

Involvement of Kistarcsa in World War II

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Hungary in WWII

The story of Hungary's participation in World War II is part of a much larger narrative - one that is a fascinating tale of rise and fall, of hopes dashed and dreams in tatters. The effect of the Treaty of Trianon (1920), that without plebiscites, truncated Hungary and deprived it of its natural resources and forced a sizeable portion of its population to live under alien jurisdiction, set the political and sociological climate in Hungary from the 1920's on. Readjustment expressed itself in the politics and led to the belief that revision of the treaty was only possible through German intervention. Hungary's attempt to regain the glory of the Hungarian Kingdom by joining forces with Nazi Germany seems today a decision doomed to fail from the start.

The Treaty of Trianon, which spelled out the terms of defeat for the Hungarians left the new country of Hungary with less than 30 percent of the former kingdom's territory, saw its population reduced by nearly the 70 percent, and stripped it of five of its ten most populous cities. Nearly all of the actions of Hungarian leaders during the succeeding decades can be traced back to this incalculable defeat. In the early years of World War II, Hungary enjoyed boom times-and the dream of restoring the Hungarian Kingdom began to rise again. Caught in the middle as the war engulfed Europe, Hungary was drawn into an alliance with Nazi Germany. When the Germans appeared to give Hungary much of its pre-World War I territory, Hungarians began to delude themselves into believing they had won their long-sought objective. Instead, the final year of the world war brought widespread destruction and a

genocidal war against Hungarian Jews. Caught between two warring behemoths, the country became a battleground for German and Soviet forces. In the wake of the war, Hungary suffered further devastation under Soviet occupation and forty-five years of communist rule.

Hungarian Jews during WWII

Yielding to German pressure, anti-Jewish laws were passed by the Hungarian Parliament in 1938-39, affecting the lives of primarily lower class Jews and depriving professionals of their livelihood, and of educational opportunities. Until the German occupation in 1944, Hungarian Jews were not physically harmed.

Operation Margarethe, the German military occupation of Hungary, began on March 19, 1944 and brought profound changes. Nazi Germany sought to reorganize and thus harvest the Hungarian economy and raw materials, including bauxite and manganese, to further the German war effort. To add insult to injury, Hungary was required to pay for the German occupation.

Secondarily, the occupation was to initiate the deportation of Jewish citizens of Hungary. The notorious Eichmann set the wheels in motion. As done in other occupied countries, this was to be accomplished in six steps: at first Jews were to be identified and required to wear yellow 6 cornered stars of a certain size, workers removed from their jobs, businesses turned over to Christians, travel was forbidden, Jewish assets (estimated to be over 20% of Hungary's) impounded, establishment of ghettos in all town larger than 10,000 in population, and finally deportation. Initially the German request was for 100,000 workers to be sent to Germany that Eichmann offered to transport. In rural areas, the constabulary was tasked with carrying out the order, with deportations from Budapest to be accomplished last.

The established Jewish Councils were instrumental in ghettoizing the Jewish communities. However, after the initial deportations, two escapees from Auschwitz wrote, in German, a report now called the Auschwitz Protocols that described the horrendous conditions in the camp. The Jewish Councils did not share this information with their communities, but based on this information, Hungarian church leaders, Protestants and Catholic alike, and later the

Vatican and others wrote to Regent Horthy to stop the deportations. Horthy instructed Lt. Gen. Károly Lázár, commander of his personal bodyguard, to assume command and prevent a coup d'état by the constabulary that threatened to take over the government and carry out Eichmann's plans. By pure chance, on July 2, 1944, Lt. Gen. Lázár met Colonel Ferenc Koszorus, commander of the First Armored Division stationed north of Budapest, and became aware of the presence of these unpublicized military resources. Regent Horthy ordered the military to remove the illegally assembled gendarmes from Budapest. This order was efficiently carried out, saving from deportation most of the 170,000 Jews registered there at that time. This was the only instance where Axis military forces were used to save the lives of Jews from deportation.

The Battle for Budapest

In August 1944, Romania abandoned its alliance with Nazi Germany, despite the fact that it fielded the second largest land army against the Soviets, and joined its former enemy. The Russians pushed west but were unable to breach the Hungarian Carpathian defenses, the Árpád line. With their new allies they attacked from the south. In the fall, they broke through and advanced along the Hungarian Plain. In the tank battle near Debrecen they suffered an unexpected defeat, losing 500 tanks to the 133 that the Germans lost. This reversal prevented the advance and quick capture of Budapest.

The battle for Budapest turned out to be the bitterest engagement on the Eastern Front post-Stalingrad. The city was defended by 33,000 German and 37,000 Hungarian troops. An estimated 30,000 horses were brought by the cavalry and artillery troops into the city, consumption of which by the defenders and civilians later saved the lives of many. The city was encircled by the Soviet and Romanian troops on December 24, 1944 and the siege lasted until February 13, 1945. 23, 624 civilians were killed and 12, 588 homes completely destroyed.

Military losses, killed, wounded and captured, were more than twice as high on the Soviet and Romanian side than of the Hungarian and German forces. German attempts at recapturing Budapest were unsuccessful, and the Soviets continued their march toward Vienna. The Soviet commander-in-chief, Marshall Malinovsky on February 13 gave the 'liberators' of Budapest

three days of free looting to celebrate.

The “liberator” Red Army and Romanian soldiers raped an estimated 50,000 women in Budapest, 20% of whom became pregnant. Since Marshall Malinovsky was unable to produce the 110,000 prisoners of war he was expected to capture, some 50,000 men were picked up on the street and deported to concentration camps in the Soviet Union. Though precise figures are unavailable, an estimated one-third of the deportees never returned.

Further Reading

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