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## **The Mystery of Raoul Wallenberg's Death**

**(Translated from the Russian by the author)**

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Fifty five years ago, on July 17, 1947, Raoul Wallenberg—the famous young Swede who in 1944 saved thousands of Budapest Jews from extermination by the Nazis—mysteriously died in Moscow prison Lubyanka. Since 1990, a number of documents have been found in Russian archives proving Wallenberg's imprisonment in the two Moscow investigation prisons of the Soviet State Security Ministry (MGB), Lubyanka (known also as Internal Prison) and Lefortovo. No information indicates that he was alive after July 17, 1947. Therefore, July 17, 1947 appears to have been the real date of Wallenberg's death. Here is the story of how this date became known.

### **The Smoltsov Report**

The date July 17, 1947 originated from a handwritten secret report of Aleksandr Smoltsov, Colonel of Medical Service and head of the Medical Department of the Internal Prison, to Viktor Abakumov, MGB Minister. The report stated that Wallenberg suddenly died of "a heart attack" in his cell. An additional note on the report stated: "I have reported personally to Minister. [He] ordered me to cremate [the body] without an autopsy. July 17. Smoltsov." Additionally, there is an almost illegible page number, possibly "59," in the right upper corner of the report. This number was written over a previous one, which is clearly seen on the Xerox copy of the report released by the Russians to the Swedish officials in 1990. Obviously, the twice written number indicates that the document was filed more than once or that the numbering of pages in the file was changed.

The Smoltsov Report was cited for the first time in the diplomatic *Memorandum* that Andrei Gromyko, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, gave to Swedish Ambassador Rolf Sohlman on February 6, 1957. Although this document is known as the *Gromyko Memorandum*, it did not have Gromyko's signature. Most probably, a draft of the *Memorandum* was written in the Secretariat of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party using materials the Secretariat had received from the KGB and Foreign Ministry. Some archival documents declassified and released in the 1990s point to the events that preceded the writing of this draft.

On December 9, 1955, Aleksandr Sakharovsky, deputy head of the 1st KGB Main Directorate (foreign intelligence, the predecessor of the current Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, SVR), answered an inquiry made by Mikhail Gribanov, head of the Foreign Ministry's Scandinavian Department. Sakharovsky wrote: ". . . It would be expedient to describe the absence of the data on WALLEMBERG [in Soviet archives] by saying that possibly he was kept in the USSR under

another name from the end of the war until his death.” In other words, Sakharovsky suggested to use a sort of a red herring.

It is hard to believe that Sakharovsky wrote his answer without having looked through documents about Wallenberg. It is unknown if he examined any archival file connected with the Wallenberg case or the Wallenberg family (the Wallenbergs were and still are one of the most powerful Swedish financial and industrial tycoons). According to the memoirs of Pavel Sudoplatov, the notorious functionary and assassin of the Soviet secret services (NKVD/MGB), the latter file exists in the SVR Archive. Unfortunately, historians do not have access to this archive.

The Soviet Embassy in Sweden wanted to insist on the traditional Soviet explanation of Wallenberg's disappearance. The Embassy asked Vyacheslav Molotov, Soviet Foreign Minister, “to confirm once again [like in the previous diplomatic statements] that Raoul Wallenberg has never been in the USSR.” On March 8, 1956, copies of this letter were sent to the members of the CC Presidium, i.e., Nikita Khrushchev and his close associates.

On April 28, 1956, the CC Presidium discussed the Wallenberg case. Molotov and Ivan Serov, KGB Chairman, suggested postponing their final answer to the Swedes and to ask them for additional information about Raoul Wallenberg. The Presidium members accepted this suggestion.

A few months later, on August 8, 1956, A. K. Sirotnin, head of the 1st Special Department (Archive) of the MVD (the Interior Ministry), signed a confirmation that documents on Raoul Wallenberg had been returned to the File of Especially Important Materials at the MVD Secretariat, where they have been kept since then. Unfortunately, the note did not mention if the documents came from the KGB or CC. Possibly, this was the file, from which the Smoltsov Report was taken out and copied. It is unclear why this time the MVD was involved in the case since before that all materials about Wallenberg were kept in the KGB.

Finally, on February 5, 1957, the CC Presidium approved a draft of the *Gromyko Memorandum* prepared by the CC Secretariat. The next day Gromyko handed the approved unsigned version of the *Memorandum* over to the Swedish Ambassador.

### About the Prison File

The *Gromyko Memorandum* stated that the Smoltsov Report was found “as a result of an examination of the archival documents of the medical service of Lubyanka Prison.” It is hard to believe that this was true. As a rule, such reports were put in the so-called Prison File of the investigated prisoner and most probably, the report was taken from Wallenberg's Prison File.

According to Soviet rules, there were two files for each arrested person kept in the MGB investigation prisons Lubyanka, Lefortovo, and Sukhanovo in Moscow: the Prison File and the Investigation File. The Prison File (the title *Delo arestovannogo* or *Arrestee's File* was printed on the cover of the folder) contained documents that concerned the everyday life of the prisoner: his biography which was filled out after his/her arrival to the prison, a report of the brief medical

examination, a report on the search of the prisoner, receipts for valuables and money taken from the prisoner, notes about which department was in charge of the investigation of the case, orders for the transfer of the prisoner from one cell to another, etc. Also, the Prison File contained the investigator's requests to transport prisoners for interrogation (each request had the investigator's name), orders to punish the arrestee for his/her attempts to contact inhabitants of other cells by knocking, and many other types of documents, as well as, finally, a document about the conviction of the prisoner (called at the last stage of the investigation procedure *the accused*) and a document to what labor camp or prison the convict should be sent. An investigator wrote the document about the future incarceration *before* the trial.

As for Raoul Wallenberg, he was captured in Hungary by SMERSH operatives (SMERSH is an acronym of the Russian words "Death to Spies"). SMERSH was a military counterintelligence branch of the Soviet Army, a secret service that acted independently from the NKGB (State Security Commissariat, later the MGB) and the NKVD (Interior Commissariat, later the MVD). Most POWs were arrested and investigated under NKVD jurisdiction, and only those whom SMERSH considered of high importance because of the intelligence information they possessed, were sent to Moscow and investigated by SMERSH's Main Directorate. Wallenberg was among them.

On an order from Moscow, the detained Wallenberg and his driver, Vilmos Langfelder, were brought to Moscow and investigated in the Main Directorate of SMERSH. In June of 1946, SMERSH was incorporated into the MGB as its 3rd Main Directorate. Simultaneously, the head of SMERSH, Viktor Abakumov, was promoted to MGB Minister. All arrestees, including Wallenberg, were transferred to the jurisdiction of the MGB. However, the same group of investigators continued to investigate their cases.

Political prisoners, including those who, like Wallenberg, were arrested on suspicion of espionage (Article 58, paragraph 6 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation), were sentenced by the MGB Special Council, known in Russian as the *Osoboe soveshchanie* or OSO. The OSO was a unique extra-court council that consisted of the MGB Minister and two of his deputies. In some cases, the accused was sentenced on political charges not by the OSO, but by the Military Collegium of the USSR Supreme Court. The Politburo discussed and approved the decision of the Military Collegium *before* the trial.

After sentencing, the Prison File was renamed the Convict's Personal File (*Lichnoe delo zaklyuchennogo*) or, for short, the Personal File. It now contained a copy of the OSO Decision or the Verdict of the Military Collegium and an order to transfer the convict to the particular labor camp or prison. The Personal File was sent along with the convict to a camp or prison. Since mid-1948, there were three special punishment prisons for especially important political prisoners, in the towns of Vladimir (about 100 miles from Moscow), Verkhne-Uralsk (in the Ural Mountains), and Aleksandrovsk (near the city of Irkutsk in Siberia). Of them, Vladimir Prison was used for important political prisoners from mid-1947 on.

All other political prisoners were sent to the labor camps. The Soviet legal system was based on the principle that political prisoners should be "corrected" through hard physical work. This was a hypocritical cover for Soviet industry's need in cheap slave labor. From mid-1948 on, political

prisoners were kept separately from convicted criminals, in a system of Special Camps with an especially strict regime. Documents on the life of the convicted prisoner in a camp or prison were filed in the same Personal File that arrived with the prisoner.

The content of the Investigation File was different from the Prison/Personal File. The folder had a printed title in Russian *Delo No.*, and the investigator wrote by hand the number of the particular case. It contained documents on the arrest and investigation of the arrestee, including some reports of secret service informants before the arrest, transcripts of interrogations of the arrestee (named protocols) signed by an interrogator and the prisoner, etc. After sentencing, the Investigation File was sent to the MGB/KGB archive, where it was kept as the Archival Investigation File of the prisoner even after his/her release or death.

If an arrestee died in an investigation prison before the completion of the investigation, a report on his/her death with a preliminary diagnosis of the cause of death, signed by the head of the Medical Department of the prison, was put into the Prison File. Usually, an autopsy report followed this document in the file.<sup>1</sup> All autopsy reports on political prisoners who died in Moscow NKGB/MGB investigation prisons that I have seen in the files, were signed by the same doctor, Professor Pyotr Semenovskiy, Moscow City Chief Medical Forensics Expert.

An order to send a corpse to the Moscow Crematorium was usually the next document in the Prison File of a dead prisoner. Sometimes this order stated that the cremation was ordered by the MGB department that had been in charge of the investigation. In other cases there was a note of the commandant of the prison and head of the prison's medical department: "*To the head of the Crematorium. A corpse of a male is sent to you for cremation.*" On the back, the head of the Moscow Crematorium wrote that he had received the corpse. After this, the note was filed in the Prison File of the dead prisoner.

Therefore, most probably the Smoltsov Report was taken from Wallenberg's Prison File. This file, in fact, existed since it was mentioned in a copy of one of Lefortovo Prison's documents dated March 1, 1947, and released by the KGB to the Swedish officials in 1991. Possibly, Sakharovskiy's note dated 1957 that I have already described, was the last mention of this file. Unfortunately, the correspondence between the MGB and the CC Secretariat, as well as documents the MGB sent to each of the Politburo/Presidium members including Stalin and Molotov, are still classified in Russia. Each Politburo member kept them in a Special MGB Folder. Possibly, these documents could disclose the fate of Wallenberg's Prison File and his fate.

The authenticity of the Smoltsov Report was confirmed by the Swedish forensic handwriting experts who carefully studied the original. However, in my opinion, the additional note on the report on the cremation of the corpse does not look authentic and needs a separate detailed study. The letters in the note are written too carefully, especially the signature of Smoltsov. Regrettably, the Swedish officials never questioned the KGB/FSB archivists about why, in the

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<sup>1</sup>According to the rules, three copies of the autopsy report were written. One copy was sent to the investigation unit in charge of the case, the second was sent to the Prison Department, and the third was filed in the Prison File. See NKVD Order No. 00674 dated June 11, 1939. Document No. 33 in Kokurin, A. I., and N. V. Petrov, *GULAG (Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei) 1917-1960* (Moscow: Demokratiya, 2000), pp. 115-116 (in Russian).

case of Wallenberg, the order not to cremate the body was written on the report of the death. According to the MGB rules, which were very strict, this should be a separate document. Doctor Smoltsov would not violate the rules. Therefore, I think another examination of the handwriting of the cremation note is needed.

### The Last Straw

Despite a careful search, no document mentioning that Wallenberg was alive after July 17, 1947, was found in the Russian archives. However, analysis of the recently released documents allows me to reconstruct the events that were preceded that day.

On February 26, 1947, Colonel Sergei Kartashov, head of the 4th Department of the 3rd MGB Main Directorate, ordered the transfer of two prisoners of war, Wallenberg and his long-term cell-mate, Willi Roedel, former SS-Brigadefuehrer and a specialist on the "solution of the Jewish question," from Lefortovo to Lubyanka in Moscow. In Lubyanka, Kartashov ordered the prisoners to be put "together to Cell No. 7." This cell was located on the first floor of Lubyanka Prison, where intensely interrogated prisoners were kept. For some unknown reason, only Roedel, mentioned as "special prisoner No. 205" (Wallenberg was "special prisoner No. 206"), was transferred on that day.

Wallenberg was transferred to Lubyanka three days later, on March 1, 1947, "together with his Prison File," as a note in the registration book of Lefortovo Prison stated. Apparently Wallenberg was kept in Lubyanka separately from Roedel. The last known information about Wallenberg is that Major Aleksandr Kuzmishin, head of the 2nd Section of the 4th Department of the 3rd MGB Main Directorate, interrogated him on March 11, 1947. The interrogation took place in Room (Office) 671 on the 6th floor of the main Lubyanka building and lasted from 2:15 to 4:00 pm. Possibly, another investigator, who knew German and could translate the interrogation (Kuzmishin did not speak German), was also present. One can only guess what Major Kuzmishin asked Wallenberg about or told him.

Wallenberg's cell-mate Roedel outlived Wallenberg for only three months. On September 12, 1947, he complained to the Medical Department of Lubyanka Prison about a pain in his heart. After examining Roedel, the doctor on duty of that department concluded that Roedel had "an uncompensated heart disease."

A month later Kartashov ordered the transfer of Roedel to Camp No. 27 for POWs in the town of Krasnogorsk, in Moscow's suburbs. This was a special POW camp, in which not yet convicted mostly former high-ranking Germans were kept under MVD jurisdiction. Counterintelligence of both the MGB and MVD worked with them and, in particular, picking informants among them for use in Moscow investigation prisons as stool-pigeons (or sent them to East Germany). On October 15, 1947, 50-year-old Roedel suddenly died on the way to this camp. The above-mentioned Chief Forensics Medical Expert Semenovskiy signed the autopsy report that stated that Roedel's death was caused by "a sudden heart paralysis."

Since Roedel was still listed under the jurisdiction of the 3rd Main MGB Directorate, the next day Colonel Aleksandr Mironov, Commandant of Lubyanka Prison, reported to Kartashov about

Roedel's death. He ended the report with a request: "I ask for your permission to cremate the body." Therefore, contrary to Wallenberg's situation, the MGB rules were not violated in the case of a sudden death of his cell-mate, Roedel, and the necessary paperwork was done.

Roedel's death looks very suspicious to me. Was it a coincidence that the two cell-mates, Wallenberg and Roedel, died of a similar sudden heart failure or were both killed? At present, it is impossible to answer this crucial question without open access to the classified materials at the former MGB/KGB and now FSB archives.

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*A Comment (written in 2006)*

In 1991, when I worked at then secret Special Archive in Moscow, in answer to my request for Roedel's Personal File, Anatolii Prokopenko, the head of the archive, told me that the archive did not have this file. However, although the KGB and then FSB representatives never confirmed the existence of Roedel's Personal File in the archives, his medical records and reports about his death and cremation obviously originated from this file since this is the only type of MGB/MVD file where such documents were kept together. Additionally, I was informed that in 1992, the Russian part of the Working Group was provided with copies of a series of documents from Roedel's file that were not released to the Swedish part of the Working Group.

Regrettably, the Swedish-Russian Working Group never made an attempt to interview A. K. Sirotin, who in 1956 was head of the 1st Special Department (Archive) of the MVD and signed a confirmation that documents on Raoul Wallenberg had been returned to the File of Especially Important Materials at the MVD Secretariat. To my knowledge, Sirotin was still alive in 2003.