

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 419

“Millions of Spectators”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

“Only a handful of sadistic SS men were needed to hit a Jew, or cut off his beard, but millions had to participate in the slaughter of millions. There had to be masses of murderers, thousands of looters, millions of spectators.”

Jewish partisan leader Abba Kovner.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 419. Millions of Spectators.

I mentioned back in episode 389 that following the German defeat at Stalingrad, the government of Hungary began putting out peace feelers to the Allies. Today, I want to begin by discussing exactly what that means and what happened during those secret talks.

The first Hungarian efforts to reach out to the Allies, or maybe I should say the United Nations, began in the aftermath of Operation Torch, the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa on November 8, 1942. American troops landing at Casablanca set off alarm bells 2,700 kilometers away, in Budapest. Hungarian military leaders saw at once the possibility, indeed, the probability, that these landings in French North Africa would lead to the eviction of Axis forces from the African continent, which in turn would lead to Anglo-American forces landing somewhere in the Balkans, which would put Hungary square in their crosshairs.

The Hungarians saw an Allied landing in the Balkans as the next logical step just as Winston Churchill did, and for the same reason. It had been an Entente army in the Balkans that triggered the final collapse of the Central Powers in the last war. The Bulgarian Army was unable to hold off an Entente advance into Bulgaria, which triggered Bulgarian capitulation, which opened the way into Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary had no armed forces on its southern flank capable of holding back the Entente, so it capitulated. Germany likewise had no armed forces on its southern border with Austria-Hungary, so it capitulated as well.

It's a truism that generals are always fighting the last war, so it should be no surprise that the Hungarian generals anticipated a replay of the events of 1918. The Hungarians feared this Anglo-American invasion of the Balkans might begin as soon as the spring of 1943.

Hungarian diplomats sounded out their British counterparts in three neutral capitals: Stockholm, Bern, and Ankara. The British response was curt: "[S]o long as Hungary continues to fight against our Allies and to help the Axis, she can expect neither sympathy nor consideration."

The British Foreign Office communicated the news of these Hungarian contacts and the British reply to the US and Soviet governments. The US State Department replied that it was "not in the least interested..." in negotiating with Budapest.

This began to change after the Battle of Stalingrad. Germany's defeat was an early warning sign that the Axis was in real danger of losing this war. Hungarian forces on the Eastern Front had been overrun and virtually destroyed by the Red Army's Operation Little Saturn.

It became apparent to the Foreign Office that democratic opposition groups of the center and left were gaining support in Hungary, and even some of the right-wing factions supported Hungarian nationalism over fascist solidarity. Jewish organizations in Britain pointed out to the government that Hungary's anti-Semitic policies were relatively mild and that Hungary had refused German demands to turn over its native Jewish population to the SS, and for these reasons Hungary's 800,000 Jewish citizens were alive and by 1943 constituted the largest surviving Jewish community in Axis-controlled Europe.

In consideration of these facts, British foreign secretary Anthony Eden concluded that the United Kingdom should perhaps soften its stance on Hungary, at least a bit, but only after consultations with Moscow and Washington.

At this same time, a prominent Hungarian scientist, Albert Szent-Györgyi, the researcher who had first isolated vitamin C and had gotten a Nobel Prize for it, appeared in Istanbul and approached diplomats of the United States and United Kingdom. He told them that he had been in touch with the leaders of Hungary's most important political parties, with the exception of the fascist Arrow Cross Party, and they were prepared to form a government of national unity, with Szent-Györgyi as prime minister, which would overthrow Admiral Horthy, withdraw its military forces behind Hungary's borders, and support the United Nations.

The British were loath to negotiate with the current government in Budapest, but if it should be replaced by a new, more liberal, more democratic government, that would be more attractive. The Americans and the Soviets remained cool to the idea, and the Czechoslovak government in exile objected that Hungary had annexed land that was part of Czechoslovakia before the war. The First and Second Vienna Conferences, overseen by Germany, had awarded to Hungary territories belonging to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and Romania as well. Allied diplomats

didn't particularly care about Romania, but Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were members of the United Nations. Their interests had to be taken into account.

Also, though the Hungarians didn't know it, the British certainly knew that an Anglo-American invasion of the Balkans was not happening in the foreseeable future, no matter how badly Winston Churchill wanted it. What good would a change of government in Budapest do, if it were swiftly followed by a German occupation? Even worse, a German occupation of Hungary would open the way for the Nazis to send Hungary's Jewish population to the death camps.

These were thorny problems. Clearly, thought had to be given to Hungary's postwar borders and its role in postwar Europe. The British government also wanted to see political and social reforms in Hungary that would make the nation more liberal and democratic. Some in the Foreign Office suspected that the principal reason Hungarian elites were proposing to switch sides was to protect their own political power within the Hungarian state.

The Soviet Union had its own ideas on how to deal with Hungary and the other smaller Axis nations. The principles the USSR proposed were first, unconditional surrender; second, withdrawal of all military forces; third, indemnification for war damages; fourth, punishment of those responsible for Hungary's support of Germany.

The Soviet Union did not recognize the Vienna Awards, and never had. In June 1941, shortly after Germany invaded, Moscow offered to support Hungary's claims to Romanian Transylvania, if Hungary would remain neutral in the war between the USSR and Germany. Hungary had rejected the offer.

As for the Western Allies, Britain declared war on Hungary, Romania, and Finland on December 5, 1941, owing to Britain's new alliance with the USSR. Just days later, after the Pearl Harbor attack and Germany's declaration of war against the USA, Italy, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria also declared war on the United States. The United States declared war on Germany and Italy, but took no immediate action against the other Axis nations in Europe, because the US Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, believed Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria should be regarded as merely German puppets, but in June 1942, President Roosevelt did submit a request to Congress to declare war on those three nations, which Congress did immediately, by unanimous vote.

Fun fact: the 1942 US declarations of war against Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria were the last time the United States Congress formally declared war. At least, as of the date I release this episode.

The United States and Finland were never technically at war. And technically is the key word here. What I'm getting at is that although the UK and the USA were technically at war with Hungary as these discussions I've been describing were taking place, the fact was that Hungary had never taken any military action against either country, but it was all in on the war against the

Soviet Union. Therefore, it seemed to American and British diplomats that the Soviet Union should have the greatest say in formulating the terms of any Allied agreement with Hungary.

Hungarian overtures to the Allies became urgent after August 1943, when Italy changed sides in the war, thus providing a useful example of what Hungary was looking for. An official from the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs appeared in Ankara to tell Allied diplomats that Hungary would accept the deal that Italy got: unconditional surrender and all Hungarian airfields and military installations to be made available to Allied forces. And please come quickly. The Hungarian official was sent back to Budapest with a radio transmitter to be used for direct communication with Allied diplomats.

Among the Western Allies, it was felt that a Hungarian capitulation was neither helpful nor wise until Allied troops reached Hungary's frontiers. Talks over the radio link proved frustrating. The Hungarians promised a credentialed diplomat would be sent to Lisbon for further negotiations. The Allies waited. No one showed up. The Hungarians offered to send a top military commander to Istanbul to discuss military cooperation with the Allies, but no such commander ever showed up. The British proposed parachuting an Allied military mission into Hungary to meet with the Hungarian military command, but the Hungarians refused. They warned they would not be able to guarantee the safety of the mission's members.

Weeks passed, and the Foreign Office began to think the Hungarians were playing for time. The British considered an ultimatum to Budapest: show us some concrete action in opposition to Germany within two months, or else the RAF would begin bombing Budapest.

In February 1944, that Hungarian official returned to Istanbul, carrying a message from the Hungarian government. Hungary now wanted to negotiate its surrender with the Soviet Union, which would include the surrender of Hungarian armed forces on the Eastern Front, though the Hungarians wanted to stage the surrender to look as if their forces had been surrounded by the Red Army and forced to capitulate.

The Foreign Office decided Soviet diplomats should be included in these discussions, but nothing came of it, because...other events transpired.

[music: Melartin, *Marcia funèbre*.]

With Allied bombers now bombing every corner of the Reich, Adolf Hitler ordered concrete reinforcements installed in the bunkers at the Wolf's Lair in spring of 1944. During the construction work, he moved to his Alpine retreat at the Berghof.

Since the defection of Italy last September, Hitler had become deeply concerned about the loyalties of Romania and Hungary, especially now that the Red Army was approaching their borders. The Berghof was closer to the Balkans than was the Wolf's Lair, so here was an

opportunity to meet with the leaders of the two countries, take their measures, and sound out their loyalties.

He met first with Ion Antonescu, the dictator of Romania, and I already described that meeting. It went well and Antonescu remained committed to the fascist cause.

Hungary was another story. Hitler had already ordered the Wehrmacht to draw up plans to occupy Romania or Hungary in the event either country tried to betray Germany, and by early 1944, German intelligence was well aware of Hungary's attempts to negotiate with the Allies, so when Hitler arranged to meet Hungary's ruler, Admiral Horthy Miklòs, he also instructed the Wehrmacht to prepare for the occupation of Hungary. This would end any worries about Hungarian betrayal and offered the additional advantage, as Hitler saw it, of at last securing German control over Hungary's Jewish population.

You'll recall that after the end of the last war, Hungary endured multiple traumas: the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the imposition by the Allies of the hated Treaty of Trianon, a Communist revolution, a Romanian invasion, and a right-wing counter-revolution.

In 1920, the Hungarian Parliament installed Horthy as Regent of what was still officially the Kingdom of Hungary, though Hungary had no king. Serving as regent of a kingdom that had no king was a gig that suited Horthy, and it paired nicely with his other role, admiral of a nation that had no seacoast.

On March 18, Hitler and Horthy met at Klessheim Castle, outside Salzburg. Horthy could hardly have expected the treatment he got: it was the same treatment Hitler had given Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg in 1938, episode 304, and Czechoslovak president Emil Hácha in 1939, episode 306. Hitler demanded that Horthy dismiss his prime minister, whose government had begun those negotiations with the Allies, replace him with a new, pro-fascist government, and agree to Hungary's occupation by the German military. When Horthy refused these demands and attempted to leave, Hitler's staff simulated an Allied air raid, sounding sirens and setting off smoke bombs. Horthy was told it would be too dangerous to leave. After hours more of browbeating, Horthy gave in.

He returned to Budapest the next day, accompanied by a high-ranking SS official named Edmund Veessenmayer, whom Hitler appointed *Reichskommissar* for Hungary. The German occupation proceeded like clockwork. Horthy was forced to appoint a new pro-German prime minister, and the SS sent its resident genocide expert, Adolf Eichmann, to Budapest and with the enthusiastic assistance of the new government, Hungarian policy toward its Jewish citizens went from yellow star regulations to ghettos to deportations to Auschwitz in a matter of weeks.

After these drastic steps, Hitler was forced to call another meeting with Antonescu to explain and justify his treatment of Hungary. He pledged he would "ruthlessly confront every threat to the joint conduct of [the] war," which is German for, "Don't you even think about it." He also

advised Antonescu that the way to win a war was to begin by ruling out any prospect of a negotiated settlement, or, in his words, “If you have destroyed the last bridges behind you, you go more lightly into battle and have better chances of achieving victory.” He promised Antonescu that Germany would soon go on the offensive in the East once more.

Three weeks later, Soviet troops marched into Odessa.

Most of the Jewish people deported from Hungary following the German occupation of that country were sent directly to the murder camp at Auschwitz, at an estimated rate of 12,000 per day. That was as many as the camp could handle.

Of the estimated one million Jewish people murdered at Auschwitz, it is thought that one out of three of them were Hungarians who arrived during a 56-day period from May 15 to July 9, 1944, at which point Horthy suspended the deportations. More about that in a few minutes.

Until these 350,000 or so Jewish Hungarians were murdered in 1944, the camp where the most murders were committed was Treblinka. It was these Hungarian deportations that made Auschwitz into the deadliest camp of the Holocaust, and one of the reasons Auschwitz in particular has its infamous reputation.

The other reason is *The Auschwitz Album*. *The Auschwitz Album* is a photographic record of the mass murders of these Hungarians in 1944, created by photographers working for the SS. *The Auschwitz Album* was discovered at the end of the war by a Jewish survivor, who kept it because she knew some of the people in the pictures. In the 1960s, the existence of the album became public. In 1980, the owner donated the album to Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial institution. Why official SS photographers took these pictures when the Nazis otherwise strove to hide evidence of their crimes is not clear, though the most likely explanation is that it was meant as part of some kind of report to higher officials in Berlin, touting the efficiency of the camp.

That album, and one other album of personal photographs taken by an SS officer working at Auschwitz in 1944 are our best photographic evidence of what exactly happened there. This second album is now held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. They are our best evidence, but note that both of them contain photographs taken in 1944, during what you might call the final stage of the Holocaust, during the murders of Hungarians, and they were taken at Auschwitz. Note also that by 1944, the SS had the system down. The gas chambers and crematoria they were using by then were both capacious and efficient, much more so than the equipment used during the 1942 Operation Reinhard.

These photographs did much to establish the reputation of Auschwitz as the biggest and worst of the camps, which was true by 1944, but not necessarily in the earlier years of the Holocaust. Still, in our time, it is Auschwitz, and particularly Auschwitz as it was in 1944, that has come to epitomize the mass murder machinery of the Holocaust, with its efficient clockwork operation, its gas chambers and crematoria, and its practice of tattooing serial numbers onto the prisoners

chosen for slave labor, even though this image is more a snapshot of one camp at one moment in time, rather than a representation of the entire operation, involving multiple camps and killing squads, operating over the course of almost four years.

I mentioned Treblinka, the camp where the most murders had taken place until 1944. On August 2, 1943, prisoners at Treblinka rose up against their captors and attempted to seize control of the camp. These prisoners were the ones who had been spared because of their youth and strength to be used as prison labor, including assisting in the murder of newer arrivals. After Operation Reinhard wound down and fewer and fewer people were being brought in to be killed, these workers realized it was only a matter of time before the SS would kill them as well, as they were witnesses.

The prisoners who organized the uprising understood that simply to escape would not be enough. The SS would hunt them down. So they planned to steal weapons, kill the guards, take control of the camp, and destroy it. These were ambitious goals, and unfortunately, the conspirators were not able to achieve them. The uprising began prematurely, because the conspiracy was about to be discovered.

Of the 850 or so prisoners in the camp at the time, about 350 were killed and 100 chose to stay. A few German guards were killed and fires set which damaged the camp, though they did not destroy it. Some 400 prisoners did escape. Of these, 300 were captured and killed, mostly within 24 hours. About 70 of them survived until the end of the war, in many cases thanks to offers of food and shelter from Polish peasants.

The SS continued to use Treblinka as a murder camp for a few weeks after the uprising, but then had the camp dismantled and destroyed.

On October 14, 1943, there was an uprising at the Sobibor camp, organized by a group of prisoners that included some Soviet POWs. This one also began prematurely. About a dozen guards were killed, along with 350 or so prisoners. About 200 escaped. Half of these were later found and killed. Forty-seven of the escapees are known to have survived the war.

Afterward, the SS also dismantled and destroyed the Sobibor camp. In both cases, the grounds were leveled and planted to look like meadows or farms, in an attempt to erase any evidence of the crimes committed there.

On April 10, 1944, two Jewish Slovaks, named Rudolf Vrba and Alfréd Wetzler, escaped from Auschwitz and made their way back to Slovakia, where they wrote out a detailed report in Slovak describing the Auschwitz camp and its operations. The Slovak *Judenrat* translated their report into German. When the deportations from Hungary began, the Slovak *Judenrat* sent a copy of this report to the Budapest *Judenrat*, but it seems it wasn't shown to many people. Georg Klein, a Jewish Hungarian Swedish scientist, who at the time was an 18-year-old clerk working for the *Judenrat*, was one of the few who did get a look at this report. Klein later described his

efforts to warn his family that the German plan to “resettle” them was in fact a scheme to murder them, but to no avail. Klein’s uncle, a physician, demanded to know how Klein could believe such nonsense. Klein escaped the SS and went into hiding in Budapest until the Red Army captured the city in 1945, making him the only member of his family to survive.

The reluctance of the *Judenrat* to share the information in that report more widely is a bit of a mystery. If more Budapest Jews had been aware of the contents of the report, they would have been less cooperative with the SS deportations, which would have slowed the process and saved lives. It may be that they held the information close so as not to disrupt negotiations with Adolf Eichmann and the SS. I’ll also talk more about that in a few minutes.

A few weeks later, a copy of the report made it to Switzerland, where the Swiss press publicized its contents. On June 4, 1944, *The New York Times* reported the story and followed up with a second, longer report on June 20. The BBC Overseas Service broadcast the news on June 15.

A few days later, Pope Pius XII called for an end to the deportations, a call that carried serious weight in Catholic Hungary. Then US President Franklin Roosevelt and Swedish King Gustaf V made similar calls. Roosevelt had already issued a public warning that officials in Axis countries who participated in mass murders would be prosecuted after the war.

The British government and Foreign Office were less willing to publicize information about the Holocaust, as they were already sitting on a powder keg in Palestine. Efforts to call attention to the persecution of Jews in Europe would be likely to lead to the unfortunate result (in the British government view) of creating diplomatic pressure on the UK to allow Jewish refugees from Europe to resettle in Palestine, which in turn make a political solution in Palestine even more difficult than it already was.

Horthy Miklós himself was given a copy of the Vrba-Wetzler Report, and it appears the contents of the report, together with those international calls to end the deportations and Roosevelt’s threat of prosecution were sufficient to persuade Horthy to end the deportations. On July 7, 1944, Horthy did exactly that: he issued an order halting the deportations, even going so far as to authorize Hungarian police to use deadly force, if necessary to keep the German SS from resuming them.

It’s worth taking a moment to examine what is happening here. Once Hitler ordered the German Army into Hungary, you might be tempted to conclude that Hungary had been reduced to the status of a German puppet and Horthy and its government had no choice but to cooperate with the Germans. But clearly that was not the case; Horthy had the power to halt the deportations. He proved that on July 7.

The real question is, why didn’t he end them sooner? For what it’s worth, Horthy later claimed he had not known the deportees were being murdered; he believed they were being taken to do forced labor in Germany and would be returned after the war. That’s his story, anyway.

About 450,000 Jewish Hungarians were deported during this period. Some 80,000 or so of the young and strong and healthy were kept alive as slave labor; the rest were killed. By 1944, the war was going against Germany and it seemed the Nazis were willing to moderate their policy of murdering every single Jewish person they could get their hands at least a little for the sake of the war effort. On the other hand, the SS made sure that even these Jewish slave laborers were fed inadequately and housed inhumanely, conditions that bred sickness and disease. These laborers could have been more productive and contributed more to the German war effort if they had been better treated, but it seems the SS was not willing to go that far.

Apart from those who were murdered immediately upon their arrival at Auschwitz and those who were spared for the sake of their labor, there was a third and even more gruesome category: Jews and Roma who were experimented upon. The SS performed a variety of revolting experiments on some of its prisoners, including subjecting them to gunshot wounds to test various treatments, deliberately inducing infections, and surgery without anesthesia.

At Auschwitz in 1944 was the most notorious of the medical experimenters, Josef Mengele. Mengele, a physician, had been working at Auschwitz since 1942. He was involved in the process of deciding which prisoners should be kept alive for their labor, and which laborers had become too sick or weak to be useful and should therefore be sent to the gas chambers. For this, he came to be called the “Angel of Death.”

By 1944, Mengele had taken an interest in genetics and began a study of twin children. Ordinarily, children arriving at the death camps were killed immediately as a matter of course, but Mengele began keeping pairs of twin children, hundreds of them in all, for his genetics studies. Some of his subjects were siblings posing as twins to stay alive. Mengele encouraged his experimental subjects to call him “Uncle.”

Mengele kept his child twin subjects under more humane conditions than other prisoners and subjected them to thorough medical examinations every week. It’s not clear what his purpose was. Some of these children were eventually killed as part of some experiment or another, but hundreds of them survived the war.

Meanwhile, back in Budapest, efforts were underway to spare some of the 250,000 or so Jewish Hungarians still alive. Back in April and May, as the deportations were beginning, an underground Jewish group called the Aid and Rescue Committee began negotiations with the SS for the purpose of buying the freedom of some of Hungary’s Jews. And here may be the explanation for the *Judenrat’s* failure to publicize what the SS planned to do with the deportees. It may have been an effort to avoid disrupting these negotiations that could potentially save lives.

One such negotiation involved a man named Joel Brand, who actually got a meeting with Adolf Eichmann on April 25. Eichmann offered a deal: one million Jews in exchange for war materials from the Western Allies, including such items as tungsten, and in particular 10,000 trucks, which

Eichmann promised would be used only on the Eastern Front. Brand was given money and a German passport and instructed to go to Istanbul, meet with Allied officials, and relay the offer.

Brand traveled to Istanbul in May, as the deportations were beginning, and met with Zionist leaders there, then traveled to Aleppo, where the British took him into custody and brought him to Cairo for questioning. British, American, and Soviet officials discussed Eichmann's proposal, but by this time, the D-Day invasion of Normandy had already taken place and Winston Churchill believed the offer was likely some kind of trick, and what the SS really wanted was to open talks with the Western Allies concerning a separate peace. He and his Cabinet made the decision not to respond to Eichmann's proposal. The story was subsequently leaked to the British press, which ridiculed the German offer. This was probably done to ensure no Allied power would be tempted to pursue further discussions with Eichmann.

Another effort was led by the Swiss vice-consul in Budapest, Carl Lutz. Lutz negotiated a deal with the Hungarians that would allow the Swiss to issue 8,000 letters that would guarantee safe passage for 8,000 Jewish Hungarians to travel to Palestine. Lutz set up a series of safe houses in Budapest where Jews could seek refuge, declaring these houses extensions of the Swiss embassy and therefore off-limits to German or Hungarian officials. He then chose unilaterally to interpret the deal as giving him authority to issue these safe passage letters to 8,000 Jewish families, not individuals.

In that way, Lutz was able to spirit some 60,000 Jews out of Hungary. Other diplomats in Budapest from neutral nations also worked to rescue Jews, including officials at the embassies of Portugal, Spain, the Vatican, and Sweden. With regard to Sweden, I have to take note of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, who arrived in Budapest on July 9. Wallenberg and a colleague named Per Anger, issued passes identifying the bearers as Swedish subjects. In one instance, a witness recalls Wallenberg climbing onto the roof of a railway car full of Jewish prisoners about to be deported and handing out passes to everyone he could, even as members of the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross movement were firing into the air in an attempt to intimidate him. Wallenberg was not intimidated. He handed out every pass he had and instructed the recipients to debark from the car and proceed with him to the Swedish embassy. The Germans and members of the Arrow Cross present made no effort to stop them.

Wallenberg used money funneled to him from the American War Refugee Board to lease properties around Budapest, which he declared to be Swedish diplomatic properties. He had Swedish flags flown over them and signs designating the buildings "Swedish Research Institute" and such. The buildings were in fact safe houses that gave refuge to some 10,000 people.

On October 15, 1944, Hungary asked the Soviet Union for an armistice. Germany responded by overthrowing Horthy and installing a fascist Arrow Cross government in Budapest, which attempted to resume the deportations of Jews, but by this time the chaos of war was too close. By the end of the year, Budapest was under siege, and the city surrendered on February 13, 1945.

But that is a story for another episode. We'll have to stop here for today. I thank you for listening and I'd like to thank Joel and Simon for their kind donations, and thank you to Matt for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Joel, Simon, and Matt help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone always, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

As always, the podcast website also contains notes about the music used on the podcast. If you hear a piece of music on the podcast and you would like to know more about it, including the composer, the performers, and a link to where you can download it, that would be the place to go. While you're there, you can leave a comment and let me know what you thought about today's show.

I've gotten a lot of response to my call for questions, and it looks like there will be a question-and-answer episode, sometime before the end of the year. I'll keep you posted.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we look at the new chapters in the story of the Holocaust unfolding in 1944 and consider the guilt of not only large numbers of Germans, but large numbers of people across Europe. A Continent-Wide Crime, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Most of Raoul Wallenberg's activities saving Jewish people in Budapest took place after the installation of the Arrow Cross government. Wallenberg remained in Budapest until the Red Army captured the city. He was then placed under arrest and transferred to the NKVD's Lubyanka prison, in Moscow.

He was never heard from again. The Soviets claimed at first he had been killed by the Arrow Cross in 1945. In 1957, Soviet officials stated that Wallenberg had died of a heart attack while in NKVD custody in July 1947.

Reports of other prisoners claiming to have seen Wallenberg or someone who resembled him persisted into the 1980s. In 1980, one of the people Wallenberg helped escape the Holocaust, Tom Lantos, now 52 years old and a US citizen, was elected to Congress as a Democrat from California. One of Lantos's first acts was to sponsor legislation granting honorary US citizenship to Wallenberg. It passed in 1981, making Wallenberg only the second person ever to receive this honor. The first was Winston Churchill.

The honorary citizenship helped publicize the story of Raoul Wallenberg at a time when it was thought he might still be alive in Soviet custody. It did indeed, and in the Cold War era, Wallenberg's story was significantly embellished for propaganda purposes. Exaggerated claims circulated that Wallenberg was personally responsible for saving as many as 100,000 people. As a matter of historical record, Wallenberg was not the only neutral diplomat in 1944 Budapest

working to save lives, and there were others who saved more. In saying this, I don't mean to diminish either Wallenberg's heroism or the 10,000 lives he did save, both of which were remarkable and praiseworthy.

In 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union, information from Soviet archives was revealed that indicated Wallenberg was executed by the NKVD in 1947. Why did the Soviets arrest him and later execute him? In 1996, information from the archives of the American Office of Strategic Services, the US wartime intelligence agency, later the CIA, showed that Wallenberg was working in secret with the OSS, possibly as a liaison between them and the Hungarian resistance. It may well have been this connection with a Western intelligence agency that led the Soviets to regard him as an enemy.

[music: Closing War Theme]