 March 1939 he escaped through the Balkans to France and then to England, where he became a Royal

Air Force fighter pilot. On 17 June 1941 he was shot down over France. He was sent to different prisoners' camps and he undertook several extraordinary escape attempts. In 1944 he joined the preparations for the so-called Great Escape from the Stalag Luft III camp in Sagan. His life story inspired the British postwar film "The Captive Heart".

After the war he married and settled in Olomouc with his English wife. After the Communist coup in February 1948 he tried unsuccessfully to escape across the Iron Curtain. He was imprisoned, sentenced in a fabricated trial and sent to excavate uranium in the prison camp Jáchymov, where he died of a heart attack on the night of 12 August 1957. His family was not notified; his grave was only discovered in 2009.



ARCHIVE OF KAREL BRYKS

Josef Bryks

The Escapes of Josef Bryks

written by Luděk Navara

It is the last day of 1952. Prisoner No. 868 is filling in a questionnaire. It contains plenty of nonsensical questions. One of them reads: Which failures and disappointments did you have in life?

Prisoner No. 868 answers: *"For goodness and selflessness toward man and for false understanding I have been innocently imprisoned for over nine years now. I experienced disappointment by greatly overestimating the Czech soul."*

The prisoner signed his name – Josef Bryks. Member of the Order of the British Empire, holder of the Czechoslovak Medal for Gallantry in the Face of the Enemy and other distinctions. A fighter pilot about whose courage later legends would be told. And one of whose escapes inspired the creators of the British postwar film *The Captive Heart*.

In its own way, the title of the film held true even on this last day of the year 1952. Now however, Bryks was a prisoner of the Communists. And that was worse. Never again would he return to freedom, never would he see his wife and daughter, never again would he fly.

If we add up the years spent in German captivity and in Communist prisons, Bryks lived a total of thirteen years behind barbed wire. When he died he was only 41 years old.

Although Bryks became famous during the war for his escapes from German custody, he ended up in a Communist prison because his escape across the iron curtain failed. He spoiled the crucial escape of his life.

Well, he did not; it was not his fault. The escape was provoked by the Communist intelligence service and Bryks merely got caught in a trap which had been laid.

RETURN THE BOOKS

"Return the books" was the code phrase chosen by a group of former soldiers who were getting ready to escape to the West. All but one had English wives and if they wanted to live with them in a free world, they had practically no other choice than to cross the iron curtain illegally, as the Communist regime had not given them passports. They were planning to cross the border to the West near Kynšperk, but they never got near it.

Bryks was arrested on 2 May 1948. At home.

“I was apprehended in a flat in Olomouc on charges of suspicion of preparing to escape abroad. ...because I had a wife of English origin, my only interest was in getting abroad in order to build a new home by means of honest work in Australia. Neither knowingly nor unwittingly did I want to cause damage to my own country for which I had suffered so much during the war,” wrote Bryks in one of the many life accounts which unfortunate prisoners were made to produce in Communist prisons in order to “critically” ponder their own past.

Even so, in the summer of 1948, the situation did not look so bad for Bryks, despite his arrest. The Communists did not have the entire judiciary under control yet, and so the Superior Military Court acquitted him of all charges. It was only a fleeting victory though – after an appeal, the Communist-directed State Court intervened, sending Bryks to prison for ten years.

At his entrance interview in the Pilsen-Bory prison, Bryks clearly expresses what he thinks of his imprisonment. Asked what incited him to commit the alleged criminal offence, he answered: *“The desire to live among righteous people who respect bravery and the sacrifice which I brought to our country – and particularly the possibility to live happily with my family.”* His family however was now far away on the other side of the English Channel.

Trudie and Josef met in England where Josef arrived after an adventurous departure from occupied Czechoslovakia. During his escape he went through a lot: the graduate of the military academy in Hranice and later member of the 33rd RAF Squadron in the rank of flight lieutenant fled through Slovakia and Hungary in such an unfortunate way that he got arrested in Budapest and sent to prison for three months.



After the war. Josef Bryks with his wife Trudie Bryks née Teller
ARCHIVE OF KAREL BRYKS

After that he was returned to Slovakia, but he escaped from there too, and did not stop until he got to Syria where he joined the Foreign Legion. And then the road led him to the Czechoslovak Army abroad. It was on 4 August 1940 that he first sat in the cabin of a plane bearing the sovereign marks of the British Royal Air Force...

In May 1941 he and Trudie meet. But not for long – 17 June 1941 is chosen by the command of the Royal Air Force as the best date for bombing a power plant in France.

The action however ends in a bloody battle; Bryks’ plane is among the thirteen shot down. He fought bravely. *“I attacked once again but several*

minutes later black smoke appeared in the cabin which made it impossible for me to check the instruments. Shortly thereafter a fire broke out in the cabin,” Bryks later said, describing the air battle which he survived by making a bold jump from the burning plane.

Only later it transpired that his plane was shot down by Adolf Galland himself, the German flying ace. Bryks managed to save his life then; he did not know that he would spend the entire remaining four years of the war in captivity or on the run...

Seared by burning oil, without shoes but otherwise surprisingly unharmed, he landed in a field. French people in a nearby village gave him old civilian clothes but the disguise did not help. The Germans found him, beat him up (they would beat him up many more times) and sent him to a prisoners’ camp. Nevertheless, Bryks succeeded in one regard: concealing his identity. Even during his parachute descent he had checked his pockets to make sure he did not have any papers on him.

Those going through the lists of prisoners in German wartime archives might come across several different names: for example a certain Ricks who was arrested in Berlin during an attempted escape. Or a Bruno Sax figuring among the prisoners. These names belonged to one person: Josef Bryks either invented the names or swapped them with fellow prisoners or acquaintances. He knew that Czechs in custody were treated much worse than Englishmen and he also knew that he might endanger not only his own life but also his relatives in the Protectorate. So he sent his first letter from captivity to Trudie under the fake name Ricks. (“I knew immediately by the handwriting who it was from!” Trudie recalled later.)

THE GREAT ESCAPES

At first, the Germans think Bryks is a Pole. And he tries to escape at any cost. *“During the night of 19 to 20 April 1942 I escaped through a tunnel from the camp Oflag VIB at Warburg. I had organised the escape together with Otakar Černý, Zdeněk Procházka and three Poles. Černý was caught after about eight days in Hamburg. I continued on foot for another day and at night I stole a bicycle... I continued in the direction of Switzerland via Offenbach and Stuttgart where the German police shot at me while crossing a bridge. Due to lack of food and water I fell ill with dysentery. I was found gravely ill in the woods southwest of Stuttgart by a member of the Hitlerjugend,”* was how he later described his first escape to English officers.

17 September finds him escaping again. Without food, socks or shoes he crosses the mountains and tries to get onto a German airfield from where he wants to fly away in a German Messerschmitt fighter plane. But the escape fails again and Bryks is put behind barbed wire.

And so he flees for the third time. This time in a barrel for human waste. And he gets all the way to Poland, to the command of the local underground Home Army (Armia Krajowa). He is arrested by the



Poster of the British film “The Captive Heart” (1946) based on Josef Bryks’ life story in WWII
STUDIOCANAL

Gestapo in Warsaw. While “talking to him” during interrogation, the Germans stab him through the abdomen and destroy his eardrum. So that he has something to remember, they say. They succeed; he was left hard of hearing until his death. *“On 5 June 1943 I was terribly beaten and kicked in the abdomen in the cell by SS-Scharführer Grün until I lost consciousness,”* Bryks will testify later.

Bryks even took part in the preparation of the legendary “Great Escape” from Sagan which went down in history for the bloody settling of accounts with the escaped officers and later on by the eponymous film starring Steve McQueen. The escape was planned through secret tunnels and the numerical order was set by the prisoners in advance. Josef Bryks had a high number and so he did not get into the tunnel because the escape was foiled before his turn came. In fact, he was lucky: despite international agreements about the treatment of prisoners of war, most of the escapees were murdered.

However, a new danger arises: the Nazis discover his true identity and send him to Prague, to the feared Petschek Palace, the headquarters of the Gestapo. A trial for high treason is pending (he betrayed his Protectorate homeland) and death. This time he

might be “pleased” that he will be hanged “properly”: under his real name.

But he survives. The camp in which he is waiting for the end (of his life or of the war, whichever comes first) is liberated by the Americans and Bryks is a hero. At home and in England. *“He was standing there at the bus stop; the entire street knew that an RAF pilot was waiting there for me. We hadn’t seen each other for almost five years, but he recognised me immediately and took me in his arms. I was surprised. And he asked straight away if I would marry him,”* Trudie recalls. *But still she hesitated. Bryks telephoned her several times a day. Until he lost his patience. “The door flew open and he said that either I would marry him or that he was leaving immediately and would never return to England.”*

And there it was. At that moment he already had an engagement ring ready in his pocket. It looked like a happy ending, just like in a war novel. They spent their honeymoon on the Isle of Man and when they set out for Czechoslovakia, they went on a special train expedited for returning war veterans and their new English wives. There were about a thousand wives. A band was waiting at the train station in Prague, a red carpet and a festive banner: “Welcome to the British war brides.”

In fact the novel could have continued: the hero marries the woman who was waiting for him

faithfully (done), they have a child (done) and they are happy together (done). If only Bryks had not had the stupid idea of returning to Czechoslovakia, it could have been a very happy story. But it was not to be.

A BRIEF IDYLL

They settled in the town of Olomouc; his father ran the family farm in nearby Laštany. They did not care about politics, but the first conflict came soon, in 1946. Officer (and non-Communist) Bryks who knew English and German, interpreted in court during a trial involving German collaborators. *“There somebody accused him of being a traitor because he had left and gone to the West. When he retorted, a demand of the Communist editor-in-chief appeared in the newspapers that he apologise,”* Trudie Bryks recollected. That was a warning. They did not take it to heart very much.

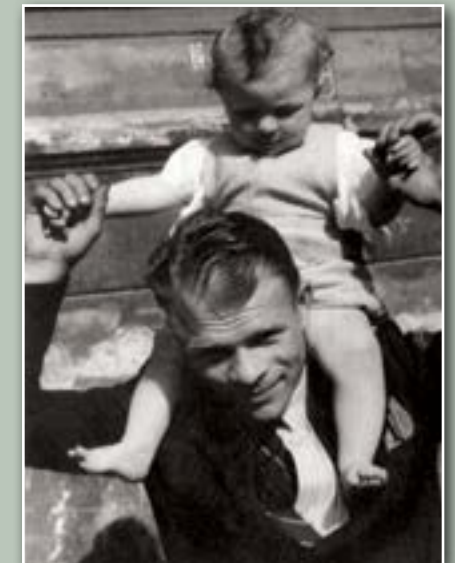
They were living through their most beautiful time then. Their daughter Sonia was born and the loving and happy father and husband was teaching Trudie horse-riding, skiing and mountain climbing in the nearby Jeseníky Mountains.

On 24 February 1948 the idyll ended. *“I remember being at the dentist; a girl who used to help us out in the household came running and she cried: You must go home at once; the major is being taken away; he does not know where.”* It then turned out that the officers had been taken out of town in the critical days of the Communist coup. Josef was made to clean sties with German prisoners whom he had fought against not so long ago. And he was made to attend re-education courses. The “certificate” after passing them looked like this:

“- Political education: unsatisfactory. Not suited for political education of his subordinates due to his negative stance toward all achievements of the people’s democratic establishment. As a consequence of his inability to value the ideology of the people’s democracy and army – unsuitable.”

“- Usefulness: useless.”

They dismissed him from the army and ordered him to report at the labour office as of 1 May 1948 where he would be given unqualified manual work. The future looked bleak for the “useless one”. *“I wanted him to escape abroad; our daughter and I would get out somehow on my British passport,”*



Brief happiness after the war. Josef Bryks with his daughter Sonia in Olomouc shortly before his arrest, 1948
ARCHIVE OF KAREL BRYKS

IRON CURTAIN

● The term “the Iron Curtain” was used for the border between the eastern and western blocs in Europe. It is associated with Winston Churchill’s speech which he delivered on 5 March 1946 at Westminster College in Fulton, USA, although it had been used already before that. On the borders of the Communist states, fences and various ensnaring devices were gradually installed which were to prevent the inhabitants of the country from illegally leaving it. Often most of the villages in the border zone were gradually evacuated. In 1961, the famous wall was built in the divided city of Berlin. Its fall became symbolic of the fall of the Soviet empire. On a lesser scale, the Iron Curtain was however also repeatedly lowered within the Soviet bloc, associated with the outbreak of the system crisis of the Communist regime (Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Poland at the beginning of the 1980s).

INFO BOX

Trudie Bryks did not sleep well. Her husband (who was so brave in escaping German custody!) was not capable of escaping from this Communist country. *“I was about to doze off when I thought I heard a tap on the window. Had I imagined it or was I becoming paranoid?”* was how Trudie Bryks later described the fateful moments in her book.

Unfortunately, she was not being paranoid. Bryks had come back after his unsuccessful escape. Then two high party officials approached him with a strange offer: if he divorced “that Englishwoman”, he could become a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) and a career would lie ahead of him. He refused. The only remaining option was a properly executed escape to the West.

He was not the only one who realised that, and a day later they came for him. He had just returned from the cinema with Trudie. It was about eleven at night. When they were arresting him, they told his wife: *“You know darling, it is like in the old times. Then, the enemy was different. Today it is our own people.”*

First, he got ten years for an attempt to escape across the iron curtain, high treason and espionage. They then added another twenty years for an alleged escape attempt from the prison in Bory. They were afraid of him. *“Josef Bryks was, as far as I know, terribly hard. Hard on himself. There was something unbreakable in him. Finally they sent him to Jáchymov, perhaps to get rid of him,”* his colleague from the British Air Force and fellow inmate during Czechoslovak imprisonment Josef Šišpera said later.

Trudie said. He agreed with his wife’s suggestion, so he tried.

Bryks tried to escape together with General Karel Janoušek, the former commander of the Czechoslovak Air Force in Britain. He knew him well; Janoušek had even come to his wedding. The crossing of the iron curtain however ended in catastrophe. Bryks and his friends, including Janoušek, who had been communicating through the British Embassy already, were under surveillance by the secret police. The closest they got to the border was in Kynšperk nad Ohří but the woman at whose place they met told them that the crossing was not possible. She said it was too bright. It was a shock. What could they do? They had to return. Janoušek tried escaping at another place and was arrested.

Conversations between the husband and wife took place only behind bars from now on. There weren’t many, anyway. He saw his daughter Sonia for the last time in prison just before she and her mother left for England. It was in the summer of 1948. He held her in his arms and kissed her until the prison guards came to warn him that the time for visits was over. In a way, Trudie Bryks was lucky. She managed to get permission to leave and crossed the Channel with her daughter. She never remarried, although her husband offered her a divorce in one of his letters from Communist prison. Once again, this sounds like a theme for a novel. Actually it could be the second volume, but let us count: Trudie and Josef knew each other for sixteen years altogether. Of those, they were married for twelve. How many years of life did they spend together? About three. For the rest of the time, the husband and wife waited in vain for each other, sending sad letters across the iron curtain. If they were delivered at all, of course. *“I never regretted marrying Josef,”* Bryks’ wife Trudie said later, and she will maintain this until she dies.

A SYMBOLIC DEMISE

Behind the curtain, Bryks became just a number: “prisoner No. 868”. And the Communists took undignified revenge on all of the prisoners constantly: Josef was not allowed to send even the little money which he earned excavating uranium to his wife and child to London. At the end, the hero of the film The Captive Heart died in almost a symbolic way: on 12 August 1957, in the prison hospital of the Rovnost uranium mine, his heart burst.

“Bryks died and they carried out the autopsy. Never in their lives had they seen such a terrible heart attack, they told me. The heart burst as if it was cut open with a scalpel,” Zdeněk Kessler, Bryks’ fellow prisoner and later Chairman of the Constitutional Court testified several years later.

The Communists knew how to complicate not only a man’s life but also his



A mere number. Behind bars Josef Bryks became “prisoner number 868”. Of course he was stripped of all his military distinctions. He would eventually die in prison.

NATIONAL ARCHIVE

death. The Czechoslovak authorities did not bother to inform Bryks’ wife Trudie about his passing. And the regime took revenge on the relatives too: it did not allow the body to be released to them for a dignified burial.

Bryks’ family across the Channel was supposed to forget the Czech hero. And according to a fiendish plot it was made to look as if Bryks had forgotten them too. That was why he was not allowed to send money to his wife...

Historian Jiří Rajlich does not doubt that Bryks was a threat for the Communist regime. *“Just think about what he had been through. Clearly he was potentially a horribly dangerous person for the Communists! Very often these people did not end up in prison for having committed something but because the regime was terribly afraid of them. They had been brought up in completely different traditions, they believed in what they did, loads of them proved that during the war. So there were preventive reasons too.”*

Had Bryks survived, according to the sentence he would have left prison only in 1978...

Trudie Bryks was finally helped by a British foundation for air force veterans. Her daughter Sonia got a place in a boarding school and Trudie worked as a journalist, first in England, and later in the USA. *“I wanted to bring up our child and I wanted to bring her up well,”* she said. She succeeded but later fate turned its back on her: Sonia fell ill with multiple sclerosis and died in 2000.

Trudie Bryks spent more time fighting for her husband than in their marriage together. First she tried to get him out of Czechoslovak prison, later, after 1989, she campaigned for his posthumous rehabilitation and strived to achieve his recognition in his own homeland. The homeland that sent him to prison and let him die there.

The site of Bryks’ grave was identified in 2009 in the Prague-Motol cemetery and Trudie Bryks died in 2011. She was ninety-one years old. She managed to achieve yet one more important thing in her lifetime: on 28 October 2006 she received the Order of the White Lion for her deceased husband from the Czech president.

Dear Sir!

Excuse me for writing though I am a foreigner; however in seeking justice, we leave formalities aside. Since I have lived previously in Czechoslovakia, I appeal for your help: I am addressing you in particular as I know that you hold the most important position in the KSČ and as I know that you must be an honest and just man in occupying such a position, since these properties count the most here.

I believe that you most likely know the case of both the abovementioned persons and that you must have forgotten them by now, given that events in human life occur and become forgotten almost in an instant: the wives and relatives of such persons however cannot forget and with time, they become truly

more and more desperate and with ever growing difficulties we strive for the release of these unfortunate men, these former Czechoslovak heroes who are now unlawfully imprisoned: their only crime being that they tried to obtain a passport to be able to live with their wives in England...

Was the blood they shed, their hardships and suffering in vain? Has it been forgotten already? Is this the way to treat people who suffered so much for Czechoslovakia?

Mr Slánský, I am acquainted with all the facts of this embarrassing case and I am ready to come to Prague to tell you everything – these people do not bear any guilt, the charges against them have been construed in a fantastic manner...

The letter in which Bryks’ wife living in Britain pleaded for mercy for her husband. The letter was addressed to Rudolf Slánský, the secretary general of the KSČ, still mighty at the time⁷. She never got an answer to the letter.

CONTRIBUTED BY PAMĚŤ (MEMORY), CIVIC ASSOCIATION

⁷ In an ironic twist of fate, Rudolf Slánský was executed by his own party on 3 December 1952 after a show trial staged against fourteen high-ranking members of the Communist Party, most of them of Jewish origin. Eleven death sentences and three life-term prison sentences were pronounced (the so-called Slánský trial). [translator’s note]

SLOVAKIA



The Republic of Czechoslovakia was founded after WWI from the Czech and Slovakian regions of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Bohemia, Moravia, Austrian Silesia, Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia). In the second half of the 1930s Czechoslovakia was the only democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

PRO-NAZI REGIME

In October 1938, Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSĽS) declared autonomy within Czechoslovakia and seized power in its Slovak part. The declaration of independence of 14 March 1939 was a result of Hitler's pressure; however, the one-party HSĽS government headed by Jozef Tiso was left to a great degree to pursue its own policies in internal affairs. The Slovak state was an ally of Hitler and Slovak Divisions fought at the Eastern Front. Jews were persecuted and deported to concentration camps. The Slovak Uprising of August 1944 was defeated by German forces. The entire territory was liberated by the Soviet army by 1 May 1945.

COMMUNIST REGIME IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

In March 1945, the Czechoslovak exile government and the Communist party signed a government programme in Moscow which, among other things, banned the largest pre-war conservative political party. Czechoslovakian statehood was restored, but Ruthenia was annexed by the Soviet Union in June 1945. In 1946, the Communists won in restricted elections. On 25 February 1948, a Communist coup d'état followed. A period of softening of Communist policies, known as the Prague Spring, was crushed by a military invasion of the Warsaw Pact countries on 21 August 1968. The regime fell in the Velvet Revolution started by a student demonstration on 17 November 1989; free elections were held in June 1990.

On 1 January 1993 Czechoslovakia separated peacefully into the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia.

JOZEF REMŽA was born on 17 July 1940 in Kátlovce in the Trnava region of what is now Slovakia. He came from a worker's family. His father Ján Remža was employed in the Bratislava electrotechnical enterprise as a worker and his mother was a worker in the Kátlovce United peasant cooperative. In July 1959, 19-year-old Jozef and his friend Stanislav Štrbo tried to escape across the Czechoslovak border to Austria, in search of a better life in the West. They were intercepted upon getting off the train at a border station and served 6-month prison sentences. However, Jozef was not deterred and continued to dream of freedom. During a second escape attempt on 15 August 1960, while being pursued by border guards, Jozef Remža was killed by high voltage current from the electrified Iron Curtain.



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Jozef Remža

A Tragic Fate on the Road to Freedom

written by Ľubomír Morbacher

THE FIRST ATTEMPT

The report of the arrest, which is a part of the investigation file on two young workers Jozef Remža and Stanislav Štrbo, describes how their attempt to escape to the West was thwarted, in a very similar way to the case of hundreds of other escapees. I am stressing their social background at the very beginning, though it will appear several times more in the story, to remind ourselves of the fact that official Communist propaganda presented the “people’s democratic” and later on the “socialist” state as a social system created for workers, meaning for the working class.

In the evening hours of 27 July 1959, at precisely 7.35 p.m., the two young men were detained by a border guard patrol immediately after they got off a train in the Devínska Nová Ves station. Since they did not carry documents on them which were obligatory at that time – a permit to enter the border zone – they were taken to the Devínska Nová Ves Border Guard unit. After “preliminary questioning” they admitted their intention to get to Austria and they were arrested by first lieutenant Vendelín Vincúr, officer of the intelligence department of the 11th Border Guard brigade. Thereafter, an investigation of their case was launched by State Security investigator sergeant Lipták of the District Administration of the Ministry of the Interior in Bratislava. Charges were brought for an attempt to commit the criminal offence of leaving the republic as defined in Art. 5 and Art. 95 par. 1 of the Criminal Code¹. Both friends were imprisoned and by the time they were sentenced to unsuspended prison sentences, they had had their first experiences with the State Security interrogators. For one of them, the instigator of the escape Jozef Remža, the affair did not end by serving the sentence. He became convinced that he had to leave such a country and he tried to escape again. On his own this time, and alas, with tragic consequences.

Who was Jozef Remža who naively tried, together with his friend, to travel unnoticed to the border village of Devínska Nová Ves in July 1959?

¹ Act No. 86/1950 Coll.

Jozef Remža, a 19-year-old youth born in Kátlovce in the Trnava region came from a worker's family, as stated in his own words in the report of the State Security interrogator. His father Ján Remža was employed in the Bratislava electrotechnical enterprise as a worker and his mother was a worker in the Kátlovce United peasant cooperative. After finishing his elementary school education Jozef spent a year helping out on the family's 2-hectare farm which still was their own at the time. Starting in 1955, he trained to be a tractor operator at the apprentice school in the town of Galanta. After graduating, he first worked for two months at the machinery and tractor station in Trnava. From there he transferred to work for the Czechoslovak oil wells enterprise, the exploratory department in Brno, where he met Stanislav Štrba, a worker from the village of Modranka. When the work for the Czechoslovak oil wells ran out in the winter, he was advised to search for another job. Without knowing about each other, the boys met again

in Bratislava at the Georgi Dimitrov chemical enterprise where they both started their new jobs.

The friends made use of the possibility of lodging at the "bachelors' quarters" in Bratislava – Gaštanový hájik (Chestnut Grove) which enabled them to live in Bratislava and meet often. It was Remža's idea to escape to Austria from Communist Czechoslovakia. He explained his motivation to emigrate to the intelligence officer of the Border Guard unit No. 5947 Bratislava (11th Border Guard brigade) in the following way:

"About two months ago I decided that I would illegally escape to Austria for the reason that I was not satisfied with my job here, because it was heavy work for me. I worked as a worker in the Oleum 2 department where I worked for 8 hours followed by 24 hours of free time. On average I earned

*1,300 Czechoslovak crowns a month. Although I only had to spend this money on myself, it sometimes happened that it was not enough even for my subsistence. That is why I decided to escape to Austria illegally."*²

In the assessment by the political department of the Georgi Dimitrov chemical enterprise, Remža does not come across as an absentee misfit who has problems with hard labour or who is likely to "betray" the working class. In the evaluation created for the purpose of the State Security investigation, his employer says: *"According to a statement by his superior, the aforementioned carried out his work well and*

conscientiously. His work attendance was regular, he did not have absences... His nature was quiet, withdrawn, he was popular in the collective of his fellow employees."

With this stereotypical assessment one has to be reminded that citizens were constantly subjected to "cadre" and performance assessments (of course not only by the employer). They were often evaluated by people of low moral qualities – apt to attend party meetings more than to do specialist work and who also settled various personal conflicts this way. The evaluations however were extremely important for the further existence of people in their professions, in the pronouncing of criminal punishment and in a countless number of situations in which the state was the decision maker. In the case of the worker Jozef Remža however, even a good evaluation did not weigh in.

But let's go back to the attempt by the two young men. Remža's friend Štrbo agreed with his proposal to leave Czechoslovakia. The friends had very a naive notion of the risks facing escapees even while gathering very basic information about the surveillance and technical engineering devices securing the border with the West, and they decidedly had no idea about the widespread informer network of the "Helpers of the Border Guard" and the agent network of the Intelligence Service of the Border Guard and the State Security. Despite that, they had a reasonable amount of time to think about the way to escape until the moment when they were detained at the Devínska Nová Ves railway station, especially given that Remža inquired about the situation at the border both with colleagues and strangers. On 7 August 1959 Remža testified to the State Security interrogator sergeant Lipták from the District Administration of the Ministry of the Interior:

"About two months ago, when Štrbo and I agreed that it would be good to leave the country illegally, we set out the next day for the Bratislava Castle to gain certain knowledge about what it looks like at the border. The same day, I left with Štrbo for the Viedenská cesta³ to gain information about how the border is guarded along that section and whether it would be possible to leave this way and go abroad illegally. As we were walking along the Viedenská cesta, we met a fisherman who was returning from fishing on the right side of the road. Štrbo stopped him and asked him how far away the border guards were and whether they had dogs. The fisherman replied that the border guards were about 1 km away from that place and that not every one of them had a dog. Then Štrbo asked him whether one could cross to Austria through the forest which was on the right side of the road."

Remža asked many other people too about the border. One thing helped him, nevertheless. He explained his curiosity in a partly truthful way – soon he was to start his compulsory military service and when asking about what it looked like at the border he claimed he was to enlist with the Border Guard.

² Archive of the Nation's Memory Institute (NMI), fund of the District Administration of the National Security Corps Bratislava, V-1391, Personal investigation file. Remža Jozef. All further quotations in cursive text in this story are taken from documents of the Archive of NMI.

³ Viennese road, a road leading from Bratislava through the Austrian border to Vienna. Vienna is only about 50 km from Bratislava, however, during the Communist dictatorship, the iron curtain was built in between [translator's note]

When Remža and Štrba went to the main station in Bratislava in the evening hours of 26 July to see when the trains for Devínska Nová Ves departed, they were checked by a member of the National Security Corps. However, when he found out that they came from the vicinity of Trnava like himself and Remža talked him into believing that he was joining the Border Guard, the man started explaining the situation. As Remža stated in his testimony:

“Then he started to talk about the wires on the border, also mentioning that there was a forbidden zone and that the wires came only after that. He said that from Bratislava to Devín there is a forbidden zone of about 20 km and then the wires, and that around Devínska Nová Ves there is only the (river) Morava, that there are no wires there⁴. In the conversation he also mentioned that most people who escape do it around Kúty. He also mentioned that the state borders are more guarded here than in Šumava⁵ and that he did his service there, and that even such cases occurred there in which members of the Border Guard jumped straight from the 10-metre tower onto German territory where they were reportedly well received, with handshakes and so on.”

The member of the National Security Corps of course had to bear the consequences of his “talkativeness”. In the totalitarian society, these facts were strictly secret and the duty to maintain confidentiality was required so much the more of members of the National Security Corps. On 10 August 1959 the State Security investigator proposed to issue an instructive order to members of the National Security Corps so that such cases would not be repeated.

Just as in the overwhelming majority of other cases of apprehended escapees, no weapons were found on Remža or Štrbo during a personal search upon their detention. Truly “serious” material proof was attached to the investigation file: *“Remža with his accomplice had procured binoculars and two maps for this purpose which were to serve them as aids for illegally crossing the state border.”* Remža had owned the binoculars since WWII and he and Štrbo had bought the maps of the Southern and Northern Small Carpathian Mountains⁶ in a bookshop in Bratislava. The absurdity of the totalitarian regime of the day is further demonstrated by a confirmation receipt from the investigation file in which the Prague central department of the Ministry of the Interior certifies that on 23 January 1961, two maps of the Southern and Northern Small Carpathian Mountains were received from the District Administration of the Ministry of the Interior Bratislava pertaining to the criminal case of Jozef Remža. Next to the stamp and signature, a handwritten note reads: “commissionally destroyed”. Although this was exactly in accordance with the valid criminal law procedure of the day, one cannot help getting the impression that the representatives of the regime probably would have been most satisfied if regular citizens were not sold any maps.

⁴ Of course, this was not true

⁵ The Bohemian Forest, a mountain range along the borders with West Germany [translator's note]

⁶ A mountain region running north of Bratislava, a tourist region entirely on Slovak territory [translator's note]

What was not trivial however were the punishments imposed by courts for the unauthorised leaving of the republic, or the intimidation by the security services. One can see directly from the testimony of Jozef Remža made on 28 July 1959 how every “violator” of the border was to end up, if he was not caught. These sentences which the member of the State Security had dictated into the report without attempting to change their substance, unambiguously show that in the case of the border, the law and internal norms were one thing, whereas the practice another:

“In the conversation at the unit we learned, correction, I learned that on the state border in the space of Devínska Nová Ves there are wires too, that there is electricity so that it would kill us or that they would shoot us dead or that we would drown. This was said both by soldiers and by officers.”

Jozef Remža and Stanislav Štrbo, though young and inexperienced, surely were not suicidal. Had there been a possibility for them to freely leave their country, they would have certainly utilised it and not risked their lives or, in the better case scenario, risked facing the interrogation methods of the State Security and prison. Even after finding out that they could not get to the West legally, they first tried to find a way of escaping whereby they would avoid the “green border”. In July 1959 they tried to find out whether they could board a ship which was taken by the Czechoslovak delegation to an international festival in Vienna. They found out that the strictly selected delegates were thoroughly checked by members of the Border Guard. Only then did they start planning an escape across the “green border”. That the young worker Jozef Remža did not try to “play games” even during investigation is proved by his honest answer to the State Security interrogator:

“What else do you want to add to your testimony? Answer: To my testimony I add only that I had imagined it differently. I thought that we would not be detained and that we would get to Austria and that we would be better off in Austria than in the Czechoslovak Republic.”

For stating the true motive of his action, he was “deservedly” punished.

SENTENCING

On 10 September 1959, the People’s Court of Bratislava–outskirts pronounced a sentence in the criminal proceedings against Jozef Remža and Co. pursuant to Art. 5 para. 1 and Art. 95 para. 1 of the Criminal Code



The site where a person was killed at the Iron Curtain. The numbered plates mark the places where pieces of evidence were found by the Communist investigators.
SECURITY SERVICES ARCHIVE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

– for the criminal act of attempting to leave the republic: 10 months unsuspended imprisonment for Jozef Remža and 8 months unsuspended imprisonment for Stanislav Štrba.

After Remža and Štrba appealed, the District Court in Bratislava lowered each of their sentences to 6 months of unsuspended imprisonment. Despite the mitigation of Remža’s and Štrbo’s punishment for, so to speak, getting off the train in Devínska Nová Ves, it is important to note the following construct in the justification of the sentence in order to understand the state of the Communist justice system of the time:

“The accused namely committed a very grave act, because in the case that they would have executed their departure abroad, they would certainly have been used by the enemy country for espionage activities against our republic, as they are young and healthy boys.”

In the year 1959, several years after the death of Stalin, the principle of notoriety was being applied just as it was at the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s⁷. It is therefore necessary to perceive the past of Communist Czechoslovakia in its entire reality, not only based on the relative relaxation in some spheres of society like, for example, arts and literature, which cautiously declined Stalinism. At the end of the 1950s, the justice system consisted of judges with ideological equipment from the end of the 1940s and the early 1950s – meaning that of an intensified class struggle. As for the approach of the Communist regime at the beginning and at the end of the 1950s to values such as justice and rule of law (at the time, the reality was the exact opposite), there were no significant differences.

THE SECOND ATTEMPT

Even after serving his sentence, Jozef Remža continued to long to escape to freedom, out of reach of the totalitarian state. This became fateful for him in Bratislava’s Petržalka district on 15 August 1960:

“According to the testimony of the Border Guard patrol – the unit on duty in the forbidden zone in the area of the community of Petržalka–Kopčany, they detected an unknown man entering a corn field under suspicious circumstances, having a wooden club with him and making his way in the direction of the wire obstacles. The patrol of the Border Guard started to pursue this man through the corn field, whom they repeatedly asked to stop, but he did not stop upon being requested and continued his escape in the direction of the wire obstacles. During the pursuit after the futile request, the patrol proceeded to use a weapon to warn the escapee, which had no result either, and after Jozef Remža had left the corn field the said got in between the wire obstacles where he hit the power line with his head, as a result of which he was killed by electric current and remained lying thrown aside among the wire obstacles...”⁸

⁷ The “notoriety principle” as a legal term is a generally known fact which need not be proven

⁸ The writing style of the source text is very poor [translator’s note]

THE DEADLY ELECTRIFICATION OF THE IRON CURTAIN

A few more sentences about the period prior to 1989, during which the state was killing its own citizens purely because they wanted to leave their homeland freely. By 1952, a triple-fence wire barrier was erected along all the sections of Czechoslovakia’s border with Austria and the Federal Republic of Germany, practically hermetically sealing the border. On the orders of the first commander of the Border and Interior guard of the Ministry of National Security major-general Ludvík Hlavačka of 12 June 1953, the wire barriers were charged with high voltage electric current, carrying 2,000-4,000 Volts⁹.

In the secondary legislation codifying the activity of the Border Guard and the purpose of the technical engineering devices on the border it is clearly stated that the usage of high voltage current in the wire barriers was supposed to fulfil the role of “liquidation of the enemy”. In most cases meaning escapees. The terminology used in the investigation files describing the causes of death on the border testifies about the fear of the representatives of the regime of their own deeds and the possible response from the population. In the protocols about the examination of the corpses the coroners mostly use the sentence:

“According to the finding of the security authorities the deceased suffered an injury by high voltage electric current.”

In 1994, Ludvík Hlavačka was charged with the criminal act of a threat to the general public which he committed as a commander of the Border and Interior Guard of the Ministry of National Security when he proposed and organised the electrification of the wire barriers, as a result of which at least 61 people lost their lives, based on facts known at the time. The real count is much higher, more than 96 victims. However, the Communist criminal was never punished, either for the electric fences, or for the mine fields along the border, or for the sadistic torture of political prisoners with electric current in the prison in Uherské Hradiště. He died in Prague in 2005 at the age of 94.

In the field, this is what the monstrosity of the Communist “improvers” looked like: the transformer was located in a special walled room in the guardhouse at the unit. The cable from the



The electrified triple fence on the border of Czechoslovakia seen from above, 1952

SECURITY SERVICES ARCHIVE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

⁹Performance of duty to protect the state borders – on the electric installation for the protection of the state borders (EZOH). Order of the commander of the Border and Interior Guard No. 0090/1953 of 12 June 1953.

transformer to the first pole was insulated, and from there the power lines continued directly to the wire barrier. On the middle fence of the wire barrier there were four electric lines spaced in the following way: the first one ran 30 cm above the ground, the second and third each ran 50 cm above the line below it and the fourth electric line ran along the top of the middle fence. At the gates in the wire barrier, the electric wire was buried underground at a depth of 60 cm, insulated and covered by bricks. An automated switch of the electrified wire barrier was placed in a wooden cupboard at the guardhouse. The key to the cupboard was held by the commander of the unit. When he was away, it was in the possession of his deputy or the supervising officer of the unit¹⁰.

The electrified wire barrier was the middle fence of three and it was dangerous for the escapees because of its high voltage. The transformer converted low voltage current from the local grid to high voltage of 2,000-4,000 Volts. If the escapee touched just one of the electric wires, in most cases he was killed as a result of the discharge of short-circuit current between the charged wire and the ground or between the wires¹¹.

The commanders of the brigades of the Border Guard bore a high degree of responsibility for the surveillance of the borders and the maintenance of the system created along the border with the West, along their particular sections of the border. It follows from the daily information report of the Main Administration of the Border Guard from 16 July 1960 that the electric installation for the protection of the state borders at the time of the killing of Jozef Remža¹² was switched on by a direct order of the commander of the 11th Border Guard brigade Florián Čambal due to “great pressure in the area”. This meant that it was a section of the border with frequent escapee attempts to cross¹³. Again, it was not by chance that this was a person under whose command terrible tragedies occurred on the Slovak-Austrian border. Among other things, he was responsible for the massacre of refugees in December 1952 on the border in Petržalka when the entire Ehrenfeld family, including children, was shot and killed.

The electrification of the barriers at the border lasted until the mid-1960s. It was abandoned as a result of high financial costs and dangerousness for members of the Border Guard, but mainly because it was replaced by technically superior signalization installations. The electrified iron curtain claimed the lives of escapees in the area where units of the 11th Border Guard brigade were stationed too. One of them was the frank young man Jozef Remža who refused to accept the idea that he could not live in a free world.

¹⁰ Archive of the Nation’s Memory Institute, fund: Border Guard Army, inventory unit: 180. Protocol of the inspection of the EZOH in the segment of the 3rd unit Gajary - presentation.

¹¹ Vaněk, P.: On the development of the technical engineering reinforcement of the state border in the years 1951-1955. In: Proceedings of the Archive of the Ministry of Interior, 2004, No. 2, p.197-198.

¹² Meaning during the day time; due to high energy consumption and dangerousness it was normally turned on at night time hours in the 1960s

¹³ Security Services Archive of the Czech Republic, information report OD HS PS No. 218

People who lost their lives on the electrified iron curtain on the Slovak-Austrian section of the border (cases documented so far):

Tibor Walter, born 18 May 1938	† 30 November 1954
Antal Pangracz, born 1936	† 20 October 1955
Illés Tóth, born 14 June 1937	† 29 July 1956
František Borka, born 17 January 1941	† 18 April 1957
Franciszek Lukaszek, born 18 September 1930	† 22 July 1958
Ján Krivák, born 8 September 1927	† 6 August 1959
Unknown man	† 4 June 1960
Jan Ignacy Mrohs, born 29 May 1938	† 1 August 1960
Jozef Remža, born 17 July 1940	† 15 August 1960
Pawel Medwid, born 3 May 1939	† 11 July 1961
Jozef Kolarczyk, born 9 March 1929	† 20 July 1962
Jozef Maksymilian Holota, born 27 September 1931	† 6 June 1964

CONTRIBUTED BY THE NATION’S MEMORY INSTITUTE

FEDOR GÁL, sociologist, politician, entrepreneur, writer and essayist of Jewish origin, was born in March 1945 in the Terezín concentration camp where his family was deported toward the end of the war. He was kept in a shoe box instead of a cradle. His mother managed to nurse him and another baby at the camp, thus enabling their survival. His father died in April 1945 during a death march from the Sachsenhausen concentration camp to Schwerin. Fedor Gál studied chemical engineering and sociology in Bratislava. In 1989 he was a co-founder and a leader of the civic opposition movement Public Against Violence, which won the first free elections in Slovakia in 1990. After the break-up of Czechoslovakia, he moved to Prague, where he still lives. In 2008, he retraced his father's last march, creating a documentary film called *The Short Long Journey*. Fedor Gál is an advocate of the rights of minorities – especially Jews and Roma.



MIRO ŠVOLÍK

Fedor Gál

My Short Long Journey

written by Fedor Gál

I NEVER SAW MY FATHER

For a long time I believed that he had been arrested, sometime around 1942, when he tried to get his family to safety. After my mother's death I discovered a fragment of her "official" biography, which she had to write during Communist times, and in it this passage: "... my husband was with a military unit; I hid in the mountains. After the suppression of the uprising at the end of October 1944 I was dragged, along with my four-year-old son Egon and my husband, who had come to take us to safety, to the concentration camp at Sered', where they immediately separated us. I, together with my child, was taken to Terezín, while my husband, as a member of a military detachment, was taken to a concentration camp somewhere in Germany, where he was shot along with other members of the Czechoslovak army in Slovakia. In the Terezín concentration camp I gave birth to my second son, Fedor, who was born posthumously and never saw his father."

In 1994, at my mother's funeral, Mr Zoltán Lenský related how he had been with my father on the death march from Sachsenhausen to Schwerin. "... And on that death march we passed through a German village at noon. It was exactly twelve o'clock; I remember it as if it were yesterday, because it struck twelve from the clock tower. Just then a new shift of SS men came on duty. We dragged him [Gál] as well as we could. And one of the SS men asked what was the matter with him and said that he should walk on his own. But he no longer had the strength. 'You're not allowed to drag him! You're not allowed to carry him! I'll shoot the lot of you!' So what could we do? Orders are orders. We knew what it meant. Dead bodies lay all along the roads of that march. And just then, in that village, exactly at twelve, the SS men changed shifts. And one of those swine said: 'Well, if he can't...' Gál pulled his prisoner's jacket over his head, to cover his eyes so he couldn't see, but that man tore it off him and with his black submachine gun shot him accurately through his forehead."

I knew then that I had to set out on a journey. I had to fill that emptiness left behind after my father's short and unfulfilled life. But my father would deserve an epic. The story of a young man who had been born to Jewish parents in a small town in Slovakia, parents who had supported his studies so he could take over the farm. A man to whom circumstances had granted only a few years of marriage. A man who, under the fascist Slovak state, turned from a respected Jewish fellow citizen into a lousy Jew. A man of thirty-five

DEATH MARCHES

At the end of WWII, as the Allied armies were approaching the Nazi concentration and extermination camps, the Nazis gradually evacuated the prisoners and moved them to other camps. In many cases this was done by marches on foot over long distances in the winter, with minimal food and water. When the exhausted or sick prisoners were not able to continue, they were often killed. The prisoners were often also transported in sealed railway carriages which had originally been used for transporting cattle. Most death marches took place at the turn of the years 1944-1945 while the Soviet army was gradually conquering Poland.

INFO BOX

who was shot dead at the very end of the war solely because he could walk no further.

I want to write this story for my children and for the children of my children. I want them to know that their grandfather and great grandfather lived, had a name, a home and a family. He was sent to his death by some of his neighbours. And I would like to add the story of my own life. Because I have experienced the children and the children of the children of some of my father's fellow-countrymen in action. If the opportunity were to arise they would once again send me, my children and their children to their deaths. It's not that I believe that the written word can stop the hand of a treacherous bastard, but I regard it as my duty. Like walking from Sachsenhausen to Schwerin or erecting a memorial plaque at Partizánska Ľupča. It would be good if my children, their children and the children of their children occasionally stopped at Partizánska Ľupča, laid a small stone in memory¹⁴, stopped at a nearby cottage for some cheese and soured ewe's milk and chatted to the local people. It will probably also be necessary to re-erect the vandalized tombstones.

ALL MY NEAREST AND DEAREST

My personal experience of racial, ethnic or national intolerance has been sporadic. I usually encountered all of these together and in a corner of my soul I have somehow been prepared for these incidents all my life. In actual fact, however, I was – paradoxically enough – confronted with those sentiments only after the collapse of Communism, in our democracy. They arose from the anonymous masses and were hiding behind myths about the perfidy of the Jews, about their dark conspiracies and their parasitism. But only when I was a child did some of the youngsters address me directly as “You Jew-boy”.

Whenever I have spoken to witnesses or victims of the Holocaust I have listened uncomprehendingly to accounts of how relations with neighbours towards integrated and often secularized Jews had changed abruptly. From one day to the next friends would slam the doors of their houses in their faces, move away

¹⁴ A Jewish tradition [editor's note]

from them at tables where they had sat together for years or ceased to communicate with them. And they behaved like this even before the uniforms of native or German Nazis appeared in the streets and before the racial laws were passed. These floodgates were mostly opened by pro-fascist political doctrines, by leaders and by hopes of personal profit.

The Holocaust of the Gypsies revealed this dark side of the human soul with particular hideousness. The Gypsies owned nothing that anyone could profit from. And their fate decades after the war is a memento. Today, public opinion polls show that the majority of Czechs refuse to put up with the Roma minority, whom they view as a loud and lazy band of parasites. Those same Czechs view themselves as friendly, tolerant and hard-working.

My voyage to the roots of degenerate behaviour by humans convinced me that these are not selective anti-Jewish or anti-Gypsy feelings. They reveal man's ability to hate his fellow man out of mere inclination. The rationalization of this inclination is a secondary matter. But if I say A I must also say B. Behind every living or surviving person there is also the story of another – of his protector, of a righteous and good person. The fact that these events are less numerous in the compilation of testimonies should not blind us to the real existence of two equal sides of the human soul.

For instance, on my trail of my father's footsteps, I encountered the stories of German anti-fascists. From the very beginning of the Third Reich they were moved to camps like Dachau, Sachsenhausen and others. Only a few of them survived, but they were amongst the first who, after their return, apologized for the Holocaust. Allegedly, they said they could have done more. In Slovakia, for instance, as I write these lines there are still men in the Government who defend the fascist Slovak state and amongst the Catholic clergy some important positions are still held by those who regard the President and Roman Catholic priest, Jozef Tiso (president of the fascist Slovak state during World War II), as a person worthy of sanctification.

In Sachsenhausen and in the woods near Below I saw fresh traces of arson by German neo-Nazis. The fact that I mention their nationality is of no great significance. I had come across Czech and Slovak neo-Nazis even earlier. Their heads were shaven, they were wearing combat boots, they had muscular bodies and a string of racist, ethnically or nationally motivated violent offences



Leopoldov Prison, Slovakia, December 1989

TIBOR HUSZÁR

behind them. All of this sixty-three years after the war, when on the site of the concentration camp in Lety near Písek, a pig farm still stands.

HOW I SEE MYSELF

All my adult life I have heard about self. Know thyself, work on yourself, develop your personality, your ego, practise self-perfection and so on. I immersed myself in the dedicated literature of philosophy, sociology, psychology, mysticism, Tibetan Buddhism and yoga. I listened to what is called spiritual music. There was a time when, day after day, I focussed intently at a certain point and tried to cleanse my mind of anything that even resembled a thought. I sat cross-legged, breathed according to instructions, kept a diary, examined my conscience, read the Bible. And yet I felt like some weakling. Good Lord, how can one approach those who can consciously control their bodies, move objects by willpower, fast for weeks, enter into their past lives by mere concentration, and utter wise sayings? And how can one, by the repetition of mantras, the disciplining of one's body and by meditation, rid oneself of suffering and be happy? And, after years of deliberate work on one's ego, no longer feel the cold, feel pain, understand death? Where am I going wrong? Is it because I devote myself insufficiently and in an unqualified manner to my soul, my mind, my emotions?

So one day I got up at three in the morning and once again began to examine my ego. After all, I have always just lived from one day to the next. For many years I worked in smelly chemical factories, on shift work, because I had to make a living, first for myself and then for my whole family. I frequented taverns, because my friends were there and that was where friendships were struck up. In turn, I nurtured my body and abused it, because the former is right and the latter is often pleasant. I read and I wrote because I wanted to satisfy my curiosity, gain recognition and say what I wished to say. I helped people who asked for help or who needed help. I honed my professional skills so I did not need to mechanically repeat everything or obey those who were more skilful than, or placed above, me. Yet all the time I was aware of some deficit – happiness came to me only sporadically, with the passing years my muscles gradually lost their tone, and my writing and thinking were no longer the same as before. Had I begun too late? Had I missed the right moment years ago?

Needless to say, on those occasions I increase my own self-esteem by recalling heroic periods of my life. And I ask myself: “So what the hell is this about?” The fact is that nobody remembers our scientific achievements of the seventies and eighties any longer or our samizdat publications during the Communist era. Even the revolution in November 1989 was amateurish, with many mistakes made. My books sold in small numbers, hardly anybody quotes my articles now and I can't even bear to look at many of them myself. But both of my sons evidently had greater opportunities than me and exceeded my own abilities by some

margin. Yes – they are me. And I am also those children who fall asleep listening to the fairy-tales written by my wife, an accomplished author of children's books. Thus I slowly observe how my ego progressively separates from my body. I watch that process calmly, with a cigarette in my hand and – whenever possible – with a glass of red wine and a book. Because now I know that the Short Long Journey of my father did not end at Linde and will not end with me.

ABOUT FEDOR GÁL

written by Prof. Peter Zajac¹⁵

I encountered the young, happy Fedor, overflowing with energy, only briefly. He came, said what was going on, one, two, three and left. He never stayed anywhere longer than half an hour. He had a lot to do. He wrote in the morning, he was the boss throughout the day and relaxed in the evening. It was in those days when gender equality still meant boys befriending girls. In his face, fine wrinkles of laughter met at the top of his nose. Later on, there was less laughter, wrinkles became furrows, but still they were furrows of laughter.

Fedor loved the human cluster in Mozart's House where the Public against Violence¹⁶ had its headquarters after November 1989. We worked together day and night, we formed a joint body and mind, we breathed in a joint rhythm. I am still convinced today that this was the main reason why we succeeded, despite our inexperience and mistakes. It was a rare, exceptional moment, a desire which found its collective identity in that November body. Just before that I had read Mary Renault's novel “The Bull from the Sea”. Theseus' band of men from Athens who set out for Crete to offer the

¹⁵ In 2009, Fedor Gál was presented the Ján Langoš Award for his work. Prof. Zajac's text was the laudatio at this occasion.

¹⁶ A political movement established in Bratislava, Slovakia, on 20 November 1989. The Slovak counterpart of the Czech Civic Forum

SAMIZDAT PUBLISHING

● The term samizdat comes from Russian. In the 1940s, the poet Nikolaj Glazkov wrote the word “samsebyaizdat” (published for oneself) on the title page of a typewritten collection of his poems. The term came into use for secretly copied and distributed texts which the Soviet regime perceived as hostile. Texts written by Alexander Solzhenitsyn were distributed in this form, for example. Gradually, the term was also adopted for other Communist regimes (in Poland, however, where this type of activity reached its peak in the second half of the 1970s, it did not take root; instead, the expression drugi obiegi, meaning “second circulation”, was used). In a number of countries however the unofficial spreading of texts had an older tradition, for instance from the time of the Nazi occupation. Religious believers were particularly well experienced in trying to secure religious literature in this way. In Czechoslovakia, samizdat became one of the most visible forms of civic resistance in the 1970s and 1980s. Important literary works were published in this form in several series. The best-known were founded by Ludvík Vaculík (Edice Petlice [Padlock Series]) and Václav Havel (Edice Expedice [Dispatch Series]). As well as making individually typed copies, more efficient copying technologies were gradually employed. During the time of samizdat publishing, a number of texts of banned authors were simultaneously also published in exile, from where they were smuggled back behind the Iron Curtain.

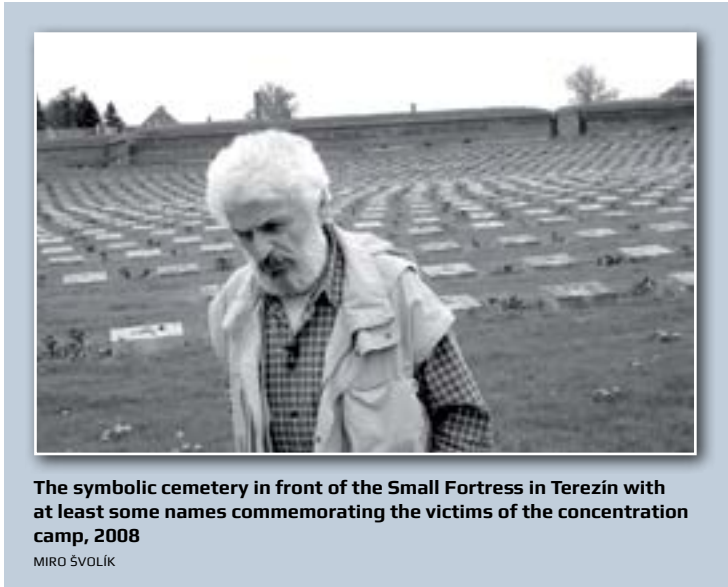
annual human sacrifice manages to create a sort of a common collective body in the labyrinth, to defeat the Minotaur and to free the king’s daughter Ariadne. It was a fascinating story and that joint November body reminded me of it. The story had a continuation however. After returning to Athens, the collective body fell apart and turned into single individual stories full of sorrow. I was waiting to see what would happen to that joint November body. Some found their way, some died, others evaporated, a few turned into lice, some remained who they were. Fedor remained himself.

I experienced one of the most absurd scenes in my life after the victorious elections of June 1990. Fedor sat on a table, dangling his legs, his long arms hanging alongside his body, nodding his head rhythmically. Since then, I have witnessed this bodily state of absolute exhaustion more times, but that was the first time. The victory was definitively ours, and we disintegrated into pieces. From then on, things went fast. Fedor became an enemy of the people, and those who had formed a common cluster together with us just recently, left us like rats, some quietly, some slamming the door loudly. It was a time of betrayal which threw Fedor out on the shore of the Czech sea. He became a vagrant. The wrinkles deepened into first salty furrows.¹⁷

Fifteen years passed. The hatred lessened, people started smiling at him again in the streets of Bratislava. Then he set out on a road to himself. At the end of the film “A Long Short Journey” a lonely Fedor Gál walks through a tidy German village between Sachsenhausen and Schwerin with a small stone in his hand. He was never here before and he will probably never come here again. But this is where

the road of death led and on this site they might have killed his father. This is where Fedor finds him in one moment and loses him again. He lays the stone behind the fence on the imaginary airy grave of which there are plenty in this world. It is a story like in a film unwinding backwards. But what does this backward movement mean? At the beginning there is certainty – I was born, I survived, I am. At the end of the film a wrinkled uncertainty – who

¹⁷ After achieving great success in the first elections after the Velvet Revolution, a rift developed in the People Against Violence party. Fedor opposed the breakup of Czechoslovakia and became a figure of public hatred. He was also the target of anti-Semitic abuse by so-called “nationalists” [editor’s note]



The symbolic cemetery in front of the Small Fortress in Terezín with at least some names commemorating the victims of the concentration camp, 2008

MIRO ŠVOLÍK

am I after all? This uncertainty is going to trouble Fedor until the end of his life; he just does not know about it yet. Because human identity is autobiographical. It is what is left at the end as the memory of life. All his life Fedor has known what it means to be a secular person. What it means to be evangelical, the way he was baptised, he will not learn on this Dante-esque road. It would have to be longer for that. And maybe he will never learn it. But this time, he will definitely learn what it means to be a Jew in this world. That it means being a human whom they kill just because he is. Irrespective of religion, race, family, nationality.

After the attack of Czech neo-Nazis in 2009, Natálka¹⁸ burned like a fire offering. Fedor and his friends help her today to return to life. She burned just because she is a little Roma girl. What kind of a world is this, asks the newest wrinkle on Fedor’s face. The wrinkle is deepening, it is becoming a furrow, just as Fedor’s entire face is turning into furrows which compose his portrait today.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE JÁN LANGOŠ FOUNDATION

¹⁸ Two-year-old Natálka Kudriková was severely burned in an arson attack by Czech neo-Nazis [editor’s note]

HUNGARY

After dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire the Hungarian monarchy was restored in 1920 and Admiral Miklós Horthy was elected as regent.

NAZI REGIME

Hungary joined the Axis, fearing the Soviets, and in order to regain territories lost after WWI. The Hungarian Army fought on the Eastern Front from 1941. In March 1944 Germany invaded the country and installed a puppet government, but Horthy remained in office. After the German invasion of 1944 most Hungarian Jews were deported to concentration camps. Horthy tried to conclude an armistice with the Soviets in October 1944, but was deposed by a German-organised coup. The leader of the Hungarian Nazis (Arrow Cross Party) Ferenc Szálasi became Prime Minister. The Soviet Army entered Hungary in September 1944, gaining control over the country by April 1945.

COMMUNIST REGIME

In the essentially free elections of 1945, the Communists won 17% of the vote. Still, the Soviets imposed a coalition with the Communists and their allies in key positions. In heavily rigged elections of 1947, the Communists, backed by the Soviet forces, did not gain even half of the votes. Nevertheless, they continued to establish total control and in 1949 the People's Republic of Hungary was proclaimed. In 1956, the Communist dictatorship was overthrown in a nationwide revolution which was crushed by the Soviet Army. Large-scale retaliation followed. The regime collapsed in 1989 and free elections were held in 1990.



JÓZSEF PEHM was born in the village of Csehimindszent, Hungary, on 29 March 1892. He gained his profound religious faith from his family. He embarked on theological studies and by 1917 he was a teacher of catechism at a public high school for boys. He

began to get involved in public life at the end of World War I. He publicly opposed both the Nazi and Communist regimes. He adopted the surname Mindszenty in 1941, partly to honour his native village, and partly to express his disagreement over the growing German influence in Hungary. He was arrested and sentenced to

life imprisonment in 1949. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 he was freed for a few days but Soviet intervention quelled the revolution. The cardinal spent 15 years in the American Embassy building in Budapest. He was finally allowed to leave the country in 1971. He died in exile in Vienna in 1975.



CARDINAL MINDSZENTY
FOUNDATION

Cardinal József Mindszenty

Hungary's Conscience

written by Tamás Stark

Cardinal József Mindszenty lived through a tormented period of various political scenarios, experiencing life in the shadows of various 20th century dictatorships. Born as a child of humble parents, he worked his way up from being a simple parson to the highest post in the Hungarian Catholic hierarchy. In spite of all the trials and tribulations he had to undergo, he never changed at his core: he never failed to persist in being meek in order to help the poor and the oppressed, firm in order to fight against injustice, and constant in the expression of his faith.

EARLY YEARS AND STUDIES

His story began in the village of Csehimindszent, not far from the western border of Hungary, where he came into the world on 29 March 1892 as József Pehm. He adopted the surname Mindszenty in 1941, partly to honour his native village, and partly to express his disagreement over the growing German influence in Hungary. He gained his profound religious faith from his family. His mother, Borbála Kovács, proved to be one of his strongest supporters even in his adulthood. He was a student of the Premonstratensian High School of Szombathely between 1903 and 1911 and he graduated with excellent grades. In 1911, he went on to study at the theological college faculty of the Szombathely diocese. During these years, he had the opportunity to travel across the western part of Hungary and to gain a deeper insight into the everyday lives of the locals.

TEACHING CAREER AND PUBLIC LIFE

Having finished his theological studies in 1915, he served at a small village in the Western part of Hungary, called Felsőpaty. Following a period of one and a half years serving as a catechism teacher and curate there, on 26 January 1917, he was sent to Zalaegerszeg¹ to be a teacher of catechism in the public

¹ A medium-sized town located about 60 kilometres from the Austrian, the Slovenian and the Croatian borders, respectively

high school for boys. He began to get involved in public life at the end of World War I, under the influence of social movements appearing in the wake of the Hungarian military collapse. In February 1919, he became a member of the preparatory committee of the parliamentary elections. His public activity was rebuked by Mihály Károlyi's "civic democratic" government, hence, on 9 February 1919, when he was on his way to arrange some affairs in Szombathely, the police arrested him on suspicion of "counter-revolutionary incitement" and confined him to the Bishops' Palace. On the day of the Hungarian Communists' coup, 21 March, he was transported to the lockup at the town courthouse. From there, he was taken back to Zalaegerszeg on 15 May, where the head of the Communist directorate allowed him to stay in town on the condition that he refrained from any clerical activity. Since he did not comply with this term, he was expelled from Zala county as an "incorrigible element" on 20 May. His native village was designated as his permanent place of residence; moreover, he was obliged to show up twice a day in front of the village workers' council. He was able to return to Zalaegerszeg in August 1919, after the fall of the short-lived Communist regime.

A few years later, in 1921, he was appointed parson of the same town, a function he then held for 25 years. Over this period, he did his best to modernize his parish, and to help the poor. He had the Franciscan Church and Monastery of Zalaegerszeg built and he founded several schools, such as the mothers' home and teacher training college of the Notre Dame Sisters. He set up sheltered accommodation for the poor, and he supported rural boys from unfavourable circumstances during their studies. Furthermore, in order to help the poor and promote their integration into religious life, he established the organization of "home apostles", which involved the believers of the parish who, in their free time, visited the families of the neighbourhood and helped out as best as they could wherever it was needed.

He also strove to enliven the cultural life of Zalaegerszeg, so he stirred up the activities in the catholic cultural house and contributed to the establishment of the Göcsej Museum. As a part of his endeavours, in 1918, he established a newspaper, too, which he edited himself and published in a printing house also founded by him. In this newspaper, and in other newspapers as well, he firmly represented Catholic spirituality, striving to get it to prevail. After a while, he undertook a leading role in the regional and national clerical public life seeking to find solutions for ardent social issues, and he stood up for the teachings of the church formulated in the papal encyclicals². He also tried to draw attention to the dangers of both Communism and Nazism, which posed a threat not only to the Hungarian Catholic Church but to Hungarian society as a whole. His outstanding pastoral activity was acknowledged by both the Hungarian Catholic Church and the Holy See³.

² Circular letters issued by the Pope [editor's note]

³ The episcopal jurisdiction of the Catholic Church in Rome (popularly but incorrectly "The Vatican") [editor's note]

WORLD WAR II

With the outbreak of World War II his public activity intensified. In 1939, Prime Minister Pál Teleki asked him to take over the leadership of the Trans-Danubian National Political Service. The major goal of this organization was to counterbalance the propaganda activity pursued both by Germany, which tried to expand its influence on Hungary through the German National Socialist organization, Volksbund, and through the Hungarian ultra-right Arrow Cross Party.

Pope Pius XII appointed Mindszenty Bishop of Veszprém on 4 March 1944, in a very ominous period, just a few days before the German occupation. His ordainment took place six days after the invading German forces marched in on 19 March. The freshly appointed chief pastor was deeply concerned about the new political situation in the aftermath of the invasion. He wrote a confidential letter to primate archbishop Jusztinián Serédi on 14 April, warning him about the strengthening of the ultra-right wing powers and requesting him to intervene with Governor Horthy in order to hinder their advance.

As, in the wake of German occupation, the persecution of Jews had begun, Mindszenty stood up for them with words and deeds alike, protesting against the establishment of countryside ghettos and deportation. He also endeavoured to help them in his diocese: he requested his priests to show brotherly love towards the Jews signing up for baptism, and made their conversion rite to Christianity faster. He forbade the Catholic institutions from accepting any goods or realties plundered from the deported Jews. At the time of the mass deportation of the Jews from the countryside, he appealed directly to Governor Horthy in his letter of 19 June 1944, begging him to stop at least the deportation of the baptized children of Jewish ancestry.

His tremendous efforts along with other voices from among the Catholic leaders against the persecution of Hungarian Jews also contributed to the cancellation of the deportation from the Budapest Ghetto in the summer of 1944.



József Mindszenty hearing a confession in public during the Eucharistical World Conference that was held in Hungary in 1938

ARCHIVE OF THE HOUSE OF TERROR MUSEUM

In seeking to help the Jews, he also confronted with the national socialist Arrow Cross Party. First, he forbade them to have a thanksgiving holy mass in the Franciscan Church of Veszprém to celebrate the deportation of the Jews. Then, at the end of October, after the Arrow Cross Party had seized power with German support, Mindszenty along with two other bishops elaborated a memorandum for the new government and demanded that all fighting in the Trans-Danubian region of Hungary should cease immediately because the war no longer served the interests of the Hungarian people. To retaliate against his



Mindszenty and other high-ranking clergymen in 1948, a year before his arrest

ARCHIVE OF THE HOUSE OF TERROR MUSEUM

action, the local authorities intended to occupy his Bishop's Palace crowded with refugees and to use it for military purposes. Because Mindszenty refused to obey this demand, he was arrested on 27 November 1944. First, he and his priests and novices were held at the local county jail, but on 23 December, as the front line was approaching, they were transported to the westernmost part of the country, Sopronkőhida, where there was a big prison filled with numerous adversaries of the Arrow Cross government, many of whom were later executed.

In April 1945, after the front line and the remnants of the Arrow Cross Party members had left the country, Mindszenty and his fellow inmates were released. Thus, Mindszenty could resume his service in Veszprém, where he strove to undo the

material and moral devastation caused by the war. As a bishop, he was to carry on the active, organizational service he used to perform back in his Zalaegerszeg years. Even though he could only hold this position for a very limited time, he did a lot for his diocese; in just half a year he founded 34 new parishes and 11 new village schools.

As his predecessor had died in March 1945, Pope Pius XIII appointed Mindszenty the archbishop of Esztergom on 16 August 1945. With this nomination, Mindszenty became the leader of the Hungarian Catholic Church. The Pope ordained him as cardinal in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome on 21 February 1946.

SOVIET OCCUPATION

After World War II, Hungary was occupied by Soviet troops, and started to fall within the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, so there was no scope for any truly democratic transition. Mindszenty spoke

out on behalf of democracy many times in many places. In his chief pastoral letter issued before the autumn elections in 1945, he already took a clear-cut stand, saying: "Hungarian life has drifted from one total tyranny to another one." Mindszenty also carried on his work to fight against injustice and for the rights of the oppressed. He wished to protect everyone whose human rights had been offended, regardless of origin, nationality, religious belief or social status. During the time of the foreign occupation and the unfolding Communist dictatorship, when the gradually silenced government and political parties could not voice these opinions, he undertook the burden of expressing his concerns about the key issues of Hungarians. He paid close attention to the fate of those arrested and interned, and he went around visiting all the prisons and internment camps crammed with the political adversaries of the new regime. He sought to find ways to have the Hungarian prisoners of war and civilian internees who had been deported to the Soviet Union brought back home.

As the end of World War II brought about massive deportations which primarily hit the Hungarian and German minorities living beyond the borders of their native land, Mindszenty protested against the persecution of Hungarians in the former Hungarian territories of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and against the deportation of Germans from Hungary. Furthermore, he also remonstrated against the violent and inhumane atrocities committed during the forced relocation of the Slovak-Hungarian population, which aimed at eliminating Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia. The archbishop firmly opposed the gradually advancing new Communist dictatorship. This brave staunchness was the root of the respect and unprecedented popularity that surrounded him.

Apart from standing up to the new regime and its inhuman practices and standing up for the oppressed and the maltreated, he also tried to give hope to the devastated country through the power of faith. He did his best to revive the Catholic religion. His pastoral and preaching charisma glowed particularly between 1945 and 1948. In his sermons the themes of propitiation⁴, a pious life, respect for the Virgin Mary, adoration of the Hungarian saints and purity of family life held central positions. He also organized a grandiose event called the "Virgin Mary's Holy Year" (the Virgin Mary had been the patron of Hungary for centuries), which took place between 15 August 1947 and 8 December 1948, and attracted enormous crowds of believers. To illustrate the true dimensions of this event, suffice to say that the different shrines across the country were visited by 1.5 million and by 1.7 million pilgrims on 15 August and 8 September 1947, respectively, while, in October 1947, about 480,000 young people and workers took part in a congress held in Budapest. In the meantime, authorities of domestic state affairs controlled by the Communists banned the Catholic associations and school congregations, threatened the priests and hindered believers in practicing their religion. So, it was truly meaningful that this enormous

⁴ Becoming reconciled to God (atonement) [editor's note]

mass movement took place despite all the anti-clerical campaigns and open attacks by the Communist authorities.

MINDSZENTY'S ARREST

As democratic parties and organizations had been forced to disintegrate between 1947 and 1948, it became crucial for the new government to eliminate the ultimate major organizations capable of influencing and mobilizing huge masses: the four chief religious denominations in the country. The Catholic Church was the biggest of the four – embracing more than two-thirds of the whole population – and had the most steadfast leader, so it was little wonder that Catholics were exposed to the harshest attacks. Consequently, after almost a year of preparation, Mindszenty was arrested in his Primate's Palace in Esztergom on 26 December 1948. The trumped-up charges against him were treachery, plotting the fall of the republic, espionage and trafficking foreign currency. He was taken into custody and brought to the State Protection Authority's Budapest headquarters, the infamous building and torture chamber at 60 Andrásy Road (the State Protection Authority, or ÁVH, was the new Hungarian state's secret police service, notorious for its methods of interrogation and brutality). Accordingly, Mindszenty himself had been interrogated and tormented for a long time before his orchestrated show-trial started at the beginning of February. As a matter of fact, the whole process against Mindszenty, from the very outset, had been directed and carried out according to the guidelines issued by the Communist party leader Mátyás Rákosi himself.

His "public" court hearing took place between 3 and 5 February 1949. At those times cases were heard by the so-called People's Court. These courts were set up after World War II to bring war criminals to justice, but they continued to function even after their primary goal was fulfilled. They operated as a kind of jury whose members were made up of parties cooperating with the Communists. As such they served as a tool for condemning the Communists' social or political enemies. At Mindszenty's trial, as directed by Rákosi, the jury members belonging to the Smallholders' Party pleaded for 15 years in a penitentiary, the Peasants' Party jury member pleaded for life imprisonment, while the two Communist party jury members pleaded for the death penalty to be imposed on the defendant Mindszenty.

Finally, the court sentence issued on 8 February pronounced life imprisonment on the cardinal, and this was also approved by a superior court trial of the National Council of the People's Courts held on 6 July 1949.

The court sentence caused a great uproar in the Western world. Both Pope Pius XII and U.S. President Harry S. Truman condemned the decision. The Hungarian government was given a British-American memorandum on 2 April 1949, which stated that the country was breaching the basic human

rights stipulated in the 2nd article of the peace treaty and the basic rights to freedom. The General Assembly of the United Nations also condemned the behaviour of the government and declared the cardinal's imprisonment to be an international breach.

Mindszenty was held in solitary confinement in a jailhouse and later in a public prison. However, his health deteriorated as a consequence of the torture as well as the physical and psychological terror he suffered. Since the Communist regime would not have benefited from his martyrdom in a prison cell, he was transported to the countryside and kept under house arrest from the summer of 1955. But even when under house arrest, he was isolated from the outside world and had no access to the printed press or radio.

A BRIEF TASTE OF FREEDOM

In October 1956, the Hungarian people had had enough of the oppression they had suffered for almost a decade and, after student demonstrations across the country, on 23 October, they sparked a revolution that later developed into a freedom fight against Soviet oppression. A few days after the outbreak of the revolution, on 30 October, Mindszenty was set free by a group of Hungarian soldiers. The very next day he was in Budapest and working with great zeal and devotion. He had a string of negotiations with politicians, members of the episcopacy, leaders of his diocese, with Minister of State Zoltán Tildy, leading officials of the Calvinist and Lutheran churches, and even

PERSECUTION OF CHURCHES UNDER COMMUNIST REGIMES

● "Religion is the opium of the people" – this quotation of Karl Marx defined the attitude towards religion by all Communist regimes. The church was a competitor of the Communists and their dogmatic atheist ideology, particularly in countries with a low level of education and literacy. Therefore some external forms of religious rituals were simply taken over by the Communists. The similarity is evident between the cult of icons of the Greek Orthodox Church and big public portraits of Communist leaders, and also between religious cross processions and compulsory public processions on Communist holidays under portraits of the leaders and slogans.

During 1918-1943 the clergy were brutally persecuted in the Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands of clergymen were executed, monasteries were closed, churches were demolished and church property was confiscated. In 1943 Stalin, until then referred to as the Antichrist by religious people, decided to use the people's religiousness in his propaganda – the repressions against the Russian Orthodox Church were cancelled and priests were ordered to pray for the victory of the Soviet army. After WWII the Communist power continued to oppress the churches. Church services were allowed, but the brutal atheist propaganda and persecution of distinguished clergymen continued, including abduction and murders of priests by the State Security. The churches were infiltrated by the secret police, both among clergy and churchgoers. Believers were intimidated and preferred to conceal their faith. However, the policy was somewhat different in different countries. In Poland the Catholic Church managed to maintain its position among the people, while e.g. Albania was declared to be an atheist country. In East Germany where the churches profited from connections with their West German counterparts, Protestant Church circles played an important role in the dissident movement which led to the fall of the totalitarian regime.

with representatives of foreign aid organizations. Upon the request of Prime Minister Imre Nagy, he delivered a 15-minute speech that was broadcast via the Free Hungarian Radio station on 3 November. He expressed that even though he had been suffering for years, he had no rancour in his heart; he supported the objectives of the freedom fight and outlined a future democratic society to the public.

However, the very next day, 4 November 1956, after an attack on the country by Soviet troops, he was forced to request political asylum from the Embassy of the United States. Initially, he presumed that his stay there would last only a short period time due to the expected international pressure on the Soviet Union. However, his “temporary” political haven at the embassy lasted 15 years. At the embassy, he was informed about the news and events in Hungary and the world from the media and personal discussions. Forced into passivity, the chief pastor spent his time writing his diary, conducting historical research and elaborating his memoirs.

The Government of Hungary would only have approved of his leaving the country on condition that the Vatican give guarantees that the primate would not talk about his court sentence, his custody, and the general conditions in Hungary. They also demanded Mindszenty’s renunciation of his title as archbishop. Although the Holy See refused these terms for a long time, on 9 September 1971, an agreement was finally reached on the cardinal’s fate – but behind his back.

EXILE FROM HIS HOMELAND

Eventually, obeying the request of Pope Paul VI, Mindszenty left the embassy for Rome on 28 September 1971 and stayed there until 23 October 1971. Then he moved to Vienna, where the Hungarian Catholic Church had a seminary of its own, and settled down there. He engaged in very intense priestly activity; he considered it his duty to strengthen the faith and national identity of Hungarians scattered all over the world. The exiled chief pastor visited North and South America, South Africa, Australia as well as New Zealand, and was greeted with the greatest enthusiasm and respect everywhere, while many people paid him visits at his residence in Vienna.

The cardinal’s undiminishing authority and the spectacular success of his pastoral activity during his journeys irritated the Hungarian Communist leaders. They reminded the Vatican that the primary condition of the negotiations about the primate’s release had been his renunciation of the archbishop’s seat of Esztergom. Thus, Pope Paul VI, as a gesture of the policy of “opening” towards the Eastern socialist countries, declared the archbishop’s seat of Esztergom to be vacant on 18 December 1973. Mindszenty complied with the pontifical decision and did not use the title of archbishop any more. However, he did not retire: he went on performing his zealous ecclesiastical activity until his death on 6 May 1975 in Vienna.

In accordance with his last will, he was buried in the St. Ladislaus Chapel of the Holy Church of Mariazell on 15 May 1975. A large number of mourning believers took part in the funeral ceremony, and in his tomb consecration on 30 May 1976. However, this tomb was not intended to be his final resting place since in his testament Mindszenty had expressed his wish to rest in peace in the soil of his homeland as soon as it became a free country. The solemn repatriation of his mortal remains and the reburial ceremony in the vault of the Basilica of Esztergom took place on 4 May 1991.

At the end of 1989, the Public Prosecutor’s Office of Hungary ordered the posthumous retrial procedure of the Mindszenty case. He was “rehabilitated” on 18 May 1990. The process of his beatification was initiated in the autumn of 1996. His full legal compensation took place no sooner than 2012.

Years after his death, Cardinal Mindszenty’s memory is still alive, which was eloquently demonstrated by the innumerable celebrations and commemorations held on the 120th anniversary of his birth. His true and unswerving character keeps on setting a good example for all Hungarians, giving them hope and comfort. As such, he will always remain what the Hungarian people know him as: the Conscience of Hungarians.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLIC FOUNDATION FOR THE RESEARCH OF CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN HISTORY
AND SOCIETY – HOUSE OF TERROR MUSEUM

JÓZSEF UNGÁR was born on 3 February 1932, in Vörösberény in West Hungary. He came from a worker's family; however, his social status according to official documents was intellectual. His father was a painter, his mother a seamstress. Due to his family's financial problems, he started working after the first year of secondary school. In 1951 József and a group of his friends founded an anti-Communist movement. The resistance organization aimed at weakening the dictatorship, reinstating pluralism and democracy. They armed themselves as well as they could and planned action against the Communists. They established clandestine foreign contacts and started carrying out espionage activities. József was arrested in October 1952. He was tried together with his friends, sentenced to death and executed in 1953 at the age of only 21. His mortal remains have not been found.



ARCHIVE OF THE HOUSE
OF TERROR MUSEUM

József Ungár

An Anti-Communist Resistance Fighter

written by Dorottya Baczoni

In Hungary, the Communist dictatorship, based on the Soviet model, was established progressively after 1945. The new political, social, and economic system provoked different reactions from society. Broadly, one part of society chose resignation, while the other part resisted, either passively or actively.

Here, we tell the story of an active resistance fighter, the story of a young boy who stood up against the Communist regime and its repressive authority. He was the leader of the Hungarian National Defence Association⁵, and he laid down his life for it. His activity took place in Hungary, at the beginning of the 1950s, a period called the Rákosi era. It was a one-party system which strove to preserve its power by means of terror. Terror was maintained by the political police force called ÁVO until 1948 and ÁVH from that time on.

József Ungár and his friends founded an organization in their village against the totalitarian regime. It took only one year till they were arrested and then executed. The case of József Ungár and his followers clearly shows us how the political system and justice worked in Hungary at that time.

These young boys believed that the system could be abolished and those in power overthrown.

EARLY DAYS

József Ungár was born on 3 February 1932, in Vörösberény, which, at the time, was a part of the town of Balatonalmádi in West Hungary. He came from a worker's family; however, his social status as recorded in official documents was intellectual. Due to his family's financial problems, he started working after the first year of secondary school. His father was a painter, his mother a seamstress. He had a sister and a brother who lived in Germany. First, he became a registry clerk at the sport office of Veszprém, and then he was promoted to the position of head of the office. He was member candidate of the MDP (which was the Hungarian Working People's Party founded in 1948, after merging of the Communist and the Social Democratic Party, and that soon became the country's only party) and of the DISZ (Union of Working Youth).

Ungár's school years turned out to be decisive for the movement as he and three of his associates,

⁵ Magyar Nemzetvédelmi Szövetség. There has been more than one organization in Hungary's history that could be translated to English as Hungarian National Defence Association [editor's note]

Jenő Hugó Hatvári, Gábor Kuti and István Tolner were classmates in primary school. One day, a friend of Ungár's found the body of a man who had been beaten to death. He had been murdered by the political police of Veszprém, which was the capital of the county. This case made such a deep impression on Ungár that he decided to organize a resistance group with his friends who shared common values.

THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL DEFENCE ASSOCIATION

In 1951, they founded a movement, first called the Hungarian Partisan Association, and then renamed as the Hungarian National Defence Association. The leader of both organizations was József Ungár himself. Their main goals went against the so-called "people's democracy". Actually, as every democracy is based on the will of the people, the name "people's democracy" was something quite meaningless. Communists still named their system as such, trying to conceal the real driving force of their dictatorship. Ungár and his associates demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the country, and the restitution of both pluralism and the democracy of 1948. They were propagating these principles both privately and openly in school newspapers. They took a vow to Ungár, they promised to be humble servants of the movement and agreed that the punishment of a traitor would be death. The oath was pronounced in ceremonial circumstances, while the Hungarian National Anthem was played on a gramophone. *"I... the son of the Hungarian resistance movement swear that I will be a faithful partisan of the Hungarian National Defence Association."* They also had a common certificate and a seal. The meetings were held at Ungár's apartment in Vörösberény.

What were the aims of the organization? They tried to gather more members, weapons, to prepare themselves in case a new World War broke out; they intended to support the Western armies should they appear on the territory of Hungary as well as to carry out terrorist attacks against the Soviet and the Hungarian Communist army. They managed to acquire some weapons but most of them were used during World War II, and were of little use. They also found an old and valuable revolver; it had been made in the 19th century and did not have a cartridge, but an expert at their trial confirmed that it was "suited for the extinction of human life". The group possessed two submachine guns, two pistols and three or four hand grenades. They planned to blow up railways and bridges in the neighbouring towns (Eplény and Vörösberény), and to damage the telephone network. On one occasion in May, József Ungár and Hugó Jenő Hatvári painted "antidemocratic" graffiti along a major road. They had a hand grenade with them in case they were caught.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE WEST

The organization had foreign contacts, too. One of its members, Lajos Sz. Molnár, escaped to the West with Ferenc Bata. Their mission was to establish connections with the Western world that might have

helped them by providing weapons and financial aid. They had connections with Graz in Austria, from where they got regular arms supplies.

Ungár wrote three encrypted letters to the West giving information about the Veszprém Metal Works where machine gun cartridges were produced. He detailed how many workers were in the factory, the proportion of women and men and he also wrote down the registration plate numbers of about 20 Hungarian and Soviet cars. For handing over that information, first he received 500, and later 300 Hungarian Forints. Other members of the organization also helped him to get the information.

Ferenc Bata came home on 22 September 1952 for three days. He stayed in the attic at Ungár's flat. He taught the basics of espionage to the group every night: cryptography, recruitment, etc. Ungár gave him unfilled housing application forms and sport cards⁶ to take abroad.

ARREST AND TRIAL

József Ungár had taken Ferenc Bata to Ják⁷ on his own motorcycle before he left the country. However, Bata was arrested just before crossing the border. Ungár returned to Vöröberény, and then went to work at the Sport Office on 1 October. Someone persuaded him that he had to do something in the countryside and asked Ungár to take him on his motorcycle. When they arrived at a café in Veszprém, the man put a gun against his back and said: *"Turn right here, not there."* They entered through an iron gate, where Ungár was arrested by the ÁVH. After a few days, all the members of the Hungarian National Defence Association were arrested. When they met again, Ungár said indignantly: *"I let myself be tortured for two days to help you escape. But you didn't realize what this was all about. I didn't show up for two days."*

First, they were kept in the building of the ÁVH in Veszprém, and then transferred to the Fő Street Prison in the capital, Budapest.

The first trial was held on 5 February 1953. Ungár was charged with armed conspiracy against the state, high treason, and espionage. His attorney insisted that he was too young and irresponsible to fully understand the seriousness of his acts. Ungár's last words at his trial were: *"I didn't know I was committing such a serious crime. I grew up alone without parents⁸. I am young; I appeal for a light sentence."*

The court found him guilty of espionage and crime against the state, for which he was sentenced to death by hanging and complete confiscation of properties.

The first four defendants made an appeal, which was refused on 16 April 1953: *"At the infliction of punishment, the court of first instance pointed out rightly the high social risk of the accused activity. All the*

⁶ Cards issued to members of sports federations [editor's note]

⁷ A village in Vas county, on the western boundary of Hungary

⁸ This was not strictly true but he was pleading for leniency and trying to appeal to the judge [editor's note]

accused are enemies of our nation that has embarked on building socialism; their goal was to pull down the power of working people with imperialist forces. The secondary defendant was the actual leader of the conspiring band. He not only organized the movement, but was also active in espionage. In light of these facts, the death penalty is the only decision that sufficiently serves the interest of the people's democracy, and so the appeal has to be refused."

In the record of the appeal hearing, on 16 April 1953, Ungár said: *"The weapons were all unusable, we collected them during the war as children. We didn't want a serious movement; I understood the seriousness of my crimes only after the investigation had started. The data were all well known in the neighbourhood. The initiative came from Sz. Molnár; it was him who gave me the orders, and we founded our organization out of childishness, not for political purposes. I deeply regret my actions, I am asking for a benign punishment."*

In the end, on 14 July 1953 the Military High Court did not pardon Ferenc Bata and József Ungár, but Jenő Hugó Hatvári's and István Turi's death penalties were changed to life imprisonment.

The military court did not regard their young age as a mitigating circumstance in order to pass a lighter judgment than the death penalty.

According to one of his associates, Ungár bore the tortures quite well. He didn't collapse at lamp light, which is why they made him stand in water, where he developed kidney and bladder inflammation; he had constant strangury, but he got medicine for longer when the doctor learned that he had been sentenced to death. József Ungár and Ferenc Bata were executed in the courtyard of the military prison on 18 August 1953. József was just 21 years old at the time of his death.

Even when he ended up in prison, Ungár refused to believe that someone had betrayed the organization. He was not religious before, but he converted to Christianity in prison and became a believer.

His mortal remains have not been found, but a headstone keeps his memory alive in the cemetery in Vörösberény. A statue was erected for him at his birthplace, Balatonalmádi, on 25 May 2002 with the text reading: *In memory of "vitéz" József Ungár, 1932–1953. Executed by the Communist dictatorship because of his participation in the national resistance movement. 2002.*

His picture can be found on the wall of the House of Terror Museum in Budapest, reminding everyone of the courage and determination of these young boys.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE PUBLIC FOUNDATION FOR THE RESEARCH OF CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPEAN HISTORY AND SOCIETY – HOUSE OF TERROR MUSEUM

SLOVENIA

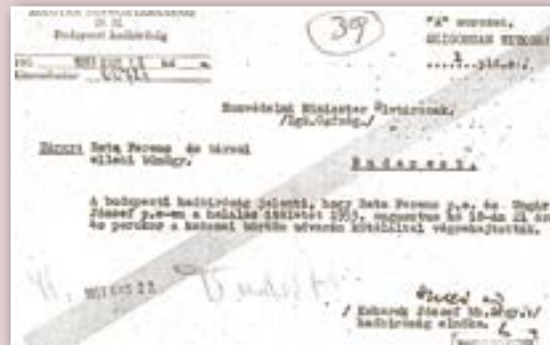
Until 1918 most of the territory of present-day Slovenia belonged to the Austro-Hungarian province of Carniola. In October 1918 the Slovenian National Council decided to join Slovenia to the Yugoslavian state. Some Slovenian lands were annexed by Italy.

FASCIST REGIME AND NAZI OCCUPATION

After Benito Mussolini came to power in Italy in 1922, violence was exerted against the Slovenian minority in the regions of Trieste, Gorizia and Istria. The Axis forces invaded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, dividing Slovenian territory among Germany, Italy, Hungary and the State of Croatia, founded after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. A strong Communist partisan liberation movement was formed. From 1942, the war extended into a civil war between partisans and anti-Communist forces, leading to massacres carried out around the end of the war by the partisans.

COMMUNIST REGIME

At the end of WWII, approx. 130,000 people were killed by Tito's Yugoslav Army without any trials, among them approx. 15,000 Slovenians. Many of them were civilians. More than 600 hidden mass graves have been found in Slovenia so far. After WWII Slovenia became part of Communist-led Yugoslavia. Concentration camps, secret political police, religious persecution, forced exile, collectivisation, nationalisation, show trials and censorship were part of everyday life. Demos, a democratic coalition, won the first free elections in April 1990. Slovenia became independent on 25 June 1991.



Document sent to the Minister of Defence by the presiding judge of the military court, announcing that Ferenc Bata and József Ungár have been executed

ARCHIVE OF THE HOUSE OF TERROR MUSEUM

IVANA was born in 1901 into a family of farmers and traders in a small village in the Vipava Valley, which was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and is now Slovenia. VIKTOR was from the same village as Ivana and they

knew each other as children. He was born into a poor family with eight children. Viktor's medicine studies were paid for by Ivana's father, his future father-in-law. Ivana and Viktor spent several years living in Yugoslavia before moving to the northern part of Slovenia, which was occupied by German troops in 1941. Having experienced forced Italianization in their youth, the

couple now faced Germanization. After WWII, the Communists came to power. One May night in 1948 Viktor set off on his bicycle to tend to a patient and never came home. He was murdered by the Communist secret police. Ivana never married again. She died in 1994.



FAMILY ARCHIVE
OF LJUDMILA VALIČ

Ivana and Viktor Valič

A Life in Three Totalitarian Regimes

written by Andreja Valič Zver, PhD.

In the 20th century, Slovenes experienced three totalitarian regimes: Fascism, Nazism and Communism. The lives of Ivana and Viktor Valič were marked by violence from all three totalitarian regimes.

Ivana was born in 1901 into a family of farmers and traders in a small village in the Vipava Valley, which was then a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Due to their proximity to the Soča front, at the beginning of World War I the residents of the village were relocated to the interior of the country. After the end of the war, the western part of the Slovene territory, at the time inhabited mostly by Slovenes, was made part of Italy in accordance with the decision of the victorious superpowers.

The Vipava Valley, which was the home of the Valič family, shared this fate. For Slovenes, this was a period of Italianization, which was especially intensive after Mussolini's rise to power in 1922. Ivana had to speak Italian in school, and she could only use Slovene at home and in church. Schools, newspapers, official documents, first names and last names were in Italian only and the Slovene language was prohibited. Various forms of violence against Slovenes only intensified over the years.

ITALIANIZATION

Viktor was from the same village as Ivana and they knew each other as children. He was born into a poor family with eight children, all of whom were exceptionally talented. Unfortunately, they could not all afford to study. Viktor and his brother France were the only ones who, with the help of the villagers, managed to enrol in university. Viktor's medicine studies were paid for by Ivana's father, his future father-in-law, first in Prague and later in Graz. The young intellectual, who witnessed the horrors of the Soča front, loved returning to his native Vipava Valley. He and Ivana fell in love and in 1924 they got married.

Due to the pressures by the Italian Fascist authorities, they decided soon after the wedding to leave their home and move to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes¹. First Viktor moved to Ljubljana; Ivana

¹ A Balkan state that was renamed as Yugoslavia in 1929 [editor's note]



Valič family, Preddvor, spring 1944
FAMILY ARCHIVE OF LJUDMILA VALIČ

followed him one year later with their baby. Their first home was in Sodražica in the Dolenjska region, and then Viktor was sent to Preddvor in the Gorenjska region as a local doctor. He was considered a dangerous element by the Italian authorities. Viktor was painfully aware of the fact that he might never again embrace his parents, shake hands with his brothers and sisters and stroll through the vineyards and meadows of his home village. His fears were partially realised. The next time he returned home was six years later when his mother died.

Ivana and Viktor made a home for themselves and their four children in the Gorenjska region. Viktor was rather small with a skinny, but tough physique. In his youth, he was a good runner and he retained his physical speed. He was keen on sports, so he took an active part in the sporting life in Preddvor. Viktor was a member of the shooting association and he sometimes went to the village shooting gallery to relax. He took to skiing and all four of his sons followed his example. He found walks in nature relaxing, but he never walked far, as he was always conscious of the fact that a patient might need his help at any time. He enjoyed his work very much. He liked to receive people in his surgery and he never found it difficult

to spend a good part of his time on countless visits to patients in need of his help. On these visits, he was accompanied by his faithful companion – a bicycle with hand brakes.

Just before World War II, he used his savings to buy a motorcycle, which would significantly facilitate his home visits to patients. However, he did not have much luck with the motorcycle. At the beginning of the war, the vehicle was confiscated by a Yugoslav Army military courier, who wrecked it during his first ride. Viktor was left without his motorcycle and once again carried on in his old, familiar manner – by foot, by bicycle or rack wagon² on dusty tarmac roads and paths or on sleighs in the cold and deep snow in the winter.

When Germany attacked Yugoslavia in 1941, Viktor was mobilised in the Yugoslav Army, where he held the rank of sergeant. He was angry with the military authorities for incorrectly spelling his name (writing a soft “č” with an incorrect diacritical mark). The rapid disintegration of Yugoslavia in April found

² A horse-drawn wagon

him in Ratitovec, from where he fled to Ljubljana. Dressed in civilian clothes, sheltered by the night and in an air of great uncertainty and fear, he returned home on foot.

GERMANIZATION

In 1941 the Gorenjska region was occupied by Germans. The scenes from his home Vipava Valley were repeated once again. Ivana, Viktor and their four sons had to speak German in public, their first names and last name were Germanized, newspapers and books were published in German only and children in schools were punished for uttering a word of Slovene. Any movements of villagers were dangerous, under strict surveillance and prohibited during curfew hours.

As a doctor, Viktor was permitted by the occupying authorities to attend to urgent patients even between seven o'clock in the evening and seven o'clock in the morning, when other residents had to observe the curfew. The risks and dangers which already marked his trips to patients were thus accompanied by fear. Each visit meant a brush with death; each “doctor’s” action was under strict surveillance. In addition, the German occupying authorities had a German teacher move into their house, which also served as a surgery. The elder son was mobilised into the German Army and deployed to France, while the youngest two sons had to continue their schooling at a gymnasium in Klagenfurt. Amidst the raging of the war the family was split up and had to face difficult ordeals. People were plagued by fear, not only for themselves, but also for their loved ones.

German violence fuelled resistance. The troops of the Kokrica detachment were frequently on the outskirts of Preddvor, while Partisan informers and couriers were in the nearby settlements of Mače and Bašelj. There were several clashes between the German and the resistance forces, burning down of villages and cottages, shootings of hostages and secret night-time executions of people over alleged treason. Fear plagued everyone’s lives.

In 1943 Viktor received a call from the Kokrica detachment for mobilisation into the Partisan forces. He decided against leaving for the mountains, but remained with his patients instead and, in accordance with the Hippocratic Oath, helped all those in need. It is possible that his decision not to respond to the Partisan mobilisation sealed his fate. He continued with performing his



Viktor Valič
COLLECTION OF ANDREJA VALIČ ZVER, PHD

doctor’s duties both in the surgery and in the field, while regularly following the Radio Klagenfurt reports on the events on the world’s battlefields and keeping silent about his patients, German, Partisan and all others, in front of his family, especially the children. Each uttered word could signify a decision between life and death.

After the end of the war, he carried on with his work. He helped people who still needed his medical help and advice, prescriptions, injections, bandaging, assistance with births and childhood diseases, death certificates and occasionally he was just someone who lent a sympathetic ear to their daily problems. Scabies, rash and lice infestations appeared in addition to the diseases which were widespread and deadly before the war, especially tuberculosis. He treated Partisan invalids, who lived in the Danica Villa and orphaned children from Bosnia living in the castle next to the church. As a doctor he led first aid courses in Preddvor and in Jezersko. He advocated and promoted the construction of the Preddvor water supply system, and the use of this water for drinking and personal hygiene, as he was well aware that numerous infections were due to unclean water from streams and wells.

CHANGEOVER FROM ONE TOTALITARIAN REGIME TO ANOTHER

The Nazi authorities were replaced by Communist ones, with one form of totalitarianism taking the place of another. In the years after the war thousands of Slovenes (men, women and children) were imprisoned and murdered in woods, chasms and mine shafts, simply because the new Communist authorities feared that they might jeopardise their rule. Slovene territory became fields of death.



One May night in 1948, like so many times before, Viktor was called to attend to an alleged patient. He cycled off into the darkness on his bicycle, together with his brown leather bag containing first aid instruments. He never returned home. He was found dead, with a smashed skull, lying by the road under the mountains. In the dark of night, the locals heard his cries for help in the distance, but they did not know where they came from. Times were harsh, and knowing too much or asking too many questions was potentially fatal... The official cause of death mentioned a work-related accident, even though the locals living beneath the mountains can testify to this

day to the fact that two OZNA members carried out a vindictive act and fatally clubbed the “doc”. Ivana was left alone with four children. She accepted the official version of the story, as to do otherwise would have jeopardised her own life and the lives of her children. She never remarried and until her death in 1994 she cherished the memory of Viktor, the love of her life. The memory of “grandpa” lived on in pictures, in stories, and in caring for his grave and commemorative plaque at the site of the tragic event... The true cause of Viktor’s death was never discussed. Who knows what might happen to anyone who would try to research the background and the truth of this dark story, which gradually revealed itself in all of its dimensions only after Slovenia achieved its independence at the beginning of the 1990s.

● The author published an article on the life and work of Dr. Viktor Valič in the Preddvor collection of papers (Dr. Viktor Valič: Life and Work of a Country Doctor, in: Preddvor in time and space, edited by Tone Roblek, Preddvor 1999, pp. 357–361). The data on his life are preserved in the family archive, while the transcripts of oral testimonies on his tragic death are kept by the SCNR (Study Centre for National Reconciliation).

CONTRIBUTED BY THE STUDY CENTRE FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

JOŽE PUČNIK was born on 9 March 1932 into a family of farmers in the village of Črešnjevec near Slovenska Bistrica. It was in his secondary school years that he first encountered the lack of democratic qualities of the post-war Yugoslav regime. Together with two of his classmates, Pučnik founded a group that discussed the French revolution and human rights. After completing his military service he studied Philosophy and Comparative Literature at Ljubljana Faculty of Arts. Pučnik was an outspoken critic of the Communist regime of Josip Broz Tito. He was imprisoned for seven years and then forced into exile. He returned to Slovenia in the late 1980s and became the leader of the Democratic Opposition of Slovenia, which defeated the Communists in the first free elections in 1990. He died in January 2003.



FAMILY ARCHIVE OF MAG.
MAJDA PUČNIK RUDL

Jože Pučnik

A Story of a Dissident

written by Andreja Valič Zver, PhD.

Dr. Jože Pučnik is the best-known post-war Slovene political dissident. He bore persecution with incredible strength and decisively contributed to the most important act in Slovene political history – attaining independence.

A FREE-THINKER FROM HIS SECONDARY SCHOOL YEARS

Pučnik was born on 9 March 1932 into a family of farmers in the village of Črešnjevec near Slovenska Bistrica. As a young child he heard about nationalisations in the village, about “liquidations”, atrocities, acts of pressure. It was in his secondary school years when he first encountered the lack of democratic qualities of the post-war Yugoslav regime. Together with two of his classmates, Pučnik founded a group that discussed the French revolution and human rights. The informants in the classroom notified the authorities in Maribor and what followed was the first attempt to expel him from school. Pučnik fought it and protested by resigning from the youth organisation, while he continued to attend school. At the beginning of the 1950s, he and his classmates started publishing the illegal publication *Iskanja* (Searches). Pučnik said that “*only a few, perhaps five, issues were published. It had black covers, while Iskanja was written on them in white letters. There were some 10 or 12 of us taking part in this publication. It was not registered and we distributed it in secrecy. It had about 20 to 30 pages and it was typed by some girl. We published under pseudonyms. It was primarily a literary paper, but with a political feel.*” Pučnik contributed the introductory article for the first issue of *Iskanja*, a sort of a programme, which he himself described as partially oppositional and of course also a bit romantic. “*As far as I remember, I wrote that the borders were closed, that we were all surrounded by barbed wires and such things,*” he said.

Due to hearing information about his pending expulsion from school, Pučnik decided to withdraw himself. Only in this way was he able to sit the exam for the entire eighth year of secondary school and he passed it even though a few days before he was detained in the Maribor branch of the UDBA and taken to a judicial prison for questioning. After a full day of interrogation, during which he was accused of demolishing socialism, a house search of his home in Črešnjevec was carried out. Just before his baccalaureate examination, Pučnik was prohibited from attending the examination for one year by the

teachers’ assembly. He appealed to the Ministry for Education, claiming that he was no longer a pupil of the school, but a private student attending the exam independently. His expulsion from school was extended to four years. Pučnik was very upset by this decision. He decided to enter military service and was only allowed to take the baccalaureate examination after completing his service.

He studied Philosophy and Comparative Literature at Ljubljana Faculty of Arts. His colleagues with whom he spent his study years were the distinguished Slovene intellectuals Janko Kos, Taras Kermauner, Veljko Rus and Juš Kozak, and writers Venko Taufer, Dane Zajc and Dominik Smole. Pučnik became active in the student organisation, and he also wrote articles for the publication *Naši razgledi*³. The central issue of his early articles was the question of human freedom, with regard to which he came to the conclusion that one must “exercise freedom”, that is, actively strive to attain it. It was this active concept of exercising freedom which, in his own opinion, later caused him to end up in prison.

After his graduation in 1958, Pučnik was employed as an assistant at the department of philosophy. It seemed that this insightful young intellectual was looking at a successful career. However, things took a different turn. Pučnik’s articles, especially one in the publication *Revija 57*⁴ titled *Our Social Reality and Our Illusions*, in which he critically assessed the social situation, led to his arrest in the autumn of the same year.

Pučnik worked on the article *Our Social Reality and Our Illusions* in the summer of 1958. He tackled a sensitive issue, that is, the discrepancy between the ruling ideology and reality. The article was written on the basis of an article on the Party which Pučnik had written for the publication *Naši razgledi*. It drew attention to the gap between the people and the authorities and to the growing distrust the authorities had of the people. Pučnik’s wish to publish the article in *Revija 57* led to a great dispute between the members of the editorial board, but most of them voted in favour of the publication. Pučnik was very outspoken during these heated discussions, and it was not until many years later that he learned that the UDBA had eavesdropped on their conflicts, while an eminent Party member, Miha Marinko, allegedly said that the publication had to be eradicated. The university committee of the League of Communists prevented the publication of the aforementioned article.

POLITICAL ACTIVITY, ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT

Jože Pučnik became politically active in that same year. On 8 January 1958 he joined the League of Communists, as he believed that the system could be changed from within. However, Pučnik insightfully noted the fact that the student organisation was a mere tool in the hands of the Party, and its members “the

³ Meaning “Our Views” [editor’s note]

⁴ Meaning “Review 57” [editor’s note]

worst students”. His attempt at acting from within the structures soon fell through. Pučnik was not a man to merely go along with the course of events; he was by nature a man who transformed things. His belief that he would be able to change things from within, that he would be able to carry out a “march through institutions”, thus quickly ran up against limitations imposed by the system.

In the autumn of 1958, Pučnik was the subject matter of different political forums and, immediately afterwards, by law enforcement bodies. At the end of October 1958, he was detained and in the following months submitted to intensive interrogations in the Ljubljana prison. In the same year he was expelled from the League of Communists in absentia. At the extraordinary Party meeting, two UDBA members allegedly informed the participants that the State Security Administration had discovered Pučnik’s ties with emigration. His interrogator made an official note on the matter, stating that Pučnik’s attitude upon receiving the news of his expulsion was one of sarcasm.

In March 1959 the district court in Ljubljana sentenced Pučnik to nine years of harsh imprisonment. Pučnik allegedly attempted to found a group of people whose goal was to undermine the power of the working people. He supposedly plotted to found troikas⁵ to carry out acts of sabotage, and he also allegedly spread hostile propaganda against the state and social order in writing. With regard to this the indictment firstly mentioned the article *Our Social Reality and Our Illusions*. Pučnik of course never admitted to such absurd accusations.

After the verdict, Pučnik was placed in the Maribor jail from where he and a fellow prisoner attempted to escape after only one month. His fellow inmate was caught on the run, while Pučnik, horrified at the brutality with which the guards dealt with his unfortunate comrade, turned himself in. In an interview he gave at the beginning of the 1990s, he said that he was then “*brutally beaten and dragged away. I got one month of the bunker. Each night, they came to beat me up.*” In the following months and years he was submitted to severe violence in prison: prohibition of writing, night-time beating, sleep deprivation, nine months in a concrete solitary cell. He was only allowed a home visit after his mother fell gravely ill. On the occasion of the general amnesty in 1961, his sentence was shortened to seven years, while he was released on parole after five years in 1963.

Despite his parole, Pučnik wished to return to his intellectual activities and publishing work. He returned to Ljubljana and published a dissertation *On the Dilemmas of Our Agriculture*. It seemed that there had been a breeze of limited liberalization, although Pučnik remained sceptical of it.

⁵ Groups of three activists



Jože Pučnik, Ljubljana, February 1989
(founding congress of the Social-Democratic Association of Slovenia)
FAMILY ARCHIVE OF MAG. MAJDA PUČNIK RUDL

In his introduction to the piece Pučnik stressed that agriculture was not an economic problem, but that the revolutionary method had transformed it into an ideological, political and social problem. “Forcible” collectivisation was said to have caused great damage. Pučnik criticised “ruthless field activists” who committed violence against farmers. The publication was soon sold out, and it was reflected in the media as well. Due to a film review in 1964 he was once again arrested and charged with hostile propaganda. He did not manage to publish the article titled *On Methods and Perspectives of Social Action*, which led to his arrest and conviction. His parole was cancelled and he had to go to prison once again; this time to the Dob prison. He spent twenty months in solitary confinement.



Jože Pučnik at his home in Verje, summer 2002

FAMILY ARCHIVE OF MAG. MAJDA PUČNIK RUDL

EMIGRATION TO GERMANY

When he returned to freedom after serving two years, he unsuccessfully searched for a job. He felt excluded, cheated and lonely and fleeing abroad was at that time the only remaining option. After emigrating to the Federal Republic of Germany, he settled in Hamburg, where he made his living as an auxiliary worker in the zinc plant and in the port. When he decided to enrol in post-graduate study, the University of Ljubljana refused to issue him a graduation certificate. Without the copy of his university degree, he could not enrol in post-graduate study, which is why he enrolled in part-time study at the University of Hamburg, studied Sociology, Philosophy and Pedagogy and concluded his studies in 1971 with a PhD. He obtained the position of assistant professor of sociology at the University of Lüneburg, from where he retired as a senior academic councillor in 1989.

In the second half of 1980s, Pučnik once again actively joined politics. First as a publisher and then increasingly as a politician, his courage, determination and analytical ability made a very significant impact on the process of democratisation and attainment of independence in Slovenia.

RETURN HOME AND POLITICAL WORK

The liberal 1980s, linked to the publication *Nova revija*⁶, summoned him home. This was a time when the old system was falling apart, while the emerging new public was demanding new answers. Slovene

⁶ Meaning “New Review” [editor’s note]

civil society was being born. The arrest of Janez Janša and his colleagues triggered a mass movement for human rights and liberty. Alternative political organisations were being founded. Pučnik joined the Social-Democratic Association of Slovenia, which he led from 1989 onwards. He was one of the co-founders of the multi-party movement Demos, and also led it as the indisputable authority figure of the opposition. Demos won the first democratic election in April 1990 and carried out a historic role – it implemented formal democracy and in 1991 achieved independence for Slovenia.

Pučnik was not one to look for easy ways; he walked steep, untrodden paths, full of thorns and rocks. This is why his view was deeper and more far-reaching, and his judgements, decisions and actions carried a lot of weight. When in 1993 he handed the leadership of the party over to Janša, he dedicated himself to the parliamentary commission investigating post-war killings. He produced a report, which represents an excellent foundation for the search for reconciliation towards the Slovenes. Joachim Gauck, with whom Pučnik cooperated, had an easier time in Berlin where there was widespread consent about the need for totalitarian structures to be disintegrated and injustices redressed. In Slovenia, there is no such consent.

Pučnik never spoke much about the horrors he experienced in prison. However, he did write: *“The realisation that we lived in a brutal totalitarian system helps me give some meaning to all the experiences which I endured. The Communists never respected the basic right to the inviolability of life and liberty. Their regime was simply a totalitarian one, just like Italian Fascism and Hitler’s Nazism.”*

CONTRIBUTED BY THE STUDY CENTRE FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

ROMANIA

PRO-NAZI REGIME

From 1938-1940 Romania was a dictatorship under King Carol II, who abdicated in favour of his son Michael I, and during 1940-1944 under Prime Minister Ion Antonescu. The secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 stipulated a Soviet interest in Romanian Bessarabia, annexed by the Soviets in 1940. Romania joined the Axis in 1940 and fought against the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front, conquering the Moldova and Odessa regions. The Jewish population in regions occupied by Romania were subject to killings and deportations, though the majority of Romanian Jews survived WWII. Antonescu was arrested by King Michael I on 23 August 1944, several days before Soviet troops entered Bucharest.

COMMUNIST REGIME

On 6 March 1945, Communist Petru Groza was appointed Prime Minister with Soviet support. In 1946, the Communists falsified elections and constituted the government. In 1947, all other political parties were dissolved, King Michael I was forced to abdicate and, in 1948, the Romanian Constitution stipulated that the Communist Party was the only political force in Romanian society. Communism in Romania was marked by severe human rights violations and brutality of the Securitate (secret police). The regime collapsed violently in the Romanian Revolution of December 1989. The last Communist dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu, was court-martialled and executed.



ARISTINA POP was born in Lăpuș Land, north-western Romania, on 13 May 1931. She was the daughter of the forester Nicolae Pop – a leader of an anti-Communist resistance group in Romania – and Maria Pop. Her father saved a number of Jewish children from being deported to Auschwitz during the Hungarian occupation of 1940-45. After the war, in 1948, because he had hidden anti-Communist fugitives, Nicolae was forced to flee into hiding in the Țibleș Mountains. He took 17-year-old Aristina and her brother Achim with him. The rest of the family was deported to the steppes of southern Romania. After 4 years of leading resistance operations from the mountains, Nicolae was executed without trial. Aristina was imprisoned for 11 years, until the general pardon of 1964. She currently lives in Bucharest.



ARCHIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR STUDIES ABOUT COMMUNISM, THE MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM AND TO THE ANTICOMMUNIST RESISTANCE

Aristina Pop Săileanu

A Carousel of Terror

written by Romulus Rusan

In a house in the centre of Bucharest, hidden away at the bottom of a vegetable garden and orchard, there lives a lady with a sensational biography. The history that shaped her also prevented her from telling her story until recently.

Her father, a famous forester from Lăpuș Land (a region of north-western Romania), saved a number of Jewish children from being deported to Auschwitz during the Hungarian occupation of 1940-45, and is listed by the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem as one of the Righteous among Nations. But after the war, in 1948, because he had hidden anti-Communist fugitives in his canton, he himself was forced to flee into the Țibleș Mountains, threatened with arrest after rejecting the Securitate’s proposal that he become an informer. He took two of his children with him. The daughter was seventeen and had the mythological-sounding name Aristina. The son, Achim, was four years older. After their departure, the other members of the family – wife, other children, and numerous other closer or more distant relatives – were deported to the steppes of southern Romania.

In 1953, having led the Țibleș resistance group (see information box) for four years, seriously ill Nicolae Pop asked to be carried down from the mountains, so that he would not be a hindrance to his comrades in arms and in order to ransom his persecuted relatives. The Securitate men found him but did not wait for his illness to finish him off: they executed him without trial. Shortly thereafter those in the mountains were either shot or caught and convicted: Achim received twenty-two years and Aristina Pop twenty years imprisonment. Aristina spent eleven years in prison until the general amnesty of 1964, herself seriously ill, but protected by the friendship of her fellow sufferers, among whom she was always the youngest.

Aristina Pop has experienced the most terrible suffering, but she has always found a hand to protect her. She is a person who can



Aristina Pop’s family (L-R): back - Gheorghe Bendrea (brother-in-law), Ion Pop (brother), middle - Elena Bendrea (sister), Mariuca Pop (mother), Cornelia Pop (sister-in-law), front - Viorel Bendrea (nephew), Nicolae Pop (brother)

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Aristina Pop, photo from her arrest in 1953

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make herself loved precisely because she is incapable of hate. She disarms her interrogators with her ingenuousness, her female guards with the fact that she is young enough to be their daughter, her doctors with the selflessness of her youth. Although she lives among sick women and witnesses many of them dying beside her, she never loses her faith, she refuses to become resigned, she continues to hope. The intellectuals, peasant women, nuns and high-society ladies form an ideal world, a supportive community of ennobling suffering.

On her release from prison the Securitate attempts to make of use her, but she asks them rather to send her back behind bars.

She marries “on first sight” a young man, Nicolae Săileanu, who had been in the same prison and had fallen in love with her without knowing what she looked like, merely having heard her story. She has the same good fortune with her parents-in-law, into whose house she moves, and at work, where she is hired “without an autobiography”. She vanishes into the teeming city of Bucharest, cautiously, but without complexes.

IN TIMES OF TERROR, IN TIMES OF FREEDOM

How did such a person manage to make herself loved in a world of hatred and class struggle? The secret undoubtedly resides in an innate knowledge of how to remain normal in a world of abnormality.

Aside from these psychological data, Aristina Pop is also an exceptional witness and confessor. Her account is simple, clear and luminous. The numerous people alongside whom she lived – in the mountains,

in the prisons, and in private life after her release – are sketched by means of a single feature, the description of a gesture or biographical event, always the most flattering. A goodness that does not lead to the cheaply idyllic, but to an existential floating above the world’s misfortunes, a kind of “sanctity” in the state of sacrifice and suffering.

As documents, her confessions put an unexpectedly high figure on the number of those who resisted Communism and those who filled the prisons. Across the inherently narrow horizon of the hideout in the mountains or of the prison there file dozens, hundreds of people, behind whom stand thousands and thousands of others, hosts of trustworthy people, who suffer

in silence and are willing to help you. Many more then, in times of terror, than today, in times of freedom.

COINCIDENCES AND SURPRISES

The coincidences and surprises are astonishing. It sometimes happened that a number of members from the same family were held in the same prison without knowing of each other’s presence there. A prisoner sees her sister savagely beaten by the Securitate but does not recognise her because of her disfiguring wounds. An octogenarian father is sentenced to eighty years hard labour because he refuses to denounce his son, who has been parachuted into the country by the Americans. Prisoners are released from and return to the same prison, years later, in a carousel of terror. And finally, on her return home from prison, at first “Auntie Aristina” is recognised not by her elderly relatives, but by a twelve-year-old niece who was born during her absence and knows her only from the stories of others.

Likewise, unbelievable things sometimes happen: in a house in whose attic the partisans are hiding, a Party meeting is held, at the end of which the fugitives hear the now drunk Communists singing the refrain we have used as the title of a book: “Long live the partisans, / Here come the Americans.” Opportunism? Cynicism? Vain hope? For a country whose prisons were bursting at the seams with political prisoners, the American dream was a universal panacea, but also an illusion.

These are details which, albeit dependent on chance, speak of the terrifying dimensions and nuances, in space and time, of the prison-camp system.

THE ȚIBLEȘ RESISTANCE GROUP

An armed resistance group that operated in Lăpuș Land under the command of forester Nicolae Pop from Lăpușul Românesc. Over the course of its existence, the group had around twenty members, with alternations. The group clashed with the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs on numerous occasions. By adopting a defensive strategy – they never attacked – they managed to escape. In the winter of 1952, the group’s food store was captured. Securitate troops were spreading out through the mountains and the methods they used to annihilate the group diversified: they recruited an increasing number of informers, they threatened parents, siblings and relatives. These measures led the group to separate into smaller units in 1952, in order to resist more easily. In 1953, the Țibleș resistance group was completely crushed. One by one its members fell into the hands of the Securitate. Dumitru Hotico was shot in September 1952, Atanasie Oniga in January 1953 and Vasile Hotea in March 1953.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE CIVIC ACADEMY FOUNDATION – THE MEMORIAL TO THE VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM AND TO THE ANTICOMMUNIST RESISTANCE



Former political prisoners visiting the former political penitentiary Miercurea Ciuc, 1991

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REMUS RADINA was born into a poor Romanian family in 1924. Following the rigged elections of 1946, he resigned from his post as a sub-lieutenant in the army on the grounds that he had sworn loyalty to the people rather than the Party, to which he was now obligated to make an oath. He worked in the lowliest jobs to support himself while he studied International Law. He made several attempts to escape to the West. During interrogation after his failed attempts he lectured the Securitate officers on human rights. During his long years of imprisonment he went on hunger strike many times in defence of his persecuted fellow prisoners. In 1978, he managed to make his way to France where he wrote his book Testament from the Morgue, an account of his political imprisonment. He died in Paris on 7 May 2012.



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Remus Radina

A Normal Man in an Abnormal World

written by Romulus Rusan

An emigrant from a country in Eastern Europe, from where he had emigrated thirty-four years previously, died in Paris on 7 May 2012. He lived alone in a block of flats, cared for by a devoted compatriot who visited him daily to bring him food and medicine. He was buried in Montmartre Cemetery, where a plot had been prepared for him, and his tombstone reads simply: REMUS RADINA, Romanian.

Who was this Romanian, all too little known to the people of Paris? He was one of the most steadfast fighters for his country’s freedom. With his lifelong friend Cicerone Ionițoiu, he was the last bastion of the Romanian anti-Communist exiles in France, who were defined by their uncompromising nature, self-denial, faith and hope.

TESTAMENT FROM THE MORGUE

In 1978, Remus Radina managed to make his way to France, followed a year later by Cicerone Ionițoiu, following protests on the part of Romanian exiles, who demanded that Nicolae Ceaușescu¹ respect the 1975 Helsinki Accords, in particular the paragraph referring to freedom of movement. Arriving in Paris for a stay of two months to treat the illnesses he had contracted during ten years of interrogation and beatings in prisons and labour camps, Radina lived in an insalubrious one-room flat and worked part-time as an electrician while he wrote, sitting on a park bench, a 150-page book entitled Testament from the Morgue², an account of his political imprisonment. It was a book that revolutionised the Western view of repressive terror in Romania. Written in lapidary style, as if hewn from stone, packed with quotations and aphorisms from the oral lore of the prisons, as well as from the world’s great thinkers, the book became a bestseller. In the preface, the

¹ Leader of Communist Romania from 1965 to1989, General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party (1965-1989) and president of the Socialist Republic of Romania (1974-1989)

² Testament from the Morgue (a symbolic title, as the author had felt he was on the threshold between life and death ever since the beginning of his imprisonment) is a disturbing autobiography, a mixture of stubbornness and heroism, of intransigence in the face of tyranny and altruism towards fellows in suffering, of constancy towards the precepts of normality and sacrifice towards those in misery and helplessness.

great playwright Eugène Ionesco, a Romanian by origin, famous for his stylistic and moral intransigence, declared his wholehearted admiration for the barely known author, whom he placed among “the heroes and saints of our age.”

And so it was that Remus Radina became a model admired by friends and feared by those who threatened the freedom of his beloved country. Nevertheless, confronting all the risks, Radina returned to Romania, where the Securitate were to take their revenge on him. Followed everywhere, covertly filmed on the street, his telephone calls bugged (even in public telephone boxes), Radina was brought to trial in

October 1980 and in front of a public gallery with instructions to heckle him he was convicted of breaking the Press Law. The grounds: “publication of a work whose content is harmful to the state order in our country.” As a result of demonstrations in Paris organised by Cicerone Ionițoiu and numerous other exiles, Radina’s sentence was commuted to a fine and he was allowed to leave Romania, this time for good. And so began the final stage of Radina’s struggle, which was to last from 1980 until his death.

Returning to Paris, he was soon caught up in the activities of the Romanian exiles: tending the Soultzmatt Cemetery in Alsace, where 678 Romanian soldiers were buried during World War I; creating the tomb of the exiled anti-Communist hero in Paris; promoting via Radio Free Europe a proposed law to release political prisoners in Romania; celebrating annual Heroes’ Day; publication of articles about Romania. At the same time, he tried to treat the incurable disease he had contracted during his imprisonment.

His life was marked by countless seemingly utopian gestures of extreme dignity, but which have marked him down in history.

In 1946 he resigned from his post as a sub-lieutenant in the army on the grounds that he had sworn loyalty to the people rather than the

Party, to which he was now obligated to make an oath.

He worked in the lowliest jobs to support himself while he studied International Law, with which he clad himself for the rest of his life in order to protect, at least in theory, individual freedom.

In 1949 he fled to Yugoslavia, which he thought was freer than his own country, but there he was imprisoned in a labour camp before being delivered straight back into the arms of the Romanian Securitate.

Convicted and imprisoned for five years on the Danube-Black Sea Canal “construction site of death”, he defied his physical weakness, staging numerous hunger strikes, thirst strikes and silence strikes,



The cover of the book *Testament from the Morgue*

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not in his own defence, but in defence of his sick, brutalised and starving fellow prisoners, forced to perform labour that exceeded their strength. Attempts to force-feed him failed. He barricaded himself in his cell until a commission from the prosecutors’ office came to investigate and take measures to improve the inmates’ conditions.

Shortly after his release, in the autumn of 1956 he wrote a memorandum demanding the release of all political prisoners in Romania and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. On 10 December 1956 (International Human Rights Day) he delivered the memorandum to the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest. After leaving the embassy he was followed, in preparation for a new arrest, which made him determined to attempt to flee to Yugoslavia once more (the only possible escape route to the West for Romanians). He was arrested as soon as he set foot on Serbian soil and was once again delivered to the Securitate.

IMPRISONMENT

During the interrogations that followed, in Timișoara, he was humiliated and tortured by a Securitate officer, but he did not give up until he had lectured the officer on human rights, beginning with paragraphs from the U.S. Declaration of Independence and ending with articles from the Universal



Remus Radina, penal registration sheet, 1949

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FORCED-LABOUR CONSTRUCTION SITES UNDER COMMUNISM

● Forced labour of political prisoners and deportees together with criminals was largely used in the Eastern Bloc. Special prison camps were founded to provide the labour for bigger construction sites. Mortality of prisoners was high due to the hard work, violence of the guards, malnutrition, inadequate equipment and clothing and also safety and medical care. Terrible hygienic conditions meant diseases were rampant. Prisoners worked side by side with free workers, construction battalions of military conscripts, and volunteers of the communist youth. The most famous site that used the forced labour of political prisoners was the White Sea-Baltic Canal, opened in 1933. The city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur (from 1932), Baikal-Amur Mainline (1932–1984) and a lot of others followed. The 64 km-long Danube-Black Sea Canal, shortening the Danube waterway to the Black Sea, was the prime Romanian example. The canal was built during 1949-1953 mostly by political prisoners, but it was finalised only in 1974-1987 with the use of free labour and military construction units

Declaration of Human Rights passed by the United Nations in 1948. The proces verbal of the interrogation, discovered in the archives of the former Securitate, is unique: the victim explains to his torturer how many judicial and moral laws he is breaking. It is a version of David and Goliath. He is sentenced to ten years imprisonment and resumes his one-man strikes. But in the dreaded Gherla Prison, on 14 June 1958, his one-man protest becomes a general strike, involving hundreds of prisoners, making him a symbol of political imprisonment.

He grows accustomed to torture, to the diabolical prison with nails in the walls and water on the floors; and suffering, which he accepts and even incites, becomes his second nature. Word of him spreads throughout the Romanian Gulag and his jailers, cowed by his indifference in the face of death, come to rejoice when he is released and they finally see the back of him. But release from prison brings no respite, because surveillance, blackmail and threats on the part of the Securitate turn his life into a daily nightmare.

The fraternal gesture of the French authorities, who sheltered him after the hell he had endured, was in itself a recognition of the inhumanity of the political regime from which he came and, implicitly, of the abnormality of the Communist system in comparison with the normality of ordinary citizens, those who understand that the world is built (or ought to be built) from love, faith and hope...

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AND TO THE ANTICOMMUNIST RESISTANCE

BULGARIA

WORLD WAR II

The Kingdom of Bulgaria joined the Axis on 1 March 1941, occupying a part of Eastern Macedonia and Western Thrace after the German invasion of Greece. Bulgaria did not declare war on the Soviet Union; however it did so against the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The Bulgarian government saved its 50,000 Jews, however it collaborated with the Nazis on the deportation of 11,343 Jews from “New Bulgaria” to the Treblinka death camp. Tsar Boris died on 28 August 1943, after returning from a meeting with Hitler. On 5 September 1944, the Soviet Union invaded the country. A Communist coup followed on 9 September 1944.

COMMUNIST REGIME

A coup d'état on 9 September 1944 backed by the Soviet army installed a government led by the Communists. In 1946, Stalin's vassal Georgi Dimitrov became Prime Minister and a single-party dictatorship was established. Political opposition and religions were persecuted; the king fled the country. The last Communist dictator, Todor Zhivkov, stepped down after 35 years in power on 10 November 1989. The first free elections were held on 10 June 1990. They were won by the former Communists, the Bulgarian Socialist Party.



LYUDMILA SLAVOVA was born in 1913 into the family of a famous lawyer and Social Democrat politician and member of parliament. She graduated in law from Sofia University in 1936 and was a secretary of the Social Democrat Youth Union. She stood

up actively against the collaboration of Bulgaria with Nazi Germany. After the Communist coup she ran for election as a United Opposition candidate in the 1946 parliamentary elections. However, on the election day, while performing routine inspections of polling stations, she was abducted by a gang of men from the Workers' Youth Union (RMS), a Bulgarian Communist youth organization. They beat, tortured, and left her for dead. But she survived and continued to speak out against the Communist tyranny. Lyudmila Slavova died on 16 October 1948, aged 35, after being scalded with boiling water in the custody of the Communist state security. Her burial place is unknown.



FAMILY COLLECTION

Lyudmila Slavova

A Flower in the Sinister Machine

written by Angel Filchev

The name of Lyudmila Slavova means nothing to present-day Bulgarian citizens.

Today, apart from her surviving relatives and a narrow circle of like-minded members of the Social Democratic party destroyed by the Communists, the Bulgarian public has not even heard of her. That is not only her fate but also the fate of tens of thousands of Bulgarians – with unidentified graves doomed to oblivion by the totalitarian state and its epigones¹. Journalists in today's Bulgarian media avoid speaking of the victims of communism – in order not to remind people of the events that unleashed after the cataclysm of 9 September 1944. For the real owners of those media are mainly people from the former Communist State Security.

The events after 9 September 1944 are termed “Socialist Revolution” by the Communist party that usurped power with the “decisive help of the Soviet army.” With that term it tries to convince those who do not know the truth about the past that it had to commit crimes out of historical necessity – in the name of the progress of mankind towards the inevitable “bright Communist future.”

A TUMULTUOUS POLITICAL BACKGROUND

In the monstrous meat-grinder Lyudmila Slavova was just a little flower in the way of that sinister machine. She spent her childhood and youth in tumultuous and difficult times. She was born in 1913 into the family of a famous lawyer and Social Democrat activist. “Milya”, as her friends and relatives called her, grew up with the ideals of freedom, democracy and social justice and dreamt of peaceful and prosperous days for her home country, but her time was rather different.

Bulgaria's participation in World War I brought a nightmarish national catastrophe. The country was bleeding from everywhere – new territories with Bulgarian population were torn away from it. Thousands of homeless and ruined refugees whom the state could not take care of flocked in through its crippled borders. Indignation at the culprits of the catastrophe increased along with despair. Tsar Ferdinand lost his

¹ Inferior imitators [editor's note]

throne, riots broke out, and favourable conditions were created for the penetration of both the ideology and the agents of the newly-established Bolshevik empire in Moscow to the north, which also inspired the establishment of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP).

Russian intervention in its domestic affairs was nothing new for Bulgaria but it did take on new dimensions. In the Russian Bolsheviks' strategy Bulgaria was the main target in the Balkans in their attempts to instigate new "waves of revolutions" in Europe. The Bolshevik leaders never let go of the mirages of a world-wide Soviet socialist republic under their control. Moscow allocated considerable financial resources to destabilize society and strengthen the Communist agents in Bulgaria despite Soviet Russia's own state of starvation and ruin.

Poverty and diseases brought by World War I drove the masses in Bulgaria to join social movements and parties demanding social justice. Some of them were quite radical. A Communist wing split off the Social Democratic party. The anarchist groups grew in numbers. In 1920, the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BZNS) formed a government controlled solely by BZNS that defended the interests of small and middle-class rural landowners. Back then Bulgaria was an agrarian country with a weakly developed industrial sector and peasants made up the majority of the population, which determined their support for the government. But the BZNS-controlled government also employed some dictatorial methods to implement their policies.

On 9 June 1923, it was overthrown by a coup d'état led by the Military League and the People's Alliance, and Aleksandar Stamboliyski was tortured and killed. A period of violence ensued in the country. In addition to domestic factors, it was also inspired from abroad – from the consolidating totalitarian power in the Soviet Union. In September 1923, the Communist party functionaries Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov incited the peasants from North-western Bulgaria to revolt but the uprising was brutally suppressed by the regime of the "Democratic Alliance." The order to launch the uprising came from the Comintern² in Moscow.

After the September Communist mutiny Georgi Dimitrov and Vasil Kolarov fled the country. But more than 1,000 rebels were killed by the military and police forces of the Democratic Alliance government. Communist and anarchist guerrillas went into the mountains to fight terror with terror. On 16 April 1925, the Communist party's military wing killed and wounded hundreds of people in the St. Nedelya Church assault. After the attack several hundred Communists, left-wing BZNS members and democratic intellectuals were murdered without charge or trial and the prisons were filled up with convicted leftists.

THE PATH TOWARDS TOTALITARIANISM

The normalization of political life in the second half of the 1920s and early 1930s was interrupted by another coup d'état on 19 May 1934. Bulgaria's political development set out on the path towards totalitarianism.

² The Communist International, an international Communist organisation set up in Moscow in 1919 [editor's note]

Lyudmila Slavova graduated in law from Sofia University in 1936. Back then women were not admitted to the bar so she worked as an in-house lawyer at a home building company. During her study she witnessed the 19 May 1934 coup d'état. It was led by Kimon Georgiev, the future prime minister of the first "anti-fascist" government after the Soviet occupation. But in 1934 the coup perpetrators (from the Military League and Zveno political group) had typically fascist attitudes – they abolished the constitution, dissolved the Parliament, banned all political parties, and subjected many political activists, including Communists, to persecution. The government practices of the perpetrators of the 19 May coup were borrowed from Mussolini. But the regime established diplomatic relations with the USSR and, on that basis, due to their experience in coups d'état and their readiness to engage in unlawful activities they were positively appreciated by Moscow. And cooperation was thus established between Kremlin's Communists and Bulgarian fascists...

From its very outset, the entire ideology and history of Communism was permeated by a total and cynical lie, so the interactions between Communists and Social Democrats, even after the new course hypocritically announced by the Comintern in 1935 to build up a common front against fascism and war were not running smoothly. However, quite a few people with democratic convictions succumbed to Stalin's demagoguery. Among them were many Social Democrats. Lyudmila Slavova was also deceived. At that time she was already an active participant in the life of the Social Democratic Party. She was famous as a publicly minded personality and a superb speaker. It was not long before she was elected secretary of the Union of Youth Social Democrats and then to a position in the Social Democratic Party's leadership. Lyudmila wholeheartedly adopted the idea of fighting to defend peace and democracy. In their name she was willing to cooperate even with the Bulgarian Communist youth organization Workers Youth Union (RMS). And then she was disappointed again.



Sofia in 1945
ARCHIVE OF THE HANNAH ARENDT CENTER – SOFIA

THE WAR FOLLOWED BY COMMUNIST TERROR

On 23 August 1939, the Soviet leader Josef Stalin, the loudest antifascist voice whom many perceived as the "chief antifascist," unexpectedly signed a pact with Hitler, thus opening the door for World War II. The pact and the joint Soviet-German aggression against Poland strained both the relations between Social Democrats and Communists and those inside the Social Democratic Party. Lyudmila Slavova was

among those who refused to accept the opinion dictated to Bulgarian Communists by the Kremlin that the Western democracies England and France were to be blamed for the global massacre that had begun. Her mistrust towards the Communists did not disappear even when Hitler attacked the USSR and the Bulgarian Communist Party diametrically changed its position. Lyudmila's doubts remained even after July 1942 when Georgi Dimitrov, the head of the Comintern, which served as the international arm of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and at the same time the BKP's leader, proclaimed his project of forming a "Fatherland Front" to fight "monarcho-fascism and Hitlerist invaders."

But the situation was such that although the Social Democrats felt it was a Communist cover to be used in the future to usurp power, they joined it as well. Save for one of their long-standing leaders, Krastyo Pastuhov, who managed to see that the Communists were only temporarily making use of the Social Democrats as an ally and that they were preparing to establish a dictatorship. Thus, after the Red Army invaded the country and the coup of 9 September 1944 two Social Democrats gained seats in the "Fatherland Front" government. But that did not stop the Communists from starting to actively meddle in the Social Democratic Party's affairs. One day four "left-wing social democrats" accompanied by militiamen raided the party's headquarters, deposed the Secretary General Lulchev and imposed in his stead the Communist agent Neykov. That act made the party's split inevitable and in 1945 Lulchev registered the new "Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party – United", which joined the Democratic Opposition against the advancing dictatorship.

The Communists were quite cruel to the Social Democrats whose authentic ideals of social justice they imitated in their propaganda. The Social Democrats were the ones who revealed the Communist functionaries' true face – one of ruthless careerists striving for power by means of lies, propaganda and terror.



Nikola Petkov, leader of the democratic opposition
ARCHIVE OF THE HANNAH ARENDT CENTER – SOFIA

Initially Stalin ordered the Communist leaders in Bulgaria to form alliances with leftist parties and promise "popular democracy" until they established full control of the society by terror. When that was accomplished in a gangster fashion, as intended by Stalin, the naïve allies had to be removed from power and later killed. Nikola Petkov of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union (BZNS) participated in the "Fatherland Front" government as minister without portfolio but in the summer of 1945 he resigned and headed the Opposition to the regime, which was included the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (United) and the Democratic Party.

The legal resistance of the Democratic Opposition lasted until the end of 1947 when the so-called "Dimitrov Constitution" (named after the Communist leader Georgi Dimitrov sent to the country by Joseph Stalin) was imposed by means of Communist terror. In the course of

these two and a half years the Opposition leaders – Nikola Petkov, Dimitar Gichev, G. M. Dimitrov (BZNS), Kosta Lulchev and Krastyo Pastuhov (Social Democrats) and Nikola Mushanov (Democratic Party) together with thousands of their supporters, mainly agrarians, stood up for the democratic values in Bulgaria against the brutal totalitarian regime imposed by the Soviet Union.

By means of arrests, murders, imprisonment and concentration camps, bans and censorship the Stalinist Communist functionaries who came from Moscow, led by Georgi Dimitrov and Valko Chervenkov, broke the Opposition and established a government monopolized by the Communist party and supported by a system of figurehead organizations. Nikola Petkov, who was arrested on 5 June 1947, was executed on 23 September 1947, just three days after the United States recognized the Bulgarian government. Later Nikola Mushanov and Krastyo Pastuhov were also killed, while Kosta Lulchev and Dimitar Gichev were imprisoned for many years. G. M. Dimitrov (Gemeto) managed to escape but his secretary, 23-year-old Mara Racheva, was brutally murdered at the Headquarters of the People's Militia³ for helping him to escape. The young woman's only fault was that she accompanied the Opposition activist Gemeto who had managed to escape his house arrest to the apartment of a British diplomat.

BRUTAL MURDER OF AN INNOCENT

The Communist party in Bulgaria has always tried to lay the blame for each of its discovered crimes on "irresponsible" Communist functionaries supposedly acting contrary to the leadership's instructions. But Mara Racheva's murder proves exactly the opposite. On the day of her death, Traycho Kostov (the second in command in the Communist party hierarchy) informed Georgi Dimitrov, the Communist leader who had already ascended to cult status, that Mara Racheva had started to give interesting evidence about the arrangements for Gemeto's escape and the British involvement in it. *"But today, he wrote in his note, she jumped off the fourth floor of the Militia's Headquarters and committed suicide."*

The extent to which his account is true is evident from the communication of Colonel S.W. Bailey, an official of the British Secret Service in Sofia to the Foreign Office: *"I am informed by the doctor, who was in attendance on the girl's mother when the coffin was opened, that the following injuries were established, in addition to the bullet and knife wounds: ..."* What follows is a horrifying account of multiple abominable mutilations.



Mara Racheva
ARCHIVE OF THE HANNAH ARENDT CENTER – SOFIA

³ Communist Police [translator's note]



People arrested in Sofia after the communist coup
ARCHIVE OF THE HANNAH ARENDT CENTER – SOFIA

Such were the circumstances under which Lyudmila Slavova dedicated herself fully to the hopeless battle to defend the last remnants of Bulgarian democracy. The young woman travelled across the country, encouraged the desperate, and talked to people face to face with all the passion and selflessness of her ardent heart. At the meetings organized by her she always spoke to full houses despite the fierce stalking of the agents of the Communist State Security and the blood-stained bludgeons of Communist gangs. Lyudmila became a hugely popular tribune of Democratic Opposition, which the Communists would never forgive.

The political atmosphere was getting increasingly darker. Its whirlpool sucked in more and more faces, among them many of Lyudmila's nearest and dearest – relatives, friends, like-minded people she had met across the gloomy Bulgarian crossroads. That is why just some fragments have been preserved of her life as well as of the lives of many others.

A STRONG SPIRIT

Here is the account of Vasil Gatev of Nova Zagora, an advocate of Lyudmila when she ran for election as a United Opposition candidate in the 1946 parliamentary elections:

“.....On the election day Lyudmila Slavova and I set out on foot from [the village of] Konyovo to [the village of] Mladovo to check the polling station and deposit my advocate's power of attorney there. About midway between the two villages, next to the bridge, we were attacked by some dozen men armed with bludgeons, all from Konyovo, some of them my relatives. I was tied up and brutally beaten to unconsciousness. Thereafter, I lay wrapped up in sheepskin for at least 40 days... Anyway, I survived, I am well and it is good I am alive now so that I can tell about Milya... They took her to the nearby acacia grove, she was screaming for help and begging them, the poor thing, but no-one dared respond for fear of suffering the same fate. And there were people in the neighbouring fields and orchards... There they beat her and committed outrages against her, she was gang raped by the entire RMS pack, they broke both her arms and a leg, they burnt her with blazing ballots, the ones we had with us for the polling stations... After the beating, all covered in blood, Lyudmila managed to crawl to the vegetable garden of old Dinyo Penchev, next to the railway tracks. That happened late in the afternoon and when old Dinyo went there to water his garden he heard a moan and a voice begging for help. The old man somehow managed to secure Lyudmila's broken arms using rags and sticks, bought her a ticket for the night train to Sofia and helped her get into the last carriage...”

What a spirit that frail young woman had in order to recover her mind and body after the monstrous shock and steadily continue along her martyr's path! Just one month after the inhuman outrage occurred an article entitled “Political Impudence” written by her crippled hands was published in the Social Democratic Party's newspaper Svoboden Narod [Free People]. In it she did not scream about what had happened to her but raised a voice against the violence towards the entire Bulgarian people and against the bribed foreign observers:

“‘Bulgarian voters have had a full opportunity to freely express their will,’ says the Central Commission of Public Monitoring of Elections. I hereby make my electoral card available to that Commission and I state that I, Lyudmila Slavova, running for office as deputy in the Nova Zagora District, was prevented from voting and I am ready to have that matter investigated. I blame not only the obedient immediate perpetrators of the unthinkable crimes they committed on the election day; I also blame the ones who gave them the party directive of which one of my bullies and torturers was talking. On that day, I went to check the polling stations in the village of Konyovo and I personally visited our two beaten down advocates out of more than ten people who were subjected to beatings. I dare to cast blame with no fear for the human mind cannot imagine something more terrible than what I experienced and for I still see the crying mothers and children, I still hear their screams, I still see the terror in their eyes and the bruises, and the blood on their backs. The same I know also from the terror I myself experienced that cannot be qualified by human morality ‘during the most peaceful and lawful elections.’”

At the end of her article Lyudmila called upon all who were still not afraid to fight against tyranny: *“Women, mothers, sisters, Bulgarian citizens, on your behalf I cast blame and seek a guarantee of our freedom and life. For that reason in the name of humanity, freedom and democracy, we, the vast majority of the people among whom I have always been, I am and I will be, must continue the fight.”*

“It's not the people who vote that count. It's the people who count the votes!” teaches Stalin, the “leader of world proletariat”. Georgi Dimitrov, the “leader and teacher of Bulgarian people”, teaches the same. But despite the officially announced victory the election results infuriated the victors. Despite the ruthless terror more than one million two hundred thousand people dared vote against their dictatorship, sending 110 opposition deputies to the Parliament. Something the BKP could not forgive, neither of the Opposition, nor of the unsubdued people. For many, both deputies and activists of opposition parties, from that moment on what was on the wane were not only their seats at the National Assembly but also their physical existence. The extermination had started long ago, systematically and on a daily basis, by irresponsible killings, by the “People's Court”, murders and kidnappings into the darkness of the night, into concentration camps, prison cells. Lyudmila Slavova's time was also running out. In line with the Communist practices she dug her own grave because of her intransigent attitude. And she added yet another unforgivable count to her verdict – despite the “accident” she won the elections in her district. Gritting their teeth the “counters” falsified what they needed to and cancelled her electoral victory.

Excerpts from the memories of Penka Neykova of the town of Nova Zagora:

“I met Lyudmila in 1946 because we were running for office as United Opposition candidates, me as a representative of BZNS, Nikola Petkov and she as a representatives of the Social Democratic Party. We had a jeep at our disposal and we travelled across the district during the election campaign. There were 72 villages in our district. This was during the elections in October 1946. Together we attended public meetings in Nova Zagora, she spoke very ardently and people listened to her with great attention. The last week we went to the mountain villages – Tvarditsa, Gurkovo, Kozarevo, Konare and Sborishte... On the election day Lyudmila left for the village of Konyovo near Nova Zagora with Vasil Gatev.

My second meeting with Lyudmila was in Bosna (Nozharevo) concentration camp in the district of Silistra. They put me into the room where the female political prisoners were; the only person I knew was Lyudmila. Our meeting was both tragic and joyful; we shared the straw plank bed for a month. Unexpectedly, Lyudmila was told she would be released but she was not very happy about the news. As if she sensed what was in store was not freedom but something worse. She told me ‘Penke, I don’t know what is going to happen to me...’ That’s how we parted. Not long thereafter came Magda, a woman from Sofia, a very honest and trustworthy person. She told me she had shared a cell with her. When they were about to be taken to the bathroom Magda wanted to go first but the militiaman in charge ordered Lyudmila to go in first. And so it happened. Bathing time had long elapsed but Lyudmila didn’t come out and when Magda opened the door she saw her unconscious, hot water poured on her. That happened at the very headquarters of the State Security. Unfortunately, Magda, who was the only witness to Lyudmila Slavova’s tragic ‘accident’, was later run over by a tram and today she cannot retell her story. Magda told it to me. She is an eye-witness of the crime.”

Excerpts from the memories of Dr. Nikola Grozev of the town of Pomorie, April 1991:

“As a doctor I had to attend the deaths of many people. My life has been such that in most cases I witnessed violent deaths. As soon as I graduated in 1943 I went to work as a physician on the surgery ward. During the bombardments many killed or wounded were brought in there, then I took part in the war, more killed and wounded. Then, from 1945 on, it was more camps, prisons... That’s how I got used to death. People react differently when they feel their end is nearing: some clutch at you and beg you for help, others sink into apathy, grow indifferent, resigned. But her look was quite different, a Madonna-like look, peaceful, full of Christian grace, I will never forget it. Even now she is in front of my eyes, the look of a woman that gathered the pain, faith and hope of our entire nation during the years of extermination of our intelligentsia from 1944-1950. She was brought in at Sofia Central Prison’s hospital as an emergency case: all boiled! Yes, literally boiled... I saw the greyish white scalded skin on almost all of her body. She remained conscious for only three days. She refused morphine. While she was holding my hand, she once whispered: “Tell all my friends I did my duty as much as I could. But that’s the way it had to happen...”

“People, citizens, hats off to the saint Lyudmila Slavova. She died in her prime, she died for all of us

who have lived long enough to enjoy freedom and democracy for a while,” said Dr. Grozev, calling on today’s Bulgarian citizens...

This is almost everything left of Lyudmila: fragmentary memories of casual witnesses, fellows and relatives, scarce pieces of evidence in the lamentable reports of the informants of the State Security wrapped in its phoney glory by the eminent Communist propagandists and a pale photo of an ordinary and at the same time so very exceptional young woman whose eyes are looking at us through the years.

Lyudmila Slavova died on 16 October 1948, aged 35; her burial place is unknown. At that time her father, stripped of his deputy’s immunity, was under arrest, expecting his sentence, together with the last remaining living leaders of the Social Democrat Party. Later he was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Her brother Dimitar Slavov was at Kutsian concentration camp when he learned of his sister’s brutal death more than a year after it had happened. When he was moved from one camp to another he got the news from a casual acquaintance who was confined after her death.

Apart from Mara Racheva and Lyudmila Slavova, tens of thousands other defenders of democracy in Bulgaria met their death in the dark building housing the Directorate of People’s Militia on Lavov Most⁴ in Sofia. Today, 23 years after 1989, there is no plaque on the building commemorating those heroes.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE HANNAH ARENDT CENTER – SOFIA



The former Directorate of the People’s Militia in Sofia
VASIL KADRINOV

⁴ The Lions’ Bridge [translator’s note]

GEORGI MARKOV was born on 1 March 1929, in Knyazhevo, a district in Sofia. In 1946 he graduated from secondary school and went to university to study industrial chemistry. He worked as a chemical engineer and as a teacher at a technical school. He was a talented writer and wrote several novels, plays and collections of short stories. By the mid-1960s he was well known as a popular and respected author, but became more and more disillusioned with the Communist regime, which censored everything he produced. He emigrated to London and communicated his ideas via radio programmes on the BBC World Service, Radio Free Europe and Deutsche Welle. Their criticism of the Communist government made Markov even more an enemy of the regime. On 7 September 1978 he was shot with a poisoned pellet fired from an adapted umbrella. He died in hospital four days later at the age of 49. The murder had been committed by the Bulgarian Communist state security with the support of the KGB.



BULGARIAN TELEGRAPH AGENCY

Georgi Markov

The Voice of Bulgaria

written by Gillian Purves⁵

A WRITER

Georgi Markov was born on 1 March 1929 in Sofia. He graduated from secondary school in 1946 and went to university to study industrial chemistry. He worked as a chemical engineer and as a teacher at a technical school. At the age of 19 he became ill with tuberculosis and frequently required hospitalisation. He made his first literary attempts during that time of illness. His first novel *The Night of Celsius* appeared in 1957. The novel *The Ajax Winners* (1959) and two collections of short stories (1961) followed. In 1962 Markov published the novel *Men*, which won the annual award of the Union of Bulgarian Writers. At that point Georgi Markov started working for the Narodna Mladezh publishing house. His collections of stories *A Portrait of My Double* (1966) and *The Women of Warsaw* (1968) secured his place as one of the most talented young writers in Bulgaria. By the mid-1960s he was a popular and respected author. During that time he was courted by high-ranking Communist officials and was introduced to the Communist dictator Todor Zhivkov. However, the attempt to co-opt him failed. The mood that permeated his writings grew darker and many of the plot lines that he developed could be read as thinly concealed criticism of the Communist system. He found it increasingly difficult to cope with the pervasive censorship. Markov also wrote a number of plays but most of them were never staged or were removed from the theatre repertoire by the Communist censors. His novel *The Roof* was halted in mid-printing since it factually and allegorically described the collapse of the roof of the Lenin Steel Mill. By that point Markov was thoroughly disillusioned with the regime.

EMIGRATION ABROAD

In 1969 he moved to join his brother in Bologna, Italy. When the Bulgarian government refused to extend his passport in 1971 Markov moved to London where he learned English and started working for the

⁵ Sources used: Georgi Markov, Biography, bulgaria.globalmuseumoncommunism.org. Hristo Hristov: Who was Georgi Markov and his assassination, hristo-hristov.com, Richard H. Cummings: Who Killed the Wanderer? The 1978 Murder of Georgi Markov Remains Unsolved, 9/9/2011, coldwarra-dios.blogspot.com.

Bulgarian section of the BBC World Service. He also later became a freelance broadcast journalist for Radio Free Europe and Deutsche Welle, the German international broadcast service. Markov began broadcasting on Radio Free Europe on 8 June 1975 with a programme entitled The Debts of Contemporary Bulgarian Literature and his prime-time Sunday-night broadcasts attracted a large listenership in Bulgaria.

In 1972 Markov was sentenced in absentia by a Bulgarian Communist court to six years and six months in prison for his “collaboration with foreign organizations acting against the People’s Republic of Bulgaria (PRB)” and for “his commentaries and essays at Radio Deutsche Welle against the state order in PRB...”

All traces of Markov’s work were purged from public life in Bulgaria. His works were removed from libraries and bookshops and the official Bulgarian media made no reference to him until 1989. The Bulgarian Communist state security “Durzhavna Sigurnist” started an intelligence file on Markov under the code name “Wanderer”.

In 1975 Markov married Annabel Dilke and their daughter Alexandra-Raina was born a year later. In 1974 his play To Crawl Under the Rainbow was staged in London, while the play Archangel Michael, written in English, won first prize at the Edinburgh Festival. The novel The Right Honourable Chimpanzee, co-authored by David Phillips, was published after his death. Between 1975 and 1978 Markov worked on his In Absentia Reports about Bulgaria, which analysed life in Communist Bulgaria. They were broadcast weekly on Radio Free Europe. Their criticism of the Communist government and of the Communist dictator Todor Zhivkov personally marked Markov out even more as an enemy of the regime.

AN ENEMY OF THE REGIME

According to Former KGB general Oleg Kalugin, in June 1977, the Bulgarian Communist dictator Zhivkov chaired a Politburo meeting at which he stated that he wanted to put an end to Markov’s activities. In early 1978, the Minister for the Interior Dimitar Stoyanov requested KGB assistance with killing Markov. He wanted Markov killed in a way that would leave no link back to Bulgaria.

The Chairman of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, agreed to assist with the assassination, as long as there would be no link back to the Soviets.

Former KGB general Oleg Kalugin writes⁶:

“The meeting at which the issue of Georgi Markov’s assassination was raised was held in Andropov’s spacious office in Lyubyanka. Attending were Andropov, Kryuchkov, Vice-admiral Michail Usatov – the first deputy chief of intelligence, and me. After discussing several other issues Kryuchkov took the floor.

‘We have received a request from the Bulgarian minister of internal affairs Stoyanov to help them deal with one of the opponents of the regime, who lives in London – the writer Markov,’ Kryuchkov said. ‘They want help

⁶ Oleg Kalugin and Fen Montaigne: Spymaster: The Highest-ranking KGB Officer Ever to Break His Silence, 1995. Blake Publishing Ltd.

with the physical removal of Markov. This request was made by comrade Stoyanov, but it comes from the president Zhivkov himself.’

We sat quietly for a few seconds. I will never forget the pure euphemism that Kryuchkov used for Markov’s murder – ‘the physical removal’... I felt shivers running down my back, and then I thought: ‘To hell with these Bulgarians. They can do whatever they want with their political opponents. Why are they dragging us into this mess?’

Andropov was also surprised. He rapidly rose from his desk and began to walk nervously back and forth. The chairman, it seems, was lost in thought for a few seconds, then he said: ‘I am against political killings. I do not think this is the right way to deal with these problems. The time when such things were done with impunity is long gone. We cannot return to the old schemes. I’m really against this.’

There was silence again, except for the quiet sound of the traffic on Dzerzhinsky Square. Kryuchkov finally spoke again.

‘But comrade Andropov,’ Kryuchkov’ said. ‘This is a personal request from comrade Zhivkov. If you refuse him help, Zhivkov may think that comrade Stoyanov has lost our trust or that his own reputation in the eyes of the Soviet people has been tarnished. Comrade Zhivkov can take this as a sign that we are distancing ourselves from him. I repeat: This is a personal request from Zhivkov. We have to deal with the problem somehow.’

Andropov continued to walk around the room.

‘Okay, okay,’ he said, stopping suddenly. ‘But there must not be any direct involvement from our part. Give the Bulgarians everything they need, show them how to use it and send someone to Sofia to train their people. But that’s all. No direct intervention. I will not allow anything more than that...’

The first assassination attempt took place in Munich in the spring of 1978 when Markov visited friends and colleagues at Radio Free Europe. There was a plot to poison his drink at a dinner party. However, after Markov’s brother was warned about the plan, Georgi Markov cancelled his trip. The second failed attempt was to be made on the Italian island of Sardinia, while Markov enjoyed a summer vacation with his wife Annabel and daughter Alexandra. Apparently agents decided against this for fear that his wife or daughter would become collateral victims.

THE POISONED UMBRELLA

The final and successful attempt was made in London on dictator Zhivkov’s birthday on 7 September 1978. On that day, Markov worked a double shift at the BBC. After finishing the early morning shift, he reportedly went home to have lunch. Afterwards, he drove to a parking lot on the south side of Waterloo Bridge, which was part of his routine. He parked his car near the bridge and climbed the steps to the bridge

⁷ Kryuchkov later led a coup against Gorbachev

at about 2 p.m. As he neared a waiting bus queue, he felt a sudden stinging pain at the back of his right thigh. He turned and saw a man bending down to pick up a dropped umbrella.

The man, who was facing away from Markov, said the word “sorry” in a foreign accent and jumped in a taxi. The man has never been identified and Georgi Markov himself is the only known witness to the events. Although in some pain, Markov continued on his way to the BBC building. He then noticed a small spot of blood on his trousers

and told colleagues what had happened on Waterloo Bridge. He showed one acquaintance a small red swelling on his thigh. Nevertheless, he worked his shift at the radio station to the end and went home that night as usual. Overnight Markov developed a high fever and was unable to report for work the next day.

The fever got worse and the next evening Markov was taken to London’s St. James’ Hospital, where doctors treated him for an undetermined form of blood poisoning. He did not respond to medical treatment however and after a few days of suffering pain and delirium, Georgi Markov died in London on 11 September 1978 at age 49.

Supposedly, the top secret KGB laboratory known as the “Chamber” developed both the weapon, concealed in a US-manufactured umbrella, and a wax-coated platinum-iridium pellet the size of a pinhead impregnated with the deadly biotoxin ricin.

Markov’s grave can be found in a small churchyard in Dorset, England. His *In Absentia* Reports were published in Bulgaria in 1990, after the fall of the Communist government. In 2000, Markov was posthumously awarded Bulgaria’s most prestigious honour, the Order of Stara Planina, for his “significant contribution to Bulgarian literature, drama and non-fiction and for his exceptional civic position and confrontation of the Communist regime.”

Georgi Markov was a writer who fought against totalitarianism in Europe through his essays and the best way to understand him and his life is to read his works. Here we present his essay *Our Own Fascism*, which he read on Radio Deutsche Welle.

FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS INTO THE COMMUNIST BLOC

● Radio became an important instrument of propaganda soon after WWI. During WWII all parties tried to influence not just the population but also the soldiers of the enemy through radio broadcasts. In some cases all private radio receivers were confiscated and only the public transmission network based on loudspeakers on the streets and in public institutions remained for spreading information. Secret listening to foreign radio stations was harshly punished by the Soviets and also by the Nazis, but it was broadly practised by the people nevertheless. During the Cold War, external radio broadcasts on short-wave AM radio continued to be an important source of information for the citizens of the Communist countries about the life in the free democratic world, as well as about dissidents and anti-regime activities in their own countries. All public broadcasters of the major Western European countries (BBC, Deutsche Welle, Radio France), but also Radio Vatican, had special programmes in many foreign languages, directed specially to the countries of the Eastern Bloc, and also to Asia and Africa. The staff was usually composed of political émigrés from the respective countries. The Communist authorities attempted to deliberately “jam” these broadcasts by broadcasting interfering noises on the same frequencies, which made listening more complicated. The most popular overseas radio stations, financed from the U.S. federal budget, were the Voice of America and Radio Liberty / Radio Free Europe.

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OUR OWN FASCISM

written by Georgi Markov (abridged)

It seems we have established a comfortable rule to blame only public order, systems, ideologies or individuals governing people for our troubles. Frequently and without hesitation we grant ourselves the rights of fairest of all judges and, being deprived of a sense of humour, we place our own “selves” outside the planet. And, of course, we are so noble as to forget our own participation in execution of the offenses, sins or crimes we judge. We gladly judge everyone except ourselves. All of us would say that this is one of the most human sins because it is typical of everyone.

However, I begin with this not because I want to justify the existence of corrupt public systems, ideologies and leaders but because I want to understand the scope of our own guilt, the scope of what actually feeds, supports and so steadily maintains public injustice. This is an issue as old as the world. Many times lots of people have asked themselves: “Is it true that only public forms of fascism were the reason for the troubles of millions of people?” Many times lots of people have asked themselves: “Is it true that only Communist ideology is the reason for the troubles of other millions of people?”; “Were Stalin and Beriya⁷ the only people responsible?” And, of course, the answer so far is one enormous “NOT ONLY”.

Let me first say that in this line of thought I do not distinguish between fascism and Communism. I am using the term “fascism” as historically more clear and specific, devoid of the illusionary charm of the word “communism”. Both express in absolutely the same degree the refusal of mankind to have its own face, its own character, its own individuality, the refusal of people to be themselves by turning into an amorphous part of somebody’s herd with herd mentality, herd voice, herd type. To me it is of absolutely no importance in the name of what an individual is turned into a herd member – whether it is in the name of a great nation, or in the name of an imagination, a happy future.

But before we get to the herd, let’s look at what actually formed it and what is not outside the accepted ideology or personality, i.e. [precisely] OUR OWN FASCISM. Let us look into ourselves, survey the roots and look into their depths.

Probably the first sign of our own fascism is the refusal to recognize the existence of other humans as having equal rights, equal value and independent of us. Our own fascism starts from the moment of the pleasant feeling that I am something more than the person in front of me, from the arbitrary, sometimes unrestrainable instinct that my existence is more meaningful than his/hers. And almost immediately the other instinct – to show my superiority by realizing any kind of the other person’s submission. So one of the original sources of our own fascism is this unrestrained hunger to be more than others.

⁷ Lavrentiy Beriya, Chief of Soviet security and the secret police under Joseph Stalin during World War II

Everyone can see that Communist ideology and all actions of Communism are special reasons for developing to the highest possible degree this terrible origin of our own fascism. The theory of class struggle, Marxism in general, what is called Leninism, is nothing other than an ideological development of our own fascism.

Because the refusal to recognize the equality and independence of other humans leads to the second beginning of our own fascism – the refusal to understand others. We are forced to view them only through the narrow frames of our superiority. We close all roads and ways to real contact with others and sift all messages through the censure of our superiority. We say “He/she is such and such” and treat him/her as “such and such” which is usually too far from the real “him/her”. We refuse to understand all motives, reasons, steps, feelings, actions that do not correspond to our idea for “this”.

Also, let us not forget that the nature of “this” comes from the first origin of our own fascism – namely that he/she neither has equal rights, nor equal value nor independence from us. Our superiority is our

blindness. We do not want to see the real face of the person in front of us and also do not want to understand the truth underlying his/her unique originality. Because each human is unique and original. We communicate only with that part of him/her that suits our superiority. In this, our obvious and complete lack of understanding of the person in front of us, we fanatically insist that our opinion and judgement is the only right one. I believe I do not have to mention the strikingly obvious examples in Bulgarian reality, illustrating the enormous size of our own fascism, deeply rooted in almost all our relations.



Georgi Markov with his daughter Alexandra-Raina and wife Annabel

MARKOV FAMILY COLLECTION

Our lack of understanding of others deprives us of the ability to establish real contacts, deprives us of the most precious elements of human communication – love, forgiveness, generosity, justification...

...Our own fascism – these are the evil spirits inside; this is probably what all religions call the Devil.

And now let me emphasize a very important point: while denying other people’s right to independence, our own fascism denies our own right to independence, too. This is what turns us from free individuals into members of different herds.

I have always been perplexed by the fact that millions of individuals accept the idea of becoming part of a herd and voluntarily, often with enthusiasm, become fanatical members of the herd. Why? What makes

them give up their freedom and accept with submission and subjection a place in the herd? Isn’t it illogical that they deny the equality and independence of other individuals but recognize the herd? Maybe precisely because nobody is free in the herd, because it guarantees security, protection and support. Besides, relations in the herd potentially correspond to our own fascism coming from within. The issues about professional development, struggle for profit, making friends or enemies, fulfilment of ambitions and vanity – all this will flourish only in the atmosphere of a herd, no matter whether it is more or less democratic. The herd castrates to an ultimate degree the inborn spiritual individuality of its members, removes their multi-coloured clothes and dresses them in uniforms, giving them in return its support and the triumph of our own fascism – that you or I belong not to ourselves but to the herd and its leader. Our own fascism culminates in the complete denial of our human individuality...

...Taking away your individuality, the herd offers you a number of facilitations. First, you have nothing to think about, there is somebody to think instead of you. Second, the herd has one truth – the truth of the majority, no matter whether this majority is real or fictitious. Third, the herd does not tolerate exceptions – attempts to part from it are called betrayal or treachery. Attempts not to bleat collectively but to express your own voice are called individualism and punished. Fourth, the herd is directed by the shepherd and nobody has the right to discuss the direction where he leads the herd, otherwise they will have to deal with the dogs. Fifth, the herd requires unconditional submission. Sixth, the herd demands service... it is possible to list many other typical characteristics of the herd but my topic is our own fascism, or rather the potential desire of many people to belong to a herd...

...Our own fascism is in the centre not only of our social relations but mainly in the centre of our personal relations. It is much more serious and terrifying when it involves spouses, children, friends, relatives.

Ideology, the sinners in power, and dramatic events are only reasons for manifestation of our own fascism, just as Stalin was not such a killer but rather a reason for people obsessed by their own fascism to kill other people. And finally, there is one thing I should not omit to mention. Our own fascism is what mercifully offers to transfer the personal responsibility for our own action to the mass of the herd. But let us not mislead ourselves. Herds are irresponsible and the responsibility of their members will remain forever personal, individual. Our own fascism is our most terrible drama...

● FURTHER READING: Markov, Georgi (1984). *The Truth That Killed*. Ticknor & Fields. ISBN 978-0-89919-296-3.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE HANNAH ARENDT CENTER – SOFIA

MOLDOVA

COMMUNIST REGIME

During 1918-1940 Eastern Moldova, Bessarabia, belonged to Romania. In 1924 the Moldavian Autonomous Socialist Republic (ASSR) was created on the eastern bank of the Dniestr River in the Soviet Union. According to the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of 23 August 1939 Bessarabia fell under the Soviet "sphere of influence" and was occupied by the Red Army at the end of June 1940. The Moldavian SSR was created from Bessarabia and the Moldavian ASSR. The forced sovietisation began immediately in former Bessarabia, culminating in a mass deportation in June 1941.

PRO-NAZI REGIME

Romania conquered Moldova again in the summer of 1941. Only about 10 per cent of the Bessarabian Jews under Romanian administration survived the Holocaust. More than 2,000 local Roma were deported; half of them died from inhuman conditions. More than 20,000 men from Moldova served in the Romanian army.

COMMUNIST REGIME

The Soviet Union re-occupied the territory of today's Moldova in March 1944. Sovietisation and Soviet repressions continued with mass deportations in July 1949 and April 1951. A mass famine of 1946-1947 killed 150,000 to 200,000 people. After Stalin's death the political arrests eased up, but the regime remained oppressive until the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Moldova declared its independence in August 1991.



AGLAIA ARAPU was born in 1935 in the village of Ursari, Republic of Moldova, into a Roma family. She was deported to Transnistria in November 1942 as part of a concerted effort to wipe out the whole village, which had

a predominantly Roma population. Conditions were so harsh that, out of a total of 25,000 Romanian Roma deported to Transnistria, 11,000 died there. After 1944, when the German and Romanian army retreated from Transnistria and Bessarabia, the surviving Roma returned to their homes. From Aglaia's village it was only about one in four. Today Aglaia Arapu is the only survivor of the Roma community that was deported from Ursari in 1942.



LUKÁŠ HOUDEK

Aglaia Arapu

A Lone Survivor

written by Igor Casu, Ph.D.

During World War II, the Axis nations pursued a policy of racial purification on their territories. Romania was not an exception in this sense¹. One of the most well-known ethnic and racial groups – besides the Jews – targeted in this process of racial purification – was the gypsy or Roma minority.

The deportations of Roma commenced in November 1942. This process affected both nomadic and settled Roma communities. All in all, about 25,000 Roma were deported from Romania to Transnistria, including men, women, old people and children. Out of this number, the members of the Bessarabian Roma community numbered 2,237 (114 people from the nomadic Roma and 2,123 from settled Roma communities).

One of the victims of Romanian racial policy during World War II was Aglaia Arapu, born in 1935 in the village of Ursari, formerly Lăpușna County, now in the district of Călărași, Republic of Moldova. In an interview given in 2007 to Moldovan researchers Ion Duminica and Tatiana Sîrbu, Aglaia Arapu told her story of being a child who was deported to Transnistria in November 1942. She recalled that the deportation of Roma from Ursari was planned to take place in two distinct stages with the final aim of destroying the entire village in which they formed an absolute majority. According to Aglaia Arapu, the two stages of deportation corresponded to the two lists of people to be deported made by Samuilă Arapu, himself a Roma from the village.

The Roma who had to be deported later, in the second stage in 1943, were those who paid a certain amount of money to Samuilă Arapu. Those who did not pay were deported in 1942, Aglaia being among them. The second stage of deportation did not take place in 1943; it was cancelled by Romanian authorities in the context of the losses inflicted on the German army on the Eastern front. As to the attitude of neighbouring Moldovans/ethnic Romanians to the deportation of the Roma, Aglaia said that the people were glad that in this way the land and property of the Roma would become theirs.

¹ The greatest part of the present day territory of the Republic of Moldova – Bessarabia – was a part of Romania at that time; and Transnistria – a small part of which is too a part of Moldova now – is the territory between the Bug and Dniester Rivers, and was at that time under Romanian civil and German military administrations

The Roma deported to Transnistria lived in special places, usually working on the collective agricultural farms of the region. They were paid poorly, were fed insufficiently and lived in very bad sanitary conditions. Out of 25,000 – the total number of Romanian Roma deported to Transnistria – 11,000 died there for various reasons – bad food, cold, epidemics, and other reasons. Aglaia Arapu told one striking story about how the Roma were treated in Transnistria.

DEVIL ON A WHITE HORSE

One day a Romanian officer riding a white horse came to the barracks where the deported Roma lived. At first, the Roma thought that he had come to organize their mass execution as usually happened with Jews, and some of them started to cry. Instead, the officer led them to a public bath. The joy of the Roma was immense, since they had not had the opportunity to have a hot bath since they had been deported to Transnistria (one and a half years before). They left their clothes aside and entered the public bath, but were surprised that when they came out, their clothes were gone. As it was winter, a great number of Roma died from the cold. The survivors were the most resistant ones who managed to

PORAJMOS – PERSECUTION OF ROMA IN EUROPE DURING WWII

● The term Porajmos (also spelled Porrajmos or Pharrajimos) comes from the Roma language where it originally meant consumption or destruction. In a figurative sense it is used to refer to the extermination of the Roma during WWII by Nazi Germany, Ustasha Croatia and Horthy Hungary and their allies. The persecution of the Roma was a continuation of the oppression of their ancestors in earlier centuries which took on different forms. These ranged from bans on leading a nomadic life and criminalisation to their exclusion from public spaces. After the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany a number of decrees were gradually adopted based on which the local Roma were first labelled as “asocials” and finally as a group destined for “physical liquidation”. In September 1935 the Roma, together with the Jews and people of African origin, were first called “non-Aryan people” and they became citizens without full political rights. Based on a decree of 8 December 1938 on “fighting the Gypsy menace” lists of “Gypsies, Gypsy half-breeds and persons wandering about in the Gypsy way” were elaborated on German territory and later on in the annexed lands. These people were gathered in work camps after which most of them were deported to extermination camps. The first mass murder of Roma took place in January 1940, when 250 Roma children were killed in Buchenwald. The total number of Roma victims of the Nazi regime is estimated within 220,000 and 500,000 victims originating from Germany and the occupied countries. Another at least 90,000 Roma however fell victims to the Ustashe regime in Croatia and about 36,000 people, including people from Moldova, fell victims to the pro-Nazi regime in Romania. For a long time, adequate attention was not given to the genocide of European Roma and, to this day, it has still not been subjected to thorough historical research. Practically no perpetrator of these crimes has ever been punished for them.

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run fast and reach the neighbouring villages. Among them was Aglaia Arapu, then 9 years old.

After 1944, when the German and Romanian army retreated from Transnistria and Bessarabia, the surviving Roma returned to their homes. Only about 1 in 4 Roma from Ursari survived and returned home. Today Aglaia Arapu is the only survivor of the Roma community deported from the village of Ursari in 1942.

The story of Aglaia Arapu is important because very little is known in Europe today about the fate of the Roma community during the World War II. It tells us the story of people who were deported and lived in inhuman conditions purely because they belonged to a particular ethnic and racial group. Our duty is to keep the memory of these innocent people alive and to help the Roma minority to integrate in the societies in which they live, as very often they are still treated badly in Europe to this day.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF TOTALITARIANISM

GHEORGHE DAVID was born in 1943 in the village of Pepeni, district of Sângerei (formerly Lazovsk). In 1970, he graduated from the Chişinău-based Polytechnical Institute. From 1970 to 1979, David worked as an engineer for various organizations and was highly regarded in his field. In the 1970s and early 1980s, Gheorghe David openly expressed his views on the nature of the Communist system, writing critical letters to various politicians. He was eventually arrested on 1 August 1986 during a business trip and was sent to a psychiatric hospital in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, a place that was regularly used for depositing political prisoners in the Soviet Union. He was released in 1988 only after interventions by foreign human rights organizations. He died in 2007, just a few months before the European Court of Human Rights recognized that he was a political victim of Communist repression and that psychiatry had been used illegally against a healthy person.



CURAJ.NET

Gheorghe David

A Victim of Punitive Medicine

written by Igor Casu, Ph.D.

The Communist regime persecuted millions of people using various methods, including mass deportation, summary executions and mass famine. In the former Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic alone, the Soviet Communist regime deported more than 130,000 people considered dangerous for the regime because of the class they belonged to, their nationality, or education. The mass organized famine of 1946-1947 brought a death toll of at least 150,000 people. Several thousand people were executed in 1940-1941 and 1944-1953.

All of this happened during the Stalinist period. It is less known however that after 1953 the Soviet regime continued its repressive policy, albeit on a lesser scale. There were no mass deportations, mass famine or summary executions, but certain groups and individuals were sent to the Gulag for various political reasons: criticizing the monopoly of the Communist party, discrimination based on national allegiance, bad economic conditions, etc. What is specific for the post-Stalinist Communist regime in the USSR is that some of the dissenters and dissidents were sent to psychiatric hospitals to be “healed” of their critical attitudes towards the regime. It was considered that individuals who expressed dissatisfaction with Communism were mentally alienated².

The first documented case on the territory of the present-day Republic of Moldova was that of Alexei Sevastianov, an ethnic Russian who was sent to a psychiatric hospital in 1958 because he burned a picture of Nikita Khrushchev. In the Soviet Union, the most important and well-known case of using psychiatry against political protesters was that of Vladimir Bukovsky, who spent 12 years incarcerated between 1963 and 1976, including in a psikhushka (psychiatric hospital). He emigrated to the West in 1976 and became a professor at Cambridge University.

CRITICISM OF THE STATE

In the former Moldavian SSR the best-known case was that of Gheorghe David. He was born in 1943 in the village of Pepeni, district of Sângerei (formerly Lazovsk). In 1970, he graduated from the Chişinău-based Polytechnical Institute. From 1970 to 1979, David worked as an engineer for various organizations and was

² Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader who started destalinization, said so in a public speech in 1959

highly regarded in his field. In the early 1970s, Gheorghe David openly expressed his views on the nature of the Communist system and on how the Soviet state was created. More precisely, he called into question the main myth of the regime that the USSR had been purportedly created by the free will of the people. Gheorghe David also criticized the decision to invade Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Consequently, in 1974, he was called before the KGB and was warned that he would be punished in line with the Criminal Code if he “relapsed”. The attempt at intimidation by the Soviet repressive bodies failed, and in 1982, right after Brezhnev’s³ death, David sent a letter to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (Soviet Parliament), arguing that the disastrous social and economic situation in the Soviet Union, in general, and the Moldavian SSR, in particular, was generated by inflated spending on the military sector. Gheorghe David stated explicitly that the Soviet Army was an aggressive army (quoting the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979), rather than a defensive one, as the official propaganda claimed. After Andropov’s⁴ death (February 1984), Gheorghe David sent a letter to Konstantin Chernenko, the new General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, expressing his opinion about the critical economic situation of the overwhelming majority of the Soviet population and listing some of its causes. In April 1985, he sent a letter to Mikhail Gorbachev, shortly after his appointment as head of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. As he had received no answer to his letters, and pressure was already being exerted on him, Gheorghe David decided to send another letter to Gorbachev on 26 October 1985.

At the same time, he sent it to the editorial staff of some Soviet and foreign newspapers, such as Tinerimea Moldovei (in Chişinău), Pravda (Moscow), Rahva Heacle (Tallinn), România Liberă (Bucharest), Unità (the newspaper of the Italian Communist Party), L’Humanité (of the French Communist Party), as well as to some private individuals. In the letter, Gheorghe David wrote to Gorbachev that the Soviet Union had promoted an imperial foreign policy, that the whole Soviet history was full of falsifications, he criticized the fact that historians were keeping silent about the content of the Nazi-Soviet pact of 23 August 1939 (the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact as a result of which the USSR occupied the Baltic states, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, etc.). He also asked for the rehabilitation of the Latin alphabet in the Moldavian SSR as it had been prohibited in 1941 and in this way ethnic Romanians from the Moldavian SSR, forming the majority of the local population, were unable to read Romanian language publications published in Romania. This policy, believed David, reflected the discrimination against local Romanians and was a part of the strategy of Russification of the local population.

³ Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, presiding over the Soviet Union from 1964 until his death in 1982 [editor’s note]

⁴ Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 12 November 1982 until his death fifteen months later [editor’s note]

ARREST AND “HOSPITALISATION”

Besides the anti-Soviet and anti-imperial message, Gheorghe David bitterly criticized the Communist regime and ideology, defining Communism as a system based on lies and exploitation of the people. He also emphasized that the experience of World War II proved to the whole world the need to ensure a better future that would be “more peaceful, more plentiful, without empires or wars”. As a result of his acts of courage, in 1986 Gheorghe David was demoted from his job, becoming an ordinary worker. As his ideas were considered dangerous for the dictatorship of the totalitarian party that held all of the power in the USSR, he was arrested on 1 August 1986 during a business trip to Tiraspol, a city on the left bank of the Dniester River. While being questioned by the Chişinău-based Prosecutor’s Office, he was told that the Soviet regime had the means needed to “brainwash” him and that he would soon see that. David had already been in custody for several months when he was transferred to the criminal psychiatric section of the Chişinău prison, where he was subjected to the “treatment” promised by the authorities.

In December 1986, a special psychiatric commission diagnosed Gheorghe David as being “mentally alienated” and interned him in the psychiatric hospital in Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine, one of the most dreadful psikhushkas for political prisoners in the Soviet Union. The main “arguments” that the commission invoked to back up its diagnosis were David’s opinions about the violation by the Soviet Union of the sovereignty and independence of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and of Afghanistan in 1979, as well as about the identity of the “Moldavian” language and the Romanian one. Gheorghe David was tried and sentenced on 12 January 1987 in his absence. It was only in the summer of 1988 that David was set free as a result of reports published by the Soviet press, which was becoming increasingly free, and thanks to protests staged by foreign human

PSYCHIATRY AS A POLITICAL TOOL UNDER COMMUNISM

● In April 1969 KGB chief Yuriy Andropov ordered the establishment of a network of psychiatric institutions in which political adversaries of the regime were to be interned and “treated”. Shattering witness testimonies about this system of psikhushkas (a Russian colloquial term originally meaning a psychiatry clinic) were given by a number of dissidents, among them Vladimir Bukovsky, Natan Shcharansky and Natalia Gorbanevskaya. They were administered various psychopharmaceuticals and they were subjected to electroshock therapy. At the same time, they were held in one space together with genuine severely ill psychiatric patients. Soviet official psychiatry tried to legitimise these procedures by means of pseudo-scientific publications. The World Psychiatric Association denounced these practices at its 6th world congress in 1977, calling for their investigation and an end to them. Representatives of the criticised state later resigned their membership in this professional organisation. Psychiatry as a science was often abused in other countries where the Communist party was in power too. The case of the Czech Christian activist Augustin Navrátil for example attracted a lot of attention abroad at the end of the 1970s.

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rights organizations, among them Amnesty International as well as broadcasts of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. After he was released, he taught at the Technical University of Moldova and was responsible for two technical inventions. He died in 2007, just a few months before the European Court of Human Rights recognized that he was a political victim of Communist repression and that psychiatry was used illegally against a healthy person.

The case of Gheorghe David shows that political repression in the Soviet Union in general and in particular in Moldova did not stop with Stalin's death. Moreover, it continued until the last years of Communism, the difference being that it continued via more sophisticated methods, which were no less inhuman and in contradiction to the basic human rights that Communism pretended to manifest and protect. The case also demonstrates that freedom of speech – a basic human right – was not respected in the USSR and present-day Europeans should not forget that freedom and democracy should not be taken for granted.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF TOTALITARIANISM

UKRAINE

COMMUNIST REGIME

During the war of 1918-1921 the Soviet Red Army conquered most of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was established as a part of the Soviet Union in 1922. Western Ukraine was ceded to Poland after the Polish-Soviet War (1919-1920) and joined to the Ukrainian SSR after the defeat of Poland in 1939. Soviet policies and especially the ideologically motivated forced collectivisation beginning in 1929 destroyed Ukrainian society. In 1930-1936, more than 2 million wealthy peasants were deported to Siberia with their families, a large part of them Ukrainians. In 1932-1933 a famine followed, known as the Holodomor, causing more than 3 million deaths from starvation in Ukraine. In 1940-1941 deportations from Western Ukraine followed.

NAZI OCCUPATION

Ukraine was under German occupation in 1941-1944. During this period, up to 3 million Ukrainian residents were killed, up to 900,000 Jews among them. The territory was divided into so-called Distrikt Galizien, which became a part of the General Government, and the Reichskommissariat Ukraine. Ukraine was an area of active armed resistance. The Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), Polish Armia Krajowa and the Soviet-supported red partisan units fought against the Germans but also against each other. Ukrainians also served in units formed by Germans, the SS Division "Galizien" and cossack cavalry formations among them.

COMMUNIST REGIME

During 1944-1991 the Ukrainian SSR was a part of the Soviet Union again. The mass repressions continued, but also population transfers. Deportations took place in 1944 (mostly Poles), 1949-1952 (wealthy peasants and members of the national resistance), 1951 (mostly Jehovah's witnesses) and later. Between 1944-1946, more than 2 million Poles were deported to Poland and half a million Ukrainians to Ukraine. Although the Ukrainian SSR was among the founding nations of the United Nations in 1945 its independence was proclaimed only during the disintegration of the Soviet Union in August 1991.



OMELYAN KOVCH was born on 20 August 1884 into the family of the Greek-Catholic priest Grygorij Kovch. The baby was destined to become a priest, like his father, his uncle and grandfather. His birthplace was the land of Galicia, where Ukrainians, Poles and Jews lived together for centuries. Omelyan studied in Rome, married and became a priest of the Greek-Catholic Church. He had six children. He participated in the war for independence in 1919-1920 as a chaplain in the Ukrainian Galician Army. He stood up to and was persecuted by the Bolsheviks and the Nazis alike. During German occupation in WWII he bravely rescued Jews and tried to help them by baptising and hiding them. For these activities, he was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to the Majdanek concentration camp where he died on 25 March 1944. In 2001, during a visit to Ukraine, Pope John Paul II declared Father Omelyan Kovch a Blessed Martyr.



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Omelyan Kovch

A Priest, a Patriot, a Righteous Man

written by Volodymyr Birchak and Volodymyr Viatrovych

“He was a son of a priest of one nation and died in the lands of another one, because he had been saving the sons and daughters of a third one.”

These words by Cardinal Lubomyr Husar represent the life story of Omelyan Kovch, a man who was an ardent patriot of his country, but nevertheless managed to rise above national prejudices. His birthplace was the land of Galicia, where Ukrainians, Poles and Jews lived together for centuries. The pages of the history of their coexistence are marked by many dramatic events and conflicts. But the figure of Omelyan Kovch symbolises a man who stood up for all representatives of these three nations.

When on 20 August 1884 a son called Omelyan was born into the family of the Greek Catholic priest Grygorij Kovch everyone was sure to know his fate. The baby was sure to become a priest, like his father, his uncle and grandfather. Like every Greek Catholic priest in Galicia at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he would unite clerical service with active public work in rural areas. After all, that was the style of life of his grandfather, father, uncle, and hundreds of other priests of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, who became key figures of the Ukrainian national revival in Galicia, which was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at that time.

Almost all of these predictions proved correct. But besides the expected arduous clerical and public activities, the boy was to endure suffering no-one had been able to imagine – two world wars, participation in the Ukrainian liberation movement, persecution by the Polish, Soviet and Nazi powers and death at the Majdanek extermination camp.

There were three other children in the family. But despite financial difficulties Grygorij Kovch did his best to ensure that his son got a good education. Having finished primary school in Kosmach, where his father was a parish priest, Omelyan continued his studies at the gymnasium (secondary school) in Lviv, the main city in Galicia, and then ventured even further from home – to Rome, where in 1905-1911 he was a student at Saints Sergius and Bacchus College.

STUDY IN THE ETERNAL CITY

The young man got an opportunity to live and study in the Eternal City thanks to aid provided by the Head of the Greek Catholic Church at that time, the Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky. Later, after



Omelyan Kovch seated second from left, while studying at Saints Sergius and Bacchus College in Rome, 1908

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many years, the Head of the Church would make another attempt to help Omelyan Kovch, this time rescuing him from death, not from poverty.

Even before graduation and taking holy orders Omelyan Kovch married Marie-Anne Dobriansky, who was also a daughter of a priest. The happy family had six children – three sons and three daughters. The first parish the young priest was assigned to was far away from home, at the other end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the town of Kozarats (modern Bosnia and Herzegovina). His parishioners were poor Ukrainian immigrants, and therefore the priest's family lived in difficult material conditions.

But rather soon the turbulent historical events changed the quiet life of Omelyan Kovch. In 1914, when World War I started, the priest returned to his native land, which became one of the arenas of the bloody war. Galicia was conquered by the Russian army, then it was re-occupied by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then the Russians came back. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the Ukrainians at that time was the fact that in the war happening on their lands they were struggling against one another for alien interests in imperial armies. That was the price they paid for the lack of their own country.

The Ukrainians learned that lesson. They rose up to fight for independence. At the final stage of World War I the empires collapsed and states of previously oppressed nations began to emerge on their ruins. In November 1918 in Lviv the West Ukrainian People's Republic was proclaimed. However, representatives of another people constituting the Austro-Hungarian Empire beforehand, i.e. the Poles, also claimed ownership of Galicia. So a war between the Ukrainians and Poles began.

IN THE ARMY

Among those who joined the Ukrainian Galician Army (UGA) protecting the newly created West Ukrainian People's Republic there was Omelyan's brother Yevstahiy. Omelyan Kovch, being a cleric, had no right to take up weapons, but he could not ignore his patriotic impulse and became a chaplain of the Ukrainian army. Other priests conducting their duties among soldiers of the UGA included Omelyan's father Grygoriy Kovch. The old priest died of typhus in the army in late 1919. His son continued his service

in the army till its last days. Having been defeated by the Poles in Galicia, the army retreated to the east and defended the Ukrainian People's Republic in the struggle with the Bolsheviks.

It was during the war that people could see the extreme faith, sometimes overflowing into daring courage, of Omelyan Kovch for the first time. He was often seen with soldiers on the advanced front. "I know," he said "that the soldier on the front line feels best when he sees a doctor and a confessor nearby". And he jokingly added: "You know that I'm sanctified, and a sanctified person is not an easy target for a bullet." This belief allowed him to get out of very complicated situations and to inspire confidence in others.

He was eventually captured by the Bolsheviks, along with other soldiers of the UGA. The prisoners were loaded into wagons that carried them to the place of execution. At one of the stops the train guard, a Russian soldier, let the pastor go, saying "Father, do not forget to pray for Luka." But instead of liberty Omelyan Kovch again found himself in a camp for prisoners of war, this time a Polish one. Typhus was the worst disaster; it claimed the lives of hundreds of soldiers every day. Father Omelyan who sat with dying people till their last breath was bound to get ill. Nevertheless, he managed to survive and after a long war he returned home.

BETWEEN THE WARS

In 1922 he received a parish in the town of Peremyshlyany in the Lviv region. After the war, this territory belonged to the new Poland. Peremyshlyany, like other towns of that kind in Galicia, was multinational; besides Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, Gypsies, and even some German families lived there. Despite the recent war and complicated history of relations between the nations, the population of the town lived quite peacefully, trying to tolerate and respect the traditions and customs of other peoples. When the Christians had some important religious feast day, the Jews closed their shops and declared a day off, and the Christians did the same on Jewish holidays.

Omelyan Kovch lived and worked in Peremyshlyany during the short period of peace between the two world wars. Of course he did not limit himself to the work in the church but also took an active part in the public life of the town. He was the founder of the People's House (venue for Ukrainians' national holidays), and the reading room



Peremyshlyany, Galicia, 1925

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of the “Prosvita Association”, the purpose of which was to spread awareness among the Ukrainians. He also initiated the establishment of the Ukrainian Bank, which was supposed to be a tool for providing financial independence of the Ukrainian community.

Kovch’s activities caused repressions by the Polish government, which tried to limit the development of the Ukrainian national movement, which it saw as a threat to the integrity of the state. Searches of the priest’s house became an unfortunate local tradition; from 1925-1934 there were about 40 of them. After half of them he was arrested and imprisoned for a longer or shorter time. Despite the persecution, Father Kovch was always open to everyone. He found time for his faithful, but also for members of other faiths – rather often Poles and Jews asked him for advice.

SOVIET REPRESSIONS

In September 1939, after World War II started and Soviet power was established in Galicia the situation in the city changed rapidly. The Poles, who enjoyed privileges as representatives of the ruling nation under the previous government, were the first victims of Communist repressions. Arrests and repressions affected first of all those who had been public servants, and later touched the leaders of political parties and public associations. Father Omelyan was among the first who rushed to help them. Either with food or with money or with just a kind word he visited the families of Polish officers sent to Siberia. Their wives asked the priest – *“How can you help us, if my husband only recently conducted searches of your house?”* But he only smiled and said that it was his duty.



Omelyan Kovch was the father of six children, but he helped to bring up other children as well. The youngest boy is a child taken on by the priest from a poor Ukrainian family.

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During the first months of the Soviet regime Ukrainians and Jews felt some relief (Communist propaganda was talking about their “liberation from Polish oppression”). But rather soon they too became subjects of NKVD persecution. After trains carried Poles to the East, wagons filled with Ukrainians and Jews started on their way too. The Ukrainian national movement was declared “bourgeois nationalist” and hostile to the new government; its activists were arrested and sentenced to imprisonment or even execution. Omelyan Kovch escaped repression during that terrible time. He continued with his clerical service; moreover he dared to organize mass religious events for believers, despite the marked anti-religiousness of the government.

In 1941 repressions by the new government grew continuously. The prisons of Western Ukraine (at that time annexed to the USSR) were filled with prisoners, mostly political, those whom the government called “enemies of the nation”. Most of them were young boys and girls, activists of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, which launched an underground anti-Soviet struggle.

On 22 June 1941 a new phase of World War II started with attacks of the German troops against the Soviet Union. The Soviet government turned out to be unprepared for such rapid events and was not able to organize an effective defence. The Germans advanced further east with each hour that passed. Meanwhile, the Soviet political police force – the NKVD – was busy with arrests of all “politically unreliable” individuals. That day Father Omelyan Kovch was to be among them. Some citizens (some witnesses say they were Jews) hid the priest away and he thus escaped not only arrest, but probably execution. The Soviet government left a trail of blood right across Western Ukraine – after its retreat the bodies of thousands of people were found in prisons. They had been shot without any trial since there was no time for hearings, and there were no means to evacuate prisoners. There were many priests among the executed.

Meanwhile it was already the fifth change of authorities that Omelyan Kovch had observed in his homeland. The Nazis were not going to restore any state there; neither Polish nor Ukrainian. The territory was to be just a colony of the Third Reich, and its population to be slaves for new rulers. The German authorities treated Ukrainians and Poles with disgust, and deprived them of many rights. But their attitude toward the Jewish population was the worst. Mass murders started in the very first days of this new power.

UNCOMPROMISING FAITH

Frightened by constant repressions, people often tried to ignore the atrocities being inflicted on others. Everybody was preoccupied with his own problems, and remained alone with his pain and fear. This fear was also accompanied by various national prejudgments, memories of past problems and conflicts. All of that somehow allowed people to miss others’ suffering and ignore the extermination of other nationalities. But Omelyan Kovch never compromised his moral values even in such a time, no matter what it might cost him. And once again his faith and confidence did wonders.

In September 1941 a group of German SS men closed off the synagogue in the town of Peremyshlyany filled with people who had come to pray right at that time. Someone threw bombs inside. A fire started, people rushed to the door and understood that they were caught in a deadly trap. “A Roman Catholic priest and a group of people ran to Father Kovch asking him to help to save the synagogue,” former resident of Peremyshlyany Leopold Klyajman-Kozlovsky recalled. “Kovch, who spoke German perfectly, shouted to the German soldiers asking them to let him into the synagogue. The soldiers were struck dumb by surprise and let him in. Kovch rushed to carry people out of the burning synagogue.

Aaron Roqueah, the rabbi of Belz was among those saved by Father Kovch.

Omelyan Kovch was capable not only of a single heroic deed, but also of long-term risky work. When a ghetto was established in Peremyshlyany, the priest got inside on more than one occasion to help the Jews. He brought them food, medicine, clean clothes, etc. Another way the priest managed to save Jews from extermination was to make so-called “Aryan documents” (information extracted from the church books about baptism). Namely Rubin and Itka Piza managed to survive thanks to documents provided by Omelyan Kovch.

For such activity Father Kovch was arrested by the Gestapo in January 1943 and imprisoned in Lviv prison on Lontskyy Street. His family, friends and even the Metropolitan Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church Andrey Sheptytsky did everything possible to release him. The Nazis put a single condition on his release: the Ukrainian priest must provide a written obligation not to help Jews. Father Omelyan refused. *“Listen to me, Mr. Stavitsky,”* he said to a Gestapo officer *“you are a police officer. Your duty is to seek out criminals. Please leave God’s affairs in God’s hands”*. The officer, indignant because of the priest’s response, ordered that he be taken back to prison.

MAJDANEK CONCENTRATION CAMP

This time he was tortured for a long time in the prison, and then was sent away to Majdanek concentration camp. But even a stay in the terrible death factory did not break the pastor. *“I understand that you are making efforts to have me released,”* he wrote to his family, *“but I ask you not to do anything. They shot 50 people yesterday; if I am not here who will help them to go to the next world? They will go on forever with their sins in deep despair hanging over this hell. But now they are leaving with their heads up, with their sins far behind. They cross the bridge with joy in their hearts and I see peace and ease settling in them when I have a last conversation with them.”* Omelyan Kovch believed that there, among people condemned to death, he would fulfil his mission in the most appropriate way. And that was the most important thing for him.

“I am grateful to the Lord for His being so kind towards me,” we can read in one of his letters. *“But for the heavens this is the only place where I would like to be. We are all equal here. Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, Lithuanians or Estonians. I am the only priest here. I cannot imagine what they would do without me. Here, I can see God – there is only one God for everybody, regardless of our religious differences. Perhaps our churches are different, but all of them are dominated by Almighty God. When I serve the liturgy, they are praying. They pray in different languages, but God understands all languages, doesn’t He? They die in different ways and I help them to cross the bridge. Is this not a blessing? Is it not the best crown which the Lord could ever put on my head? This is true. I thank God thousands times per day for His sending me here. I could not have asked him for more. Do not despair because of me. Rejoice with me. Pray for those who have created this camp and this system. They*

need your prayers most of all... May God be merciful to them...”

Omelyan Kovch, prisoner No. 2399 of Majdanek, worked like all the others in the camp, but after heavy physical labour he still served as a pastor of a terrible death factory. He provided all who needed it with inward consolation regardless of their nationality or religion.

The brutal camp conditions finally broke the health of the priest, who was no longer a young man. He died behind barbed wire on 25 March 1944, just a few months before the liberation of Majdanek. Heart failure was given as the official reason for his death. The body of the priest, like thousands of others, was burned in one of the horrifying camp crematoria.

But the memory of this righteous man could not be destroyed as easily as his body. People who he saved reminded others about his deed. In 2001, during a visit to Ukraine, Pope John Paul II declared Father Omelyan Kovch a Blessed Martyr.

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Majdanek concentration camp, the last “parish” of Father Omelyan Kovch

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OLEKSANDRA RADCHENKO (1896-1965) worked as a teacher in Ukraine for most of her life. She and her three children survived the Holodomor famine in 1932-1933. She wrote about those times in her diary, documenting the horrors of what was essentially deliberate starvation of the people. In August 1945 she was arrested and accused of anti-Soviet propaganda. Her diary was presented as evidence at her trial. She was sentenced to 10 years in a Communist concentration camp. Oleksandra returned to Ukraine in August 1955 after completing the full term of her imprisonment. As a result of her poor health, she lived as a free person for only ten more years.



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Oleksandra Radchenko

Persecuted for her Memory

written by Volodymyr Viatrovych

Ukraine's historical past under Communist rule is similar to other post-Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Unlike other former eastern bloc countries, totalitarian rule arrived in Ukraine much earlier – not following World War II, but several decades earlier. The most horrible crimes of the Communist regime – mass murders, deportations, Holodomor – were committed prior to World War II. Ukraine became a “laboratory” for the Communist regime: proven methods of oppressing opponents and the tools of a totalitarian system, which were later used in other countries “liberated” by the Red Army from Nazi occupation.

After the fall of the Ukrainian National Republic in 1921 Communist rule came to Ukraine as a result of the Bolshevik Red Army occupation of most of the territory of Ukraine. Among the Communist activists there were many Ukrainians, but the formation of the regime was possible only after the Bolshevik army conquered Ukraine with support from Moscow. Because of massive anti-Communist resistance, numerous rebellions lasted until the end of the 1920s.

UKRAINIANIZATION

In order to control the territory, Communists had to compromise with the Ukrainian national movement. They began the policy of “ukrainianization” – the Ukrainian language became official in government institutions, and Ukrainian theatres and universities were opened. These favourable conditions resulted in a renaissance of the Ukrainian culture giving rise to a new generation of poets, writers, artists, and cinema and theatre directors. A new economic policy, announced by the Communists, allowed peasants to be land owners and upgrade their farms. But ten years later, following the Communist take-over, a famine would ravage the countryside, and the reborn “intelligentsia” would become part of the “Executed Renaissance”.

The Bolsheviks understood that the cultural and economic concessions for the rebellious Ukrainians could only be temporary, and in the late 1920s, after the final consolidation of Stalin's rule, a major offensive was initiated against everything Ukrainian. This attack was called the “Soviet genocide of Ukrainians” by the world-renowned lawyer, and author of the term “genocide”, Raphael Lemkin. The genocide included

repressions (i.e., executions and imprisonment) of the intelligentsia, and the “liquidation” of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Furthermore, the genocide led to mass deaths of Ukrainian peasants – who constituted the main source of national identity. The artificial famine brought about during 1932-1933 took the lives of millions of people (estimates range from 4 to 7 million). This heinous crime became known as the Holodomor (from the Ukrainian words holod [hunger] and mor [death] or “Death by Hunger”), which is not only a part of Ukrainian history but world history as well.

During the early 1930s, the collectivization of Ukrainian villages was ended, and its residents were driven forcibly onto collective farms. As a result of this policy, the farmers and peasants became totally dependent on government subsidies. Using mass deportations and repression, the Communists were able to eliminate wealthy and independent landowners – “kulaks” – who could form the basis of a national movement. But even after this repressive period, local anti-Soviet rebellions continued. To destroy the resistance movement definitively the government decided to punish uncooperative peasants with hunger and starvation.

SYSTEMATIC STARVATION

First, the government established unreasonably high quotas of grain procurement. The anticipated failure was declared as sabotage and resistance to the government. After that, forced requisitions began, and special brigades were sent off to the villages. They confiscated all the grain that was found. The government violently punished anyone who tried to hide grain, which was declared government property.

In August 1932, a special law was adopted that became known as the “law of five ears of wheat”. Violators of this law were punished with imprisonment or even execution for so called “plundering of socialist property”. In reality it was an attempt to prevent people from keeping for themselves even enough grain for a meal, or from finding scraps of grain

after the crop was gathered. An alternative method for the starving of peasants was the establishment of so called “natural fines”: peasants who did not meet the expected quota of grain delivery had all their food confiscated. Responsibility for “sabotage” was also laid on whole villages, which were registered on so called “black lists”. Such villages were completely isolated from the outside world and deliveries of any goods or provisions were stopped. Ultimately, the entire territory of Ukraine became a “ghetto of hunger”; its borders were surrounded by an army that did not allow hungry people to escape.



Famine victims, Kharkiv region, 1933
COLLECTION OF CARDINAL THEODOR INNICIR

Deprived of any food and the possibility to leave the region impacted by the famine, millions of people died, including whole villages. The dead peasants were buried in large pits near their villages, because there were too many dead to be buried in single graves. Sometimes even living people were buried, because those who gathered the bodies were so weak that they could not come back to the same place twice.

This tragic death of millions of Ukrainians was hidden from the world. It was prohibited to talk about the famine in Ukraine. Censored newspapers wrote about the great successes of the Soviet government, and any news regarding the famine was interpreted as anti-government propaganda and was severely punished.

Some of the famine victims were certain that the famine was the result of criminal activities by local authorities, and all they had to do was to inform the central government in order to stop these crimes. People wrote letters to Stalin, in order to “open the national leader’s eyes” regarding the horrors of the famine. The Communist government listened to such letter writers attentively and then arrested them.

Nevertheless, survivors of the Holodomor tried to preserve their memories and pass them down to their descendants. Mykola Bokan from the Chernihiv region took photographs of his family in those horrible years.

Some time later, these photographs became evidence in the criminal case against him. As a result, he was sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment. But Mykola Bokan never came back from the Gulag concentration camps and died in a distant foreign land.

A WITNESS TO HORROR

Oleksandra Radchenko was one of the millions of witnesses of the deaths by starvation. She worked as a teacher in the Kharkiv region at that time.

She had a food ration, and it helped her and her family to avoid starvation. But the “ration” that she received from the state couldn’t isolate her from the surrounding terror. It was hard to be isolated, because as a teacher she had to look



Armed guard at a grain storage facility, village of Vilshany in the Kharkiv region
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Mykola Bokan with his remaining children during the funeral for his son Kostya, who died of starvation on 10 July 1933
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into her students' hungry eyes and see the number of her students decreasing constantly. She knew that any attempt to spread information about the situation in Ukraine would result in her imprisonment, and death for her children, who would be left to fend for themselves. Oleksandra Radchenko understood what risks she took by entrusting the truth of what she saw to her diary, and what awaited her should her diary be discovered. But she could not refrain from writing in her diary:

“Tuesday, 5 April 1932. Hunger, an artificial famine, is taking on a monstrous character. Why are they taking the last grain of bread? No one understands why. And they continue to take everything down to the last kernel, seeing full well what the results are. The children are tortured by starvation, and worms from eating raw beets, which will not last them through to the next harvest in four months. What will happen then??”

“Wednesday, 6 April 1932. Sometimes I am seized by uncontrollable anger and feel ill. I read about “Soviet speed” (reported in the Communist newspaper ‘Pravda’), about the opening of the first blast furnace in Europe, about the completion of the dam in ‘Dniprostroy’ and much more. This is all good, but what good is this speed compared to the swollen children and men due to hunger and starvation? Generally the hunger begins to fly into a rage and brings with it all our troubles, anything that you can imagine. Crime develops with special speed... Thoughts about the swollen, starving children torture me and the rage is growing...”

“Thursday, 2 June 1932. It’s difficult to survive and getting desperately harder. It is an unusual time, never before seen in history. Everyone is suffering because of malnutrition or starvation and a destitute existence. Moreover, the impersonality is terrible and depressing.”

“Sunday, 20 November 1932. The old man, who worked at the rabbit hutch, was ‘robbed by the authorities’, as he said. This means that everything like grain and vegetables were taken away from him. He has been dispossessed for two years, almost a beggar, except that he does not beg. He is 70 years old, his wife is 65 and their disabled daughter lives with them. And now, miserable, what little they had that could have lasted them until February, was taken away.”

“Monday, 9 January 1933. The horrors of the hunger are spreading in Kharkiv. Children are being kidnapped and sausage made from human meat is being sold. Healthier adults are being tricked and kidnapped by individuals supposedly selling shoes. This was reported in newspapers, asking people to be calm, because measures are being taken... but children are still disappearing.”

“Thursday, 23 March 1933. On this day I saw an incredible amount of human suffering. I returned home with burdensome impressions. On the way to the village of Zarozhne, in the field close to the road, we saw an old man, who was thin, clothes tattered, and without boots. Perhaps he fell down emaciated and exhausted, and then froze to death, or just died and fell...and someone took his boots. When we returned from the village we saw him again. No one needed him...”

“Departing from Babka, we caught up to a seven year old boy. My companion called out to him. However, the boy continued walking unsteadily, and it appeared that he did not hear us. When the horse caught up to him, I cried out, and the boy turned unwillingly away from the road. I was drawn to look into his face. The expression on his face made a horrible, terrible and unforgettable impression on me. Probably such an expression in the eyes occurs in people when they know that they are approaching death. Yet, they don’t want to die. But this was a child! I couldn’t control my emotions: What for? Why children? I cried silently, so that my companion would not see. The thought that I can’t do anything, that millions of children are dying because of hunger, the inevitable horror, led me to despair...”

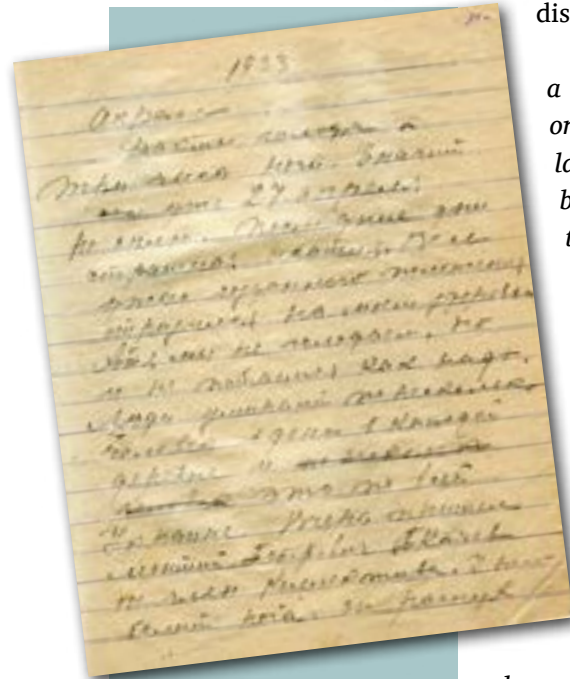
“Several days earlier a stableman came over – his face and arms were all swollen. He says that his legs are heavy, and he is ready to die. ‘It is a pity for the children – he says. – They don’t understand anything – they are not guilty.’”

Oleksandra Radchenko and her three daughters, the youngest of which was born in 1931, survived the Holodomor. They were not impacted by the wave of repressions of the Great Terror in 1937-1938. But quite a bit of misfortune was still to befall them.

In 1940, the Radchenko family moved to Bukovyna, which had recently been annexed by the Soviet Union. In the summer of 1941, they were caught up in the beginning of the German-Soviet War. Oleksandra and her husband, Vasyl, were arrested by the Romanian military, which, as the allies of the Third Reich, occupied this Ukrainian territory. They were in the prison camps together for a few weeks, until they were liberated by her husband’s colleagues – forestry engineers. After getting out of prison, Vasyl Radchenko continued to work as a forester.

FALSE HOPE

In the first days after the change of power many local people, including Oleksandra Radchenko, believed in the “German liberation from the Communists”. That’s why she told a German official, who had worked as a correspondent back home, about her diaries. He proposed publishing them. German propaganda routinely used information about Communist crimes (this was the case with information about the mass execution of prisoners in the summer of 1941, and about the discovery of buried Polish officers in Katyń). But the diary about the Holodomor was not published in the press by the new regime. Soon Radchenko understood that this new regime was no better than the previous one. That’s why in her notes



A page from the diary of Oleksandra Radchenko
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Oleksandra with her husband and daughter
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from 1941 and 1942 she wrote about the crimes of the Nazi regime. In 1943 a cruel occupation policy directly touched her family – her seventeen-year-old daughter Elida was forcibly taken to work in Germany.

The return of Soviet power to Ukraine in 1944 resulted in another loss for the Radchenko family. Vasyl, Oleksandra's husband, was taken to the front in a penal battalion, because he had "served under the Germans as a forester".

In 1945 the war was over. Prior to that Elida returned home from Germany. In August Vasyl Radchenko returned, having been awarded a "Medal for Battle Merit". The Radchenko family was finally together again.

But the good times were short lived and the totalitarian regime intervened in their lives again. On 7 July 1945, the investigator of the Kamyanets-Podilsk regional office of the NKVD signed a warrant for the arrest of Oleksandra Radchenko. During the search in her apartment they found seven of her diary notebooks covering the period of 1926-1943. The diaries became the primary evidence in the indictment of Radchenko in "anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation".

Her daughter Elida remembers that tragic moment in her family history: *"Mother never hid her diaries. They found the box where the diary notebooks lay. I was able to hide five or six other notebooks under a pillow. When mother was arrested we started reading them and discovered so many horrors written about the Holodomor that we were afraid that the whole family would be executed and so we burned them..."* But the information found in the notebooks seized by the NKVD was enough to convict the teacher.

INVESTIGATION

The investigation lasted almost half a year. Oleksandra immediately admitted that she was the author of the diaries. But that was not enough. The investigator tried to force her to admit that the notes were lies, that they were written to discredit the Soviet regime. "The investigation was deeply preconceived," she wrote some time after in her complaint to the prosecutor. "I was threatened with a long, drawn out investigation unless I signed a confession where it was already written that in the early 1930s I was keeping a diary with counter-revolutionary contents. My impressions of prison, fear and poor health were the reasons why I signed the confession."

Once the investigation was finished the case went to trial court in Proskuriv on 14 December 1945. In her remarks before the court, Oleksandra Radchenko practically denied the evidence recorded in the case

by telling the judges: *"The main aim of my writings was to devote them to my children. I wrote because after 20 years the children won't believe what violent methods were used to build socialism. The Ukrainian people suffered horrors during 1930-1933..."*

Of course the judges didn't listen to her, which is why in the accusation it was written that Oleksandra Radchenko *"was hostile to the Soviet regime during 1930-1933, and wrote a diary with counter-revolutionary contents, which condemned the actions of the Communist party for organizing collective farms in the USSR and described the difficult living conditions of the working people"*. Despite the absurdity of the accusation, the punishment was very real and cruel – 10 years in a Gulag concentration camp. Once in the camp the former teacher continued to fight for her release, writing complaints and protests; however it did not change her destiny.

RETURN TO UKRAINE

Oleksandra Radchenko returned to Ukraine in August of 1955 after completing the whole term of her imprisonment. As a result of her poor health, she lived as a free person for only ten more years.

Several weeks prior to the breakup and collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991, Radchenko was "posthumously rehabilitated". The Soviets admitted that she was imprisoned unjustly. Her diaries (unfortunately not the complete set – three notebooks were burned during the investigation because they "did not have useful information") were stored in the KGB archives, and no one knew of their existence. Upon the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Secret Service of Ukraine (SSU) inherited these archives, which contained the remaining Radchenko diaries.

It was not until 2001 that the archived documents, including the diaries which described the Holodomor atrocities, were discovered. *"Just by chance, I heard on the radio that it was possible to review the archival documents of Oleksandra Radchenko,"* remembers her daughter Elida, *"that were kept by the Secret Service of Ukraine. I was touched and started crying. Mother's time in prison was not in vain, and her work did not disappear. She wrote the truth..."*

In 2007, fragments from the diaries were published in the book *Declassified Memory*. Today, this book is an important historical source for investigating the events of the 1930s in Ukraine. The sincere words of a caring teacher, the Radchenko diaries, ruin the Soviet regime's propaganda myths about a "happy Soviet life" and describe the horrible truth about the events in Ukraine during 1932-1933.

In the end, Oleksandra Radchenko accomplished her mission: she kept and handed over for her descendants the memory about the tragedy of the Holodomor.

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AYSHE SEITMURATOVA was born in 1937 in the village of Hadzhi-Elie on the Crimean peninsula. Her father, Seitmurat Borseitov, was killed in action, defending the USSR. When Ayshe

was seven years old she was deported with her mother Naime and six siblings to the Samarkand region in Uzbekistan (Central Asia). Her university studies were constantly disrupted by the authorities due to her active membership in the Crimean Tatar national movement. She was imprisoned from 1971 to 1974 for her work as an activist. She emigrated in 1978 and reached New York in 1979.

Since then she has campaigned on behalf of the Crimean Tatars, a Muslim minority, determined to tell their story and to secure a way for them to return to their homeland. She is currently the director of her home-based nursing service for single Crimean Tatars called Qartlar Evi in Simferopol.



PRIVATE ARCHIVE
OF AYSHE SEITMURATOVA

Ayshe Seitmuratova

The Story of a People who Refuse to Die

written by Ali Khamzin

The main cause of the tragic history of the twentieth century, with its terrible crimes against humanity, with its many wars unleashed that resulted in loss of human life on a massive scale, was the establishment of a totalitarian regime in Russia. An attempt at the practical implementation of insane ideological slogans about the need for “victory of the socialist revolution all over the world”. It was the so-called socialist revolution of Russia in 1917, with its false slogans of social equality, which later became a stage from which to spread the ideology of German National Socialism, and the Nazis came to political power in Germany.

The Nazi system also asserted the need to establish some kind of social equality and justice belonging to the “Aryan German race”. That ideological spirit was the reverse of the Communist regime. Such terrible, mind-boggling crimes of deportation of entire peoples from their homelands were accompanied by the genocide of ethnic communities. This was a result of the Russian Communist action with the totalitarian regime.

The Crimean Tatar people were one of the many groups of people who were deported by that regime on May 1944, from the Crimea to central Asia and northern Russia. During the first years of NKVD surveillance, cancelled only in 1956, the nation lost about the half of its population. That was mainly children, women and old men, including Crimean Tatar soldiers who had fought against Nazi Germany and worked in the labour army.

There are plenty of bright and patriotic individuals in the history of the national struggle for the return of the Crimean Tatars to their homeland. Ayshe Seitmuratova was a courageous woman who challenged the totalitarian regime of the USSR.



Ayshe as a student, Samarkand, 1957
PRIVATE ARCHIVE OF AYSHE SEITMURATOVA



Ayshe (top left) with dormitory roommates at Samarkand State University, early 1960s

PRIVATE ARCHIVE OF AYSHE SEITMURATOVA

She made a great contribution to the fight for the return of her people to the Crimea and the restoration of national rights (1979-1990). As a correspondent of the Voice of America radio station in the USA, she informed the whole world and the Soviet public about the plight of the Crimean Tatar people, about their long-term and self-sacrificing struggle for their right to live in their homeland in the Crimea.

EARLY LIFE

Ayshe Seitmuratova was born in 1937 in the village of Hadzhi-Elie, Mayak-Salynsky district, located on the Crimean peninsula. Her father,

Seitmurat Borseitov, was killed in action, defending the USSR. Her mother Naime, with seven children, was deported to the Samarkand region in Uzbekistan (Central Asia).

Deportation, the special settlement regime, and the humiliation and suffering endured by her family and her people left a deep mark on Ayshe's soul. So, after graduating from high school, she aimed to explore the history of her people and to find out the reasons for their persecution and discrimination. In 1958, she entered to the Faculty of History of Samarkand University. In 1963, Ayshe graduated with honours from the University. She started to work in a local school and as an assistant at the historic faculty.

In 1964, she made an attempt to gain acceptance to the Post-graduate School of History at the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. She successfully passed all the exams. However, she was not accepted, because of her activity in the Crimean Tatar national movement.

She was a member of an initiative group in Samarkand and later became part of the Initiative Group of Uzbekistan. As the national representative of the Crimean Tatars she repeatedly travelled to Moscow. Along with her associates, she tried to prove the injustice and invalidity of the deportation of the Crimean Tatar people at meetings with the party leaders.

Her principal activity and position was always monitored by the Soviet government and the KGB.

At the end of 1965, she was dismissed from the university.

On 14 of October in 1966 during an interrogation by the Samarkand KGB Ayshe was arrested. She was taken under guard to Moscow.

On 24 of October she was charged with a crime, alleging that she “engaged in the preparation, printing and distribution of slanderous documents shaming and irritating the USSR”. There was a secret

trial in May 1967 and she was sentenced to 3 years of supervision by the authorities.

Within a year, Ayshe Seitmuratova became a representative of her native people in Moscow. She also took an active part in collection of numerous materials for the Crimean Tatars, self-printed books, etc. She compiled texts, protests and appeals to the supreme state authority of the USSR. She wrote materials about the Crimean Tatar national movement and distributed them through the Soviet human rights organizations.

In autumn 1967, she made a fourth attempt to become a post-graduate student. She combined her studies with contributing to the struggle of the people to return to the motherland.

IMPRISONMENT

In June 1971, a few months before she was due to defend her thesis, she was arrested again and sentenced under the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan and Russia to 3 years of imprisonment. Ayshe served her time in the camps of Mordovia.

She was released in 1974. She was denied the opportunity to do research and teaching. But neither prison nor deprivations and humiliations could break Ayshe's spirit. As a well-known public figure, Ayshe understood that the Soviet Union limited her activities and attempts to fight back.

In 1978, Ayshe found out that the authorities had a plan to have her forcibly admitted a psychiatric hospital. She openly declared: *“It would be better to set myself on fire and burn on Red Square. I have nothing to lose. But before I do that, I will turn to the Muslim world and describe the life of Muslim women in the USSR”*.

Ayshe wrote to Andropov¹: *“All forms of persecution in the country councils are delaying my death.”*

On 23 June 1978 in the Crimea, during a protest against the discriminatory policies of the authorities, who didn't allow the Crimean Tatars to live freely in their country, Musa Mamut² committed an act of self-immolation. The Soviet authorities did not want to have another scandal that could cause a negative reaction in Soviet and international public opinion. Eventually, Ayshe was allowed to emigrate.

EMIGRATION AND A NEW LIFE OF ACTIVISM

In November 1978, Ayshe, with the help of a “Jewish invitation” first travelled to Vienna, and in January 1979, she arrived in New York.

The independent Muslim magazine Impact International wrote: *“The Soviets believed that they had*

¹ Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, a Soviet politician and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 12 November 1982 until his death fifteen months later [editor's note]

² Musa Mamut was born to a shepherding family in the Crimea. On 23 June 1978, he poured petrol on himself and set himself on fire to protest against the deportation of Crimean Tatars. He died five days later. [editor's note]

put an end to Ayshe, but they were wrong. She told everyone how a small Muslim nation was destroyed in the Crimea". Emigration to the United States, beyond the "Iron Curtain" marked a new chapter in Ayshe's life and a new stage in the struggle for the Crimean Tatars' national and human rights.

She settled in New York and became a correspondent of the Voice of America radio broadcaster. Broadcasts in Russian, Uzbek and Azeri informed the public about the issues of the Crimean Tatars. Her voice could be heard on the airwaves of Radio Svoboda (Radio Free Europe), the BBC, and Deutsche Welle.

EMIGRATION FROM COMMUNIST COUNTRIES

● Emigration from the Eastern Bloc was, in most cases, prohibited by definition. Escaping was complicated due to extremely restricted permissions to travel abroad, effective border control and heavily guarded borders to Western Europe (the Iron Curtain). Thousands were killed trying to cross the borders to the West; many more were captured during an attempt to leave the country and sentenced to long years in prison camps.

The very few tourist groups who were allowed to travel abroad were strictly controlled by the group leaders and additionally by secret police agents who were included in each group. Another way of leaving the country was expatriation as a punishment. To be punished in such a way was the "privilege" of only a few outstanding dissidents, who had usually become well-known abroad before their expulsion, like the novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

All kinds of methods were used to escape the "Communist paradise". People commandeered passenger planes, crossed the strictly guarded borders successfully, defected during tourist or business or private trips, etc. But all of these methods were also used by the Communist secret services to infiltrate their agents to the West. Therefore most émigrés had to go through thorough "screening" by the respective western agencies.

Travel restrictions in some Eastern European countries in some periods were more lenient. So for example, a lot of people managed to escape Hungary after the Revolution of 1956 and Czechoslovakia after the oppression of the Prague Spring in 1968, and millions of Germans left Eastern Germany before the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. East Germany also infamously "sold" its citizens wishing to emigrate to West Germany.

INFO BOX

Ayshe's broadcasts explored the history, culture, language and political situation of the people. The topics included: "The national languages of the USSR (using the example of the Crimean Tatar language)", "Elimination of the Crimean Tatar literature", "Destruction of the Crimean Tatar intelligentsia (1917–1940)", "Documents on the policy of the Crimean Tatar's assimilation" etc.

In addition to work on the world's leading radio stations, Ayshe participated in many international conferences on human rights: in Washington, Ottawa, Montreal, London, Stockholm, Oslo, Ankara, Istanbul and Rome. Evaluating her participation in the Fifth International Sakharov Conference, which took place on 10 to 11 April 1985 in London, the magazine Impact International wrote: *"Her presence at the hearing was particularly important as the harsh reality of the Soviet treatment of minorities was not generally known. It was also a reminder that the 'forgotten people' of the USSR consisted of Muslims. There were more than 50 million, although the problem was almost never raised at the international forum. That was significant, because very little was known about them. Ayshe, one of the few Muslim immigrants from the Soviet Union, was able to give an authoritative description of the conditions under which they live."*

In order to alert the public about the problems of the Muslim Crimean Tatars Ayshe Seitmuratova was involved in three Muslim international conferences initiated by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (which includes 43 countries) in London (1980), Paris (UNESCO office in

December 1980) Kuala Lumpur (November-December 1981). Ayshe was the only woman among the participants at a conference in Malaysia on the 15th anniversary of a century of Islam. She performed wearing the Crimean Tatar national clothes, showing the audience the culture of her people.

Ayshe Seitmuratova actively lobbied for the interests of the Crimean Tatars in the Final Act of the Conference on the Helsinki Accords. In November 1980, she was invited to participate in a conference in Madrid, and in November 1986 in Vienna. Speaking at the Madrid Conference, as the authorized representative of the Crimean Tatars in the West, she addressed the Final Act of the Helsinki Accords to support the Crimean Tatar people in their quest to return to their motherland in the Crimea and advocate for convicted members of the Crimean Tatar national movement: Mustafa Dzhemilev, Seydameta Memetova, Eldar Shabanov, Mamedov Chobanov, Dzhemilev Kadyeva Roland and others.

"I hope," she said "that members will respect the principles of the Helsinki Final Act. Members shall respect the equality of all peoples and their right to self-determination, acting at all times in accordance with the requirements and principles of the UN Charter and international law. Distinguished delegates of the Madrid meeting, protect the national and human rights of the Crimean Tatars!"

Ayshe Seitmuratova produced a brochure in English for the Vienna Conference, on the protection of Mustafa Dzhemilev, who at that time was in prison in Magadan. The booklet contained various facts about and photographs of Dzhemilev.

The Vienna Conference prompted the release of political prisoners of the USSR. Thereafter on the orders of Mikhail Gorbachev, Sakharov was returned to Moscow from exile and Dzhemilev was released from the camp.

Ayshe Seitmuratova has spoken on the plight of the Crimean Tatars in the parliaments of Canada, Great Britain, Italy, Turkey, France, and the U.S. Congress. These performances evoked a response and a desire to help the Crimean Tatars. Thus, during her visit to Italy, shortly before a visit to the country by Gorbachev, Ayshe also managed to enlist the support of Italian senators, who paid great attention to the problems of the Crimean Tatars. At a conversation with a Canadian senator Paul Yuzik, the latter ended the meeting with the call to reporters, *"I want you to shout to the world that these people need to be saved."*



Ayshe among delegates of the Second Kurultay of the Crimean Tatar People, Simferopol, June 1991

PRIVATE ARCHIVE OF AYSHE SEITMURATOVA

To raise the voice of the international community in support of the Crimean Tatar people, she met with leaders from around the world. Ayshe was invited twice to the White House to meet with President Reagan (1982, 1988). She talked with the presidents Turgat Ozal (Turkey), Václav Havel (Czech Republic) and Leonid Kravchuk (Ukraine).

To draw attention to the problem of the Crimean Tatar students and scholars, Ayshe lectured in various universities and colleges around the world about the Crimean Tatars and appealed for them to be allowed to return to their homes.

Ayshe also participated in international organizations such as Amnesty International, the International League for Human Rights, the U.S. Helsinki Group, the Center for Democracy in the USSR and more.

In 1986, she organized in 12 countries a Committee for the Defence of Mustafa Dzhemilev, lobbying for the release of Yuri Osmanov, Reshat Ablaev, Sinaver Kadyrov and other members of the Crimean Tatar national movement.

Speeches and articles by Seitmuratova in the international media had great importance in terms of raising international and public awareness of the Crimean Tatar problem. Her work has appeared in such



Celebrating the Kurban bayrami (Eid al-Adha) holiday at the Qartlar Evi nursing home, Simferopol, 2001

PRIVATE ARCHIVE OF AYSHE SEITMURATOVA

influential publications as *Kontinent*, *Le Nouvel Espoir*, the journal *Rabitat Al-Alam Al-Islami*, *New Russian Word* and others. She rose her voice in defence of other nations oppressed by the Communist regime. The magazine RCDA published an article called “*The genocide in Bulgaria*” (co-authored with Ibrahim Tuna), dedicated to the violent Bulgarization of Turkic Muslims. Her articles can be seen in books published by Columbia, Harvard and other universities. In 1997, a brochure called *National Movement of Crimean Tatars* was published. In the late 1980s to early 1990s Ayshe was busy with the

delivery of humanitarian assistance to compatriots who had returned home without the help of government agencies in a period of severe economic and social crisis of the USSR and its subsequent collapse. These people faced many challenges including financial difficulties caused by withholding of their bank savings.

In 1992, she created and headed a charity fund called Merhamet Evi (House of Mercy). Its goal was to provide material, medical and legal assistance to elderly people who were alone and to families with many children.

HER LEGACY

Certainly, the activity of Ayshe Seitmuratova as a correspondent of Voice of America was invaluable. It was a great contribution to the fight of the human rights movement in the Soviet Union and the national movement of the Crimean Tatar people against the Communist regime. She was the most significant Soviet human rights activist and one of the most active participants in the national movement of the Crimean Tatar people, a prominent public figure, who understood the crimes of the Communist regime of the USSR in a complex way, inside and out, and understood the danger of its overwhelming hateful ideology to mankind. In protecting the rights of its repressed people, she made a tremendous contribution to the protection of human rights in the “evil empire”, which naturally collapsed in late 1991.

Currently she is the director of her home-based nursing service for single Crimean Tatars called Qartlar Evi in Simferopol. The life path of Ayshe Seitmuratova, her selfless struggle for the restoration of national and civil rights of Crimean Tatars, is a prime example of the Crimean Tatar people’s struggle for survival, revival and development in their homeland in the Crimea. An international magazine referred to Ayshe Seitmuratova’s story as the story of a people who refuse to die.

● This abstract was written on the basis of newspapers, magazines, Internet-sources and books, including Ayshe Seyitmuratova is at the microphone: transmission on Radio Freedom, by Gulnara Bekirova, PhD (Political Sciences) and Edie Muslyumova; and the article of Eldar Seydametov, PhD (World History) titled The role of Ayshe Seitmuratova in the solidarity movement of Crimean Tatar diaspora in the U.S.A. for the return of compatriots to the homeland – Crimea.

CONTRIBUTED BY THE MEJLIS OF THE CRIMEAN TATAR PEOPLE

COMING TO TERMS WITH TOTALITARIANISM ON THE EUROPEAN LEVEL

The citizens of countries under totalitarian rule lived in a state of lawlessness, where one political group exercised complete control over society, committing heinous crimes and systematically violating fundamental human rights. The consequences of the destruction of basic values in societies suffering under totalitarianism over several generations are still visible today. They manifest themselves in, among other ways, widespread corruption, malfunctioning democratic institutions, and insufficient upholding of the principles of a legal state. It requires a daily effort by all of us to promote the development of a truly democratic society in all of Europe.

After the fall of the Communist regimes in Europe in 1989-1991 and with the progressing integration of Europe, significant political efforts have been made to help society come to terms with the legacy of totalitarianism on the European level, in order to ensure that the atrocities committed by the totalitarian regimes can never occur again. Following are some important resolutions adopted by democratically elected European bodies.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe:

Resolution 1096 of 27 June 1996 “On Measures to Dismantle the Heritage of Former Communist Totalitarian Systems”

Resolution 1481 of 25 January 2006 “Need for International Condemnation of Crimes of Totalitarian Communist Regimes”

European Parliament:

Declaration of 23 September 2008 “On the Proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Nazism and Stalinism”

Resolution of 2 April 2009 “On European Conscience and Totalitarianism”

OSCE Parliamentary assembly:

Resolution of 3 July 2009 “Divided Europe Reunited: Promoting Human Rights and Civil Liberties in the OSCE Region in the 21st Century”

PRINCIPAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS IN EUROPE

European Convention on Human Rights of the Council of Europe – in effect since 1953

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union – in effect since 2009

EUROPEAN CONSCIENCE AND TOTALITARIANISM

European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
- having regard to United Nations General Assembly Resolution 260(III)A of 9 December 1948 on genocide,
- having regard to Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty on European Union,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
- having regard to Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law¹,
- having regard to Resolution 1481 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 25 January 2006 on the need for international condemnation of the crimes of totalitarian Communist regimes,
- having regard to its declaration of 23 September 2008 on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism²,
- having regard to its many previous resolutions on democracy and respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, including that of 12 May 2005 on the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe on 8 May 1945³, that of 23 October 2008 on the commemoration of the Holodomor⁴, and that of 15 January 2009 on Srebrenica⁵,
- having regard to the Truth and Justice Commissions established in various parts of the world, which have helped those who have lived under numerous former authoritarian and totalitarian regimes to overcome their differences and achieve reconciliation,
- having regard to the statements made by its President and the political groups on 4 July 2006, 70 years after General Franco's coup d'état in Spain,
- having regard to Rule 103(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

- A.** whereas historians agree that fully objective interpretations of historical facts are not possible and objective historical narratives do not exist; whereas, nevertheless, professional historians use scientific tools to study the past, and try to be as impartial as possible,
- B.** whereas no political body or political party has a monopoly on interpreting history, and such bodies and parties cannot claim to be objective,
- C.** whereas official political interpretations of historical facts should not be imposed by means of majority decisions of parliaments; whereas a parliament cannot legislate on the past,
- D.** whereas a core objective of the European integration process is to ensure respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law in the future, and whereas appropriate mechanisms for achieving this goal have been provided for in Articles 6 and 7 of the Treaty on European Union,
- E.** whereas misinterpretations of history can fuel exclusivist policies and thereby incite hatred and racism,
- F.** whereas the memories of Europe's tragic past must be kept alive in order to honour the victims, condemn the perpetrators and lay the foundations for reconciliation based on truth and remembrance,
- G.** whereas millions of victims were deported, imprisoned, tortured and murdered by totalitarian and authoritarian regimes during the 20th century in Europe; whereas the uniqueness of the Holocaust must nevertheless be acknowledged,
- H.** whereas the dominant historical experience of Western Europe was Nazism, and whereas Central and Eastern European countries have experienced both Communism and Nazism; whereas understanding has to be promoted in relation to the double legacy of dictatorship borne by these countries,
- I.** whereas from the outset European integration has been a response to the suffering inflicted by two world wars and the Nazi tyranny that led to the Holocaust and to the expansion of totalitarian and undemocratic Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as a way of overcoming deep divisions and hostility in Europe through cooperation and integration and of ending war and securing democracy in Europe,
- J.** whereas the process of European integration has been successful and has now led to a European Union that encompasses the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which lived under Communist regimes from the end of World War II until the early 1990s, and whereas the earlier accessions of Greece, Spain and Portugal, which suffered under long lasting fascist regimes, helped secure democracy in the south of Europe,
- K.** whereas Europe will not be united unless it is able to form a common view of its history, recognises Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes as a common legacy and brings about an honest and thorough debate on their crimes in the past century,
- L.** whereas in 2009 a reunited Europe will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the collapse of the Communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe and the fall of the Berlin Wall, which should provide both an opportunity to enhance

¹ OJ L 328, 6.12.2008, p. 55.
² Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0439.
³ OJ C 92 E, 20.4.2006, p. 392.
⁴ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0523.
⁵ Texts adopted, P6_TA(2009)0028.

awareness of the past and recognise the role of democratic citizens' initiatives, and an incentive to strengthen feelings of togetherness and cohesion,

M. whereas it is also important to remember those who actively opposed totalitarian rule and who should take their place in the consciousness of Europeans as the heroes of the totalitarian age because of their dedication, faithfulness to ideals, honour and courage,

N. whereas from the perspective of the victims it is immaterial which regime deprived them of their liberty or tortured or murdered them for whatever reason,

1. Expresses respect for all victims of totalitarian and undemocratic regimes in Europe and pays tribute to those who fought against tyranny and oppression;

2. Renews its commitment to a peaceful and prosperous Europe founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights;

3. Underlines the importance of keeping the memories of the past alive, because there can be no reconciliation without truth and remembrance; reconfirms its united stand against all totalitarian rule from whatever ideological background;

4. Recalls that the most recent crimes against humanity and acts of genocide in Europe were still taking place in July 1995 and that constant vigilance is needed to fight undemocratic, xenophobic, authoritarian and totalitarian ideas and tendencies;

5. Underlines that, in order to strengthen European awareness of crimes committed by totalitarian and undemocratic regimes, documentation of, and accounts testifying to, Europe's troubled past must be supported, as there can be no reconciliation without remembrance;

6. Regrets that, 20 years after the collapse of the Communist dictatorships in Central and Eastern Europe, access to documents that are of personal relevance or needed for scientific research is still unduly restricted in some Member States; calls for a genuine effort in all Member States towards opening up archives, including those of the former internal security services, secret police and intelligence agencies, although steps must be taken to ensure that this process is not abused for political purposes;

7. Condemns strongly and unequivocally all crimes against humanity and the massive human rights violations committed by all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes; extends to the victims of these crimes and their family members its sympathy, understanding and recognition of their suffering;

8. Declares that European integration as a model of peace and reconciliation represents a free choice by the peoples of Europe to commit to a shared future, and that the European Union has a particular responsibility to promote and safeguard democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, both inside and outside the European Union;

9. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to make further efforts to strengthen the teaching of European

history and to underline the historic achievement of European integration and the stark contrast between the tragic past and the peaceful and democratic social order in today's European Union;

10. Believes that appropriate preservation of historical memory, a comprehensive reassessment of European history and Europe-wide recognition of all historical aspects of modern Europe will strengthen European integration;

11. Calls in this connection on the Council and the Commission to support and defend the activities of non-governmental organisations, such as Memorial in the Russian Federation, that are actively engaged in researching and collecting documents related to the crimes committed during the Stalinist period;

12. Reiterates its consistent support for strengthened international justice;

13. Calls for the establishment of a Platform of European Memory and Conscience to provide support for networking and cooperation among national research institutes specialising in the subject of totalitarian history, and for the creation of a pan-European documentation centre/memorial for the victims of all totalitarian regimes;

14. Calls for a strengthening of the existing relevant financial instruments with a view to providing support for professional historical research on the issues outlined above;

15. Calls for the proclamation of 23 August as a Europe-wide Day of Remembrance for the victims of all totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, to be commemorated with dignity and impartiality;

16. Is convinced that the ultimate goal of disclosure and assessment of the crimes committed by the Communist totalitarian regimes is reconciliation, which can be achieved by admitting responsibility, asking for forgiveness and fostering moral renewal;

17. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the parliaments of the Member States, the governments and parliaments of the candidate countries, the governments and parliaments of the countries associated with the European Union, and the governments and parliaments of the Members of the Council of Europe.

ABBREVIATIONS

ÁVO	Hungarian State Police State Protection Department (Magyar Államrendőrség Államvédelmi Osztálya)
ÁVH	State Protection Authority (Államvédelmi Hatóság)
GDR	German Democratic Republic
KGB	Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union (Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti)
MGB	Ministry of State Security of the USSR (Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti)
NKVD	People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del)
NSDAP	National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei), commonly known in English as the Nazi Party
NSV	National Socialist People's Welfare (Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt)
OZNA	Department of National Security, (Odjeljenje za zaštitu naroda)
POW	Prisoner of war
SA	Storm Detachment (Sturmabteilung)
SD	German Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS)
SED	Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands)
SiPo	German Security Police (Sicherheitspolizei)
SS	Protection Squadron (Schutzstaffel)
UB	Security Office (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa)
UDBA	State Security Administration (Uprava državne bezbednosti)

LEST WE FORGET

Memory of Totalitarianism in Europe

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