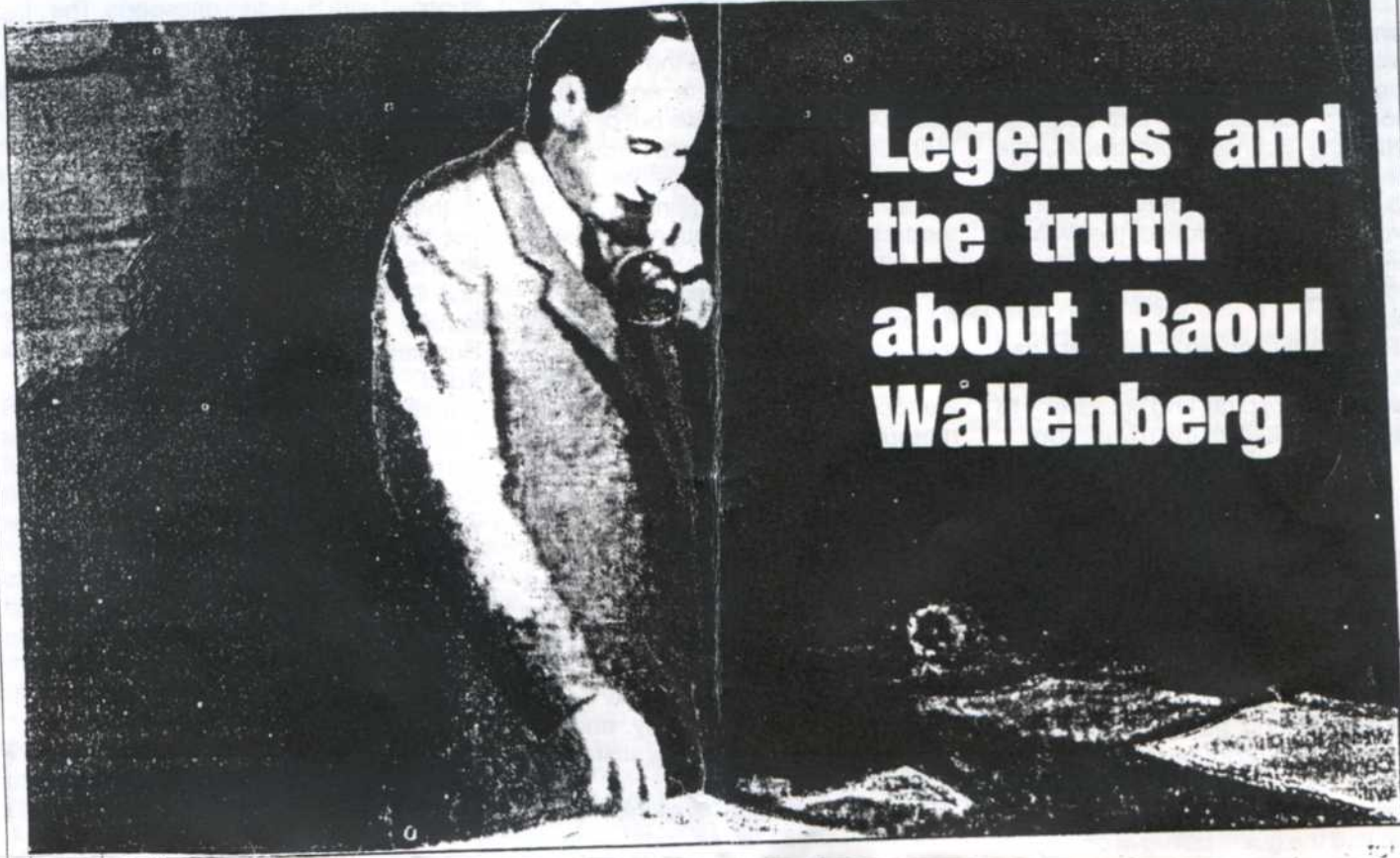


## THE PAST AND THE PRESENT



## Legends and the truth about Raoul Wallenberg

**T**he name of this man has been figuring in the world press for over forty years now. Early this year the Swedish media commented again on his activities during World War II and on the seemingly mysterious circumstances under which he had died. The occasion was an American lawyer's visit to the Soviet Union and his application to the U.S.S.R. Procurator's Office for more evidence on the so-called "Raoul Wallenberg affair." Somewhat earlier, the well-known Swedish journalist Stig Fredriksson addressing a get-together of Soviet and Swedish public figures, covered by Soviet television, said it was about time the matter was settled and done with once and for all.

The fate of the Swedish diplomat remains an object of guesswork and speculations in the West. The most "popular" legend is that he is still alive, kept behind bars in the Soviet Union and, as a monograph puts it, "continues his endless travels around the GULAG." Some Swedish journalists claim he is now held in a Blagoveshchensk mental hospital. A Swedish author asserts in his book,

published in 1986, that Wallenberg is very ill. According to him, Wallenberg is confined to a madhouse, has lost all sense of reality and cannot even identify himself. His condition is being aggravated by daily contacts with mental cases. The book was translated into English and published in the U.S. in 1988.

British documentary film-makers went all out to substantiate these assertions. The "witnesses" appearing in it claim that while imprisoned in the Soviet Union they allegedly saw anonymous person who might well have been none other than Raoul Wallenberg.

Owing to the absence of glasnost in the U.S.S.R. until recently, the "Wallenberg affair" kept taking on ever newer "details" reiterated, and further added to, by newspaper after newspaper and book after book. The few and brief reports on the subject, occasionally carried by Soviet papers, only went to pour oil on the flames. They could well create the impression that the Soviet side was holding something back about Raoul Wallenberg.

### The family

Well, who is Raoul Wallenberg, and why such an unabating interest is being evinced in him? What actually happened to him, and how did he find himself in the Soviet Union?

Now that many "blank spots" in history connected with the Stalin personality cult are being brought to light, and the good names of the victims of unjustified repressions restored, it would be appropriate to dwell, even though briefly, on the Swedish diplomat's tragic fate.

Raoul Wallenberg was born in 1912 into one of Sweden's wealthiest and best-known families tracing their genealogy back to the second half of the 18th century. In 1856 a Wallenberg - André Oscar - founded the Enskilda Banken with a capital of one million riksdalers to start with. The present generation of the Wallenberg banking dynasty adheres to the motto: "Exist, but invisibly." In 1971 Enskilda Banken merged with Skandinaviska Banken to form the powerful financial group Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken, one

of Sweden's and Western Europe's biggest. Today the Wallenberg clan is in control of more than a hundred companies in the key branches of the Swedish national economy. These companies' products include telephones (Ericsson), ball-bearings (SKF), the Scania-Vabis trucks, the Volvo cars, the Bofors cannon and armoured cars, the Götaverken shipyards. The annual profit of the Wallenberg-controlled enterprises equals two thirds of the country's state budget.

Raoul Wallenberg's mother had married to the General Director of the Karolinska Hospital, and his sister - to the Riksmarskalk of the royal court.

## A mission to Budapest

Raoul often made business trips abroad as a representative of his family bank. His business missions took him to Hungary, among other countries, which he first visited in 1938. In Budapest, the young member of a well-known and rich family was received at the Foreign Ministry, met with its top officials and with Miklos Horthy himself. The Hungarian dictator had the guest put up in one of the city's best residences - the Buda Palace.

In 1941, Raoul Wallenberg arrived in Budapest again as a private individual, and met with his high-society and business acquaintances there. Friends helped him to find his way into private mental clinics which sheltered Jews from persecutions raging through Hungary where racist laws had been adopted. It was supposedly on his second visit to Hungary that Wallenberg started his hard but noble mission of saving the victims of fascist genocide.

In July 1944 Wallenberg revisited Budapest, this time as first secretary of the Swedish diplomatic mission. The situation in Hungary had changed strikingly since his previous time there. Fierce fighting was already under way on the country's territory. Dictator Horthy, one of Nazi Germany's last satellites, had decided to turn Hungary into a bastion of the Third Reich. Oil - the value of which for the Wehrmacht increased after the loss of Romania - was pumped out of its entrails. Grain and other farm products were also shipped to Germany. German generals and Horthy were determined to offer stubborn resistance to Soviet troops.

Hungary's Jewish population suffered terribly from fascist dictatorship and terror. Notable, the Jewish community of Hungary had been one of Europe's largest before the war. At the London Times' estimate, no less than 600,000 Hungarian Jews out of nearly 900,000 were annihilated. Raoul Wallenberg established business contacts with the Foreign Ministry. He attended official receptions, masses and ball parties.

Raoul Wallenberg remained cheerful and optimistic even in the most awkward situations. One day Raoul and Tivi Zichy, a young and wealthy aristocrat, a professional racing motorist, went to the English Park. They saw a rare sideshow there. A beautiful woman sat in a rocking chair at the edge of a huge bathtub filled with the then fashionable Palmolive detergent, next to a shooting range. Whenever someone hit a target she would fall into the water with a splash. Wallenberg and Zichy offered the sideshow owner a double day's take in exchange for the beauty, and the deal was clinched to the satisfaction of all those concerned...

At that time Raoul Wallenberg had an affair with Katalin Karaty, a pretty young actress, who was courted by General Ujhazy. Having caught Raoul and Katalin together one day, the general lost his temper and was about to challenge Wallenberg to a mortal duel. With his characteristic sense of humour and presence of mind, Raoul Wallenberg assured the frenzied general that he had never met a more courageous and self-controlled man, and so noble and well-mannered one, too. Raoul admitted that the general had outbraved him. Ujhazy was flattered, grabbed Katalin by the arm and strutted away, proud as a peacock. Looking after him, Wallenberg said he would never stake his lofty mission on a silly duel.

## End and means

Raoul Wallenberg collected all the evidence he could about the Hungarian Jews persecuted by the Nazis and needing immediate help. He issued to such persons documents saying that their bearers were under the protection of Swedish Authorities. Those certificates served as charters of immunity in the inferno the fascists had turned Hungary into. With the help of his trusted assistants, Wallenberg or-

ganized the evacuation from the country of all those whom he had supplied with Swedish passports. The rescued left for Switzerland by rail. The estimated number of those saved by Wallenberg varies from 4,000 to 100,000. The Soviet press put the figure at over 20,000.

The consensus of Western opinion is that the Swedish diplomat would not have succeeded in his salvation efforts hadn't he bribed Hungarian and German authorities. He was personally acquainted with top-ranking Hungarian security officers and with Adolf Eichmann, the chief of Budapest Gestapo.

Wallenberg and Eichmann, a humanist and an executioner... To look at them, one would think they were inseparable friends. They frequented the officer's casino together, moved in military and youth circles, could often be seen enjoying themselves at noisy parties. Eichmann would often cast envious glances at Wallenberg's sturdy canvas-top convertible. Having noted Eichmann's interest, Raoul, a motoring and racing enthusiast himself, once asked him, as if in jest: "Like it? I might as well get you one. Ten even. But mind you, one good turn deserves another..."

Eichmann wondered what "good turn" Wallenberg expected him to do. It turned out that the "turn" (releasing those doomed to death) called for a certain degree of resourcefulness. Eichmann had more than enough of that. And Wallenberg was generous.

Drawing upon trustworthy documents, some Western authors came to the conclusion that while in Budapest in 1944 Wallenberg was not altogether unconnected with the American intelligence service. The operations involved in saving Hungarian Jews were paid for by the U.S., the American Jewish community for the most part. This circumstance could not but furnish grounds for further speculations. One American historian wrote, for instance: Wallenberg's American connections might have given Soviet authorities the suspicion that he had been sent to Budapest on an intelligence mission. They probably knew that Ivar Olsen, a WRC (War Refugee Council - V.P.) agent in Sweden, was an OSS man, from which it followed that Wallenberg was also connected with the OSS (Office of Strategic Services - V.P.), the predecessor of the CIA. The Ameri-

can historian produces no evidence to support his opinion which, therefore, remains hypothetical.

## The last witnesses

At the end of December 1944, the troops of the 2d and 3d Ukrainian fronts completed the encirclement of the 190,000-strong German-Hungarian grouping near Esztergom. It took two months of fierce fighting -- January and February of 1945 -- to suppress the grouping. On February 13, Soviet troops took Budapest by storm.

According to a Hungarian paper, Raoul Wallenberg told one of his close associates then that he was waiting for further developments with a great deal of interest, although he wasn't sure what he was in for.

Information on the time, place and circumstances of Wallenberg's arrest is extremely controversial. In his U.S.-published book, Jeno Levai writes that Wallenberg was last seen in Benczur Street, Pest, on January 17, 1945, escorted by Soviet officers, and that he was to be sent to Debrecen, the seat of the Provisional National Government of Hungary headed by Colonel General Bela Miklos. The idea probably was to hand Wallenberg over to Hungarian authorities as a person who had maintained close links

with Hungarian fascists and German Nazis (the true nature of those relationships was, naturally, not known at that time). The diplomat himself might have wished to enter into contact with the new regime as an official representative of Sweden.

Early in 1987, the Hungarian paper Magyar Hirlap carried an interview with Laszlo Hertelendy, an assistant of Wallenberg's. Hertelendy said he had seen Raoul Wallenberg last on February 12, 1945, in the church on Krisztina Square in Budapest. According to him, that day could not be mixed up with any other, because it was then that Soviet patrolmen and Hungarian volunteers wearing red armbands climbed down the mountain slope along Naphegy Street. Raoul Wallenberg wanted to take refuge in the church and advised Hertelendy to do the same. He was vague about his future and said he didn't know what he was in for, Hertelendy reminisced.

The church on Krisztina Square was known in Buda as "fragrant mass" because during Sunday divine services the lady parishioners were enveloped in the aroma of fine French perfumes. When Wallenberg was leaving the church, he was seen by Dr Imre Szabo, a church priest; Soltan Lizka and Miklos Nagy, chaplains; Jozsef Paletta, the parish priest of

the chapel; and Nogradi, the vestry guard. They were the last to see him.

## A memorandum

Since about that time Raoul Wallenberg disappeared from the scene. After a while, however, his Swedish relatives and friends began to make inquiries about his fate. Official Stockholm repeatedly asked Moscow about his whereabouts but got contradictory answers. At first the Soviet side said that Wallenberg and a group of others had been detained and taken away to safety where they were under Soviet troops' protection. Then the Swedish side was unexpectedly informed that Wallenberg was not to be found on the Soviet territory and his whereabouts were unknown. It was only after the 20th CPSU Congress, which initiated the campaign of exposing the lawless practices of Stalinism, that there arose the conditions for an objective investigation of the Wallenberg case.

Today it is perfectly obvious that Abakumov, the then Minister of State Security, committed a malfeasance



Eichmann and his victims

by holding Wallenberg in prison and arbitrarily deciding his fate. The investigation revealed that Abakumov and his accomplices deliberately held back information about Wallenberg and then destroyed the dossier on him in order to cover up the traces of their crimes. (Abakumov was condemned and sentenced to capital punishment by the U.S.S.R. Supreme Court.)

At a reception, the ubiquitous Western correspondents elbowed their way to Khrushchev through the crowd. Khrushchev enjoyed granting interviews, and journalists took advantage of that to clear up certain problems. That time he was asked a difficult question: "Where is Wallenberg, what has happened to him, and why doesn't the Soviet side provide exhaustive explanations on that score?"

Nikita Khrushchev, noted for his skill at repartee, gave the following reply after a moment's pause:

"Well, take the Piskaryovo Cemetery in Leningrad, for instance. It's hard to tell how many people lie buried there. Estimates vary, and we can only guess at the exact figure." And added, as an afterthought: "Many anonymous heroes haven't been found yet, and the identity of many of those missing is still to be established."

Khrushchev was not trying to dodge the question - probably, he had no exact information on the fate of the Swedish diplomat himself, and wanted to look deep into the matter.

In February 1957, R. Soulman, the Swedish ambassador to the Soviet Union, was invited to the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and handed a memorandum the contents of which were rather unusual for routine diplomatic practice. It gave a reply to the request of the then Prime Minister Tage Erlander that whatever information there was about Raoul Wallenberg be thoroughly rechecked.

In compliance with the Swedish government's request, the memorandum said, the Soviet government instructed the relevant agencies to find out about Wallenberg. The agencies rummaged through archives and questioned many people who had anything to do with the Wallenberg case. A thorough check of prison records



The Wallenberg monument in Budapest

revealed a hand-written report by Smoltsov, the chief of the Lubyanka prison sanitary service, to Abakumov, the then Minister of State Security.

"This is to inform you," the report says, "that prisoner Wallenberg died suddenly last night, presumably of heart failure. Being under your orders to keep Wallenberg under my personal supervision, I request instructions as to who is to do the postmortem examination of the body to establish the cause of death.

Colonel Smoltsov, Medical Corps,  
Chief of the Sanitary Division"

July 17, 1947

The report bears the following inscription in Smoltsov's hand; "Reported to minister in person. Was told to have the corpse cremated without a postmortem.

Smoltsov"

July 17.

No documentary evidence or eyewitness accounts were found; Smoltsev himself died in 1953. So there is nothing for it but accept the fact that Wallenberg passed away in July 1947 and that the location of his grave is unknown. It was pointed out in the memorandum that the U.S.S.R. government expressed its regret and asked the Swedish government and Raul Wallenberg's relatives to accept its condolences.

## Place in history

The February 1957 memorandum of the U.S.S.R. Ministry of Foreign Affairs is known to experts, journalists and the world public. Published in Volume 1 of the Swedish Foreign Ministry's White Book on Raoul Wallenberg, it is quoted by an American journalist and by the Hungarian paper Magyar Hirlap. This piece of documentary evidence supposed to put an end to all sorts of speculations about Wallenberg's fate. The Wallenberg mystery was finally cleared up, and his name took its fitting place in the history of World War II. Nevertheless, the Soviet side's answer is taken by certain Western quarters as not convincing enough. How could Wallenberg's body been cremated, they argued, if the Lubyanka prison has never had a crematorium? Another argument in favour of his still being alive is that his personal belongings have never been returned to his relatives, and that the "violet-cover NKVD file," which could have helped trace the prisoner's peripeteia, has been either lost or destroyed.

At the time of Stalin tyranny and the undivided sway of persons vested with enormous power, the "trifles" like cremating dead bodies, eliminating prisoners or disposing of their personal belongings were no problem at all. To think how many innocent Soviet people have disappeared without a trace like Wallenberg!

We in the Soviet Union who have suffered so much from the war and from Stalin's tyranny, have every sympathy for those concerned about Wallenberg's fate - for his relatives, above all. Unfortunately, the only answer we can give to the Swedish side's inquiry of 1986 and to other démarches is that already given in 1957 and reaffirmed at the U.S.S.R. Foreign Ministry's briefings in 1987-89: Raoul Wallenberg died in 1947. We realize that those who owe Wallenberg their lives and admire his inventiveness and resourcefulness find it hard to resign to this fact. They still hope for a miracle. One can well understand the way they feel. But there is no undoing the past. It is our common duty to build a world worthy of the memory of all humanists who had dedicated themselves to saving people from assassination and Nazi persecutions.

Vladimir Peshchersky