

CLEAR THE LINE

**Hungary's Struggle to Leave the Axis
During the Second World War**

by

LAURA-LOUISE VERESS

edited by

DALMA TAKACS Ph.D.

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“Most Immediate — Clear The Line”

(Directions on telegram from Winston Churchill concerning Hungary's offer of surrender, September, 1943)

“The position of the Magyars in Hungary has been maintained over many centuries and many misfortunes and must ever be regarded as a precious European entity. Its submergence in the Russian flood could not fail to be either the source of future conflicts or the scene of a national obliteration horrifying to every generous heart.”

(Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*, Volume VI)

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Preface	xi
Maps	xvi
Chronology	xix
Prologue	1
I The Wounds Of War	21
II Hitler, The Menacing Mentor	29
III Swept Into War	47
IV Dangerous Ally, Reluctant Enemies	59
V Prying Loose From Hitler: Kállay's Two-Step Dance	71
VI Veress In Istanbul: Surrender To A Distant Enemy	89
VII Hungary And Her Neighbours: The British View	107
VIII The Italian Campaign: Hopes Kindled And Snuffed Out	119
IX Second Mission To Istanbul: Churchill Clears The Line .	127
X Living Up To Istanbul	153
XI Sudden Silence	173
XII German Invasion	187
XIII Hitler Has Won — For Now	209

XIV	Odyssey To Bari	235
XV	1944: Summer Of Discontent, Autumn Of Despair	255
XVI	October, 1944: Last-Minute Nazi Coup	283
XVII	The Siege of Budapest; the Conquerors and the Conquered	297
XVIII	The Peace That Started The Cold War	315
XIX	Escape From Workers' Paradise	333
XX	Epilogue	353
	Notes	367
	Documents Cited	371
	Bibliography	391
	Index	399

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Preface

me of the best ways to start a conversation with a person over sixty is to ask, “Where were you during World War II?” Over the years the subject has not dulled; on the contrary, it has gained in lustre. It seems that on the subject of the Second World War the jury is still out; in fact, the trial has not even been concluded. People are still listening to testimony, trying to find out from those who were there not only how things happened, but also why they happened, and how the dire consequences could have been avoided. This book is a testimony from an unexpected witness: I was a Hungarian woman who spent the war years in Budapest, Hungary.

In some ways my life was an ordinary one. My husband, Louis Pálóczi Horváth, worked in the monitoring service of the Hungarian Radio. We lived with our young daughter, Dalma, in a comfortable apartment in the hills of Buda. The war touched our lives as it touched the lives of millions of others like us.

But I also had another life. My comfortable marriage was a marriage in name only—an amicable arrangement with my estranged husband to protect the happiness of our child. My story is also a story of heartbreak and a story of love which led me into danger and opened for me the door of the murky diplomatic engine of the war machine. Two years after my estrangement from my husband, I met a young diplomat named Leslie Veress, who was to be the emissary of the Hungarian Government to conduct secret negotiations with the British through SOE in Istanbul concerning Hungary’s proposed withdrawal from the Axis and surrender to the Allies. For several months he ran a secret radio operation from an apartment in the

hills of Buda, exchanging coded messages through SOE between the Hungarian and British governments.

What made Veress' operation different from the run-of-the-mill resistance story was that he acted with the approval, albeit sometimes reluctant, of the highest-ranking members of the Hungarian Government. This is how Leslie characterised the operation:

It was the Prime Minister, Miklós Kállay, who personally dictated some of the messages transmitted. It was the Minister of the Interior, Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, who provided the radio operators for the secret transmitter. Both were to suffer for their actions in the Nazi concentration camps. It was the Undersecretary of State in the Foreign Ministry, later to perish in Dachau, who, in response to the radioed request by SOE, personally pinpointed on the map of Hungary the selected spot where a secret mission could be dropped. It was A. Szegedy-Maszák, the Head of the Political Department in the Foreign Ministry, who directed the diplomatic moves designed to withdraw Hungary from Hitler's war, and lead the country into a new Europe which, so the Allies promised, would be free and democratic for all. He too was to know the horrors of Dachau.***

In the end Veress' mission failed. The Allies were interested, but not interested enough to abandon their plans for an invasion through Normandy in favour of an invasion through the Balkans so as to be on hand to take advantage of Hungary's surrender. Had they done so — and Churchill himself did not consider the plan totally

*** Leslie was too modest to mention that he himself composed many of the telegrams with the Prime Minister's approval.

unpractical — they might have spared East and Central Europe four decades of agony and economic devastation. The surrender attempt failed: in 1944 Hungary was invaded by Germany, and in 1945, by the Soviet Union. In the history of Modern Europe Leslie Veress' efforts on behalf of Hungary and the Allies take up only a few pages, but his actions and the feelings which motivated them symbolize the tragic struggle of Hungary to resist both German and Soviet power, and her constant desire to reach out to England and America. Over the past 40 years the significance of his effort has increased a hundredfold. The Communist edifice in Europe had been built on the backs of small nations who were enslaved by the brute force of the Soviet Union and the consent, albeit reluctant, of the Western Allies. In the course of the last few years we have seen these small nations shake off Communist rule and even inspire the Soviet republics to rid themselves of oppression. It was the small nations of Eastern Europe that have brought about the transformation of Eastern and Central Europe and even of the Soviet Union. This book is an insight into the heart and soul of one of these small nations — Hungary.

It was Leslie's intention to tell his story in the broader context of Europe in World War II. His work as commentator in the European Section of the BBC made him an expert on this tragic phase of European History. What he had in mind was a story of the War from a new perspective — that of a small country in a vital strategic position, caught between two giants, Germany and the USSR, trying to save her national integrity — and perhaps the cause of freedom in Central Europe.

He had the material for his half of the story, but the other half was missing. The relevant documents which reflected Allied thinking on the subject were all classified and thus inaccessible. When, after 30 years, the records were opened to the public, he suddenly had access to the other half of his story. He spent many days in the Public Record Office studying telegrams and memos dealing with the

strategic importance of Hungary's clandestine surrender offer. It was then that he fully realized the importance of his seemingly quixotic venture. The copies of close to a hundred documents he acquired on the subject provide an insight into the minds of the Allied leaders. They tell a story of tensions, differences and mistrust boiling under the united front. They tell of compassion for a small country in the shadow of the Nazi oppressor; they tell of cold strategic calculations involving the sacrifice of that small country in an effort to win the war; of conflicting feelings of mistrust and loyalty towards Russian leaders whose support was essential to victory; of nagging doubts about the fate of Europe after an Allied victory.

Now Leslie had the material he needed to complete the book, but his health was failing. In August, 1980, he made his last visit to the Public Record Office at Kew. I had to go with him because he walked with some difficulty. We had lunch there, and he spread out on the table copies of his latest finds. He liked to share his ideas with me, and now his mind was churning with all the things he wanted to include in his book. The notes, clippings and documents he had accumulated in the course of thirty years were beginning to fall into place. In his mind the book was taking shape.

"If I die tomorrow," he joked, "you'll have to ride with the Valkyries and write my book for me." Whenever a book appeared about some statesman or general written by his former wartime secretary, Leslie used to say, "The Valkyries ride again!" I had for many years written journals recording my own recollections and experiences, and one day I hoped to write my own story. I was not a historian, and I had no ambitions to become one, but Leslie forced my hand. On 23rd September, 1980, after a one-day stay at Brompton Hospital, he died of a heart attack.

Suddenly aware of the limited time available to us, I started to organize my journals. The revived interest in World War II made me feel that people might be interested to see the events of the war in Hungary from the point of view of a private person. However, when

I started writing about my memories of the war years and my life with Leslie, I found that I could not separate our story from the story of our country. I was his close companion during the war years, and he shared with me all the details of his mission that were not top secret So I decided that I must write both stories and include in my account the material that Leslie had collected for his book.

It took me several years to complete the research and organize the material for the book In the process I gained a fascinating insight into the workings of history which I would like to share with my readers. My daughter, Dalma Takács, who is associate professor of English at Notre Dame College of Ohio, USA, helped me in editing the final version.

This book is both a personal history and a public history. It is the story of my life at a dramatic moment in the history of Europe. It is also the history of Hungary's uneasy but ardent love affair with Great Britain and Western civilization.

Laura-Louise Veress
London. 1994

Chronology

- 1918 End of World War I
- 1919, March. Communist dictatorship established under Béla Kun.
- April. Provisional government led by Admiral Milklos (Nicholas) Horthy set up to oppose Communist rule.
- 1920, March. Admiral Horthy appointed regent and head of state.
- June 4. Treaty of Trianon (Versailles) signed. Parts of Hungary lost to Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia.
- 1933, January 30. Adolf Hitler becomes chancellor of Germany.
- 1936, March. Hitler occupies the Rhineland.
- 1938, March 13. Germany annexes Austria
- May 13. Béla Imrédy becomes prime minister.
- 1939, February 15. Imrédy resigns.
- February 24. Paul Teleki becomes prime minister.
- September 1. Germany attacks Poland.
- September 3. England and France declare war on Germany.
- 1940, May. Germany invades the Netherlands.
- June. German forces enter Paris.
- 1941, March. Hitler attacks Yugoslavia, forcing Hungary to break treaty with Yugoslavia.
- April 3. Teleki commits suicide in protest

- June 26. László Bárdossy appointed prime minister.
 Hungary declares war on USSR.
- December 7. Japanese attack Pearl Harbor.
 US and Britain declare war on Japan.
 Britain declares war on Hungary.
- December 12. Hungary declares war on US.
- 1942, March. Miklós (Nicholas) Kállay becomes prime minister.
- 1943, January. Casablanca Conference. Agreement concerning "unconditional surrender" of Axis powers.
- László (Leslie) Veress goes to Lisbon as the first official representative of the "Hungarian Government Resistance Group."
- March. Veress sent to Istanbul to convey to British SOE representatives the Hungarian government's offer of surrender.
- July 10. Allied landing in Sicily.
- August 11-24. Quebec Conference.
- August 10-September 10. Veress' second mission to Istanbul. Churchill modifies and endorses terms of Hungary's offer of unconditional surrender. Veress brings back radio transmitters for contact with British government via SOE.
- September 29. Radio contact established between Hungarian Government Group and SOE.
- November 28-January 12, 1944. Teheran Conference.
- 1944, February. Veress' third mission to Istanbul communicating Hungarian government's willingness to surrender to the Russians.
- March 19. German invasion of Hungary.
- March 20. Veress escapes from Budapest
- 1944, June 6. Normandy invasion.

Chronology xxi

- March 20-June 9. Veress makes his way through the Balkans to reach British forces in Italy.
- June 9. Veress is flown by special plane to British headquarters in Bari.
- October 15. Horthy's radio proclamation of Hungary's armistice with the Allies.
Nazi takeover led by Ferenc Szálasi. Arrest and imprisonment of opponents including Prime Minister Kállay.
- December-January, 1945. Siege of Budapest
- 1945, January 20. Hungary concludes armistice with United Nations and cooperates in war against Germany.
- May 8. End of War in Europe.
- November 3. Hungarian general election gives absolute majority to anti-communist Smallholder Party.
- 1946, February. Hungary becomes a republic with Smallholder leader Zoltán Tildy as president
- March 5. Churchill's Fulton speech warns of an "Iron Curtain" descending across Europe.
- March. Veress returns to Hungary.
- 1947,
- January. Veress is arrested and released.
- February 10. Hungarian peace treaty signed in Paris.
- April 1. Veress leaves Hungary.
- August 29. Hungarian elections. In spite of fraudulent Communist ballots, opposition parties still score high.
- November. Laura-Louise and Dalma leave Hungary.
- 1948, July 30. Tildy is forced to resign as president and is

- replaced by Communist leader Arpád Szakasits.
Purges of anti-communists continue.
1949. Communist takeover completed.
1950. Veress joins the BBC Hungarian Section as talk writer and commentator.
1953. Stalin dies.
- 1956, October 23. Hungarian Revolution against Communist rule.
- November 4. Soviet forces invade Hungary. Mass exodus of Hungarian refugees.

Prologue

Every Hungarian child used to know the legend of the two princes Hunor and Magyar who lived in a far-off Asian land. One day, a thousand and some years ago, as they went hunting, the two princes caught a glimpse of a magic white stag. They rode off in hot pursuit of the animal, which was always fleeing to the west and was always just out of reach. Day after day, he appeared in the morning and disappeared at night. Day after day, the two princes galloped after him, always toward the west. After many days of fruitless pursuit, the two young men and their followers realized that they had strayed too far from home to go back. They found a new country where they settled for a while. In time they separated and migrated to other lands. Although they never caught the magic stag, they always migrated in a westerly direction, hoping one day to catch him.

The ancient Hungarians, who according to the legend were descendants of Magyar, conquered the Danube basin at the end of the ninth century. They were a fierce and warlike people whose lightning attacks struck terror in the hearts of their neighbours to the west. There are records of Hungarian forays deep into the heart of Europe to cities such as Bremen, and Orleans, and even as far south as Constantinople.

In the course of the next century the Hungarians gave up their wild pagan ways to become part of Western civilization. In A.D. 1000 St Stephen was crowned king of Hungary with a crown sent to him by Pope Sylvester II. Thus Hungary became part of the community of Christian nations. Like the two princes in pursuit of the magic stag, Hungarians through their one-thousand-year history as a

European nation pursued the ideals of Western civilization, reaching out in friendship to Western nations, often fighting aggressors from the East

The pursuit of the magic stag of the West brought more penalties than rewards. In the thirteenth century Hungary prevented a barbarian invasion of Europe by making a stand against the Mongolian Tartars. As a result, the country was laid waste, and half its population was destroyed. In the fifteenth century, under the leadership of János Hunyadi, Hungarians fought in the Balkans to keep Islam from engulfing Christian Europe. For several decades they succeeded. Then, after a devastating defeat in 1526, Hungary was overrun by Turkish forces, and for the next 160 years, one third of the country was ravaged by Turkish rulers, and large portions of her population were killed or transported into slavery by the Turks. What was even worse than the devastation was the dismemberment of the country. The western portion was Royal Hungary, ruled by a Hapsburg king; the middle section, which included the Great Plain, was under Turkish rule; and the south east section, Transylvania, became a semi-autonomous territory ruled by its own prince, paying heavy ransom to the Turks.

The task of containing the Turks in the middle sector fell largely to the Hungarian garrisons of the border fortresses. The men of these forts were determined fighters, and some fought until the last man. Miklós Zrínyi and his men defended the fortress of Szigetvár until they knew that resistance was hopeless. Then they dressed in their ceremonial finery, filled their pockets with gold (to identify them as noblemen and earn them a decent burial), and rushed out into the midst of the besieging Turkish army. They fought until they all perished.

Other forts proved too tough for the Turks. Eger was defended not only by soldiers, but also by the women and children who had taken refuge behind its walls. The inhabitants kept huge kettles of boiling liquids on the ramparts and poured down different

concoctions (tar, water, and on one occasion, goulash) on the bald heads of the Turks who tried to scale the walls. After many months of siege, the Turkish army retreated.

Stories of these gallant exploits lived on in public consciousness as symbols of Hungary's ardent desire to remain a part of Western civilization and to save her independence. Her national independence was in grave danger indeed during the 160 years of Turkish rule as the country was divided into separate territories. To reunite their country, Hungarians looked to their Hapsburg kings, who were not always totally dedicated to the cause. Finally, at the end of the 17th century, through the concerted efforts of the Austrian and the Hungarian armies, the Turks were pushed out, and Hungary was again unified. But the threat to her national independence did not diminish. Over the next two centuries, the Hapsburgs imposed their rule on the country and often disregarded their own promises to respect Hungary's sovereignty.

The political oppression by Austria in the 18th and 19th centuries caused resistance to German culture among those who considered themselves "real" Hungarians. This feeling is exemplified in a satirical song by Adám Pálóczi Horváth (1760-1620), an ancestor of my first husband, Lajos Pálóczi Horváth. In mock resignation, the poet decides to give up his crisp Hungarian boots and spurs in favour of shoddy German slippers, and learn to dance to mincing German music:

We might as well dance the German caper,

We're chained and Vienna holds the sabre.

He ends each verse with an appeal to Arpád, the great chieftain who founded the Hungarian nation:

Arpád our leader, help your seed

To save this land by blood redeemed.

Along with a fierce desire to protect their national independence, Hungarians also at times felt a romantic desire to protect their sovereign in times of trouble. A supreme example of this love-hate

relationship is the famous scene in 1741 when the young Habsburg queen Maria Theresa appeared before the Hungarian Diet, and holding her baby in her arms, appealed to the Hungarian nobles to defend her claim to the throne against Prussian aggression. The members of the Diet were so moved by the sight that they voted by acclamation to send 100,000 soldiers to the defence of their queen, shouting, ““Vitam et sanguinem pro regina nostra, Maria Theresa” (Our lives and blood for our queen Maria Theresa.”) Never mind the sotto voce codicil that rumour added to the proclamation, ““sed non avenam” (but not the oats); the Hungarian forces saved the Queen’s throne.

Along with such moments of generous enthusiasm, and a genuine admiration for German culture and scientific advances, there was also a feeling that things German represented oppression and a threat to national identity. By the 20th century the magic stag had skipped beyond Austria and Germany. Many Hungarians now looked with friendship and admiration to England. One of the most cherished bridges in Budapest was the Chain Bridge, built by the English Architect Adam Clark. When Edward VIII as Prince of Wales visited Hungary, he was feted like a hero.

In World War II, Hungary’s foreign policy was an intricate web of seeming contradictions which baffled outsiders, but made perfect sense to Hungarians. The majority of the people sympathised with Britain and the U.S., yet Hungary was an ally of Germany. The government maintained an alliance with Hitler but tried to send as few troops to the Russian front as possible, and after Stalingrad, refused to provide fighting forces altogether. What made Hungary side with Germany? The Treaty of Versailles (known in Hungary as the Treaty of Trianon) had inflicted on the country a worse dismemberment than the Ottoman invasion. Between the two wars what was left of Hungary was afflicted with not only a sense of crying injustice, but also with horrendous economic problems. The country was overcrowded with refugees from the lost territories. Jobs,

housing and goods were scarce. If there was to be a revision of Trianon, it would have to come through German help. That was the compelling reason for the German alliance.

We all wanted to save the country that we called “home.” In Hungarian the word “haza” refers to both your home and your native land. Leslie Veress and I, as well as my first husband Lajos PáJóczy Horváth, had all been born and brought up in parts of Hungary that were later torn away by the Treaty of Versailles. But political divisions had no effect on the concept of “home.” “Home” was what was commonly referred to as “Greater Hungary.” “Home” included all the regions of Pre-World War I Hungary. Whatever our personal differences, one passion we all shared — the desire to restore the PreTrianon frontiers of Hungary.

Leslie Veress was born in 1908 in Sepsiszentgyörgy, Transylvania, which at that time was still part of Hungary. His mother belonged to a well-to-do family. His father was a self-made man who worked his way through college to become an engineer. In spite of their different backgrounds, the two provided a happy and supportive home for Leslie and his older sister Catherine. Like most upperclass children, they were taught German, French and English by a governess, and they saw their parents only at mealtimes. At the dinner table, Leslie listened avidly as his parents and their friends discussed politics, the state of the country, and the conduct of the war. Leslie was six years old when World War I started, and he was fascinated by stories of complicated military maneuvers.

The end of World War I brought Rumanian rule to Sepsiszentgyörgy, and life for Hungarians there became increasingly oppressed. In 1922 the family had to move to Hungary — “Mutilated Hungary” as it was called — because Leslie’s father refused to take the Rumanian oath of allegiance.

Leslie continued his education at the gymnasium in Miskolc in post-Trianon Hungary. He spent long hours in his room reading. He

was a bright student, and he always had a few classmates who depended on him for help in their studies. One of his former classmates, a professor at the university of Miskolc, told Leslie's sister how Leslie had spent many hours helping him study for his final exams. The act was characteristic of Leslie: throughout his life he liked to avoid the limelight, but he took pleasure and pride in helping others to enjoy it

As a young student, Leslie had one all-absorbing ambition: he wanted to enter the diplomatic service. The idea of rearranging history by skillful intellectual maneuvers appeared to him the most exciting and fulfilling vocation for a man. All his activities were geared to preparing him for a diplomatic career. After graduating from the gymnasium, he enlisted in the Hussars for a year, not because he had any military ambitions — he had a marked distrust of horses and naked swords—, but because a year with the Hussars was considered an essential part of a diplomat's education.

The same ambition took him to Paris where he spent several years at the École Science Politique studying law. He also spent some years in London working for a successful lawyer and learning to love the British way of life.

By the time he returned from England, his plans for becoming a diplomat were well under way. But his father, who had been very generous in financing his education abroad, could not understand Leslie's ambitions. He dreamed of a career in business and industry for his son, and sent him to Berlin to spend some time with the Farbenindustrie company. Leslie went but thoroughly despised the work, and soon he was back home again. His family was now living in Budapest. His father still would not give up. He persuaded the director of the Salgótarján coal mine, who was his bridge partner, to give Leslie a job. The director had great plans for Leslie, but Leslie did not share the director's rosy view of his future in business. Every day he came home in a gloomy mood, slamming doors, threat-

ening suicide. In the end his father got the message, and Leslie was allowed to pick his next job himself. He accepted a position at the Revision League, an organization devoted to achieving the revision of the boundaries imposed by the Treaty of Trianon. It was there that I first met him.

I too was a “refugee” in my own country. I was born in Orsova, a small town by the Danube at the southern tip of pre-World War I Hungary. My grandmother, Sophia Euxenia Saladuhim-Zolotuhin, lived in Turkey where she married a Belgian at the end of the nineteenth century. When her first husband died, she moved to Hungary and remarried. From her second marriage she had one daughter, Aurora, who married Imre Halász de Heves, a Hungarian ship’s captain who commanded a ship on the Danube between Germany and the Black Sea. Imre Halász became my father. I had one brother, Emil, and two sisters, Hajnal (Aurora) and Charlotte. Charlotte eventually married Prince Philip of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, whose family is related to most of the still crowned heads of Europe.

My native town, Orsova, was a busy harbour town with a mixed population of Hungarians, Rumanians, Bulgarians, Serbs and Croats. It was here that some years earlier they had constructed the Iron Gate, a navigation channel in the Danube. The Iron Gate was a Hungarian enterprise funded in part by European investors. Some of the Italians, Germans and French who had worked on the construction also stayed on in this enchanting harbour town to add to the diversity of the population. At present my birthplace is under water; the Rumanians have built a dam over the Danube which flooded most of the town.

My earliest memories go back to 1910, when I was three years old. Because of his job, Father was away much of the time, and there was great excitement when his ship came in. He was handsome and kind, and when he was home, I never left his side.

As children, we spent much of our spare time at the harbour,

watching the boats come in from all the countries bordering the Danube, and listening to the talk. Orsova was a microcosm of prewar Hungary. Our neighbours were Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, Rumanians. They had enthralling stories to tell about strange animal men and cruel Turkish pashas. When we had a new baby, they brought us sweet Turkish treats from Ada Khaleh, a small Turkish island in the Danube. They came to our weddings and funerals, and we went to theirs.

The years between 1910 and 1914 passed in a haze of bittersweet memories. There was a cruel teacher named Lichtfuss who hit me over the knuckles for another child's offence. There were trips to the fair in Father's delightful company. There was an outing to the Kazan Gorge where we saw ancient Roman marble tablets commemorating the rule of the Emperors Trajan and Septimus Severus as well as modern tablets in memory of two great Hungarian statesmen. István Szécheny and Gábor Baross. Early in 1914 my sister Charlotte was born. Of my mother's eight children, four of us survived infancy.

World War I burst in on us on July 23, 1914, as I was walking along the banks of the Danube with a girlfriend. We were trying on each other's new shoes; I was hobbling along in my friend's new gold-embroidered Turkish slippers. As we gazed across the Danube to the Serbian side, all of a sudden we heard whistling shots from across the river. We saw grownups running around, terrified, shouting to us to run for shelter. The panic seized us too and we started to run, tripping in our ill-fitting shoes. Finally we made it home, barefoot and scared. Dogs barked, birds disappeared, and Mother was frantically searching for us. When she saw me, she wavered between the urge to spank me and to hug me. To make sure I was safe — and would stay that way — she brought out a small bottle of holy water which she had brought home from church.

“Here, take a drink of this,” she commanded. I took a gulp and screamed as I spat it out all over Mother’s dress. That’s when we discovered that the “holy water” was actually rubbing alcohol.

In spite of its scary beginnings, the first year of World War I was not too bad for us. Father took Emil on his ship for a trip down the Danube. The ship was captured by Serbs, and Father and Emil became “prisoners of war”. They were taken to a village where Father knew all the officials — and some of the ladies. The Serbs welcomed their captives and plied them with good things to eat and drink. They apologized for the war and assured Father that it would all be over by autumn. For Emil the whole adventure was like an extended vacation. In 1915 they were released and came home in great spirits.

In the summer of 1916 Mother left home to take my sister Hajnal to high school in Pozsony, then a Hungarian town. now called Bratislava. Father and Grandmother stayed at home to take care of us children. It would be two years before we would see Mother again, and Mother would never see her husband again.

The war was now all around us, and we learned to live with it Each day when the bombardment started, we went to a nearby underground shelter which was an ordinary cellar stocked with food and other necessities by the families who used it When a bomb fell nearby, the jamjars danced on the shelves. The artillery followed a regular schedule with time out for lunch. When the bombardment halted, Emil and I sneaked out to collect pieces of schrapnel and pointed rifle bullets. Some of them were still hot Once we found some copper tubes full of explosives. I don’t know why we were not killed. We hoarded our treasures in the loft Some months later, when Orsova was already under Rumanian occupation, Grandmother climbed the ladder to the loft and was horrified to discover a heap of spent — and unspent — bullets on the floor. “If they find this, they will hang us all,” she lamented.

On August 27, 1916, Rumania declared war on AustriaHungary. Soon the Rumanians occupied Transylvania and Orsova

which was on the south western edge of that territory. Mother was still away: she could not come home because of the fighting.

It was a bitter cold day in early winter when I awoke at dawn to a shrieking noise. I jumped out of bed to investigate and saw Father and his helpers in the courtyard preparing a freshly slaughtered pig. Usually a pig roast meant festivities, good eating and lots of fun. But today everyone was serious. Father and his men worked quickly, dressing the meat for the winter ahead. Our tenant, Mrs. Szabó, a Rumanian woman married to a Hungarian, came out and offered to help, but Grandmother Sophie did not seem to hear her. After a while she went back to her apartment without a word. Later I saw her leave for town.

Around eight o'clock in the evening two Rumanian detectives came to our house and asked to see my father. When Father introduced himself, they said that they had orders to take him to the town hall. They would not wait for him to change his clothes, and Father left with them. Mrs. Szabó, who had been so interested in the pigroast, was nowhere to be seen.

I did not understand why they took Father, but I felt that something was very wrong, and I started to cry. Grandmother's face was sombre and apprehensive. We helped her clean up the mess in the courtyard, and then we all went inside the house. Grandmother started to say the Lord's Prayer aloud.

It was 10:30 at night, and Father was still not back. Grandmother made Emil and me put on our Sunday clothes and sent us to the town hall to find Father. Emil was 14, and I was nine. Silently holding hands, we made our way down the long dark main street. Dogs were barking on both sides. The town hall was a busy place even at that hour. Rumanian soldiers and peasants in white linen trousers came in and out of the building. There was no sign of Father.

We went to the first floor to enquire and were shown into a room where a Rumanian official was sitting behind a large desk in

a high-backed chair. I don't know why I did this, but as soon as I saw the man, I knelt down and pulled Emil down beside me. I put my hands together as in prayer and implored him to release our father. Surprised, the official got up awkwardly from his chair and came round to our side of the desk. He stroked my hair and said that there was nothing he could do: this was a military matter. Emil asked him when Father would be allowed to come home; the man said he did not know. Nobody seemed to know.

From that time we were in the care of Grandmother Sophie. She forbade us to talk to the tenant, Mrs. Szabó. She was convinced that the woman had denounced Father. I later found out that she had tried to seduce Father and he had repelled her advances. Her revenge made us orphans. After a while she moved out and spread stories about seeing Father send signals from the attic window to the Hungarian warships in the Kazan Gorge of the Danube.

The war dragged on. Once the Germans broke through and recovered Orsova. There was hand to hand fighting in the streets, and we children watched it, popping up and down by the window. In the evening the injured and the dead were lying all over the town. Two wounded Rumanian soldiers were stretched out on the pavement in front of our house. Grandmother went out and gave them mugs of hot black coffee. I could not understand how she could help Rumanians. It was Rumanians who took our father. But she said she helped them because they were in need and far from their own people.

When the war was over, Mother came home from Pozsony to find her husband gone. She searched everywhere for him, but found only rumours. One time she heard that a man named Bodea had been in the same prison as Father. She contacted the man who told her about the inhuman conditions in the prison. One time they were locked in a cellar for a whole month. Father could not bear the suffering, and one day he cut his wrists but was saved by fellow prisoners. Mother wanted to leave Orsova but hesitated, thinking that Father might still be alive. Then one day she received official

notification that Father had committed suicide in prison. Bodea did not believe the story; he was convinced that Father had been secretly executed. We never discovered the charges against him.

The Treaty of Versailles made Orsova part of Rumania. Grandmother had died soon after Mother's return, and Mother was left to take care of her four children by herself. She was anxious to leave before she was required to swear allegiance to Rumania. She wrote to some friends in Budapest, who managed to rent a small flat for us in the outskirts of the city. We left our pleasant home to join in Budapest the thousands of refugees who had similarly fled from the Hungarian areas of what was now Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. In October 1918 we arrived in Budapest, an overcrowded city which had little food and fewer jobs. My older sister Hajnal became the breadwinner; with her shorthand and typing skills she managed to find a fairly good job in a bank. Mother took care of my baby sister Charlotte and earned some money by knitting garments for a shop. Emil and I went to school

In April 1919 came the Communist takeover under Béla Kun, and the city broke out in a rash of red bunting, red paper garlands and red stars. Most of my neighbours and teachers were appalled at what was going on, but the new headmistress of my school was a loyal Communist. She summoned the whole school for an assembly and made a speech. She told us that from now on there would be enough food, and everybody would be free. Until then I did not know I was not free. The headmistress had a big red nose to match the red garlands which adorned the auditorium. She was a tall, straightbacked woman, and her large bosom swayed rhythmically as she spoke.

““And now, children, we must prepare for the May First Celebration, which will take place in three days. You will go home and make as many red stars, bows and garlands as you can. On the First of May try to wear something red. Attendance at the festival will

white bread and juicy frankfurters the likes of which we had not seen for years. I shall never forget the taste of that meal. “If this is Communism, it’s not so bad after all.” I said to my stomach.

In the early afternoon we returned to town and the headmistress led us to the municipal baths. The boys and girls went to separate changing rooms. We took off our clothes and huddled in the room, trying not to look at each other’s tiny or non-existent breasts. At last we could not put it off any longer. We crept cautiously forward on the warm tile floor, dreading the moment when we would meet the naked boys.

Another girl caught my hand. “Come on. we have to face it,” she said, and together we marched toward the pool. The boys were already splashing and shouting in the big pool. As we approached the smaller pool, where the girls were supposed to bathe, the younger boys started laughing and making funny faces, but the older boys turned away from us. We took refuge in the water, and soon the boys were absorbed in their own water fights and took no notice of us. The whole experience was awkward, but not nearly as exciting as we had imagined. All the same, we were relieved when it was over, and glad that our headmistress did not repeat this experiment in equality.

The peasants hated the Communist system so much that they refused to bring their produce to the city markets. They even refused to harvest the fruit and vegetables, but they allowed people to pick what they needed. So we spent some happy summer days in country gardens, picking our own pears, apples, beans and peas. We would fill our baskets and pay the fanner who was leaning on the gate, smoking his pipe. Some farmers made good money this way, but it was not what the Communists had in mind. Many peasant farmers were put to death because they refused to co-operate with the system.

Within a year the Communists were overthrown, but the country’s economic problems still remained, and poverty was widespread.

To help those in need, the people of Holland and - Belgium opened their homes to thousands of impoverished Hungarian children who spent a year or more with their Belgian or Dutch “‘parents.” My family had friends in Belgium, and when I was 18 years old and a pupil at the convent school of the English Sisters in Budapest, I was invited to spend some time there. I stayed in Belgium for almost two years

16 Clear The Line

After returning to Hungary I finished my secondary education and managed to find a job at the Revision League. There I met a young man named Lajos (Louis) Pálóczi Horváth. He was not very tall, but he had a handsome face that was alive with humour and intelligence. He had a prodigious skill in languages; he had spent some six years at the university, soaking up all the information he could find. He discovered something interesting in every subject except economics — the subject he was supposed to study for his degree. In all the years I was married to him, he never bored me. He had a passionate interest in Hungarian folk music and arts. He knew over 500 folk songs of different nations, including those of the FinnoUgrian minorities of Russia. He played the piano well, I loved to sing, and I learned to sing folk songs in many different languages. He gave lectures on the folk music of different countries for various organizations including the Hungarian Radio Service. I helped to illustrate these talks by singing the songs to his accompaniment

Louis introduced me to the literary life of the country. He had many writer friends, including several peasant writers who were fighting for land reform and improved working conditions for the nation's peasant class. Although he came from an upper class family of landowners, (his mother, Elisabeth Horthy was related to the Regent, Admiral Horthy), Louis was a passionate advocate of land reform and championed the peasants' cause energetically.

Louis Pálóczi Horváth was eight years older than I, but in many ways he was like a child, easily hopeful, easily discouraged, always ready for new experiences, often not knowing where to stop. Perhaps that is why I fell in love with him; he needed me so much.

Our daughter Dalma was born in 1933, the year of Hitler's accession to power. It was also a year of crisis in our marriage. We stayed together for the sake of our child, but henceforth our relationship was friendly rather than conjugal.

It was while I was struggling to put my life back together that I met László (Leslie) Veress, who also worked at the Revision League. (Louis had by this time obtained a position with the Monitoring Service of the Hungarian Radio.) Leslie became the "other man" in my life, and eventually, my second husband. Louis did not give me up easily. He challenged Leslie to a duel and they met at dawn, accompanied by their seconds, pistols in hand. Although in private life Louis and Leslie were rivals, and at times bitter enemies, in their convictions they had a great deal in common. They were both driven by a passionate desire to save our country. They had both lost their native lands to the Treaty of Versailles, and they were both determined to remedy the injustices of that treaty. Both men mistrusted Germany as well as the Soviet Union. They were equally against Nazism and Communism. They both felt anxious as Hungary became more and more involved with Germany.

Hungary had looked to Germany to gain redress against the injustices of Trianon. When, as a result of the two Vienna

Accords, parts of the lost territories were regained, the country was euphoric. But the restored lands came with a heavy price tag—Hungary's commitment to the Axis. Hungary's leaders, including the Regent, Admiral Horthy, joined the German alliance with strong reservations.

By 1942 Hungary was looking for a way out of her entanglement with Germany; however, the enterprise was fraught with difficulties. The Hungarian Government wanted to offer to surrender to the British forces, but the British were not within reach to take advantage of the surrender. Germany, on the other hand, was very much within reach. If the Germans found out about the surrender negotiations, they would invade Hungary, making her useless to the Allies and unable to protect the one million Jews, refugees, and others with anti-Nazi sympathies who had so far lived unharmed in Hungary.

How to get out of the war and away from the embraces of an increasingly imperious Germany was the daily topic of conversation in wartime Hungary. It was also the subject of serious but strictly private discussion among some members of the Cabinet including Prime Minister Nicholas Kállay. These people were determined to do something, but they had to act in the utmost secrecy. Leaks to the Germans, or to German sympathisers, would be fatal to the enterprise — and to the country. The anxiety to keep the mission secret also hindered its effectiveness. The early emissaries were simply low echelon diplomats making contacts in neutral countries such as Sweden or Portugal.

To make these so-called peace-feeler missions count, the Government needed a low-ranking, inconspicuous diplomat willing and able to negotiate on behalf of the Hungarian Government with a high level representative of the British government in deepest secrecy. The person chosen for this delicate task was Leslie Veress. He had the necessary qualifications: a keen mind, a willingness to risk his life, an ardent love of his country, and a love of Great Britain.

In addition, he was obscure enough to be able to come and go unnoticed by the Germans.

Veress went to work as the official emissary of the Hungarian Government, and he succeeded in turning talks into negotiations. In the middle of the war he accomplished an unprecedented diplomatic feat: as the representative of an enemy country, he met with British Ambassador Knatchbull-Hugessen in Istanbul, and gave the Ambassador an offer of surrender from the Hungarian Government which made Winston Churchill, then in Quebec, give orders to “Clear the Line,” so that he could freely communicate with Anthony Eden in London.

Leslie followed up the talks by taking two radio transmitters back with him to Budapest and keeping radio contact with the Allies for the next several months. If Hungary had succeeded in surrendering to the British forces in 1943, would Europe have been spared four decades of strife and anguish? The Hungarian surrender initiative made Churchill’s idea of invading through the Balkans a practical plan. An Allied invasion through southeast Europe might have prevented Soviet expansion into the heart of Europe. Without the presence of Soviet troops, Hungary would never have become a Communist state. The same is true of the other former satellite countries. Imagine a Europe without an Iron Curtain; without millions of refugees; without a Berlin Wall; without bloody uprisings and ruthless suppression in Germany, Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. Imagine Europe without a Cold War. Decisions made in 1943 might have made that fantasy a reality.

It is possible that saving Europe from Soviet domination would not have prevented Soviet expansion in the rest of the world, where the people themselves looked to Communism as a cure for their problems, but in the countries of Central and East Europe the Communists had no following significant enough to establish a Communist state without Soviet military presence. Hungary’s surrender to British and American forces in 1943 could have

prevented a Soviet occupation of the country. Obviously, the Allies appreciated Russia's part in the war effort, and that explains their territorial concessions to the USSR, but there is no doubt that in 1943 the free world missed an opportunity.

It is not the aim of this account to wallow in nostalgia for unrealised pipe dreams. Nor is the book intended to deliver praise or blame. Rather, it is an attempt to examine the circumstances and factors that caused this tragic missed opportunity. My hope is that a clear picture of the details and a look at fresh evidence will yield some useful lessons for the future.

I

The Wounds Of War

Post-Trianon Hungary was a place of despair and desperate hope. With two-thirds of the country gone, the economy was in chaos. The territories to Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia by the Treaty of Trianon contained most of Hungary's valuable natural resources, and what was left of the country was overcrowded with refugees like ourselves. Jobs were scarce; university students had to support themselves by working as street sweepers. People with college degrees had to take whatever menial jobs were available. The Wall Street crash of 1929 made matters still worse.

Indignation about the terms of the Trianon Treaty was universal. With their daily prayers, school children recited a new creed: "I believe in one God, I believe in one country, and I believe in the resurrection of Hungary." Patriotic societies and movements had one object the reversal or "revision" of the terms of the Treaty of Trianon. The official organization that coordinated these efforts was the Revision League, founded in 1927.

After receiving my school diploma, and after several months of fruitless search, I finally found a job at the Revision League. Here I spent my working days typing hundreds of letters to the leading politicians of various countries, newspaper tycoons, and anyone else who would listen. explaining the plight of Hungary and appealing for their support in correcting the injustices of the Treaty of Trianon. The League sent representatives all over Europe until

finally our grievances were brought to the attention of the League of Nations. In England Lord Rothermere took up our cause. There was much rejoicing in Hungary when the headline ““Hungary’s place under the sun” appeared in Lord Rothermere’s paper, The Daily Mail in 1927. I remember Lord Rothermere’s son, Edmund Harmsworth on his visit to Hungary. He was a good-looking, tall, fair-haired young man, and all the women fell in love with him. He also gained the hearts of people in high places. There was even talk of making him king of Hungary.

Another English visitor received with open arms in Hungary was Edward, Prince of Wales, who came for a visit in 1935 with his fiancée, the elegant Wally Simpson. We liked to think that he was interested in Hungary because his grandmother, Claudia Rhédey, was a Hungarian. We liked everything about him — his enthusiasm for Hungarian food, wine and music; his boyish enjoyment of taking a walk on the Danube embankment in the red-orange glow of the dawn after a night on the town; his high spirits as he once took a pot shot at a street lamp . . . When later he gave up the throne for the woman he loved, we knew exactly how he felt. Many of us would have accepted him as our king with or without Mrs. Simpson.

Between the two world wars, Hungary’s relations with her neighbours were uneasy at best. Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania, worried about the fate of their newly acquired territories, wanted a non-aggression pact with Hungary. Kálmán Kánya, the Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, refused to sign such a treaty unless the rights of the Hungarian minorities in the transferred territories were guaranteed. The Allies asked the three neighbour states to make some concessions to Hungarian demands, with very little success. Yugoslavia alone was willing to make some reparation to compensate Hungary for her territorial losses. Eventually, in order to survive, Hungary concluded economic agreements with the Yugoslavs and also with her other neighbours.

But under the surface smouldered hostility on all sides. The parents of my husband Louis lived in Beregszász, a Hungarian town in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, an area that after Trianon became part of Czechoslovakia. After we were married, we made annual summer visits to see my in-laws. After a while we accepted the bitter routine of procuring passports and visas in order to go “home.” In 1936 Louis, myself, and three-year-old Dalma were on our usual summer vacation staying at my father-in-law’s house when one night the Czech police came and arrested Louis. The event was totally unexpected and inexplicable.

Louis was locked up in the gaol section of the court building where his father had once been a judge. In the same cell with him were a Gypsy who had been convicted of stealing a pig, and a smuggler who protested his innocence for hours at a time. The Gypsy too was indignant: “Why did they have to catch me in the summer? Why couldn’t they wait until winter, when I need the shelter?” he complained.

In years to come Louis would entertain his friends with colourful reminiscences of his imprisonment; of how the Gypsy told him stories to cheer him up; of how he in turn regaled the Gypsy with stories from the Hungarian classics. By the end of the ordeal he had mastered the rudiments of the Gypsy language.

In retrospect, compared to his five years of penal servitude in a Communist political prison under the Stalinist Rákosi era, the Czech episode seems like a vacation; however, at the time it made us all desperate, all the more so as we did not know the charges against him, or how long he would be detained. The Czech authorities took away his passport which also had Dalma’s and my name on it, so none of us could leave. Louis’ brother-in-law, a Hungarian member of the Czech Parliament, made some enquiries in Prague and found out that the charges against Louis were indeed serious. Someone had denounced him for a patriotic “crime” he had committed several years earlier, when his home town was first annexed to

Czechoslovakia: he had put up a Hungarian flag in the church steeple in Beregszász. The authorities intended to put him on trial and make an example of him. Fortunately, they released him pending the hearing, and all three of us managed to escape. Louis stole across the border at an unguarded spot, and a friend smuggled me and Dalma across in a horsedrawn carriage. I was clutching my sister-in-law's passport while three-year-old Dalma was hiding obediently under the carriage blanket. Thus did the Treaty of Versailles exile my husband from his home town. For his mother the Czechs were somewhere in the same class as the Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar in the Bible.

In the late thirties, Hungary's political situation became tense. The Government had to keep a balance between the rightist and leftist elements. There were very few Communists — actually, most of them called themselves Social Democrats — but Communist propaganda poured in from the Soviet Union, appealing to the disadvantaged. Right-wing propaganda had similar aims, promising solutions to our problems. In 1937 there were several violent strikes for better wages and working conditions. The steelworkers went on hunger strike, with resulting casualties. Four hundred miners went on strike, and some lost their jobs. Other factory workers followed suit. There were clashes between right and left-wing factions, resulting in arrests and three to ten-month prison terms for the culprits. In April, 1937, police searched the offices of the extreme right-wing party and its leader, Ferenc Szálasi. A list of party members, incriminating documents and propaganda materials were seized. Szálasi was arrested and sentenced to three months' imprisonment. After his release later in the year, he was arrested again and imprisoned for ten months.

In the thirties, Hungary's intellectual life was teeming with talented writers of many different political persuasions, both right and left. Louis had many writer friends and at literary gatherings they threw themselves into fiery political and philosophical

arguments. Some, like peasant writer Zsigmond Móricz, kept a balanced view, others held more extreme views which sometimes landed them in gaol. The poet Gyula Illyés had his “Book of Poems” confiscated and he himself was sentenced to ten months in prison. Imre Kovács, another left-wing writer, received a three-month sentence. We felt that the arrests of writers were unwarranted. Several times Louis interceded with the authorities and sometimes he succeeded in persuading them to release a writer friend who had been arrested for his opinions.

Communists were closely watched, and their meetings forbidden. To outwit the authorities, they held their meetings in various innocuous locations, often under the pretext of cultural events. Once while we were still engaged, Louis and I unwittingly attended such a meeting. A friend from a labour union invited us to a performance by a folk singer from the Soviet Union. Louis, who was passionately interested in folk art and had a collection of the folk songs of many lands, eagerly accepted. The performance was given in a private apartment in Nagymező street. There were some fifteen people gathered to hear the artist. Among the listeners sat a young man named Antal Apró, who after the 1956 Revolution was to become a cabinet minister in the Communist government of János Kádár. All this was hidden from us in the mists of the future. As we sat waiting for the performance to begin, we saw some members of the audience casting suspicious, furtive glances at us. One man stood by the window staring out into the street with a tense, nervous look. The “artist” turned out to be a young man with a balalaika who sang Communist revolutionary songs and was vigorously applauded by the audience. Soon we realized that we were attending a secret Communist meeting, and the person at the window was a lookout Louis, who in 1919 had been a member of the White Army that had fought to defeat the Communists, was horrified to find himself in their midst. I kept thinking, what if the police raid this place and put us in gaol along

with everyone else? Walking away from that meeting was like waking up from a nightmare.

In the course of 1937 we could feel the ties that bound us to the Axis states pulling tighter: our leaders met the leaders of Austria and Germany with increasing frequency. The state visit of the King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel and his Queen provided some relief to the tension. The King and Queen were welcomed with great enthusiasm; the streets were decorated with Italian and Hungarian flags, flowers and bunting. The Hungarian dignitaries in the welcoming procession were wearing their historic ceremonial garb, complete with swords, plumed shakos, and fur-trimmed velvet coats embroidered in gold. The people of Budapest, dressed in their Sunday best, lined the streets, cheering the visitors. Between the two wars there were very few occasions to celebrate.

Behind the celebration, the question on everyone's mind was, where will Hungary end up in the next war, if there is one. Foreign Minister Kánya was convinced that in a European conflict Hitler would lose, and he did everything in his power to prevent Hungary from pledging herself to Germany. When late in the year Italy left the League of Nations and joined Germany and Japan in the Anti-Comintern Pactum, we felt that Kánya was facing an impossible task.

My private life was as precarious as the politics of the country. Leslie Veress and I saw each other regularly, and I tried to help Louis accept the idea that our marriage was a marriage in name only.

Leslie shared his views and experiences with me. From 1934 to 1936, in addition to his duties at the Revision League, Leslie was also a delegate to the League of Nations, and between 1936 and 1938 he was a copywriter and editor of the English language newspaper Hungarian Quarterly. In 1937 the menacing clouds of Nazi power were gathering over Austria and Hungary. Leslie's uncle, General Louis Veress de Dálnok, was at the time the Hungarian Military Attache in Vienna. Leslie was planning a trip to Austria to gather information on the situation there, and he suggested that I accompany him. The trip would also give me a chance to meet General Veress.

On a bleak winter day in 1937 we arrived in Vienna and found very little "gemütlichkeit" in the ancient city. But Uncle Veress received us with great affection. He was an honest, forthright person, a soldier who thrived on discipline both in his public and private life. He was very fond of Leslie, but he steadfastly refused to pull strings for him. On one occasion, when Leslie was a volunteer in the Hussars, they both attended a party which was so lively that

Leslie missed his curfew. In vain did he entreat his uncle to give him a note to his commanding officer. The General patted him on the shoulder and gave his nephew a puckish smile. “‘You must learn to obey the rules, my boy:’ To get back into his barracks that night, Leslie had to shinny up a six-foot garden wall in his dinner jacket. It was his strong self-discipline and total lack of self-pity that helped the General survive ten years of political imprisonment, but it was his unwavering devotion to his country that landed him in prison in the first place. During World War II he was to become Commander of Hungary’s Second army. When the Germans occupied the country, they jailed him for his refusal to co-operate with their demands. When the Russians took over, they too put him in gaol, for his involvement with the underground resistance against Communist rule.

In 1937 General Veress’ — and Hungary’s — ordeal was just starting. He told us about the grave situation in Austria. Vienna was in turmoil, its future uncertain. There were Communist plots and daily clashes between right and leftwing factions. His own position was none too secure. We were all aware that Hungary’s own fate depended on events in Austria.

II

Hitler, The Menacing Mentor

Soon events in Germany and Austria were to overshadow our private problems. Jealousies and personal grievances faded as we watched the rise of Adolf Hitler. Germany's plight was a mirror image of Hungary's. She had lost vital territories and was forced to pay crippling restitution debts. She suffered from unemployment and dismal economic conditions. She was looking for someone to put things right

On January 30, 1933, President Hindenburg had reluctantly appointed Hitler Chancellor of Germany. When we first saw him on newsreels, speaking to crowds of cheering Germans, we watched perplexed. How would the little man with the Charlie Chaplin moustache tackle Germany's horrendous problems? But soon his rhetoric beguiled not only the crowds of desperate Germans but also Britain's Lloyd George. He came back from his meeting with Hitler, singing his praises: "Führer is the proper name for him. He is a great and wonderful leader . . . The saviour of Germany," he declared. He concluded cheerfully that "the Germans have definitely made up their minds never to quarrel with us."

The Reichstag fire provided Hitler with an opportunity to start eliminating his enemies. The Communists were blamed, and thousands were arrested. For the rest of the thirties we watched Hitler put Germany back on its feet and eliminate his opposition. In June, 1934 we heard about a plot to depose Hitler, organized by one of his closest friends, Ernst Roehim. On the "Night of the Long

Knives” Roehim and his followers were arrested. Seventy-seven people were shot to death. As for Roehm, a pistol was laid on his desk and he was given ten minutes to use it Thus Hitler dealt with his enemies—and his former friends.

In Hungary the main question was, will Hitler help us? Memories of the Communist terror of 1919 were still vivid in our minds. Under the regime of Admiral Horthy, order had been restored. Mátyás Rákosi, one of the leaders of the hated Communist regime and responsible for its atrocities, was serving a life sentence. One of Horthy’s worst mistakes as Regent was to release Rákosi to Russia. In a hopelessly Hungarian patriotic gesture in the late thirties, Horthy exchanged the past and future tyrant of Hungary for a collection of Hungarian army flags seized by Russia in the ill-fated 1848 Hungarian War of Independence. His generosity allowed Rákosi to spend the war years in the Soviet Union, preparing his bloody comeback. He was to become the Joseph Stalin of Hungary.

In the thirties, Hungary had two main concerns: how to avoid a Communist takeover, and how to regain our lost territories. Appeals by the Revision League to Britain and her allies were not proving to be successful Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia and Rumania were often brutally oppressed. The crippled mother county was still struggling with unemployment, low wages and the resulting strikes. A popular argument at the time ran somewhat as follows: if Hitler can save us from the evils of Communism and dismemberment, it would be worth enlisting his support It is true, he is somewhat harsh with the Jews, and he does keep harping on the triumph of the Aryan race, but nobody is perfect Before World War I Hungarians had nothing against the Jews. But after the Communist Terror of 1919, it was impossible to forget that Béla Kun, Mátyás Rákosi, and most of the leaders of the Communist Coup had been Jews. After World War I the numerus clausus quota system excluded some Jews from higher education, and Jews were not accepted for employment in high government positions, but in every other area they were well

represented, and people recognized their contributions to the economy and to the arts. Rich Jewish businessmen were known to help poor Hungarian writers and artists. So, maybe Hitler was a bit hard on the Jews, so went the popular argument, Hungary will not follow his example. In any case, it is not as if he is stringing them up on lamp posts . . . Dachau and Auschwitz were just tiny black dots on the map, and the world was still innocent of death camps and gas chambers.

Newsreels and newspapers featured constant visits and discussions between the leaders of Hungary, Germany, Austria, and Italy. Leslie became more and more apprehensive as our government continued to establish ever stronger ties with Hitler. To enlist Hitler's support in our struggle to correct the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles, the right-wing government of Gyula Gömbös concluded a secret pact with Germany against the Communist world. Later Gömbös tried to initiate more liberal policies, and we were surprised to see a translation of *Das Kapital* at the annual Book Fair.

On March 7, 1936, Hitler's troops marched into the Rhineland — a territory Germany had lost after World War I. What if we were to march into Transylvania? What if our troops could recapture Beregszász, Louis' home town in the foothills of the Carpathians? Regent Horthy congratulated Hitler. The Italian-German Axis came into being. In November 1936, Germany and Japan signed an AntiComintern Pact For Hungary, an alliance with Germany seemed to hold hope. The new Prime Minister, Kálmán Darányi, continued to forge ties with Hitler.

Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland made Britain realize that Germany was becoming a military power, but a power with which Britain was prepared to negotiate. When Lord Halifax visited Hitler in 1937, he let the Führer know that England recognized Germany's "rearrangement" of Central European territories. From this meeting Hitler concluded that Britain would also allow him a free hand in

Central and Eastern Europe. While we realized that Germany was becoming a serious threat to Hungary's independence, we had nowhere else to turn for justice. Britain and France, while recognizing the need for revision of the Treaty of Versailles, did nothing. So Hungary was left with only Italy and Germany to help her. Hindsight has made it more and more obvious that Allied decisions after World War I directly determined the course of events that led to World War

II. C.A. Macartney in *October Fifteenth—A History of Modern Hungary* puts it this way:

It is, however, necessary to insist more explicitly that for Hungary, as for all of Central Europe, the wars of 1914-18 and of 1939-45 were not two wars but one: two chapters of open fighting separated by an intervening period which differed from them in degree rather than kind The Treaty of Trianon, which Hungary signed on 14th June, 1920, formed, once signed, a fixed point to which every subsequent act of Hungarian international policy was directly related (Part I, 3-4)

Whatever hope we had from Hitler's activities was tempered by the realization that Hitler was a dangerous ally. We watched with apprehension the fate of Austria, our next-door neighbour. On February 20, 1938, Hitler made another of his notorious speeches at the Reichstag, calling Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg a dwarf, a Jesuit spawn, and a murderer. He vowed to protect the ten million "Germans" living in Austria and sentimentally remembered his own Austrian birthplace, his "beloved Salzburg."

The sequence of events that followed was a pattern that would be repeated several times in the coming months: inflated news of unrest, street clashes and civil war, followed by a German occupation "to restore order." As he marched into Austria, Hitler was anxious to give the impression of a peaceful takeover welcomed by the people.

His orders to his troops were to avoid provocation and the use of force as far as possible, but to break resistance ruthlessly by force of arms. Our old ties with Austria from the days of the AustroHungarian Monarchy made us very sensitive to every event that happened in that country; when Hitler's army marched into Austria. in Hungary we felt the ground tremble from their goose steps.

If we had any illusions about Hitler's peaceful intentions, they were shattered by Chancellor Schuschnigg's speech to the nation on the eve of the Annexation. He declared that news of riots and bloodshed were "pure invention from A to Z" and went on to describe the situation in plain terms: "Our president had instructed me to inform the Austrian nation that we are yielding to force. However, he declared his determination not to spill blood: 'We have ordered our forces, in the event of an invasion by the German army, to withdraw without any resistance.'" On 12th March, 1938, German troops crossed the Austrian border, and the Anschluss (Annexation) was accomplished.

Hungary now had Hitler in her backyard. As we listened to the news from Austria. we had to ask ourselves, can we really expect Hitler to help us regain our lost territories? By the Treaty of Trianon, a strip of Western Hungary, Burgenland, had been given to Austria. After the Annexation, this region now belonged to Germany. Instead of getting something back, we had actually irretrievably lost part of our country to Hitler. Foreign Minister Kálmán Kánya made no secret of his disapproval of the Annexation. The German forces were decidedly too close for comfort. The question on everyone's mind now was, "Are we next?"

Hungary's pro-British politicians and businessmen tried in vain to enlist British support and economic help to counteract Hitler's power over our country. In this regard, Hungary was no better off than Rumania. Czechoslovakia. and the Balkan states. The British were aware of the need to help these nations, but were in no position to act. Lord Halifax recommended that Czech President Benes be

advised to come to an agreement with Germany. Hungary's pleas for economic aid went equally unheeded in spite of earnest efforts on the part of Lord Halifax. Assistant Foreign Secretary Orme Sargent was of the opinion that buying wheat from Hungary would not save her from German domination.

Nearly three weeks after the annexation of Austria, the people of Hungary were still waiting to be reassured about their future. At last on April 3, Regent Horthy spoke to the nation and assured us that the Anschluss would not affect Hungary's independence. Actually, our independence came with a heavy price tag. Hitler insisted that Hungary supply him with food and raw materials, and later also with fighting troops for his Russian campaign.

The Regent's person provided a unique buffer between Hungary's fragile independence and Hitler's ever-increasing dominance. Regent Nicholas Horthy had been an admiral in the fleet of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. He was a true patriot and an honest man of his word who scrupulously avoided any semblance of favoritism. A proof of his honesty was his refusal to use his authority to help my husband to find a job, even though Louis' mother was his second cousin. Although Horthy was by no means enthusiastic about a German alliance, Hitler respected him, and for a time at least, the Regent was able to hold him at bay and thus save close to a million Jews and others from Nazi death camps.

On May 14, 1938, Béla Imrédy became Prime Minister. He had strong right-wing sympathies not shared by all members of this cabinet, members such as Minister of the Interior Ferenc KeresztesFischer and Minister of Education Count Pál Teleki. It is worth noting that despite his leanings to the right, Imrédy did not tolerate extreme right-wing activities. Ferenc Szálasi, who later became the leader of the Nazi Arrowcross Party, was arrested under Imrédy's government and sentenced to imprisonment for his subversive activities. Three Communists were also sentenced to nine to fifteen

years on similar charges. It was Imrédy who pushed through the First Jewish Law, which limited the maximum number of Jews to 20% in certain key positions. His second Jewish Law defined a Jew as a person with Jewish grandparents, or one Jewish parent, and reduced the quota to 6%. Eventually Imrédy became a victim of his own legislation. When it was discovered that he himself had Jewish blood in him, he was forced to resign.

In 1938 Hungarians watched intently as Hitler was planning to annex the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia. Foreign Minister Kánya sent a message to British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, stating that if Germany were allowed to regain the Sudetenland, then Hungary would also reclaim her former territories from Czechoslovakia. However, it soon became apparent that Hitler was in no hurry to advance the cause of Hungary. In his discussions with Chamberlain on September 15, nothing was said about Hungary's claims. Even the Munich Agreement, signed on September 30, 1938, only granted the Sudetenland to Germany and left Hungarian and Polish claims to be discussed with Czechoslovakia.

Chamberlain may have thought that he had achieved "peace in our time," but very few people in Hungary shared his optimism. Hitler increased his demands for Hungarian support. He now wanted not only raw materials and food, but also troops to help him occupy Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian Government wanted at all costs to avoid being involved in a war and made excuses which Hitler did not buy. "He who wants to eat with us, must also help to cook dinner," he told the Regent.

After the Munich Agreement, we all expected some action in regaining our lost territories from Czechoslovakia. but Hitler was dragging his feet. Finally, he allowed Hungary to reclaim only a portion of the lost regions, the area south of the line between Pozsony, Nyitra, Kassa, Ungvár, and Munkács. The Czechs were naturally opposed to the proposed adjustments and wanted to negotiate only the parts they considered Hungarian-speaking. The

Hungarian Government in turn demanded a census to determine the demography of all the territories in question.

While the leaders were negotiating, other patriots were taking more practical steps to regain the territories lost to Czechoslovakia including Louis' home town of Beregszász. To support the army, an "irregular army" of volunteers was organized by Miklós Kozma. Their task was to go to Czechoslovakia to perform sabotage activities. Louis felt he had to do something to help regain his native town and enlisted. Leslie, who was a reserve in the Hussar regiment of Cegléd, was called up for service. I went to see him in Cegléd. While he was out on training exercises, he locked me in his room so nobody would know that he had a female visitor. I felt like an eighteenth century camp follower. In the evening we walked on the sandy river bank and had a dinner of "halászlé" (a spicy fish stew) in a small restaurant by the river. I returned to Budapest, thinking that I would see him again shortly. I did not. On November 2, 1938, German and Italian leaders gathered in the Belvedere Palace near Vienna and decided to grant Hungary permission to regain part of the territories lost to Czechoslovakia. The benefit was much less than we had hoped, but the Hungarian Government decided to make the most of the situation and gave orders to march into Czechoslovakia, pushing beyond the boundaries set by the Vienna Accords, but taking pains to refrain from violence and brutality. Actually, there was no need for violence; the Slovak population was as glad as the Hungarians to be rid of the Czechs. Leslie marched with his regiment to occupy the lost regions.

For several months the country celebrated. Louis' family and the other residents of his native Beregszász, who, by the way, were all Hungarian, were like people awakened from a twenty-year nightmare. Louis' father, who was suffering from a painful nerve disease, made a spectacular recovery. For months he was free from pain, and he cheerfully entertained droves of jubilant houseguests.

Then one night, after saying good night to his family and guests, he smiled and said, "I'm going to bed now; don't expect me to wake up to-morrow." He died in his sleep, happy. The rest of us who did wake up the next day, and for the next several years, were not so lucky.

After Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia. Europe was being swept ever nearer to the brink of war, and we struggled more and more desperately to stay out of it. For Hungary, the only vital issue now was the reunification of the country. To achieve that aim, we had no choice but to take chances. It soon became evident that war was inevitable. Chamberlain declared that Britain would not tolerate further German aggression and guaranteed assistance to Poland. British efforts to enlist Russian aid for Poland came to nothing. From Germany came more disquieting news: Hitler's followers were going after the Jews. Crystal Night received its name from the streets covered with glass from the shattered windows of Jewish shops. The Night of Broken Glass saw synagogues burned down, Jews attacked in the streets, thousands of Jews arrested. Alliance with Hitler was now seen as not only dangerous, but also evil.

On February 15, 1939, pro-German Prime Minister Béla Imrédy was replaced by Count Pál Teleki, a man whose profound love of his country was combined with a ruthlessly efficient intellect and an uncompromising sense of honour. He was a great statesman and scholar. In 1919 he had been one of the chief organizers of the counter-revolution which toppled the post-World War I Communist regime in Hungary. He was Prime Minister of the first anti-Communist government formed in 1920. In 1921 he resigned because of his disagreement with Horthy's decision to order the Hungarian army to take the oath of allegiance to him (Horthy) rather than to the Hapsburg king, Charles IV. After his resignation, he retired from political life and devoted his energies to academic pursuits as professor of geography at the University of Budapest.

Teleki's keen intellect sized up Hungary's plight accurately. He

saw clearly that both Russian and German domination were a menace to his country. His first act in office was to ban Hungary's two most extreme right-wing organizations. Teleki viewed Hitler's methods with distaste. Hitler for his part did not trust Teleki: in a speech in April, 1939, outlining his strategic plans, he declared that Hungary was not a trustworthy ally. As a concession to Hitler, the Hungarian Parliament passed another Jewish Law in May, 1939, barring Jews from many professions including the press, medicine, theatre, and scientific activities. Many statesmen, among them former Prime Minister Count István Bethlen, were most unhappy with these restrictions.

Prime Minister Teleki refused to send Hungarian troops to assist Hitler in his planned invasion of Poland, and Hitler was furious. He told Foreign Minister Count Csáky that since Hungary was so ungrateful for his help in recovering the lost territories, he would not back further claims by Hungary. Hitler was no more successful with Mussolini, who told him that Italy was not prepared for a major war which would inevitably follow if they attacked Poland. Finally, without even telling Mussolini, Hitler turned to the Russians. On August 23, 1939, Hitler signed a Russo-German non-aggression pact. Now we were really scared.

I the summer of 1939 we moved to a new apartment in Alma Street in the Buda Hills; on September 1st, 1939, Dalma started school, and German tanks rolled into Poland. Chamberlain was forced to honour Britain's guarantee of Poland's safety by declaring war on Germany. France followed suit. The Polish army was no match for the overwhelming German forces. Our Prime Minister gave orders: "Please stand by for retreating Polish troops." Russia and Germany carved up Poland between them, and Poland as a country ceased to exist. Its government went into exile, but the Polish Embassy in Budapest stayed in place. Tens of thousands of Polish refugees crossed the border into Hungary. The Hungarian Government, co-operating with the Polish Embassy, gave

them shelter and made it possible for large numbers of Polish soldiers to leave Hungary and join the Allies. Nicholas Kállay, who was to become Prime Minister in 1943, describes in Hungarian Premier the Hungarian Government's role in helping Polish refugees:

Hungarian authorities not only tolerated but often supported the political activities of the Polish refugees, especially their relations with the underground in Poland To give one example, we organized a camp at the request of the Polish refugees in Dunamocs so that they could observe German shipments on the Danube. We harbored and covered their secret radio broadcasts from Balaton Boglár, which furnished the Allies and governments in exile with military and political information. (330-331)

The institute for Polish Resistance Studies in London confirms the existence of the radio transmitter at Balatonboglár as well as other radio contacts, among them two codenamed "Romek" and "Dod." These contacts ensured communication between the Polish underground and the Polish forces fighting with the Allies, and were dismantled only by the Germans after their invasion of Hungary in March, 1944.

Poles who opted to stay in Hungary received permanent visas. The Government gave them aid and provided them with opportunities for employment. My brother, who was a civil engineer, employed two young Poles. The Government even provided Polish schools for the children of the refugees. Respect for ethnic culture had been a tradition in Hungary long before World War I. Rumanians, Slovaks, Serbs, all had their own schools in the AustroHungarian monarchy, and many members of these minorities also achieved high positions in the government and the church.

When Hitler marched into Poland and Britain declared war on Germany, there were changes in the Foreign Ministry. On Prime Minister Teleki's suggestion, a new Foreign Press Control Department was created, and they needed more staff with knowledge of languages. A special office was set up for the censorship of incoming foreign press. Before the outbreak of hostilities, Leslie had assisted the correspondent of Reuter's Agence Havas and worked for the Budapest representatives of "Britanova," which under the British Ministry of Information operated "K.H.," a news agency, in Hungary. He now applied for a position in the Press Control Department and was appointed press secretary and deputy censor directly responsible to the Prime Minister. This is how he describes his duties:

"My assignment was highly confidential. I had to maintain contact with the anti-Nazi Hungarian resistance movement as well as with the Western Allies. My task was to read the incoming press—books, periodicals, newspapers, leaflets, pamphlets, brochures. The aim was to keep an eye on damaging articles which could harm Hungary's interests, and, as a concession to the Germans, to black out by hand unfavourable news about Germany. I developed a method of blacking out only part of the offending sentence, so that the reader could still get a good idea of the truth.

"I reported exclusively to Prime Minister Teleki, who insisted on seeing matters of interest in the foreign press himself. He leafed through the glossy periodicals; most of the time he ignored the saucy pictures, but once I remember that he smiled at a picture of a nude with a fan in Esquire.

"It was a shock to the Germans to see the Swiss papers, favourites with the Budapest public, show up on the bookstalls with articles about German disasters and atrocities still legible under the tar paint. I assumed that it was part of my duties also to counterbalance German propaganda. Once I unofficially "confiscated" several bags of small silk swastika flags which were sent as handouts along with shipments of Der Tag Germany's propaganda paper. The

bags of German flags were still sitting in my flat two years later, when I was coding and de-coding messages to and from the Allies on our secret radio, and they remained there to greet the Gestapo when they searched my flat in 1944.

“The Germans were most unhappy with my censorship activities and complained bitterly that too much unfavourable and hostile enemy news was passed on to the Hungarian media. To give them a dose of their own medicine, I sometimes censored the German papers too. When in 1940 the *Vo1kischer Beobachter* carried an article by Mr. Göring ridiculing King George VI of England, the copies ‘approved for distribution’ by the Hungarian censor displayed the article completely blacked out by hand.”

As Germany destroyed Poland, and Russia attacked Finland, Hungary sympathized with the victims but also had to protect her own independence. She tried to keep the Germans at a distance by sending them raw materials and wheat.

In February, 1940, our ambassador met with Lord Halifax and conveyed to him a message from the Hungarian Government: Hungary asks the British Government to support her claims to her former territories. Hungary also wishes to make clear that although economically she is compelled to comply with German demands, politically she is a free agent, acting in the country’s best interests. Britain fully understood Hungary’s difficult position and did not object to her having failed to formally declare neutrality. To the British, the important point was whether a country was *de facto* neutral, not whether it had made a public declaration. Barcza, Hungary’s ambassador in London, was authorized to assure H.M. Government that Hungary had no aggressive intentions toward anyone and would never in any circumstances whatever, make common cause or undertake common action with the USSR. Lord Halifax received the communication with “manifest satisfaction” and sympathy for Hungary’s difficulties and expressed his willingness to

tolerate even the pro-German tone of the Hungarian press. (Quoted in Macartney, Oct. 15, I, 375) .

By the spring of 1940 there was no longer any doubt of Hitler's intentions. It seemed to us that every week, often on a Sunday, he marched into a new country, destroying all hopes of peace as he went. We saw German troops marching into Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and Luxemburg. Finally Britain too woke up to the fact that World War II had started in earnest. The nation called on Churchill to save it from disaster, and Churchill had nothing to offer but "blood, toil, tears, and sweat." Prime Minister Teleki was so pessimistic about the future that he made plans to establish a government in exile in the event of a German takeover in Hungary. Through the Foreign Ministry grapevine we heard that he had sent five million dollars to be deposited in Washington for the possible use of such a government. He asked former Prime Minister Count Bethlen to be Hungary's representative in the West, but Bethlen declined. On May 21, Teleki abandoned the idea of a government in exile and gave instructions for the money to be returned. We were disappointed: we felt that Czechoslovakia had the edge over us because she had her government in exile headed by Benes, who could plead her cause in the West. Benes' cause was not our cause. He had handed over his country to Germany with his famous motto, "rather Hitler than the Hapsburgs," the Hapsburgs being in his mind identified with Hungary. As Nicholas Kállay points out, Benes later changed his motto to "rather Stalin than the West, rather Bolshevism than peace among the peoples of the Danube Basin" (Kállay, 54).

Between Leslie in the Press Control Department and Louis in the Radio Monitoring Service, I was supplied with unbiased information about the progress of the war in Europe. I had free access to all the bad news. The British Army was fighting a losing battle in France and Belgium. British forces were trapped in Dunkirk, and boats of all descriptions sailed across the Channel to carry the soldiers to England. Belgium surrendered; France admitted defeat.

Churchill and Hitler were matching strength not only on the battlefield, but also on the podium. After the war, in the 70's, Leslie and I got to know Sir John Martin who had been one of Churchill's private secretaries from May, 1940 through the war years. Sir John sometimes talked about Churchill's famous speeches and his method of composition. The role of the private secretaries, as Martin described it, was not to prepare first drafts, which were always the work of Churchill himself, but to check them with different departments and individuals concerned, and then submit to the P.M. any resulting proposals for amendment. That could be a formidable duty, for Churchill often reacted strongly against suggested changes. However, if the suggestion had merit, he was quick to recognize it and would take it into account when preparing the final draft.

In his broadcast speech of May 19, 1940, describing the battle raging in France and Flanders, Churchill used his powerful arsenal of words to rouse Britain's fighting spirit. After describing the desperate struggle, he warned that it would soon be England's turn to fight "the bulk of that hideous apparatus of aggression which gashed Holland into ruins and slavery in a few days." He wound up with a warlike quotation from antiquity: "Arm yourselves and be ye men of valour, and be in readiness for the conflict; for it is better for us to perish in battle than to look upon the outrage of our nation and our altar:'

While England could avoid the outrage with "blood, toil, tears and sweat," we in Hungary felt that we had been looking upon the outrage of our nation for the past twenty years with little hope of a remedy. A large proportion of the population disliked Nazi Germany, loved Britain and America. and wept for the fall of free western nations. But we had to accept the fact that the defeat of Germany would not bring back our lost territories. Fighting Germany would simply reduce the country to rubble and possibly destroy a million Jews, Poles and other refugees who had found shelter in Hungary.

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So we carried on with our lives, eating rationed food and trying to ignore Nazi propaganda in the press. The annual Book Fair still featured books by both left-wing and right-wing authors. Illustrated periodicals tried to include as few pictures of Hitler as they decently could.

More disquiet was caused by a rumour that the Soviet Union intended to claim for its own the newly returned territories of the north-east Carpathian region, Louis' native land. Molotov assured the Allies that Russia had no claims on the Carpathians. That was just a small chunk in the huge pack of lies we were to swallow in the years that followed. In 1944, when the Russian army approached, Louis' family locked up their house in Beregszász and fled to Budapest for safety. In 1945, after the fighting ended, Louis' brother returned to Beregszász which was now part of the Soviet Union. In the family home he found a Russian gentleman who politely informed him that he was welcome as a guest but not as the owner. Louis' brother, two sisters and mother could never return to their home. They lived out their lives in a cramped dark flat in Budapest.

When France fell, I met Leslie on Castle Hill. We embraced and wept for the fall of a great Western nation. We both had beautiful memories of France, and the news of Hitler's march into Paris felt like a personal wound. We talked about de Gaulle's valiant vow never to surrender. France too was faced with difficult choices. De Gaulle may have been speaking in the name of France when he vowed to continue the fight, but Marshal Petain formed a new government and agreed to an armistice. The Franco-German armistice was signed on June 21, 1940, in the Forest of Compiègne in the very same railway carriage where Marechal Foch had handed the devastating armistice terms to the German delegation in 1918. Hitler was triumphant and felt that this second armistice vindicated the German people.

While Hitler was feted in Germany, Churchill was booed in the House of Commons, and the Hungarian Government was still trying to gain Hitler's support for recovering Transylvania which had been

annexed to Rumania by the Treaty of Trianon. Foreign Minister Count Csáky sent a message to Ribbentrop promising increased wheat shipments if Germany would allow Hungarian troops to take Transylvania. At first Hitler refused because he badly needed Rumanian oil, but after the agricultural agreement with Hungary was signed, he relented and went so far as to urge Rumanians to settle their differences with Hungary. Meanwhile Rumania was forced to cede another section of her territory, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina, to the Soviet Union.

On July 19, 1940, Hitler made one last theatrical attempt to persuade England to make peace. Italian statesman Ciano, who attended his speech at the Reichstag that day, felt that Hitler's desire for peace was sincere, and it seemed to him that the Germans were actually disappointed that Britain rejected the appeal.

So the Luftwaffe went into combat with the RAF. Between July and the end of October, 1940, the Germans lost 1,733 airplanes, and Britain, 915 (Liddell Hart, 115). In Hungary we felt like people in the eye of a hurricane. The skies were ominously quiet. War had not yet come for us, but we knew it was coming, and when it did, there would be no escape.

When Churchill vowed to fight the Germans on the seas, on the beaches, in the hills, and in the streets, he left out another type of combat to which he later referred as the "ungentlemanly war," and which his strategists called by the acronym SOE. With the outbreak of the war in 1939, and even before the setback in France or the evacuation of Dunkirk, the idea of a secret organization for activities behind enemy lines was born in the main building of the War Office. It finally materialized as the Special Operations Executive (SOE for short), and throughout the war years it was charged with the task of organizing, training and supporting sabotage and other forms of resistance in German-occupied countries. It may have been an ungentlemanly operation, but the SOE was to play an important role in winning the war, and also in Hungary's efforts to leave the Axis.

III

Swept Into War

As the war intensified, Nazi propaganda came in heavier doses. Prime Minister Teleki was forced to recognize extreme rightist leader Ferenc Szálasi as the head of the Right-Wing Party. Right-Wingers instigated miners' strikes. Hitler also demanded special privileges for the German minorities who lived in Hungary. He forced an agreement which ensured that they be proportionately represented in government positions, that they should have their own schools, and enjoy other civil rights. Actually, these demands were superfluous. Ethnic Germans had been a part of the life of Hungary since the 18th century.

German demands became more menacing when Hitler induced Hungary to sign the Tripartite Pact along with Rumania. Teleki who had signed the pact so as not to lose German support for Hungary's territorial claims, was still anxious to keep Hungary neutral, or at any rate removed as far as possible from German domination. Yugoslavia — a key to the Balkans — was still uncommitted. In an attempt to find an ally in resisting German pressure, on December 12, 1940, Teleki concluded a "Pact of Eternal Friendship" between Yugoslavia and Hungary. The name of the treaty was far too Quixotic for the cold, calculating politics of the time, but Teleki was a man of his word and fully intended to stick to its terms. Hitler, however, had other ideas and continued to press Yugoslavia to sign the Tripartite pact.

Finally, on March 25, 1941, the Yugoslav government signed the Pact. Communist demonstrations followed throughout Yugoslavia, and in a few days the pro-German government was overthrown and replaced by a leftist government sympathetic to the Allies. When Churchill heard of the change, he said it had been a long time since he had received "such joyous good news.

When Hitler heard the news, he was furious, and he gave immediate orders to attack Yugoslavia. He now generously informed Döme Sztójai, the Hungarian ambassador in Berlin, that he recognized Hungary's claims to her former territories in Yugoslavia and, in return, expected to receive Hungary's permission to allow German troops to pass through Hungary on their way to Yugoslavia. Knowing that Hungary was still hoping to establish ties with the Allies, Hitler wanted to force her to be involved in an attack on Yugoslavia and thus destroy her credibility with the Allies.

Teleki's struggle to keep Hungary neutral now became desperate. He sent messages to London and Washington to assure the Allies of Hungary's intent to keep the terms of the Hungaro-Yugoslav Pact and remain neutral. He declared his intention to refrain from participating in an occupation of Yugoslavia unless that country's government disintegrated to the point of endangering the lives of its Hungarian minority.

Meanwhile the Germans pressed on with their demands. Reluctantly, the government allowed German supply convoys to pass through Hungary, but this was not enough for Hitler. On the 2nd of April 1941, the German army attacked Yugoslavia on the fabricated pretext of retaliating against supposed Yugoslav atrocities committed against the Hungarian and German population. Thus Hungary was forced into the embraces of Germany. To allow German troops to invade Yugoslavia by way of Hungary meant breaking the Eternal Friendship Pact with that country and losing our neutrality and credibility with the Allies. To resist Germany would have caused the

immediate occupation of Hungary by German forces, with its dire consequences of bloodshed, deportations, and the annihilation of the Jewish population. To survive, Hungary had no choice but to allow German troops to pass.

But Teleki had given his own and his country's pledge to the Yugoslavs, and his sense of honour was outraged. On April 3rd, 1941, he shot himself. He left three notes, one for his wife, and two for the Regent.

The first note to the Regent is an outraged expression of personal and collective shame:

Your Highness!

Cowardice has made us break our word. We have broken the pact of Eternal Friendship which you pledged in your speech at Mohács. We have sold the honour of our country.

We have sided with scoundrels — the alleged atrocities against Hungarians, and even against the Germans, are all a pack of lies. We are nothing but graverobbers — a most despicable nation.

I feel guilty because I did not stop you.

Paul Teleki
3rd April. 1941

The second note makes his intentions clear:

Your Highness!

In the event that my action is not completely successful and I stay alive, I hereby resign.

With deepest respect,

Paul Teleki
3rd April, 1941 (Doc 1)

When the news of Teleki's death was announced on the radio, my husband and I both wept. We both felt that the country had lost a great statesman who had tried in vain to steer us clear of the vortex into which we were now rushing. We both had personal recollections of Teleki. Louis had attended his lectures at the university, and I remembered summer afternoons at the League of Revision when I worked for him. He had called for someone who could take dictation in French. His office was shuttered to keep out the heat of the sun, and I remembered typing page after page by the light of the sunrays which seeped in between the slats. He offered me black coffee, and we chatted for a few minutes, sitting on the settee. I did not remember the conversation, but I remembered his gentle voice, and now I felt that I had lost a friend. In the afternoon I met Leslie; he too had tears in his eyes.

Teleki was given a magnificent state funeral. His funeral cortege bedecked with flowers wound its way through the streets of Budapest which were lined with mourners. I remember standing in Main Street watching the procession and wondering what lay in store for us. Teleki was greatly loved, and some of those who mourned him could not believe that he had committed suicide. There were rumours that the Germans had killed him. In a way, the rumours were right. Teleki was the one who pulled the trigger, but it was the Germans who drove him to his desperate act.

Teleki's death destroyed the last remnants of British confidence in Hungary's loyalty to the Allies. On 8th April 1941, Anthony Eden gave a final message to G. Barcza, the Hungarian Ambassador in London, to transmit to his government:

It would be an eternal shame on Hungary that she had attacked a country with which only a few months previously¹ she had concluded a Treaty of Eternal Friendship. If a state was not master of its will and its

actions, let it at least not conclude treaties which it then breaks. Teleki was the last Hungarian whom Britain had trusted. His successors should know that Britain would win the war and would remember this conduct of Hungary's at the peace conference.

(Quoted in Macartney, 15th Oct., II, 8)

Teleki would have agreed with Eden.

The tone of this message was characteristic of the attitude of the superpowers to the small nations of Europe. The leaders of the major powers, although themselves engaged in a life and death struggle, seemed to be looking forward to a judgment day at the conference table where they would have the power to judge the quick and the dead. London's messages to Hungary frequently included reminders that certain actions would be rewarded, and others punished. Hungarian statesmen were well aware that they were being constantly "judged," and were often forced to weigh their course of action according to the "standards" of whichever superpower seemed to be in charge of their destiny at the moment. In a broadcast from Lisbon, Nicholas HORTHY JR. put it this way: "Sometimes a small nation is not her own boss." The Germans protested vigorously against the remark, yet Horthy Jr. spoke only an understated version of the truth. Twenty years earlier Hungary had witnessed the "judicial" activities of the superpowers at the conference table of Trianon. The same powers would be judging us again at the end of World War II.

When Hitler attacked Russia on June 22, 1941, there was rejoicing in London, and for a short time also in Budapest. Churchill was euphoric because with Russia in the war, he finally acquired a strong ally in Britain's struggle. Hungary was jubilant because she hoped that at last the day had come to make an end of Bolshevism.

The Soviet Union for her part tried to keep Hungary out of the war. On June 23, Molotov asked to see Kristóffy, our ambassador to Moscow. He told Kristóffy that Russia had no claims on Hungarian territory and would back Hungary's territorial claims against Rumania. "Why not remain neutral?" he said. Most Hungarians, and most of their leaders would have chosen neutrality. Much as she wanted Germany to make an end of Communism, Hungary had no desire to become involved in a war with Russia. Unfortunately, although the message reached the new Prime Minister, László Bárdossy, he did not share it with the Regent, or with his cabinet. At an emergency cabinet meeting on June 23, 1941, Bárdossy recommended that Hungary demonstrate her loyalty to the Axis by severing diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union.

To support his recommendation for speedy action, Bárdossy mentioned that several political figures, first and foremost amongst them the extreme rightist followers of ex-Prime Minister Imrédy, were also in the "race" for German support, and it was essential for the government to forestall them. These people, as Bárdossy saw it, were currying favour not so much with the German government as with the Nazi Party. If it were not for this race, he said, "I would not care if we came in last." Bárdossy felt that by immediately severing diplomatic ties with Moscow he could gain the confidence of Germany and prevent further encroachments in the Hungarian government by extreme right elements.

Bárdossy took pains to point out that the country was not declaring war — only the severing of diplomatic relations. Members of the Cabinet asked the Minister of Defence, Colonel-General Károly Bartha, for his expert opinion on the progress of the day-old German war against the Soviet Union, whereupon Bartha delivered the following prediction based on his military experience: "It took the Germans three weeks to defeat the Poles in 1939; they conquered France in about the same length of time in 1940; the conquest of Yugoslavia and Greece in 1941 also took about three weeks. Judging

from their record, I predict that it will take the Germans six weeks to defeat the Russians and occupy Moscow.” The Cabinet unanimously agreed to sever diplomatic ties with Moscow.

For the sake of historical accuracy, it is worth noting that Bárdossy retained the minutes of this meeting until after his resignation in March, 1942, when he prepared an edited version. In this second version, the minutes of his own speech contain two more reasons why the severing of diplomatic ties was necessary: first, that the Italian government was ahead of us in the “race,” having already declared war on the USSR, and second, that the Soviet Union had already severed relations with Hungary by announcing on February 2, 1939 her intention to disband the Russian Embassy in Budapest with the expectation that Hungary would likewise disband the Hungarian Embassy in Moscow. Although Bárdossy destroyed the original minutes, Recording Secretary István Bárczy has reconstructed the original from his own notes and affirms that Bárdossy’s speech at the meeting did not contain the added statements. In fact, Bárczy observes, on June 23, 1941 at 5 p.m. Molotov sent Bárdossy a lengthy message urging Hungary to stay neutral, a message which Bárdossy concealed from the Cabinet and from the Regent. (Doc 2).

As it turned out, the Germans were not content with a simple severing of diplomatic ties with Russia. On June 25 the Hungarian town of Kassa was bombed. The Germans said that the attackers were Russian aircraft the Russians, still anxious to keep Hungary neutral, categorically denied responsibility. (The Hungarian air force later established that the planes were German.)

Prime Minister Bárdossy was convinced that Hungary had been a victim of a dastardly Russian attack. Apparently he did not stop to ask why, if the Russians wanted to be at war with Hungary, they denied responsibility for the attack. The Japanese did not deny attacking Pearl Harbor.

On June 26, 1941, Bárdossy called another cabinet meeting at which the decision was made to declare war on the USSR. As on

June 23, the minutes were prepared by István Bárczy. These minutes too were retained for nine months and “edited” by Bárdossy. The second, “edited” version surfaced in March, 1942, soon after Bárdossy’s resignation.

The original document reconstructed by Bárczy shows considerably more dissenting opinions than Bárdossy’s edited version. Minister of the Interior Keresztes-Fischer steadily opposed a hasty declaration of war against a superpower. The Minister of Agriculture, Daniel Bánffy, joined him in opposing declaration of war; he felt that the Germans did not need Hungarian help at present and would not give us any rewards after the war was over. When Keresztes-Fischer warned that our declaration of war might start an avalanche of disaster, Bánffy continued to support him, saying, “If the Russians thrash the Germans, our fate is sealed.” Other dissenting voices included Minister of Justice László Radocsay, who shared Keresztes-Fischer’s view that declaration of war was premature, and Minister of Industry József Varga, who advocated “sleeping on it.”

Bárdossy urged the declaration, keenly aware of the possible “rewards” from Germany. He felt that to reap maximum benefits, Hungary had to declare war immediately, so as not to be left behind the Slovaks, the Italians, and the Rumanians, who were already engaged in the war. The Slovaks, he pointed out, entered the war to gain spoils with the Germans, not because of German pressure.

From this debate it would appear that Germany did not openly pressure Hungary to declare war on Russia. While Churchill was coaxing and cajoling his allies, Hitler opted on this occasion to adopt the tactics of Tom Sawyer. He feigned frosty indifference and relied on each country’s territorial desires to accomplish the job. In answer to questions about the German position, Bárdossy explained that Germany had made no attempt to ask Hungary to declare war:

On June 18 the German ambassador to Hungary simply advised us to take defensive measures. Following this communiqué, the German Chief of Staff, Halder, stopped in Budapest and met with the Hungarian Chief of Staff Henrik Werth. Then on Sunday, June 22, the German ambassador informed me in my capacity of Foreign Minister that as of 4 a.m. Sunday, a state of war existed between Germany and Russia. He handed me a letter from Hitler to the Regent in which Hitler informs the Regent of the existence of a state of war between Germany and Russia and adds that he hopes that Hungary will appreciate Germany's decision. That was all.

Now Colonel-general Henrik Werth has received another communication: "The German Chief of Command would be grateful if Hungary would join them." (Die Deutsche wäre dankbar, wenn Ungarn mittun könnte.) Werth replied that he would communicate the message to his government. I in turn transmitted it to the Regent who declared that this was a political matter and asked the German government to express its opinion. (Doc 3)

Hitler was leaning against the fence, waiting for nations to come begging to be allowed to paint it. He knew that the Hungarians, the Slovaks, and the Rumanians all depended on his good will.

To allay the fears of some of his cabinet concerning the consequences of an open declaration of war against a world power such as the USSR, Bárdossy asked that the minutes include his statement that Hungary's participation in the war "will be limited according to the circumstances." He instructed the Minister of Defence to instruct the Chief of Staff that he may send our limited forces into action only if the Russian forces are

substantially weaker: "In other words, no hussar heroics will be permitted."

The concession did not impress Minister of Interior KeresztesFischer: "Once we declare a state of war, we can't tie the hands of the Chief of Staff The implementation is up to him."

The final decision of the Cabinet indicated a unanimous decision to send a mission to retaliate against the bombing of Kassa. On the subject of the declaration of war there were four dissenting votes: Keresztes-Fischer (Interior), Radocsay (Justice), Varga (Industry), and Bánffy (Agriculture). Bárdossy (Prime Minister, Foreign Minister), Reményi Schneller (Fiance), Homan (Education), and Bartha (Defence) voted for declaration of war. Bárczy notes that Dezső Laky arrived only at the end of the discussion, and Secretary of State Ferenc Zsindely spent the afternoon at the swimming baths on St. Margaret Island and was consequently absent.

The Cabinet's final decision was for Hungary to participate in the war with Russia within feasible limits.

Bárdossy's "edited" version of the minutes leaves out most of the opposing viewpoints. It notes Keresztes Fischer's opposition but leaves out dissenting comments by Bánffy, Radocsay and Varga.

It is true that Bárdossy used some questionable methods to achieve what he wanted. But did he deserve to be hanged for these actions after the war? He had acted according to what he thought were the best interests of the country. He followed his conscience, but his conscience did not serve him well. He entangled us in a war that we had no hope of winning, and many think that he could have preserved Hungary's neutrality. Regent Horthy for one, strongly disapproved of his rightist views and high-handed methods, and eventually in March of 1942, replaced him by Nicholas Kállay, a man of moderate views, dedicated to removing Hungary from German dominance.

As the international scene became more and more menacing, we felt an increasing need to make the most of the world that was left to us. In the summer of 1941 Louis and I went on a short vacation to the newly returned regions of Transylvania. We spent our days walking among the high mountains, inhaling the scent of pine, marveling at the rich vegetation, gazing at rushing streams cascading into deep gorges. watching the trout glistening in the silvery water. We went to the Békás Pass and explored underground caves with their frozen forests of stalagmites. A narrow footpath cut in the side of the hill took us to the little chalet where we stayed. Louis held me firmly by the arm as we climbed. I hardly dared to look down into the gorge below. Every now and then we stopped to pick and eat wild strawberries which grew in profusion.

When we came down from the mountains, we spent a few days at Tusnád, a Spa resort. When I turned on the tap in the bathroom, I was amazed to see sparkling mineral water gushing out. Transylvania has many mineral springs.

We went to Sepsiszentgyörgy, Leslie's birthplace, a totally Hungarian town. I knew that his family still lived there in a spacious mansion which, Leslie told me, had originally belonged to Count Potoczky, a Polish count, who fell madly in love with Leslie's great aunt. For some potent reason, he was forced to leave her to go to France, but he did not want her to forget him. So he cut off his little finger and left it for her as a token of his affection. The great aunt must have been impressed because when Leslie was a little boy, the finger was still kept in a fine red Venetian glass container in a glass cabinet.

As we walked up the hill towards the big house, I saw Leslie's mother and father walking past us down the hill. We exchanged polite greetings fit for residents and out-of-town visitors. In two short weeks our vacation was over, and I was on my way back to Leslie and World War II.

IV

Dangerous Ally, Reluctant Enemies

Hungary's declaration of war against Russia brought an avalanche of new German demands. One was the sinister proposal for the "repatriation" of Hungarian Jews. The concept of treating Jews as an alien race to be sent back to where they came from was totally unacceptable to Hungarians. It was true that Hungarian Jews had originally come from Russia or Poland, but they had lived in our country for hundreds of years and they were true Hungarian patriots. They were talented, prosperous people, leaders in industry and in the cultural life of the country. There was room for them in our lives, along with the other minorities who had been part of the nation before World War I.

The leaders of Hungary had no intention of complying with German demands concerning Jewish deportations, but in the months and years to come, resistance became increasingly difficult. Again and again Hitler asked the Hungarian government to send contingents of Jews for work detail in Germany, citing their manpower shortage as the reason. Bárdossy's successor, Nicholas Kállay, writing about his conversations with Hitler, relates that Hitler's question, "What will Hungary do about the Jews?" was a constant refrain, like Cato's "Carthage must be destroyed." Kállay, like most other Hungarian statesmen, made endless excuses, explaining that he could not spare the Jews without disrupting Hungarian

industry. When Jews were used for work detail, they were carefully protected from the Germans. It is significant that the same term “munkaszolgálat” was applied to all wartime works service, regardless of who performed it. University students who were not in the army were also required to perform “munkaszolgálat.”

Horthy was extremely unhappy with German demands concerning the Jews, and insisted that his cabinet members maintain his restraint. In September 1942, he dismissed his Defence Minister, K. Bartha, because of the latter’s hostile attitude towards the Jews. In an effort to counterbalance German pressure, in July, 1942 Parliament passed a law to reinstate the Jewish religion as a state-approved religion. Throughout the war, the Hungarian government shielded the Jews to the best of its ability. It was only after the German occupation in March 1944 that any deportations took place.

Much as we wanted to preserve our independence Hungarian contribution to the German war effort was unavoidable. As we contributed more and more food and supplies, shortages increased, rationing became more severe, and in the shops ersatz replaced the real thing. Mulberry leaf tea, soybean sausage, fake chocolate, lemon powder, and biscuits sweetened with carrots were the price we paid for buying the sops to throw to the German Cerberus.

Unfortunately, Cerberus wanted more than food; he also wanted Hungarian fighting men. The Hungarian Chief of Staff Henrik Werth, was eager to comply with German demands for Hungarian troops — even before these demands were made. In a memo to Bárdossy in August 1941 he accused the government of dragging its feet in the struggle against the Soviet Union and recommended that to rectify this negligence, we offer Germany four or five divisions without waiting for the Germans to make the demand. The memo highlighted the friction between Werth and the more moderate elements in the government. Horthy disliked Werth’s pro-German

sympathies and high-handed methods, and in September 1941, replaced him with General Ferenc Szombathelyi as his Chief of Staff.

With the new Chief of Staff, Horthy and Bárdossy set out on September 7 to Germany to bargain with Hider. They tried without much success to induce Germany to help in regaining the lost territories. In return for some fairly empty promises, they were persuaded to offer more troops to serve as occupying forces on the Eastern Front.

October brought German victory at Kiev and a short-lived German euphoria before the Russian winter set in and froze all hope of success. The German army was ill-equipped for the severe weather; they had inadequate winter clothes and no antifreeze for the tanks. As they advanced to Moscow, they met stiff resistance and suffered so many casualties that the attack had to be abandoned. As we read the news of the failed autumn offensive, we thought of Napoleon's ill-fated Russian Campaign. At least he succeeded in entering Moscow and planting the tricolour on the walls of the Kremlin.

On the 4th November, 1941, Molotov, eager to involve Britain in a total effort against Germany, sent a message to Churchill urging him to declare war on Finland, Rumania and Hungary. Churchill was most reluctant to do so and in his reply of November 7 explained why: "In these countries we have many good friends; they are occupied by the Germans who suppressed them and forced them into the war. But if the situation changes and luck abandons the scoundrel, these countries will be our allies. The declaration of war would only aggravate the situation." Stalin was furious: "An intolerable situation has arrived; does it mean there is no coordination between the Allies?" he demanded. Churchill was not affected by the harsh message from Stalin, but so as not to aggravate the situation, decided to send Eden to Moscow.

Churchill and Roosevelt were satisfied with Stalin's victory, but not so Stalin. As early as 1941 Stalin was interested in what would

happen after the war. He wanted Eden to underwrite the post-war Russian frontiers and the states which would be under Russian domination. Probably our fate was already decided at that time. Russia wanted the Baltic States which she had invaded, but what she wanted even more was to extend her frontiers westwards to Poland, East Prussia, Rumania and Transylvania. Stalin maintained that the signing of the Atlantic Charter and the Anglo-Soviet agreement meant British acquiescence in their designs. Churchill was appalled and let Stalin know that the frontiers would be decided after the war, and that there would be no secret commitments. He informed President Roosevelt immediately of Stalin's demands but Stalin stuck to his goal and at Yalta he got what he wanted and more.

No matter how much he disapproved of Stalin's views, Churchill was in no position to disregard them in 1941. On the 29th November, before Eden went to Moscow, the British Government sent an ultimatum to Hungary: if Hungary does not withdraw her troops from Russia by the 5th December, 1941, she should regard herself on war-footing with England. The Hungarian government and military command could see no way to comply with the demand: Hungarian troops were intermingled with German troops and separating them in a few days was next to impossible. But in any case, they did not seem to see the relevance of such a move to our relations with Britain. After all, there was no likelihood that Hungarian troops would come into contact with British troops in Russia, and if they did, they would have gladly joined them in fighting the Germans.

The American Ambassador, Herbert C. Pell, who was charged with delivering the ultimatum, asked Bárdossy if he had any answer for the British, but Bárdossy declined. Pell was anguished about his mission and tried on own initiative to dissuade the British from taking this step, to no avail. On 7th December Great Britain declared war on Hungary, Rumania, and Finland. We found ourselves at war with Britain, the country whose friendship we valued the most.

There is no more eloquent expression of Britain's attitude to Hungary at this harrowing turn of events than Professor C.A. Macartney's broadcast to Hungary on December 7, 1941. Macartney was an Oxford don who had devoted his life to the study of the Hungarian language, history and culture. During the early years of the war he contributed his expertise to the war effort by regular broadcasts to Hungary on the Foreign Service. We loved listening to his talks which he delivered in Hungarian with an endearing AngloSaxon accent. Any foreigner who spoke Hungarian was regarded as a person of miraculous powers. The very effort of learning our difficult language was a proof of sincere friendship. On December 7 he spoke of the tragic conflict of his personal anguish with his public duty:

There is no need to tell you of my personal anguish, and that of many others, over the news announced a few hours ago. /Britain's declaration of war against Hungary/ This is the second time in one generation that the ominous power of Germany and its agents swept Hungary into war against us. Thanks to them, I must now regard as enemies many dear personal friends, as well as the whole brave nation which I admire and love. And I must stand by and watch — as we stood by and watched in the last war — Hungary's ever-increasing affliction until the fatal conclusion of the war. ...

Although I myself, and, I am sure, many others of my countrymen, feel sympathy for the Hungarian nation, I must stress that there is no one in England who does not totally support the action of His Majesty's government which is the result of extensive consultations with Britain's friends and allies. This step was inevitable ever since that fateful day six

months ago when Nazi puppeteers used their ethnic German and Hungarian puppets to drag Hungary into war /with Russia! by means of an unauthorised proclamation.

What an unconscionable act of deceit was perpetrated that day against the Hungarian people and its representatives! I am speaking of the supposed Russian bombardment of Kassa....

The British Empire, the United States of America, and all other powerful nations that love freedom will fight for that freedom with their last drop of blood and will firmly support each other. Whoever attacks one, attacks all of them and must accept retribution from all.

In spite of his distress, Macartney ends on a note of hope that the Hungarian people will resist German pressure. Former Hungarian leaders have been successful in such resistance. It was only in the last few months that Hungarian leaders have bowed to the Germans:

But what about the people of Hungary? Must they too be destroyed by these conspirators? I firmly believe and trust in God that such a fate is not inevitable. We have not changed in our attitude toward the Hungarian people. Our policy is still the policy of the Atlantic Charter. We fight to uphold the freedom and equality of nations, and we believe that nations should freely cooperate. We offer you freedom; the Nazis offer you captivity. It is up to the Hungarian people to make a choice. I trust in God and firmly believe that you will find leaders in Hungary who will choose freedom. (Doc 5)

The time was drawing near when Hungarians would indeed find leaders who wanted to choose freedom, who sent an emissary to the British representative in Istanbul with an offer of surrender. For the next several months we continued to listen to Macartney's broadcasts. He was truly an expert on Hungary who understood Hungarian history and Hungarian thinking. We liked his fatherly warnings about the German menace which we knew only too well. He was our lifeline to a world of freedom. Unfortunately, there were too many in Britain who did not agree with him that there was hope for Hungary. One of these was Bruce Lockhart, the head of the British Political Warfare Ministry. On one occasion he expressed the opinion that Hungary was the poorest territory for British propaganda: 'We can't expect anything from them.' In August 1942 Lockhart stopped Macartney's broadcasts.

On the 7th December I met Leslie in Városmajor Park. We were both reeling from the shock of Britain's declaration of war. He raised his eyebrows in helpless desperation. He could not believe we had come to this pass. The future looked very bleak.

The 7th December was equally devastating for Britain and America, but for another reason. In the early morning the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, destroying a score of battleships and killing some 3500 sailors. America was now forced into the war, and Britain had a strong ally.

We barely had time to get over the shock of being at war with Britain when on 12th December we were hit by the next bombshell:

we were also at war with the United States. Bárdossy, whose mind was very sensitive to German wishes even before they were uttered, had called a cabinet meeting on 11th December to discuss the latest developments in Hitler's plans. He explained that as a result of American acts of aggression, the Führer and Mussolini had found it necessary to declare war on the United States. Bárdossy felt that as participants in the Tripartite Agreement, it was our duty to fall in line

with Germany, preferably before Germany made an actual request. Then he proceeded to outline two possible courses of action: 1. To sever diplomatic relations, or 2. To declare war on the U.S.

In the debate that followed members of the Cabinet weighed the advantages and hazards of each course. Minister of Defence Bartha felt that declaring war before the other smaller members of the Tripartite Pact did so would gain points for us with Germany; however, he could not help observing that as a small nation without a seaport, it might seem somewhat grotesque for us to declare war on a major world power such as the U.S.

Minister of the Interior Keresztes Fischer did not like the idea of declaring war. What if as a result of our action we are forced to really mobilise our forces against the U.S. or perhaps against Serbia? Bárdossy thought it extremely unlikely that we would ever have to fight the Americans, or that we would be forced to march into Serbia.

Bartha advocated asking Germany which would please them most, option one or option two. Bárdossy felt it would be indelicate to ask the Germans. The Minister of Agriculture thought it was ridiculous to keep vying for German favours. In the end the Cabinet agreed that it would be sufficient to sever diplomatic relations with the U.S. Bárdossy accepted the Cabinet's decision and held to it until 12th December when he met with the representatives of the Italian and German government who expressed their dissatisfaction with the arrangement (Doc 4). Although at first he tried to justify the Cabinet's decision, he soon allowed himself to be browbeaten into declaring war. He did so without consulting the Cabinet — and without telling Horthy. Horthy himself regarded the declaration totally unconstitutional and expressed to the American Ambassador his hope that the United States would not recognize such an irregular declaration of war. In fact the U.S. ignored the declaration on the ground that it was made against the will of the Hungarian people. It was only in June 1942 that she actually acknowledged a state of war to exist between the U.S. and Hungary.

From a perspective of nearly fifty years, we can attempt to give an objective explanation of Hungary's tragic involvement in World War II. It is tempting to blame Bárdossy for plunging Hungary into the war on Germany's side, or Horthy and the Cabinet for not preventing Bárdossy's actions, or the Hungarian people for not choosing the right leaders. However, laying the blame on any of these factors will not provide the full explanation. Hungary's desperate need to regain her former territories was the single most important reason for her involvement on the German side. She received no encouragement or promise of relief from Britain concerning the lost territories. In this matter Britain was clearly allied to Hungary's rivals and neighbours the Czechs. By allowing herself to be swayed by the Czech leader B senses, Britain in fact pushed Hungary into the enemy's camp. Hungary's participation in the war may not have had a material impact on the Allied victory, but if Hungary had received some encouragement from Britain, she would have certainly tried to stay neutral, and it is just possible that she might have succeeded. In that case a neutral Hungary would have been a bulwark against Soviet encroachment after the war, as she had been a bulwark against the Turks, and against the Mongolian invaders centuries earlier.

Leslie Veress sums up Hungary's plight in this way:

"We who never believed that Hitler could win were vindicated by Britain's endurance and Hitler's inability to force her on her knees. From 1939 to the end of 1941, Britain was regarded and admired as the best bastion of European civilization. The picture became spoiled after Britain's deference to the wishes of the Soviet Union.

"In the winter of 1939-40 Hungary was, in fact, neutral. The head of state and the Government firmly refused to help Hitler against Poland. With a decidedly pro-British Prime Minister in the person of Teleki, who was respected and trusted in London, there was no submission to Hitler. There was an attitude of quiet defiance.

The change came in the summer of 1940: the sudden and total defeat of France had left Hitler the master of the European continent. During the summer of 1940 I recall the sudden appearance of a surprising number of German "tourists" in Hungary. It seemed to us then that their appearance heralded an imminent invasion and occupation of Hungary by Hitler. From that time the fear of German occupation dominated the thinking and attitudes of Hungary. German occupation would have meant the destruction of an intellectual elite, anti-Nazi almost to a man, the destruction of leftwing political opposition, Social Democrats, Liberals, cryptoCommunists, royalists, a wide spectrum indeed of anti-Nazis; and it would have meant annihilation for the Jews. It would also have meant something unacceptably humiliating for Hungarians: the Rumanians, the Slovaks, the Croats, and even the Czechs becoming the favourites of Hitler's Germany and claiming their share in dominating or even occupying parts of Hungary.

"A German invasion would have meant the imposition of a quisling government on the well-known pattern. It would not have been easy to avoid it; pro-German tradition was strong in Hungary. It did not necessarily mean admiration for Hitler; rather, it stemmed from an admiration for the German cultural heritage, for Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, Mozart, or Thomas Mann, and for the all too well-known military virtues of the Germans. In 1940 it was by no means clear to the admirers of German culture that the Germany they admired was no longer there, that it had fallen under the spell of a most ruthless and inhuman dictatorship — one which also harboured hostile designs on Hungary. In February 1940 the British Foreign Office thought fit to state that it was not worthwhile to make sacrifices for Hungary since the importance of the Czechs, the Rumanians and the Yugoslavs far outweighed that of Hungary alone. The same consideration had occurred to Hitler: liquidate the regime in Hungary, and win the cooperation of the Rumanians and other neighbours of Hungary.

“The unresolved territorial disputes were there to be used by whichever side succeeded in exploiting them. Transylvania was the bone of contention. Britain and France still harboured illusions about treating Rumania as a potential ally. London through its Foreign Service broadcasts encouraged Rumania to resist Hungarian claims to Transylvania. Russia wooed Hungary, Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina Hitler had more ambitious plans and wanted no trouble in his backyard. By careful manipulation of both Hungarian and Rumanian claims, he kept both nations in his camp. The Vienna Award ensured Hungary’s cooperation by granting her northern Transylvania, and by not giving her any more of Transylvania, he also retained the use of Rumanian oil for his planned attack on the USSR.”

By January 1942 German demands for Hungarian troops became more and more menacing. On January 20, Fieldmarshall Wilhelm Keitel came to Hungary and ordered the government to provide more military support for the German war on the Russian front. He pointed out angrily that Rumanians were fighting on the Russian front, and Hungary was dragging her feet. At first the Chief of Staff resisted the demands, but finally, fearing a German occupation, the Government gave in, and the Second Battalion was set up. In addition to troops, we also had to send more and more food and raw materials, until even flour and bread had to be rationed — a sore point with Hungary, the breadbasket of Europe.

More anguish followed over news from Yugoslavia. In January Serb partisans made sweeping attacks on Hungarian territories around Ujvidék, killing several home guards, derailing trains, raiding villages, looting, harassing and killing some of the inhabitants. On the 12th January General Feketealmi Ceydner reported that it would be necessary to purge the area. Permission was granted with instructions that no superfluous or exaggerated measures were to be taken. On their own initiative, staff officers Feketealmi Ceydner and Major J. Grassy, together with Lt. Colonel Deák and Captain Zöldi

of the gendarmerie avenged the killings by a massacre of the innocent Serb and Jewish population. The shameful acts were perpetrated with the knowledge of Minister of Defence Bartha but concealed from the rest of the Cabinet. The perpetrators hushed up the atrocities; when through eyewitnesses the facts gradually became known, the country was outraged. We never had any hostile feelings towards the Serbs and felt that the honour of the army was stained. Reports circulated that the trouble was deliberately fermented by the Germans to prevent Serbs and Hungarians from becoming "too friendly." Germany was still trying to induce the Hungarians to invade Serbia in order to ease the German situation on the Russian front. When the facts became known, Horthy dismissed Defence Minister Bartha, and Parliament demanded an investigation into the case. When Nicholas Kállay replaced Bárdossy as Prime Minister in March, he ordered a full inquiry and the culprits were tried before a military court. Five persons were sentenced to death, and twenty to terms of imprisonment from 8 to 15 years. It is significant to note that all the criminals were of German extraction. What is more, when the Germans found out about the death sentences, they arranged for the five officers to escape. All five broke their parole, fled to Austria, which was now part of Germany, and joined the Waffen SS before the sentence could be carried out. When the Germans occupied Hungary in 1944, their first demand was that these officers should be reinstated without delay.

Although Bárdossy was not implicated in the Ujvidék massacre, his pro-German sentiments and high-handed methods displeased Admiral Horthy who was becoming convinced that Germany was losing the war. Bárdossy's campaign for a new Jewish Law to facilitate their deportation was the last straw. In March, 1942 Horthy dismissed Bárdossy and asked Nicholas Kállay to form a new government.

V.

Prying Loose From Hitler: Kállay's Two-Step Dance

When Horthy was considering a replacement for Bárdossy, he looked in the ranks of the numerous statesmen who wanted to resist German pressures and embraced Western ideals of democracy and freedom. Among these were Miklós Kállay, Count István Bethlen, Count Gyula Károlyi, F. Keresztes Fischer and many others. Horthy discussed his choice with Count Bethlen who was very much in favour of Miklós Kállay, a former Minister of Agriculture and landowner. Kállay enjoyed the friendship and esteem of the Upper house, the aristocracy, and the industrial magnates. The Regent knew his opposition to the extreme right-wingers and to the government's right-wing policies. At first Kállay did not want to accept the premiership in the country's present miserable position. He was totally against German policy and Hungary's involvement in Germany's war. We were nominally at war with the U.S. and Britain; we were militarily involved in a hopeless campaign against Russia 1000 miles from our own frontiers. Kállay had no love for either our ally or the enemy we were forced to fight. In his memoirs he comments on the uninviting choice we were facing between German imperialism and Bolshevik imperialism.

The Regent persevered in trying to persuade Kállay to accept the post of Premier and they held daily discussions. Kállay asked the

Regent what was expected of him: to continue the present policy or to work against it? He outlined his own policy if he were to accept the nomination. He explained that he would seek contact with the Allies and that he would cautiously replace the pro-German elements in the government with pro-Western people. He would accomplish these changes, taking care not to provoke repercussions from Germany. He also outlined his new policy towards the national minorities, and expressed his misgivings about the German attitude to the Jews and his intention to put an end to transgressions against the Jews in Hungary.

Horthy knew Kállay well and accepted his programme, giving him a free hand and asking him first of all to get rid of the pro-Nazi cabinet members. Finally, after many discussions, Kállay agreed to serve as Prime Minister and interim Foreign Secretary.

The advent of Kállay was a turning point in Hungary's policy towards the Germans. He had a dangerous and difficult task. In his memoirs he describes his predicament:

I had to camouflage my real intentions. It sounds paradoxical, yet it is true that in order to pursue my own policy I had to surround myself with people whose ideas were different from mine and that I had to carry out my foreign and domestic program through helpers committed to precisely the opposite program. Had I replaced these right-wing and ProGerman people with pro-Allied and left-wing elements, I should have been instantly overthrown, and with my downfall would have vanished the last possibility of saving what could still be saved.
(Kállay, 77)

His main task was to build bridges and seek contacts with the Allies through Britain without arousing the suspicions of Germany. There

is a Hungarian folk dance called the Kállai kettos (double dance) which consists of two steps to the right and two steps to the left. This was the popular name given to Kállay's dual policy.

The Germans received the appointment of the new Prime Minister with the greatest suspicion. Openly they did not comment on the event, but privately they knew that the tide was turning against them. Joseph Gobbels, the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, wrote in his Diary: "The new Minister President, Kállay, has long been known as an anti-German. Young Horthy is a definite pro-Jew and wants no truck with the Axis. Thank God, we never had any illusions about Hungary, so we are undergoing no disillusionment now" (Quoted in Macartney, Oct. 15, II 93).

Veress felt it was quite inaccurate to say that Hungarian efforts to withdraw from the war started only after the bitter defeat at Voronezh and the resulting panic: "The process of seeking a withdrawal from the war began much earlier — in fact in March 1942, with the appointment of Kállay. His mandate was clearly to lead the country out of the war without provoking a German occupation, a tall order, if ever there was one.

Kállay set about accomplishing his mandate by building up a public image of himself as a pro-German. Publicly he praised Germany's heroic struggle and even made a few remarks against the Jews. Privately he kept careful watch on the German Legation in Hungary to check for possible infiltration of our ministries by German spies. He called several key diplomats from the West to brief them on what he called his "independent foreign policy." On one occasion he sent a note to Ambassador Steinhardt in Turkey to explain that his anti-Jewish statements were just a cover-up for his moves towards the Allies. His accomplishments as Prime Minister speak to his true sympathies: he provided for the Jews protection unparalleled in wartime Europe, he allowed almost complete freedom to all anti-Hitlerites, and later he actually concluded a secret agreement to surrender to the Allies unconditionally when their

troops should reach the frontiers of Hungary. The BBC Hungarian broadcasts labeled Kállay a pro-German; the label helped him maintain his dual policy.

From 1942 on there were several Hungarian politicians abroad who wanted to do something about Hungary's unhappy situation, but they were mostly far leftists. The British Foreign Office was not in favour of supporting a leftist regime, but they were equally against Kállay's efforts to save the Horthy regime. In London Count Mihály Károlyi, the "Red count", was the head of the Hungarian emigres. Kállay had no desire to use that connection; instead, he looked for diplomats and journalists who lived in neutral countries.

The first such man contacted was Andor Gellért. In the summer of 1942 he was the representative of the Hungarian Revision League. The head of this organisation at the time was Dr. Endre Fall. Gellért had many American and English friends all over Europe, and Fall was a staunch anti-Nazi.

In America there was Otto von Hapsburg, son of our last king, Charles IV. There was not much chance that he would ever succeed to the throne, but he loved Hungary and had good contacts with President Roosevelt. So had Dr. Tibor Eckhardt, former Member of Parliament of the Smallholders' Party who had emigrated to America and had many influential friends there. Eckhardt was an astute politician, an advocate for a confederation of the Danube lands. He did not want to collaborate with the leftists abroad who dreamed of a leftist government for postwar Hungary.

As the year drew on, Kállay quietly prepared his contacts with the allies. He was not so much an initiator of momentous actions as a facilitator and catalyst for people with ideas. As CA. Macartney remarks, "The young generation in the Foreign Office were putting ideas in Kállay's head as early as 1942." One of the key members of this young generation was Leslie Veress, who, according to

Macartney “was always ahead of his superiors.”

What Veress had in mind was to seek “official” contact with the allies, that is, Government approved contacts, as opposed to “unofficial” discussions conducted between low—echelon diplomats without mandates from their respective governments. Eventually it was Veress’s idea that brought results in the form of official recognition from the British government. However, for most of 1942 peace-feeler missions were conducted on the unofficial level while Kállay was grappling with the monumental task of pacifying Hitler without feeding him the country.

In June 1942 Hitler invited Kállay to see him at his headquarters in Germany. As he traveled through Vienna, Kállay received a cool reception from the Austrian gauleiter who did not even come to the station for the customary welcoming ceremony. On the 15th June Hitler received the new Premier of Hungary at his headquarters which was a concrete shelter in the woods, camouflaged with moss and pine saplings. The whole area was surrounded by barbed wire. As Kállay stepped out of his car, Hitler met him half-way. He wore a simple uniform; Kállay was dressed in travelling clothes. In his memoirs Kállay describes their greeting: “We shook hands, and the cameras clicked and produced the picture which afterwards caused amusement throughout Europe, for as it happened, I had unconsciously put out my hand rather stiffly and Hitler took it with a deep bow. This of course was entirely unintentional, but it pleased a large number of people in Hungary” (Kállay, 90).

Hitler usually did not allow people to speak, but drowned them in a flood of words. This time, to Kállay’s amazement, he started with questions. He asked about the Hungarian-Rumanian situation in Transylvania. Kállay complained about some statements made to the Germans by the pro-German Rumanian dictator Antonescu, who had declared that as soon as the war with Russia was over, Rumanian soldiers would come home to deal with their main enemy, the

Hungarians. Hitler did not want any trouble between Hungary and Rumania and assured Kállay that the situation was under control. Then Kállay reminded Hitler of his promise that Hungarian troops would not be sent to the front lines, adding that their equipment and training were inadequate for such duties. 20,000 troops were already serving in Russia, and it had been agreed that they would return home at the end of the summer offensive.

As usual, Hitler mentioned the Jews. He asked once more that people of Jewish descent should be sent to Germany to beef up the workforce which was badly depleted as a result of the war effort. Kállay refused to comply, saying that he could not spare the Jews as they were needed at home in essential industrial jobs. Besides, he said, Hungary had already allowed 10,000 people of German origin to be recruited into the Waffen S.S.

In Budapest we watched the course of the war with increasing anxiety. From the BBC broadcasts we were horrified to learn about the fate of the town of Lidice in Bohemia. At the end of May Reinhard Heydrich, the Gestapo leader was sent to Prague to recruit Czech workers for work detail in Germany. At the instigation of the Exiled Czech Government in London headed by Benes, three Czechborn young soldiers serving in the British army were sent to Prague to kill Heydrich. They landed by parachute and lay in wait for Heydrich to pass by on his way to the Hradcin. Their instructions from London were "Kill Heydrich at all costs." They tossed a hand grenade at Heydrich's car, fatally injuring him. The attackers fled to a hiding place in the town of Lidice where they were discovered. Two of the three soldiers were killed. The third, who was a traitor, was hanged in 1946 when the war was over. The seven women who had hidden the attackers were shot. By way of reprisal the Germans massacred the male population of Lidice, sent the women to concentration camps, and razed the whole town to the ground. We were horrified and knew now, if we had not known before that resisting Germany was dangerous business.

When will the British get here? was the question most frequently asked in Hungary at this time. To this question Churchill himself did not have the answer. The war in Africa was not going well. Stalin was pressing Britain for more aid in the form of war materials. Britain's supply convoys were decimated by German Uboats. Then on June 20 we heard that the British had surrendered Tobruk and 25.000 men were taken prisoner, and we were as desperate as Churchill himself. Like Churchill, we had hoped that once victory was achieved in Africa, the Allies could concentrate on advancing to Central Europe. What we did not know at the time was that the Allies were, at Stalin's insistence, actually discussing the opening of a second front, not in Southern Europe, but in Normandy. Stalin wanted the invasion to start in 1942, but the Allies were nowhere near ready to embark on such a venture until 1943. In spite of Roosevelt's and Stalin's enthusiasm for a second front in Normandy, Churchill cherished another line of action which he explained to Stalin at their stormy August meeting in Moscow. He drew a picture of a crocodile to represent the German domination of Europe. If we can win this year in North Africa, he said, then we can attack the crocodile's "soft underbelly," which was southern Europe.

On the 20th August the nation suffered a great tragedy when István Horthy, the elder son of the Regent, died in a plane crash near the river Don. According to eyewitnesses, when Horthy received the news, he fainted. Young Horthy was an excellent pilot, and inevitably there was speculation about the cause of the disaster. According to one rumour the Germans had shot him down; another story ran that on the previous night he had been to a party where he had a little too much to drink. The following day he was up at dawn because he was supposed to leave for the Russian front. His comrades noticed that he looked tired and tried to dissuade him from flying, but he took off anyway, lost control and crashed. The Regent was bitter. Among his family and entourage he often accused the Germans and blamed himself for entering the war.

On the 4th September the Russians bombed Budapest for the first time. We were at home in bed when we heard the shattering explosion which demolished a nearby church in Buda and broke the huge windows facing our balcony. Now we knew that we were at war. For nine-year-old Dalma this was a new experience; for me, it was like sounds from the past, from the Great War.

It was said that 30-40 planes were used in the attack. They missed their target, the main Post Office, and dropped their bombs on civilian buildings. In a few months anti-aircraft guns were installed on top of the hill above our house. At night we could see their powerful search-beams which were supposed to locate, follow, and destroy enemy aircraft. We felt very safe until the planes actually arrived. At that point the guns were no longer very effective. The attacks came so quickly that by the time we made our way to the shelter — actually a basement storage area with windows level with the ground — the air raid was over.

In mid-October the German position on the Eastern Front worsened. The Germans could not hold Stalingrad and the river Don; the German army was trapped between the Don and the Volga. Once more the early Russian winter performed its deadly service. The Germans tried to break through without success; the Paulus Army was doomed.

Then the tide turned in Africa. In November, 1942, after weeks of bitter fighting, Alamein was captured by the British, and Rommel's army was on the run to Tripoli. This victory was followed by the Allied landing in North Africa under the command of General Montgomery. Churchill felt that the turning point had indeed arrived. "It could be said," he wrote in his memoirs, "before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat." The Allied victories in North Africa caused great excitement in Hungary. It no longer seemed impossible for the Allies to start a campaign in Italy and proceed through the Ljubljana Gap to the Balkans. Our hopes were rekindled, and high hopes were raised in government

circles that it might be possible to save the country from both the Germans and the Russians — if only the British would reach Hungary before the Russians!

Meanwhile, we still had to deal with Hitler. In December, 1942, Sztójay, our Ambassador in Berlin, brought a strongly worded message indicating that the Germans did not intend to wait any longer; Hungary was to take strong measures to solve her Jewish problem as soon as possible. Hitler demanded that the Hungarian government should be more ruthless towards the Jews: Jews should be required to wear the Yellow Star; they should be removed from important positions in government, industry, agriculture and cultural activities. Jews of military age, blue and white collar workers alike, should be sent to labour camps for physical work such as road construction, farmwork and industrial work; ghettos should be set up in each town to house the Jewish population. The most dangerous demand was for 300,000 Jewish men and women to be sent to Germany to work in industry and agriculture. Obviously, Hitler was planning to send them to the death camps, but to make his demand more palatable to Hungarians, he “guaranteed” that the Jews would be given suitable land for settlement, and that their livelihood would be assured. What the “guarantee” meant is anybody’s guess. He even promised to fulfil Hungary’s territorial desires if Kállay agreed to his demands.

Kállay had no intention of complying with Hitler’s demands. He was trying to save the Hungarian Jews from the fate of Jews in neighbouring countries such as Czechoslovakia, Slovakia, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia, where Jews were rounded up by the thousands and deported to German concentration camps. The Laval government of Occupied France actually asked the Germans to deport the Jews. Among nations allied to or occupied by Germany, Hungary was unique in her desire to protect the Jewish population.

Before sending Hitler an emphatic refusal, Kállay consulted with Jewish leaders, who felt strongly that he should not antagonize Hitler by refusing all his demands. In his Memoir Kállay relates that when he suggested that instead of being sent to Germany, Jewish men of military age should be placed in labour camps in Hungary, the Jewish leaders “accepted the solution with satisfaction. Then, as on other occasions, they warned me and begged me not to provoke Germany; from their point of view, anything was preferable to being handed over to the Germans” (Kállay, 124). Negotiating with Hitler was rather like dealing with a hijacker who was holding a whole nation hostage. Hungary, because of her special, if uneasy relationship with Germany had enough independence to achieve the safety of the Jews. However, Kállay knew that by resisting Hitler’s demands, he was risking that very independence. Nevertheless, he refused to comply. He refused to send Jews to German labour camps, explaining that they were needed at home. He refused to make Jews wear the Yellow Star, stating that such a measure would cause a national outcry. Several attempts were made by Germany to make him change his mind, but he held fast.

The news from the Russian Front was equally dismal. We kept waiting for our troops to be withdrawn, but Hitler kept them there to support the German army against the Russian offensive at Leningrad and Voronezh. The bloody battle in January, 1943, destroyed half of the Hungarian Second Army; more than 150,000 died, many were captured, and its war-material was completely destroyed. The Hungarian soldiers had no weapons or training to match the power of the Soviet army. Their outfit looked lamentable, totally inadequate for the Russian winter. According to high-ranking Hungarian officers, the Hungarian infantry consisted of new recruits who had never seen a tank or armoured car until they got to the Russian Front. Before arriving at the Russian front, they had had no experience with live ammunition. They did not even have air support. Their losses were

enormous since they had to hold the line until the Germans finally withdrew from Voronezh. Partly because of the German system of mixing Hungarian and German troops in the same division, the Hungarian Government had great difficulty in withdrawing the remaining units. Communications broke down; it seemed that nobody knew of the whereabouts of the Second Hungarian Battalion in Russia.

The German army suffered a major blow at Voronezh; the defeat was also a turning point in Hungarian policy. After Voronezh substantial Hungarian forces were not sent to the Eastern Front, and those that were sent were used only as occupying forces.

Leslie Veress, who had been “putting ideas into Kállay’s head” as early as 1942, now intensified his efforts, realising that the time was ripe to start contacting the Allies officially. Kállay, along with numerous other members of the cabinet and the diplomatic corps, was prepared to swing into action and set up a so-called “peace-feelers’ or “government resistance group.” This group was different from other resistance groups because it included the Prime Minister and other key figures in the Government. The nucleus of the group included Kállay, who was Prime Minister as well as Foreign Minister; Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer, Minister of Interior; Jenő Ghiczy, Deputy Foreign Minister and later Foreign Minister; A. Szent-Miklóssy, head of the Political Department, (he was later murdered by the Nazis at Dachau); Aladár Szegedy-Maszák, a key official in the Political Department; and A. Ullein Reviczky, Head of the Press Department. The resistance group also included other high-ranking officials in the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister’s office, as well as a number of junior and senior diplomats, and other gifted individuals who functioned in a semi-diplomatic capacity. In this latter group was Dr. E. Fall, the director of the Revision League, and Andor Gellért, the League’s representative in Berlin, who was eventually sent to Stockholm for an unofficial peace-feeler mission.

Most members of the government backed the “government group”; a few did not agree, but were passive; and a few were proGerman. There were ministerial employees who were sitting on the fence. If the Germans win, we will be all right, they reasoned, and if they don’t, we’ll still be safe because we sort of sympathized with the peace-feelers. Then there were people in high ministerial positions who were very much for the peace plan, but at the start of the negotiations, they were not fully informed. G. Luby, a junior secretary at the foreign Office, was helpful in every way. Z. Zilahy (not to be confused with L. Zilahy the writer), was a high-ranking right-wing official, a clever man who knew what was going on, but turned a blind eye. “When he met me,” writes Leslie Veress, “in the corridors of the Ministries, he had an understanding twinkle in his eye. I chatted with him about the progress of the war without telling him about the group.

Kállay had to tread very cautiously so as not to arouse German suspicions. That is why the early peace-feeler contacts were made through diplomats in neutral countries who acted in a private or semi-official capacity. Some of these private contacts had unfortunate consequences. George (Bobby) Pálóczi Horváth, (no relation to my husband Louis) working for British intelligence under the name of Howard had contacts in Istanbul with a certain Baroness who was an SOE agent. In the spring of 1942, Horváth sent her on a mission to Budapest. Hidden in the eye of her blue fox fur cape was a roll of microfilm containing a 32 page letter of somewhat murky instructions for sabotage activities, and a 16 page coded message. The Baroness was a flamboyant person who attracted the attention of German counter-intelligence. They followed her, arrested her, and found the coded message. The not-so-secret code was easily deciphered; she was brought to trial for high treason and sentenced to death. The Hungarian Chief of Staff, using his authority, commuted the death sentence to 12 years of hard labour.

Another unfortunate contact occurred in May, 1942, when Basil Davidson, an SOE officer in Istanbul, sent secret letters to two prominent opposition leaders, Social Democrat Arpád Szakasits and Peasant party politician Imre Kovács. The letters were brought to Budapest by the English-born wife of Baron Miske Gerstenberger, the Hungarian Consul General in Istanbul. Baroness Miske did not want to be personally involved, so she simply pushed the letters through the two men's letterboxes. The letters contained a denial that the Anglo-Saxon powers were abandoning Central and Eastern Europe to Bolshevism. They affirmed the Soviet Union's intention to keep its hands off popularly elected governments in those countries. At the same time they expressed mistrust of the Horthy regime and urged the Popular Front, whom they regarded as their allies, to build a strong opposition able to supplant the Horthy regime when the time came. They asked Szakasits to send a reliable personal representative from the Social Democratic Party to London and Washington to maintain contact with the Allies. The letters, if discovered by the military security services, would have meant several years' imprisonment, if not death, for the addressees. Szakasits and Kovács were afraid to answer the letters. Szakasits deposited his copy with a reliable lawyer. They also showed the letters to Social Democratic leaders Anna Kéthly and K. Peyer. Unfortunately, Kovács was caught with the letter in his hand by the military counter-espionage and arrested. He was sentenced to a prison term. Kéthly, Peyer and Szakasits were saved by Prime Minister Kállay who managed to hush up the affair (Macartney, Oct. 15, II, 106).

A tragic footnote to this affair is the fate of Mary Miske. After the war she went looking for her husband in Vienna, unaware that he was already dead. As a result of her role in delivering the incriminating letters from Britain, she was classified by the Russians as a British spy. She was kidnapped by the Russians and spent ten years of hard labour in Siberia. She was a tough English lady and survived. When she returned to England after her ordeal, she was

employed by the Foreign Office to monitor the Russian and Hungarian press. She visited us several times in our London home, accompanied by a bodyguard. Her ten years in Siberia had left their mark on her: she was highly strung, easily irritated, and spoke in a high-pitched voice which became rather exhausting to listen to. But we loved her dearly and were outraged at the cruelty of her sufferings.

There were three major neutral cities in Europe where contact with the British was possible: Stockholm, Lisbon, and Istanbul. Andor Gellért, a representative of the Revision League, went to Stockholm at the end of 1943 on an unofficial peace-feeler mission. There he met Vilmos Böhm, who had been the Secretary of War under the communist regime of Béla Kun in 1919. In 1942 Böhm was an employee of the British Press Office, working as a Hungarian translator. Naturally, Böhm trusted only his Social Democrat friends in Hungary and wanted Peyer, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, to come to Stockholm for talks. Peyer was ready to go, but the Germans denied him a transit visa.

Another unofficial emissary to Stockholm was Aladár Szegedy-Maszák, the head of the Foreign Office Political Department. As he could not get in touch with British officials, he gave his peace-feeler message to a Swedish official, who in turn gave it to Owen St. Clair O'Malley, British ambassador, accredited to the Polish Refugee Government.

The message described Hungary's present situation, her fear of both the German and the Bolshevik menace, her inability to make separate peace at present because of the distance of the British and American forces from her frontiers, and her intention of defending her frontiers against the Russians, the Rumanians and the Yugoslavs, but not the Americans and the British. Ambassador O'Malley sent this memorandum to London with his personal comments.

Istanbul was another neutral city where contact with the Allies was possible. This was where Nobel Prize winner Professor Albert Szentgyörgyi tried his own unofficial peace-feeler mission, with

unfortunate results. Kállay knew of his mission but did not know exactly what Szentgyörgyi was going to say to the British. On the 7th February, 1943, the Professor arrived in Istanbul. His personal communication to the British was not quite what Kállay had in mind. Szentgyörgyi claimed to be a representative of the Hungarian democratic opposition and stated that all the parties, except for the extreme right-wing organizations, would accept himself as Prime Minister. He expressed his readiness in the event of an Allied victory to head a democratic government, replacing the present regime. Unfortunately, he also talked about his mission to a "British officer" who was a German agent in British army uniform. Hitler would soon tell Horthy that Kállay's emissaries had committed treason.¹

To save Hungary from the German stranglehold, Kállay needed official contacts with the British: he wanted to send emissaries with authorization from the Hungarian Government to negotiate with representatives of the British Government. He had two major problems in accomplishing his goal. First, he had to tread very cautiously so as not to arouse the suspicions of the Germans, who kept a close watch on all our movements. Second, he had to overcome the mistrust of the British, which was at least as difficult, if not more. The Casablanca agreement of January, 1943, between Britain, the U.S. and the Soviet Union required that the Allies accept nothing but "unconditional surrender" from any of their enemies. Kállay was hoping for some leeway in the negotiations. An even more formidable obstacle was the existence of a contract between the Allies that none of them would get in touch with any Axis country without informing the others. Kállay was trying to steer the country away from both Germany and the USSR: he wanted to negotiate with Britain, but not with the Soviet Union. Britain, for her part, was willing enough to enter into discussions with Hungary, but felt that official contacts with the Hungarian government would have been a breach of faith to the Allies. When it came to serious negotiations,

it would have been impossible to deal with Britain and the U.S. without involving the Soviet Union. It was because of these obstacles that the early peace-feeler missions, although most of them had the blessing of the Prime Minister, were officially treated by both the Hungarian and the British governments as “unofficial.” Eventually negotiations and an agreement did take place between Hungary and Great Britain, thanks to a felicitous “formula” devised by Leslie Veress for his mission to Istanbul in March, 1943. According to Veress’ formula, the Hungarian emissary represented not the Hungarian government, but a “government resistance group” which included the Prime Minister.

Kállay’s first significant contact with the British was accomplished in 1942 through Antal Ullein-Reviczky, Head of the Foreign Office Press Department, who, with the help of his father-in-law, a retired British Consul-General living in Istanbul, succeeded in delivering a message to the British concerning Hungary’s desire to leave the Axis. The British answer stated that if Hungary wanted to leave the Axis, she should send a high-ranking representative officer of the Army, with the full authority of the Hungarian Government, for discussions. In January, 1943, Ullein-Reviczky played a key role in the coming events. He was a man of strong character, gifted, ambitious, and a staunch anti-Nazi. In addition, he had a team of excellent men working for him at the Press Department. Under the pretext of visiting his father-in-law, he flew to Istanbul in January, 1943. He took with him a message from the Hungarian Government, indicating Hungary’s intention to leave the Axis. He was also bearing a message of goodwill from the Hungarian Chief of Staff Szombathelyi who declared that if the Hungarian army under his command came into contact with British troops, the Hungarians would join the British in fighting the Germans.

Later in January, at Ullein-Reviczky’s suggestion, Kállay sent another peace-feeler to Istanbul; this was András Frey, the political journalist of the daily Magyar Nemzet, who, although he went in an

unofficial capacity, still conveyed to thee British the intentions of the Hungarian Government: Hungary will not resist Allied forces if they reach her frontiers or enter Hungary. In theory Hungary is prepared for military action against the Germans and is prepared to establish secret contact with the Allies. The British Government, whose obligations to thee Allies made it unable to deal with enemy governments directly, used the SOB to transmit its answer: the Hungarian Government should send to Istanbul two high-ranking army officers for military discussions. On receiving the message, Kállay was somewhat alarmed. The SOE was usually charged with organizing sabotage activities behind enemy lines. In Hungary the "resistance" was part of the Government itself. What he wanted was discussions of surrender on a diplomatic level, not plots to blow up our own bridges. That is why he found it vitally important at this time to send an official representative of the Hungarian Government to raise the talks to a diplomatic level.

VI

Veress In Istanbul: Surrender To A Distant Enemy

Prior to 1943, the Allied attitude to peace-feelers in general, and to Hungarian peace-feelers in particular, was an ostentatious lack of interest. Eden's telegram of February 14, 1943, to Sir R. Campbell, the British Ambassador in Lisbon, is characteristic of this attitude. In it he instructs the Ambassador as to the official British reply to Hungarian peace offers designed to save their country in the case of a German defeat: His Majesty's government is not interested in such offers; as long as Hungary is fighting against the Allies and supports the Axis, she can expect neither understanding nor mercy.

Nevertheless, records of discussions in February, 1943, show evidence of changing views on the subject of peace-feelers. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Under-Secretary of State, voiced such a view:

I begin to wonder whether we are right in always turning down flat any approach from the satellite states. I suppose we are afraid of appearing to "appease" them. It seems to me that in the present critical phase for Germany, anything we can do to make the satellite states more of an embarrassment to Germany would be all to the good. Of course, there are two dangers: 1) of rousing the suspicions of our

allies and 2) of having to give commitments that would be embarrassing later...²

Cadogan could have added that in Hungary there was more political and intellectual liberty than in any other “satellite” country. He could have added that Hungary was also the only unoccupied satellite at that stage, and its future course of action would largely depend on the encouragement and, when the time came, the protection which the Allies could offer.

At a meeting of leading officials at the Foreign Office on 26th February, 1943, Frank Roberts summarized the consensus: ‘There would be an advantage ... in adopting a less negative attitude.... We have no desire to see Hungary torn to pieces, or to penalize the Hungarian people for the follies of their government... Our attitude will be influenced by the practical steps taken by the Hungarians themselves.’³

It became Veress’s task to take some of these “practical steps.” His way was not at all smooth. He had to overcome considerable mistrust and reluctance on the part of the British leadership. Roberts’s account of the February 26 meeting notes that Bruce Lockhart for one, disapproved of dealing with Hungarian peacefeeler and had instructed the BBC to avoid the topic in its broadcasts. When it was agreed that Britain should respond to Hungarian surrender offers, he insisted that the US and the Soviet Union be kept informed and was glad to note that the USSR was interested in establishing contacts with Hungary. It is significant that he obtained his information from an article in the Soviet War News, carried by the British Communist newspaper *The Daily Worker*. The author of the article was Mátyás Rákosi, who had held a key position in the Communist government following World War I, and was later to become the Joseph Stalin of Hungary.

In spite of conflicting attitudes towards Germany’s satellites, information about the different countries was filtering through to the

Allies. In a note to Halifax, British Ambassador in Washington, and to Sir A.C. Kerr, British Ambassador in Moscow, dated March 10, 1943, Eden shows that he has modified his attitude to the satellite countries and declares that a totally negative attitude to peace-feelers is no longer advisable. Furthermore, he states that in view of the great differences in the situations of these countries, it would be unwise to adopt a uniform policy towards them.⁴

When Veress arrived in Lisbon as the first “official” representative of the “Hungarian Government Resistance Group” in January, 1943, the British attitude to peace-feelers was still extremely mistrustful. The term “government group” was his own creation and turned out to be attractive to both the British and the Hungarian leadership. Britain liked it because it enabled her to enter the discussions without breaking her commitment to her allies, and Kállay liked it because he wanted to conceal his efforts from the proGerman members of his cabinet.

The choice of Veress as the emissary was also fortunate. He had a solid family background, a good knowledge of languages, and a thorough knowledge of world affairs gained from his study of the foreign press as deputy censor. Another great advantage was that he had expertise without high rank. He had joined the Foreign Office late, and at the age of 34 was only an assistant secretary. His rank was too low to be suspected by the Germans of carrying out top-level negotiations. The Germans, whose approval was necessary to obtain the transit visas of Axis countries for his travels, knew only that he was traveling to Lisbon as a courier.

The night before he was to leave, he asked me to meet him at the foot of Castle Hill, near the Chain Bridge. He came down from the Foreign Office, elegantly dressed as usual in a dark blue suit, white shirt and a dark blue French silk tie. We went to a good restaurant called the Három Veréb (The Three Sparrows). I could see that he was very excited. He told me that he was going to Lisbon on

a special secret mission. I pressed his hand, gave him a butterfly kiss, and told him how thrilled I was about his trip, though I was sorry to lose him, even for a week. His mind was on his trip; we barely finished our veal and mushroom meal and left without eating the chocolate cake. We went to his apartment to pack his heavy brown pigskin suitcase. We piled all his "necessaries" on the bed, but the suitcase rigidly refused to accommodate more than half his belongings. Finally we managed to close the deal by sitting on the old grouch. We laughed in each other's arms until we remembered tomorrow. It was wartime and there were no guarantees about tomorrow.

The next day Leslie set off for Lisbon. I did not go with him to the station because he had with him officials from the Ministry to see him off. The following is his account of his mission to Lisbon as the emissary of the Hungarian Government Resistance Group:

"I traveled to Rome by train and spent several days there waiting for a passage by air to Lisbon. In my capacity as courier I carried diplomatic bags which contained, among other things, a "Hell-schreiber" (teleprinter) to enable the Hungarian legation in Lisbon to make contact with Budapest if telegraphic communications became impossible. In Rome I handed over my diplomatic bag and talked with embassy officials. Most of them were shattered by the disaster at Stalingrad. They were eager for news from Hungary. Nobody guessed what my mission was. I met Count Ciano at the Golf Club, and we talked about the war in general. I attended an "At Home" at the residence of the German minister Otto von Bismarck whose wife, I was told, was the most beautiful woman in Europe. Some of the guests described the mood and the condition of Italy as facing moral collapse.

"At another reception in Rome I met a White Russian princess, Irina Galitzim. She was an elegant young lady, a would-be fashion designer. In Rome she was invited everywhere and knew many important people. She was not much interested in my mission, but

wanted to know if I was going to Lisbon, and if I could bring her back some American cosmetics. But only Revlon would do. That luxury was not available in 'Fortress Europe' at that time.

"At last the plane to Lisbon arrived. I boarded the ramshackle Italian aircraft which limped across the sea. We barely made it to a forced landing in Barcelona.

"All during my flight to Lisbon I wondered what I would find there. Would I be able to contact the right people? Would I be able to have serious contacts, would I accomplish serious assignments — other than finding the right Revlon cosmetics for a pretty princess?

"In Lisbon I went straight to the Hungarian Legation. Andor Wodianer, the Hungarian Ambassador, was a tall, elegant, friendly gentleman, a staunch anti-Nazi of partly Jewish origin. I conveyed the Prime Minister's greetings and handed over my diplomatic bag and the teleprinter machine. Then I set about exploring Lisbon for possible contacts with the British. The city itself was enchanting, but swarming with foreign agents and double agents, everybody watching everybody else on neutral territory. I had to be very careful not to do anything beyond what was normal for a simple diplomatic courier carrying his diplomatic bags.

'I went to a reception given by Wodianer where I found a microcosm of the diplomatic corps of wartime Europe. I met German officials, including Baron von Reinhaben who was thought to be a Canaris Abwehr man. They were all shaken by the fall of Stalingrad; they conveyed the impression that they had no illusions about the outcome of the war. I could sense that everyone was keeping an eye on everyone else; I remember standing next to Wodianer who was looking for a cigarette. When the French Ambassador politely offered him one, Wodianer looked around anxiously to see if the Germans were watching. The surreptitious glance was not lost on the French Ambassador who grinned and remarked, 'Prends mon ami, ca ne te compromettera pas.' (Take one, my friend, it will not compromise you.)

“Polish exiles, acting as intermediaries, delighted in arranging complicated cloak and dagger meetings with British officials. One such intermediary, Colonel Kowalszki, was most helpful. With his assistance, I succeeded in holding a friendly if inconclusive discussion with David Walker, a British journalist unofficially authorized to talk to representatives of the Axis governments. I told him about Hungary’s present situation: how Kállay hoped that Italy would surrender and thus enable our two countries to turn against Hitler. I explained that Hungary was in no position to act alone against Hitler’s might. Walker listened with much sympathy, but told me that as a result of the Casablanca agreement, the Allies would accept nothing less than unconditional surrender from Hungary. I was still hoping that the Casablanca agreement applied only to Germany; that towards Hungary a less humiliating attitude might be permissible. Above all, I was hoping that the insistence on unconditional surrender would not prevent my government from starting discussions with Britain. I received another significant insight from David Walker: ‘No tears would be shed in London if the Germans and the Russians tore each other to pieces,’ he told me.

“I soon realized that Lisbon was much too conspicuous a place to start secret discussions with the Allies. In a fit of despondency, I went on a shopping spree. Lisbon had an array of shops stocked with ‘peacetime’ treasures. I bought a length of soft beige and navyblue silk fabric and a pair of beige lizard shoes for Laura I could not find Revlon cosmetics for the little Princess. I went to the Casino in Estoril, but left hastily when I saw men in dark suits staring at me. I had heard stories of enemy agents looking for losers and offering them money in exchange for ‘cooperation.’

“On my way back to Hungary I stopped again in Rome where the customs officers confiscated — and avidly read — all my English and other foreign newspapers.

“The message I brought back from Lisbon spread gloom over the Foreign Ministry. Premier Kállay was shocked by the British

requirement of 'unconditional surrender He was not yet prepared for that drastic action.'

In spite of the gloomy outlook, however, Kállay did not give up his determination to contact the British. It was decided to try to make contact in Istanbul, and in March the Foreign Office teleprinter rattled out the message to the Hungarian Legation in Berlin: "Please obtain seat for Veress on German diplomatic courier plane to Istanbul." The Germans obliged, and on 6th March a Hungarian diplomat was on his way to Istanbul on a German diplomatic courier plane by special permission of Berlin on a clearly defined mission: to withdraw his country from the Axis. Here is Leslie's account of his first mission to Istanbul:

"On the 6th March I boarded a JU-88 Junkers German plane at Budapest airport Its huge swastika emblem was a grim reminder of my precarious position as I joined the silent and somewhat sinister crowd of German couriers, agents and emissaries bound for Turkey. It was in their company that I, a junior Hungarian official was flying to Istanbul to prepare Hungary's desertion of Germany. At Istanbul's Yesilköy Airport a car was waiting for me. The driver was an oliveskinned Levantine whose chauffeur's cap was adorned by the seal of Hungary. I had the strange feeling that nothing was what it seemed to be.

"At the Hungarian Legation I handed over my diplomatic bags and explained that I wished to spend a few days relaxing in Istanbul, a city of great beauty and many historical associations for Hungarians. The Turks had occupied and devastated Hungary for 150 years, but now the two nations were the best of friends. An Istanbul vacation was a plausible cover which helped me to keep a low profile, all the more important as the Hungarian ambassador, Vörnle, was a pro-German.

"As I looked out from the balcony of my rooms in the Pera Palace at the magnificent view of the Golden Horn bay, I almost

believed my cover. I had a sumptuous supper of chicken Kiev and a dessert of an exquisitely sweet Turkish cake smothered in syrup, accompanied by Anatolian white wine. Before going to bed, I strolled up and down the steep streets to the quay where the ships were lit with bright lights. It was late at night, but everything was open and filled with the vital noises of life. Turkish music seeped through little cafe doors. Under the strange spell of the orient, my mind was battling with thoughts of tomorrow.

“The next day I was to meet George (“Bobby”) Pálóczi Horváth. Bobby was a Hungarian journalist who had first left Hungary in 1935, returned and left again in 1941 to work for British intelligence. He was designated by the British Special Operation Executive (SOE) in Cairo to represent the British in Istanbul. Since the Allies had agreed not to deal directly with governments of German satellite countries, SOE was charged with dealing with potential peace-feelers from these countries. SOE was a convenient vehicle for both British and Hungarian interests; however, we had strong objections to the person of Bobby Pálóczi Horváth as intermediary. It was common knowledge in Hungary that he had been a spy for the right-wing government of Gy. Gömbös, and that he later became a left-wing socialist with strong sympathies for Moscow. The British discovered only in December, 1944, what we already knew at the time, that Bobby Pálóczi Horváth was regularly passing information to the Russians. It is true that in 1943 Russia was a British ally, but Bobby carried on his activities without the knowledge of the British and American Governments. When I went to Istanbul with my message, I was disagreeably surprised to find that he was designated as my liaison with the British authorities. Our attempts to remove him from the negotiations were unsuccessful, so it was Bobby who arranged my meeting with two SOE officers on March 7, 1943.

“We met the two officers over a snack of Turkish coffee and fresh figs in their private flat. I gave them my memorized oral

message from my government concerning a separate peace treaty for Hungary as follows:

1. Hungary does not intend to oppose Anglo-American or Polish troops if they reach the Hungarian frontier and advance into the country. For this action Hungary expects no recompense. However, it will be understood that Hungary undertakes to adopt this attitude only towards the regular troops of the Allies, not towards partisan bands. (Hungary did not want Yugoslav guerrilla troops to re-enter her newly returned territories.)

2. Hungary is in principle prepared to take positive action against the Germans if it proves to be possible to work out in advance a practical plan for cooperation between the armies concerned.

3. The purpose of this offer is not to save the Hungarian regime, but solely to serve the interests of the Hungarian people.

“Our message was acknowledged, but their answer was, ‘Nothing less than unconditional surrender will be accepted: At this point I made a suggestion: If the British government cannot enter into talks with an enemy government save for accepting ‘unconditional surrender,’ they might agree to talks as partners with a ‘resistance group’ in Hungary. It so happened that our ‘resistance group’ included the Prime Minister who was also Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of the Interior, and the political director of the Foreign Ministry. The group was also supported by the Chief of Staff.

“Another problem presented was linked with what was understood to be the nature of SOE itself. The SOE pattern of contact with resistance groups in German occupied countries usually consisted in news gathering, intelligence, sabotage, and making as much trouble as possible for the Germans. I had to emphasize that independent Hungary’s case was different as here the resistance was the government itself. I conveyed to them Prime Minister Kállay’s message: ‘A country whose government is sympathetic towards the Allies and wishes to change sides by declaring a surrender should not

be expected to commit sabotage to destroy its own resources.” The SOE officers understood our position and did not insist on acts of sabotage. They did, however bring up the idea of eventually sending a secret British military mission to Hungary. They wanted us to send them as much information as possible about German military forces and plans. Unfortunately, the Germans did not confide their military secrets to Hungary whom they considered to be a very unreliable ally.

“In order to cut out swarms of unofficial or self-appointed Hungarian contacts, and to exchange information in a responsible manner, I suggested wireless contact between myself and the SOE. I was not authorized by my government to make this proposal, but I felt that such an offer was necessary to confirm the seriousness of our intentions. Actually, it was not until five months later that I was able to slip two radio transmitters through German controls into Budapest. The radio contact turned out later to be very useful as it eliminated unnecessary mediators and thus diminished the possibility of leaks. When in March, 1944 Hitler accused Horthy of treachery and machinations, he mentioned Szentgyörgyi, Frey and Ullein-Reviczky, but not once did my name crop up. My discussions and wireless contact were a very well kept secret.

‘What was the result of my discussions with the SOE officers? Everything was acknowledged, but they gave me to understand that for the time being the contact between Britain and Hungary was ‘official in name only.’” What they said to me in effect was, it depends on you gentlemen to prove to us that your proposals are important enough to be reported to the Prime Minister or to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. In other words, we had to convince them that it was advantageous for Britain to include Hungary — a much maligned country — in her strategic plans, and that Britain could do so without upsetting previous agreements with the Soviet Union. As it turned out, SOE was a most effective channel for our contacts with the Allies. It transmitted faithfully all our messages and suggestions to

the foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister, and the Chief of Staff, who, in turn shared the information with the highest authorities in Washington and Moscow.

“After my meeting with the SOE officers, I went back to my hotel, and then for a stroll in Istanbul, well satisfied with the day’s work. I was well aware that my movements were observed by Turkish authorities. Once I turned around and faced my ‘shadow’; the man made an apologetic gesture: it was his job to follow me. On another occasion another ‘shadow’ approached me to ask a favour: his wife was having a baby, and he longed to be at her side. Could I please tell him where I was going to spend the evening, so that he could make his report without having to follow me?

“Back in my hotel room, I was starting to relax after the strain and stress of the day when I heard a knock at the door. My muscles tightened. I had not ordered anything, and I was not expecting anyone. I put on my jacket, and with some trepidation I opened the door. There stood before me a well-known high-ranking SS officer in his full regalia, complete with the Order of Blood in his buttonhole. My life passed before me in a split second. The Germans knew about my mission. The SS officer would shoot me with a silencer, or drug me and drag me away in a black limousine, and I would disappear without a trace. Trying not to show my fear, I said, ‘What can I do for you?’ He said, ‘I am sorry I did not telephone before coming, but

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I had my reasons.

‘With a watery smile, I invited him in. He apologised again and disclosed the purpose of his visit. Would I be so kind as to take with me his and his wife’s jewels and valuables for safekeeping to Hungary, in case Turkey entered the war on the Allied side. He handed over a packet to be picked up by his wife who lived in Budapest. Breathing deeply, I agreed to take his valuables. He assured me they were not war loot; he had bought them in Turkey. During the war gold coins, especially Napoleons, and valuable Persian carpets were often bought in Turkey and sent in diplomatic bags to ensure safe

delivery. Two small Turkish carpets were brought up from his car. Having left his 'valuables' with me, the SS officer thanked me again, and left with a most engaging smile. The sound of his clicking heels was at that moment sweeter to me than the 'Ode to Joy.'

"After recovering from this traumatic experience, I went out for another stroll, to find a little jewellery shop where I had seen a delicate gold Venetian necklace. The old woman in the shop displayed the lacy ornament decorated with little fringes shaped like hands and flames. She made me describe Laura in detail and assured me that the necklace would suit her perfectly. She told me that she was of Russian origin, and the necklace was a family heirloom. I did not much care if her story was true: the necklace was divine.

"Late in the afternoon I was back in my hotel room admiring my new acquisition when I was startled by another knock at my door. I opened it to find before me a man holding an oriental rug. When he introduced himself, I remembered that I had promised to do him a favour. He asked me to take the small carpet and some gold coins to his daughter in Hungary. He also gave me a large amount of currency to hand over to a Jewish organization. With all the articles entrusted to me, I could see my diplomatic bags bulging on the trip home.

"I traveled home by train through German-occupied Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. At the Bulgarian frontier we had to change trains and pass through customs. I watched as a Turkish couple approached the customs officer. The man opened his suitcase which revealed six pairs of satin slippers with curved, pointed toes, embroidered in blue and gold. He probably expected to get a good price for them in Bulgaria. The customs officer stared at the slippers for a moment and asked him how many wives he had. The man pointed to the lady beside him. 'Oh,' said the officer, 'Une femme, une pantoufle,' (One wife, one pair of slippers), and confiscated the rest.

"The train was full of German soldiers, officers on leave, on their way to Hungary for rest and a good time. I talked to them in German

about the war. They were still optimistic. I would have liked to know how they talked among themselves. The train journey was blissfully uneventful. As George III wrote in his diary on July 4th, 1776, 'Nothing happened today.' I sat in my seat, satisfied with the results of my journey, although somewhat worried about the Prime Minister's reaction to the demands of the Allies.

"After leaving glittering Istanbul, I arrived in drab Budapest. I took a taxi home to my flat in Garas Street where I refreshed myself and sorted out my diplomatic bags. Then I hurried to the Foreign Office for debriefing. The secrecy of my mission made it inadvisable for me to report openly to the Prime Minister. As far as the Germans were concerned, I was a simple diplomatic courier returning from a trip to Istanbul. Therefore I talked to Kállay's son Christopher who had his father's complete confidence. We agreed that Christopher would take me somewhere by car where we could talk without arousing suspicion. He took me to a quiet spot in the Buda hills where I told him the substance of the discussions. Later I had the opportunity to talk to the Prime Minister personally and report to him on the details of the SOE message. He was shocked by the demand for unconditional surrender, as were the other members of the 'Group,' but there was nothing we could do about that. When he heard about the British demand for talks with high-ranking Hungarian army officers, he said he was reluctant to involve the military establishment at that early stage of the proceedings. The Allies were still fighting in North Africa. Premature action would only result in savage reprisals by Hitler. Besides, the Hungarian Officer's corps was full of officers who were sons and relatives of former Austro-Hungarian imperial army officers and had strong ties with Germany. Although the Chief of Staff Szombathelyi had at one point expressed his willingness to cooperate in the peace effort, Kállay did not feel that at this time he would be able to send such an emissary. Once again, he categorically refused to consider ordering sabotage activities. His emissary was not a partisan agent, he said, but a trusted

member of the Foreign Office, conducting official negotiations between two governments.

“I had to convince the Prime Minister of the usefulness of radio contact to keep up connections with Britain. I even talked to exPrime Minister Count Bethlen who was in constant contact with the Government Surrender Group and asked him to persuade Admiral Horthy to lend his support to the idea Bethlen was most enthusiastic about it, and in the end Kállay did not say no to my suggestion of accepting a transmitter. I realise that in the matter of the radio connection I had promised more than the Prime Minister had bargained for, but I was authorized to talk in the name of the Hungarian government group in accordance with the needs of the given situation. I had to use my judgment, and I was at the time convinced that such an offer would present the government with a *fait accompli*, and thus help to end their indecision which threatened to ruin the whole enterprise.

“Kállay rather liked the idea that in the future the Allies might send a secret military agent to Hungary. He said that he wanted above all to see Hungary out of the German sphere of influence. His only wish was to make friends with Britain. He hinted that he would like to see a neutral Hungary, but he was afraid of German retaliation.

‘When talking to the Prime Minister, I left it to the last to inform him that contacts with SOE were to be accomplished through George Pálóczi Horváth. He loathed Bobby and was furious. ‘No honest officer would speak to that Muscovite agent!’ he exclaimed. I assured him that in our wireless contacts I would do everything to exclude him. In this I succeeded. On my second mission to Istanbul Bobby was eliminated as a go-between.”

Soon after his return from Istanbul, Leslie had to tackle another touchy “diplomatic” mission. The SS officer’s wife came to his flat in Garas Street to collect her valuables. He opened the door to find a beautiful, elegant lady smiling at him. The orderly who accompanied

her carried the carpets to the Jeep waiting below. Having handed over the packet and transmitted greetings from her husband, Leslie expected her to leave. But the lady lingered at the door, casting inquisitive glances inside his apartment, and fixing him with a not so enigmatic smile. To make sure he did not misunderstand, she took a step towards him. But Leslie straightened himself and bade her a polite farewell. The lady left, puzzled and disappointed by such coldness from a handsome, red-blooded Hungarian bachelor. The siren had three things going against her: She was the wife of an SS officer, Leslie was head over heels in love with me, and he was expecting me to arrive any minute.

The high excitement and hopes of the Istanbul meeting were followed in March and April by increasing frustration and anxiety for Leslie. Had the SOE really taken his message seriously? Would the Hungarian Government continue to strike the iron which he had with great zeal and personal risk managed to heat in Istanbul? Had he been able to peruse the top secret communications between the Allies, he would have been reassured that the Allies were indeed considering Hungary as a promising potential foe of Germany. An aide-memoire from the British Embassy to the Department of State in Washington, dated 6th April, 1943, notes the frequency of efforts by minor German satellite countries to establish contacts with British representatives abroad "as a reinsurance against a German defeat." The note reflects the new British attitude: "His Majesty's Government have therefore been considering whether it might now be advisable to endeavor further to weaken the already faltering loyalties of these countries to the Axis and for this purpose to modify the entirely negative attitude which His Majesty's government have hitherto adopted towards any peace-feelers from these countries. His Majesty's Government have however reached the conclusion that the position of the various minor satellites ... differs so greatly that it is neither possible nor desirable to adopt a common line in regard either to

peace-feelers emanating from them or to British propaganda towards them.” It then describes the positions of the satellites Finland, Rumania, Hungary, and Bulgaria, depicting Hungary as a country that “succeeded in preserving a greater degree of independence than any other satellite in South Eastern Europe. It notes the existence of a strong opposition to pro-German policies, and “not unsuccessful efforts in Hungary to moderate the persecution of the Jews” (Doc 6).

Thirty years later in an interview with Hungarian journalist Péter Bokor, Sir Frank Roberts reminisced about his responsibilities as the Foreign Office functionary in charge of German and German satellite affairs. He told about the multitude of peace-feelers from different Axis countries, including Germany itself. It was his job to select those which seemed genuine. He remembered Hungarian “feelers” as early as 1942:

A more serious attempt came only when Mr. Veress approached us. Veress came as the representative of Mr. Kállay.... It was crucial for us to find out whom Mr. Veress really represented. From the Hungarian Embassy in Lisbon we received satisfactory assurances that Veress represented a group of serious individuals who acted with the approval of Prime Minister Kállay. (Translated from Bokor, 39-40)

While the British Government was planning a less rigid policy, SOE was still contemplating sabotage activity in Hungary. A memo dated 20th March, 1943, establishes the following priorities: “a. The disruption of German communications with Rumania and Yugoslavia.” and “b. The promotion of revolt against collaboration with Germany.

Actually in the course of April the British received more messages from Hungary than they were willing or able to handle. Early in April Communist Vilmos Böhm, who was employed at the

British Press Office in Stockholm as a Hungarian translator, asked for permission to travel to London for talks about a Hungarian surrender. His superior, C. Parrott, wrote to London about Böhm, and was refused permission for his visit with the explanation that the British government wished to avoid peace-feeler talks until both Washington and Moscow have indicated their reactions to Britain's proposed modification of policies concerning peace-feeler approaches from German satellite countries. Böhm was indignant and threatened to resign; Roberts' note to Hubert Howard, dated 21st April indicates the British Government's willingness to allow Böhm to come, but only for the purpose of gathering information, and not for peace-feeler talks.⁵ The real reason for the refusal to receive Böhm was that the British Government was already in contact with Hungary through Veress, and that peace-feeler talks were already in progress.

As follow-ups for Veress' mission, two emissaries were sent from Hungary with the Prime Minister's approval. I. Barcza, our former Ambassador in London, was sent to Switzerland, and Károly Schrecker to Istanbul. Both men had been members of former Prime Minister Bethlen's cabinet. The message they carried was the familiar one: Hungary wishes to leave the Axis. Kállay told Barcza that he opposed any suggestion of bringing back to Hungary the "Red Count," Mihály Károlyi, a move he felt would lead us straight into the arms of the Soviet. Unfortunately, neither Barcza, nor Schrecker succeeded in getting in touch with the British. It seems that Britain was really becoming anxious not to act without American and Soviet approval.

The Russians did not have anything to say about Hungarian peace-feelers until June, when an injudicious statement by George Gibson in the Daily Telegraph suddenly provoked a letter by Molotov to the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, on June 7, 1943. The letter said in part:

The Soviet Government consider it possible for the Allies to have informal contacts and to enter into conversations — keeping each other previously informed — with opposition elements in Hungary. In relations with the Satellites they should follow the principles of unconditional surrender, return of occupied territories, indemnity for war damage and the punishment of war criminals The Soviet Government consider that the responsibility must be borne not only by the Hungarian Government but to a greater or less extent by the Hungarian people.
(Doc 7)

The race was on. Hitler's satellites were scrambling to leave the Axis, and the Allies realized that they had to make the most of the situation.

VII

Hungary And Her Neighbours: The British View

When Leslie returned from Istanbul, the big question on everyone's mind was, can we beat the Rumanians to surrender? Rumours were plentiful, and the documents bear out the rumours. Notes from the American Ambassador to Spain (Hayes) to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, dated 21st and 23rd March, 1943, give an account of a request by the Rumanian Minister Nicolas Dimitresco to the Argentine Ambassador to serve as intermediary in communicating Rumania's desire to make peace with the Allies at the 'earliest possible moment.' The rest of the conversation, described in the second note, must have started Allied heads shaking vigorously. The Minister related that Antonescu, the Rumanian Chief of State, had lengthy discussions with Hitler who had given him instructions to seek peace with the Allies. He described Hitler as a changed man," who no longer believed in winning the war; he offered to surrender and agreed to restore all conquered territories including Poland, but wanted part of Ukraine in return for being a bulwark against Communism. When the Argentine Ambassador enquired as to what was to be done with Hitler after the war, the Minister said "he would have to stay. He had done such marvelous work in Germany. German people had confidence in him and were solidly behind him." 1

This “changed man” was obviously not the same Hitler who received Admiral Horthy at Klessheim in April. There was no love lost between the two men. True to his custom when meeting Nazi officials, the Regent wore his navy uniform, complete with white gloves. (The gloves saved him from having to shake hands with people he disliked.) As soon as they met, Hider launched into a tirade against the Regent and against Kállay’s government. He accused Horthy of underhanded machinations. Ribbentrop produced a dossier.² Hider struck the dossier and shrieked, “Here is the proof of your treacheries!” He mentioned Barcza’s mission to Switzerland, as well as the peace-feeler missions of Szentgyörgyi and A. Frey. (He never mentioned Veress.) He demanded that Kállay resign. Horthy refused even to look at the dossier. He indignantly denied any knowledge of clandestine peace talks. Actually he was telling the truth as far as he knew. Kállay had deliberately withheld specific information from him so that he could in all honesty deny Hitler’s accusations.

Hitler continued his offensive by accusing the Kállay government of being too soft on left-wing elements and of sabotaging the “Jewish problem.” He declared that almost every European country, except Switzerland and Sweden, had accepted German demands concerning the Jews. Only Hungary refused to comply. Again Hitler was right: although Kállay was making anti-Jewish speeches, he did nothing to help Hitler’s “Final solution”; on the contrary, he was protecting the Jewish population of Hungary. At one point Jewish industrialist Ferenc Chorin was appointed as one of the fifty members of the Upper House of Parliament.

To neutralise the effect of Kállay’s ambiguous policies, Hitler proposed that he and Horthy should issue a joint declaration which would show the world that Hungary had no intention of leaving the Axis, but was, on the contrary, standing squarely on Hitler’s side. The text was to read as follows:

The Führer and the Regent give expression to their determined resolve to continue the war against Bolshevism and its British and American Allies till the final victory. The Hungarian nation will mobilise its forces to the last man for the liberation of Europe and the security of the Magyar people. (Quoted in Kállay, 183-184)

A similar communiqué was signed by the Rumanian Head of State, Antonescu, when he had visited the Führer shortly before. Horthy had no intention of signing such a declaration and he refused. Ribbentrop threatened him with serious consequences; Sztójay the Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin, a staunch pro-German, expressed his grave fears about German reprisals, but Horthy could not be moved. When the communiqué reached Ullein-Reviczky, the Chief of the Foreign Office Press Department, he rushed to Kállay in despair. On his return home, Horthy assured them that he had not signed the declaration, and Kállay forbade its publication in its original form. Finally the communiqué appeared in the Hungarian press as a "German Declaration," and the sentence about the British and the Americans was left out, an omission that made the Germans furious.

On the Regent's return home, a letter was drafted and sent to Hitler, explaining the Hungarian position. "Nothing happens against my will," the Regent assured Hitler, "Peace and order will be maintained." Once more he denied German accusations, expressed his complete confidence in Kállay, and reaffirmed Hungary's loyalty to Germany. As for Hitler's demand that Hungary clamp down on left-wingers and Jews, the Regent declared that these were purely domestic matters.

Following the Regent's visit to Hitler, right-wing politicians stepped up their activities to force Kállay's resignation. There was a

busy exchange of letters between the German Legation in Hungary and members of the right-wing opposition such as Imrédy, Jaross, Rajniss, Vajda, and Baky. In the House the right-wing members were planning to ask difficult questions about such topics as Hungary's war contribution and the Government's tolerant policy towards leftist elements. Kállay invited right-wing opposition leaders to call on him and asked them to prevent these questions from being asked and thus avoid a national crisis. Imrédy replied that this was precisely what they wanted to achieve: they wanted to bring matters to a crisis and thus force Hungary to adopt a sincere pro-German policy. Imrédy still believed in a German victory and felt that Kállay with his pessimistic outlook should yield his office to someone who possessed the confidence of the Germans.

The opposition was busy, but Kállay managed to stay in power and continue his efforts to replace pro-German officials in key positions with people sympathetic to the Allies. One of these was Dr. Dezső Ujváry who arrived on 1st May in Istanbul as the new Consul General. Vörnle, the pro-German Hungarian Ambassador in Ankara, mistrusted and hated the new Consul Ujváry said that Vörnle even sent his henchmen to spy on him. To make his activities proof against German spies, Ujváry moved his consulate to a different building. He also departed from the accepted procedure of sending his messages to the Foreign Office through the Ambassador in Ankara and sent messages directly to Budapest Kállay, who was well aware of Vörnle's pro-German sympathies, permitted the new Consul to exclude the Ambassador.

To Churchill, Turkey was an important potential ally because of her strategic location. If only Turkey could be persuaded to enter the war, an Allied base there would be vital in disrupting German communication lines, and Churchill's plan of conquering Europe through the Balkans would have a much better chance of success. The Balkan plan was uppermost in Churchill's mind when he left for

the Trident conference in Washington in May. His efforts to finalize plans for a landing in Sicily received a boost by the signal from General Alexander that Anglo-American troops were victorious in Tunis and were now “masters of North Africa’s shores.” We had not read the euphoric telegram, but we were hoping with Churchill that the time was now ripe for the Allies to start moving towards Italy and eventually to Hungary, taking advantage of our willingness to aid them.

In fact, America agreed to an invasion of Sicily and an advance through Italy, but eventually Churchill’s plan of a Balkan advance had to give way to plans for a landing in Normandy and opening a Second Front in France. Churchill saw a landing in Normandy as a costly, and in 1943, also a risky operation and tried as long as possible to resist American and Soviet pressure to go ahead with it. American historians are inclined to blame Churchill for his insistence on the Italian campaign which slowed to an embarrassingly sluggish pace for many months and was seen as a hindrance to Allied preparations for Normandy. It is possible, however, to view Churchill’s plan from a different angle. An all-out invasion of Southern Europe, with no diversions of troops for a Second Front in France, with help from Tito’s guerillas, and the cooperation of the Hungarian and possibly also the Rumanian army, would probably have shortened the war and benefited the Allies even if after the war they were intending to relinquish Eastern Europe to the Soviet Union.

By 1943 Yugoslavia was indeed an important potential asset to the Allies. Although since the spring of 1941 the country was under German occupation, it was by no means under complete German control. Yugoslavia is a mountainous country, ideal for guerilla warfare, and the Germans were meeting constant resistance from the guerilla groups of two military leaders, Colonel Draza Mihailovic and Marshal Tito. The Allies welcomed any help they could get against

the Germans; the only trouble in Yugoslavia was that Mihailovic and Tito were diametrically opposed in their political views. Mihailovic was a right-wing royalist and an extreme Serb nationalist. He was a friend of Great Britain and France, but he dreaded Russia and Communism. His guerilla troops, the Cetniks, fought to preserve the country from German as well as Russian domination.

Tito, on the other hand, was of Croatian and Slovenian descent. He had started life as the son of a poor peasant farmer in the AustroHungarian Empire. In his childhood he had seen peasant demonstrations against Hungarian rule — in 1867 Hungary had gained her autonomy from Austria — mostly because of high taxes. As a young man, Tito left his young wife and family to seek work in Austria as an industrial worker. In Austria he met Social Democrats who first introduced him to the concepts of Marxism. Subsequently he worked in the steelworks of the Ruhr region and espoused the cause of the working classes. Back in Hungary, he was recruited into the AustroHungarian Army where he hated the rigid discipline, but nevertheless achieved the rank of non-commissioned officer. In World War I he was sent to the Russian Front and became a prisoner of war. It was in Russia that he became a member of the Communist party. He married in Russia and came back to Hungary in 1920 to find to his disappointment that the Communist takeover under Béla Kun had been unsuccessful.

In the new state of Yugoslavia, which included large portions of formerly Hungarian areas, he secretly organized a Yugoslav Communist party. Actually, in his Croatian homeland the peasants were very conservative and not very keen on social changes. Tito received monetary support from the Comintern until 1937, but after that time he worked without foreign support. In 1948 he was to break with Stalin and establish his own version of a Communist state.

In January 1942 Tito formed his Partisan Brigade and soon they were engaged in a bitter fight against attacking German forces in the Bosnian Hills near Sarajevo. The Partisans fought bravely under

cruel conditions. They fought with weapons captured from German and Italian forces. For a while the Cetniks and Tito's Partisans cooperated in a common effort to liberate the country, but it soon became evident that Tito and Mihailovic did not see eye to eye. Tito was hopeful that he would receive aid from Russia to help his Partisans wage the war against Germany. Mihailovic and his Cetniks on the other hand, sometimes collaborated with the Italians.

In Hungary we had no enmity towards the Yugoslavs and hoped that the Partisans would help the advance of the Allies in Southern Europe. Not realising the insurmountable differences between Mihailovic and Tito, the Hungarian general Istvan Ujszászi contacted Mihailovic, telling him that the Hungarian Army was ready to help him if the Allies reached the Balkans, and asking him to stop the Yugoslav army from entering Hungarian territory. The request was firmly refused by London and by the Yugoslav government in exile. Our dream of an Allied invasion through the Balkans did not come true, but in less than a year, Tito's Partisans did render Leslie an important service: they helped him elude the Germans and escape to Italy.

The Allies were anxious to enlist the services of both guerilla troops and urged Mihailovic and Tito to come to an agreement in the face of a common enemy, but it soon became evident that the Allies would have to choose one or the other. The British at first supported Mihailovic because he was not a Communist, but eventually, when they received information that Mihailovic had made prisoner exchange deals with the Italians and even with the Germans, they decided to back Tito instead. Tito for his part welcomed the support, having for months begged the Russians in vain for aid.

Now, in 1943, the differences between Mihailovic and Tito had turned to bitter enmity, and Mihailovic was bent on wiping out the Partisans, while Tito began hunting down the Cetniks. Not wanting to fight their own countrymen, more and more Cetniks changed sides.

Although in London there was a Royalist Yugoslav emigré government whose representative in occupied Yugoslavia was Mihailovic, the British high command was beginning to think that Tito was more useful to them in winning the war. These views were confirmed when in May 1943 Captains Deakin and Stewart and a small party were parachuted into Montenegro, Tito's headquarters. Captain Deakin returned from his mission, reporting that the military achievements of Tito's forces were worth investigating. Based on his firsthand knowledge of the situation, he stated that in his opinion the military value of the Partisans was greater than that of the Cetniks. Churchill, occupied with plans for the invasion of Italy, wanted to make as much trouble as possible for the Germans, and exploited this opportunity by having his son Randolph dropped into occupied Yugoslavia to confer with Tito. Meanwhile Britain still sent supplies to Mihailovic, angering Tito. However, by mid-June the Cetniks were found to be hopelessly compromised by their dealings with the Axis, and Britain decided to transfer her support completely to Tito. Mihailovic now felt betrayed. To this day he remains a controversial figure. His supporters include hundreds of American airmen whom he saved in 1944 from German captivity. His enemies are equally positive about his villainy. Tito expressed his view in 1946 when he had him tried and executed by a firing squad.

In order to win the war, Britain was forced to treat each nation or group according to its usefulness in the war effort. The Allied support of Tito is understandable in the context of the exigencies of war, but its long-range effects have proved to be disastrous. Recent events have shown the deep-seated enmities between different national groups and religions in the Balkans. Allied policies that created Yugoslavia from a group of incompatible nations after World War I confirmed the artificial state by supporting strongman Tito and thus caused many decades of suffering to a variety of ethnic groups.

Another group that performed a useful service for the Allies was the Zionist Organisation. The SOE, which needed safe houses and contacts in German-occupied Europe, drove a bargain with Zionist leaders who could provide them with such contacts. A. C. Simonds, a member of SOE, organized the network with the help of Lt. Colonel Sir Ronald Wingate whom he had known before the war in Palestine. The bargain was, for every Ally they rescued, the Jews could bring out one Jew. Some 25 Jewish SOE agents went to work, among them the Hungarian poet Hannah Szenes and a man called Nussbacher. Both were dropped into Yugoslavia on June 14, 1943. They both reached Budapest and made contact with the Jewish colony in Hungary. Szenes had been recruited into the Women's auxiliary Air Force; Nussbacher passed himself off as an ordinary Jew. Unfortunately, after the 1944 German occupation, they were discovered by extreme rightist Arrow Cross members and arrested. It was later reported that Hannah Szenes had been executed. Today she is remembered on a memorial tablet in her honour in Lambeth Town Hall. When Eichmann found out about the operation, he too wanted to drive a bargain with the Allies: he proposed releasing Jews in quantity at the rate of 100,000 Jews for 1000 lorries and other supplies. The Allies drew the line at doing business with Eichmann. It was Sergeant Nussbacher who insisted that they should not go through with such a deal. After all, the lorries would be used against our allies the Russians. Sergeant Nussbacher's subsequent fate highlights the ironies involved in relationships with the Russians. When the Soviet army reached Budapest, he emerged from hiding and reported to Russian headquarters as a friendly Allied agent and offered his help. The Russians showed their gratitude by arresting him on the spot. He was tortured and sent to a concentration camp in Russia. It was not until months after the war that he managed to extricate himself from the clutches of the NKVD.

But in June 1943 Russia was still an ally whose goodwill and approval were essential for winning the war and for negotiating

with Hungary. The Molotov telegram of June 7, 1943 (See Ch. 6, p. 105-106) concerning Hungarian peace-feelers clarified the Russian position and gave Britain the green light for a more favourable policy toward Hungary. In a note dated June 16th Roberts discusses the telegram and how it compares with Britain's own views. He deals with the four major points of the telegram, 1. The requirement of unconditional surrender, 2. The return of occupied territories, 3. Indemnity for war damage, and 4. Punishment of those responsible for the war:

I do not think we need quarrel with the Soviet thesis that the Hungarian people must share some degree of responsibility with their rulers or with the four principles laid down in paragraph 3. We are ourselves committed to (1) and to (2) in so far as such a return is desired by our Allies. We have some hope that the Czechs will be sensible enough to agree to some frontier rectification in areas where the Hungarian population predominates. (2) would not commit us to an integral return of Transylvania to Roumania and we should, I think, agree with the Russians that the Vienna Award was not "fully justified". (3) and (4) are under questions, on the detailed application of which we and the Russians may not see eye to eye, but we need not quarrel with the general principles expressed. (Doc 10)

It would have heartened all of us if we had known that British decision makers were contemplating some rectification, however minor, of the injustices of Trianon.

If the British had doubts about Russia's designs on Eastern Europe, they allowed themselves to be soothed by a sentence in the telegram in which the Russians stated that the Soviet Government

“stands for the preservation and independence of the German Satellite States.”

In the light of Soviet reactions, British authorities began in June to draft new approaches to the Hungarian peace initiative. In the June 16th note Roberts suggests that Britain “introduce the agreed modification in our propaganda policy, informing the U.S. and Soviet Governments that we are doing so. In point of fact this will not mean any very noticeable change.” Further, he suggests that Britain thank the Soviets for their communication and ask them for information. He notes: “They have a distinguished communist, Rakoczy, (sic) in Moscow and I should be surprised if their contacts with Hungary are not at least as good as our own” (Doc 10). This sentence would have been read with painful outrage in Hungary: the “distinguished Communist” was not Rákóczy, the family name of one of the great 18th century champions of Hungarian liberty, but Rákosi, one of the hated perpetrators of the 1919 Communist coup.

A much tougher approach is reflected in a private cypher to London from “A.D.3.” dated June 6th, 1943, demanding anti-Axis action on the part of Hungarians before negotiations can take place, and taking “every opportunity of introducing defeatist propaganda through Hungarian contacts.” The writer of the cypher reflects that allowing a German occupation of Hungary might not be such a bad thing for the Allied cause. “It may even be that German occupation would greatly increase our prospects of success” (Doc 9). Such was the war. One country’s national tragedy was another’s tactical advantage.

Churchill had his own problems with the Russians: they needed war supplies urgently and Britain was unable to satisfy their demands. The Italian campaign left no spare supplies to be shipped to Russia. Then he had to break it to Stalin that the Second Front would not be opened in 1943. Stalin was furious and Churchill knew why. The Russian leader thought that the best way to keep the

western Allies from landing in the Balkans was to keep them busy on the Second Front in France.

After Veress' return from Istanbul, Kállay continued his efforts to extricate Hungary from the war. He intensified his efforts to bring back Hungarian troops from the Russian Front and met with some success in spite of the difficulty of disengaging them from German units with which they were intermingled.

The Prime Minister also continued his search for possible allies in his attempt to leave the Axis. In April, 1943 he visited Rome where he had an audience with the Pope and also met with Mussolini. Unfortunately, Mussolini saw no advantage in seeking a separate peace. To desert Germany seemed to him not only dishonourable, but also disastrous. He assured Kállay of his good will, but he could offer no practical help.

Earlier Kállay had sent a memorandum to Pope Pius XII which was in effect a "Cry for Help." When he had his audience with the Pope, they both agreed that Germany had lost the war, and that the task of the Roman Catholic Church was to save all the people of Europe, not just the Catholics. The Pope condemned National Socialism as no better than Bolshevism. He described it as an inhuman system which was brutal not only to the Jews, but also to its own people. Kállay returned empty-handed but determined to continue the struggle for surrender.

VIII

The Italian Campaign: Hopes Kindled And Snuffed Out

The summer of 1943 was the last of the old family summers. It started at the end of June when Louis and I attended Dalma's fourth form final examination at Városmajor elementary school. As was customary on this festive occasion at the end of each school year, the classroom was decorated with flowers, the children, dressed in crisp white dresses embroidered in patriotic red white and green, sat demurely at their desks, surrounded by admiring parents, waiting to be examined by a tense, smiling teacher, a tense, severe principal, and a relaxed government inspector. As the questions were answered in more or less halting tones, the audience smiled and clapped vigorously, remembering similar ordeals from their own childhood. Finally, with a sigh of unmistakable relief, the teacher called upon the music teacher to show the children's progress in the vocal arts. Mothers placed handkerchiefs at the ready as the children started to sing the National Anthem. Once more we listened to the words which echo Hungary's tragic past: "God bless our nation and give us a happy future after so much past suffering. This nation has done penance for both past and future sins." We wept and smiled at the children's faces, and made plans for the summer. We did not know how many more years of penance the future held for us.

In July Dalma went off to her grandmother's house in Beregszász to soak up some sunshine and country air. We

stayed in Budapest to listen to news of the war. Leslie was tense; the British had established July 20th as their deadline for receiving a high ranking military officer for surrender talks. The date was fast approaching, and such an officer was still not to be found.

On July 10 came the big news: The Allies were landing in Sicily. The invasion electrified the country and heartened Kállay. It also made leaving the Axis more urgent and feasible. It was now possible to send a message to Istanbul: "The requested staff officer would soon be despatched to Turkey."

But in spite of optimism, problems still remained. This is how Veress described them:

"The Military were not under the authority of the Premier-led group. Moreover, the Prime Minister and the Chief of Staff would have liked to see the military situation riper for Hungary to take the plunge. Although Kállay, a proud Magyar, was hesitant about accepting the humiliating formula of unconditional surrender, both he and his advisors were determined to preserve the Western connection.

"Also, there was not sufficient understanding between the Prime Minister and his Chief of Staff, General Szombathelyi. Both would have liked to see the military situation more ripe, but the Chief of Staff was much more set against military talks than the Prime Minister. Not that General Szombathelyi was disloyal. He was ready to support Kállay; but he was also a military realist. He said: did the position of the Allied forces justify the risk which Hungary would take by entering into talks on a military level? The British were still only in Sicily; was that a good enough reason for Hungary to take the plunge and face Hitler's vengeance unprotected by these distant Allies? He was convinced, and Kállay was inclined to agree with him, that the Allies would find it very difficult to land in Italy, let alone win in a short time.

“Kállay himself preferred diplomatic negotiations to military action. Through his diplomats he was in constant contact with the British and the Americans. These diplomatic spokesmen included Barcza, the former minister to the Court of St. James, BakáchBessenyei, Baranyay and Radvánszky. In Switzerland he contacted the American representative M. Dulles and Mr. Royall Tyler, the American finance Adviser to the League of Nations. The reply he received concerning Hungarian frontiers, was that the decision would have to be postponed until the Peace Conference after the war. Furthermore, he was advised that Italy’s surrender would still provide Hungary with her last chance of escaping relatively unhurt. The Italian surrender would render the Tripartite Pact legally invalid. They advised Hungary to take advantage of the legal pretext and withdraw from the war. (At that time there were no Hungarian fighting units in Russia anyway.) Tyler even advised Hungary to face a German occupation if need be. To this suggestion, Kállay’s answer was always a flat no.

“But the British themselves had begun to simmer down. When Barcza passed Kállay’s message to Halifax, Halifax indicated that London was no longer expecting Hungary to ‘jump out ‘ immediately.”

In July the Resistance Group was reinforced by the appointment of Colonel Kádár as head of the Intelligence Counter Espionage in the Ministry of Defence. He is not to be confused with János Kádár who became the head of the Communist Party after the 1956 Revolution. Colonel Kádár fully backed the Group’s policy and made it possible for a reliable and well-qualified staff officer, Colonel Szöke, to be selected as a military attaché in Ankara It would be his job to begin the long-delayed staff talks with the British. But at this critical stage there was a sudden hitch: the Germans switched Szöke’s assignment, and he was sent to Sofia instead of Ankara. The Germans replaced him with Otto Hatz, a pro-German officer. Now the search had to begin all over again to find a way to send a staff

officer without arousing the suspicions of the new Nazi Security Chief E. Kaltenbrunner, successor to Heydrich, who had been killed in 1942 by Czech resistance fighters.

The advance of the Allies through the Italian peninsula for the next twelve months was fraught with setbacks and frustrations. It took a month until the last German soldier had been, in the words of General Alexander, “flung out of Sicily.” Then came the arduous task of preparing a landing on the mainland. Events seemed to favour the Allies when on July 25th Mussolini was ousted. His successor, Marshall Pietro Badoglio, although publicly loyal to Germany, secretly negotiated with the Allies. But the talks hit many snags. Like Kállay, Badoglio balked at the thought of “unconditional surrender.”

In Budapest we received the news of the fall of Mussolini with no very strong feelings. We felt he was not a villain on the level of Hitler. We thought of him rather as a somewhat pathetic megalomaniac. He would have been all right if he had not mixed with that scoundrel Hitler. After all, he did make Italy cleaner, safer, and more tolerant of the Jews. We would no longer see his big blown up face on the newsreel screens as he addressed the jubilant crowds from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia. Now that he was gone, we asked ourselves, what could be expected of Badoglio? Would he make peace with the Allies, and was this the beginning of the end of our national nightmare? Many thought so on the 25th July. Aylmer Macartney in October 15th describes the sudden wave of optimism: “All Hungary jumped to the conclusion that within a few days Italy would have joined hands with the Allies, whose triumphant forces would be within a few days’ march from the frontier of Hungary” (II, 169).

Kállay could not afford to share this wild optimism, not as long as the King of Italy and Badoglio continued to assure Hitler of their loyalty. At the end of July Kállay received a message that Badoglio was secretly seeking contact with the Allies to negotiate Italy’s

surrender. The Prime Minister held discussions with the leaders of the Smallholders' Party, Bajcsi-Zsilinszky and Zoltán Tildy, as well as with the heads of the Social Democratic Party, Anna Kéthly and Károly Peyer, about the country's policy after the fall of Mussolini. They all agreed that we should be cautious and not provoke a German invasion. They all supported the idea, however, of continuing contacts with the Allies through Istanbul.

In the course of the summer, the slow advance of the Allies killed our hopes of a speedy end to the war. But it was that very slowness that made the British now more insistent that Hungary take positive steps towards surrender. A terse message from Istanbul indicated that the Hungarians should take definite action by July 20, or else the British saw no earthly reason for maintaining contact with the Government Group.

The British message had the force of an ultimatum. It was no longer possible to temporize. By now both the Chief of Staff and the Head of Intelligence were for sending a staff officer to Istanbul in the unrealistic hope of arranging for an Allied parachute landing in Hungary. Kállay still thought that the danger of a German occupation outweighed the risky and doubtful benefits of premature staff talks. But he knew that the British connection must be saved at all costs, now that Italy and the Adriatic were within the grasp of the Allies. So he turned to Leslie Veress once more, this time giving him high level negotiating powers, hoping that this provision would satisfy the British need for "action."

By August the Hungarian leadership was ready for "action." Veress described a luncheon given by the Finnish ambassador which he attended in early August shortly before leaving for Istanbul:

"A number of leading cabinet ministers were among the guests; the chairman of the Government-Party, a close relative of Horthy was also present; so were a number of right-wing political and press personalities, known for their pro-German views. Italy after the fall of Mussolini was, of course, the main topic of conversation. I have

never before or since witnessed such unanimity of views expressed by Hungarians. There was no doubt that Italy would change sides and that Hungary must save herself by following the Italian example. Such were the views of the governing establishment at the end of July, 1943. It only remained for the emissary to translate them into action.”

While Veress was planning his mission to Istanbul, Churchill was planning to leave London for a conference with Roosevelt in Quebec. After the fall of Mussolini, Churchill wanted to discuss the future conduct of the war with the Allies. His goal was to push forward to the North of Italy and then on to the Balkans. He felt it was of utmost urgency to get agents and commandos into Albania and Yugoslavia. Field Marshall Smuts was in complete agreement with Churchill. Roosevelt was undecided. During the Italian campaign he was sometimes for a Balkan invasion, and sometimes against it Churchill now felt that cables were inadequate to make decisions and suggested a personal meeting of Allied heads of state. Quebec was chosen for the conference which was code named QUADRANT.

While the Allies were planning the war in Quebec, Hitler's allies were planning to get out of it. The only difference was that each of the Axis countries had its own separate plan which it did not want to share with the others. Kállay had tried to team up first with Italy, and then with Rumania with no success. Rumania's opposition leader Maniu rejected Kállay's approaches because he was planning to enlist Allied support for his country's claims on Transylvania. On 13th August 1943 Maniu sent a message to Stockholm for transmission to the American and British governments. In it he assured the Allies as leader of the opposition, that as soon as the British and American forces reached the Danube, the right-wing dictatorship would be overthrown. He asked the British and Americans not to encourage sabotage in their broadcasts to Rumania because the

German army was still very strong, and disorder would provide an excuse for Hungarians to occupy the whole of Transylvania and for Bulgarians to occupy Dobrudja. Furthermore, Maniu suggested a population exchange, bringing Rumanian minorities from Istria and the Balkans to Transylvania which was now inhabited mostly by Hungarians. In the decades that followed the war, Hungarians had more to fear from Rumanian rule than Maniu had from Hungarian plans. The Hungarian population of Transylvania under the Rumanian Communist system suffered discrimination, a destruction of their national culture, deportation and imprisonment

If the Allies had hopes of a federation for the countries of South East Europe, 1943 was not the time to start planning this venture. The war was closing in on the small nations of Europe, and each was looking to its own survival. In Budapest air raids were becoming a way of life. At the end of August the Ministry of Education decided to delay the opening of school in September. We thought it best to leave Dalma in Beregszász. She was worried about starting gymnasium late. I sent her schoolbooks and she listened daily to the radio which provided lessons for the children. In October she began to enjoy her forced vacation because it was time for the wine harvest and the family moved to the cottage in the vineyard to supervise operations. She wrote enchanted descriptions of waking up in the early morning and looking down from the top of the hill on the mistcovered town, seeing only the church spires glowing in the sunrise. She wrote about piles of fragrant sticky grapes, barrels overflowing with must, bonfires in the evening, and roasting bacon and onions on a spit. It was to be her last visit to Beregszász, and the family's last wine harvest. After the war Beregszász became part of the Soviet Union, and the family home was appropriated by a Russian dignitary.

In Budapest, we tried to cope with the practical frustrations of the war. In the mornings we drank our "Planta" tea, an evil tasting herbal infusion. For lunch we ate our soybean sausage and dreamed

of roast pig. I bought yards and yards of thick blackout material to cover all the windows at night if the night patrol saw a shard of light from our apartment, he came ringing the doorbell with a warning to cover up." At night the streets were supposed to be pitch dark to prevent enemy planes from spotting us. During the day I suppose we had to take our chances. When the sirens went off, our basement storeroom became an air raid shelter, and I became the air raid supervisor for our apartment building. I liked the job because it enabled me to stay out of the musty shelter while I was "checking" to make sure that everyone else went down.

In the afternoons I often saw Leslie for a few minutes. He was preparing for another trip to Istanbul. He seemed to be more tense and excited about this trip than I had ever seen him before. What we are doing now will make it into the history books, he told me.

IX

Second Mission To Istanbul: Churchill Clears The Line

Veress: "The real purpose of my journey to Istanbul was camouflaged. Officially I was taking volumes of Corvinas, the famous illuminated manuscripts of King Mathias, and other rare books and cultural materials to the Smyrna World Fair. They were all safely packed in huge diplomatic bags and wooden boxes. The personnel who were entrusted to take care of the materials were told to keep a very watchful eye on them. My worries were of a totally different nature: to save our relationship with the Allies and achieve meaningful discussions on the eve of Italy's imminent surrender. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister were in agreement with the Chief of Staff and hoped eventually to send two staff officers to Istanbul. But Prime Minister Kállay was still afraid that sending two Hungarian high-ranking army officers would not go unnoticed by the Germans who were still strong enough to retaliate. Germans had infiltrated the Hungarian General staff, and a leakage of information would certainly provoke Hitler into an invasion of Hungary. When I left for Istanbul. Kállay was still undecided about sending the staff officers, and I was given the following orders: if the final decision was that the staff officers would not be sent, I was empowered to negotiate on behalf of the General Staff as well, and I would receive a cipher telegram with the words: 'Veress should buy missing copies of Times.'

“My mandate was certainly vague, but not restricted. My moves were dependent on developments in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. With Italy’s surrender, we thought the German South Eastern Front would collapse.

‘With the help of A. Szegedy-Maszák, the Chief of the Political Section, and Ullein-Reviczky, Head of the Press Section, I succeeded in getting Prime Minister Kállay’s signature on the following statement, which I was to memorise and convey to the British:

Hungary renews her undertaking that if the Western Allies reach the Frontiers of Hungary, she would in no case oppose them, but would turn against Germany to the extent of placing her airports and transport systems at the disposal of the Allies. She would accept the guidance and instruction of the Allies, and although at the moment no General Staff Officer was available, she would establish wireless contact and provide information. Hungary would make it possible for the Allies to come into her territory if there were no Rumanian, Czechoslovak, or Russian troops involved. She asks that this offer should be taken as an advance notification of unconditional surrender, and asks the British to communicate their ‘preliminary condition.’

On the eve of the Italian ‘unconditional surrender’ there was no way that the Allies would accept anything less than ‘unconditional surrender’ from Hungary.

‘This time there was no German courier plane to Istanbul, and I had to travel by train for several hot and bothersome days through German occupied Rumania and Bulgaria, arriving in Istanbul on 10th August, 1943. While waiting in Istanbul for the Times’ telegram, I conferred with Dezső Ujváry the Hungarian Consul General in

Istanbul who was a trusted member of the 'Group.' I told him I knew Kállay's intentions, as well as his anxieties and hesitations, and I interpreted the mood in Budapest as being ripe for decisive action.

"At last the pre-arranged telegram arrived at the Hungarian Legation. A young first secretary delivered to me the decoded text: 'Veress should buy the missing copies of the Times.' He smilingly asked, 'Why should such an innocuous message be sent as a top secret telegram?' He guessed that there must be rather more to the telegram than it appeared. He was right: it was a signal compelling me to make decisions in the name of my country's distant government without consultations. I was faced with lone decisions and burdened with a heavy responsibility.

"Now I could go to meet the representatives of the British government. I asked Ujváry and the go-betweens to arrange a meeting with the SOE officers whom I had met in March. I duly met the SOE officers and asked them to make it possible for Ujváry and me to raise the surrender discussions to a higher diplomatic level. They promised to make the arrangements, and I returned to my rooms in the Pera Palace Hotel to wait for the message.

"I went to bed both apprehensive and excited at the prospect of meeting the British representatives the next day. At dawn I was awakened by the familiar noise of flocks of sheep rushing through the streets, donkey cries and street vendors selling their vegetables. I opened the shutters; the sun was already high, and the ice cream and refreshment vendors were crying their merchandise: 'dondurma, dondurma!' They carried the sweet drink in tanks on their backs, dispensing the sherbet to thirsty customers through an attached mbe.

"At last we got the message that we could meet SterndaleBennett, Councillor of the British Legation. To pass the time until the meeting, I reviewed my memorised orders from the Prime Minister. I went down and wandered around the nearby streets, thinking of my message and how to convey it to the Councillor. Occupied with my thoughts, I hardly noticed a lean street cat under my feet, pleading

lamentably. I could not give her anything, I only caressed her bony back.

“It was on 16th August, 1943 that in the company of Consul General Ujváry I met Mr. Sterndale-Bennett to conduct the first high level diplomatic exchange between Britain and Hungary. Beside the three of us, there was no one else present, contrary to later assertions by other Hungarians who claim to have been there. The meeting took place in a secluded house owned or rented by the British authorities.

“After the usual polite formalities to put us at ease, the discussions began. Our Consul-General and I informed SterndaleBennett about Hungary’s readiness to surrender to the Allies on the basis already agreed in March. I gave him my memorised message composed and signed by the Prime Minister and explained the specific details. We understood the requirement of ‘unconditional surrender’, but it was still painful to agree to this term officially. I asked the British command to explain what that term meant exactly, and what they expected us to do until the Allies reached our frontiers. I stated my government’s willingness to refrain from sending troops to the Russian Front and pointed out that at the present time there were no longer any fighting Hungarian units in Russia We would also replace pro-German high ranking officers in the Army. Then I explained that although no General Staff Officer was at present available for discussions, I was authorised to represent not only my government and the Group, but also the Chief of Staff. Ujváry then testified that I was indeed empowered to represent Hungary’s government and military command.

“The most difficult part of my mission was to convey the government’s desire that the Allied occupation forces should not include Russian, Czech, or Rumanian troops, and that there should be no bombing of Hungary. These requests sounded very much like ‘conditions’ to ‘unconditional surrender.’ I also emphasised that the cease-fire should be kept secret for fear of German repercussions. To make up for the absence of a General Staff officer, I renewed our

offer to establish wireless contact with the Allies to provide a vehicle for discussions and information. I invited the Allies to state their terms and tell us what they expected of us.

“Sterndale-Bennett seemed to understand our point of view. He said we would have an answer from London concerning our memorandum. Then he elaborated his own view of our suggestions. The Hungarian government should not think that the Allies would act without letting the Russians know about Hungary’s intentions. If the Russians discovered it, there would be an unpleasant confrontation. The war was a joint operation with the Russians, and all information must be shared. I assured him that we understood that point. About bombing Hungary, ‘one can’t interfere with that’ he said. ‘It all depends on the strategic situation.’ He did appreciate the fact that actual surrender was not possible until the Allies reached Hungary’s frontiers.

“After I conveyed the Prime Minister’s messages, I thanked the Councillor for listening to us and then requested a meeting with the British Ambassador himself so that the surrender offer might be raised to the appropriate level. I expressed my hope that the Councillor would arrange such a meeting. That, I said half jokingly, was my one ‘condition’ for ‘unconditional surrender.’ The Councillor did not bat an eye, but he was noticeably impressed. He assured us again about a reply from London, and we left with a friendly, polite handshake.

“I was to wait in Istanbul for an answer. There could be no communication even in cypher with Budapest **The Hungarian Prime Minister did not actually know at which dramatic moment he had in fact surrendered to the Allies ‘unconditionally.’**

“At the Hungarian Embassy they knew that I had come to the Smyrna Fair, and while I was waiting impatiently for a reply from London, I was uncomfortably aware that they were wondering why I was staying so long in Istanbul. Turkish security men were also busy secretly, and sometimes not so secretly, watching me. I

felt I was attracting attention when all I wanted was to blend into the crowd.

“The answer took over three weeks to arrive. In the meantime I had to do something to make myself less conspicuous, so I allowed myself to be entertained at various diplomatic functions. Since Turkey was a neutral country, these functions were usually attended by intelligence agents from both the Axis and the Allied powers. On one occasion it happened that a British agent and a German agent both turned up wearing identical suits. Having just arrived from their wartorn countries, they had both gone shopping to the same shop in Istanbul. The guests who knew both men were much amused. The two agents looked at each other and rushed home covered in new outfits—and embarrassment

“Once I was invited by some Japanese diplomats to a sumptuous luncheon at the Park Hotel. I am not quite sure whose idea it was to invite me. It could have been the Germans or the Japanese themselves who were curious about Hungary’s attitude to the war at the present moment. All I know is that they did their utmost to get me to talk pro or contra.

“Once at the Hungarian Embassy I had coffee with the notorious German Ambassador von Papen. On another occasion I saw the Hungarian Ambassador Wörnle and Papen listening to the BBC news. Von Papen told me he always listened to the BBC news. Long after the war when I read Papen’s memoirs, I was astonished to read his account of an interview with Horthy in 1943. On his way to Ankara, Papen had stopped in Budapest and went to see Horthy. According to Papen’s account, Horthy told him that he saw no hope of a German victory and that he had already put out certain peace-feelers in order to ascertain the intentions of the Western powers.¹

During the same visit he also met Kállay and the Minister of Interior Keresztes-Fischer, who showed him a document which was a report of a conversation between Nazi Party emissaries and a group of Hungarian ‘nationalists’, (probably members of the extreme right-

wing Arrow Cross organisation) in which they discussed the possibility of breaking up Hungary into its constituent provinces and incorporating them into Germany. Admiral Horthy and his cabinet were referred to in the grossest terms. 'I agreed to make representations to Berlin,' wrote von Papen, 'which I did on the spot, as the Hungarian Prime minister, M. Kállay had no contact with the German Minister. The only apparent result of my intervention was that Veessenmayer, one of the chief Nazi schemers in Budapest was appointed German Minister.' I wonder what was going on in von Papen's mind as he was stirring his coffee and watching me across the table.

'While I was wined and dined—and sitting on pins and needles— in Istanbul, Kállay was labouring at home to bring back Hungarian troops from Russia. He sent Minister of War Csatay to German headquarters to ask for the withdrawal of the Hungarian contingents, which were included in the German army. At that time the Hungarian troops were no longer fighting; they served only as occupying forces. His explanation for the request was that the troops were needed at home. Hoping to gain his objective by making some concessions, Csatay on his own initiative, and with the approval of Chief of Staff Szombathelyi, promised that he would send some troops to the Balkans, a promise of which Kállay strongly disapproved. In any case, Fieldmarshall Keitel received Csatay's proposal with the greatest suspicion. He had grave misgivings about the loyalty of the Hungarian Government. All the same, he agreed to allowing the Hungarian units to leave Russia. He thought it would be useful to send them later to the Adriatic coast if Italian troops had to be demobilised. The Germans were already fearing what Churchill was vainly hoping: an Allied attack on the Adriatic.'

Kállay was in a very difficult situation. While abroad he was pursuing his foreign policy of secret surrender, inside the country he had to keep under strict control both the extreme right and the extreme left elements. Jewish leaders, fearing German retaliation,

begged him not to provoke the Germans, but he felt he could not allow troops to be sent to Yugoslavia.

Chief of Staff Szombathelyi, for his part did his best to make the army 'German proof. To guard against a takeover by officers of German origin and other rightwing elements, he set up a body of reliable military personnel who would be responsible only to the Regent. The person he selected to lead this group was Iván Héjjas, an efficient, powerful leader, with a strong following among the peasantry, and one who had played a key role in suppressing the 1919 Communist coup of Béla Kun. Szombathelyi was preparing for the worst: even if we succeed in avoiding a German occupation, he asked, what of the Russians? Would the West save us from the Red Army?

Hungarian Communists who had fled to Russia in 1919 were busy trying to organize sabotage activities in Hungary with very little success. Their leader Mátyás Rákosi even went to see Lieutenant General Stomm, who was then a prisoner of war in the Krasnojarsk camp, to press him to become head of the resistance brigade. Stomm was willing to work against the fascists, but he refused to act against his Regent. The Communists also sent a few hard-core agitators into Hungary to recruit people for sabotage action. They had no success with this venture either because the people had a horror of Communism. Their debacle did not stop them from creating a myth after the war that they had been active as partisans in Hungary throughout the war.

Meanwhile time was running out for Veress. His cover, the Smyrna Fair was starting, and he could not stay on in Istanbul without arousing suspicions. On August 28th, he had one more brief discussion with Sterndale-Bennett, and explained to him that to keep his cover plausible, he had to leave for the Smyrna fair on 5 September, but would be able to return to Istanbul for one day on September 9. After another week of waiting without receiving any reply from Britain, on September 5th, he was forced to leave on the

long journey to Smyrna The Fair was to end on 10th September. After that date he would have to return to Hungary. Thirty years later Leslie found out the reason for the British delay:

“What I did not know at the time was that during my agonizing three weeks of waiting, the Allied heads of state were at Quebec for the Quadrant conference. At the time of my meeting with SterndaleBennett, both Churchill and Eden were away from London, although Eden returned earlier than Churchill. From recently released British Foreign Office documents it emerges that the Hungarian declaration of surrender was first studied in London during this period by the Foreign Office and by the Vice Chiefs of Staff, and evaluated by the Acting Chief of Staff in Quebec at the Quadrant Conference.

“Originally Churchill had intended to return to London immediately after Quadrant ended on August 24: ‘It is only in the event of some unexpected development in Italy or elsewhere which would make it desirable for me and the President to be close together that I should prolong my stay.’ Events in Europe during the next few days made him stay. On August 20th 1943, in a telegram coded Welfare 261, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff requested an immediate ‘most secret’ telegram from Quebec to Vice chiefs in London ‘to state from a military point of view the request to be made to Hungary in the event of the “initiative” (Veress’ communication of 16th August) succeeding, and if there are specific questions which ought to be dealt with.’² Then on August 25th, a Most Secret telegram arrived from Eden in London, summarising the terms of Hungary’s surrender offer as stated by ‘a permanent official of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Veress Laszlo.’ Eden informs the Prime Minister that Veress’ mandate has been checked out and he did in fact represent ‘a group consisting of the Hungarian Prime Minister, Minister of Interior, chief of General Staff and the Chief of Political Department of the Foreign Office.’ He emphasises the urgency of action ‘as Veress’ cover was a visit to Smyrna Fair and he could not delay his return to Budapest beyond August 29.’” (Doc 14).

Churchill arrived in Washington on September 1st and was entertained at the White House as the guest of the President. On 3rd September he received the news that Badoglio had accepted Eisenhower's surrender terms. There were now enough 'unexpected developments' to make Churchill stay close to Roosevelt.

The Quebec Conference had done little to advance Churchill's dream of a Balkan invasion. The highest priority in the talks was "Overlord" the planned invasion of Normandy. D-Day was set for May 1944. So suspicious were the Americans of British preference for a Mediterranean strategy that there was even a suggestion that the invasion must not be entrusted to a British commander. Throughout the Staff talks, the British met stonewall resistance from the Americans against any extension of operations in Italy, let alone in the Balkans. Churchill had some success with General Marshall, the American Chief of Staff who had always been opposed to Churchill's strategies. Marshall finally agreed that if too much material was not taken away from the build-up of "Overlord," then the successful ending of the Sicilian campaign could be quickly followed by an attack on the Italian mainland. Moreover, he was in favour of a bold seaborne assault in the Naples area which delighted Churchill. But the general thrust of the discussions opposed Churchill's plans. Eisenhower's projected landing beyond Salerno was adamantly resisted. The Americans said that every diversion would weaken "Overlord". (Actually, this view did not apply to every diversion. While pushing "Overlord," the Americans also decided on a landing in the South of France.) In vain did Alan Brooke enlarge on the advantages to be derived in France from tying down the Germans in the Balkans. He wrote in his diary of "stupidity, pettiness and pigheadedness that were stultifying (his) long-matured scheme." Churchill was depressed and alarmed about the loss of a chance in the Aegean and the Balkans. Eisenhower was nervous. Stalin violently opposed the Italian campaign. He had been demanding a Second Front in France for over a year and accused the Americans

and the British of not doing their share. He was angry: why waste time in Italy and the Balkans? His aim after the war was to have the Balkans for himself.

For human beings there are moments when one has a chance to alter the course of one's life. For the continent of Europe, Quadrant was one such moment. When Churchill insisted on an Italian campaign followed by advance into South East Europe, he saw the chance to save Europe from decades of fear and oppression as the Iron Curtain descended. When the Allies decided to focus on Normandy and neglect the Balkans, it seemed that the fatal decision had been made. Then came the Italian surrender which coincided with the Hungarian initiative, and suddenly, there was another chance to save Europe from Communism. Churchill was intrigued, and even sceptics came to see potential in pursuing the opportunity presented.

The Hungarian message was considered in a preliminary study by the Joint Planning committee in London. Their report dated 22nd August, 1943, reveals with stark honesty the British reaction to Hungary's peace overtures. The report demonstrates the great advantages which a Hungarian surrender would provide for the Allies and lists the "requirements" Hungary should be asked to meet: deny to the Axis all communication facilities through her territory; refuse to furnish Germany with raw materials; withdraw the six to nine Hungarian air squadrons still remaining in Russia; provide facilities for Allied intelligence operations. Hungary's compliance would deprive Germany of vital communication links with the Balkans as well as with Russia, and essential raw materials such as Rumanian oil and Hungarian bauxite (Doc 11).

The report then proceeds to assess the likelihood of success in inducing Hungary to turn against Germany openly. There was no way to send British forces to Hungary to receive their surrender and save the country from a German invasion. But perhaps some judicious bombing could persuade Hungary to defect. They also

realized that the threat of bombing would be successful only if Hungary thinks that "the German reaction will weaken Germany elsewhere to such an extent that she cracks."

Hungarians were anxious to avoid a German invasion which would have destroyed the country, and annihilated the Jewish population and countless refugees from German occupied countries. But British minds were working along different lines:

From our point of view, a German invasion of Hungary would suit our book very well. During the two to three months which might be required before Germany could collect the necessary forces, overcome resistance and complete the occupation of the country, Germany would have received no benefit from Hungary and little from Rumania. During that period she would have been hard put to it to maintain her forces in the Balkans. Even after order had been restored in Hungary her position would be much worse than it is now. Moreover the diversion of German forces for the invasion and occupation of Hungary might result in a dangerous weakening of the German position elsewhere. (Doc 11)

While enumerating the disadvantages to Germany of an invasion of Hungary, the report fails to note that by occupying Hungary, Germany would actually retain one of the main benefits of the Hungarian alliance: free use of her communication system.

As for the timing of the Hungarian capitulation, the report concludes that it would be best for it to happen at the "same time as Italy surrenders, or as soon thereafter as possible."

The Planning Staff realized that Hungary might not be willing to comply with all British requirements. In that case, she might still be willing to "take certain action calculated to embarrass the

Germans to a lesser extent” such as organizing delays in transportation of German supplies or granting intelligence facilities to the Allies.

On the same day, August 22nd, the Joint Intelligence SubCommittee of the War Cabinet also produced a report on the Hungarian situation. This report provides more in-depth analysis of the significance of the Hungarian proposal. Signed by F.H.N. Davidson, F.F. Inglis, C.R.W. Lamplough, C.G. Vickers, and A. Noble, it expresses doubts that Hungary would openly capitulate at the moment, but considers such capitulation, if it happened, of great importance because of the domino effect it might create in bringing about the defection of Rumania and Bulgaria. The report notes also that “the Hungarian Government have long been anxious to get out of the war. The Hungarian people have never had much enthusiasm for it except insofar as it seemed to them to offer some chance of territorial gain.” The members of the group were well-informed about Hungary’s relations with Rumania and noted that “She is probably anxious to forestall any similar approach by Roumania” They are also cognizant of Hungary’s anxiety to avoid a Communist takeover:

‘The governing class in Hungary have had experience of Communist rule at the time of the Béla Kun regime and are, therefore, anxious to get out of the war before Communism again becomes a menace by capitulating first to Great Britain and the USA.’

The report then details the possible consequences for Germany of a Hungarian capitulation. If Rumania and Bulgaria followed suit, the effect on the German war effort would include loss of vast amounts of raw materials from the three countries, disruption of German lines of transportation to Yugoslavia and the consequent increase of guerrilla activity in that country. ‘The political and military effects of such a series of defections, coupled with the economic consequences referred to above would be such that Germany could not for long continue the war’ (Doc 13).

Eden’s telegram to Churchill (FO 5678) dated August 25, 1943,

relays Veress' message to the Prime Minister: "The Hungarian Government wished to inform the Allies that Hungary accepts unconditional surrender and is anxious to do everything to have this realised as soon as possible. He (Veress) said that the Hungarian Army was prepared to defend the frontiers of Hungary against the Germans, to give the Allies full access to and use of Hungarian airfields and other military installations and generally to collaborate with the Allies with a view to facilitating Allied occupation." Eden justifies the haste with which the interview with Sterndale-Bennett had been arranged: "Action had to be taken without delay, as Veress's cover was a visit to Smyrna Fair and he could not delay his return to Budapest beyond August 29" (Doc 14).

The prospect of Hungarian surrender was obviously attractive to the British command. The great problem was, how to make the most of the Hungarian offer without being there to receive the surrender. Churchill's answer was, let's get there as soon as possible through the Ljubljana Gap. He was still hoping that such a strategy was possible. Unfortunately, his allies did not agree with him.

The Soviet Union looked upon the Hungarian initiative with considerable distaste. On September 1st a telegram came from the British Ambassador in Moscow: "Molotov let me know that they have no objections that the British Ambassador should listen to Veress, but they find Hungary's possible capitulation still remote, and Veress' approach should be taken only as a peace-feeler."³

On September 3rd Eden was able to report to Churchill further developments in the talks with Veress:

Mr. Sterndale-Bennett saw Veress with Hungarian Consul General at Istanbul on 28th August Veress had no credentials in writing, but he and ConsulGeneral gave personal assurances that intention was serious, and that the four persons mentioned in my

telegram under reference represented the real executive power in Hungary and that the movement had the support of the Regent.... Veress said that he was returning to Izmir (Smyrna) on 5 September but expected to be back in Istanbul on 9 September and to leave the same day for Budapest.... H.M.G. consider that the approach is sufficiently serious to justify maintaining contact. I refer to Vice-Chiefs estimate of Hungary's situation. H.M.G. accordingly propose, subject to the views of the U.S. and Soviet governments, to convey to Veress a reply on the following lines: a. H.M.G. would like to see more authoritative credentials than those so far produced by Veress, although these are in fact regarded by us as genuine, b. H.M.G. would expect the Hungarian Government to make a public announcement of their acceptance of unconditional surrender, c. If time not yet ripe for announcement, the Hungarian Government should, as evidence of their good will, assist the Allies by ceasing all cooperation with Germany, d. if the Hungarian Government agree, HM.G. would be prepared to discuss ways and means with a Hungarian military representative at Istanbul as suggested by Veress. (Doc 16)

By way of reaction to the proposed British reply, a telegram from the British Ambassador in Moscow indicated on September 7th that "the Soviet Government have no objection to transmission to Veress of message based on the principle of unconditional surrender. They suggest that the message should be drawn up according to the proposals contained in sections "A" and "B" of... your telegram, but consider for tactical reasons it would be inexpedient to convey proposals in "C" and "D" particularly since Hungary has expressed

her readiness to accept unconditional surrender” (Doc 17). In other words, Moscow wanted Hungary simply to declare capitulation immediately.

Anthony Eden’s September 3rd telegram arrived in Washington on the day the Italian representative signed the terms of the Italian armistice. Churchill had a busy schedule: a Press Luncheon on the 4th, a speech at Harvard on the 6th. On the 7th September he arrived back in Washington and sent the following telegram to Eden in London:

WELFARE NO. 639
TOO. 070921Z
TOR. 070420Z

MOST SECRET CYPHER TELEGRAM
MOST IMMEDIATE — CLEAR THE LINE.

From:- Quadrant
To:- War Cabinet Office

WELFARE NO. 639 7th September, 1943 Prime
Minister to Foreign Secretary.
Most Secret and Personal.

1. Your No. 5911 of September 9 about Hungary. It is certainly most significant that the Hungarian Government who must know the inside conditions of the German Front pretty well, should be prepared to take this line. Their desertion of Germany would be of the utmost value provided it took place at the right moment. On the other hand, it would be most improvident of us to squander the Hungarian volteface and merely produce a premature outbreak followed by a German Gauleiter or super-Quisling Government installed by force. The timing is everything.

2. We should immediately consult with the emissaries to find out about their situation and endeavour to concert with them appropriate action. We should not be impatient in this matter. I should myself like to see the Balkans much riper than they are now, and for this purpose to let impending events in Italy, if they turn out well, play their part. I hope therefore the telegrams and Vice Chiefs of Staff Memorandum may be modified to meet this point. (Doc 18)

Churchill realized what some of his staff did not, that the real advantage to the Allies lay in keeping Hungary independent and actively friendly, and not in letting her be crippled by a German occupation. When drafting the British reply, Eden was still nervous about disregarding Moscow's preference for an immediate declaration of surrender. On the same day, September 7, he wired back to Churchill, explaining certain points in the message:

2. Only passage in our message which might be inconsistent with line suggested on your Welfare 639 is the reference to action "at the earliest possible moment" in paragraph 4(b) of my telegram 5911. Question is, however, complicated by Soviet attitude set out in Moscow telegram 905, which is being repeated to Washington. Soviet Government would probably prefer immediate action by Hungarians, which would compel Germany to dissipate her reserves in occupying and holding down the country. You will note that Soviet Government would like our message to be restricted to a simple repetition of unconditional surrender. As Hungarian war effort has been entirely directed against U.S.S.R. and not against

us, we must, I think, take Soviet views into account so far as we can. 3. You do not mention the President's reactions. If he shares our views, I think we should proceed with action proposed in my telegram 5911, explaining our reasons to the Russians on the lines of your Welfare 639. I feel, however, that we might have great difficulty with the Russians if we effected any further modification of our message in the sense of encouraging the Hungarians to postpone action. My immediately following telegram contains text of instructions which I propose to send to Istanbul, if you agree.

4. Matter is extremely urgent as we can only catch the emissary in Istanbul on September 9th. (Doc 20)

Eden's CONCRETE NO. 781, also dated September 7th, 1943, contains the proposed text of the message to be delivered to Veress:

Following from Foreign Secretary for Prime Minister. Following is text of message to Veress.

Please give Veress message on following lines: —

(a) H.M.G. would like to see some more authoritative credentials, which could presumably be communicated through any channel which the Hungarian Govt. thought advisable.

(b) H.M.G. will expect the Hungarian Govt. to make a public announcement of their acceptance of unconditional surrender and to take at the earliest possible moment the action originally suggested by the Hungarian Govt. and summarised in telegram from S.O.E representative at Istanbul of August 19th.

(c) if the Hungarian Govt feel that the time is not yet

ripe for such an announcement, they should as evidence of their good will assist Allies by ceasing all cooperation with Germany and by carrying out obstruction, delaying action and even possibly minor sabotage.

(d) If the Hungarian Govt. agree to (c), H.M.G. would be prepared to discuss ways and means with a Hungarian military representative at Istanbul (Constantinople) as suggested by Veres. (Initialed by Anthony Eden) (Doc 21)

Churchill studied the text and suggested only one change:

WELFARE 666

TOO 081809Z

TOR 081950Z

MOST SECRET CYPHER TELEGRAM

IMMEDIATE

From:- Quadrant

To:- Air Ministry

WELFARE 666. 8th September, 1943. Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary.

YOUR CONCRETE 781.

1. I agree with this text but I should like if possible to insert in B. after the word "make" the words "at a suitable moment".

2. Your CONCRETE 780. The President read the telegram but had no marked reaction except that he said it was all very interesting. I see no reason why you should not go forward as you propose. (Doc 22)

Churchill's insertion of the phrase "at a suitable moment" reveals his understanding of the Hungarian position and of the strategic importance of timing the surrender. J.K. Roberts in a note dated September 7, 1943 attempts to pinpoint the differences in the views expressed concerning Hungary. He shows that the Vice Chiefs of Staff do not essentially differ from the Prime Minister in the substance of the message to be sent to Veress, except possibly in their use of the term "at the earliest moment" for the timing of the surrender. With the Russians, however, he notes fundamental differences: "The Soviet Government would probably like Hungary to make a desperate gesture at this stage and so force upon the Germans the occupation of Hungary with all the drain upon German manpower which that would imply."

In a reference to the final judgment day at the conference table, he also points out that "many friends of Hungary, including Sir O. O'Malley, think that Hungary should make this desperate gesture in her own interests, as the only means of rehabilitating herself." In his concluding remarks Roberts recommends sitting on the fence: "In view of the Soviet attitude, we cannot, I think, water down our message any further in the sense desired by the Prime Minister without arousing Soviet suspicions. If, however, as is probable, the U.S. Government agree with us, we should, I think, maintain our original message as it stands, giving the Soviet Government a suitable explanation of why this is being done" (Doc 19).

The note provides an insight into the way decisions were made between the three Allies. As it turned out, America did not actively support the Soviet insistence on immediate surrender. On September 9th Eden sent a polite note to the British Ambassador in Moscow, explaining why the message did not contain the cuts suggested by Molotov, and the message actually delivered to Veress contained Churchill's "watered down" phrase of surrender "at a suitable moment" (Doc 24). One cannot help wondering how the Yalta and

Potsdam agreements would have turned out if Roosevelt had strongly supported Churchill.

When Veress was already back in Budapest with the British reply and two radio transmitters, the Russians still disapproved of allowing Hungary to postpone announcing its surrender. A telegram on 20th September from Sir A. Kerr in Moscow voices their dissatisfaction (Doc 37).

In early September, while telegrams were flying back and forth over the Atlantic, Veress was promoting friendly relations between Hungary and Turkey at the Smyrna Fair. A minor crisis occurred when he discovered that one of the shiny booklets about Hungarian history contained a chapter which described in graphic detail the atrocities committed by the troops of Turkish Sultan Suleiman during the Turkish occupation of Hungary in the seventeenth century. The offending pages had to be hurriedly removed from all the copies intended for distribution.

The crisis of the books was barely enough to take his mind off the telegram he was expecting hourly from Istanbul. Before leaving, he had agreed with his contacts that the signal requiring his immediate return to Istanbul would be a telegram in German asking him to return "übermorga", (the day after to-morrow) with the word "übermorgen" misspelled. On September 8th, 1943, events started moving. This is how Veress describes the occasion:

"On the 8th September, 1943 I received the 'UBERMORGA' telegram requesting my presence in Istanbul as soon as possible. It was sent by a semi-official but authorised contact with the British in Istanbul. The private joke in the German text consisted in the fact that the name of my S.O.E liaison was Bill Morgan. I travelled to Istanbul immediately, and on September 9th in the morning I was told by the British official that London's answer, which had been affirmed with Washington and duly brought to the notice of Moscow, would be arriving at any moment I was told to keep myself in readiness to meet the Ambassador, Sir Hugh Knatchbull-

Hugessen, who would communicate to me the Allied terms the same night

“I asked the Hungarian Consul-General, Dezsö Ujváry, to come with me to hear the conditions of surrender. He said he had an urgent bridge party that night. That is how he missed the historic occasion. He never forgave himself — or me.

“Late at night on 9th September, accompanied by two S.O.E. officers, I set out by motorboat on the Sea of Marmara to look for the yacht of Knatchbull-Hugessen, the British Ambassador. It was a moonlit night, I remember the glittering sea. It was not easy to find his yacht among the hundreds of boats and yachts which were mooring in the bay, and we searched frantically. It was already two o'clock in the morning when we spotted in the moonlight the gleaming white yacht, MACAO II.

“One of the officers set out in a small motorboat and boarded the yacht which was in complete darkness. Then all of a sudden the vessel was completely lit up, and the Ambassador himself appeared on the deck. He had just been roused from his sleep and had obviously dressed in a hurry. He wore white flannels and a white pullover, an open-necked tennis shirt and white tennis shoes. The S.O.E. officers escorted him to our boat where he greeted us with a sleepy half-smile. We sat in the lounge of our small boat, drinking beer out of teacups. The meeting was informal and friendly. Mr. Molotov would have found it too friendly. He would not have approved of so much camaraderie between two ‘enemies.’ The Ambassador was assisted by the two S.O.E. officers. Beside myself, no other Hungarians were present. I am sorry to say that at least two of my countrymen have in their memoirs claimed to have participated in this historic meeting. Since memoir-writers’ memories tend to be very creative, I wish to set the record straight by stating that I was the only Hungarian present. [Decades later, in an interview with Hungarian TV personality Peter Bokor, Ujváry tried to downplay the importance of Veress’ mission (Bokor, 50). At that time Veress was

already dead and not available for comment.]

'After showing me his own authorisation in the shape of a freshly decoded telegram from Mr. Eden, Sir Hugh informed me that H.M. Government had 'taken note' of Hungary's communications and read out the following 'preliminary conditions' as modified by Churchill, which I had to memorise:

(1) Hungary to confirm her offer, and her acceptance of the Allies' conditions, through regular diplomatic channels .

(2) The agreement to be kept secret until published at a moment to be agreed which should in no case be before the Allies reached the frontiers of Hungary.

(3) Hungary progressively to reduce her military cooperation with Germany, to withdraw her troops from Russia and to assist allied aircraft flying across Hungary to attack targets in Germany.

(4) Hungary similarly progressively to reduce her economic co-operation with Germany and not to participate in Germany's war production.

(5) Hungary to resist if Germany attempted to occupy her, and to that end to reorganize her High Command so that her army should be able to attack the Germans.

(6) At a given moment, Hungary to place all her resources, communications and air bases at the disposal of the Allies for the continuation of the fight against Germany.

(7) At a suitable moment, Hungary to receive an Allied S.O.E . air mission, to advise on the preparations for the break-away.

(8) Hungary to establish regular radio contact through S.O.E. in Istanbul with the Allies and to keep

them informed of the German and Hungarian situation.

(9) Hungary to engage in no further negotiations with other quarters.

‘The Allies did not bind themselves to refrain from bombing Hungarian territory: they reserved their right to bomb when and where they deemed necessary. But they said that the necessity would probably not arise so long as Hungary kept her side of the agreement and so long as German transports across Hungary, or Hungarian deliveries to Germany did not increase. This was the understanding that came to be known as the ‘Istanbul Agreement

“When the meeting ended, we exchanged handshakes, the Ambassador returned to his yacht, and the three of us returned to Istanbul. By the time we left our boat, dawn was breaking. On taking leave of the two S.O.E. officers, I went back to my hotel. My excitement was now tempered with doubts, uncertainties as to how all this would end. Would the Allies reach us at all? How would my own government react? Suddenly I was glad it was all over, at least for now. I was exhausted and slept until ten o’clock in the morning. I was awakened by busy street noises. Istanbul’s sunny, hot morning was in full swing. The street vendors’ cries and the sorrowful braying of their donkeys reminded me of where I was. For a while I listened to the din with a feeling of satisfaction that I had achieved something positive and now deserved the luxury of listening to the friendly, familiar voices of the city.”

Thirty years later Leslie was able to compare the message he memorized with the much revised draft that was dispatched to Istanbul on September 9th, 1943.

MOST SECRET
COPY of MOST IMMEDIATE TELEGRAM TO
ISTANBUL

repeated CAIRO 9.9.43
MOST SECRET. OFFICER ONLY. DECIPHER
YOURSELF.

Following is Foreign Office message for VERES.

A. H.M.G. would like some more authoritative credentials which could presumably be communicated through any channel which the Hungarian Government thought advisable.

B. H.M.G. will expect the Hungarian Government to make at a suitable moment a public announcement of their acceptance of unconditional surrender and to take at the earliest possible moment the action originally suggested by the Hungarian government and summarised in Para B. of Istanbul's telegram 806 of August 18th.

C. If the Hungarian Government feel that the time is not yet ripe for such an announcement they should, as evidence of their goodwill, assist Allies by ceasing all co-operation with Germany and by carrying out obstruction, delaying action and even possibly minor sabotage.

D. if the Hungarian Government agree to (C), H.M.G. would be prepared to discuss ways and means with a Hungarian military representative at Istanbul (Constantinople) as suggested by Veres.
(Doc 28)

In signing the Agreement, Britain had achieved a diplomatic as well as an operational success. Hungary's decision to extricate herself from Hitler's clutches followed one day after the Italian surrender, and the two events created in Britain a feeling of optimism that the war was at last coming to a victorious end.

On the 10th September the telegram from the British Ambassador was dispatched to London:

I saw Veres on night of September 9th/September 10th and spoke as instructed in S.O.E. telegram 9112 of September 9th. As regards credentials I suggest:

(A) Signed letter from Kállay or other member of the Government at present belonging to group in question. There may be physical difficulties in transmission of this.

(B) Failing (A), assurance given by a Hungarian representative abroad to one of His Majesty's Representatives. E.g. at Vatican but not in Turkey. All other conversations to continue here.

(C) Proof of sincerity by carrying out of our proposals.

Veres returns to Hungary at once. (Doc 33)

Living Up To Istanbul

V erness: "Discussions were over: now it was time for the 'practical steps.' On September 10th I contacted the S.O.E. officers who presented me with two B Mark II morse coded transmitting wirelesses neatly packed in wooden boxes. They showed me how to use them and gave me a nondescript thin blue book significantly entitled Britain and the British People: Prelude to Peace by Ernest Barker, father of historian Elizabeth Barker. This was to be my code book. I had to memorise the coding system and then use portions of the text to code and de-code messages. My symbol was MHL. I was not authorised by my government to accept a radio transmitter. Kállay was leery of radio-communication, but my tactic was to be one step ahead in the hope that the Prime Minister would follow me.

'The transmitters were 'portable', but they weighed some 30 pounds each and were not exactly inconspicuous. I travelled by train to Budapest, lugging my dangerous cargo. At Swilengrad, on the Turkish Bulgarian border, the German border control was rigorous, but I managed to bluff my boxes through the checkpoint I continued the anxious journey, watching the two hefty boxes and my diplomatic bags, one of which contained my blue code book, while keeping an eye on the German security officers of the Sicherheitsdienst, who were in evidence everywhere.

"Since the train was swarming with German soldiers and SS men, I could not leave my baggage unattended for even a few

minutes. I had to share my compartment with some German officers. As soon as they found out that I was Hungarian and spoke German, they started to chat. We talked about how the war was going. We assured each other of the coming victory in a chorus of 'Na jo, jo, wir werden schon gewinnen.' None of us sounded very convincing.

'There was an air raid over Sofia and we had to get out of the train. Unfortunately, for some reason, we also had to change trains. I placed my two transmitters on the platform. In the jumble of shabby wartime bundles, the neatly packed wooden boxes stood out conspicuously, flaunting their British origin. It seemed to me that only a fool could have missed them. One of the SS men edged his way nearer and nearer to me, so near that he started to tap one of the boxes gently with his foot, not noticing that I saw what he was doing. I broke out in a cold sweat. Suppose the SS man was an efficient, enthusiastic spycatcher? However, I was lucky; one of the German officers from my compartment approached. I quickly started an animated conversation with him. The SS man sauntered off, and the officer helped me put the boxes on to the Budapest train.

'With a gigantic internal sigh of relief, I sat back in my seat and let the conversation flow around me. The Wehrmacht officers swapped off-colour jokes and talked about beautiful Budapest where they were looking forward to having a good time. It was pleasant for them to spend a few weeks in a country which was not under German occupation. They said Budapest was safer than Sofia or Belgrade. I smiled and nodded, but my mind was on my lucky escape. I remembered a recent case of a Swiss diplomatic courier who was taken off the Istanbul Express by German Intelligence. His bag was seized and his body thrown into the river. It was officially declared that he had been robbed and killed by 'bandits.' The statement was not far from the truth. Diplomatic immunity was no life insurance within 'Fortress Europe:

"While I was bumping along on the noisy train to Budapest, Germany was launching a savage counterattack in Italy and the

Aegean. German triumphs culminated in the commando raid led by Colonel Skorzeny whose daring parachutists landed in the courtyard of the heavily guarded hotel in the Appenines where Mussolini was confined. Skorzeny walked to the second floor, flung open the door of Mussolini's room and announced 'Duce, the Fuhrer sent me. You are free.' Mussolini embraced and kissed him, saying, 'I knew my friend Adolf Hitler would not desert me.' In five minutes it was all over. Mussolini was rescued and not a shot was fired. The Italian carabinieri even waved them good-bye. A few days later Mussolini was taken to meet Hitler. They had a tearful public reunion, Mussolini overwhelmed with gratitude, Hitler grasping his hand with brotherly love. However, as soon as they were alone, Hitler's mood changed: What is this Fascism that it melts like butter under the sun?' he asked contemptuously.

"After a long, 'uncomfortable' journey across German occupied Balkans, I reached Budapest safely with my memorised account of the Istanbul Agreement, my two transmitters, and my code book. On arriving in Budapest, I went straight to the Foreign Office. Here I found that during my absence the mood of optimism had totally disappeared. The disappointing circumstances of the Allied landing and operations in Italy, plus the spectacular liberation of Mussolini by German commandos and the ferocity of Hitler's reaction to Italy's treachery had all combined to make the Government Group feel that Germany was still a dangerous enemy.

"When the Group heard the British terms, they were bewildered. Kállay was taken aback by the boldness of his emissary's move and the agreements concluded in his name in Istanbul. At the same time, he could not help being impressed by the fact that the Allies had accepted our offer to switch to their side. Other members of the Group, some of whom heard the details for the first time, were shocked and felt that 'the emissary had exceeded his brief.' Jenő Ghyczy the Foreign Minister, who of course knew about my journey, thought that I had promised more than Hungary would be able to

perform, and that it might be necessary to disown me. Many felt that a dangerous situation had been created which might provoke Hitler into a savagely punitive occupation of the country.

“Nevertheless, F. Keresztes-Fischer, the courageous Minister of the Interior, helped to convince Kálay that the Istanbul Agreement should be confirmed. The ball was now well and truly in the Allied court. Much depended on the attitude of the Allies and the progress of their operations in Italy. Would they be willing to exploit the Hungarian position?

“Many obstacles still remained but I could at last set up my radio transmitters and start sending messages to Britain. The original idea was that one of the two transmitters should be used for contact with the Government Resistance Group, and the other for more private, inside information. However, this idea did not seem workable, so I put one of the transmitters in the cellar store room of the Foreign Office. As far as I remember, it was there when the Germans invaded Hungary, and when the Russians stormed Buda, it was still there.

“Soon with the help of Minister of Interior Keresztes-Fischer and with the approval of both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, wireless contact with SOL in Istanbul was established. Keresztes-Fischer placed at my disposal two highly trained reliable wireless operators who were police officers under the personal supervision of the head of the Security Police. They were given to understand that the purpose of the transmissions was to exchange messages with Hungary’s embassies or agents abroad. They transmitted the messages from various flats and later from a rented villa in the Svábhegy area of Buda. When the Germans invaded Hungary, these two brave men were caught by the Gestapo. One of them was shot; the other managed to avoid the firing squad by some fast talking.

‘The coding and decoding were exclusively my responsibility. There was no ‘safe’ room in the Ministry for this work. During the

day I had to cypher and decypher wherever I happened to be, a characteristic procedure in those devil-may-care days. It was agreed with the SOE that there would be three transmissions a day. With the help of my little blue book, I alone drafted and encoded our messages to SOE in Istanbul, some of which were dictated by the Prime Minister himself, but most of them by the Foreign Minister, the Undersecretary of State, or the head of the Political Department in the Foreign Ministry. All messages were sent out under the authority of the Surrender Group. The incoming messages from London by way of SOE in Istanbul were decoded by me and passed on to the Foreign Minister or the Prime Minister and then to the person for whom they were intended.

“I had nominal duties at the Foreign Ministry. In fact my time was spent in fighting for the implementation of the Istanbul Agreement and in drafting, coding and decyphering messages. Military espionage was explicitly excluded as far as Hungary was concerned. A government could not be expected to spy on itself. Information learned at the Führer’s headquarters by the Hungarian Chief of Staff and brought back to Budapest, was sometimes transmitted by me to the Allies, but the Allies never demanded from me purely military information. Government spoke to government, or Budapest to London, but not as a spy to his master. However, the Hungarian side sometimes volunteered information and comments about the situation on the domestic scene. I often added my own comments which were not seen by the Government Group.”

I remember the day that Leslie sent his first message to the Allies. On the 29th September we met near a little church on the edge of Városmajor Park in Buda. It was late in the afternoon, on a sunny, autumn day. He came rushing towards me with a broad smile; we kissed and walked hand in hand through the park which was already in its rusty yellow and green autumn beauty. We walked up the steep hill to his flat in Garas Street We made coffee and listened to the BBC broadcast on his big Orion radio. The Hungarian

broadcast as usual declaimed against Kállay. Leslie was preoccupied; I felt that he was thinking of something else he still had to do that night I left early; he accompanied me through the park, and we said good-bye.

Back in his flat, as he told me later, Leslie began coding his first official SOE message to the Allies. He took out the little pale blue history book by Ernest Barker from its amateurish hiding place in the linen cupboard and looked at the map of England on its inside cover. On the back cover he saw a map of London with the Thames, the House of Commons, the Temple, and the Law Courts where he had worked for a year as a young man; all that seemed now farther away than ever. He read Barker's quotation from 'The Ballad of Sir Andrew Barton':

Fight on, my men! says Sir Andrew Barton,
I am hurt, but I am not slain;
I'll lay me down and bleed a-while,
And then I'll rise and fight again.

He leafed through the pages, as instructed, until he found Chapter V. Religion and the Churches in Britain. In the next 16 pages certain lines were underlined. These phrases were to serve as the key to his code. He set to work on his first attempt at using a secret code. The SOE transmitted the message to London as follows:

MOST SECRET
(COPY)

CIPHER TEL. FROM ISTANBUL
DESP 2130 29.9.43 RECD. 30.9.43
NO 933

MOST IMMEDIATE

A. VERESS CAME UP SEPTEMBER 29TH AND SENT FOLLOWING MESSAGE QUOTE REGENT PREMIER AND FOREIGN MINISTER INFORMED ABOUT ISTANBUL CONVERSATIONS AND LONDON MESSAGES POSSIBILITIES HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY WEIGHED. UJ VARY REPEAT UJVARY CALLED HOME FOR RECEIVING INSTITUTIONS AND POSSIBLE CREDENTIALS. FOR TECHNICAL REASONS W/T SET PUT INTO OPERATION UNDER PERSONAL AUTHORITY OF HOME SECRETARY WITH CONSENT FIRST MENTIONED. PLEASE LISTEN DAILY UNQUOTE.

B. WE ARE REPLYING URGING NECESSITY FOR PROMPT ACTION. (Doc 41)

So began the radio exchanges which would keep Leslie busy for the next few months. He often did his coding in one of the fine old coffee houses near his office. In a place such as the Ruszwurm or Gresham Palace coffee house a person could sit at one of the small marble top tables for half a day with a cup of coffee, reading, writing, or in his case, sending messages to SOE, and no one would bother him. One time a group of German officers sat down a few tables away. They spent a few happy hours there, talking and laughing, enjoying themselves. Budapest was still a good place to stay in spite of the war. Why should they suspect subversive activities in such a pleasant place?

Veress: "Wireless contact was established but there was still hesitation about the follow-up. The Government's reply to the British message was delayed while Kállay agonised over its wording and

consequences. He still felt disturbed by the words 'unconditional surrender' which had a humiliating undertone. Finally I could stand the delay no longer. Without Kállay's knowledge, I sent a message to S.O.E. asking them to demand a definite answer from the Hungarian Government group on the subject of unconditional surrender.

"In the end after much hesitation, although somewhat evasively, the Government agreed to ratify the Istanbul Agreement. The Hungarian Minister in Lisbon confirmed my mission and made a statement intended to fulfill the first of the four agreed terms to Sir Donald Campbell in Lisbon. The Hungarian Foreign Minister reported to Regent Horthy, informing him that contact with the British had been established and the Istanbul Agreement ratified.

"I had not been entirely repudiated after all. One point, however, deserves attention: Horthy did not wish to be informed of the subsequent details. He lived by the code of honour of an officer and a gentleman which made it intolerable for him to lie even to the Germans. He felt that if he did not know about Kállay's communication with the British, he could in reasonably good conscience deny these contacts to Hitler. The equivocation was not caused by lack of courage; at this point Horthy was trying to save the country from a German invasion. Exactly a year later, when Hungary was already occupied by the Germans, Horthy made a national broadcast declaring Hungary's surrender to the Allies, and this time the declaration was sent directly to the Hungarian Armistice delegation in Moscow.

"In addition to agonising about the surrender terms, Kállay was faced with a new dilemma when Mussolini formed a new Fascist government in North Italy and Ribbentrop asked Kállay to recognise it. Our neighbours Rumania, Slovakia, and Croatia all recognised the new puppet state. Kállay was most reluctant to do so and waited from September 15th till the 29th, when he finally sent Mussolini a cautiously worded telegram: 'We take this occasion to inform you that we always possessed in Mussolini a true friend of the Hungarian

cause.' Thus he was 'taking cognizance of' but not officially 'recognising' the new state. As he explained in his memoirs, to defy the German demand 'in our position would have been a perfectly useless sacrifice.'"

The ball may have been in the Allied court, but the Allies were still not totally in agreement as to what to do with it. Several messages refer to an individual designated as DH 18 who seemed to have great doubts as to the credentials of Veress, whom he calls a "dubious person." A private cypher (1093) from Istanbul to London relays DH 18's suggestions for testing Veress' credibility:

3. DH 18 suggests we demand from VERES following confirmation:

- a) immediate provision Hungarian order of battle b) arranged broadcast by SZEGEDI MASZAK
- c) arranged article by SZEKFU in MAGYAR NEMZET
- d) good treatment pro-British Hungarians still in prison.

4. London please instruct Istanbul direct repeating here whether wish these demands put to Veres.
(Doc 34)

On September 9th, DH 18 had more suggestions. A telegram to London (B1/ 1094) indicates that DH 18 proposes to meet Szegedi Maszak ad the delegate of Szombathelyi "at a convenient spot say NOVISAD or PALANKA. In other words, he was willing to meet them "inside GESTAPO frontiers." His reasoning: "If GROUGTS (sic) serious, they dare not send their principals to Istanbul" (Doc 29).

The doubts of DH 18 notwithstanding, on September 10th the Foreign office sent telegrams to its Dominions Canada, Australia, New Zealand ad South Africa informing them of the terms of

Hungary's unconditional surrender (Doc 31).

On September 15th, telegram NO. 4144 from Washington to Sir RI. Campbell at the Foreign Office expresses agreement with the British reply:

State Department have been kept fully informed.

2. They agree generally with the line you have taken particularly as regards the dangers of provoking an untimely outbreak. Their only comment was that it would be difficult to know how far Hungarians could go alone on the lines of /c/ in your telegram 1282 to Angora without provoking violent German reaction.

3. They would like to be informed of anything further you may hear from the Soviet Government when the latter learn that full reply has been sent (Doc 35)

On 20th September, Telegram No. 982 from Moscow to Foreign Office indicates the predictable Russian reaction:

Your telegram No. 1296

In acknowledging my letter M. Molotov tells me that the Soviet Government have taken note of its contents but still consider inclusion of paragraphs "c" and "d" to be superfluous for reasons already mentioned. They believe that "it would be to the advantage of the Allies to act quickly and resolutely, not allowing either Germans or pro-German Hungarian circles to recover from confusion connected with Italy's surrender. Hungary's unconditional surrender at the present moment especially in connection with latest events in Italy,

would inevitably cause serious difficulties for Germany and more favourable conditions both on the Eastern front and in the Italian theatre of war. On the other hand postponement of Hungary's surrender would allow Germany to recover from confusion and strengthen her position in South Eastern Europe and in Italy. (Doc 37)

On September 15th the Hungarian peace proposal was on the agenda of the War Office meeting. The minutes record a report by Col. Templin "that arrangements had been made in the United Kingdom for a party to go into Hungary when further evidence of good faith had been received and the reception area had been given."

If the Kállay Cabinet had known how seriously our peace offer was being taken, perhaps they might have been less hesitant in pursuing our goal. A wealth of letters and telegrams attest to British interest in the Hungarian proposal. Selecting the ideal place for the exchanges was a major decision and the subject of several communications between W. Harrison, F.K. Roberts, and Anthony Eden. Finally London accepted Veress' suggestion of Lisbon as the most suitable place to confirm his credentials.

Accordingly, on October 3, 1943, Sir A. Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, drafted a letter endorsed by Anthony Eden to be sent to Sir Ronald Campbell, the British Ambassador in Lisbon, summarizing the Hungarian surrender initiative and authorizing him to receive Veress' credentials when the time came. Obviously some doubts still remained concerning Veress:

"The latter's credentials were not watertight but it seemed probable that he had authority for his mission" (Doc 44). It was to make these credentials "watertight" that the Hungarian Ambassador to Lisbon, Andor Wodianer, met with the British representative in Lisbon on October 10. Originally Sir Ronald Campbell wanted Prime Minister

Kállay and Foreign Minister Ghyczy to sign the document, but finally he was satisfied with Wodianer's signature alone.

The Hungarian proposal was also subjected to scrutiny in America. In a letter to H.F. Matthews, Director of European Affairs at the State Department, dated September 27, 1943, G. Kennan, American Deputy Ambassador in Lisbon, relates his conversations with Wodianer concerning the Hungarian situation. Wodianer was authorized by his government to make his presentation. He stated that the Hungarian government was anxious to enter into military and political agreements with the United States. From Wodianer's remarks Kennan presents a revealing picture of Hungarian aspirations and views of the future. He found out that Hungary was negotiating with the Germans for the return of the Hungarian troops from the Russian front; however, Germany would agree to this request only if Hungary would transfer an equivalent number of troops to the Western front, a demand which Hungary refused. Actually he was told that the Hungarian Government saw a 50 per cent chance of an agreement between Russia and Germany, in which case Hungarian troops would be needed to defend Hungary's frontiers against a Russian invasion. Wodianer also had information about Hungary's attitude towards her neighbours. The government had close ties with the Polish resistance, and hoped to join forces with the Polish army when such action became feasible. As for relations with other neighbouring states after the war, he said Hungary was willing to conduct negotiations with the Serbs concerning territorial claims, but not with the Rumanians.'

One important interpreter of American policies towards Hungary was Tibor Eckhardt, the former head of the Revision League, who was living in the United States. In several letters to Andor Wodianer in the course of September, October and November, he urges closer contacts with the U.S. On September 20 he reports that Hungary is finding favour with Washington and claims to reflect

“authoritative views in Washington” in recommending that Admiral Horthy should resist all German pressures to the contrary and stay at the helm in order to ensure order and control over the army.

On November 4, 1943, Wodianer in a telegram to Foreign Minister Ghyczy, describes another communication by Eckhardt in which the latter gives an account of a meeting between Crown Prince Otto von Hapsburg and President Roosevelt. The story, three times removed from the source, may have lost something in accuracy, but is revealing nevertheless: Roosevelt is reputed to have told Otto that since Rumania would probably end up in the Russian camp, Hungary, if she played her cards right, might be able to recover the whole of Transylvania. Eckhardt took this declaration to be a good reason for intensive negotiation with the U.S. and recommended that Hungary explore the possibilities of becoming a “co-belligerent” state with the Allies. Transylvania was a carrot which Eckhardt could not resist, even though it was coated with the bitter sauce of co-belligerence.²

Actually, the Hungarian troops were in no condition for prolonged fighting. In a letter dated 14 September, the Military Attache in Portugal (Solborg) writes to General Kroner, Chief of Military Intelligence describing a private interview with Alexander de Hollan, a Hungarian career diplomat. Hollan told him that at the time there were in Russia about 120,000 Hungarian troops which included some labour battalions. All sources agree that these troops were extremely ill-equipped serving only as occupying forces by special agreement with the Germans. However, in September the Germans, in spite of the agreement, sent them into combat against Russian armoured troops around Kiev. The resulting Russian attack inflicted a 50 per cent loss on the Hungarian forces. It became imperative to bring back Hungarian troops from the Russian front. In the months following the Istanbul Agreement, the Hungarian government made repeated demands for the return of the troops and received only cynical excuses from Hitler. A favourite answer was

that there was “no surplus rolling stock” to transport the troops home. In effect, the Hungarian expeditionary force was Germany’s hostage to ensure Hungary’s co-operation.

Living up to the Istanbul agreement was all the more difficult as there were still many pro-German military leaders. A note by HR. Perkins, dated 27 October, 1943, summarizes the essentials of the Hungarian messages to the Foreign Office. It makes reference to a message by Veress which explains that the government has no confidence in the present leadership of the army and has not yet completed the elimination of pro-German elements from the Chiefs of Staff.³

The same document describes a message from Dezső Ujváry, the Chief Consul at Istanbul; Ujváry stresses the same problem, affirming that pro-German high-ranking officers are being gradually removed from key positions, often causing the Germans to be suspicious. Kállay was doing his best to meet the British demands, but at the end of October his army was still not ready to send a military representative for talks with Britain. For these reasons, it would at this time have been impossible for Hungary to guarantee the safety of a secret British military mission to Hungary.

Another cause for concern was the confusion over which channels should be authorized to conduct negotiations with the Allies. Ujváry asked emphatically that the Foreign Office should use only Lisbon for this purpose and not involve the Ambassador in Stockholm, Antal Ullein-Reviczky.

As messages started to flow between Budapest and London via Istanbul, London became more and more insistent in demanding tangible proof of Hungary’s good faith in the form of military talks and resisting German demands. Kállay, along with many intellectuals in England and America, was anxious to avoid a confrontation with Germany which would precipitate a German occupation. Professor Namier, an official of the Jewish Agency of Palestine, most emphatically agreed with Kállay’s policy. On 14 October, 1943, Sir

A.W.G. Randall reports a conversation in London in the course of which Namier expressed his deep apprehension, and that of his colleagues at the Jewish Agency about the effect Hungary's open declaration of surrender would have on the fate of the 800,000 Jews who were at the time still living in comparative safety in Hungary. He felt that such a declaration would inevitably provoke a German occupation and the subsequent annihilation of Europe's last remaining substantial Jewish community. He urged British authorities not to insist that Hungary break with Germany until that country was no longer able to retaliate.⁴

S.O.E., on the other hand had a war to fight. The Allied landing in Bari on 3 October enabled this branch of the British forces to establish its headquarters there. Its task was to send supplies and help to resistance groups in German-occupied territory and make as much trouble as they could for the Germans in the Balkans, Hungary and Albania. Their favourite plan was to suggest that the Hungarian resistance group link up with Tito's Yugoslav partisans to "organise subversion and sabotage in Hungary." It took Veress many hours of coding to explain to the S.O.E. that in Hungary the government was the resistance and it had no desire to blow up its own railways. An S.O.E. report dated 18 November, 1943 sums up Hungarian feelings concerning this type of resistance: "Quote . . . Hungarian Government wish to make it clear that as responsible Government they cannot promote such sabotage as would destroy public order and paralyze industry now working for national needs to extent 80 per cent unquote" (Doc 53).

S.O.E. never quite gave up matchmaking between the Hungarian and the Yugoslav resistance. When they organized Yugoslav sabotage attacks on railways in Novi Sad (Ujvidék), Budapest, Pécs, Szeged and Timisoara (Temesvár), they assured London that "leaders Partisans do not hate Hungarians and Partisan Army highly disciplined" (Cipher message 25 Oct, 1943). When the Partisans wrecked and then abandoned a railway station

in Virovitica and the Hungarians “marched in,” S.O.E. sent an anguished note to London: “Not clear whether Partisans evacuated under pressure” (Doc 54). Actually the Hungarian government had no quarrel with the Yugoslav partisans, or with the Yugoslav people. Those responsible for the Ujvidék atrocities were tried and sentenced for their crimes. But sabotage activity was out of the question for Hungary for both geographical and political reasons. Hungary simply did not fit the S.O.E. mould.

Kállay was anxious to keep the Istanbul agreement alive and tried his utmost to comply with British demands. The S.O.E. plan to send three Hungarian agents by parachute into Hungary was given close scrutiny. S.O.E. planned the mission for November and was becoming impatient. Yet Kállay felt he could not agree to such a mission unless he could ensure a safe reception for it. Also he was still reluctant to endorse a mission that might involve sabotage against the country’s resources. So Veress was instructed to delay the mission but keep negotiations going. S.O.E.’s frustration is compressed into a telegram to London, dated 11 October, 1943: “Pse send instructions and guidance on what you want me to do. Suggest Surrender group will not rpt not play at sabotage so long as negotiating with FO rpt FO but will keep VURES /sic E/ bait dangling carrotwise. This is an old trick ends” (Doc 48).

Finally, the Hungarian Government hit upon a compromise: a telegram from Istanbul to London dated 18 November quotes the following message:

Quote reception of mission of 5 by parachute impracticable at present but since Hungarian Government wish to avail themselves of assistance ad would sincerely appreciate (being) advised by mission they suggest the dispatching to Hungary of members travelling (as) neutral passengers with

neutral passports. Members should speak German fluently. (DOC 53)

The S.O.E. reply of 24 November makes it clear that the British had something entirely different in mind. They rejected out of hand Hungary's idea of disguising the mission as neutral travellers and accused Hungary of footdragging and bad faith. The Hungarian Government's reply reflects its anguish and struggles to save the country and stay faithful to the Allies: the parachute mission was discouraged because it would have been less than honest to pretend that its safety could be ensured; the government has unceasingly continued to minimize its military participation against the Allies; the Hungarian army is at present forcibly controlled by the Germans who have declared their intention to oppose any independent move by military force; the Hungarian Government is constantly censured by the Germans for its anti-German stand; it recognized and never withdrew its recognition from the legal government of the King of Italy and recognized the Mussolini government only after being forced to do so by German pressure tantamount to an ultimatum; any lipservice paid to Germany serves only to avert a German occupation and the resulting anarchy which so far from shortening the war, would actually prolong it by depriving the Allies of a secure base for military operations. This was the Hungarian position.⁵ Veress and his government meant every word of it, but the British felt that additional methods of persuasion were needed to bring Hungary round.

A telegram dated 23 November, 1943, from the Mideast to London reflects British disappointment with Hungary. Hungary's seizure of Virovitica is interpreted as an act designed to help Germany secure railway communications to Yugoslavia "There is no political excuse such as minority question or frontier dispute for this action." The telegram observes that Budapest is the most important railway centre east of the German frontiers and thus bombing it

would be of great advantage all the more so as the Hungarian surrender group is "now temporising" Hungary is now classed in the same category with Bulgaria: "As Bulgaria so with Hungary deeds rather than words will bring home the fact that we regard them as enemy countries until by active resistance to Germans they acquire right to different treatment. In this respect there is close parallel between bombing of Budapest and bombing of Sofia" At the same time, the British felt that they owed Hungary an explanation of the air attack; paragraph 7 of the telegram adds the following recommendation: "If you agree with our recommendation we suggest also P.W.E. London be instructed to prepare suitable leaflets to accompany bombs" (Doc 57).

Two days later a message from Eisenhower in charge of the European Theatre of Operation for the U.S. Army heartily endorses the plan:

An attack on Budapest can be carried out with good effect in our opinion. We propose to do so if you approve, and request that operation be put on opportunistic basis. We do not consider that such an attack justifies diversion on a heavy scale of aircraft or that the attack need be made more than once.

Entirely agree paragraph 7 of the above cited message and consider leaflets indispensable to operation. Therefore, as recommended, request they be furnished. (Doc 58)

Nothing heavy handed just a little judicious bombing with plenty of leaflets should do the job.

Hungary's problems were, unfortunately, too complex to be solved by strategic bombing or explanatory leaflets. A speech by General Smuts in early December fueled latent fears concerning

Hungary's fate after the war. The speech seemed to confirm German propaganda that Central and Eastern Europe had been designated as part of the Russian sphere of influence. Veress sent a message asking for clarification and reassurance on this point

The November moon period favourable for landing passed without a parachute mission to Hungary. S.O.E. now pressed for a reception for two parachutists in the January, 1944 moon period. The Hungarian Government was still extremely uncomfortable with the idea of a parachute drop and Veress was forced to send messages containing information the British did not particularly want to know, and evading the topic of the parachute mission. Colonel H.M. Threlfall of S.O.E. replied in exasperation that Britain was not interested in his newsreports, only in knowing whether the Hungarian Government would accept the mission.

By December 8, Veress had had enough; he decided that something had to be done to stop the mounting indecision that threatened to destroy relations with the Allies. In his message of December 8 he added a suggestion of his own: he explained that he was working under considerable strain and was frustrated by his government's delay. He expressed his belief that the time had come for the British to send the Hungarian Government an "Ultimatum" demanding confirmation of Hungary's agreement to unconditional

6

surrender.

As it turned out, there was no "ultimatum," but the Hungarian Government finally realized that it must accept the S.O.E. mission if it was to retain its credibility. Therefore, Veress, jointly with the Hungarian Foreign Minister, pinpointed the terrain for the dropping zone, selected a comfortable villa for the accommodation of the parachutists, and radioed the details together with a statement of the Government's formal agreement to receive the mission. The Resistance Group now waited for a reply: what they received was deafening silence. It was like talking into a dead telephone. Even

routine radio contact was suspended for a while. Finally there came a lame excuse from S.O.E.: 'There will be no suitable period of the moon for quite some time.' There never was a suitable moon period thereafter.

XI

Sudden Silence

What was the reason for the sudden British silence? To form a complete answer, it is necessary to explore once more the intricate web of Allied strategy which at this time included strands of many clashing colours. At the Quebec conference in 1943, Britain and America agreed on an Allied landing in Normandy the following year. Action in other parts of Europe was still a subject for discussion, with Churchill pushing for an invasion through the Balkans, the “soft underbelly” of Europe, the Russians trying to keep the Allies as far from Eastern Europe as possible, and Roosevelt meandering between the two. Churchill saw the invasion of Italy as a necessary step to achieve a German defeat, but he also hoped that Allied control of the Eastern coast of Italy would facilitate a Balkan invasion.

Minutes of the Quadrant Conference show that Churchill and Roosevelt both saw the advantage of supporting the Yugoslav guerrillas against Germany, but while Churchill saw the Balkan invasion as part of the overall plan of the invasion of Italy, Roosevelt was more inclined to leave the Balkan operation to “opportunity.”

Churchill’s memo to Roosevelt, dated September 9, 1943 points out that “we must expect far-reaching reactions in Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary.” It was this thinking that produced the favourable British reactions to the Hungarian surrender offer. Churchill’s memo to the Chiefs of Staff, dated October 19, 1943, reflects the Prime Minister’s views: he directs the Chiefs of

Staff to “carry out a staff study of the situation in the Mediterranean with particular reference to the growing resistance to Germany, both actual and potential, which is developing in varying degrees in all the Balkan countries.” While not wishing in any way to jeopardise OVERLORD, he feels Britain cannot allow this opportunity to escape her. Item 4 of the memo reveals Churchill’s position vis a vis the other allied powers: “Pray let this enquiry be conducted in a most secret manner and on the assumption that commitments into which we have already entered with the Americas, particularly as regards OVERLORD, could be modified by agreement to meet the exigencies of the situation” (Doc 50). It was this attitude that sent Veress back to Hungary with two radio transmitters. Hungary was clearly part of the Mediterranean strategy. What happened to cool Allied interest in Hungary’s offer of cooperation?

The minutes of the Sextant meeting of the Allied Chiefs of Staff held in Cairo on November 22, 1943, reveal the American view of Churchill’s Mediterranean strategy:

1. Present situation - American views.

Sir John Dill said that the United States Chiefs of Staff considered that the British regarded the Mediterranean as the primary theatre of operations whereas the Americas thought our major effort should be made in Europe, and that we should therefore stick to Operation Overlord as agreed at Quadrant.... They were afraid that if we undertook further operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and Balkans the cumulative effect of such operations would be a serious drain on the resources provided for Overlord. (Doc 55)

In the end Churchill agreed “but with a heavy heart” to pull seven divisions from the Mediterranean Theatre. Hungary’s chances of

success were diminishing along with Churchill's hopes.

Late in October, the American, British and Soviet Foreign Ministers met in Moscow to discuss the conduct of the war, to decide how Germany was to be treated after the war, and to put some more nails into East Europe's coffin. Molotov repeated the Russian view that there should be no negotiations with Hungary except on the basis of unconditional surrender. He even opposed SOE discussions of anti-German sabotage activities in Hungary; he was totally against any British contacts with Hungary. Another Russian move designed to keep Britain and the US out of Eastern Europe after the war concerned the British draft of a Four Power declaration of an undertaking that there would be joint action in all matters relating to any occupation of any enemy territory and the liberation of other states held by the enemy. By insisting that this clause be deleted, Stalin showed that he was determined to keep his own hands free to act as he wanted in territory occupied by the Red Army.

The Teheran Conference of November 1943 dramatised the relationship between the three heads of state. The British and Soviet Embassies were in close vicinity while the American Embassy was more than half a mile distant from the other two. Commuting daily to and from meetings would have posed a serious security risk for one or the other of the three world leaders. As the Soviet Embassy was more spacious than the British, Churchill joined Molotov in urging Roosevelt to stay there. (Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 343). Thus it happened that for the duration of the Teheran Conference, the American President was the guest of the Soviet Union. The Shah of Iran mentions in his memoirs that he was puzzled by this arrangement.

Roosevelt's residence in the Soviet Embassy may have been a matter of convenience, but his closeness to Stalin was soon manifested in other ways. At the first meeting, at which he presided by common consent, he expressed his joy at finding the Russians, the

British, and the Americans sitting around the table as members of the same family intent on winning the war. The friendship between Roosevelt and Stalin became more profound after the first Plenary Meeting. On one occasion Roosevelt was so anxious to include Uncle Joe in the family circle that he declined to have lunch with Churchill alone for fear of offending the Soviet leader. Churchill was quite surprised especially as he knew that Roosevelt had already had a private conversation with Stalin (Closing Ring, 363).

Churchill, who supported wholeheartedly Allied plans for a Normandy landing, nevertheless believed that there were enough unengaged troops which could usefully be employed in what he called a "right-handed movement from the north of Italy, using the Istrian peninsula and the Ljubljana Gap, towards Vienna" (Closing Ring, 345).

The Teheran meeting revealed Stalin's role in Allied strategy:

Marshall Stalin thought... the best course would be to make Overlord the basic operation for 1944 and once Rome had been captured to send all available forces in Italy to southern France... He would even prefer to assume a defensive role in Italy and forego the capture of Rome for the present if this would admit the invasion of /southern/ France by, say ten divisions. Two months later Overlord would follow, and the two invasions could then join hands. (Doc 56)

Churchill countered that that it was impossible for the Allies to forego the capture of Rome. It would be regarded as "a crashing defeat and the British Parliament would not tolerate the idea for a moment" (Doc 56).

Unspoken thoughts governed spoken words. Stalin's aim was to get the Allies to beat Germany, but to do it as far from Eastern Europe as possible. Churchill's objective was to keep the

Russians from swallowing up half of Europe. His true feelings were expressed on December 4, 1943 at the Third Plenary Meeting in Cairo:

.....The Prime Minister pointed to the great military advantages that were to be gained by operations in the Aegean. If Turkey entered the war, there would be great political reactions. Bulgaria, Roumania and Hungary might fall into our hands. We ought to make these German satellites work for us The Prime Minister pointed out the great advantages that were to be gained by Roumania's entry into the war. If we could get a grip on the Balkans there would be a tremendous abridgement of our difficulties. The next conference might perhaps be held in Budapest. All this could help OVERLORD.

If in Hungary we could have heard those words, who knows what we would have been willing to do?

But Britain was not free to decide on Allied strategy by herself. Roosevelt was anxious to please the Russians, and whenever Churchill brought up his Mediterranean strategy, the Russians objected. At one point, faced with Churchill's insistence on a Mediterranean front, Stalin angrily left the conference room. Roosevelt, afraid of losing Russian support, finally decided to side with Stalin, and Churchill was outnumbered. By the end of the Teheran Conference, it was agreed that there would be no operations in the Balkans or the Mediterranean with a view to entering the Danube lands. After the landing in Normandy, a subsidiary landing in the South of France would take place instead in order to support OVERLORD.

As they discussed the future of Europe after the war, there were more tense moments. When Poland's future was on the agenda, Stalin was

Stalin was reserved. As for the Baltic States, he said that they had not been independent during the Tsars. He also declared his opinion that Germany must be divided to prevent her from a rapid recovery. Over dinner Stalin expounded on the subject of punishment for Germany. At least 50,000 Germans must be executed he declared. Churchill, fully convinced that Stalin was serious, was appalled and said that the British would never tolerate such butchery. To ease the tension, Roosevelt jokingly suggested that 49,000 would suffice and offered the services of the U.S. Army to help Stalin carry out the plan. At this point Churchill had had enough. He got up and walked out of the room. Stalin and Molotov had to go after him and with wolfish grins on their faces assure him that they were only joking. Churchill was growling, but Roosevelt was delighted with Uncle Joe's sense of humour and cracked a few jokes of his own at Churchill's expense.

Without the vigorous Russian opposition, Britain would probably have taken advantage of the Hungarian peace initiative. Although the telegrams sent to Hungary are severe in tone, internal memos suggest that the British were willing to regard Hungary's efforts favourably. The British view of Hungary's plight was on the whole objective and even sympathetic. Highlights from Frank Roberts' summary of the Hungarian situation on September 22, 1943, give a pretty good idea of what the British were really thinking:

The main political pre-occupation of the Hungarian Government and of the great majority of Hungarians is —

- (a) to preserve an independent Hungary, and
- (b) to maintain as much as possible of the territories lost in 1918 and regained from Czechoslovakia, Roumania and Yugoslavia since 1939.

In pursuit of this policy Hungary has accepted the role of accomplice of Germany, and has been guilty of many offences against international morality. None the less, Hungary has succeeded in maintaining a very considerable degree of independence from German control.

ANNEX I

1. Except for Finland, Hungary is the only Axis nation to have maintained traditional parliamentary institutions. Apart from the Communist Party, the only political movements banned are those of Nazi character, all other political parties can carry on their work in comparative freedom.

2. There is in Hungary a flourishing Social Democratic movement. The Peasant Party is believed to have grown to include at least a million members, and trades union membership has risen to 300,000. The Social Democratic Party has its own newspaper and considerable freedom to carry on political propaganda.

3. The churches enjoy full liberty to carry on their work and public statements by Church leaders are outspoken and often anti-German.

4. Similarly, intellectual life enjoys remarkable freedom as compared with other Axis countries. The press is remarkably free.

5. Despite German pressure and the magnitude of the local Jewish problem the Hungarian Government have taken no strong action against the Jews in Hungary and the Prime Minister has openly indicated that he does not intend to do so.

6. On the other hand a blow had been dealt to the German minority in Hungary by depriving of Hungarian nationality those who volunteer for service in the Waffen SS and by insisting on their transfer to German control (Doc 38)

It was not Roberts who caused the “deafening silence” that greeted Hungary’s offer to receive the parachute mission. In his note of 26th December he expresses his view that it would be important for Britain to keep in contact with Hungary. He refers to a telegram from Stockholm suggesting that the Hungarians are disillusioned by Britain’s negative attitude to their peace-feelers and have therefore turned towards the Germans. “It is clearly not to our advantage,” states Roberts, “that the Hungarians should be confirmed in this impression as they could certainly give far more assistance to the German war machine than they are now giving”

The event that prompted this conjecture was Kállay’s public reconciliation with the pro-German Imrédy party and the projected trial of three prominent Social Democrats on charges of treasonable correspondence with the Allies. Roberts’ personal view was that these moves were simply a ploy to ward off Germany’s suspicions. “The only thing which might drive the Hungarians definitely into the German camp would be certain knowledge that we propose to reimpose the Trianon frontiers and to support all Roumanian claims against Hungary. I imagine, however, that, whatever our ultimate designs, there is no intention of revealing them in this form for some time to come” (Doc 60).

In paragraph 2 Roberts comments somewhat sourly that the Hungarians have now agreed to accept the S.O.E. mission “Which was the original pretext for all our recent contacts with the Hungarians and the refusal of which was to have been our pretext for telling the Hungarians that they obviously did not mean business. This is no doubt a sop thrown to us just as the arrest of the Social

Democrats was one thrown to the Germans. We can accept it as such and get out of it what we can in the form of increased sabotage etc." Roberts was obviously aware that Britain had to keep up the appearance of not negotiating with the enemy, but he still felt that the contact was valuable and worth the risk of breaking a few rules. However, the margin to this note tells an entirely different story. Anthony Eden's handwritten comments speak of deep misgivings: "Does not this conflict with what I told the Russians at Moscow?" he comments.

Roberts: "(a) We need raise no objection to S.O.E. proceeding with their sabotage mission . . . although we should remind them again that this mission is purely for minor sabotage and must not be drawn in any way into politics."

Eden: "I am not so sure. (See above)"

Roberts: "(c) In view of Washington telegram 5786 at Flag B we should say something to the Americans and we therefore better also give a brief statement of the present position to the Russians. This could be on the lines that our talks with the Hungarians have only produced concrete results in the case of the S.O.E. mission, which is proceeding into Hungary purely with a view to sabotage activities and to providing a useful minor test of the Hungarian Government's future intentions."

Eden: "I think this pretty dangerous or likely to arouse Russian suspicions."

It would seem that while Roosevelt was charmed by the Russians, Anthony Eden was terrified of them. His handwritten note dated Decenuber 28, at the end of the document is the verdict on the fate of the mission: "I am not at all happy about this S.O.E. mission. Russians reacted strongly at Moscow against any attempt by us to contact Hungarian Govt. I can see little advantage in this S.O.E. Mission and would prefer to drop it. A.E. Dec. 28" (Doc 60).

The Hungarian Government Group, unaware of the forces which had defeated plans for the S.O.E. mission, continued to

attempt to reach the British by radio. Threlfall of S.O.E. writes on 31st December to Roberts:

Dear Roberts,

1. As I mentioned to you on the telephone this morning, we have just heard from Veres, and I think you will be interested in what he says.
2. He describes the political situation in Hungary as highly uncertain and believes that drastic and urgent steps will be taken by the Germans to establish their authority. He says that German infiltration is already noticeably on the increase.
3. He describes the reconciliation in Parliament between Kállay and Imrédy as an attempt by the former to secure the position of his majority in Parliament, since he regards this as essential if the plans which we are concocting with his Group are to be successful. Veres himself approves of these tactics of Kállay's, which he describes as 'realistic' but he does not think that they will have much effect on German intentions to solve the Hungarian situation in a drastic manner, since the Germans have no confidence in the present Hungarian Government.
4. He adds that he is most eagerly awaiting the arrival of our party. I am not taking any step to have him informed for the time being of the prospects of delay in this party's arrival due to the reconsideration which you are undertaking. That can wait until we know more definitely what is to happen. I very much hope that the position will be favourable as our patient negotiations now seem to have produced the desired circumstances and

we have had every hope of getting the party off in
January.

Yours sincerely,
— Threlfall
Major (Doc 61)

Writing thirty odd years later, Veress sees why the British were silent and also what that silence has meant to Hungary and Eastern Europe:

“It was the overall strategy of the Grand Alliance which in fact decided the fate of Hungary and the Danubian lands. With the Istanbul agreement, Britain had made it clear that she had a stake in Hungary’s future. The British strategic concept was not only opposed by Russia, it also differed from that of America. In TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY, writing about the Allied fleet which was carrying troops to land on the Riviera, Churchill writes: ‘If I had had my way, they would be sailing in a different direction’ (i.e. through the Balkans) . The story of the Istanbul Agreement shows Britain’s s interest in Hungary as a potential ally; it also shows the limitations, military and political, of Britain’s capability to shape alone the future of South East Europe.”

If the Allies had decided to adopt Churchill’s Mediterranean strategy, they would have had plenty of help along the way. In addition to the Hungarian contacts, they could have also capitalised on Rumania’s willingness to surrender. Rumanian confidence in a German victory had been eroding steadily. In March, 1943 the Rumanian Minister in Madrid had already made overtures to the Allies concerning terms of surrender. In November Antonescu, the Rumanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, instructed the First Secretary of the Rumanian Legation in Madrid to establish contact with the American Ambassador in Madrid “to the end of ascertaining what Rumania should do in order to withdraw from the war.”¹

The Allied reaction reflected the usual Allied position: nothing but unconditional surrender would be acceptable. In December the Allies had another offer from Rumania, this time from the peasant opposition leader Maniu. In a letter from Cairo, dated December 6, the Ambassador to the Greek Government in Exile writes to the Secretary of State: "Saying that he did so at the behest of Mr. Eden, the British Ambassador to Yugoslavia approached me last night with a plan evolved by the British SOE to bring out from Rumania an emissary of the Peasant Party Leader, Maniu, who is alleged to be ready, if encouraged, to take action at an early date for the overthrow of the Antonescu Government and the country's unconditional surrender."² The Allies could take their pick of whom they wanted to do business with: Antonescu, or Maniu.

While the Allies were trying to win the war with or without help from South East Europe, Hungary did what had to be done for the thousands of refugees who fled to Hungary from German-occupied countries. In German labour camps the word got around that Hungary gave asylum to escapees. About 2,000 French, Belgian, Dutch, American and British prisoners managed to escape from German camps and found asylum in Hungary. Representatives of the French Resistance, Paul Giraud and Paul Lamair, state that until 1943 French soldiers and deportees continually entered Hungary from German POW camps and were helped to reach de Gaulle's forces in Africa. Those who could not leave — some 800 of them — were free to live in Budapest or any other part of the country at government expense. Some lived with Hungarian families and enjoyed the friendship of Hungarian high society. The broadcaster Jean Bousquet has told the story of his escape and arrival across the Hungarian border. It seems that the border guard could not understand English or French. Finally, in desperation, Bousquet tried Latin: "Ego sum gallicus captivus," he declaimed. This the guard immediately understood and offered him bread, milk and

butter. He was placed in a luxury hotel in Balaton Boglár. He stayed there during the rest of the war and on French national holidays he flew a French flag from his balcony. The Germans knew where he was and demanded his extradition, but the Hungarian government refused it. Later Jean Boussaguet went to Budapest where he assisted the publication of a French periodical for the Teleki Institute. After the war he returned to Paris with a Hungarian bride. In 1956 he went to Budapest again with a huge shipment of relief parcels. The real test of Hungarian hospitality came when the Germans occupied Hungary. Countless Hungarian families gave shelter to the refugees without registering them with the police. After the war the French published a pamphlet entitled *Asylum in Hungary 1941-45* describing the Hungarian action.

Forty-four years later another wave of refugees was to find shelter in Hungary: refugees from East Germany and other Iron Curtain countries came by tens of thousands, were welcomed, sheltered and helped to escape to the West through the first cracks in the Iron Curtain, on Hungary's western borders, where Hungary was the first country to remove the barbed wire.

The first American POW's came to Hungary in 1943. A damaged American bomber made a forced landing near the Hungarian frontier. The Germans demanded their extradition, saying that the bomber was damaged over Austrian territory. Their demand was rejected.

There were also Russian prisoners of war in Komárom. When it was learned that the place was not adequate for a POW camp, Colonel Utassy, at Kállay's request, allowed Colonel Charles Howie, himself a British POW, to investigate. In his memoirs, Kállay wondered if the Russians would have permitted a British colonel to inspect a prisoner of war camp in Russia, even during the years of their closest relationship with the West.

Colonel Howie had escaped from Silesia together with Tibor Weinstein, a British soldier from Palestine. Colonel Howie enjoyed

considerable freedom in Hungary. He conferred with former Prime Minister István Bethlen and Chief of Staff Ferenc Szombathelyi. Miklós Kállay Jr. even arranged for him an interview with the Regent Colonel Howie worked out a plan for the Hungarians to fight the German army with British help in the event of a German invasion. He was provided with a radio transmitter and a secret code by which he was able to report his plans to the Navy Command of the Mediterranean. The transmitter was first located in the apartment of D. Szentiványi, then it was taken to the home of Francis Durugy, a counsellor in the Foreign Ministry, and finally it was transferred to the Royal Palace on Castle Hill.

But no amount of planning and good will could save us from what was coming. The fate of Eastern Europe was already decided. We had no way of knowing what had been decreed at Teheran; but we knew that the Germans would not tolerate Hungarian independence much longer. The axe would fall sooner or later, the only question was when.

XII

German Invasion

On December 24, 1943 Leslie and I exchanged Christmas presents before each of us went home to be with our families.

He also showed me the “present” he had that day received from the Ministry: a document informing him of his official appointment as Assistant Press Secretary. I admired the foolscap document with its embossed seal of the Royal Crown topped by the crooked cross and held by two angels. I told him how happy I was for him. He smiled sadly at the belated honour. He had been working at the Ministry for five years, and his confirmation finally came when the Russians were already at the gates.

Before we parted Leslie had told me that there was a SOE message waiting for him. It turned out to be the message that “blew his cover’s” — at least with the radio operators. The two men who transmitted the messages were reliable people, but it was thought prudent not to tell them the nature of the radio contact. They had no idea that the messages came from the Allies. That is, not until they received a cheery English Christmas greeting from the SOE: “Happy Christmas, Old boy!” The “Old boy” did it. Fortunately, they were both very discreet men and kept the secret to themselves. They just smiled knowingly when they saw Leslie.

Christmas came and went; 1943 melted into 1944. The British were not getting any nearer, the Russians were advancing, and German diplomats were distancing themselves from Hungarian officials. This is how Veress describes the scene: “von Jagow, the

German Minister in Budapest was ordered to avoid meeting and discussing business with Prime Minister Kállay. Hungarian diplomats for their part, kept a wary eye on their German counterparts, watching for unexpected moves.

“Despite the desperate situation, the people of Budapest were enjoying themselves. Cafés and restaurants were full, and there was no real shortage of food and luxury consumer goods. In fashionable restaurants rationing was usually forgotten. In shops rationing was used mostly as a excuse to prevent German visitors from buying up food or textiles. French escapees from German POW camps worked as waiters in classy restaurants such as the Ritz or the Gellért, serving the German guests with ill-disguised contempt. A delegation of Swedish journalists, entertained at the elegant Park Club was surprised to hear the orchestra play “Tipperary” at the request of Foreign Ministry officials.

“Hungarian anti-aircraft defence was forbidden to interfere with Allied aircraft flying over Hungarian territory on their way to bomb German war factories in Austria. The Hungarians dubbed these planes Titobuses.”

For the Hungarian Government, in early 1944, time was running out. In late October, 1943, in a note to Ullein-Reviczky, the Hungarian Ambassador to Stockholm, Kállay had expressed his view that German occupation would inevitably follow in less than two months. The Germans had demanded his resignation, but he had decided to stay on in order to prevent a takeover by a extreme rightwing government. Kállay was particularly frustrated and chagrined by the British attitude. He felt that the British were demanding and threatening, without telling us what to do and where to find help.

While Kállay thought that the British were too tough, the Russians accused them of being too soft on Hungary. To prove that they meant business, FK. Roberts suggested in February that Britain

consider bombing Budapest The pros and cons of bombing each of the three cities, Sofia, Budapest ad Bucharest were meticulously listed in subsequent notes. Professor Aylmer Macartney tried to dissuade the high command from bombing Budapest, but Sir Andrew Noble disposed of his arguments by listing six excellent reasons for the bombing; among them, the creation of desirable panic, pleasing the Russians, and making the Hungarians more inclined to accept the British terms of unconditional surrender. However, he warns wisely against issuing an ultimatum threatening bombardment: if the deadline passes without results, the British might not have enough planes on hand to carry out the threat.' Looking back on my life at the receiving end of those bombs, it is good to know that they were sent with such solid reasoning behind them. Actually, Sofia won the contest for the "most desirable target" It was bombed beyond recognition by Allied planes. Budapest, the second runner-up, was bombed only after more heated discussion, and not until after the German occupation.

A February exchange of memos decorated by marginal notes from Anthony Eden reveals the peculiar relationship between Britain ad her unwilling enemy. D. Allen's memo, dated 18th February, 1944, sums up the arguments for ad against bombing Hungary. One argument he lists against bombing is that there is still a chance that Hungary will enter the war on the Allied side "as soon as Allied forces are near enough to Hungary to protect her"; Eden underlines this phrase with the skeptical comment, "Yes, exactly when will that be?" Another reason against bombing is that it will not produce political benefits, but on the contrary, it will strengthen the pro-Nazi elements in the country. Also, "Bombing would destroy Hungarian war production and thus reduce its possible usefulness to ourselves later on." (Question mark from Anthony Eden.)

The arguments for bombing were seen to outweigh those against The first one listed is that "It would help to dispose of Soviet suspicions that we are unduly tender towards Hungary and would

thus make it easier for us to secure Russian agreement to further conversations with the Hungarians aimed at securing their defection from the Axis.” (Anthony Eden: “But the Hungarians are not going to ‘defect’.”) Further, bombing would shake the complacency of the present government, and increase “war weariness” among the population. There is a caveat attached to the last statement: “It would not be safe to predict that Hungarians would react in the same way to bombing as the less sophisticated Bulgars.” Finally, it was deemed that bombing would have obvious military advantages. Although “to bomb” seemed to have won over “not to bomb,” most seemed to agree that the destruction must be carefully controlled to reap the greatest political advantage. Possibly a few targets could be hit with warnings of more to come if Hungary does not comply with Allied demands. Other voices in the discussion pointed out, however, that technically it would be impossible to “control” when and where Hungary would be bombed all the more so, as these raids would in all likelihood be carried out by United States forces.

Underlying most of the reasons both pro ad con is a certain non-tactical feeling — a feeling akin to what one might experience when dealing with a difficult friend who must be saved from himself. The participants in the discussion feel they must put the war effort first, but still, some allowances have to be made for Hungary. Anthony Eden’s is the only clear, cold voice. His handwritten note allows no room for sentiment:

1. Bombing Budapest is going to have no political effect. I do wish Dym ? wd. understand that no satellite is going to “surrender unconditionally” until it has got assurance of much better protection by the Allies than Italy has got
2. Therefore, bombing of Budapest is simply a question of targets. If Budapest gives us better returns than say, Wiener Neustadt or Leipzig, let’s bomb it in

preference to other targets. There's no other "yardstick." Damage to the enemy war potential is the only consideration. There is no political consideration. (Doc 66)

In this case Eden, with his cool objectivity, shows a better understanding of the Hungarian situation than his more sympathetic cohorts.

To British observers, Hungary seemed to move very slowly. In reality, the government was making feverish attempts to bring back Hungarian troops from the Russian front, but this task was hampered and made nearly impossible by the German High Command. Veress explains: "I and members of the Group in the Foreign Ministry learned with consternation from reports and maps that the German High Command had dispersed Hungarian troops in Russia into German army corps or divisions. The Hungarians who had been there only as occupying forces had been put into positions under direct German command. They were in the German order of battle, from the Ukraine up to the North, somewhere in the region of the Pripyet marshes. Not only would they be the prisoners of the Germans, but they would inevitably become involved in fighting Russia troops, contrary to the mood of our country and our interest in the defence of our own country's frontiers. This German move made it impossible to carry out the Hungarian decision to limit the part played by the Hungarian troops in occupational duties, pending their eventual withdrawal to the Carpatians."

In February, 1944 the Germans were becoming increasingly hostile and menacing. The Russians were approaching and would wreak terrible vengeance. Hopes for protection by the Western Allies were dwindling as Allied troops were bogged down at Monte Casino, far from our frontiers. In the same month Horthy wrote to Hitler and asked him to release the Hungarian troops. There was no reply. The

Government found Hitler's silence ominous. The Germans were keeping our troops as hostages.

In his radio messages, Veress kept the Allies informed of all these developments. He writes:

"In February and early March 1944, high-ranking Ministry officials of the Surrender Group and myself discussed the intolerable situation. Looking at the map, we realized the desperate plight of the Hungarian troops on the Eastern Front. The mood of the Government Group was one of dejection and desperation. I suggested that the Russians should be contacted through the British with a request for help in extricating the Hungarian troops from the German army by somehow making it possible for them to surrender to the Russians without any stigma of desertion.

"By the end of February 1944, the Government Group in the Ministry reached a decision which marked a turning point in Hungary's foreign policy. The Group came to the conclusion that Hungary must establish contact with Russia. In desperation, Kállay decided to send me on one more mission to Istanbul to let the Allies know that Hungary was now ready to seek contact with the Russians. As we had no direct links with the Russians, I drafted the following message to S.O.E: HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT READY TO CONTACT RUSSIANS TO ARRANGE SURRENDER OF TROOPS. ASKING BRITISH HELP AND GUIDANCE. VERESS ARRIVING TO ISTANBUL"

The British had their own problems. The Allies were still trying to make headway in Italy not only at Monte Cassino, but also at Anzio where the American 6th Army had landed in January and were held under attack by Kesselring's army. Meanwhile the Russians had successfully liberated Leningrad and were advancing westward against the Germans and the captive Hungarian troops.

Hitler's patience with his unreliable Axis allies was wearing thin. As early as the winter of 1943, Hitler was already making plans for the invasion of Hungary and Rumania. He even had a code name neatly designed for each: MARGARETHE I for Hungary, and MARGARETHE II for Rumania.

Such was the state of Europe when Veress arrived in Istanbul. Veress: "When I arrived there, I described the plight of the Hungarian troops on the Eastern Front, and raised the question of a possible understanding with the Russians. The idea was a plan to be put into effect in the event that Hungarian troops, which were under German command were put into action. The Hungarian Government asked for British help to arrange for an honourable surrender of such troops to the Russians. I had also been authorized to offer help to Marshall Tito in the form of supplies to be transported from Hungary across the Muraköz frontier. The free passage for Allied aircraft over Hungary to Tito was already agreed. Finally, I expressed our wish to restore radio-link with S.O.E. and our hope to receive a British Mission to Hungary.

"The British SOE officers listened carefully but were unable to hide the fact that they were under orders to refrain from any reaction without asking London for instructions. They had nothing encouraging to say. Turkey, they thought, was an unsuitable venue for establishing contact with the Russians. They did, however, promise to convey our message to London. To my dire forecast of a German invasion of Hungary, they replied merely by asking me if I thought I would be able to stay on the scene if that happened. I cannot help wondering whether the S.O.E. already knew of Hitler's plans for MARGARETHE I.

"I said a very sad good-bye to my friendly S.O.E. officers and contacts and went to my hotel on the Pera to pack my small suitcase and diplomatic bag. I was not in the mood to buy anything for my loved ones. The sun was shining brilliantly as I left the hotel, but my thoughts were gloomy. I had the feeling that I

was going home empty-handed, having reached complete deadlock.

“My journey home lasted four dreary days through the Germanoccupied Balkans, rattling in derelict trains with broken windows. Sometimes the train was shunted to a sidetrack for hours to let military trains pass. Now ad again an air-raid siren sounded and the train would stop once more. The only cheerful sight was to see Bulgarian peasants working in the fields, the men in colourful blue ad red baggy trousers, the women in flowery skirts and headscarves, waving and smiling at the passengers. My fellow passengers were peasants taking their products to the market Their baskets were dancing with live chickens, or bulging with vegetables or cheese. At midday they opened hampers revealing lovely pink slabs of bacon and ham, snow white cheese, and brown bread. With broad smiles they invited me to share their meal. I accepted so as not to offend them — and because I was hungry. Then the ticket collector forged his way through chicken coops ad parcels. Examining my ticket, he told me I was in the wrong carriage: this was a second class compartment, and I had a first class ticket I reluctantly followed him, knowing full well that I had a first class ticket. The reason I sometimes chose a second class compartment was that I did not want to be conspicuous sitting by myself, or worse still, with some German officers, in a first class carriage.

“On my arrival in Budapest, I took time for a much needed and well-deserved bath, and having gobbled whatever I could find in my larder, I went straight to the Foreign Ministry to report to the Government Group. Alas, I could offer little hope of Allied support Still, they registered with a sigh of satisfaction the renewed radio-contact with Britain. The next leap in the dark was to contact the Russians, hoping that they were informed by the British of our intentions. From my talks with the S.O.E representatives I could not really say that the British were at all interested in our proposals.

“I was to learn only 30 years later, from the newly released top secret documents that the suggestion of an approach to the Russians had in fact galvanised the British Foreign Office into action. My visit to Istanbul resulted in dozens of letters, telegrams, memos, ad minutes between the S.O.E, Istanbul, Cairo, London, Washington, and Moscow.”

Documents before the Istanbul meeting show careful discussion of how Veress was to be handled. In a handwritten memo dated 22nd February, D. Allen advises caution in encouraging Hungarian contact with the Russians, his reason being that “the Russians might prefer no contacts at all to contacts to which we are privy.” To the suggestion that Veress be pressed for technical intelligence information, Allen replies that this would be a very unwise thing to do as Veress might feel “put off when it becomes apparent that we are taking him merely as a source of military intelligence.” Frank Roberts concurs with this view (Doc 66).

Evidence of keen interest in the Hungarian proposals is also shown in Threlfall’s report (3rd March, 1944) to Frank Roberts in the Foreign office. He explains the Hungarian desire to have certain troops surrender to the Russians ad to arrange this “without arousing German suspicions of collusion. In other words, the surrender should appear to be perfectly natural and to result from a hopeless military situation.” Threlfall is naturally waiting for instructions, but he remarks that “the whole proposal obviously opens up very interesting prospects.”

“An almost equally interesting proposal” in Threlfall’s view is the Hungarian willingness to help Tito. He states that S.O.E has already sent a recommendation to Tito that meeting with the Hungarians would give him “a very good opportunity of reducing the number of his enemies.” Threlfall ends by stressing that if the British Government wishes to pursue the Hungarian proposals, it would be “almost a necessity” to have a S.O.E party in place

in Hungary (Doc 67).

In fact, the Hungarian initiative was so attractive, it even impressed Anthony Eden who wrote a long report to the Prime Minister, summarizing the Hungarian proposals and stating that the Soviet Union had been kept informed. Regarding the proposed S.O.E mission, Eden explains that he has "hitherto declined to authorise it to proceed since, in view of the Soviet Government's attitude towards Hungary as revealed at Moscow and Tehran, [he] felt that such action on our part might arouse undesirable suspicions in Moscow.

"The latest Hungarian initiative, however, is to my mind a favourable development which we must bring to the attention of the Soviet and United States Governments." With the Prime Minister's permission, he proposes to inform Moscow of the S.O.E mission to Hungary. The closing paragraph reflects his total change of heart: "Meanwhile I have told Lord Selborne, who had written to me about the proposed mission, that I am ready to agree to the despatch of the mission during the April moon period." The memo is dated 17th March, 1944. At the top of the document is a handwritten note which says:

Hungary

This paper has been overtaken by events and the
F.O. do not wish it submitted to the P.M.

JRC

21/3 (Doc 71)

On Sunday, 19th March the Germans invaded Hungary, and there would never again be a suitable "moon period" for the S.O.E mission.

While the carefully prepared British mission was never realized a largely unprepared American mission was actually dispatched during the German occupation. Colonel Duke, Major Alfred M. Suarez, Captain Guy T. Nun, and K. Howard Travers, a employee of the American Embassy in Berne, Switzerland, on instructions from

Alan Dulles, Head of the Office of Strategic Services in Berne, boarded a Halifax bomber and parachuted into Muraköz in the south of Hungary. They landed in a field, and after burying their parachutes, walked to the next village where they talked to a man who could not understand them until they tried French. Hungarian soldiers surrounded them and escorted them to the next town, Nagykanizsa

They were held in the City Council Hall where their reception was mixed. A captain barged in, holding a revolver; then a man in civilian suit arrived and introduced himself as Major Király, sent by Colonel General Ujszászi. They all went back to the landing field, and brought back the parachutes and the radio transmitter which the party had hidden. Duke wanted to call his headquarters in Algeria to let them know of his party's safe arrival, but Király did not let him make the call because he was sure that the Germans were listening. Finally, they were taken by machine gun wielding soldiers to a prison in Budapest, where they were treated royally to a magnificent supper with wine and all the trimmings.

Colonel General Ujszászi questioned them and blamed their superiors: they should have known the situation in Hungary, that all the airfields were in German hands, and should have held back the mission. Duke told Ujszászi that he had brought a message for the Regent and wished to talk to him, as well as to Prime Minister Kállay and Chief of Staff Szombathelyi.

Very early next morning, they were brought up from their cells to talk to Ujszászi. They were told that Ujszászi had a telephone call from Kállay instructing him to free the prisoners and call Algeria. When Major Király arrived, Duke asked him for an aircraft but Király told him that available Hungarian airplanes had been blown up during the night to prevent them from getting into German hands. Király was sympathetic, but could offer them no hiding place, and advised them to surrender to the Luftwaffe before the SS arrived. The Luftwaffe was considered more humane. Indeed the Luftwaffe

officers, persuaded by a few golden Napoleons, were willing to believe their story that they wanted to go to Yugoslavia, so they were put on a military bus to be taken to a POW camp in that country. Unfortunately, before they could depart, the Gestapo arrived on the scene, ordered them out of the bus, and returned them to prison in Budapest, where they were now put in solitary confinement and treated harshly. In June they were taken to Vienna, and in August, to Colditz in Germany, the prison for prominent Allied officers. They were freed only in April of the following year, when the Americans reached the place. Their mission had been doomed from the start, because of its unfortunate timing which coincided with the German invasion of Hungary.

Preparations for that invasion had started at the end of February. On the 10th or 15th March the organizers of the planned DS and Gestapo operation, code named MARGARETHE I, were called to a meeting at Mauthausen. Himmler, Kaltembrunner, Geschke and Eichmann were among the participants. Himmler summoned the Gestapo and Sicherheitsdienst in order to brief them on their forthcoming duties in Hungary. In Austria, Eichmann's Sonderkommados, about 200 men who were to deal with Hungary's Jews, were already on standby.

Hitler needed extra troops for the invasion, but he was heavily engaged on the Russia front and knew he would not be able to bring back those forces. So, when Antonescu visited him, he informed the Rumanian leader about his plans for the occupation of Hungary and asked for his help. Antonescu jumped at the opportunity. He was only too eager to assist — in exchange for Hitler's promise to return Transylvania to Rumania. But Hitler did not want any more trouble than he already had and eventually dropped the idea of using Rumanian help.

What went on in Hitler's mind as he was planning his operation for Hungary? Veress sums it up this way:

“Hitler was not quite certain what awaited him when the German army marched into Hungary. Would there be resistance, guerrilla warfare, and general political, military and economic upheaval? Would the Regent resign? He certainly did not want to provoke violent resistance; he did not want chaos in his backyard. But the Soviet army was drawing ever closer; they were already only 100-150 kilometers from the Carpathians. Hitler could not risk leaving Hungary in the hands of a regime he did not trust. He regarded Kállay as an enemy and had had no contact with him since April 1943. He had even sent Veessenmayer, one of his top officials, to Hungary to pressure the Regent to dismiss Kállay, to no avail. He was afraid that once the Russians reached Hungary’s frontiers and came in direct contact with Hungarian troops, the Hungarians would change sides and let the Russians into Central Europe. Then in February, 1944 he received Horthy’s letter demanding the withdrawal of Hungarian troops from the Eastern Front; this, plus German espionage reports of British and American airborne missions to Hungary must have made his patience finally run out

“Still, Hitler wanted to make the invasion look ‘natural.’ In early March he moved large numbers of German troops into Burgenland, next to the western frontier of Hungary. He then asked Hungary’s permission to take his forces through Budapest on their way to the Balkans. This way he hoped he could peacefully infiltrate Hungary with German occupying forces. His demand was refused although Kállay did permit him to take troops through the south of Hungary.”

Hitler’s next move was to win or force the co-operation of the Regent. On 15th March the nation celebrated Hungary’s fight for freedom from Hapsburg rule in the Revolution of 1848. The annual celebration had taken on a special meaning this year. “Freedom and Independence” was the motto. The daylong festivities culminated in a performance of a new patriotic opera about the life of the poet and leader of the 1848 Revolution, Sándor Petöfi. The gala performance

at the Budapest opera was attended by Regent Horthy and his wife, by Prime Minister Kállay, Mme Kállay, and by other ministers of state. In the interval the German Attaché asked Horthy's aide-de-camp to tell the Regent that the German Minister in Hungary, H. von Jagow, urgently wished to see him. Horthy immediately summoned Kállay to his box and told him of the message. When Horthy met Jagow the same evening, the latter handed him a letter from Hitler in which the Führer apologised for not replying to Horthy's letter of 12th February: He had been "indisposed." Hitler begged Horthy to come without delay to see him at Klessheim so that they could discuss the question of troop withdrawals and the military situation in general. He asked that Horthy bring with him his Chief of Staff and the Defence Minister to Klessheim. He wanted to see Horthy on Friday the 17th March, or on the morning of Saturday the 18th at the latest. Jagow was instructed to emphasize the urgency of the meeting in view of the gravity of the situation on the Eastern Front

On 16th March Horthy discussed Hitler's letter and invitation with Kállay who was dead set against the trip. He tried to persuade the Regent to postpone the journey at least for a week, until the German troop concentrations near the Hungarian frontiers were explained. He suggested that Chief of Staff Szombathelyi should go in place of the Regent

The Regent held a small Crown Council with the participation of Kállay, Szombathelyi, Defence Minister General L. Csataj, and Foreign Minister Ghyczy. After careful consideration, Szombathelyi voted for the trip, saying that the Regent had to meet Hitler in order to assure him that the Carpathians would be defended, so that Hitler, in turn would allow the remnants of the Hungarian troops to come back. Csataj, who first agreed with Kállay, now feared that if he opposed the trip, he would never see his divisions again. Foreign Minister Ghyczy, after some hesitation, agreed that the Regent should go to Klessheim, saying that refusal would make Hungary's plight worse. So it was decided that Horthy would after all go to see Hitler.

Kállay then said that he wanted to be present at the discussions, and that he too would go, but the Regent dissuaded him, saying that Hitler hated Kállay, and his presence would make it difficult to gain concessions. The Germans were informed that the Regent would leave for Klessheim on Friday evening, 17th March, 1944. Szombathelyi and Csatay were included in the party, and it was decided that a civilian, namely, Foreign Minister Ghyczy should also accompany them.

Before the Regent's departure, Kállay talked to him again and again expressing his concern for his safety and that of the country. He was particularly worried about the fact that there was no Deputy Regent to take over, should anything happen to Horthy. He also told the Regent that if Hitler asked for his /Kállay's/ removal, he should agree to it. Horthy absolutely refused to accept Kállay's political sacrifice; the Prime Minister was deeply moved.

The Regent's journey to Klessheim was kept secret to avoid public panic. Before leaving, he had a last minute talk with Minister of Interior Keresztes Fischer. Prime Minister Kállay accompanied Horthy to the train. In his memoirs Kállay remembers fighting back tears and wondering when or if he would ever see the Regent again. At half past ten in the evening, on 17th March the Regent's special train left the station with its aging and worried passenger. It was a Friday; Horthy, an Admiral of the Fleet in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was said never to have set out on a journey on a Friday.

Horthy left the country, still hoping that the worst could be avoided. He did not leave any signed proclamation or authorization for Kállay to act in his name if he failed to return. The only person in the group who made any preparation for the worst scenario was Ghyczy, who privately agreed with Szentmiklóssy, the Deputy Foreign Minister, on two wire messages with special meanings. "Please let my wife know that I am well" would mean "Military occupation is to be expected," and "The visit is not to be communicated to the Press" would mean "Military occupation is certain

Horthy had assured Kállay that he would keep in constant touch using the radio on his train. Therefore, it was chilling to find that no news came of his arrival in Vienna. There was no telephone connection between Vienna and Budapest, and it was feared that Hitler had taken him prisoner.

While Horthy was at Klessheim. Kállay's counter-espionage personnel reported to him a telephone conversation at the German Legation between Kornhuber, the German Press Chief in Budapest and an extreme right-wing Hungarian politician Ferenc Rajniss in which Kornhuber said, "If the old man /Horthy/ does not sack Kállay, he himself will have to go." Kornhuber made no secret of the fact that he wanted right-wing minister Imrédy to take over from Kállay. Kállay informed the Minister of Interior of the conversation, and Keresztes-Fischer expelled Kornhuber immediately. Kornhuber was escorted to the frontier: he was most probably back in the country with the German occupying forces a few days later.

Like Ghyczy, Veress had no hopes of a favourable outcome:

The enemy was at the gates; I did not have to wait till they crossed the frontier to know their intentions. I radioed through SOE my last message to His Majesty's government: 'GERMAN OCCUPATION IMMINENT.' I gave them all the available information about German troop deployments at the Hungarian border and asked for Allied Air support if resistance was to be implemented. I asked London to please request Marshall Tito's definite promise to receive Hungarian refugees, politicians, or any persons who were involved in the surrender negotiations. The message went out on 17th March, 1944. There was no answer from London. History was to repeat itself in 1956 when Imre Nagy made his last tragic appeal to the West as Russian tanks were rumbling into Budapest."

On 18th March I went up to Castle Hill to meet Leslie at the Ruswurm Patisserie, near his office. He looked tense and worried, anxious not to be too far from his office. He said he had not eaten

since an early breakfast. It was now four in the afternoon. We had coffee and cake and he told me about the message he had sent to S.O.E.

He talked about seeing right-wing sympathisers with knowing smiles on their faces. "At least the German army will defend us against the Bolsheviks," they said. I knew Leslie must leave the country as soon as possible, but how was he going to make it to Tito's partisans through German occupied countries? I did not have time to wonder what would happen to me.

On the night of 18th March, Prime Minister Kállay was already in bed when he was aroused by the Minister of the Interior, Keresztes-Fischer, and told to get dressed quickly because serious events were on the way. German troops had crossed the border in trains, tanks, and armoured cars, and were heading toward Budapest. The General Staff reported that from the north-east and west, Rumanian, Slovak, and Croatian forces were also standing in readiness to attack Hungary.

Veress: "At night I was aroused from my sleep by a ringing telephone. It was a call from my superior in the Foreign Ministry telling me to hurry to the office as soon as possible. I had no car, and no taxi was available. I ran all the way up the steep streets of Castle Hill. When I arrived at the Ministry, I saw SS men lurking in the doorways.

"I was told that Kállay had given orders that all the secret files of his own Ministry, and of the Interior and Defence Ministries were to be burned. So we set about burning all my codes, and other incriminating documents. We spent the whole night incinerating papers from the safe. By morning I looked and smelled like a firefighter. The office was a mess, and I was covered with soot

"On the 19th March the Ministries were like disturbed anthills; desperate officials were coming and going; representatives of foreign countries came in search of information. Kállay told them to report

to their governments what had happened: The Regent and the military leaders had been lured out of the country and detained until the occupation was completed. He tried to contact foreign embassies and Hungarian representatives abroad, but found that all communications had been cut off. Military engineers were sent out to investigate, but brought back no reports. It was a clear case of sabotage.

“Former Prime Minister Count István Bethlen arrived at the Prime Minister’s office and found himself confronted by a Gestapo patrolman who had broken through the prime Minister’s police guard and demanded that Bethlen go with him to see the German Minister Jagow. Bethlen calmly answered that he was not in the habit of visiting people in the middle of the night, but if Jagow wished to speak with him, Jagow could find him here. Kállay lost no time in ordering the sinister Gestapo man to leave, and Bethlen thought it better to disappear. He escaped through the deep tunnel under Castle Hill.

“Hungarian airfields were occupied at four in the morning, and by 6 o’clock the German army was heading for Budapest. Kállay was faced with the greatest dilemma of his career. He had no constitutional authority to give orders to the Army in the absence of the Regent. Hitler had cunningly arranged it so that the Regent, his Chief of Staff, and his Defence Minister were all in his clutches while the German army invaded the country. Kállay could not find the Deputy Chief of Staff, Bajnóczy, so he consulted three army commanders, General István H. Náday, General Károly Beregffy, and General Béla Miklós, as well as Generals Szilárd and Bakay. Bakay was the officer in command of the troops in Budapest; Beregffy and Miklós were two right-wing officers who came without being called. Kállay asked the generals whether in the absence of the Regent, the Chief of Staff, and the Defence Minister, they were prepared to accept his instructions to order resistance. The answer in general was: What with? Our troops are in the north at the Carpatians, poorly equipped; the Germans are equipped with tanks and armoured vehicles; we are heavily

outnumbered; we have some recruits in the barracks, but they are untrained. Two of the generals considered resistance absolutely impossible. Only General Náday was for resistance; he said he was willing to do whatever the Prime Minister ordered, but only if the whole army went along with it. The Prime Minister and the three army commanders came to an agreement: the army was not to attack the Germans, but if the garrisons or camps were attacked, they would resist. Installations were to be barred shut, ammunition distributed and the guns made ready for action. The army was then to await the Regent's orders.

Two telegrams arrived. One was a pre-arranged one from Foreign Minister Ghyczy to Deputy Minister A. Szentmiklóssy. It read: 'PLEASE LET MY WIFE KNOW THAT I AM WELL.' (i.e. MILITARY OCCUPATION EXPECTED) The other was sent on German demand by Chief of Staff Szombathelyi to Deputy Chief of Staff Bajnóczy, instructing him to take no action until the Regent came back, and to arrange a friendly reception for the German troops. Although the first one was sent much earlier, both telegrams were delayed until the Regent's train had crossed the Hungarian border. The train had been carefully delayed until the German occupation was completed.

“Soon after the arrival of the telegrams, the German Military Attaché, Geiffenberg, informed Kállay that 11 German divisions were on the march by mutual understanding between Hitler and Horthy. They would be in Budapest by 6 o'clock. Hungary's airfields were to be occupied by German parachutists. Later a German general appeared and showed Kállay a long telegram from Keitel: German troops were going to occupy Budapest in agreement with the Regent, and Veessenmayer, the new Ambassador was arriving at the same time. The German troops would behave energetically but not inimically; however, they would relentlessly crush any resistance. He also let the Prime Minister know that armies of Hungary's neighbours were also standing by, and if Hungary resisted German

forces, they would march on Budapest too. The Germans knew that for Hungarians, the latter was the biggest threat of all.

“By 6 am. Budapest was encircled. SS units occupied the Radio station at Lakihegy, the Chief Police Headquarters, bridges and important installations. In the early morning they reached Budapest, marched in style, bands playing. The Germans were told that they would be received as friends; instead, they found themselves marching through deserted, silent streets. There were no jubilant crowds, not even in the Swabian villages around Budapest. As Kállay observed in his memoirs, ‘In Budapest even the hooligans, who had in the past noisily paraded their German sympathies, were speechless on the day of German occupation.’ Here and there the Germans tried to enter the military barracks but were received with shots and withdrew. At the frontiers and at some railway lines and airfields, some shots were fired at the Germans, but otherwise there was little resistance as Kállay had reluctantly given orders not to shoot at the marching German army. Resistance was mild even from the Communists, who wanted to save themselves for the future.

‘The country was unprepared for a general uprising, but there were instances of individual resistance. One of the most dramatic episodes occurred when Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, the leader of the Smallholders’ Party took shots at the Germans with his revolver. The Germans shot him and dragged him away, severely wounded, shouting ‘Long live independent Hungary!’

‘The Radio building was taken over only in the afternoon. The SS put one German in charge of each announcer, and the Director, András Hlatky, was warned that he would be responsible for every word that was spoken on the air. So nothing was spoken; they just played Hungarian and German military marches.” The people of the city were for the most part unaware of what was happening. On Sunday, 19th March Louis, Dalma and I went to have Sunday dinner at the home of one of Louis’ relatives who lived in Pest. We were on our way to their house when the news of the German occupation was

announced. Our hosts had heard the news on the radio, but kept it from us so as not to spoil our dinner. It was not until we got home and turned on the radio that we learned the bitter truth.

XIII

Hitler Has Won — For Now

On the 19th of March, 1944, between 11 o'clock and noon, Horthy arrived back from Klessheim. Waiting to greet him at the station were Prime Minister Kállay, Deputy Chief of staff General Bajnóczy, Minister of Interior Keresztes-Fischer, Deputy Foreign Minister A. Szentmiklóssy, General Károly Lázár, and Intelligence Department Head Gyula Kádár. Also waiting were German staff officers led by the head of the Balkan Army group, General Maximilian Weichs, who introduced himself to Kállay, but the two men made no further exchange.

As he descended from the train, the Regent was deathly pale and worn out, but being a military man, he was still master of himself. Behind him in a German general's uniform walked Dr. Edmund Veesenmayer, whom the Regent presented as the new German Minister. Next to him stood Sztójay, the right-wing Hungarian Minister in Berlin, with whom Kállay did not shake hands. From the next carriage jumped out SS officer Adolf Eichmann and his cohorts, ready to deal with the Jews.

In the limousine, alone with the Prime Minister, the Regent quickly told Kállay what had happened at Klessheim. The story that emerged in this and in subsequent interviews with the Regent reveals a sinister combination of threats and promises on the part of Hitler and his functionaries. On the morning of 18th March D. Sztójay joined Horthy on the train in Vienna. On their arrival at Salzburg, Horthy's party was received by Hitler who was accompanied by

German Foreign Minister J. von Ribbentrop, General Keitel, and other leading German officials. After a quick exchange of greetings, Horthy was swiftly taken to Schloss Klessheim, the castle where the discussions were to be held. Horthy found that Hitler looked worn out and had aged a great deal since their last meeting. The atmosphere during their ride to Klessheim was frigid, conversation kept to a minimum. Horthy asked Hitler if he desired the presence of his generals and minister, to which Hitler replied that he did not. He wanted a private discussion with Horthy. On this point alone, Horthy agreed with him.

On their arrival at Klessheim, Hitler, followed by an interpreter, took Horthy straight to his study. As the Regent spoke perfect German, he considered the interpreter unnecessary, and the man was dismissed. Horthy reveals in his memoirs that he later regretted this decision because it left him with no witness to the discussions that followed.

Alone with Horthy, Hitler looked ill at ease; he had several crucial subjects on his mind. Instead of dealing with the Hungarian troop withdrawal from Russia — the subject most important to the Regent — he started by urging Horthy to deal with the Jews radically and to dismiss Kállay. The Regent replied that he had no reason for asking his Prime Minister to resign. Hitler's staccato voice rose in pitch and volume as he reproached Horthy with not giving him more help. He ranted about Italy's treacherous surrender and shouted that he knew about Kállay's "machinations." He declared that he owed it to his country to prevent Hungary's desertion. He made Horthy furious when he accused Hungary of treachery. Horthy replied indignantly that Magyars had never been traitors. "Without my consent, there can never be the change of front that you have described," he declared. "Should events force my hand one day so that, to safeguard our very existence, I have to ask the enemy for an armistice, I assure you that I shall openly and honestly inform the German Government of such negotiations beforehand" (Memoirs,

213). When Hitler persisted in his accusations, Horthy asked him for proof of Hungary's "treachery." Hitler declared that he had written proof of Kállay's overtures to the Allies. He specifically mentioned Szentgyörgyi and Mészáros, but he never mentioned Veress and showed no knowledge of the Istanbul Agreement. In fact, surviving documents show no evidence that the Germans had any knowledge of Veress' mission. They knew of a secret wireless link which the Funkabwehr had detected, but the secret code was never broken and there is no mention of Veress. Even "Cicero" did not manage to betray this secret to the Germans.

Horthy, who genuinely did not know all the details of the surrender negotiations, became very indignant and said to Hitler, "If you accuse me of treachery, I will shoot myself!" Hitler was unimpressed: "Was habe ich davon?" (How does that benefit me?) he scoffed. When Horthy related this incident in an interview with Aylmer Macartney, he added: "If at that moment I had had my gun with me, I would have shot him."

Hitler, for his part, wanted everything to go smoothly. With the aid of his Chief of Staff, and Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, he had prepared in advance a joint communiqué which he wanted Horthy to sign. The document expressed Hungary's pledge of complete loyalty to Germany, the Regent's intention to appoint the right-wing Béla Imrédy as the new Prime Minister, to allow the German High Command to make decisions concerning personnel in high offices, to put the Hungarian army under German command, and to guarantee a friendly reception to the German troops which would march into Hungary to ensure Hungary's compliance. Outraged, Horthy refused to sign. German occupation of a sovereign country, he said, would turn the whole country against Germany. Hitler wanted no more argument: "I have decided to occupy Hungary," he blurted. The Regent was furious: "If everything has been decided already, there is no point in continuing the discussion. I am leaving." Hushed with anger, he stormed out of the room, and in spite of his

advanced age, (he was 76 years old), he ran up the stairs to his apartment on the next floor. Hitler tried to follow him, to no avail. Hitler's Chief of Protocol, Baron Dornberg, went to him. The Regent asked him to prepare his special train for departure. Finally Dornberg persuaded Horthy to wait and accompanied him to Hitler's study for further discussion. Horthy returned to Hitler, but the two parted without reaching an agreement

Horthy was beginning to feel more and more like a prisoner. He had made several attempts to get in touch with his Government, but his demands met first with lame excuses (he was told that the phone service was disrupted) and finally with blunt refusal: no communication would be allowed until the discussions were over.

Hitler invited Horthy to lunch. Chief of Staff Szombathelyi felt it was important for the Regent to continue the discussions with Hitler and persuaded Horthy to accept the lunch invitation. During lunch Horthy remembers seeing Hitler pick nervously at his vegetarian food. There was little conversation. After lunch Szombathelyi talked to Hitler, emphasizing the tragic consequences of a German occupation of Hungary. When he asked Hitler to withdraw his troops, Hitler gave the impression that he regretted his decision. He even called General Keitel, asking him if it was possible to hold back the occupation. Keitel told him it was not possible as the troops were already on the march. In the afternoon of 18th March Horthy met Hitler again and repeatedly asked him to reverse his decision to occupy Hungary. Hitler said that it was too late to recall the troops. Actually Hitler's reaction was an elaborate act: the orders for the occupation were not given until 5 pm. and the troops were not to cross the frontier until 7 pm.; there would have been plenty of time to recall them.

Faced with the inevitability of a German invasion, the Regent declared: "In that case I shall resign." Hitler wanted that least of all. To ensure a smooth takeover, he needed the Regent in place. He turned to threats: if Horthy abdicates, Hitler will command the

Rumanian, Czech, Slovak and Croatian forces to march into Hungary. He also warned that he could not guarantee the safety of Horthy's family. When threats had no effect, he tried conciliation once more. In a changed voice he pleaded with the Regent not to abdicate, saying that he had always loved Hungary. He said he knew Hungary had always been a sovereign state and would not dream of interfering with her sovereignty. He gave his word that the German troops would be withdrawn as soon as the new Hungarian Government had earned his confidence. Horthy realized that his resignation would only make matters worse. It would not prevent the military occupation and it would give Hitler a chance to impose a Nazi Arrowcross regime in Hungary. If he remained head of state, at least the army would be under his command. "While I was in charge," he reflects in his Memoirs, "they could not attempt putting the Arrow-Cross Party into office to do their deadly work of murdering Hungarian patriots, of exterminating the 800,000 Hungarian Jews and the tens of thousands of refugees who had sought sanctuary in Hungary. It would have been easier to make the great gesture of abdication, and I should have been spared many a denunciation, but to leave a sinking ship, especially one that needed her captain more than ever, was a step I could not bring myself to take" (215).

As the afternoon wore on, Hitler continued to pressure Horthy; he sent Ribbentrop to ask him to sign the communiqué which contained his approval of the German occupation; Horthy angrily continued to refuse to put his signature on a "lie." In spite of his repeated demands, no preparations were made for his departure, and he finally asked Baron Dornberg if he was to consider himself a prisoner. The Chief of Protocol assured him that the delay was caused by concern for his safety: there was an air raid alert, and as soon as the air raid was over, the train would be allowed to leave. He was sure that the air raid would be over at 8 pm. He spoke with confidence: the Führer had himself ordered the air raid alert to

prevent the Regent from leaving before the occupation was completed.

In the evening, the Regent was ready to leave, but there was still no sign of his train. Instead, he received a message that Hitler wanted to see him again. Thinking that Hitler had changed his mind, Horthy agreed to another meeting. So they faced each other once more, and after a few embarrassing seconds of silence, Hitler, oozing his oily charm, begged Horthy not to abdicate, but to dismiss Kállay and appoint a new government. The Regent finally was forced to promise that there would be no armed resistance against the German occupying forces. Hitler, in turn, promised that his army would not attack Castle Hill and the Regent's residence there, and that the Hungarian army would not be disarmed. It was the threat of the ultimate humiliation for the country — occupation by Rumanian, Czech, Slovak and Croatian troops — that finally made Horthy give in, but he never signed the communiqué stating that he had asked Hitler to invade Hungary. However, his refusal did not prevent the German High command from publishing the communiqué anyway.

Finally, at eight o'clock the Regent's train was ready to depart. A smiling Hitler with his retinue came to see him off. This was to be Horthy's last view of Hitler: a year later Horthy would be a witness to the destruction of his country, and Hitler would be dead after his suicide in the bunker of the Reich Chancellery.

Soon after its departure from Klessheim, the Regent's train was delayed on a siding while Ribbentrop made yet another unsuccessful attempt to induce Horthy to sign the communiqué. The train was already moving and Ribbentrop was still trying to get Horthy's signature. Finally he gave up and left, shouting to Horthy that his refusal would have serious consequences.

The train left Salzburg after nine o'clock on the evening of 18th March. Ribbentrop's menacing words mingled in Horthy's mind with the noise of the train as it gathered speed. The heavily breathing locomotive carried a worried and exhausted Head of State with his

two Generals and Foreign Minister on their way to face their country's destiny.

The train also carried the person who was now in charge of that destiny, namely, Dr. Edmund Veesenmayer. D. von Jagov, the German Minister in Budapest, also travelling on the train, informed Horthy that he had been relieved of his post and introduced Veesenmayer as his successor. The latter, who had spent several months recently in Budapest, assured Horthy that it was his aim to carry out his orders in consultation with the Regent, and that he would discuss with him the formation of the new government

On the way home Szombathelyi sent — as Hitler demanded — a telegram to General H. Bajnóczy instructing him to take no action until the Regent's return, and to receive the German troops as friends. The train was delayed in Linz until the answer was received and the German divisions from Belgrade, Zagreb, Krakow and Vienna had penetrated the Hungarian frontiers. It was four in the morning when the train moved on. Horthy was not supposed to arrive in Budapest until the occupation was complete. When the Regent's train finally pulled in at the Budapest railway station, it was 11 o'clock in the morning of March 19, 1944. The occupation of the whole country had lasted about 12 hours.

Meanwhile in Budapest people in critical positions tried to save what could be saved. In an effort to prevent the transfer of Polish refugees and Allied prisoners of war to German control, Kállay instructed his son, Christopher Kállay to get in touch by telephone with officials in charge of these individuals and order them to give the prisoners one month's pay and release them. Unfortunately, the German army and the Gestapo acted with such speed that in most cases these orders could not be carried out and some of these people ended up in German workcamps. However, despite the German occupation, many Polish refugees were sheltered by Hungarian families until the Russians arrived. According to one Polish resistance

leader, Colonel Mieczyslaw Mlotek, the number of Poles thus saved was approximately 2,000.

In the late afternoon of Monday, 20th March, Leslie asked me to meet him at the Budapest Western Railway Station. He looked very tired but composed in spite of the fact that he had been up all night burning incriminating documents. He was carrying a small leather suitcase with a few necessary belongings. He told me that he had packed in great haste, expecting the SS to come looking for him any minute. He told me he was first going to his parents' house in Sepsiszentgyörgy, Transylvania. He was hoping that he could lie low there for a while because his uncle Lajos Dálnoki Veress was the commanding General of the Second Hungarian Army in Kolozsvár (Cluj).

We met in front of the station. When we entered the big station hall, it was swarming with SS and German soldiers. As a civilian, he felt very conspicuous and did not want to risk asking questions about the trains to Transylvania. He had a time-table, but as he turned the pages, the small print suddenly became a blur. He had never worn glasses, and it was a shock to discover that he needed them. Helplessly, he turned to me: "Lolly, darling, can you read this for me?" Luckily I was blessed with good eyesight which enabled me to read small print without glasses well into my eighties. As I was scanning the page, he was on edge, not knowing whether he might be already missing his train. Finally, I found what he wanted. The last train that day for Transylvania was scheduled to depart in a few minutes. We tried to keep as far away from the correct platform as possible, planning to board the train at the last possible moment. The SS kept a wary eye on people who were trying to leave the country. People who looked Jewish were sometimes arrested at the station. Although Leslie had a diplomatic passport, his name spelled danger.

Then it was time to say goodbye. We looked around carefully before we risked a quick hug and a kiss. "Leave the station

immediately," he instructed me. "And go with Dalma away from Budapest as soon as possible." The guard's whistle sounded, and in half a second he was on the steps of the train. "I won't wave to you," he said. I did not wave either. I just stood there on the platform as the train pulled out I stared at the shiny tracks as they became narrower and narrower until the train disappeared. "God knows when I shall see him again," I thought

Somehow I made it home; how, I don't know. Exhausted, I threw myself on my bed, but I could not rest. I got up again and went to the larder to get myself a glass of my mother's red currant wine. I walked out on our large balcony and looked out in the direction of Leslie's street on the other side of the park. I was startled by the sound of the doorbell. Could it be they were here already? I looked out into the street; there was no sign of any military vehicle. I opened the door and found Leslie's sister Katalin standing in the hall. I pulled her inside, and we hugged and cried. I told her about Leslie's departure and promised to keep in touch. When she left, I realised

that I had to make a trip to his flat immediately to see if he had left any dangerous papers around. I also wanted to pack some of his clothes and valuables and send them after him to Transylvania. Leslie would have been horrified at my foolhardy venture. In my eagerness I barely thought of the risk I was taking. The SS had already been looking for him at the Foreign Office. If they had found me there, they would have certainly arrested me. But I was young, brave and foolish.

I climbed quietly to the second floor, clutching in my hand the key to his flat. My heart was beating faster as I was beginning to realise the danger. I stopped before his front door and listened for sounds inside. The place was silent I turned the key slowly. By now my heart was like a drumbeat inside my chest Finally I just closed my eyes and turned the handle of his front door. The door opened and there was no one inside. I walked in and looked around at the familiar male disorder. His huge Orion radio was still on, its green glass eye glowing; remnants of breakfast, ashtray full of cigarette butts, papers on the table, and his huge brass bed . . . I felt I simply must lie down on the bed for a few seconds. I threw myself down on the soft velvet bedcover, and for two seconds time stopped, receded. It was before March 19, 1944; Leslie had left his room to buy a paper and would be back any minute. We would have coffee and his favourite cakes, and then we would go for a long walk along the banks of the Danube, hand in hand . . . The rumbling of armoured vehicles in the street made me sit up. I was confused and hardly knew where to begin, but I knew that I had to hurry. I quickly emptied the ashtray, then realized how senseless this act was. I started to pack his clothes, but left them when I suddenly thought of the codebook That is what I must hide, I thought But where was it? I searched his mahogany bookcase with no success; then I remembered seeing him put it once into his laundrybasket I rushed to the bathroom, and there at the bottom of the linenbox, underneath his dirty silk shirts, I found the little blue codebook: Professor Ernest

Barker's Britain and the British People. I realized that it would be too dangerous to take it with me, so I placed it among the other books in the bookcase.

On the table I noticed papers with drafts of a coded message, probably his last one to the S.O.E. I tore them up into little pieces, mixed them up with some leftover food and poured water on them to make a distasteful but safely disguised concoction. I hastily packed some of Leslie's belongings and left the flat with a suitcase in one hand and one of his oriental rugs under my arm.

I was so elated with my success that the next day I decided to make another trip to Leslie's flat to see if I could salvage some more of his belongings. This time I took Dalma with me and left her to wait for me in the street while I went upstairs. As soon as I came near the door, I saw that something was wrong. The lock was broken and the door was sealed by the SS. After my initial shock, I was overwhelmed by my need to know what they had taken. I reassured myself that since they had already been there, it was unlikely that they would return so soon and decided to enter the flat. Removing the seal was not as easy as I had thought, but finally I succeeded with the aid of my German-made Solingen nail-file.

I stepped inside to find the room ransacked. The doors of his wardrobe were ripped off, their mirrors broken; the floor was strewn with books and the stuffing from his mattress. His radio was gone as well as his clothes. The SS had taken everything valuable, even his dirty silk shirts from the linenbox. They did, however leave behind Leslie's collection of silk swastika flags which as Chief of Press Censorship he had refused to distribute and had hidden instead in his laundry box. They had been so busy collecting silk shirts and ties that the blue codebook had escaped their attention. When Leslie came home after the war, he was to find it in the bomb-damaged attic where the remnants of his belongings were stored. When he fled Hungary again in 1946, he took the little water-soaked blue book with him to Italy and left it with his friend Hubert Pallavicini.

Eventually the book found its way back to England, and Leslie still had it when he died in 1980. It is still in my possession.

I spent no more than two minutes in the flat. When I left, I reattached the seal and ran down to the street to find Dalma. I grasped her hand firmly and we hurried away.

How did the SS come to pursue Leslie so quickly when they did not even know of his role in the Istanbul negotiations? Unfortunately, he had several right-wing enemies who hated his activities in the Censorship Department. One right-wing journalist, Gy. Oláh, had earlier denounced him to the pro-Nazi military leaders with the result that Leslie was drafted. It was with considerable difficulty that his superiors in the Ministry managed to have him exempted on the grounds that his language skills made him indispensable to the Censorship Department. Military service would have effectively removed him from the scene. After the German occupation, his name was among the first on the list of those to be arrested. On 20th March, Andor Szentmiklóssy, the Deputy Foreign Secretary, was questioned by the Germans about Veress' whereabouts, but he refused to give any information, saying that he obeyed only his rightful constitutional superiors. However, some of his colleagues unwittingly endangered Leslie; when questioned by the Germans, thinking that Veress had already left the country, they felt free to blame him for everything. Some of them started talking while Veress was actually still within reach. It was sheer luck that the SS found only his linen basket in his apartment

When I left Leslie's flat the second time, I realized that I must go into hiding, at least for a while. I could not risk being caught and possibly involving Louis who was totally unaware of Leslie's activities. Leslie's last instructions to me were to find a hiding place for me and Dalma, and I knew he was right. But where was I to go? Suddenly I thought of the Parádís. Jenő Parádi was a ministerial counsellor and an old friend of Louis. (He had been his aide in the

famous duel with Leslie. How idyllic that duel seemed at the present moment!) He and his wife Erzsike had both come from Transylvania and were devoted connoisseurs of Transylvanian folk art. They had a summer cottage near Visegrád in a secluded valley off the Danube. They had no children and were very fond of Dalma. After I had mailed two suitcases full of clothes to Leslie's parents, Dalma and I paid a visit to the Parádi.

Jenő and Erzsike received us with affectionate smiles. Over tea and cakes we talked about the terrible events of the past three days. It was hard for me to keep calm. Finally I could hold back the tears no longer. "Can you put us up for a few weeks at your cottage?" I asked. They were real friends; they did not ask me to explain, but agreed to move out to their summer cottage the next day — at least a month earlier than they had planned — and take Dalma and me with them. It is more than likely that Jenő was aware of Leslie's involvement, but he never for a moment thought of the danger he might himself be running.

The next day the four of us, Jenő, Erzsike, Dalma and I travelled by train to a village about three miles from the Parádi cottage. From there we had to hire a coach and horse to take us to Szentgyörgypuszta, the secluded valley that was to be our shelter. It was pouring with rain as we arrived at the bottom of their garden and stopped at the Transylvanian carved wooden gate to look up to the top of the hill where their summer home was situated. We climbed the winding clay path to the cottage, a charming replica of a Transylvanian peasant house with high roofed gables and wooden shutters. Inside, it was an enchanted place with red and white homespun curtains, colourful embroidered cushions, carved chairs, and a traditional green glazed tile stove you could sit around and lean against. Parádi was himself an artist and he had lovingly decorated the ceiling with peasant style paintings framed by the beams. On one wall ticked their prized possession, an authentic Transylvanian cuckoo clock.

After we unpacked and opened some windows, we had a meal of fresh milk, fresh brown bread and smoked sausage and gradually my nerves relaxed. The rain stopped and we went to meet our neighbours. Of the four houses in the valley, one belonged to the poet Lajos Aprily who lived there with his wife, his daughter and her toddler son. His son-in-law was in the army. We called on them and had a beautiful afternoon at their house, listening to his stories of Transylvania. The valley is now named after him.

Night came and with it promise of peace and rest. After the last nervewrecking days in Budapest, I would finally sleep in peace. In peace that is, until the cuckoo popped out and chimed each quarter of an hour. The combination of Nazi threat and cuckoo chimes was my undoing. The Parádís were real friends; next morning, when they saw my weary face after a sleepless night, they turned off their beloved cuckoo, and I could finally get some rest. The cuckoo was never the same again, but they never held that against me.

I stayed at Szentgyörgypuszta for about a week, and then returned to the turmoil of Budapest, leaving Dalma in their care. Thanks to the Parádi family, Dalma spent the critical months of March, April and June away from danger and the terrible changes that happened during those months in Budapest. She was happy as long as she could see me at frequent intervals. Therefore, I made a point of visiting her once or twice each week, bringing with me what food items I could to compensate her hosts at least in some small way for their kindness. As time went by, these trips became more and more difficult. To avoid the three-mile walk, I sometimes took the boat from Budapest, but the boat landed on the opposite side of the river, and I had to hire a man to row me across. After a while, the boat trips became risky because of the mines that had been dropped into the Danube by the RAF. But even with the discomforts of travel, Szentgyörgypuszta was a welcome relief from the nightmare of life in Budapest.

A few days after the occupation, Veessenmayer, the new German Ambassador, acting on Hitler's instructions, nominated Béla Imrédy for the Premiership. The Regent, who was averse to Imrédy's right-wing views, refused to approve the nomination and appointed Lieutenant-General Döme Sztójay, the former Hungarian Ambassador in Berlin. Although Sztójay was an ardent pro-German, knew very little about home affairs, and was a sick man, the Regent trusted him, thinking that as a military man, he would at least obey orders; also, since Sztójay had been present at the discussions in Klessheim, he would be acceptable to Hitler. Sztójay was sworn in on 23rd March, 1944.

While allowing the Regent this minor concession, the German command felt free to pursue its enemies vigorously. The arrests started with members of the Government Minister of the Interior Keresztes-Fischer who had courageously backed Veress' contact with the Allies and provided him with his radio operators, was one of the first to suffer. On the night of the 19th March, after a day of harrowing events and a Crown Council meeting, he went home for a night's rest. In the middle of the night, both he and his brother were dragged from their beds by the Gestapo. He was taken to Flossburg, one of the worst concentration camps, where members of the German resistance were taken to be hanged. He survived captivity, only to die in Austria, soon after being set free by the Allies.

Deputy Foreign Minister Andor Szentmiklóssy went into hiding at his mother's home in West Hungary. Posing as her son's friends, Gestapo agents tricked his mother into admitting that Szentmiklóssy was staying at her house. He was arrested and later perished at Dachau. Aladár Szegedy-Maszák, head of the Foreign Office Political Department was arrested, so were Sombor-Schweinitzer, the Chief of Police, General Ujszászi, Head of Counter Intelligence, and Gyula Kádár, his Deputy Colonel. Count Bethlen, one of the main supporters of Hungary's withdrawal from the Axis, managed to elude the Nazis by hiding in the countryside. When the place where he was

sheltered was liberated by the Soviet army, he reported to the Soviet general who promptly had him arrested and imprisoned. Later we learned that he was killed by his captors. Former Head of the Foreign Office Press Department, Antal Ullein-Reviczky, whose aid was vital in making our first contacts with the British in Istanbul, became the new Hungarian Minister to Sweden; he did not return to Hungary, but stayed in Stockholm.

Kállay, who had resigned as Prime Minister, stayed with his family in his home on Castle Hill. At dawn a few days after the German occupation, the family woke to the sound of banging on the gates. Kállay's son Christopher went to investigate and found outside an SS officer who told him that Veesenmayer wanted to see Kállay at the German Legation. On hearing the message, Kállay decided to take no more chances. Deep under Castle Hill was a network of tunnels and air-raid shelters including several dozen well-equipped apartments for the use of members of the Ministries. The tunnels also connected with the Regent's residence. Kállay and his family descended into these tunnels and having climbed 300 steps, arrived safely at the Regent's residence. Horthy was outraged by Kállay's plight and phoned Veesenmayer, vigorously protesting the dawn visit by the SS. Veesenmayer explained that he simply wanted to speak to Kállay and had not ordered his arrest. The Regent offered his protection to Kállay and his family, but Kállay accepted the invitation only for his family. He then phoned M. Kececi, the Turkish Minister, and asked him if the latter's offer to give him shelter, made to his wife the day before, still stood. The answer was "yes" and soon a car from the Turkish Embassy arrived at the Palace gate. Kállay was driven to the Turkish Embassy on Rózsadomb where he was warmly greeted by the Ambassador and his wife. For the time being he was safe, but leaving the Embassy was very risky. The Embassy building on Rózsadomb was floodlit at night, and streets leading to it were all guarded by German troops. Throughout the summer Kállay stayed at the Turkish Embassy with the Germans stalking

him. The Regent ordered a detachment of Hungarian police to the building next to the Embassy to intervene if the Germans tried to kidnap him. The Germans were very uncomfortable with Kállay's continued presence at the Embassy and devised various ingenious suggestions for Kállay's departure. One day he received a secret message from Himmler himself: if he left the Turkish Embassy, he would be Himmler's personal guest. Kállay preferred to stay where he was.

After the German invasion, Hungarian ambassadors in neutral countries were faced with difficult decisions: would they be allowed to continue in their positions, would they want to stay on to represent a German-controlled government? In Ankara, Turkey, J. Vörnle, the pro-German ambassador stayed on to serve the new pro-German Sztójay administration. In Istanbul Consul-General Ujvári had previously received a message from the Foreign Office that German troops were concentrating near the Austrian border. They were constantly monitoring broadcasts from the Hungarian Radio, and when on 19th March, they heard military music instead of news, they knew what had happened. The next day they received information from the Hungarian Foreign Office about the situation. The memo had Szentmiklóssy's signature, but no directives were included. The Consul-General, who was not in agreement with the new Prime Minister's policies, resigned. In Lisbon, the Hungarian representative, A. Wodianer, resigned, as did part of his staff. Some stayed because they felt that by leaving, they would hand over the whole embassy to right-wing elements. For a while confusion prevailed, and there were some instances of ugly disputes between employees about who should be in charge of the key to the bank safe.

Operation Margarethe I was accomplished — Hungary was under German control — but Hitler's star was fast fading as the Russian Army approached Hungary's frontiers. By the end of March Russian troops were at the Carpathians. In the Russian spring offensive, Zhukov struck the first major blow that altered the face of

the war: he occupied Tarnopol, then Kolomea, and on 30th March he entered Czernovitz, the capital of Bukovina, the last link between the German armies north and south of the Carpathians. The four Russian generals Zhukov, Koniev, Malinovsky and Tolbukhin inflicted on Hitler damage from which he never recovered.

Hitler may have been fighting a losing battle on the Russian front, but in Hungary he was determined to carry out his objectives with methodical efficiency. In March and April, we learned daily of the arrests of more and more public figures with anti-German sympathies. Some of these were aristocrats such as the Minister of Agriculture, Baron Daniel Bánffy, and Legitimist leaders Count Gy. Apponyi, Count A. H. Szapáry, Count A. Sigray, and Count Ivan A. Csekonics. Also arrested were Polish refugee leaders and prominent Jewish industrialist tycoons such as Lipót Aschner, Ferenc Chorin, and Leo Goldberger. The President of the National Bank, Lipót Baranyai, was also taken into custody. The Gestapo went after leaders in every social class and institution. Among those who were imprisoned were many members of Parliament, such as Endre Bajcsi Zsilinszky, Károly Rassay, Gusztáv Gratz, and Dezső Laky, as well as leaders of the Peasant and Smallholders Parties, among them Ferenc Nagy, Zoltán Tildy and Béla Varga. A handful of members of the illegal Communist Party were also taken. Some went into hiding; Social Democrat leaders Anna Kéthly and A. Szakasits were among these.

Every day had its tragic events. On 22nd March Serb, Slovak and Rumanian Communist prisoners made an unsuccessful attempt to break out of their prison and most of them were killed as they were recaptured. There was a rumour that General Otto Winkelman, one of the generals in charge of carrying out Hitler's orders, found the number of people arrested too small. It was said that he made a practice of opening the telephone directory at random, and if he found a doctor or lawyer with a Jewish-sounding name, he sent out his men with orders to arrest that person.

Minister of the Interior Keresztes-Fischer in his time had done everything in his power to suppress the anti-semitism of the rightwing parties, but after the Gestapo arrested him, he was succeeded by Andor Jaross, a member of the Arrow Cross Party. At the meeting of the Ministerial Council, Jaross informed Prime Minister Sztójay that the main goal of Himmler's Deputy, General Ernst Kaltembrunner, was to solve the Jewish question. Already on 12th March Eichmann began to organize his Sondercommando for the liquidation of the Jews of Hungary. On 20th March his two SS henchmen Krumej and Wisliceny called at the headquarters of the Israeli religious community to talk to their leaders. They informed them that in agreement with the Hungarian Government, from now on only the Germans would be in charge of dealing with the Jews. They declared that the German Command would guarantee the safety of Jewish lives and possessions if the Jews carried out their demands. They told the leaders to form a Jewish Advisory Council whose task would be to execute German orders.

On 31st March, Prime Minister Döme Sztójay, with the assistance of a retired Major of the Gendarmerie, László Baky and a former County Sheriff and newly appointed Undersecretary of State Dr. László Endre, published, no doubt on German orders, a list of restrictions concerning the Jews: Jews were to be required to wear the yellow star of David; they were forbidden to change their place of residence; they were forbidden to travel and to listen to foreign radio broadcasts; breaking any of these rules was punishable by six months' imprisonment. The order also promised that there would not be any deportations and the safety of their persons and possessions would be guaranteed, unless the rules were broken. The restrictions had to be published in the form of a government order as the Regent refused to sign them into law. Throughout the summer of 1944 the Regent and the remaining anti-Nazi leaders laboured to save the Hungarian Jews from the fate they had met in other German-occupied

territories. Their efforts saved the Jewish population of Budapest from the death camps.

The Jewish community was outraged by the restricting order and went to the Ministry of Interior for an explanation. The answer they got from the Germans was a repetition of the original mandate: Jews had nothing to fear as long as they obeyed the rules. The Cardinal Primate of Hungary protested against the order which required even converted Jews to wear the yellow star. The Bishop of the Reformed Church, László Ravasz, also protested the order and pleaded with Minister of the Interior Jaross to gain an exception at least for converted Jews. Jaross promised some concessions.

On 7th April the two Undersecretaries László Baky and László Endre called a meeting in the Interior Ministry, at which two SS and two Hungarian Police and Gendarmerie officers were present. It was decided that for the time being the Order should be distributed only to the Armed Forces. The Germans put into detention camps several hundred Jews who broke the travel rules but later released the very young and the very old. They also arrested many prominent Jews, but SS official Krumej assured the Jewish leaders that although these people would be held as hostages, nobody would be arrested simply because he was a Jew, unless he broke the rules. They tried to pacify the Jewish community and called on them to help maintain discipline and order so that all could continue to work for the common good. The Nazi leadership did everything in its power to make the Jews happy until "the final solution."

Meanwhile the British, whose information about events in Hungary was still sketchy, were waiting to see what would happen. One person who did not share this wait and see attitude was Lieutenant-Colonel E.P.F. Boughey, a distinguished member of S.O.E. Boughey had been greatly interested in Hungary's secret surrender negotiations, and after the German takeover, he personally organized a clandestine mission to Hungary. With two other officers and a

wireless operator, he parachuted into the country. Unfortunately, the whole group was captured. Eventually he escaped from a Silesian POW camp and made his way to the Russian lines. Reasons for the failure of this mission may partially be explained by Henry Threlfall's comments in a letter I received from him in 1984. In the letter he points out that in about March, 1944, the S.O.E sections in the Mediterranean were reorganized, and Hungary was taken out of his sphere in the Central European section and placed in the Balkan section which was run by people totally unfamiliar with Hungary. 'They thought it was a wild Balkan country where they could drop small parties by parachute to organize armed resistance! I advised them strongly against it, but they insisted they knew better. Needless to say, all the people they dropped were caught in an hour or so!' (Doc 93).

Other Allied "visitors" met with more good fortune in Hungary. Dr. Raphael Rupert, a Hungarian lawyer, hid an RAF warrant officer, Reginald Barratt, as well as an escaped Palestinian prisoner of war and several escaped Dutch officers in his own villa in Budapest. Barratt, who at the time was using the name of G.S. Godden, was also helped by an English woman, Evelyn Gore-Symes, who lived in Hungary between 1938 and 1945 and later bore witness to the courage of R. Rupert. In Rupert's villa Barratt was engaged in intelligence activity; in the late autumn of 1944 he had access to a radio transmitter which was carefully repaired and concealed by another helpful Hungarian engineer, László Csürös, whose service enabled Barratt to communicate with the Allies. Csürös survived the war and was until his recent death a senior official in the British Electricity industry.

Barratt had a busy time in German-occupied Hungary. Rupert remembers taking him for a pillion ride on a motorcycle to investigate the results of the RAF ruining of the Danube, and of German efforts to demagnetise the mines by flying over them JU-52 trimotor transports equipped with antimagnetic coils. In Budapest

Barratt met Sergeant Tibor Weinstein, Charles Howie's wireless operator, who gave him some target information to take to the Russians early in December, 1944. Rupert, Barratt and a Dutch officer, Lieutenant Van der Vals, left the safety of German-occupied Hungary to meet tragedy at the hands of Britain's ally. On 8th December all three were captured by the Soviets and disappeared. Barratt is known to have been held prisoner by the Russians in Bratislava in midsummer, 1945. Then for some years there was no news of him at all. Rupert was later released and now lives in Ireland. In the middle of the 1950's Van der Vall's family was officially informed from Moscow that by a regrettable socialist oversight, he had been imprisoned in the Lubyanka prison and had died there of pneumonia. Barratt's wife discovered at about the same time that her husband had been shot by Communist police in Bratislava, "while trying to escape — an all too familiar ploy for the disposal of troublesome prisoners.

Veress had often wondered whether the Allies had explored every avenue for action before and after the German occupation of Hungary. Advance German preparations for Margarethe I and II began at the end of February, 1944. Were the Allies totally unaware of these movements?

Veress: "The orders to local military commanders to earmark forces for the occupation of Hungary must have gone out on or about 12th March. They could not have gone out by telephone, as they included commands from the south east to commands west, to France and Denmark They must have gone out by ENIGMA which by now could be monitored at Bletchley park.

"Advance warnings from London/Cairo/Istanbul by the w/t link established by MH1 in September, 1943, should and could have been given without revealing the source of the information. Such action could have changed the attitude of the Hungarian Government The presence of the agreed S.O.E mission, foolishly vetoed by Eden in

December, 1943, could also have made a great difference by stiffening the will to resist. There could have been resistance under Mlied guidance — agreed at Istanbul in August-September 1943 — which was sadly missing.

“Even after mid-April, 1944, a good knowledge of the German forces left in Hungary and the employment of those withdrawn from the country could have altered the weak attitude of Horthy and his government”

A cipher message dated 26th March from B4 2687/8/9 to London shows British thinking about the Hungarian situation:

1. Absence any organised military resistance and presence Csatay in new government shows Army chiefs willing cooperate fully with Germans.

2. Presence in new Government of three civilian members preceding cabinet Szasz Remenyi Schneller and Antal and of member of parliament for Government Party Jurcsek show continuity with past

3. Apparent acceptance by Horthy of new situation, emphasis in Radio Budapest on horrors of Kun revolution, and revival of violent anti-Semitism unknown in Hungarian official circles since 1920 are all indications that Szeged regime as such is rallying to German war effort.

.....

5. New government is more than mere puppet as greater part Regime and General Staff with bureaucracy gendarmerie and secret police will support it Germans will have little or no occupation commitments and will gain much increased contingent cannon fodder. Opposition can come from:

- (i) actively anti-German elements within Regime
- (ii) liberal intelligentsia of middle class

- (iii) Industrial workers
- (iv) agricultural workers (Doc 74)

The author of the message believes that chances of recruiting the first two groups for resistance are slim: Group i. will be closely watched by the Germans, and group ii. are “largely Jewish and mostly averse to action.” He feels that the third and fourth groups are the most promising. The general feeling revealed in the memo is that Hungary is no longer a candidate for co-belligerence, only a possible terrain for sabotage activities. There is, however a ray of hope for the Allies in the bleak picture: “In new situation police control and repression will probably be more severe but will to resist should increase. This depends on bombing of Budapest and propaganda offensive. Support these two weapons can greatly help S.O.E activities.” If they had asked us at the receiving end of those bombs and leaflets, we could have told them to save the paper and the ammunition. The air raids did not make anyone more willing to resist the Germans. A footnote to the message is the identity of one of the people named for distribution: Major Seton Watson, who was to become a professor at Oxford, an expert of Eastern European affairs, and a personal friend of Leslie in England.

A British intelligence report dated 30th March, 1944, paints a more accurate picture of the situation in Hungary. It shows that the new government is the product of the German occupation, that the Germans have succeeded in eliminating “unreliable” politicians, replacing them with “reliable” pro-German elements. The report shows no clear understanding of Horthy’s role:

Relative roles of Horthy and Kállay in days preceding occupation cannot yet be determined but probably Horthy was torn between sympathy with Kállay’s attempts at reinsurance and political escape and confidence in pro-German generals who still believe

in German military strength and make good use of the bolshevik bogey: after pledging support for Kállay's stalling policy, he may have subsequently swung round and capitulated at Hitler's Headquarters, much as he did in April 1941. There is no evidence supporting rumours that Horthy is a prisoner or has not acquiesced in the new regime. (Doc 77)

The report forecasts the likelihood of further "drastic measures against Jews" and Hungarian resistance in the face of German attempts to impose Nazi ideology and system on the country. By the end of April these prophecies were rapidly being fulfilled. The government dissolved all left-wing parties; the Minister of Defence ordered all young men in their twenties, mostly university students, who were not in the army to be drafted for work detail. The end of the month saw the confiscation of Jewish houses and flats and the establishment of specially designated "ghetto" houses where Jews were forced to live together.

From the beginning of April the Allies regarded Hungary as a German satellite and therefore a suitable target for bombing. Air raids were no longer educational tools, "to make Hungarians come to their senses," to use Eisenhower's words, but full-blown regular forays causing great damage on centres of heavy industry such as Csepel, and Pesterzsébet and later on Budapest and other large towns such as Miskolc, Székesfehérvár and Győr. Government posters made the most of the damage and added lurid details for good measure. A favourite rumour was that the Allies were dropping explosive fountain pens and toys along with the bombs. One poster featured a little girl with a bleeding stump for a hand. The caption read: "Am I a military target too?" The propaganda and the devastation caused by the bombs affected some of the population. On one occasion, when an Allied plane was shot down (this did not

happen very often), the peasants angrily attacked the pilots who had baled out, and the Gendarmerie had to rescue them.

In Budapest we were getting used to the daily air raids. When the sirens sounded, we went down to the basement of our house where the coal cellar was designated as the shelter. The air raid was a time to meet your neighbours, to exchange news of what was going on in the city, to make predictions on when the Russians were going to get here. My husband Louis kept us all entertained to make us forget the inadequacies of our shelter. When the all clear was sounded, we all went back to our homes, our interrupted daily chores, meals or beds, chalking up another victory over death.

XIV

Odyssey To Bari

When we were in Budapest we felt that our whole world was collapsing. Leslie was on his way to see the war from another perspective. Our neck of the war was a very small part of the whole picture. Allied communications were now full of preparations for OVERLORD. By April the "Mediterranean strategy" had acquired a new function. It became part of the "deception plan" intended to mislead Germany as to the real plans for the D-Day landing. Code named Zeppelin, it is described in a memo dated April 25, 1944, from Brigadier H. Redman to Field Marshall Dill. The memo describes a carefully prepared time table showing "what we wish the Germans to believe and when." For example:

Zeppelin-	10 May
(ii) British 12th Army to assault Pola and Trieste	19 June.
(iii) Russians to assault Varna	19 June
(iv) U.s. 7th Army to assault Gulf of Lyons	19 June
(v) RAF and two Armd Divs into Turkey	July
(vi) Capture of Degeach and Rhodes	August
(Doc 81)	

The Allies were now pretending to do what Churchill, and Hungary, had hoped they would actually do.

Although Hungary was no longer part of a strategic plan to defeat Hider through the Mediterranean, the British continued to encourage Hungarian leaders to join forces with Tito's Partisans. Until the late spring of 1943, the Kállay Group, along with the British Foreign Office, regarded Mihailovic as the leader of Yugoslav resistance, and would have preferred to deal with him rather than with the "Comintern agent" Tito. As the British gradually moved their support to Tito, Kállay realized that he must do likewise, and in January, 1944 he sent a message to London expressing the Hungarian Government's desire to establish contact with Tito. Tito's response was negative: his message through the S.O.E to London, dated 2nd January, 1944, declared that he was unwilling to receive Hungarian delegates until Hungarian forces evacuated Bacska — a former Hungarian territory that Hungary regained by the Vienna Agreement. However, by the end of March, Tito seemed willing to welcome any Hungarian resistance groups who might wish to contact his forces.

The British were delighted at the prospect of Hungarian Yugoslav co-operation and when Count Bethlen in April, 1944, expressed his desire to go to Yugoslav territory, they urged Tito "to give the Count every assistance."

When Leslie left Budapest on 20th March, he hoped to make it to Italy with the help of Tito's partisans, but he was not at all sure of the welcome he would receive in Yugoslavia. This is how he describes the first leg of his tortuous journey:

"I left Budapest and travelled on a perfectly legal diplomatic passport in my own name to Sepsiszentgyörgy, a small town in the Hungarian section of Transylvania which had escaped German occupation for some 10 days after the rest of Hungary was overrun. My family had a summer home there, and I hoped to stay there until I could find a way to leave the country unobserved. The train was full of German soldiers; I sat in a compartment surrounded by German

military personnel, but nobody examined my papers.” This was one of the many miracles that happened to him during his Odyssey to Italy.

When he arrived at his parents’ house, they were shocked to see him. They did not ask any questions because they knew that he was in trouble. His uncle Gabriel took him to Kolozsvár (Cluj) to get the Rumanian visa necessary to continue his journey. At Kolozsvár he went to see his other uncle General Lajos Dálnoki Veress who was the commander of the Second Hungarian Army Transylvania and lived in Kolozsvár. Unluckily for Leslie, the General was out of town on an inspection tour and thus could not help him. His wife, Ilona was so alarmed by Leslie’s presence that she refused to give him any help and would not even let him sleep for a night in their home. Leslie never forgot this painful experience.

When he went to the Rumanian Legation to get his visa, he wondered if he was expected to add a bribe to his application. He put a few Rumanian leis in his passport, but when the official came to get the passport, he changed his mind and quickly removed the money, thinking that perhaps the official was an honest man who would be incensed by the insult. Then, when the man disappeared with his passport, he thought, “How stupid of me! Of course he expected a bribe!” He sat for an agonising half hour until at last the official came back with a broad smile on his face and handed him the document, wishing him “bon voyage.” Luckily, the Germans had so many things on their plates that they had as yet no time to start checking visa applications in Transylvania.

Having obtained his Rumanian visa, Leslie returned to his parents’ house to tackle the next crucial problem: how to get through the Hungarian-Rumanian frontier safely. Public transportation was out of the question; he had to find someone trustworthy who was travelling to Rumania by car — not an easy task. Every day Leslie’s father scouted the town for a suitable vehicle and driver. One day he spotted a car with a Hungarian diplomatic license plate standing in

front of a hotel. Soon the diplomat appeared and turned out to be Leslie's best friend (and former duelling aide) Dénes Nemestóthy, who could not believe his eyes when he saw Leslie. "You here?" he asked. "I thought you had been arrested and shot by the Germans."

On 12th April the two of them drove to a small border post near Kolozsvár (Cluj), which was as yet unoccupied by the Germans. The guards, who knew Nemestóthy from his numerous previous trips to Rumania, saluted, and after a few pleasant remarks about the weather, waved them over the border.

They drove to Brassó (Brasov) in Rumania where some of his Foreign Office colleagues had been transferred after the German occupation. He hoped to establish contacts and get some help or advice from them. On arriving in Brassó, they checked into the Hotel Krone. They had just settled into their room when the air raid sirens started howling. Not wanting to crowd into the air raid shelter and possibly expose themselves to unwelcome scrutiny, they went for a walk instead. They had hardly turned the corner when the hotel was hit by a powerful American bomb. After the all clear was sounded, they went back to see what was left of the hotel. Feeling their way through the rubble, they found what an hour before had been their room. Under a pile of glass shards and wood splinters Leslie could just make out the contours of his leather suitcase. He dug it out, blew off the dust, and found that the bag was as good as new.

After this lucky escape, they drove to Bucharest where Leslie made an attempt to seek refuge at the Turkish legation. The Turks were very kind, but declined to take him in, unwilling to jeopardise their neutrality. In any case, he could not have stayed there for very long, and the longer he stayed in German-occupied territory, the more his risk of discovery increased. The officials at the Hungarian Embassy in Bucharest also gave him strange looks even though he was a diplomat. He was still uncertain whether there was an order for his arrest

Uneasy in Bucharest, Veress knew he must get away as soon as possible. He hoped he could cross into Bulgaria and from there reach the neutral territory of Turkey. On 25th April he managed to get to Bulgaria. Once again, he was lucky; just before crossing the Bulgarian border he found out that he had been spotted by the German Head of the Sicherheitdienst (Security police) for the Balkans, a person well-known to the local inhabitants.

Veress: "By train I arrived in heavily bombed Sofia which was in complete darkness. Though I had been there in 'peacetime' en route to my first mission to Istanbul, now I could not find my way around. I heard the sound of horse's hooves, and soon a horse-drawn cab appeared in the gloom. I asked the driver to take me to the Hungarian Legation. At first he shook his head and made a sign indicating that it was too far for him to go. A gold Napoleon and some cigarettes helped to persuade him, and we took off. He took me to a remote place outside of town; the Hungarian Legation had been bombed out and these were its temporary quarters.

"In Sofia I made the acquaintance of a friendly Hungarian professor of archeology, Géza Fehér, who promised to help me by organizing excavations near the Turkish border. He planned to help me cross into Turkey as a member of his team. Unfortunately, because of the proximity of the excavation site to Turkey, Fehér was refused permission for the expedition.

"Finding it impossible to reach Turkey, I had no other choice but to go by way of Yugoslavia. I did not want to wait for another brush with the Sicherheitsdienst. A cab took me to the railway station, and another Napoleon was gone. Still using my own passport, and dodging German security, I boarded a train for Belgrade.

"I reached Belgrade the next day. Here it would have been impossible to pass through German controls had it not been for a heavy Allied air attack minutes before the train pulled in. As we got off the train, the whole station was in flames, and there was no one on hand to check travel permits.

“Leaving the station in a hurry, and blessing the Allied bombers, I was faced with another unrecognizable capital. I knew no one and could not risk staying in a hotel. so I used another Napoleon to get a Serbian porter to show me the way to what remained of the Hungarian Legation. I arrived to find no one but the caretaker and his wife who had been left behind in case some unhappy visitor should arrive. I was a very unhappy visitor indeed. The caretaker looked at me with some suspicion, amazed to see me there, but I produced my diplomatic passport and demanded accommodation, whereupon he showed me into the room that had had once been occupied by the Military Liaison Officer. The room was damp and cold. stripped of all luxuries, but it had a bed and a blanket, which was a great comfort to me.

“Next day I walked back to the railway station and found a train that was leaving for Zagreb in Croatia The train was swarming with German military personnel. Very few civilians were hardy enough to travel A local policeman examined my papers and took away my passport. Was he taking it to check with the Germans? I suspected that by now there must be a warrant for my arrest throughout German-occupied Europe. Today I know that this was so from German documents. Kaltenbrunner, Head of German Intelligence had in fact issued a warrant for my arrest and ‘severe interrogation.’ The train began to move slowly, and my passport still had not been returned to me. Then at the last moment, just before the train began to gather speed. a Yugoslav policeman ran up and handed me my passport through the open window.

“On the way to Zagreb the train had to be evacuated several times because of air raids. More delay was caused by repeated stops at checkpoints. The Serbian quisling police patrols were hunting for suspected Partisans. Fortunately, I was not on their list In the evening of 20th May, the train arrived in Zagreb. I passed through the control post smoothly and walked into the Esplanade Hotel facing the railway station. At the desk I discovered too late that the

hotel was used by the German military. There was nothing else to do but look cool and once again produce my diplomatic passport. I demanded accomodation suitable for a travelling diplomatic courier. I was given a room — and my passport was once again taken away. I never expected to see it again.

“The Esplanade Hotel was swarming with German officers in transit to or from other parts of Yugoslavia and Greece. I saw officers in the uniform of the by now routed German Africa corps. No doubt there were also security officers. In addition to the German military, there were also a few accredited diplomats of the Axis countries: members of the Japanese Legation also stayed there. In the corridor I ran into a former Foreign Ministry colleague who, it seemed, had been posted in Zagreb. When he saw me, he went pale. ‘What? You are alive?’ he blurted. He explained that Sztójay, the new quisling Prime Minister had been told by Veessenmayer that ‘The Anglo-Saxon agent Veress had been rendered ‘harmless,’ meaning arrested oi’ dead.

I had made it so far, but now I did not know how to proceed. I had no idea how to get to the Partisans. How do I find them? How do I make sure that they will trust me? Will they be able to get me to the Allies? These were questions to which I had no answers until I caught up with my good friend Hubert Pallavicini. Hubert, a sensitive, reserved person, gave me a friendly ‘hello’ and then left quickly, saying only that he would find a way to help me. I was somewhat baffled until I received a call from Joseph Garzuli, the Press Attaché at the Hungarian Legation, who told me that Hubert had asked him to contact me. Without this man, I would never have reached the Partisans. He promised to put me in contact with a Croatian builder who transported building materials to German command posts. His job gave him freedom of movement and he had connections with the Partisans. We agreed to meet at a designated place the next morning.

“I went back to my room hoping that this would be my last night under German occupation. But meanwhile I still had the night to pass. My passport was still in custody; as I was lying on my bed fully clothed. I imagined that the orders for my arrest were slowly catching up with me as the hours went by. Early the next morning I was roused by vigorous knocking. I got up and slowly walked to the door, my heart racing, my legs dragging like lead weights. When I opened the door, I saw the hotel manager with my passport in his hand. He handed it to me with a smile, I took it with a careless thank you for which I should have won an Oscar. I had escaped a fourth time. My only thought now was to get out of the hotel I packed my few belongings and hurried out to meet my contact, Pallavicini’s marvellous colleague, who took me to meet the Croatian builder, who took me in his lorry to a house outside Zagreb where I was introduced to my Partisan guide. The Partisan family shared their meal with me and even gave me a little bundle of food from their limited supply to take with me on the trip. Soon a plump Croatian peasant girl appeared. She put a workman’s cap on my head, hung a knapsack on my shoulder and then took my arm, and we walked like sweethearts a fair distance into the woods until we reached the first Partisan patrol. There she left me. A moment later a man appeared on a bicycle, guiding a spare one with one hand. He smiled and said in Serbo-Croat, ‘You are now in free Yugoslavia.’ The date was 28th May. My guide checked my credentials carefully and told me to get on the bicycle for our trip to the next post. It was thus that I was escorted all day from one Partisan post to the next. By nightfall I was more stiff and saddle sore than on my first day of horse training at the Hussars, but I knew that I was finally on my way to the Allies.

“Eventually I was taken to the Headquarters of the Croatian Partisan 2nd Army corps commanded by General Arso Yovanovich. Yovanovich was a Croat and an anti-Communist who would turn

against Tito in 1948. The present independence movement of the Croats is not a new idea; it is rooted in the history of the Croatian people. After Tito established full control, Yovanovich was defeated. It was reported that he had been killed while fleeing to Rumania. Yovanovich gave me a friendly reception and made it possible for me to send a message to S.O.E Headquarters in Bari, asking for transportation to Italy.

“When I asked to be taken to meet Tito, the Partisan officer shook his head, repeating the word “offensiva” Tito was obviously busy. It seems I had arrived at his headquarters in the midst of a German offensive, the heavy attack launched by a German parachute and glider force at the end of May, 1944. As I later found out, things were going so badly for Tito that he and his entourage had to be evacuated and flown to Bari by the RAF.

“But, in spite of their difficult situation, the Partisans did their best to make me comfortable. They shared with me their meagre rations of ersatz coffee, milk and brown bread and provided a straw mattress for me to sleep on. I went to sleep without any sleeping pills. At dawn I was roused by the sound of a rifle falling on the floor beside me. I looked up to see a Partisan girl who had just returned from her mission. Without even removing her boots, she threw herself on the mattress beside me; in two minutes she was snoring the sleep of the just exhausted.

“Next morning when I got up, I found only a few Partisans around. After the previous day’s German attack, they were all busy in the hills, holding off the Germans. All over Yugoslavia they were fighting under the most appalling conditions. Thousands of them, even the wounded, had to walk through rugged mountains in bitter cold and snowdrifts, sometimes pursued by howling wolves. The shortage of food was sometimes so acute that they had to slaughter and eat their horses. Most of the men I saw were polite, reserved — and tired. Yet during the ten days I spent with them, they shared their rations with me and did everything in their power to help me.

“At last on 8th June the radio message came that an Allied plane would come to fly me to Italy. Allied planes were flying dangerous missions to Yugoslavia to deliver provisions to the Partisans and to pick up downed Allied pilots and others. I was to be the passenger on one of these planes.

“The night and the hour of my departure were set, but Yovanovich did not want to let me go without a farewell party. They took me to a little village called Topusko, which during the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire used to be a health resort because of its curative waters. Now it was used to provide rest and recreation for wounded and exhausted Partisans. Topusko was the final link in the Allied escape route across the Balkans.

‘When we arrived, we were taken to a former boarding house, where a long table was spread in the courtyard. The guests were mostly Partisans, both officers and privates, and some escaped Allied prisoners and pilots. The conversation was a mixture of Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian, French, German, and broken English blended together by common goodwill and a desire to snatch a few moments of relaxation in a cruel war. Thanks to the generosity of the local Slovenian peasants, we had a feast of roast chicken, wine and fresh pastry. The Partisans sang, made music, and took snapshots of each other. When it was my turn to be photographed, they put a Partisan cap with the red star on my head. The sight of the ‘gospodin’ (gentleman) with the Partisan cap sent them into peals of laughter. They saw me as not one of them, but somehow special because of the mysterious interest I enjoyed from the Allied forces.

‘The feast was soon over; night was falling and we had to get ready to receive the British plane at the agreed landing place. An American airforce major who was attached to the Partisans arranged the customary triangle of tins with burning candles to guide the aircraft to the landing place. The reception signal to be flashed by torch in Morse code was the letter K, for Louis Kossuth, the nineteenth century Hungarian champion of liberty.

'Towards midnight we heard the buzzing of a plane, first faintly, then nearer and nearer. If that was the plane from Bari or Brindisi, this was the night I had been waiting for for the past two and a half months. If it was a German plane, I was in trouble. The buzzing intensified into a loud whirr, then into a wind and a roar as the plane approached. circled. and landed. We ran to investigate; the aircraft was a friendly C-47, its landing gear deeply embedded in a field of mud.

'The heavy door of the plane opened and a tall clean-shaven American pilot emerged. He greeted the Partisan officer, then he came straight towards me and said, 'You are Veress? I have instructions to fly you out' It was evident that the plane could not be moved by human effort alone. Operation Rescue had run literally into the ground. German reconnaissance aircraft frequently circled over the area and would inevitably spot it the next morning. Quickly we covered the aircraft with tree branches to hide it from view as much as possible.

'The pilot examined the position of the plane and asked me to communicate the problem to the Partisan major who spoke Hungarian. What we needed, he said, were about four oxen to pull the aircraft out of the mud. I explained our needs to the Partisan major who was most anxious to help, but unfortunately, the Hungarian word for ox (ökör) was missing from his vocabulary. 'I don't know what you mean by an ox,' he confessed sadly in impeccable Hungarian. This was a poor time to play charades, but I gave it my best shot, using both gestures and sound. until his face lit up, and he started running toward the village for the oxen. He returned with six animals, and a group of peasants from the village, eager to help with muscle and advice. Soon there was a crowd of more than a hundred people cheering the oxen as they strained to pull the C-47 on to dry ground. A German Fiesler Storch observation plane circled above us. If the Germans saw anything in the dark, they saw six oxen pulling Birnam Wood to Dunsinane. The plane was

covered with leafy branches. A last effort for oxen and men, and the plane was out of the mire. We were ready to depart.

“I said good-bye to my kind and brave hosts of the mountains. As a parting gift they brought us some wine and rakija (a local spirit). As I stood, waiting to board the plane, I looked around at my travelling companions. There was a downed American pilot, a French and a Polish airman, and two Partisans who were supposed to be flown out for some reason. Others had collected around the aircraft, hoping to get a place on it. I was holding my spare shoes in my hand, intending to put them on because the shoes I was wearing were falling to pieces. One of the Czech refugees, who had to be left behind, thinking I had an extra pair, came up to me and asked if I would give them to him. Unhappily I had to refuse him.

“Before we left, some of the American airmen asked me for my autograph. They thought I must be someone really important if the Allies would send a plane to fly me out from enemy territory. When it was time to take off, the pilot let me board the plane first, then the Americans, the French and Polish officers, and the two Partisans. The civilian refugees pleaded with the pilot to take them too, but they were refused. ‘Sorry, I have no instructions to take anyone else,’ he declared. It was heartbreaking to see their disappointment.

“It was a short flight to Bari and safety. We were chased by German Messerschmidts, but after a half-hearted effort, they gave up, and we flew across the Adriatic without being hit

“As I was leaving the beleaguered Balkans behind, I reflected on the events of the past few months, the German invasion, the fate of the Istanbul Agreement, my Balkan Odyssey. My stomach tightened when I thought of Laura and my family. Would I ever see them again? What happened to my friends and colleagues who had stayed behind in Hungary? For a moment it seemed that I was living in limbo — in total isolation from my former life. When I got back — if I ever got back — I would return, like Rip van Winkle, to a world of strangers. Unanswered questions kept rising in my mind. How would

my country fare in the last months — or years — of the war? After the war? Did we accomplish anything in Istanbul? The only answer I could find was that whether we succeeded or not, we had to try. Surely at the conference table the Allies would take into account our attempt to leave the German alliance. Surely they would understand that Hungary had sided with Germany only out of necessity. Surely they would find a way to redress the injustices Hungary had suffered after World War I. I had to shake myself awake: we were ready to land at Bari. The day was 9th June, 1944.

“When I emerged from the plane, the welcoming officer’s first words were, ‘We thought you had purchased the plane.’ We were 24 hours late, and they were convinced that the plane was lost. When the S.O.E officers heard that I had been travelling through Germanoccupied Balkans, they looked at me somewhat suspiciously, but they were willing to hear me out.

“As soon as we arrived. the two Partisans quickly disappeared through the dilapidated streets towards the harbour. They had their own base for training and recuperation, and avoided the British as much as possible. No doubt they thought it was safer to put as much distance as they could between themselves and the ‘gospodin’ from Hungary.

“I was shown to my lodgings — a couple of bare little rooms in a relatively undamaged building. But there was a bed with sheets and blankets, and I could sleep without expecting the SS to knock on the door.

“The next day I was to be debriefed by S.O.E. and I woke up with a dreadful toothache. When the officer who came to fetch me heard about my plight, he took me to an army dentist. They called ahead and when we arrived. the dentist, a jovial man with a pipe hanging from the corner of his mouth, was waiting for me, instruments in hand. After a few more minutes of excruciating pain (the local anaesthetic did not help very much), he relieved me of my tooth and of the agony. Next I was issued my NAAFI rations like everyone else

in the armed forces, and I had my first taste of corned beef. As I was driven to S.O.E Headquarters, there was another air raid.

“At S.O.E Headquarters I was taken to a room where I was greeted by a tall goodlooking young officer. After showing him my credentials, I told him the story of my escape from Budapest. Speaking in the safety of Bari, I did not feel it was necessary to elaborate on the hardships of my journey through German-occupied Balkans. Reluctant to portray myself as a hero, I glossed over most of the problems and dangers as I briefly described how I had ‘travelled’ from Budapest to Rumania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and finally to Bari. My modesty nearly got me into trouble. The interrogating officer got up and said with considerable irritation, ‘One doesn’t just travel to Bari’ Then, seeing my astonishment, he continued, ‘I am not suggesting that you ought to be shot at dawn, but how on earth did you manage to cross the Balkans with only the aid of the Partisans, and reach Allied Headquarters?’

“Obviously, I was expected to explain in detail. My interrogator was both suspicious and impressed by my feat. He wanted to know more. He ordered coffee and official notepaper. Then he asked me to write down my story including the events surrounding the German invasion and exactly how I had reached Tito’s Headquarters.

“I wrote page after page, trying to remember every detail. When I was finished. the pile of papers was taken to another room to be typed. In a short time the typewritten pages came back and were read back to me. As I listened, it occurred to me that I should make a few changes to clarify some details, and I asked to see the papers. I was told that this was not permissible, as my report was a ‘classified top secret document.’

“Completing the report put us both very much at ease. Before leaving, I made one humble but heartfelt request: ‘Please, if possible, no carpet bombing of Budapest.’ I like to think that my plea had some effect. In fact, the bombing of Hungary was chiefly restricted

to industrial centres and military targets. We parted with smiles and a friendly handshake.

“In Bari I was put in charge of the Hungarian section of the Bari Allied radio-service which broadcast to German-occupied countries. My job was to prepare Hungarian texts for broadcasts to Hungary. At the radio station I studied daily the pinpointed war maps of Eastern and Central Europe. There was a Budapest street map showing which parts of the city had been bombed. The first thing I looked at every day was the section where Laura lived. I dared not even imagine what might have happened to her if she had been taken by the Germans.”

Shortly after his arrival in Bari, Leslie met the man who had been at the other end of the radio transmitter at SOE, Major Henry Threlfall. Throughout Veress' negotiations with the Allies, Threlfall had been in charge of S.O.E operations in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. He was familiar with the details of the Istanbul agreement and had kept track of all Veress' communications. By the time Veress arrived in Bari, Hungary had been taken out of Threlfall's Central European section and placed in the Balkan Section, but Threlfall was still very much interested in Hungary and made the trip from his headquarters in Monopoli to Bari to meet Veress.

Some thirty years later, in 1975 in London, Leslie and I were invited to a dinner party at the home of Mrs. Joan Astley (Bright) who had been General Jacob's secretary and part of Winston Churchill's entourage in Moscow and Yalta. Among the guests were our common friends, Professor Michael Foot, an S.O.E expert, Mrs. Jean Howard, who had an important post at Bletchley during the war, Vera Long, longtime companion of Sir Cohn Gubbins the moving spirit of the S.O.E. and David Mure and his wife Sally; Mure had served in an Intelligence Deception unit in Cairo. Mrs. Astley took Leslie by the arm and introduced him to a tall, distinguished-looking gray-haired gentleman who was wearing civilian clothes, but

stood like a soldier. "This is Colonel Henry Threlfall, who interrogated you at Bari" she said with a smile. Leslie had never been so surprised. At dinner the two men sat next to each other and happily traded war experiences all evening. In the years that followed we remained friends; Threlfall spoke at Leshe's funeral. Later, when I was labouring to collect material for this book, he kindly provided me with many interesting details of his contacts with Hungary and Leslie. This is how in a letter dated February 23, 1984, he describes his meeting with Leslie at Bari:

It was with great interest and curiosity that I made his acquaintance, for the radio connection we had had previously had given me a most favourable opinion of his personality. I had somehow felt that behind the factual reporting was an intelligent and agreeable personality of which I would like to see more. But in spite of this prejudice in his favour I had to remain very matter-of-fact in meeting him. I knew more about the background than any of the others who had already seen him, both in Hungary in general and the secret negotiations in particular, so I felt a certain responsibility in questioning him, even though our meeting was unofficial in the sense that others had already put him through an interrogation. In addition there was the fact that somehow he had managed to get from Budapest to Bari in the middle of the war through German occupied territory. That was (in the way we had to think in those days) rather suspicious. So that my talk with him, although I kept the tone of it simple and friendly, was really exploratory in character, a sort of double check on what had already been done. This is why, when I spoke at his funeral, I said that in a way I had

interrogated him.

Anyway, against this background, the talk went smoothly and pleasantly, and from my point of view, reassuringly. I felt quite certain that there was nothing fishy in his story by the time we had finished. And as well as that I felt that the liking for him with which I had started the talk, formed before I even saw him, was confirmed. In fact we met, in effect, as friends and I think we liked each other. (Doc 93)

The full text of Veress' original reports to S.O.E includes not only the story of his escape, but also an account of events in Hungary leading up to and following the German occupation as told to him by colleagues in Brasov. Although the originals of these reports are still held among the classified documents of SOE, with the help of Professor Michael Foot and through the kind offices of Gervase Cowell, the S.O.E Adviser of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, I have been able to obtain a transcript of Veress' 10th June, 1944 report. The report gives a brief factual account of Horthy's visit to Klessheim, and the Government's discussions concerning resistance against the imminent German invasion. It appears that in the absence of the Regent, on the eve of the invasion, Kállay held a Cabinet meeting in which he made plans for resistance at least on a limited scale:

The question of resistance was raised by the (Prime Minister and the Government, though the Chief of Staff and the War Minister were not present at the meeting. The German Military Attaché gave a huge banquet on the Saturday night /18th March!, to which he invited all the military highups, so that resistance, as the Germans came into the country, would be non-existent. The Prime Minister was in

favour of resistance. He said that it would be very difficult to persuade Army officers in command of divisions to resist at the frontiers, as they knew that the Germans were already across the frontiers, but the idea was to defend Budapest as long as possible, in order that some sort of resistance might thus be organised all over the country. He gave orders to the Deputy Chief of Staff for the defence of Budapest. As a result, a few companies took up positions of defence around the town with machine guns and light weapons. They did not know at that time that on the Saturday night the Gestapo had already started arresting people in Budapest. There was, before the German occupation, a fairly strong Gestapo in Budapest. The people arrested were taken to the Danube Steamship Navigation Company's offices, which were turned into cells, while the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was the Gestapo HQ.

After it had been decided that at least the Government offices should be defended, HORTHY telephoned from Vienna that he was on his way home, and he definitely instructed the Prime Minister to do nothing, to take no measures whatsoever, but to await his return to Budapest. Thereupon the whole plan for the defence of the capital was postponed, in the hope that HORTHY's message meant that the situation was not so critical as he had supposed. It was, in fact, that telephone call that definitely delivered the country to the Germans without a shot, as from that moment everything was held up to await HORTHY's return. (Doc 83)

Several comments on Veress' report have survived. Unfortunately, they contain references to a final report, which is at present not available; thus it is somewhat difficult to judge the fairness of these comments. The first of these, written by Philip Broad, dated 15th July 1944, and addressed to The Right Honourable Harold Macmillan, M. P. Minister Resident, Allied Force Headquarters is the most sceptical. Having started with a warning that "the bona fides of the author have not yet been established," Broad goes on to belittle the importance of Hungary's surrender offer and discount her proAllied policy. In general, his note puts little trust in Veress' presentation of the facts:

3. through the report are signs that the author may have as one objective a wish to make out that the Regent Horthy is really anti-German and pro-ally, and that it required a large German army and police force to nullify the activities of Monsieur Kállay and his supporters, which by this report are shown to have been very ineffective and governed by fear of their hostility towards Russia. The figure, for example, of 30 divisions given in the final paragraph is absurdly (illegible); actually it has been believed to be two or possibly three divisions.

4. It is clear too that Monsieur Kállay realised that Hungary during the last few years has stored up against herself a large reservoir of (illegible) in Roumania, Yugoslavia, Russia and Czechoslovakia / please see in this Monsieur Veres's remarks on page 3, paragraph 3 of his report/, and hoped that by making the academic suggestion of unconditional surrender in August/September 1943, the British and Americans would save Hungary from her enemies. (Doc 84)

Judging from the tone of the existing report, one cannot help feeling that Mr. Broad has read his own feelings into Veress' highly objective account. D. Allen in his note of 26th July gives Veress more credit: 'This is an interesting paper and seems to me genuine enough. Mr. Veress does not attempt to hide the ineffectiveness and hesitancy of the 'surrender group'.' Allen concurs with Broad in stating that the Allies could not have expected much from Hungary in the way of collaboration. "Veress in fact only seems to have brought the group along as far and as fast as he did by continually exceeding his authority. The paper, for instance, leaves some doubts as to what authority he had even for communicating to us the unconditional surrender offer last August (see page 4)."

Macartney's note appended to the document on 11th August is perhaps the most positive:

This is surely in the main an accurate and genuine report. Veress cannot be taken as entirely authoritative on what happened in higher spheres than his own and may well be influenced by a desire, perhaps subconscious, to stress his own importance.

I can see no signs whatever of the "objective" attributed to Veress by Mr. Broad whose comments in this paragraph seem to me unreasonable. The figure of 30's is surely a misprint.

This post-mortem certainly reveals ample hesitancy and ineffectiveness. I am not sure that we could not have got much further than we did with Kállay if the hesitation had not been on more sides than one. (Doc 85)

With a barrage of negatives, Macartney hits the target: the British had been almost as hesitant as the Hungarians.

XV

1944: Summer Of Discontent, Autumn Of Despair

Through most of April I was preoccupied with taking care of my family, travelling back and forth between Visegrád and Budapest to visit Dalma, and wondering when the Germans would find me. I kept away from the city as much as possible and lived in the comparative seclusion of our apartment in the Buda Hills. News reports of orders against Jews were scanty: the Germans still wanted to maintain in Hungary the appearance of business as usual. One day, on my way to do some shopping, I was walking along a major street on the other side of Városmajor Park, when I saw a group of 60-80 men and women walking in a long file, carrying small bundles and suitcases, herded by German soldiers and Hungarian gendarmes. The marchers were all wearing yellow stars. I stood there staring at them, mesmerized. This was the first time I had seen people wearing the yellow Star of David. A few more steps and the dismal band disappeared through the gateway of a large corner house. The house too had a giant yellow star on it. The whole scene seemed unreal. Such things did not happen in friendly Budapest. To be sure, there were people who disliked Jews; it was true that most of the leaders of the 1919 Communist coup had been Jews, and people had no sympathy for that movement, but to humiliate all Jews in this manner, to drive them out of their homes and crowd them into these "Ghetto" houses,

that was unthinkable. I shivered and thought, what if I had been born a Jew? I would now be marching with them.

In my own recollection, anti-semitism in Hungary started only after the Communist takeover in 1919, when people saw Jews assume leadership of the Communist regime and perpetrate shocking atrocities. But even this experience was not enough to make Hungarians turn against Jews as a race. Hugh SetonWatson, whose sympathies in general lie more with Hungary's neighbours than with Hungary, and is therefore an objective enough observer, sums up the position of Hungarian Jews this way:

A special word perhaps for the Jews of Hungary. They had been so well treated under the old regime before 1918 (for its own reasons) that most of those who in 1918 after the treaty of Trianon became citizens of Rumania, Czechoslovakia, or Yugoslavia continued to regard themselves as Magyars, thereby bringing on themselves the understandable dislike of the newly dominant nations and the new governments. Between 1939 and 1941, when Hungary recovered a large part of these territories, the Jews who lived in them were glad to become Magyar citizens again. When Hungary had a new census in 1941, these Jews gladly registered as Magyars, thereby swelling the statistics of the Hungarian nation as desired by the rulers. Less than three years later these Jews were deported in train after train to the extermination camps in Poland... It is true that the Jews of Budapest itself escaped this fate, and merit should here be given to Admiral Horthy, the head of state. ('Sick Heart" of Modern Europe 47-48)

In his Memoirs Horthy describes how he accomplished this impossible feat. Through the summer of 1944 the Gestapo, in conjunction with notorious anti-Semite members of the Government such as Parliamentary Secretaries Baky and Endre, carried out harsh anti-semitic measures including deportations supposedly to German labour camps, and Horthy was nearly helpless to counteract the Gestapo because he had no access to military power. In mid-1944, however, there was a change. He explains:

As the defeat of Germany drew nearer, I regained, though slowly and imperfectly, a certain freedom of action. In the summer, I succeeded at last in having the possibility of freeing the Jews from the prohibitions and restrictions imposed on them by law. Of the innumerable requests that poured in, I rejected none. The deportations were supposed to be made from labour camps. Not before August did secret information reach me of the truth about these extermination camps. It was Csatay, the Minister of War, who raised the matter at a Cabinet meeting and demanded that our government should insist on the Germans clarifying the situation. This demand was not met by the Cabinet. The Churches, I must here add, did what they could for those in distress by providing them with certificates of baptism. In this, they acted in accordance with the wishes of our people. (219)

Horthy then goes on to describe his role in saving the Jewish population of Budapest. His son Nicholas had an office which was in constant communication with the Hungarian Jewish Committee and thus the Regent was continually informed of new developments. From the end of March to June, the number of Jews deported had

been put at 400,000. In August, they received information that Budapest was to be “cleaned up. This meant the deportation and destruction of the 170,000 registered Jews, plus possibly of another 110,000 who were hiding with Hungarian friends. To accomplish this atrocity, Secretaries of State Bald and Endre were planning a surprise move to round up the Jews. As soon as Horthy heard of their intentions, he ordered the armoured division loyal to him stationed near Esztergom to be directed to Budapest, and instructed the gendarmerie to assist in preventing the deportation of Jews. In retrospect, he feels sure that these measures achieved the desired goal:

That this action saved the Jews still in Budapest has been confirmed by members of the Jewish committees in Hungary, Samu Stem, Dr. Ernő Pető and Dr. Károly Wilhelm, in statements they made on oath on February 3rd, 1946. I have both photostats and an English translation of these statements, endorsed by the Swedish Embassy in Rome. (Horthy, *Memoirs*, 220)

The plight of the Jews in the summer of 1944 inspired innumerable acts of heroism by brave people in all walks of life. Certainly one of the most courageous of these was Raoul Wallenberg who on July 9, 1944, arrived as the First Secretary of the Swedish Legation in Budapest. He and his staff of some 400 Jewish volunteers distributed Swedish travel documents, *Schutzpässe*, to some 13,000 Jews, thus saving them from deportation. After Horthy's removal and the Arrowcross takeover in October, Wallenberg continued his astonishing efforts to save Jewish lives. He used every trick in the book from bribing SS guards to succouring columns of emaciated Jews walking to the death camps. He would bring convoys of trucks full of clothes and food for the victims, and tell the guards that there

were people in the group with Swedish documents. He would then rescue those with passes, and hand out food and warm clothes to the rest. On December 24, 1944, his last recorded act of heroism saved 70,000 unprotected Jews who were sealed into a ghetto building in Budapest as the Russians encircled the city, and Eichmann was preparing to flee to Germany. Before leaving, Eichmann left instructions for the massacre of the 70,000. Wallenberg, in his usual authoritative tone, sent a message to Gen. August Schmidhuber, SS commander in Hungary, telling him that unless the Jews were spared, Wallenberg would see to it that after the war Schmidhuber was executed as a war criminal. He saved the inhabitants of the ghetto, but tragically, he could not save himself. On January 13, 1945, he made a fatal mistake: he sought help from the advancing Red Army. He was taken by the Russians and imprisoned as a suspected American spy. He is known to have spent time in Moscow's Lubyanka prison for political offenders. There were purported sightings of him in various gulags all the way to seventies and possibly even the 80's, but what really happened to him is still buried in the murky depths of NKVD and KGB files.

There is no doubt that Raoul Wallenberg is one of the genuine heroes of the Second World War. But, to achieve a historical perspective, it is important also to remember two things. One is the identity of his foes in Hungary: there was no need for his intervention until the summer of 1944, when the Hungarian government was effectively taken over by Germany. He came to save the Jews not from the Hungarians, but from the SS. The other remarkable thing is that in the summer of 1944 when German-dominated Europe had already given up its Jewish population to Nazi deathcamps, in Hungary there were still close to a million Jews to be saved.

Horthy in his memoirs puts the number of Jews hidden by Hungarian friends at 110,000. From my personal experience, I would say that the figure is not an exaggeration. My sister Charlotte, for example, hid a Jewish mother and her 21-year-old son in the palace

at Uri Utca on Castle Hill. Dalma had a Jewish classmate who was sheltered by the nuns in a convent. Others took more aggressive action. There was Dr. Tamás Benedek, a Hungarian lawyer who was recruited into the Home Guard and entrusted with taking a group of one hundred Jews from Budapest for labour service in north Hungary. When the work was completed, he was to hand them over to “the next authority” — a euphemism for Auschwitz. Instead of handing them over to the SS, he brought them all back to Budapest and picked up some more along the way.

It is a grotesque truth that even this late in the war, with the crematoria working at full blast, the Germans were still willing to make deals, using the Jews as bargaining chips. On 19 May the Jewish Affairs Department of the Gestapo in occupied Hungary, undoubtedly acting with the approval, and possibly on the orders of Himmler himself, certainly under the direction of Adolf Eichmann, used as their representatives two members of the Hungarian Zionist Committee, Joel Brand, a Hungarian Zionist, and Andre Grósz, a Hungarian Jew probably in the pay of both the Hungarian and the German Secret Service. The two were flown to Istanbul carrying a preposterous German ransom proposal: one million Jews to be released from concentration camps and allowed to leave the country, in return for 10,000 lorries, 200 tons of tea, 800 tons of coffee, and other items in scarce supply such as steel, Wolfram and soap. A telegram dated July 22, 1944 from Veesenmayer to the German Foreign Ministry indicates that he has just learned of Brand's mission and is very much interested. He is not unduly worried by the possibility that Brandt has been won over by the British Secret Service. After all, he remarks, Brand's wife is still in Budapest, a free person. (Doc 86).

The British rejected the outrageous ransom offer; it was discovered that the mission was more than it seemed on the surface. While Brand was genuinely concerned with Jewish lives, Grósz alleged that he had been entrusted with the task of making

soundings about separate peace negotiations with the Allies. A British Intelligence report by Major Dewhurst, M.I.2, dated 5th July, 1944, confirmed that the Brand-Grósz approach had been made by senior Gestapo officials. Could it be that Himmler, privy to the planned plot against Hitler, tried to save himself by approaching the Allies ahead of time?

As for Hitler, he was still working on “the ultimate victory.” He was expecting a landing in Europe by Allied forces, but not at Normandy. At 2 pm. on 6th June (D-Day) he had lunch at Klessheim with Hungarian prime Minister Sztójay. He was in a jovial mood and talked about his secret weapons and the coming victory. He was convinced that the Normandy landings were a mere diversion, and the real assault was still to come — in the Pas de Calais area. By the time his orders to move the troops reached their destination, the bulk of the Allied forces had landed in Normandy.

In Hungary people were largely unaware of the momentous events in Normandy; the Nazi-controlled radio made much of the difficulties the Allies were experiencing in their conquest of Italy, and we were told that we must defend our frontiers against the advancing Russian army, but eventually everyone learned the true state of affairs from the BBC and the Voice of America. Another indication of Allied advance was the frequency of air raids in Budapest.

For months after Leslie had left, I did not venture to go to Pest, on the other side of the Danube. On a fine June day, I went to Városliget park where we had often met for lunch or an afternoon snack at Gundel’s restaurant. I sat there by the lake under the trees and tried to pretend that I was waiting for him; that any minute he would appear under the trees, striding towards me, smiling. There were lovers under the trees, and children playing, but no Leslie. I was amazed to see how people could ignore the war and the terrible future awaiting us, and lick ice cream cones in the park, and hold hands and giggle. Young people are blessed with the ability to forget

catastrophe for a few moments at a time. This makes it possible for life to go on.

Late in June I brought Dalma home from Visegrád. but the air raids were now becoming quite dangerous. Many offices were relocated away from the city. The Radio monitoring service was moved out to the hills surrounding Buda, and Louis had to move out there to be near his work. We saw him only when he had a few free days.

In July we went on a family vacation to the country, away from the military targets, to the home of relatives in Mezöcsát, a small village on the Great Plain of Hungary. Our relatives had a large estate with wheat fields, vegetable gardens, domestic animals, dogs and cats. It was good to relax in the country. We tried to forget the news, which was almost invariably bad, but the radio was on all day. As soon as we heard the blip, blip, blip of Radio Budapest, signalling the start of the news broadcast, we were drawn to it like wasps to a dungheap.

Our host employed many farmhands who were not always satisfied with their lives although he tried to give them decent wages. He was especially afraid of a Russian occupation and Communist rule. He knew his land would be taken away and distributed among his own peasants. He knew what had happened in Russia under Lenin and Stalin, and he remembered the Communist terror of 1919 in Hungary. Dalma had no such fears; she wandered happily around the garden singing as she played. Her favourite song at the time was an aria from Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio* — the one about the delightful moment when the gallows is standing and the victim is dangling. I could see our host Julius tense up when he heard the song. In the child's comic patter he heard his own terrible premonitions of a ghastly future. I had to take Dalma aside and tell her to take that number off her repertoire.

We spent the rest of the summer with Zoltán Polóny, an old friend of Louis who lived in Gyöngyös, a town in the foothills of the Mátra mountains. The members of the Polóny family dedicated themselves to making us forget the war. We went swimming and hiking in the mountains; once they took us to an aviation school where we were each taken for a ride in a glider plane — my first flight experience. On another occasion they threw a party in their vineyard and hired a gipsy band to play all night. When the musicians paused, we looked up into the sky and heard among the stars, squadrons of Allied bombers advancing towards Budapest like a swarm of disciplined bumblebees. Suddenly the party seemed like a macabre farce.

While we were apprehensively enjoying the last moments of war before its terrible conclusion and consequences, Count Claus von Stauffenberg and other high-ranking German officers were plotting to kill the Führer. On 20th July, 1944, Stauffenberg placed a bomb near Hitler's seat at the General Staff meeting. The attempt was unsuccessful and the conspirators were all executed, along with members of their families. Fieldmarshall Rommel was handed an ampoule of poison and committed suicide. The executions continued until April 1945. At the end of that month Hitler accomplished the job that Stauffenberg had botched: together with Eva Braun he committed suicide.

In August we left Dalma with the Polónys where she had her last vacation for quite some time. Louis and I came back to Budapest to hear news of an uprising in Warsaw. The Poles were fighting the Germans and the Russians refused to help them. When it really counted, Uncle Joe decided to sit out the dance. He even refused to let Allied bombers land or fly over Russian territory. By the end of the year the Polish Home Army was decimated and Warsaw was synonymous in our minds with total destruction. 'We don't want Budapest to end up like Warsaw,' was a common remark in talk about the future.

Throughout the summer we kept an eye on news from Rumania We knew that the Rumanians were also trying to get out of the war without risking a German occupation. Now that our efforts had been thwarted, we were anxiously watching to see if the Rumanians would beat us to the conference table. It seemed to us that the fate of Transylvania depended on how Rumania scored with the Allies. Actually, the Allies were waiting to see how the political situation would develop in that country. A message to Maniu dated 29th March, contains little more than advice: "If you overthrow the Antonescu regime because it has decided not to break with the Germans the Soviet Government has now signified its willingness to treat with you on the lines mentioned above. (i.e. surrender to the Russian forces)" (Doc 76). In general, the Allies wanted Rumania to embark on sabotage activities, rather than open warfare.

Other messages indicate that the Rumanians were willing to cooperate with the Russians, but Message 78 from "Mimi", reported on 4th April, 1944 by the Allies describes a better idea:

In order to ensure the national solidarity and conservation of the capacity for action of the army against the Germans I think that Russia should not insist upon the military occupation of Rumania during the Armistice. Soviet military occupation directed towards Hungary with the passage through Rumania could be undertaken in conjunction with the Rumanian Army for the reoccupation of Transylvania (Doc 78)

Translation: Rumania is willing to let the Russians pass through her territory as long as they don't stay there. They could, however, help her to regain Transylvania In fact, the Allies assured Rumania of receiving Transylvania as their reward.

As it turned out, Maniu did not have to overthrow the Government. On 23 August the Russians reached Jassy, broke through the German-Rumanian lines and the defence against the Russians collapsed. King Michael asked his pro-German minister, Antonescu, to conclude an armistice with the Russians. When the latter refused, he was arrested. The King then visited the troops and told them to stop fighting the Russians. Rumania declared war on Germany on 23 August, and subsequently concluded an agreement with the Russians which nullified the Vienna agreement and gave them sovereignty over Transylvania. The Hungarians there were once more condemned to being a despised and persecuted majority.

The Germans, who had always held up the Rumanians as examples of loyalty for Hungary to emulate, were driven out of Bucharest by their former ally on 31 August. The blow was serious: they lost access to the Rumanian oilfields and other sources of raw materials. From now on the Germans decided to concentrate on creating as many obstacles as possible for the advancing Russian army. They were determined to "defend" Budapest to the last man. To stop the Russians from crossing the Danube when the time came, they mined all the bridges between Buda and Pest. Traffic continued to flow as usual; we just held our breaths while the tram we were riding rattled across the bridge.

An assessment of the Allied view of Hungary's position at the end of the summer is revealed in a comprehensive note sent to Foreign Secretary Harold MacMillan from Bari on 22 August, 1944. The note describes the high probability that Hungary will become the "last German stronghold" and the scene of Germany's last battlefield. Reasons for this supposition are seen as compelling: on 19 March the Germans had established effective military and political control over Hungary; the Allies are not expected to reach Hungary in the near future, a circumstance which makes Hungary the ideal place for Germany to recoup her forces for the final

resistance. Another reason for German confidence as noted by the Bari report was the attitude of the people of Hungary and her leaders. The Allies perceived Hungarians as people “driven hysterical by the ‘red bogey,’ anti-semitism and the fear of losing the ‘recovered’ provinces,” who would probably follow their leaders to support Germany in her last battle unless their “real position” were explained to them by competent propaganda

The writers of the Bari report had no reason to sympathise with Hungary’s tragic struggle for survival; the document presents a penetrating analysis of the Hungarian attitude the writers call the “victim” theory. “Is it possible,” they ask, “that Horthy... (along with the supporting body politic, his loyal agents such as his diplomat agent in Hungary, M. Szent-Iványi or loyal diplomats such as Apor, Ambro and Wodianer) considers himself ‘a victim of Hitler’ and expects the Allies to consider him as such?” Evidently, the Allies thought this supposition likely, which is why the report concludes that the Horthy regime will not “put up serious resistance to the Germans — unless the thousand year old instinct of self-preservation achieves such an unlikely and unexpected miracle ... “The Allies saw Horthy and his anti-Nazi followers as people simply waiting for a German defeat, believing that as “victims” of the Germans, they would be “entitled to a lenient treatment by the Allies.”

The report advocates a strong propaganda campaign. The people of Hungary “should be told what the consequences of their present attitude and subservience to the Germans are likely to be. At the same time, it should be made clear to them that it is in their power to resist and eventually defeat German plans to use their country as a German base . . . and battlefield. and it still is in their power to improve peace terms.

While propaganda is desirable, the report concludes, “there seems to be only one effective weapon to make German use of Hungarian territory as a military base unsafe... both militarily and politically, and that is effective bombing” (Doc 87).

One must resist the temptation to use hindsight to point out the misrepresentations in the report. Perhaps the writers really did believe that Communism was nothing but a “bogey”, but it is hard to believe that they really thought Hungary could by her actions “improve her peace terms.” Even Poland, with all her courage and sacrifice could not do that. The fate of Hungary, along with that of Eastern Europe, was already sealed.

Perhaps it is unjust to say that all the Allies had given up Eastern Europe. Winston Churchill still had hopes of reaching Hungary before the Russians. On 5th September he sailed to Quebec for a conference with President Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the discussions his recurring theme is his concern that the Russians are advancing too quickly into Europe. The minutes of the 8th September meeting reflect this concern:

The Prime Minister said that he was anxious that British forces should forestall the Russians in certain areas of central Europe. For instance, the Hungarians had expressed the intention of resisting the Russian advance, but would surrender to a British force if it could arrive in time. It was most desirable for political reasons that British forces should enter Yugoslavia and advance north and northeast into Central Europe (Doc 88)

He was “most disturbed” by suggestions to reduce the size of General Alexander’s army in Italy which he hoped could eventually be used to advance into the Balkans: “The possibility of making an amphibious descent from Ancona or Venice — if we get it — upon Istria holds a very high place in my thoughts. It is by this means we could widen our front of advance into Austria and Hungary, having the ports of Trieste and Fiume at our disposal” (Doc 89).

Churchill was uttering our very thoughts and hopes. The Rumanian surrender, combined with the rapid advance of the Russian Army and the increased Allied bombings, convinced the Regent that it was time for action. On 29th August he dismissed his pro-German Prime Minister Sztójay and replaced him with General Géza Lakatos; he also appointed two other anti-German ministers. At first sight Lakatos seemed a strange choice: he had been a Red Army officer under the Béla Kun Communist Régime in 1918-19, but after serving on the Eastern Front in 1942-43, he had experienced his real taste of Communism which changed his politics entirely. The Regent trusted him. He also realised that it was imperative for Hungary to get out of the war as soon as possible.

In his endeavour to save the country, Horthy had the same problem that Kállay had a few months earlier, only in a more acute form: he too wanted to surrender to the Western Allies and at the same time keep the Russians from occupying the country. He sent General Lajos Dálnoki Veress and his 2nd Battalion to Transylvania to fight the Russians and now the Rumanians. General Veress held up the Russian army for three weeks at Kolozsvár, but his troops were in sad shape, and he needed help.

At the 10th September Cabinet meeting, it was agreed — on the suggestion of Defence Minister Csatay — that Hungary should seek Germany's help in the form of an ultimatum. They sent a message to Germany, demanding three to five armoured troops to stop the Soviet advance in southern Transylvania. They let Hitler know that if help did not arrive, Hungary would surrender. The gesture was in keeping with Horthy's open nature, but not very sound strategy. Veessenmayer promised help the same evening, but shortly afterwards presented Horthy with an ominous message from German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, explaining the importance of Hungary to the German war effort and his intention to crush any attempt on Hungary's part to defect.

The Germans were now doubly suspicious and with good reason. In fact Horthy had been sending out peace-feelers of his own to the Western Allies through George Bakách-Besseney, the former Ambassador to Britain who now lived in Berne, Switzerland, and was in contact with representatives of the Western powers. The Regent instructed Bakách-Besseney to convey the following message to the Allies: Hungary was willing to surrender unconditionally to the Allies, and would like two or three airborne or land divisions to defend her frontiers. (This request was made as a result of an erroneous report that the Allies had landed on the Dalmatian coast.) The message also included a shopping list of unpopular requests: the Allies to occupy only strategic centres in Hungary; the exclusion of Rumanian and Yugoslav troops from the occupation forces; the Allies to allow German troops to evacuate Hungary (Horthy did not want Hungary turned into a battlefield). The answer was predictable: there could be no negotiations except unconditional surrender to the Russians, and there was no hope of expecting Western troops to arrive before the Russians.

So the Regent prepared to swallow the bitter pill of surrendering to the Russians and started looking for a suitable emissary. But before sending a delegation to Moscow, he made one last attempt to contact the Western Allies and entreat their help in gaining a more favourable treatment for us at the peace conference. Colonel Howie, the brave South African who had fled to Hungary after escaping from a German prison camp, offered his services to the Regent to contact the Allies in Italy. Horthy chose him and General Náday, a former commander of the First Army, now in retirement, to be his two emissaries. He personally gave them their instructions which were to be memorized and conveyed orally to the Allies. The message contained the following points: our troops are all engaged in defending our frontiers; we have no forces to fight off the German occupying army or to prevent the Russians and Rumanians from overrunning the country. Every day, American, British, Soviet and

Rumanian aeroplanes are bombing Hungary. We urgently request that the Allies send a few divisions through Fiume to Western Hungary.

The emissaries flew from Budapest to Italy on a plane secured by Majoros, a reliable officer working as a mechanic in the German army. They arrived on the Adriatic coast of Italy and at first had no success in getting a hearing. Náday was treated with courtesy but with the utmost suspicion since he did not have written credentials. He was separated from Howie and interrogated endlessly. At last he convinced the Allies of his good faith and could deliver his message. He was predictably told that Hungary must surrender to the Russians, whereupon he offered to go to Moscow for this purpose and asked the help of the Allies. Needless to say, the Russians did not find General Náday to be the right person for armistice discussions. They declared that he did not have "the proper credentials", and in any case, they said they were already in contact with different Hungarian delegations (mainly Communists).

Howie was taken to Fieldmarshall Lord Wilson on 23rd September. He explained to the British that Horthy and his Government realized the desperate situation of Hungary, that they were trying to avoid a Russian occupation and wanted to know if the Allies could offer some help. The military proposals were regarded by the British as too vague and too late, and were accordingly dismissed.

Having exhausted all his other options, Horthy contacted the Russians. His emissary was a relative, count Zichy, who had estates in Northern Hungary and was able to contact Slovak partisans and through them a Russian army officer, Colonel Makarov, who claimed to be empowered by Russian foreign Minister Molotov to discuss terms of surrender. Zichy came back with a most encouraging answer the terms of which were alleged to have been written by Stalin himself. The message contained several promises: Russia would stop

bombing as soon as the delegation arrived in Moscow; the emissaries would be treated as diplomats and given free use of cypher and radio; the Rumanian army would stop where they were at the time; only the Russian army would advance; there would be a census in Transylvania; the Soviet High Command would arrange for an immediate cessation of hostilities and send partisan groups to Hungary to help the Hungarians with the changeover; the Hungarian police gendarmerie and administration would continue. The most important clauses of the communique concerned Hungary's independence: her integrity and independence would be assured, her present frontiers guaranteed, and the Soviet Union would not interfere with her internal affairs. The letter ended with a declaration that the Soviet Union had no intention of expanding in Europe. The letter was dated 14th September, 1944 and bore the signature of Commander Lieutenant Colonel Makarov. The same message was brought back by Baron Ede Aczél, who went through the lines and met Colonel General Kuznyetsov. The promises in both messages were so encouraging — and so much what everyone wanted to hear — that a delegation was sent to Moscow for armistice discussions. But when the Hungarian delegation returned from Moscow, they brought back a much briefer, and very different message: Russia insisted on immediate surrender, and the fate of Transylvania would be decided at the peace conference.

Horthy swallowed another bitter pill and sent his representatives to Stalin to arrange the surrender. The emissaries he chose were General Gábor Faraghó, chief of the Hungarian Gendarmerie, Count Géza Teleki a university professor and son of the late Prime Minister Paul Teleki, and Domokos Szentiványi Ambassador Plenipotentiary. They took with them a handwritten letter by the Regent in which he pleaded for his country, asking the Russians to spare her further sufferings. He pointed out that Hungary entered the war only under enormous pressure by the German colossus and asked Stalin to use his influence with the Allies to ensure fair armistice terms for his

country. To win Stalin's good will, Horthy ended his letter with a Byzantine flourish, expressing his highest esteem for the Great Marshal. The action was reminiscent of Hungarian Prince Zápolya's appeal to Sultan Suleiman II during the years of Turkish occupation. Like Zápolya, Horthy had to abase himself before a loathed ruler in order to save his country.

Although the German army was swarming all over the country, at the end of September, 1944, the Government released hundreds of anti-German, leftist prisoners. There was great unrest in the country; anti-German political parties, factory workers pressed the Government to turn against the Germans and ask the Russians for an armistice. The leftwing parties did not know that different delegations were already talking in Moscow.

An illegal Communist Party was organised in Budapest; László Rajk became its Party Secretary. A Communist Military Committee was started under the leadership of György Pálffy, Lajos Fehér and László Sólyom. The Russian government demanded that Hungary evacuate Transylvania. On Rumanian orders, 3,000 Hungarians, whose families had lived in Transylvania for hundreds of years, were compelled to leave their homeland.

In September Dalma came home from her long emergency vacation to start school in a country heading for complete chaos. We were under German occupation; the Russians were already on Hungarian soil and advancing. We lived from one air raid to the next. Military and civilian targets were hit indiscriminately by the Allies, and also by the Rumanians, who had not even declared war on us.

In this uncertain and desperate situation an S.O.E sabotage mission of three British officers was parachuted blind into Hungary on 13th September, 1944, near the town of Pécs. The leader of the mission (codenamed DIBBLER) was Captain John Coates; the other two members of the team were two Canadian Hungarians, Joe Gordon (original name Gelleny), as wireless operator, and Lieut. Mike

Thomas (original name Turk), the principal contact man, who spoke fluent Hungarian. Unfortunately, they were lured into a trap: the man who had gone in ahead — via the Partisans in Northern Yugoslavia — had been captured and forced to send out signal messages under duress. Thus the main adventures of Coates and his team consisted in planning their escape with some help from Hungarian and Polish sympathisers. In one or two cases money also helped. During their captivity, which lasted some three months, the men experienced life in four Hungarian prisons: the Military gaol in Pécs, the “Hadik” (Haditechnikai Intézet) in Budapest, the Pestvidéki on the Fő Utca, also in Budapest, and the compound within the Polish Internment Camp at Zugliget, outside the capital. After organising the escape of Thomas and Daniels (Durovecz) (of S.O.E operation WINDPROOF), and despite considerably increased security measures, Coates and Gordon finally escaped on 12 December 1944. Gordon, Thomas and Daniels went right through the siege of Budapest before being liberated by the Russians. Coates, who was hidden by a Hungarian family in Kamaraerdő, just outside the capital, reported to an advance patrol of the Red Army as early as 26 December and was thus spared the siege.

On the wall of his prison cell in the Hadik, Coates read and memorised lines scrawled in Hungarian, which translate as follows:

Magyar, you are passing through the torments of hell. Expect no mercy or pardon. Here you will suffer.

Suffer you must, for your crime is that you were born Hungarian, and you dared to love your homeland.

(Doc 95)

Coates surmised that these stirring lines were a quotation from some Hungarian patriot imprisoned by the Austrians at the time of the

suppression of the 1848 Revolution, but clearly they had relevance to conditions a century later.

John Coates told me in 1988 that in addition to his mission, there were two other S.O.E parties which actually got into Hungary over this period. one under Lt. Col. Peter Boughey, and the other (WINDPROOF) under Major John Sehmer, to the Slovak partisans, but aimed at Hungary. John Sehmer was shot by the Germans in the course of a raid on an encampment in the mountains; Boughey, who had gone in ostensibly as a sergeant in a Scottish regiment, survived and. after many adventures, which included imprisonment in a German camp in Silesia, reported, in his true identity, to staff officers of the advancing Red Army and was repatriated via Odessa (Doc 94).

On 8th October Russian Foreign Minister Molotov received Horthy's representatives who handed over the Regent's letter to Stalin. The delegation reminded Molotov of Lieutenant Colonel Makarov's letter from Stalin. Molotov's answer was that the Russian Government regarded that letter as null and void. The surrender must be unconditional on the following terms: Hungary must evacuate all territories which she had regained since 1937; the evacuations would be observed by the Allies but under Russian supervision; Hungary should cease contact with the Germans and declare war on Germany; in that task the Russian Army would assist her. As for Hungary's internal affairs, Russia would not force her political system on Hungary, would not call the army to account, but would punish the war criminals. Szentiványi, one of the Hungarian delegates, tried in vain to win some concessions concerning the regained territories.

Hoping to gain more favourable terms, Horthy did not answer immediately, but after realising that he had no choice, he agreed. asking only that the Soviet advance be slowed to give him time to explain to the troops why they were to attack the Germans. Without that explanation, he was afraid that the rank and file would simply

scatter in all directions. On 11th October, he officially accepted the Russian terms and Molotov and Faragho signed the surrender documents.

On 8th October, 1944, Churchill flew to Moscow to discuss the future of Germany and Europe after the war. His visit coincided with Horthy's surrender negotiations, and Molotov presented the Allies with Hungary's surrender when they arrived at the conference. While Churchill nursed his vision of a loose federation of the small Central European states, the Russians had very different ideas. It had already been decided that post-war Germany would be divided under British, American and Russian domination. Churchill's suggestion of a separate state consisting of Bavaria and Austria with Vienna as its capital was opposed by Stalin. Churchill and Eden tried to achieve some balance between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies by suggesting the ratio of control in the form of percentages. Hungary was supposed to be controlled 50%-50% by the West and Russia respectively. Stalin was most generous with words: he knew he would get the upper hand in Hungary as soon as the Soviet Army marched in. They discussed the future of Poland; Stalin praised the bravery of the Poles and declared that they deserved to gain territories on their western borders. He knew that after the war Russia would annex Polish territories on the eastern border of Poland. Then on 16th October shortly before the opening of the meeting, news reached Moscow that Admiral Horthy had been arrested by the Germans.

On 14th October Horthy had already decided to let the nation know about the armistice and the Proclamation was to be read on the radio the next day, which was a Sunday. He knew that the Germans suspected his discussions with the Russians, and prepared for German retaliation as best he could. He planned to protect his position by recalling General Dálnoki Veress and his 2nd battalion to Budapest. In the event that he himself was taken prisoner or

incapacitated for any reason, he appointed General Dálnoki Veress as Prime Minister and acting Head of State.

The Germans, for their part, were not idle. They had found out that young Nicholas Horthy had sought contacts with Tito and was at this moment waiting for an answer from the Yugoslav leader. On the morning of 15th October the German trap was set. Nicholas received a message that Tito's envoy wished to talk to him. Cautiously, he went to the appointed place on Eskü Square, accompanied by three armed bodyguards who waited for him at some distance, ready to come to his aid if needed. As he arrived, he was attacked by 15 armed Gestapo men who beat him severely, then put a sack over his head and rolled him in a carpet. He feigned unconsciousness, and as they proceeded to put him in a waiting van, he managed to call out for help. In the ensuing scuffle shots were fired, and one Hungarian and one German were killed. Young Nicholas Horthy was now a hostage of the Germans who hoped to tie Horthy's hands this way. It was later learned that he was put on a plane and transported first to Vienna and then to Mauthausen concentration camp.

Meanwhile the Regent called a meeting of the Crown Council and informed them that Hungary had no choice but to seek unconditional surrender. When he received the news of his son's abduction, he sent out a search party' which found nothing but spent bullets from the guns of the assailants on Eskü Tér.

At noon of 15th October Veesenmayer arrived at the Palace to see the Regent. In the presence of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, Horthy accused the Germans of treachery and the kidnapping of his son. Veesenmayer protested that he knew nothing about the abduction. When Horthy produced the spent cartridges found at the scene, Veesenmayer countered that young Horthy was justly arrested for conspiring with the enemy. At this juncture Horthy informed Veesenmayer that he had decided to cease hostilities and ask for an armistice. Veesenmayer was visibly taken aback He went

pale and asked Horthy to at least postpone his decision until he had seen the German ambassador, Rahn, who was coming to Budapest with a special message from Hitler. Horthy said that he was willing to see Rahn, but his decision could not be changed. As an afterthought, he pointed out to Veesenmayer that he would refrain from keeping him as a hostage. Veesenmayer, it appears, had also come prepared: he told Horthy that he had left orders at the German Legation that if he did not return by 1 pm., they were to ring up Ribbentrop. Immediately after Veesenmayer's departure Horthy sent the text of his Armistice Proclamation to the radio station to be read out at 1 pm.

Reading accounts of Horthy's dealings with the German High command, one has the impression of watching a lion tamer who has to operate in a cage filled with ferocious beasts — without the aid of his whip and chair.

On 15th October Louis was home for Sunday dinner. By now he was working in Budapest again, and every day he brought home the latest newsreleases, so that we usually knew ahead of time about impending events. What happened on 15th October at 1:00 pm. was quite unexpected. We sat down to lunch and switched on the radio. After the weather forecast, we heard a message asking listeners to stand by for an important announcement. Next came the voice of E. Hlatky, the Secretary of State and Commissioner of Radio announcing that Hungary was seeking an armistice. Then he read the Regent's Proclamation explaining the reasons for his action. The full text, reproduced here in translation from Horthy's Memoirs, is a powerful expression of Hungary's tragic situation:

Broadcast Proclamation of October 15th, 1944
Translated from the original Hungarian.

Ever since the will of the nation put me at the country's helm, the most important aim of Hungarian foreign policy has been, through peaceful revision, to repair, at least partly, the injustices of the Peace Treaty of Trianon. Our hopes in the League of Nations in this regard remained unfulfilled.

At the time of the beginning of a new world crisis, Hungary was not led by any desire to acquire new territories, we had no aggressive intention towards the Republic of Czechoslovakia, and Hungary did not wish to regain by war territories taken from her. We entered the Bácska only after the collapse of Yugoslavia and, at the time, in order to defend our blood brethren. We accepted a peaceful arbitration of the Axis powers regarding the Eastern territories taken from us in 1918 by Rumania

Hungary was forced into war against the Allies by German pressure, which weighed upon us owing to our geographical situation. But even so we were not guided by any ambition to increase our own power and had no intention to snatch as much as a square metre of territory from anybody.

Today it is obvious to any sober-minded person that the German Reich has lost the war. All governments responsible for the destiny of their countries must draw the appropriate conclusions from this fact, for, as a great German statesman, Bismark, once said. "No nation ought to sacrifice itself on the altar of an alliance."

Conscious of my historic responsibility, I have the obligation to undertake every step directed to avoiding further unnecessary bloodshed. A nation that allowed the soil inherited from its forefathers to

be turned into a theatre of rearguard actions in an already lost war, defending alien interests out of a serf like spirit, would lose the esteem of public opinion throughout the world.

With grief I am forced to state that the German Reich on its part broke the loyalty of an ally towards our country a long time ago. For a considerable time it has thrown formation after formation of the Hungarian armed forces into battle outside the frontiers of the country against my express wish and will.

In March of this year, however, the Führer of the German Reich invited me to negotiations in consequence of my urgent demand for the repatriation of Hungary's armed forces. There he informed me that Hungary would be occupied by German forces and he ordered this to be carried out in spite of my protests, even while I was detained abroad. Simultaneously German political police invaded the country and arrested numerous Hungarian citizens, among them several Members of Parliament as well as the Minister of the Interior of my government then in office.

The Premier himself evaded detention only by taking refuge in a neutral legation. After having received a firm promise by the Führer of the German Reich that he would cancel acts that violated and restricted Hungary's sovereignty, should I appoint a government enjoying the confidence of the Germans, I appointed the Sztójay Government.

Yet the Germans did not keep their promise. Under cover of the German occupation the Gestapo tackled the Jewish question in a manner incompatible with the dictates of humanity, applying methods it

had already employed elsewhere. When the war drew near our frontiers, and even passed them, the Germans repeatedly promised assistance, yet again failed to honour their promise.

During their retreat they turned the country's sovereign territory over to looting and destruction. These actions, contrary to an ally's loyalty, were crowned by an act of open provocation when in the course of his measures for the maintenance of order in the interior of Budapest, Corps Commander Field Marshal Lieutenant Szilard-Bakay was treacherously attacked and abducted by Gestapo agents, who exploited the bad visibility of a foggy October morning when he was getting out of his car in front of his house.

Subsequently German aircraft dropped leaflets against the government in office. I received reliable information that troops of pro-German tendency intended to raise their own men to power by using force to effect a political upheaval and the overthrow of the legal Hungarian Government which I had in the meantime appointed, and that they intended to turn their country's territory into a theatre of rearguard actions for the German Reich.

I have decided to safeguard Hungary's honour even against her former ally, although this ally, instead of supplying the promised military help, meant finally to rob the Hungarian nation of its greatest treasure — its freedom and independence. I informed a representative of the German Reich that we were about to conclude a military armistice with our former enemies and to cease all hostilities against them.

Trusting in your love of truth, I hope to secure, of one accord with you, the continuity of our nation's life in the future and the realization of our peaceful aims. Commanders of the Hungarian army have received corresponding orders from me. Accordingly, the troops, loyal to their oath and following an Order of the Day now issued simultaneously, must obey the commanders appointed by me. I appeal to every honest Hungarian to follow me on this path, beset by sacrifices, that will lead to Hungary's salvation. (259-260)

Hlatky read the Proclamation three times, and we listened, thunderstruck, wondering what would happen next. What happened to Hlatky immediately afterwards was that he received a fake message asking him to go to see the Regent at the Palace. When he got there, he was seized by the Nazi guards and arrested. He was another lion-tamer caught without his whip.

XVI

October, 1944: Last-Minute Nazi Coup

The Regent's Proclamation was received with joy and relief throughout the country. Lajos Takács, a mathematician and

throughout future son-in-law, was at the time a university student living in Maglód, a small town 15 miles east of Budapest. He told me that after hearing the Proclamation, he went out to the railway station for more news and spent the afternoon there watching trains travelling west, loaded with jubilant soldiers, coming back from the Eastern Front. The next day he watched the trains again, this time travelling east, loaded with gloomy-faced soldiers. The Arrow Cross had seized power, countermanded Horthy's orders, and the war was back on again.

While confusion reigned in the country, the Germans were still trying to remove the Regent as unobtrusively as possible — not an easy task especially as the Royal Palace and the whole of Castle Hill were now in a state of siege, and Horthy steadfastly refused to place himself under the “protection” of the Führer. At the same time, not wanting to sacrifice the lives of his faithful guards in a hopeless struggle, he ordered them not to resist. Finally, in the early hours of 16th October Veessenmayer came himself and asked Horthy to accompany him to SS headquarters at Hatvani Palace, as Horthy remembers, “to spare me the pain of seeing the occupation of the Royal Palace.” Taking this as a form of arrest, Horthy went along.

The next day he had a surprise visitor — a person who was announced as Hungary's Prime Minister. The visitor turned out to be Ferenc Szálasi, the leader of the Hungarian Arrow Cross party. Horthy was even more surprised when Szálasi asked him to appoint him Premier of Hungary. Horthy advised his visitor to get the Germans to perform this service for him. "As I am a prisoner here," he explained, "I cannot perform my official duties, and in any case you are the last person I should choose to appoint to that function." Undeterred by the refusal, Szálasi walked out of the room saying that he had the Regent's verbal authorisation to become the Premier of Hungary.

In his semi-captivity, Horthy was accompanied by former Premier Lakatos, Chief of Military Chancellery Vattay, and his aide-de-camp, Lieutenant-Colonel lost. As the hours of uncertainty dragged by, Horthy retired to his own room while the other three were waiting in an adjacent area. Suddenly he heard a shot. He entered the room to find that Lieutenant-Colonel lost had shot himself and died on the spot. He chose death rather than imprisonment and Gestapo interrogation.

In the course of the day, the Germans continued to pressure Horthy to sign a document affirming his abdication and the appointment of Szálasi as Premier, and the Regent continued to refuse. Finally Lakatos told him what he had learned from the Germans: that by signing, the Regent could save the life of Nicholas Jr. At that point Horthy realized that his refusal would achieve nothing: the Germans would publish the abdication document in his name, whether or not he signed it. On the other hand, by signing, he might possibly save the life of his only remaining son. Before putting his name on the document, he made Veesebmayer promise "on his word of honour" that Nicholas Jr. would be released. Nicholas Horthy Jr. was not released; although, to give Veesebmayer his due, Horthy later found out that the German Minister had made several attempts to achieve young Horthy's freedom.

On 17th October the Regent was taken to Germany to Schloss Hirschberg where he was kept in reasonable comfort, but under heavy armed guard. His wife, daughter-in-law and grandson, who had been forcibly removed from the residence and protection of the Papal Nuncio, were also taken and confined in the same place. Nicholas Horthy Jr. never did join them. Horthy's captors told him only that his son was "suitably housed"; they omitted to tell him that his son was housed at the Mauthausen, and later at the Dachau concentration camps.

The country was now left without the last vestige of protection which the person of the Regent had provided. On 15th October, a few hours after Horthy's Proclamation, we heard another broadcast: a proclamation to the troops by the Chief of General Staff, General Vörös (not to be confused with General Dálnoki Veress), explaining that the Regent's earlier proclamation concerned only negotiations for an armistice and not an order for the cessation of hostilities. Vörös instructed the troops to continue fighting. The announcement in effect negated Horthy's original order to the army to cease hostilities and seek contact with the Soviet forces. Veesenmayer and the proGerman elements of the army had prevailed and made it impossible for the Hungarian army to resist the German attack on Castle Hill.

All afternoon and evening we kept vigil by the radio, listening with growing apprehension to the military music which filled the time between increasingly confusing proclamations. At twenty minutes after nine in the evening we knew everything was lost when we heard the voice of Ferenc Szálasi, the ruthless leader of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party, read out his first "Order of the Day." A few minutes later followed a proclamation of the Arrow Cross Party calling for the arrest and execution of the Jewish stooge and traitor, the ex-Regent, Nicholas Horthy. The proclamation, addressed to the officers and troops of the Hungarian army, assured them that since Horthy had broken his oath of office by seeking an alliance with the Bolsheviks, they were no longer bound by their oath to the

Regent Starting today their new commander was Ferenc Szálasi., the saviour of our country, who would fight with them to the last drop of his blood to save Hungary from the indignity of a new Trianon Treaty. Death to the former Regent and his accomplices! Long live our country! Long live Szálasi! Then we heard the orchestra strike up the new Arrow Cross march.

Fel fel Magyar, az ősi föld veszélyben
Nem vész a nemzet hogyha mi merünk.
Rabszolgák lettünk ősapáink földjén,
De már a hajnal hasadozni kezd.
Ha összefog a Magyar a Magyarral
Győzelemre visz majd
A Nyilaskereszt,
Szálasi Ferenc.

(Up up arise, our country is in danger,
It's up to us to save the future now.
Foes made us slaves in
The land of our forefathers;
A new dawn is bringing liberty at last
Magyar and Magyar side by side advancing,
Will conquer with the sign of the Arrow Cross,
And Ferenc Szálasi.)

General Lajos D' old Veress who was still in Transylvania at the head of the 2nd Army did not obey Szálasi's Order of the Day. He decided that the bloodshed and devastation that would follow further fighting in Kolozsvár were too high a price to pay and gave orders to his army to withdraw. He intended to follow the Regent's orders and go to Budapest, but before he could do so, he was arrested by the Gestapo who found on him Horthy's letter appointing him as his successor in the event of the Regent's inability to carry out

his duties. General Veress was accused of high treason and taken to a Gestapo prison at Sopronköhida near the Austrian border. Subsequently he was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. He did not get a chance to serve more than a few months of his sentence because the war ended. In less than three years, however, he was accused of subversive activity against the Communist government and imprisoned for nine years. His crime was that he was Hungarian and he dared to love his country.

When Szálasi came to power, normal life in the country was disrupted. Shops and factories closed; rumours about rapid Russian advances were confirmed by people who fled to the capital from towns south and east of Budapest. But Szálasi refused to face reality: he gave orders for the shops and factories to be opened and civil servants to report to their jobs. He ordered a curfew after dark and a ban on assemblies of more than three persons. General security was tightened; martial law was extended to many offences including "race pollution," bribery and profiteering; the spreading of defeatist rumours was made punishable by death. In a desperately foolish effort to achieve victory, Szálasi ordered general mobilization: every able-bodied man between 12 and 60 was ordered to report for military service or other defence work. As conditions deteriorated, even health exemptions were revoked. Soon after 16th October, 1944, political prisoners were handed over to the Nazis.

The already difficult situation of the Jews in Budapest suddenly became hopeless. Szálasi published a decree declaring that all Jewish property belonged to the state. He did not recognize the validity of safe conduct or foreign passes issued to Hungarian Jews. Jews were now rounded up in great numbers and taken to ghetto houses. The Germans needed Jewish labour to build fortifications against the advancing Russian army, and Eichmann asked for 50,000 Jews. Szálasi sent 25,000 on condition that they remained under Hungarian supervision. They were supposed to be sent by rail, but when transportation was not available, the Jews were compelled to

make the journey on foot in threadbare clothes, in the freezing cold. Many thousands died in these death marches. Veessenmayer wanted the Jews out of Hungary because he was afraid of their resistance as the German Garrison was surrounded by the Russian army.

On 4th November my friend Edith Kozák came to our house in tears. The St Margaret Bridge had blown up accidentally and her husband was on the bridge at the time. He was paralyzed and in terrible pain. We had heard that all the bridges of Budapest had been mined by the Germans; now we knew that the rumours were true. Edith nursed her husband throughout the ensuing siege. When the Russians came and rounded up people for work detail, they would not believe that he was unable to walk. To make an example of him, they tied him to a cart and dragged him for miles until they were finally convinced that he was telling the truth. They left him for dead in somebody's courtyard, where his wife found him and took him home to die a few months after the war. He joined a group that included the Regent, General Veress and many others — people who were punished by both the Germans and the Russians.

We kept as close to home as possible. Dalma started what was to be a severely disrupted school year. Her school was across the street from where we lived, so that when the air raid sirens sounded, she ran home to our basement which served as the shelter. From the end of October we saw a steady stream of friends and relatives fleeing from the Russian advance. My sister Aurora from Szolnok came with her husband, son and her 15 year old maid, a buxom peasant girl who was to spend the siege with us. My brother Emil drove up one day on a horse-drawn wagon bringing five young slaughtered pigs. For the next week everyone was pressed into service making sausages, smoked meat, and lard. Emil then left on his way to Austria, but he left us a generous supply of meat which literally kept us from starving during the subsequent siege of Budapest

My sister Charlotte did not leave Budapest. She was married to a member of a distinguished European royal family, Prince Philippe

Josiah Saxe-Coburg of Gotha The Coburgs were related to most of the reigning royal families of Europe. Queen Victoria's favourite uncle, Leopold I, the King of Belgium, was a Saxe-Coburg; his second wife, Louise of Orleans, was the daughter of Louis Philippe, King of France. One of Louis Philippe's daughters married an Austrian member of the Saxe-Coburg family. Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's Consort, was a notable member of the Saxe-Coburg and Gotha family. Queen Victoria, who was Albert's cousin, was herself related to them. Through marriages with Hungarian aristocratic families, the Coburgs also had roots in Hungary. The first Hungarian blood came into the Coburg family when Kaiser Franz Joseph's brother Ferdinand married Antonia, the daughter of the Hungarian Prince Koháry. The great grandmother of Queen Elizabeth II was a Hungarian countess, Claudia Rhédey, a great horsewoman. When Ceausescu, the Rumanian dictator tyrant, gave orders to erase the Hungarian cemetery where the countess Rhédey was buried, Prince Charles wrote an article in the Daily Telegraph condemning Ceausescu for this barbaric act

The Austro-Hungarian branch of the Saxe-Coburg family, known as Koháry-Coburg, had extensive estates in Hungary, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Germany, as well as palaces in Buda and Vienna. During the Second World War, one of Prince Philippe's sisters died in a Nazi gas chamber. After the Communist takeover, the family lost all its possessions in Eastern Europe. It is of interest to note that after the recent demise of Communism, the Coburgs refrained from asking compensation from the economically burdened governments of the countries where their estates had been located.

Philippe Josiah was a friendly, unassuming person, devoted to my sister and their young son, Philippe August He spent his days administering his estates and provided a decent livelihood for large numbers of farm workers. He had an intense dislike of the Nazi system and kept himself far away from Nazi politics. Unfortunately

for him, in 1944 he was drafted into the Hungarian army, but he entered the service uncomplainingly as a private soldier. After the siege of Budapest and the Russian occupation, when many people fled to Austria for safety, he returned to Hungary to find his family. In 1946, all three of them left Hungary for good. On the eve of the Russian occupation, my sister Charlotte was living in the Coburg palace on Castle Hill with her infant son, her mother-in-law, Princess Clementine, and her sister-in-law, Princess Leopoldine.

My husband Louis' mother and brother considered Budapest safer than their home in Beregszász and came to the capital, unaware that they were giving up the family house.

In the middle of November, Kállay was still staying at the Turkish Embassy, but the Arrow Cross Government found his presence there increasingly irksome. Finally on 18th November 1944, the Nazi Foreign Minister sent him an ultimatum: if by 4pm. the next day Kállay did not leave his hiding place, Arrow Cross guards would penetrate the Embassy and take him out by force. Kállay could not expose his generous host to such danger and decided to leave. The next day armoured cars filled with German and Arrow Cross security men arrived at the Embassy. Kállay was arrested and taken first to a Hungarian jail, and then to Mauthausen concentration camp. As he writes in his memoirs, what he saw there was enough for a lifetime. But he survived the ordeal, was liberated by the Americans and later taken to the island of Capri where Leslie Veress visited him when he was in Italy. Later he emigrated to the United States. When I visited him in 1963 in New York, he was suffering from Parkinson's disease.

After the Germans removed the Regent, the nation as a whole turned against the Germans and the Arrow Cross. Even those who had supported Germany now felt revulsion at the activities of Szálasi's gang. An underground Liberation Front committee was formed which included all non-Nazi parties. The Front was headed by E. Bajcsi-Zsilinszky, the Smallholder leader in hiding after his

release from Nazi captivity. His principal lieutenant was general János Kiss, the Chief of the General Staff. Other leading figures were Colonel Jenő Nagy and Staff Officer Vilmos Tarcsay, both leading officers of the General Staff. The aim of the Front was to attack the Germans and make way for the Russians, to let the Russians know that it recognized the validity of Horthy's Proclamation and wished to co-operate with them. A general uprising was planned for 1st December, 1944. Members signed an agreement with László Rajk, the Hungarian Communist leader.

The comparative seclusion of our home in Buda afforded shelter to some of Louis' friends who were hiding from the Germans and the Arrow Cross. One of these was Nicholas Somogyi, a labour leader who participated in the resistance against the Germans. Somogyi called himself a Democrat, and Louis, unaware of his Communist affiliation, supported him as a fellow patriot. We regarded him as a friend; our families visited each other; in happier days Louis had been a speaker at some of the labour union meetings, and worked with their leaders to achieve better conditions for the working classes. During the Nazi takeover Somogyi often came to visit us in various disguises. His favourite outfit was a German military uniform. He wished his fellow resistance members had been more enterprising in their efforts at sabotage. On one occasion he described with frustration how a whole German army unit marched by on the road near Visegrád while the Hungarian partisans watched from the mountainside above and did nothing.

Another resistance friend was Péter Veres (no relation to Leslie Veress), a peasant leader whose main goal in life was to break up the giant estates and give land to the peasants. In this struggle Louis wholeheartedly supported him even though Louis himself came from a landed family. One day Peter Veres arrived in peasant boots and greasy hat, with a field hand's knapsack on his shoulder, telling us that the Arrow Cross was looking for him. We invited him to stay,

and he stayed with us for several weeks. He was so well concealed that even our numerous relatives were unaware of his presence. He spent November sitting beside the ceramic tile stove in our one heated room, reading Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* and listening to the Russian artillery in the distance. "It's not loud enough," he kept saying. "Why don't they hurry up and get here?" Whenever the doorbell rang, Uncle Peter, as our maid called him, was asked to step into the maid's room. Finally he got tired of waiting for the Russians and went over to the Pest side of the city because he thought that the Russians would get there faster. He left with us his hat and knapsack. He would not need them any more: after the war he became Leader of the Peasant party and President of the Land Reform Committee. He achieved his life's dream of giving land to the peasants; then he saw the Communist government take the land away from the peasants, forcing them into collective farms. He saw it all but could not bear to let go of his political ambitions. He stood by and accepted any cabinet office that was available. When he was appointed Minister of Defence he became a favourite subject for Budapest jokes.

His subsequent career reveals the main reason Peter Veres was so anxious to reach the Russians. In November the eastern half of the country was already occupied, and anti-German forces were already organizing the post-war government. He could not bear to be left out.

While events in Hungary demolished Horthy's armistice plans, the Armistice Delegation was still in Moscow and felt that provisions would now have to be made for a post-war government in Hungary. Accordingly, on 23rd October the delegation addressed a memorandum to the Allies in which they argued that since Horthy had been abducted and his designated "homo regius," General Dálnoki Veress, had also been arrested and eliminated, the delegation was itself "the only representative of Horthy's constitutional will and also the depository of constitutional continuity." General Vörös claimed leadership of the new government. The Russians were not in a hurry.

to agree. They stalled, issuing soothing statements about the Red Army which would arrive not as conquerors but as liberators, helping Hungary to change its social and economic structure. The Russians obviously had their own ideas. The Soviet Government sent a delegation of Hungarian Communists from Moscow to the territories already under Soviet occupation. The delegation was led by Ernő Gerő, Zoltán Vas, J. Révai. M. Farkas and Imre Nagy. Gerő was to become one of the worst of the Communist pack, second only to Rákosi: Imre Nagy was destined to become the hero and martyr of the Hungarian Revolution 1 1 years later. Before their departure, the delegation was carefully primed in the course of discussions with Molotov, Dekanazov, Mátyás Rákosi, and on occasion by Stalin himself. According to Ernő Gerő's Memoirs, Stalin backed the establishment of a Hungarian Provisional Government. Stalin said that he would even have accepted Horthy as a temporary head of state in order to provide the continuity so important in achieving the people's support. This plan was obviously impracticable since Horthy had been arrested by the Germans. Eventually Bela Miklós was chosen as the head of the Provisional Government.

As November wore on, we in Budapest stopped worrying about the future. The main business of life was survival from one air raid to the next, dashing out between attacks to buy provisions for the long violent winter that was stalking us. It was enough to worry about doorbells bringing unwelcome visitors, about my mother who was living at the base of Castle Hill in a small apartment which she now shared with my sister Hajnai, her doctor husband and her son; it was enough to worry about my sister Charlotte who was hiding a Jewish mother and her son, and was living in a palace on Castle Hill, an area which the Germans and the Arrow Cross were preparing to "defend" to the last man.

The artillery fire was really coming near as we entered December. The Russian army was slowly encircling the city. The surrounding small towns such as Maglód, where my future son-in-

law lived, were already under Russian occupation. Szálasi's daily orders had no longer any meaning to them, but we still had to listen to his futile exhortations and hear all too true rumours about his last minute atrocities. There was a Jewish ghetto house in a former nursing home at the bottom of our street. We could only imagine what was going on inside. After the siege we found out, as we watched work crews remove piles of charred bodies and haul them away by the wagon load. Before abandoning the area to the Russians, the Nazis had locked up the ghetto and set it on fire.

The world was on fire, but there was still eleven year old Dalma, and Christmas was coming. There were no Christmas trees to be had:

the Russians had occupied all the pine forests. The shops were bare of toys and clothes, but the bookstores were still well stocked. I bought a huge stack of books for her. For our Christmas Eve dinner we invited a friend of my brother Emil, a Polish refugee named Gotebiovski.

On 24th December we welcomed our Polish visitor, opened presents, and sat down to dinner, trying to talk loud enough to drown out the sound of artillery fire in the distance. At least the Allied planes had given up trying to drop bombs on us. The Russian front lines were too near. After dinner we sat near the big yellow tile stove and talked about things that were as far away from our present situation as possible — water buffaloes in Poland and Transylvania, Christmas customs in Poland. Dalma listened quietly, with a handkerchief in her hand: she was nursing a bad cold.

At about ten in the evening a neighbour rang the bell. He had just come home with the news: the Russians had taken a residential area about a mile from our house. There was no need to verify his story: in the past hour the rumbling artillery noises had turned into violent explosions. We could already hear the hysterical howling of the Katyusha guns as they spewed out their barrage of shells. The Russians were fighting in the streets below us.

Having prepared for a siege earlier, we had stripped our house of so-called valuables and taken them down to the so-called shelter which was partly a basement and partly a coal-cellar. There was a corner room in the basement which the tenants were to use as a communal kitchen. The cellar on one side of a corridor was divided into three by six metre sections by rough wooden plank walls. Each of these enclosures, which normally served as storage rooms for fuel, was now supposed to house one tenant family. We had packed our section with Persian carpets to sleep on, boxes of food, warm coats, blankets and other necessities. Our jewellery was buried in the mud floor of the cellar. Outside the weather was freezing cold; inside we had no heating. All we wanted was to be “liberated” as soon as possible — and survive.

Now it was evident that the time had come to go downstairs. We politely invited our guest to share our shelter. As I was assuring him that there was “plenty of room,” I furtively took his measurements, trying to figure out how we could all fit into the cramped hole in the cellar. He thanked us, but declined the invitation saying he would stay at a friend's house instead. We did not insist. There was no way to tell which of us would still be alive in a week's time.

For the next four weeks we had only slightly more control over our lives than the Persian rugs in the cellar. Hitler's army was on the run with nowhere to run, determined to fight like a mad bull attacked by vicious dogs. With most of Hungary occupied by the Russians, the German army decided to make a stand in Budapest with the aid of Szálasi's troops. Szálasi drafted everyone from 12 to 70 and scoured the parts of the country he still controlled for cannon fodder. Young boys were pressed into service with no training at all. They were sent to fight the Russian “headhunters” — sharpshooters who aimed at the head and never missed, not even when they were dead drunk. By 24th December, Pest, the east side of Budapest, was already in Soviet hands. They took 60,000 prisoners, but the Germans were undeterred. Determined to hold Buda, they blew up

all the beautiful bridges on the Danube. Now, on Christmas Eve, the Russians were closing in from the west as well, and the German and what was left of the Hungarian troops (the 10th Hungarian division had defected to the Russians) were prepared to fight for each street. By now the Russians had completely encircled the city with its 800,000 civilians and 80,000 garrison.

XVII

The Siege of Budapest; the Conquerors and the Conquered

We spent most of the night hauling belongings down the stairs, setting up house in the cellar, and exchanging news with neighbours who were engaged in the same pursuit. By Christmas morning the Russians were at St. John's Hospital, about half a mile away from us as the crow, or in our case, the shell, flies. Our kitchen was facing their front line of defence. The Germans were half a mile away in the opposite direction. We were in no-man's-land.

The shelling was so intense that we did not think we would have to wait long before it was all over. In a day or so, however, we realized that things were not going to happen that fast. In fact, there was no sign of a further Russian advance. So we hung on, each family in its own cubicle, working at warding off the cold, the hunger and the thirst. Helpless, we watched as the amenities of civilization gradually slipped from our grasp. Gas was the first to go. That was not so bad; we had a woodburning stove in the communal kitchen. It was a bit hard to jockey for positions as we tried to find a warm spot for our pots of soup on the range, but we still managed to cook dinner. When the electric light went, things got a little tougher. We collected all the candles we could find, including old Christmas tree candles, and found our stock to be so scanty that strict rationing was necessary.

We sat for long hours in the dark or lay down fully dressed and bundled up on our makeshift beds. Sometimes we splurged and lighted one candle so that Louis could read to us. Other times we just sat in the dark while he told us the stories of the many literary classics which he had read and remembered in vivid detail. His spirit was irrepressible; he had a story or a joke or a song for every situation. Above all, he made us believe that we would somehow pull through. Dalma told me later that as she thought back on the time of the siege, she could not remember any time when she thought she was going to die. While the children in the next cellar were whimpering with fear, Dalma was singing a folk song about the guns and the muskets. She slept through the worst bombardments. One morning she was really upset: a shell had hit the room next door, and she had missed it all!

One day we turned on the tap and no water came. The few bottles of seltzer water suddenly became more precious than the jewels buried under the cellar floor. We opened one only at night when we were sure of being undisturbed and even then the clinking sound of the stopper had to be carefully disguised by talk. If a neighbour came in, we would have to share the precious commodity. Civilization was wearing thin. When there was a lull in the bombardment, we ran out with pots and pans to collect snow which we melted and used for cooking. Those were the good old days when snow was pure water, without chemical deposits. Soon we found out that two blocks away at the bottom of the hill there was a well. So from time to time we ventured out with buckets in our hands to bring water. The trouble was that on our way down our steep street we were open to the Russian "headhunters" who were operating in the woods on top of the hill. They shot at any moving target, and as we trudged up and down the icy slope, we passed by the bodies of those who had been hit.

One day a neighbour came and told us that a horse had been killed by shrapnel and was lying in the street a few blocks away.

Louis said, "Let's go and get some fresh meat" When he saw our lack of enthusiasm for the project, he encouraged us by pointing out that in France they have special butcher shops for horse meat So that night we had horse stew. It had an unfamiliar sweet taste, but it was not unpalatable. The next day we decided to go back for some more, but found that overnight the carcass had frozen solid, and it was impossible to cut the meat

We kept Dalma indoors as much as possible to protect her, but Louis could not be confined to the shelter. He went out looking for news and action every day. One morning there was a knock on our cellar door. We were shocked to see a man standing there in German uniform. For a moment our eyes were locked in a frozen stare, until the man broke into a grin: it was Somogyi, Louis' labour leader friend, in his favourite disguise. "Can you get dressed quickly?" he asked Louis. "If so, I'll take you to see the front lines." Louis was ready in a minute, and the two of them went off happily to inspect the troops. It was evening when Louis returned, full of news, showing off a spent bullet He had taken time to dig it out of the wall where it had "almost hit him."

Another day we had a visit from Louis' nineteen-year-old nephew and his friend, who had both been drafted at the last minute by the Nazi Command. They came dressed in white camouflage overalls over their uniforms. They were both military cadets and in spite of the hopelessness of the situation, they were determined to put into action all the skills they had learned in military school. They were like children who were finally allowed to play with grown-up toys. Tragically, their toys were no match for the Russian sharpshooters. In a few days we received word that Louis' nephew had been shot in the head. We went to visit him in the field hospital which was set up in the nearby elementary school. We found him lying on his bed, paralysed and unable to speak but smiling under his teenage beard. "I'll make it," his eyes seemed to say. But he was wrong. After the war was over, the Russians took him as a prisoner

of war to a Russian military hospital where he died either of his injuries or of neglect, probably both.

As the days and weeks dragged on, there were other visitors, bachelor friends who braved the worst bombardment to visit us. The reason? Though we were stingy with water, we were quite generous with food, and these people were bachelors who had no winter provisions to keep them going. Shops and markets were all bombed empty. These friends were starving.

The shelling continued for a whole month after Christmas. The tiles on the roof were long gone. The north wall of the house was riddled with shell holes of various sizes. One bomb hit just under our kitchen window, making a hole which enlarged the window to give us a full view of the kitchen below. For months afterwards, we had to jump over the gap to get into the pantry. Miraculously, the jars of preserves on the pantry shelves had weathered the blast

It never ceases to amaze me how many close shaves we survived. One day as we were preparing dinner in the communal kitchen, I somehow had the feeling that the room was not a safe place. I persuaded everyone to move the stove to a small room on the other side of the hallway. It was a nuisance, the other room was small, people complained, but they went along. The next day the former kitchen was hit by a large shell and all the furniture was smashed to splinters.

On 25th January, 1945, we woke up to an eerie silence. As we went about our morning chores, it was unsettling to hear little domestic sounds again, the clinking of a well-hidden bottle of seltzer water, the crackling of wood in the kitchen stove, the shuffling steps of the neighbours on the concrete floor of the corridor. Somehow it was a shock to be suddenly deprived of the ping-pong patter of antiquated Hungarian rifles, the answering coarse rattle of Russian machine guns and the Cerberean howling of the Russian cannons which they affectionately called Katyushas (Russian for Katie), while we at the receiving end called them Stalin's organpipes. The noise

and the danger had numbed our senses, and amidst the daily concern for water, food and safety, we had forgotten the future. Now instinctively, we knew this was it. The Russians were coming. What was it really going to be like to be occupied by the Soviet Army? We were inclined to think that German propaganda had probably exaggerated the facts in those lurid reports of Soviet atrocities. All those details of rapes, killings, deportations and ruthless barbarism were meant to frighten the public into supporting the Germans. But still, we did not know for sure; we had not spoken to anyone from behind the Soviet lines.

Louis had learned Russian as a very young man when he was a member of the occupying forces in the Ukraine during World War I. Now he was preparing suitable phrases to welcome the Russian soldiers. "There are no Germans here," "Will you have a cigarette?" "There are only civilians here," so went his drill. When the Russians finally arrived, these phrases had to be replaced by more practical expressions such as "There are no young women here," "We have no wine, vodka, or even eau de cologne for you to drink," and "Don't break that door down. I have a key—never mind."

About eight o'clock on the evening of 25th January, we heard Russian voices in the garden. Louis stood by the front door as the first Russians came in. They were all tall, clean-shaven, handsome officers whose angelic appearance was enhanced by the white cloaks which they wore over their uniforms as camouflage in the snow. On closer inspection we found that these cloaks and hoods were made from damask tablecloths or white curtain material—an amusing detail. They answered Louis' greeting in a sort of slang, rather different from Louis' Tsarist circumlocutions, but they understood each other. They asked Louis to accompany them while they searched the house. Having searched every nook, looking for Germans and weapons and having satisfied themselves that the house was safe, they accepted a cigarette and asked for some water and a place to rest. Three of them moved in with us in our cellar and

spent an hour or so sleeping on our beds. One young man tried to conquer his insomnia by reading Gogol's play *The Government Inspector*. It seemed to me that he was holding the book upside down, but the light was very poor, and I could have been mistaken. Louis asked them some innocent questions about their homes and families, which they answered readily. Then we too curled up in the space that was left, and so we slumbered together, the conquerors and the conquered. When they left an hour later, we looked at each other, relieved: "If this is Russian occupation. it isn't so bad after all."

We had hardly finished discussing our first encounter with the Russians when the next batch arrived. These were slightly less cleanshaven, and smelled faintly of garlic. They accepted, shall we say, two cigarettes each. Other groups followed in quick succession. rapidly deteriorating in manners and appearance. While the first arrivals were elite troops sent to reassure the natives, these were men of business—fighters who had to establish their position. Wave after wave of Soviet troops swept through our house: they came in all sizes and races: tall Russians, short squat Mongolians, blue-eyed Siberians, Cossack, Kirghiz, and Votjak warriors. It seemed that all the nationalities of Mother Russia swept through our house in one night Louis could barely keep up with all the different dialects they spoke.

Around midnight the commander arrived and gave us to understand in loud barking tones that he wanted to establish his headquarters in the room next to our family cellar. We watched in amazement as miles and miles of red telephone wire began to creep through the house. During the weeks that followed, this strange hindweed coiled round our feet, grew in and out of windows, climbed trees and fences, or simply lay in tangled bunches in the dirty snow. Now for one night the red wire made our cellar the nerve centre of the battlefield and we listened dumbly to the shrill voice of the Russian commander swearing orders over the telephone.

By dawn headquarters and commander had vanished like the other transit visitors. Drunken stragglers followed. For the previous

month Dalma had kept a diary, describing our life during the siege. Up to the 25th January the entries were made in ink. After that date she had to continue in pencil: her fountain pen must have followed the advancing Soviet troops.

Louis was in constant demand as the troops came and went, and I was often alone with Dalma and our maid. One night I had a real scare when one of the soldiers grabbed me by the wrist and started pulling me away. I started protesting and shouting for help, losing hope by the second. Then all of a sudden the soldier let me go and started smiling and talking as if to say, "I was only joking." I looked around for an explanation of the miracle and saw a severe-looking officer accompanied by Louis. Louis introduced him to me as the Politruk, or Political officer. He was in charge of morale and propaganda, and it was his job to ensure the proper behaviour of the troops. He was most anxious to make us feel that the Russian Army was here to liberate and not to oppress. To demonstrate his concern for our welfare, he spent the next few hours resting outside our cellar door to prevent marauding soldiers from molesting us. Unfortunately, in the morning he had to leave. The Russian Army did not have enough Politruks to protect every young woman in the country.

We must have been half a mile or so behind the Soviet front line when a new contingent arrived. The billeting officer, a big man in a black fur hat, with a submachine gun hanging across his back, was yelling at the top of his voice, "Perevodchik, perevodchik (Interpreter, interpreter!)" This was Gregory, our nemesis for the next six weeks. Before Louis had time to open the front door, Gregory had kicked it open so hard that it fell off its hinges. Gregory ran upstairs, with Louis in tow, inspected the apartment on the first floor and shouted from the window to his waiting troop, "This will do. Bring the stuff up." A horsedrawn cart piled with bundles of hospital supplies and trailing loose strands of gauze bandages was pulling up to the front gate. We were to become a field hospital. Soldiers grabbed the bundles, ripping some of them and spilling delicate surgical

instruments, cotton wool, and bottles of medicine on the dirty icecovered pavement. Later we learned that the “stuff” came from nearby St John’s Hospital, which after weeks of plundering was left with pitifully inadequate resources.

As we watched the soldiers unload the cart, we were alarmed to find that they had brought no food with them. Instead, they raided our larders for whatever food they could find there. Did they expect us to feed them, we wondered. Gregory assured my husband that they did not: in fact, he had already sent his men to nearby houses to requisition food and bedsheets for the needs of the hospital. All they needed from us was some help with “small jobs.” In a very short time we found out their definition of a “small job.” A small job could mean carrying buckets of melted snow for the hospital, or logs for their blazing fireplaces, it could mean scrubbing dried blood off the hospital floor, it could mean burying wounded patients who died overnight, or it could mean the most frightening small job of all— peeling potatoes. Peeling potatoes usually happened at night when the Politruk was away; if you were a woman, peeling potatoes was the job you wanted at all costs to avoid.

As the hospital settled in, we came to know our captors and came to fully realize what it meant to be conquered. Gregory decided that apartments A and B on the first floor would serve admirably as hospital ward and mortuary respectively. The two apartments on the second floor, of which one was ours, served as living quarters for the hospital staff. He set up a special room for the Captain who was the doctor in the house. A room on the ground floor became the stable. The horses had no mangers, but Gregory was the father of invention. He removed the drawers from a polished bow-front baroque style chest of drawers, and voilà! mangers for his horses. The tenants of these apartments meanwhile continued to live in their cubicles in the cellar. At any time of day or night, as we lay on our makeshift beds, we might hear a barking Russian voice followed by a vigorous kick at the door. As soon as the door gave way, in would barge a soldier,

smelling of vodka (not the tasteless, odourless variety, but the fullblooded dour concoction that made your stomach rise and your eyes bulge) and order us to go with him to perform any one of the menial chores they needed. My family's door had more kicks than anybody else's because Louis was in constant demand as interpreter.

Sometimes the language barrier produced comic interludes. One night Gregory came down to the cellar and started shouting and banging at the door of two old ladies who lived together. The poor souls were scared stiff and tried to send off the intruder by mustering the few words of Russian they had at their command. "Stara Baba," they whimpered. 'We are old women, there are no young girls here.'" Outside Gregory was growing more and more enraged; inside the ladies were becoming desperate. Finally Gregory invoked a distinctive part of their mother's anatomy and strode off to get the interpreter. He kicked our door and explained to Louis his frustration: the day before he had given the ladies his pants to wash. "All I want is my clean pants, and they keep telling me they are old ladies!"

Sometimes Louis was called upon to solve intricate technical problems. One day he was urgently summoned. He went up to the hospital ward to find the soldiers vainly trying to open the Venetian blind. When he pulled the strap which drew up the slats of the blind and let the light into the room, the soldiers slapped their thighs in delight and applauded. He did not have the same success explaining to them the difference between the toilet and the washbasin or the toilet and the living room floor. These facilities were used interchangeably. The technological ignorance of the Russian soldier was legendary; so much so, that when ten years later Hungarians read about the first Russian satellite in space, the man in the street dismissed the news as Communist propaganda.

Most of Louis' missions were, however, much more harrowing. Again and again, people sent for him to talk to soldiers who were molesting young girls. The soldiers were armed with submachine

guns and physical resistance was completely useless; the war was nearly over, and there was too much extra ammunition to dispose of. Yet Louis could often save the girl in distress. His magic formula against brute force was the Russian language. He could draw the rampaging soldier into conversation, ask him how he could take a woman against her will, how he would like it if his own sister or wife were in the same position. Some replied defiantly that the Germans did the same to their families. Others broke down and cried. They had not been on leave since the beginning of the war. They had not felt feminine tenderness for six years. If the woman in distress had any sense, she was by this time safely hidden somewhere; for Louis could keep the flood of tears flowing for only so long, and as soon as he was gone, the soldier would again resort to his submachine gun in his search for tenderness. There were many women who had to have belated abortions after the Russian occupation. Others were infected with venereal diseases which were also rampant in the army. Many Hungarian women today are still carrying the physical and emotional scars of these brutalities. And those who tried to defend the victims were putting themselves at serious risk. Bishop Baron William Apor, who tried to defend his niece against some marauding soldiers, was shot to death by her attackers. The daughter of poet Lajos Aprily who lived with her parents next to our kind friends the Parádís in that idyllic secluded valley off the Danube river did not escape although she was heavily pregnant at the time. She lost her unborn child as a result.

We were so busy working for Sergeant Gregory that it was some time before we managed to catch a glimpse of the Captain, who was the doctor in charge of the hospital. One reason for the doctor's elusive quality was the fact that he spent most of the day sleeping off the night before. He was one of the few Russians who slept a lot and suffered from ill health. Louis said that he seemed to have more ailments than his patients. When I first saw him, I was engaged in cleaning the hospital. I looked up to see the doctor, a tall,

lean, dark-haired man with bloodshot eyes appear in the doorway. He was swaying slightly as he walked in. His pocket was bulging with something that looked like a bottle, but not a medicine bottle. His patients were lying on the floor on makeshift beds made of mattresses, Persian rugs pressed into service, or piles of straw. The doctor walked precariously between the reclining patients, ordered some painkillers and sleeping pills, and then returned to his bed, leaving his nurses in charge. The head nurse was an aggressive woman with a big bust, a large rear end and a mouth to match. She was drunk with victory and ordered us around like a slave trader. She was not much of a nurse: when wounded soldiers were brought in, she treated those with superficial wounds and let the others fend for themselves. Her assistant was a meek blue-eyed girl named Masha, who tried to help as much as she could, but was no match for her overbearing boss.

One day, towards midnight, two severely wounded, bleeding Hungarian soldiers dragged themselves to the hospital. Louis appealed to the nurses for help. The fat head nurse looked them up and down with contempt. "You fought the Soviet Union. You can wait till morning." It was no use telling her that the young men were not combat soldiers but medical personnel. She walked away without lifting a finger to treat them. When she was gone, her assistant, Masha, quickly brought some bandages, dressed their wounds as best she could, and showed them a piece of rug where they could lie down. With the help of Louis as interpreter, she exchanged some friendly words with them. She was particularly taken with one of the boys, and was delighted to find out his name, Jani. Shyly she told him her name. Louis was happy to see the young men in good hands after all. In the next weeks, Masha came down from time to time, telling us how the young patients were getting along.

Another friend we made was a rosy checked, soft-spoken young soldier who came to visit us one day. He told us his name was Stefan

Stefanovich Stefanov and he was a Votyak, one of the many minorities in the Soviet Union. Uncharacteristically, he apologised for disturbing us so late at night. He had talked to a Hungarian professor in Debrecen who told him that the Hungarians and the Votyaks spoke related languages. This was in fact true. Over a thousand years ago our common ancestors lived somewhere in Asia and spoke a language that belonged to the Finno-Ugrian family of languages. The Hungarians migrated westwards to Europe, while the Votyaks and a few other tribes stayed in Asia. Stefan came to visit us whenever he could get away. He would bring us little presents such as a piece of wax which could be used as a light, or some food from the soldiers' kitchen; not the delicacies from the officers' table, just some split peas or bread, the main fare of the common soldier. Louis had some Votyak folk songs in his collection, which we sang to his great delight. Sometimes we explored our two languages to see if we could find common words. If we hit upon a word that sounded vaguely alike in both tongues, we laughed as if we had found a diamond in a heap of coal.

One night Stefan knocked gently on our door for the last time. He was being transferred and he had come to say good-bye. He was sad to leave us and he told us more about himself than ever before. "The Captain is not a good man," he confided. The Captain had prevented his promotion. As a non-Russian, he had to fight prejudice and discrimination. I kissed him on the cheek and quietly sang for him a lullaby in his own language. With tears in his eyes, he said "Dosvidanje (Au revoir)" though he knew we would never see him again. Then he said, "I have to go now," and without looking back, silently closed the door behind him.

Stefan was gone, but we still had the Captain, his big-bosomed virago of a nurse, and his sergeant, Gregory. Gregory was not a bad sort really. He professed a brotherly affection for our maid—and left her alone. At least Louis did not have to pry him loose from desperate women victims. The Captain was a different story. One

night Louis and I were talking to him when a distraught mother came to ask Louis to save her daughter who was being molested by some of the soldiers below. The Captain wanted to know what she was saying. When Louis explained, he heaved himself up from his easy chair and said, "You just leave it to me." In a few minutes he returned, leading the frightened girl back to her grateful mother. 'What a decent man,' we said. We did not understand the full extent of Russian chivalry until later that night when he sent for Louis again and ordered him to deliver the girl to his bed.

Louis came back and sat down with his head in his hands. We felt like helpless slaves. Finally he had an idea. He went back to the Captain and told him that he had found out something about the girl which the Captain should know: the girl had VD. The story had its effect, and the Captain's ardour immediately cooled. But he did not give up his plans for the night "Get me another girl, then," he said.

Now we had another problem. But Louis had another idea. He went out and came back with a girl whom he introduced to the Captain as the nicest girl in the whole neighbourhood. She took off her winter coat to reveal a skimpy dress clinging to her fleshy thighs. Smiling seductively under her thick makeup, she patted the Captain on the chin. Then for a second she turned away, winked and said to Louis in Hungarian, "All right, I'll make a patriotic sacrifice." When Louis told me this story, I felt deep gratitude to the ladies of the night, whose services had in fact saved many young women.

One morning we woke up to a strange silence from upstairs. No yelling, no singing, no kicking of doors. We crept out of our cellar caves and greeted our neighbours with the faintest of hopes: maybe, just maybe, "they" are gone, and maybe we can go upstairs to live in our homes once more. Cautiously, we stole upstairs and were relieved to find that the soldiers, nurses and the doctor had indeed left—in a tearing hurry. In the hospital flat they left instruments, bandages, half-eaten plates of food, half-finished bottles of vodka, and a couple

of severely wounded patients. One of them was the Hungarian soldier Jani.

Suddenly, Dalma, who had been exploring our own flat on the floor above, came bounding into the hospital room shouting, "Come quickly, the table is on fire!" We raced upstairs and found a wicker table in the living room ablaze. Quick action and a few buckets of melted snow extinguished the fire and saved the whole house from going up in flames. It seemed that in their haste to depart, the soldiers had left a candle burning on the table.

After this excitement, we congratulated each other on a narrow escape and started inspecting the premises to see what was left of our belongings and what we would have to return to the neighbours. As soon as the Russians had moved in, private property was redistributed according to new principles. People who wore wristwatches or jewelry in plain sight were relieved of these appendages by one of the soldiers, usually with the help of a submachine gun. In general, the soldiers took whatever they fancied from wherever they found it, and often dropped the item somewhere else if they lost interest. If they needed a piece of equipment such as a kitchen stove, they would forage in the neighbourhood and bring one over from someone else's house. Thus one's possessions would sometimes be found in homes and gardens two or three blocks away. But before we could begin the task of sorting out property, we had to clean the place. There was nothing we could do until we had disposed of the piles of human excrement in the living room. the pools of urine in the bathroom. and the bloody rags all over the upholstered furniture. So we set to work with buckets and scrubbing brushes, and by evening we had hope that in a few days we could perhaps move in. I was sitting on some boxes with Louis, Dalma and our maid, admiring our handiwork, when suddenly we heard the rattle of a horse-car in the street. In a few moments the air was shattered by the familiar raucous yelling. "Perevodchik, Pervodchik" Suddenly it seemed that we had been dreaming all day, and had finally woken up to a nightmare.

“They” were back. In they tramped, the sleepy captain, the bigbomed nurse, Gregory of the loud voice. They all looked somewhat sheepish Eventually we learned the reason for their hasty departure:

a false alarm of a German counterattack.

While Louis was talking to the Captain in the hospital, I saw Masha steal up to Jani who was lying motionless in a corner. She knelt by his side and started to change his dressings, whispering softly the few Hungarian words she knew.

The hospital was back in business, and in the course of the next couple of weeks Jani began to recover. Sometimes he came down to us in the cellar for a bowl of soup. He was getting stronger, but he did not seem to feel any happier. Once I asked him what he had on his mind. At first he did not want to say anything, but in the end he confessed, “It’s Masha She doesn’t want to go back to Russia She wants me to marry her so she can stay here.” While we felt that with the invasion of the Russian army we had lost our freedom. Masha felt that in Hungary she had found freedom. Compared to her life at home, even our debased existence seemed like paradise to her. She saw how a Hungarian middle class family lived, in flats furnished with fine things. She met ordinary people who were kind and cultured, and she realized that the things she had been told about the West were untrue. All her life she had been looking for such a paradise, and now she had found it. She wanted to stay in our country, and Jani was in big trouble. In a moment of weakness, he had promised to marry her, and now he was dreading what his parents and family would say. In peacetime the two of them would have been quite happy together, but now, after the horrors of the Russian occupation, to take home a Russian wife to his village was unthinkable.

After a while the Russian Command decided that the city had to be cleaned up. One day all of us, men, women and children were herded out to the street that flanked our house and told to clear the road of the winter’s accumulation of ice and snow because

General Malinovski was scheduled to make his triumphant entry into Budapest through this artery. We spent the whole day cracking ice with picks and shovels while the soldiers stood on guard. In the end the General took another route, and our work had been in vain, but we were still feeling lucky because at the end of the day, we could return to our cellars with our families. Thousands of others who had been similarly taken away for communal labour ended up in Siberian prison camps. The Russians regularly supplemented their quota of prisoners of war from the civilian population.

February was drawing to a close, and spring was coming. It was time to bury the dead before the thaw brought disease and pestilence. Now our daily chores included helping to dig large communal graves in the frozen ground. Dead people were fairly easy to accommodate; the real problem was burying the dead horses. Louis was the life and soul of the gravedigging party. In the evenings he kept our spirits up by describing how various people tackled the grisly task. We were delighted to hear how our pedantic bank clerk neighbour grabbed one of the carcasses by the ear and ended up on his back side, with a horse's ear in his hand. Some people took shortcuts and buried smaller debris in bomb craters. It was not until the water supply was once more turned on and refused to flow that we found out that someone had buried a horse's head in what they thought was a bomb crater but which was also a water main.

Life was beginning in other houses, but for us it was still slave labour for the hospital. I was beginning to think we would never again sleep stretched out full length in a proper bed with white sheets. One night I was washing the dishes in the hospital and I was feeling really depressed. My tears were mingling with the greasy dishwater as I was thinking of the tragic plight of our country, Leslie, my family, and our hopeless state. Our faithful Politruk came in and saw that I was upset. He walked up to me and hugged

me, and said, "Wait here a minute." He ran out and returned with a large head of cabbage which he had looted from another house. He pressed the cabbage into my hands: "Here, don't cry," he said. I looked at the enormous vegetable and burst out laughing. He was delighted: "You see, I made you laugh." I nodded. It was a bitter laugh, but it was a laugh, and I was touched by his gesture.

The big head nurse had no such tender feelings. She continued to harass us with her shrill commands and hostile comments. But finally, we had our revenge. One day the Captain came down himself to our cellar, and he was angry. With him there stood the fat nurse, who had nothing brash to say this time. In fact, she looked humble like a beaten dog. "She needs an abortion," the Captain said. Russian women in the army were severely punished if they got pregnant. The Captain probably felt that he too was in trouble. He ordered Louis to go with them to the hospital and held him personally responsible for the success of the operation.

On the way to the hospital the Captain-doctor ordered the driver to whip the horses until they were racing down the street at a gallop, rattling and shaking every bone in the passengers' bodies. He probably thought they might save the gynaecologist a job. The cart flew down a few steps leading to the hospital and came to a screeching halt in front of the main entrance. Louis explained to a flabbergasted surgeon that he was being ordered to perform an illegal operation with defective instruments, and if the patient died, they would both be shot.

The patient was wheeled into the operating room, and Louis sat in the waiting room, opposite the Captain who was glaring at him, with a submachine gun propped between his knees. An hour crawled by as the Captain scowled and Louis mopped his brow. Finally the door opened and the doctor came out—followed by the fat nurse. Everyone was relieved that the Soviet Union had successfully lost one of its unborn citizens.

The middle of March finally brought our release from the cellar: the hospital moved out. Once more we cleaned up the house, and started moving our things upstairs. We were still living in fear that another troop would descend on us, but nevertheless we went ahead and started life among the ruins.

XVIII

The Peace That Started The Cold War

The Germans defended Castle Hill in a bitter battle, and we heard stories of the terrible destruction and slaughter of the troops entrenched there. We hardly dared to think of what was happening to my sister Charlotte and her aristocratic family in the Cohurg palace.

My older sister Hajnal (Aurora) and her family spent the siege in my mother's home at the base of Castle Hill. As soon as the fighting was more or less over, (pockets of German resistance still provoked sporadic shooting), Aurora climbed the bomb-damaged, broken stairs to the top of Castle Hill to find out what had happened to Charlotte and her family. It was Aurora who later brought us our first news of them.

Aurora found the old Princess and her daughter in the palace courtyard. The old lady, who was partly paralysed, was sitting in an armchair, gazing on the ground and repeating the same phrases over and over. 'What a climate!' she kept saying, and then, "und Marx hat gesiegt. (And Marx has triumphed)." Leopoldine stood behind her mother's chair, a tall, bewildered figure, relating in refined words how the palace was sacked. Over and over, she told how the Russians and other "bad people" behaved; how their own servants, in company with the Russians, broke open the secret room where some of the family treasures were kept, how they took the beautiful gold plated

tableware, the Sevres china sets with the family crest, the antique silver and gold ornaments, and then rushed off “leaving my helpless mother and myself among the rubble, just when we wanted to have our tea” Charlotte later told me that actually it was Leopoldine who innocently told a servant where the secret hiding place was located. Leopoldine was too unworldly for those violent times.

Aurora combed the bomb debris for timber to make a fire. She found a small broken Sheraton table which she sawed up, and with the help of Leopoldine she built a fire in the courtyard to boil their tea. The Palace larder was empty: the food had long ago been plundered. So almost every day, Aurora put on a white overall and scarf to make her look like a nurse and took a hot meal to the last members of the Coburg family. These trips were risky for her. There was danger as the shooting started up from time to time, but the greatest danger was that she might be taken for a real nurse and forced by the Russians to go with the army.

When the fighting ended, around the beginning of March, I finally ventured to make the trip to see Charlotte and her family. I climbed the steep broken steps to Castle Hill, walked down Uri utca, the street where every house was a palace. The scene was similar to our own neighbourhood, but ten times worse. Corpses, horse carcasses littered the road. Russian soldiers were picking their way among the rubble, looking for leftover treasures. I saw one soldier brandish a centuries old Japanese samurai sword. Another engaged him in a mock fight, using an antique Indonesian flame-shaped dagger. More than likely, they had collected these souvenirs from the Japanese room at the Coburg palace. I passed the ghastly remains of past elegance, impotent dwellings, their gaping roofs, broken gates and tottering walls no longer able to shelter the priceless treasures and their owners. When I reached the Coburg palace, I found the old Princess and her daughter in the courtyard. They were sitting beside a dainty little French Empire-style round table, eating dried bean soup from cracked blue Sevres plates. Charlotte appeared and we

hugged each other, unable to speak or cry. The war was over, but mentally we were still under fire, conditioned to do only the things necessary for survival. She took me upstairs to show me the bombdamaged remains of the house. We agreed that they could not continue to live there, but somehow the remaining furniture and artwork had to be saved from further looting and the weather. In the course of the next few months we made dozens of trips to the palace, pushing a two-wheeled cart up the hill and bringing it down piled high with enough artifacts to fill a small museum: Oriental vases, an eighteenth century ornamental clock, antique Spanish ceramic plates, a gigantic tapestry rug with the Coburg emblem woven in the centre, a large marble bust of Prince Pedro of Saxe-Coburg... Charlotte had moved into a small apartment and could not possibly store all these things. So they were taken to our home and the homes of other friends and relatives. When Communism closed in on us, it found us surrounded by the trappings of aristocracy.

A few weeks after the siege was over, Princess Clementine and her daughter were moved to a villa owned by Prince Philippe's secretary. Two weeks after the move, the old Princess gave up her struggle for existence. When I went to pay my last respects, I saw the Princess in her simple black dress, laid out on a long table. Her features were unyielding, solemn and regal. Her family was related to most of Europe's royal families. Her needlewoman-dressmaker had learned about the Princess's death and came to see her for the last time. She looked lovingly at her old mistress, and, with tears in her eyes, begged the family to give her something "to remind her of her beloved princess." She told them it would mean so much to her if she could have that simple dress the princess was wearing; she had made that dress for her in happier times. The family did not fulfil her dearest wish, and she left, inconsolable. As she was walking out of the door, the husband of one of Charlotte's friends decided to put her mind at rest and called after her: "Don't worry, we've removed the jewels from the shoulderpads. They won't be buried with her."

It

was the needlewoman who had sewn the Princess's personal jewels into the shoulderpads of the dress during the siege. Princess Clementine was buried in the garden of the Franciscan Church in Budapest. Later she was taken to the Cemetery at Farkasret where I visited her grave in 1982. She had died before she could see her son Philippe come home and flee with his family to the west, before she could see her grandson grow up to be a fanner in Austria, and her daughter Leopoldine live out her life serenely happy and oblivious under the loving care of Aurora in Szolnok. Marx may have triumphed, but the Cohurg family survived.

A larger enterprise was to go to find Louis' family who lived in a large block of flats by the Danube at the foot of Mount Gellert about six miles from our house. One morning we set out on foot, Louis, Dalma and I. It was a long, dusty walk, with sights of devastation along the way. The most spectacular sight was an aeroplane embedded in the top floor of one of the tall buildings along a main artery. On our way we passed people pushing two-wheeled carts piled high with junk they had saved to start their lives over again. There was still no water, electricity or gas, but you could feel in the air that things were starting to move. Just having survived the siege was such an accomplishment that every new day seemed an improvement.

We found the family all alive, with one addition: During the siege, Louis' niece Judith had given birth to a baby boy. He was the most wrinkled, scrawniest baby I had ever seen. He had been born in St John's Hospital, the Hospital which the Russians occupied and plundered, and used for their command post for a whole month before they moved in on us. His mother had gone to the hospital before the siege and was stranded there during the fighting. When the streetfighting stopped, Judith's husband walked six miles to collect his wife and new son. She was too weak to walk, so he borrowed a hospital bed on wheels and pushed mother and baby six miles to their home, settled them in and pushed the bed back to the

hospital another six miles. Baby George was facing a tough battle. There was no milk anywhere, and very little food. But he did have a great-grandmother; Louis' mother told me that she put the baby out in the sunshine every day to let him soak up some vitamins. Great-grandmother's treatment must have worked: Dalma saw George when she went back to visit in 1984, and he was a robust father of three, working for a computer firm. He also had a beekeeping business as a sideline.

While Baby George was on his way in, another member of the family was on his way out Ferenc Erdöhegyi, Louis' brother-in-law, had succumbed to the "Ukrainian disease," a severe form of dysentery which was reaching epidemic proportions in the city. We had all suffered from bouts of it in the previous months. Some days you could hear people walking up and down the corridor exchanging symptoms: "How many times did you go last night? I went six times." Children usually had the toughest time and babies often died of the dehydration it caused. Before the siege Ferenc had been a big strong man who could arm-wrestle any opponent, but he could not tackle the Ukrainian disease. When we arrived, he was wasting away in bed; there was no medicine to combat the disease, but what made his chances even worse was that he had no grandmother to put him out in the sunshine. His world had abruptly ended, and he had no hope for the future. He had had a good life as a country magistrate, and later as director of one of the famous Turkish baths in Budapest. Now he saw nothing but Russians and Bolshevism ahead; when he looked into the future, he saw only a mirror image of the past, the Communist coup of 1919, the end of decency, the beginning of terror, men hanging from lampposts and trees, innocent victims floating in the Danube. He saw no place for himself in the future. In a few months he was dead.

We left our relatives to return to our own lives. On 4th April, 1944 the last fighting troops left Hungary. Officially Hungary was at peace — with an occupying Russian Army in place. Now it was up

to the Great Powers to determine our fate. Hungary was no longer a bulwark against aggression from the East She was no longer able to defend Europe from the danger of invasion. She was a defeated, impotent nation which was expected to obey orders.

While some gave up in despair, like brother-in-law Erdöhegyi, others, like baby George, fought to stay alive and make it in the new world. A strange and surprising optimism prevailed in these post-war months. Every morning life hurled us a challenge, and every night we rejoiced in our victory: a room cleared of scum, a dead horse buried, a broken window fixed with a piece of glass from a picture frame which had miraculously escaped the bombardment At the end of March Dalma went across the street to see what had become of her school. She found some of her teachers already working; she came back to tell me that she saw her English teacher pushing a wheelbarrow full of manure, "mucking out" the ground floor classrooms which the Russians had turned into stables. Starting that day, Dalma went daily to the school to help get it ready for the school year. After a while other teachers and students appeared, and together they cleaned and scrubbed and collected enough furniture to start school. Then the children undertook the task of combing the neighbourhood to round up the students. That is when they found out who was still alive, who was coming back. By the end of April school was in session. Half of the students' day was spent in lessons and the other half in cleaning the premises. Life was starting again, and we were proud of our achievement

Civilization was waking from its long nightmare. The first burst of water from the newly restored water supply more often than not resulted in a deluge (the Russians had removed most of the taps and the pipes had frozen and cracked over the long winter), but we mopped up happily. The first flicker of gas was a real treat, and electricity when it came made our homes look palatial.

The entrance hall of every house in the neighbourhood looked like a jumble sale as everyone displayed the articles that the Russians

Chapter XVIII 321

had pilfered from other homes. People spent long hours visiting neighbouring villas to see if they could find some of their belongings.

At the beginning of summer, food was the biggest problem. Our winter stores were depleted and the food shops had no supplies, or even furniture. After a while the farmers' market opened, and peasants brought their produce to the capital, but money was not much use to them. We did our shopping mostly by bartering clothes for food. It would have been useful to be able to go across the Danube to the Central Market in Pest, but all the bridges had been destroyed in the war — Hitler's last revenge. The only way across was to hire a boatman to row you across. Also, it was risky business to stray too far from home because the Russians were still scouting for free labour. Once the trains started, they stalked the railway stations and as people arrived, they rounded them up for a day's forced labour. Some of the people taken this way ended up in Siberia as ersatz prisoners of war.

In spite of the depressing presence of the Russian army, the mood in the country was generally optimistic. Order was returning; we had a provisional government which had been formed back in December of 1944 in Debrecen when the eastern half of the country had been occupied by the Soviet army. True, the government was chosen and operated under the strict control of the Allied Control Commission, which in Hungary's case meant the Russians, but after all, it seemed to be a politically well-balanced group: the Smallholders, and the Social Democrats each had two portfolios, and the Peasant party, one. The Prime Minister was Béla Miklós, and two other members of the Cabinet were generals of the Horthy regime. True, we thought, the Communists had two important posts in the Cabinet, but surely the Russians would leave as soon as the peace treaty was signed, and then elections would eliminate the unfair Communist advantage.

Our Resistance friend, Nicholas Somogyi, came back to visit and assure us that Louis had nothing to fear in the new order. They

would see to it that he got his job back at the Radio Monitoring Service. Somogyi was on his way to become a key figure in the Labour Union organization. He had suffered a personal loss in the weeks following the Russian occupation. His brother Imre, a sculptor, had rejoiced to see the Soviet army liberate us from Nazi rule, and when he first saw a group of Russian soldiers in the street, he rushed up to them to welcome them with open arms. The soldiers, unused to demonstrations of affection from the populace, panicked and opened fire. Imre died of his wounds a few days later. We admired him both as a friend and as an artist and missed him greatly. The two sculpture busts he had made of me did not fare much better with the Russians. One was broken by the soldiers, the other eventually disappeared.

Peter Veres, the peasant leader, was so busy he did not even come back to us to collect his knapsack and his greasy hat. On March 15, 1945 the first Land Reform Bill was passed, and the peasants now became smallholders. The Pálóczi Horváth family estate was taken over by the state and the land divided among the peasants. However, for his services to the people, Louis was awarded a small piece of land in another part of the country. Eventually, this property was also taken by the state. By that time the peasants were no longer allowed to own land.

Throughout the summer of 1945 we worked and felt that there was no way for us but up. Meanwhile, in July the Allies met at Potsdam to discuss the war against Japan, peace terms and reparations. Churchill's mistrust of the Russian control of Eastern Europe was becoming increasingly evident. Churchill and Truman both refused to recognize the newly formed governments of Eastern Europe until they were "reorganized" (Quoted in Mee, Meeting at Potsdam 175). Admiral Leahy later recalled that "the result was a complete impasse, and might be said to have been the beginning of the cold war between the United States and Russia" (Mee, 175). It is ironic that the objections thus raised were against the most

diversified government Hungary was to know for the next fifty years. Of course, Truman's and Churchill's objections were well-founded. The Communists were in fact putting into practice their now familiar method of imposing power gradually. They started with a government that was outwardly liberal, but in reality, the key positions were held by Communists. As time passed, the non-Communists were eliminated, and Communist power was consolidated. However, it is important to point out that a Communist takeover would not have been possible without the presence of the Russian Army. In 1919 the Communist force was resisted by all strata of Hungarian society, the peasants most of all, and without the paralyzing presence of a Russian army, Communism was defeated in a year. In 1945 people still remembered the Red Terror and without such military presence, Communism would not have had the slimmest chance of success.

The Election results of November 4, 1945, present a fairly clear picture of public sentiment. Although some sections of the population were denied the vote, these elections were relatively free. The most powerful party was the Smallholder Party which gathered almost 60% of the votes. The Social Democrats gained 16.9%, and the Peasant Party 6.6%. The Communists won only 17% of the total votes. The rest of the ballots were cast for non-Communist parties.

We were quite pleased with the results of the election and felt that the resulting coalition government represented the will of the people fairly well under the circumstances. The Communists for their part were less than thrilled with the results and stepped up their efforts to effect a Communist takeover. It was essential for them to gain control of the workers. Traditionally, the trade unions were dominated by the Social Democratic party; in 1945, however, the Communists assumed control of the union leadership. The next time Somogyi came to visit, he got an earful of reproaches from Louis who was bitterly disappointed to find that his old friend had turned out to be a Communist. "You have sold your country to the Communists," he shouted. "You are no longer my friend." Somogyi

smiled awkwardly and said quietly, "You're lucky that you have said these things only to me. My advice to you is not to talk like this in public." The friendship was evidently over, and Somogyi left. The next time the two men met was in 1958 when Somogyi was the President of the National Trade Union Organization and Louis was a political ex-convict, deprived of his civil rights, his possessions, and his pension, eking out a living by, doing literary translations, and living with his two sisters, his brother and his brother's two grandchildren in a cramped little two-room flat Somogyi who could do nothing for Louis during the Stalinist era, was now glad to meet him again. Louis kept the first letter he received from Somogy after the Revolution. "You were a human being in inhuman times," he wrote, and signed himself "Your old friend, Somogyi." He was also instrumental in obtaining Louis' rehabilitation and helped him to get his pension back and a flat to live in.

Dalma tells me that when her father visited her in New York, he brought her a personal message from Somogyi. "Tell Dalma," he said, "that I have forgiven her." Pressed for an explanation, he recalled the fateful showdown in Alma Street. What hurt him even more than losing an old friend, he said, was Dalma's reaction. When he was practically forced to leave, twelve-year-old Dalma, who was a witness to his discomfiture, jumped up, ran to the door and threw it wide open as if to speed his departure.

By the end of 1945 "inhuman times" were closing in on us. We lived mostly on baked beans and dry peas, and the stove was warm only if we went to the woods to collect firewood. Dalma went to school carrying a small pot to hold the warm meal that was provided for schoolchildren by a Swedish charity. The country was rushing downhill into the Communist whirlpool. Having secured control of the trade unions, the Communists next started hacking away at the Smallholder Party. The Smallholders represented the country's desire for enlightened social reform, and their independent views were unacceptable to the Marxist-Leninist power structure. In a series of

Chapter XVIII 325

skilful political attacks, the Communist members of the coalition succeeded in gradually isolating the Smallholder Party from the rest of the coalition. In March, 1946, the Communists succeeded in expelling twenty-one members of parliament from the Smallholder Party because of their “reactionary” views. More expulsions followed, constantly reducing the effectiveness of the Smallholder Party, until in 1947 the Communists “discovered” a large scale conspiracy which they connected with the Smallholders. The Secretary-General of the Party, Béla Kovács, was arrested and charged with spying against the Soviet Army.

In early 1946 Winston Churchill, recently retired by the British electorate, watched in helpless rage as Eastern Europe was engulfed by Communism. On 5th March, 1946 in his speech at Fulton Missouri, he taught the world a new term to describe the tragic process:

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe, Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucarest, Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must now call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow this is certainly not the Liberated Europe we fought to build up. (Quoted in Mee, 244)

Early 1946 saw the beginning of the never ending judicial campaign to eliminate enemies of the Communist regime. Some of the early victims were real enemies of the country: Ferenc Szálasi and his Arrowcross accomplices were sentenced and publicly executed.

Louis, who could not miss an opportunity to witness history, went to see the executions. He was not one to mourn Szálasi's demise, but he was still taken aback by the reaction of some of the spectators. Apparently the gallows was not placed high enough for maximum visibility, and the smaller people in the back were jumping up and down in an effort to catch at least a few glimpses of the criminals' death throes.

When wartime Prime Minister László Bárdossy was executed, many felt uneasy, and some mourned. On the morning of the execution, the headmistress of Dalma's school created a stir by offering a prayer for Bárdossy's soul. Within a year, arrests and show trials of enemies of the Communist regime became part of life in the country.

On 1st January, 1946 we heard a radio message from Cardinal Mindszenty, the Roman Catholic Primate of Hungary, in which he denounced terrorism and exhorted the Hungarian people to examine their consciences. Throughout the year his voice continued to castigate the regime as it struck blow after blow against the liberty of the people. The Communist Minister of the Interior, László Rajk, dissolved nearly 1000 organizations including the Catholic Youth Organization and the Boy Scouts. Some students of the Piarist Gymnasium were arrested under the pretext of a "Fascist conspiracy." The Russian Deputy Allied Control Commission Chairman demanded that severe measures be taken against Catholic clergymen who were inciting the population against Russian forces. Mindszenty was undeterred. He led a series of giant pilgrimages which became his forum to address the people. On a Sunday in August, Louis, Dalma and I attended one of these pilgrimages. We marched in a crowd a hundred thousand strong through the streets of Budapest to an open air mass on Heroes Square; in his sermon the Cardinal remarked that the thousands assembled there came not on a workday, (i.e. not in a Communist organized mass demonstration,) but on their day of rest, of their own free will. Catholics and

Protestants alike, we were all moved by the Cardinal's sermon. We felt that he was truly the conscience of the country, fighting courageously for freedom under attack from tyranny. The Communists were biding their time until they could arrest Mindszenty himself, which came to pass in December, 1948. The charges included the usual array of political crimes, treason, espionage, plus the charge of currency speculation, to further humiliate a man whose strength lay in his spiritual integrity.

On 1st February, 1946 Hungary officially became a republic; the next day the Assembly elected Zoltán Tildy as the President of the new republic.

Post-war inflation, which was barely manageable in 1945, broke its bounds and raged out of control in 1946. First weekly, then daily, then hourly price increases made money completely meaningless. If you received your wages on Saturday morning, your money might buy you two loaves of bread, but if you waited until Saturday afternoon to spend it, you would be lucky to get a glass of soda water for your week's work. The government printed quantities of paper money to keep up with the demand. Dalma had a scrapbook full of these beautifully designed inflationary banknotes. On Saturday evenings she used to run down to our neighbourhood grocery store and ask the merchant if he had any money to spare. The shopkeeper opened the till and gave her a wad of worthless notes for her collection.

1946 was also the year that Leslie came back into my life. One day in March I received a message from his sister telling me that he had returned from Italy. I rushed to his parents' house and as I entered the room I saw him, or someone who had his voice, but a completely different appearance. His black hair had become grey; his oval face had become round and puffy, his swete figure had grown rotund. For a fraction of a second I hesitated — was this middle-aged man my Leslie? The next moment we were in each other's arms, and we spent the afternoon catching up. From the time of his departure

neither I nor his family had had news of him until we heard after the war from a mutual friend that he was in Bari, Italy. Early in 1946 a Canadian officer came to my home to hand me a five pound note which Leslie had sent me from Italy.

From Bari he was eventually transferred to Rome where he was quartered by the British army in the palatial home of an Italian nobleman. The house was full of priceless antiques jealously guarded by a housekeeper. Leslie, anxious to prevent damage to the fragile objects, asked her to store them out of harm's way, but she refused:

when the master came home, everything must be just as he had left them. The residence itself had an interesting history. It used to be a church which during the Napoleonic wars was used by the Emperor's soldiers as a kitchen. When we visited Rome in 1957 Leslie showed me the house: it still had the inscription "CUISINE" over the front entrance. Rome had room for many conquerors.

Leslie had a pleasant life in Rome, living on NAAFI rations, entertaining British and Italian friends, but he was chafing to come home to find out what had happened to us. He was strongly advised by the British Military command not to go back to Hungary. The British were very uneasy about what was happening in Eastern Europe and warned him that he could not expect to go back to his job at the Hungarian Foreign Ministry. As one who had worked for the British, he could hardly expect a friendly reception by the new regime. However, Leslie was determined to return at any cost. He obtained from the Swedish Legation an emergency passport issued on 16th March, 1946 and valid until 15th March, 1947. He got a seat on the last direct Rome-Budapest courier plane. The plane actually took him only as far as Udine in Northern Italy, where he was told that the Russians had refused permission for the plane to land in Hungary, and thus he would have to make his own way home. It was not an auspicious beginning. At the Udine RAF station, while he was anxiously waiting to find some means of transportation, he was curious to see a cup and some tin cutlery displayed in a glass case.

Chapter XVIII 329

The Italian personnel told him that these objects had been used by Cardinal Mindszenty on his way to Budapest from Rome after his consecration as Cardinal.

Determined to get to Hungary, Leslie finally persuaded the RAF to give him a seat on a plane that was leaving for Vienna; the same plane eventually managed to take him also to Hungary too where we had our tearful reunion after two fateful years. Back in Budapest, he tried to pick up the pieces of his former life. We went to his old flat. What was left of his belongings had been stored in the loft. He was amazed to find his little blue code book faded but intact among the debris. He picked it up gently and kept it as a reminder of his broken dream. When he went to his old office at the foreign Ministry, he found very few familiar faces. Old colleagues he met were very friendly, but torn by doubts about the future. He was allowed to report to his old department, but he found everything in a state of transition. He could not even get a desk of his own. The Committee in charge of dismissing unreliable personnel considered his case and passed him — just barely. As a former British contact, they could not very well dismiss him right away, but it was obvious that he was not trusted.

When Leslie arrived in Hungary, his uncle General Lajos Dálnoki Veress was already in hiding. Earlier he had been imprisoned by the Nazis; now the Communists were looking for him because he had been involved in the Resistance movement against the Russians. A small nation at the mercy of a large power, we were facing hard times to come.

On 10 February, 1947 the Hungarian Peace Treaty was signed in Paris, but it did not make any difference to the Communists' plans for the forthcoming elections to be held in August. Determined to avoid uncomfortable surprises at the hand of the electorate, they made various changes in the election rules. One essential step was to exclude "undesirable" elements from the ballot. A large part of the population was in effect denied the right to vote. Another method

they instituted was the use of absentee ballots by means of so-called blue tickets. These blue tickets were issued to loyal Communist brigades, who were transported from one polling station to another and voted Communist in as many places as they could reach in a day. To make trebly sure of a Communist victory, they also reorganized the political parties. The forthcoming elections were to be a contest between the Coalition and the Opposition parties. The Coalition consisted of the Communist, the Smallholder, the Social Democratic and the Peasant parties. Of the six Opposition parties, the Hungarian Independence Party, led by Zoltán Pfeiffer, was considered by the Communists to be the most dangerous, and it suffered most of the organized pre-election sabotage and violence. The other five opposition parties were not authorized by the Russiandominated Allied Control Commission until late in the campaign. This ploy preserved the semblance of democracy and at the same time prevented them from gaining many votes. The five were the Democratic People's Party, a Catholic organization, the Independent Democratic Party, the Radical Party, The Christian Women's League and the Civic Democratic Party. The Communists felt they had little to fear from these five. They had all the aces including misleading election posters telling people how to vote. Dalmás best friend, Ilona Hadik, saw an old peasant woman perusing one of these posters. The woman turned to her: 'Tell me, miss, do we have to vote Communist? It says here that you have to put an X by the name of the Communist candidate' Ilona was only thirteen, but she could distinguish propaganda from the truth. "Of course not," she said, "You vote for whomever you like." To make her point, she tore the poster from the wall. But Big Brother was already watching through the eyes of an eager policeman. Ilona was hauled off to the police station for defacing public property. Her parents were sent for and had to appear with her before a magistrate who made them promise that she would never do such a thing again.

The Elections of August 29 showed that the best laid Communist plans still had flaws. Even with their blue ticket ballots, the Communists gained only 22% of the vote, and the Coalition barely won a majority. The Opposition Catholic Democratic People's Party polled 16.41%, second only to the fraudulent Communist ballots, and more than the 15.4% gained by the eviscerated Smallholder Coalition Party. Clearly, parliamentary methods were not suitable for establishing a Communist state in Hungary.

XIX

Escape From Workers' Paradise

The results of the 1947 election were nothing short of miraculous when considered against the increasingly repressive conditions in which those elections were held. On 20th January, seven Smallholder Party members of the National Assembly were arrested on charges of plotting to overthrow the Government. On 25 February Béla Kovács, Secretary-General of the Smallholders' Party was arrested. Pictures of Leslie's uncle General Lajos Dálnoki Veress were displayed on wanted posters on the walls of Budapest. He was accused of being one of the leaders of the Anti-Russian resistance plot. Communist-organized groups created fear and disorder in the activities of non-Communist organizations. There were reports of atrocities by small bands of Communists against people they considered to be enemies of the regime. The hunt was on for the members of the Anti-Russian resistance movement and Louis, along with many others started burning possibly incriminating documents.

Leslie was hanging on, trying to see if he could weather the storm. We saw each other every day, until one day he did not turn up for our rendezvous. I rushed to his mother's home and learned there that the Russian-Hungarian Military Security Police had arrested both him and his sister. I learned that they wanted to take his mother as well, but Leslie succeeded in convincing them that she

was feeble-minded. Nothing could have been further from the truth, but apparently she looked scared and frazzled enough to support Leslie's claim.

As soon as I heard the news of Leslie's arrest, I rushed to see Darwall, one of the Diplomats from the British Legation who knew Leslie. As I did not know much English, I told him in French that Leslie had been taken by the Security Police probably to the notorious Number 60 Andrassy Boulevard where political prisoners were interrogated and tortured. Darwall listened sympathetically but told me there was not much he could do against the Russians. Evidently, the Russians were in charge, and the British were helpless. Nevertheless, he promised to do whatever was in his power to help me.

Leslie and his sister were indeed taken to Number 60 Andrassy Boulevard, where they were separated. Leslie was ordered to empty his pockets and all the items were put into a paper bag with his name on it. Among the things they took from him was a piece of paper from his breast pocket. Along with the other objects, it was deposited into the paper bag. By sheer good fortune no one bothered to read the paper. If they had, Leslie would have been accused and convicted of treason on the spot. It was a confidential report on the activities of the Russians which he was about to take to the British legation when they arrested him. But even without the "evidence," the guard who "escorted" him to his cell through the long corridors assured him that he was facing death for treason, but not right away: there were certain procedures to undergo first. He was thrown into an icecold cell. It was January 1947, and the AVO (The Hungarian Secret Police) were in full swing. Some of the guards, interrogators and supervisors were Jews who wanted to take revenge for Hitler's atrocities on the hapless victims who were incarcerated there; some were former Nazi or Arrow Cross guards who enlisted here to save their skins. They were well qualified for the job: torture was their profession.

Veress spent the rest of the day and night in his jail cell, wondering when they would confront him with the incriminating report in the paper bag. The next morning his cell door opened and to his amazement he was told that he would be released by the orders of General Pálffy. He was given the paper bag which held his belongings. Everything was untouched. Both he and his sister were released and taken to their home.

Leslie had several theories about the reasons for Pálffy's action. Pálffy was a Communist, but he managed to retain some of his individuality. He came of a middle class family and his wife was Jewish, so he had reason to hate the Germans and Leslie's activities against the German alliance may have won his sympathy. At the same time, Pálffy also disliked the autocratic methods of his Russian bosses and was more in sympathy with Tito's brand of Communism. In fact, later, when Stalin fell out with Tito, Pálffy was executed for his connections with the Yugoslav leader. Thus it is possible that when his Russian-trained colleague Gábor Péter had Veress arrested, Pálffy, knowing of Leslie's connections with Tito's Partisans, decided to countermand those orders. He was one of those who wanted "Communism with a human face." Another reason for his action might have been something as simple as Leslie's name and family. Pálffy had been a cadet at the Military Academy where General Lajos Dálnoki Veress was a professor.

Whatever the reason for Veress' release, Gábor Péter left no doubt as to his own sentiments. After his release Leslie was summoned by Peter who told him, "If I had had my way, you know I would not have released you." Veress was also told to report to the Soviet legation where he was received by Ministercounsellor Osukhin who was familiar with Veress' role in the surrender negotiations with the British. "Why," he asked Veress frostily, "didn't you come to the Russians in the first place?" He was not at all convinced by Leslie's excuse that they did not have any contacts on the Russian side. Veress describes his feelings about

the interview: "Osukhin did not like my answer one bit and left no doubt that he did not trust me an inch. As I left the premises, I thought to myself that it was time for me to leave the country as soon as possible."

We discussed the matter, and he said there were still enough people in the Ministries who were not toeing the Communist Party line. He just had to keep trying until he found the right person to send him on an assignment abroad. Finally he found such a man in Minister Nyárady who understood Leslie's dangerous position and agreed to appoint him First Secretary in the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and head of the Restitutional Control Commission in West Germany. His job would be to administer the return to Hungary of Hospital equipment removed to Germany during the last months of the war.

I had waited for two years for Leslie to come home, and now after less than one uneasy year, he had to leave again, this time for good. He was to fly out in a British or American plane. I went with him to the airport in a military jeep with an Australian driver. After some minutes of apprehension as we skirted a Russian plane that was standing on the runway, we approached the British military plane that was waiting for us. As we said a last good-bye, he promised me that he would make arrangements for me and my daughter to follow him.

Veress arrived in England on 1st April, 1947. On 16th April his uncle General Dálnoki Veress, along with two others, was sentenced to death on charges of plotting to overthrow the Government. Time was running out for all of us.

On his arrival in England, Veress had two conversations with Michael Williams at the Foreign Office which the latter reported in a note dated 15th April, 1947. The contents of the note were communicated to K. Helm at the British Political Mission in Hungary. Veress' picture of Hungary's plight is bleak, but shows his never-ending desire to do something for his country even

in his present difficult position. Williams' note reports Veress as saying that:

the political terror organised by the political police was now so great that it was rapidly becoming improbable that the existing regime could be removed by strictly constitutional methods. Although the mass of the people was staunchly antiCommunist, it was now very dangerous for anybody to undertake active political propaganda against them. His opinion was that if the final withdrawal of the Red Army was delayed for much longer than six months the Communists would have so strengthened their position that their overthrow would be almost impossible.

Veress used his opportunity while he had the "ear" of His Majesty's Government, to make a few respectful suggestions concerning British and American policy towards Hungary. This is how Williams reports Veress' words:

2 there were, however, certain steps which His Majesty's Government and the United States Government acting together could take which might help to steady the situation.

3. One of M. Veres' main pleas was that His Majesty's Government should show their dislike of totalitarian and Communist activities in a more forceful manner than hitherto. He said that it was very widely believed in Hungary that the activities of the Left bloc in Hungary had the support of the British Government In particular, he thought our attitude to the Social

Democrats was giving rise to misunderstanding. The Majority of the leaders of the Social Democrat Party were Communists in everything but name and on every matter of importance would follow the Communist line. The rank and file of the Social Democrat Party, on the other hand, were antiCommunist but were largely unable or unwilling to make their views felt This to some extent was due to the policy of His Majesty's Government towards the Social Democrat leaders. M. Veres said that contacts between the Social Democrats on the one hand, and the British Political Mission on the other were largely confined to the leaders of the Party and whatever good advice might be given to them went largely unheeded and entirely unknown to the majority of the Party. The fact, however, that the leaders were received with favour by British circles led the majority of the Party to think that their policy had British support M. Veres thought therefore that we should try to find some means of making our real views better known since this would give great encouragement to the anti-totalitarian forces in Hungary. Without such encouragement they would put up little further opposition to the Conununists.

4. Another point which M. Veres made was that there was a common belief in Hungary that there was a divergence of policy between Britain and America He thought that we should by propaganda and every means in our power endeavour to remove this misconception.

5. M. Veres also referred to the B.B.C. which, he said, was rapidly losing its wartime popularity. Its place

was being taken by the American broadcasts to Hungary. The reason, he said, was that the American broadcasts were outspokenly anti-Communist whereas our own were neither one thing nor the other and were consequently despised by both sides. (Doc9l)

The reply dated 2nd May, 1947, by Helm of the British Political Mission in Hungary reveals British thinking at this time. He attests to Veress' "good services in the war" to Britain, but, he continues, "in the circumstances of Hungary today I should not myself be prepared to go so far as to call him 'an honest anti-totalitarian democrat'" (A term used to describe Veress in Williams' report). Helm agrees that the Communists are gaining power in Hungary and while the Russian Army is in the country, it will be very difficult to check them. But he is still optimistic that weakening the Communist influence may be effected by constitutional means "provided the Soviet withdrawal is not unduly delayed." Helm could not at that time imagine that the withdrawal of the Soviet troops would be "delayed" until 1991. He believed that the Social Democrats held the key to whether or not Hungary could be "constitutionally" turned away from Communism. Other alternatives make him shudder: "If, on the other hand, the Communist influence can, as Mr. Veres suggests, only be removed by other than constitutional means, and if this should be read as meaning that he contemplates something akin to counter revolution, then I should indeed be pessimistic."

His next paragraph reveals his, and his Government's reaction to Veress' urging of a stronger stand against Communism:

4. I think that Mr. Veres shows his hand (which I suspect is not his alone) when he urges (paragraph 3 of your memorandum) that His Majesty's Government should show their dislike of totalitarian and

Communist activities in a more forceful manner than hitherto. I do not believe that it is widely believed in Hungary that the activities of the Left Bloc have the support of His Majesty's Government or of this mission. Szakasits, the Social Democratic leader, had certainly tried to exploit to the utmost his contacts with the Labour Party. But it is well known that our contacts here are with all parties and that we have sought to strengthen the sound Smallholder elements. So far as this Mission, and particularly myself, are concerned you can set Mr. Veres' remarks against the attack made on me by Mr. Szakasits' henchman in his talk to the British Hungarian Society about which I wrote to Jack Colville in my letter No. 260/2/47 of April 18th.

The next paragraph suggests that Helm is on the defensive:

5. As I have repeatedly reported the present leader of the Social Democratic Party is a Communist fellow traveler. He is, of course, also the one who makes most of the speeches. It is, however, not the case that the majority of the leaders of the party are Communists in everything but name. Nor is it the case that our contacts are confined, as Mr. Veres suggests, to the leaders (and by implication the Communist leaders) of the Social Democratic Party. We have tried as far as possible to extend our contacts with this as with other parties, but principally with this, because I believe that if the position of Szakasits in the Social Democratic Party could be weakened we should be on the way to securing our purpose. This certainly was the line which was taken by Morgan Phillips and by Denis Healey, and I

believe was the general line which you approved in London in January.

6. Nor can I accept the theory of Mr. Veres that unless we give more encouragement to the anti-totalitarian forces they will put up little further opposition to the Communists. We have given steady encouragement My regret is that we are working on a poor subject, who really wants the standing up to be done for him. Hence my repeated statement to Hungarians, including, I remember, Mr. Veres, that they are the main controllers of their own destiny.

The last remark rings hollow in light of what we know about the activities of the Russian-organized Secret police in the years following the war.

On the subject of the B.B.C. broadcasts to Eastern Europe, Helm concedes that Veress may have a point

8. The B.B.C. broadcasts is, as you know, a difficult question. We have of course been in correspondence about it, and I gather that Donner and you talked about it recently in London. Although the Americans were unable to substantiate their complaint I cannot help feeling on the basis of the information which has come my way that perhaps there is a Leftist element in the Hungarian Section which is not playing altogether straight Even so my information suggests that the B.B.C. is widely listened to. Hungary is not the only country in which the B.B.C. has been less listened to since the end of the war But I am told that Hungarian listening to the B.B.C. is on the increase. (Doc 92)

In connection with a remark by Veress on the subject of increasing Hungarian economic dependence on Russia, Helm agrees that there is a serious danger and makes a scathing comment on past mistakes of the West: "The Potsdam decision has played completely into Soviet Hands and is a disaster. But that can't be helped. Our job now is to fight its consequences and this we are doing." In this remark he admits that Hungary is actually the victim of a power play in which the West had lost. It would have been interesting to ask Helm how he could reconcile this view with his assertion that Hungarians were the main controllers of their own destiny.

The two memos have been quoted at length because they contain the elements of Hungary's plight and of the policies of the Great Powers. The strengthening of the Communist position in Hungary did indeed depend on the Social Democrats. When he went to England, Veress knew what the British Mission did not want to accept: that the Social Democrats were under Communist control. A little over a year later, in June, 1948 the Social Democratic party merged with the Communist party; the Secretary-General of the new party was Mátyás Rákosi, Stalin's best disciple and the most hated man in Hungary. In the same year all independent parties were abolished, and the only party left was the United Socialist Communist party which now changed its name to the Hungarian Workers' Party.

In 1947 the major powers, having divided up the small nations of Europe, were still professing objectivity and exhorting the small nations to work out their destinies "by themselves" — chaperoned by the Russian army. This theme became a favourite subject of discussion in speeches and debates, in salons and saloons in Britain throughout the Cold War. British intellectuals had problems distinguishing the Hungarian people from the Hungarian Communist government, and in general, they had trouble distinguishing their friends from their foes. They trusted the B.B.C. Hungarian section to reflect British policies in spite of their admitted suspicions

that the Section was staffed by left wing sympathizers. Just as they made themselves believe that the Russians would withdraw as soon as the peace treaty was signed, so they made themselves believe that the Social Democrats would save Hungary from Communism. When it became evident that Communism was imposed and likely to stay in Hungary, it was comfortable for the left-wing intellectual to believe that this was “the will of the people.” It became our harrowing and hopeless task as Hungarian refugees to dispel this terrible misconception.

While the British left-wing intellectuals (we called them salon Communists) spouted admiration for the “good things” Communism did for the people of Russia, the British Government was critical but extremely anxious not to offend the Russians. Expressing antitotalitarian sentiments was one thing, but anything more “forceful” was unthinkable. It is ironic that in 1947 Helm uses the word counter revolution to describe activity to overthrow the Communist government. In 1956 the Communists used exactly the same word to describe the Hungarian Revolution.

Leslie spent the rest of his life trying to enlighten Western policy makers and journalists about the real nature of the struggle between the West and the Soviet Union. He was not trying to incite His Majesty’s Government to start a war over Hungary, but he strongly believed that Soviet power could be curbed by a strong moral stand on the part of the Western Powers. As he watched and studied world events over the next decades, he became more and more convinced that the Soviet Union extended its powers only in areas where it met no resistance. Whenever it did meet strong and determined resistance, the Communist bulldozer stopped and even retreated. This happened when Tito stood up against Stalin, it happened in Hungary for a few days in October, 1956 while an outraged West stared down the Soviet Union and before the West dropped the cause of Hungary in favour of settling the Suez Crisis; it happened in Berlin in 1960; it happened in the Cuban missile crisis. Instead of starting

a new life and finding a new career in England, Leslie chose to stay close to Hungarian affairs and continue the seemingly hopeless fight to save his country from Communism. But first he had to fulfill his obligations to Nyárády, the minister who helped him get out of the Communist trap.

In April 1947 Leslie took up his duties as Head of the Hungarian Restitutional Control Commission in West Germany. He was installed in a handsome villa in a suburb of Bielefeld, called Brackwede. This is where he had his office and living quarters. He was given military rations and identity cards with full entitlement to use the military stores and other facilities. His job was to catalogue and expedite the return of Hungarian hospital equipment which had been taken to Germany by the Arrow Cross. He spent his spare time talking on the phone to his mother and sister and me, and making elaborate arrangements for me and my daughter to join him in Germany. I was supposed to travel to Bielefeld to take up my duties as his secretary. It took me the summer and most of the autumn to acquire the necessary papers as Nyárádi, the minister who had kindly agreed to help me, was out of the country. Meanwhile as he was hearing more and more bad news from Hungary, Leslie was getting impatient. If we waited much longer, it would no longer be possible to obtain a passport to leave the country legally.

At home, it was not easy for me either. Beside the aggravation of waiting, I had to watch the unhappiness of Louis who was desperate at the thought of losing me and his beloved daughter, and of Dalma who had to face losing everything she held dear. Finally everything was in order, and we could start packing. Tears flowed as we tried to decide what we could risk taking. No papers, books, nothing to expose us to customs scrutiny. Dalma had to leave behind her diary of the Siege and all her books. I packed clothes, and a few mementoes. The strangest of these was a stiletto with a lapis lazuli knob. I could not explain why I chose this

piece, certainly not for protection as I packed it deep in the bottom of the suitcase.

At last the terrible long-desired day arrived. Dalma, who had been going to school up to the last day so as not to arouse suspicion, now stayed at home. At the end of the school day her best friend Ilona Hadik came to see what was the matter. When Dalma told her that we were leaving, their sobbing could be heard all over the house. Everybody knew that this was no ordinary parting. Everything we did, we did for the last time. My mother made one last meal for us

— fried chicken. We had not seen chicken for six months, but in our gloomy mood the chicken tasted like the baked beans or lentils we had been eating for months. Louis wanted to see us off at the railway station, and it broke my heart to have to tell him no. Leslie's sister was coming with us, and the awkwardness would have been more than anybody could stand. So we left unobtrusively on foot, carrying two suitcases. Louis walked as far as the post office on Krisztina Crescent. From there it was a short walk for Dalma and me to the little tobacco shop run by Leslie's sister Kathleen. Louis stood, forlornly waving to us as we walked away. Dalma waved back two or three times; I did not trust myself to look back more than once.

We took a taxi to the station. I was surprised and pleased to find Louis' sister Charlotte waiting for us there. She was Dalma's godmother, and she could not miss seeing her off. She knew we were not coming back, but she did her best to cheer us up. Smiling, she teased Dalma: 'When I see you again, I bet you won't even be able to speak Hungarian any more.' Dalma did not smile. To her this was not a joke but a challenge. "I will never forget my Hungarian," she said, and she has kept that promise.

Finally the train was ready and the painful parting was over. As the train moved out, and we had waved our last goodbyes, I sat back and dared to start being happy about the future. I was going to see Leslie; I was going to see the world. I was escaping the nightmare that was Hungary. I tried not to look too closely at Dalma's sad face.

I knew in my heart that she would thank me one day, but at this moment that day seemed light years away.

In an hour or so we both had to put our feelings aside and start worrying about the border check. The train stopped and for what seemed like several hours, the customs officers searched our luggage. In the end they stamped our passports and let us leave. We spent the night sitting in the compartment as the train passed through Czechoslovakia. It was dawn when we stopped in Prague. Strange smells, strange sights, strange people; we were now “abroad,” on our way to Frankfurt where Leslie was waiting.

Life in Germany was certainly an improvement. I was appointed to a post as Leslie’s secretary in the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR). We received military rations which were Spartan but nourishing and adequate. We had a car and a chauffeur at our disposal for business and private use. We made trips to Bad Salzuflen, where we were permitted to use the British officers’ club and see English movies at the British cinema. Compared to the living conditions of the average German, we lived sumptuously. It was a mystery to me where the inhabitants of Brackwede obtained their food: the windows of the grocery stores displayed baskets of wooden eggs and wax cheese. But what seemed like a totally devastated country was in reality a country hard at work and play. We travelled on the newly repaired super highway, the Autobahn, and we saw a superb performance of Rigoletto at the Bielefeld opera.

Leslie and I spent our days cataloguing Hungarian hospital equipment to be shipped back to Hungary. We worked closely with the Hungarian hospital staff who were living in refugee camps on very short commons. We tried to help at least a few of them by engaging one woman as a cook, and a man as a chauffeur — and letting them take away as much food as they decently could from our pantry. They were classified as DP’s (short for Displaced Persons). Most of the DP’s had fled from the Russian advance at the end of the war and now decided to stay in the West. They accepted privations

and an uncertain future rather than return to Hungary to live in a Communist system. But some decided to go back. One of these was a doctor with extreme rightwing views. When Leslie asked him why he would risk going back, he said, "Hungary is my country; it's where I belong. Even if they put me in prison, I have to go back." His answer was a poignant reminder of the two conflicting philosophies that we were all trying to resolve. My husband Louis would have agreed with the doctor: he stayed at home in Hungary and endured imprisonment rather than leave because he felt that anyone who left was lost to the country. He could see no life for himself outside Hungary. Those of us who decided to leave felt we were making a statement against the Communist system, and we tried as far as we could to help our country from abroad.

Technically, we had not yet made the decision: Leslie and I were still in the employment of the Hungarian Foreign Office. Leslie received his salary from the Hungarian Legation in London where he went periodically to collect it. He knew that his position was highly precarious; back in September, 1947 he had received a letter from an official in the Hungarian Political Department who signed himself "Your dearest friend," and made a friendly suggestion that Leslie send home some of the "political observations" he might have made during his trips to London and in his contacts with the British. Leslie realised that the letter was a veiled attempt to recruit him as an intelligence gatherer, but he chose to ignore the invitation. As time passed, however, he became increasingly uncomfortable in his position. Then one day in March, 1948 he telephoned, according to his custom, the Hungarian Legation in London and asked to speak to the Ambassador, István Bede. The Ambassador was not available; Leslie spoke only to his wife who seemed reluctant to answer any questions. Alarmed, Leslie called a friend and colleague at his home in London. This friend told him in confidence that the Ambassador was about to resign. Leslie got on the next train and boat to London and rushed to the Hungarian Legation intending to hand in his own

resignation as well. Arriving at the Legation, he asked for his salary and some extra money he had left in the Legation safe — a total of about £600. To his consternation, he was told he could not have it. He applied to Bede, who had by then resigned. Bede told him that he had taken his own money from the safe, but not the funds belonging to Leslie. Leslie handed in his resignation, but then had to return to Germany while he applied for permanent British visas for the three of us. He had offers of work from several German firms and also a chance to go to America, but he chose to go to England because it was there that he had the most friends and connections both before and during the war.

It was April by the time we arrived in post-war England. We had practically no money, thanks to the Hungarian Legation, and very dim prospects for work. Our life in England started in a dingy boarding house which smelled of mutton drippings. From there, with the help of the Foreign Office, we worked our way up to a more spacious but equally dingy furnished flat in Queen's Gate Terrace, and then to an unfurnished flat near Holland Park. In 1948 London was still regulated by ration books. When Leslie's friend, fellow diplomat and duelling aide Dénes Nemestóthy came over from France to visit us, he brought us a welcome present of eight eggs. Some weeks we received only one egg per person. Rationing continued until 1953, long after it had stopped in Germany.

What London lacked in comforts, it amply made up in character. The parks were green and blooming, the museums were a marvel, the famous buildings breathed history, and what was essential at the time, most of these attractions were free. The British Foreign Office helped us by advancing Leslie his £600 back pay and then collecting it from the Hungarian Government, but we had to be extremely careful with our expenditures. Leslie's search for permanent employment proved harder than we thought. He applied

for a job at the Foreign Office, with no success. The Foreign office advised him to apply for a job at Bush House, in the Hungarian section of the BBC. Such a job would have been perfect for Leslie, allowing him to use his expertise in East European affairs. Unfortunately, his voice test turned out to be unsatisfactory; he did, however, obtain a job at the monitoring section at Caversham. It was not perfect, because he had to be away from London and came home only at weekends, but at least he had a regular salary. For a while I supplemented our meagre income by embroidering blouses for a fashion firm, but in 1949 I succeeded in getting a job in the Hungarian Section of the BBC at Bush House as secretary-typist. Every third day I was on the night shift; on those nights I had to type the copy for the late news, sleep for a few hours in the Bush House dormitory, then get up at four a.m. and type the morning news. It was a tough schedule, but I was glad to have a full-time job and hoped that eventually Leslie could join me at Bush House.

In 1948 Dalma started her English schooling at Carlyle Grammar School in Chelsea. This was a county school in a working class neighbourhood. Most of her classmates expected to leave school at the age of sixteen, after taking the General School Certificate exam, but the few who stayed to go on to college received a first-rate education. Classes were small and the teachers had excellent qualifications. For the rest of her life Dalma has had nothing but gratitude for the education she received in England.

In March, 1949, my divorce was completed, and on 11th October, 1949 Leslie and I were married in a simple civil ceremony. My life with Leslie was now launched, but Dalma still kept in touch with her father and her letters to him usually included a message from me. Once he even sent us a recorded message which we had to take to a record shop to hear, since we did not own a gramophone. Our letters and messages had to be totally non-political. The Communist mafia had established heavy postal censorship, and I often worried about Louis' comments. His unsubtle attempts at

disguising his disapproval of the system were obvious to everyone including the censors.

I continued my work at Bush House and made several attempts to persuade my boss that Leslie would be a good person to recruit as talk writer. Finally, in 1950 I succeeded, and Leslie joined the Hungarian Section as talk writer and political commentator. Between 1950 and 1959 he wrote hundreds of talks broadcast on the Overseas Service on current affairs, mostly concerned with Eastern Europe, but also some on the history of Britain and the Western world. The Leftist oriented management never quite trusted him — he had to sign a new contract every three months — but finally he was doing something with his heart in it

For the people of Eastern and Central Europe the BBC was their lifeline to the West and to the truth. They looked to those brief broadcasts to find out what was really happening. In addition to news of current events, they also looked for news of the future — the future of their countries, and the BBC's reputation for objectivity made them feel that its editorials also truly reflected the attitude of the West to the people of the Satellite countries. Thus the BBC filled a role far beyond the simple dissemination of information. Veress felt a strong responsibility in his talks to give a faithful picture of Hungary's situation and of British policies towards Eastern Europe.

In this endeavour he frequently found himself opposed by one of his Hungarian superiors who had marked Leftist sympathies, namely George Tarján, the head of the Hungarian Section and later Department Head in charge of the Polish, Hungarian, Finn, Czech and Slovak Sections. Tarján, a former Hungarian actor, had had strong Communist sympathies before and during the war. He had spent the war years in England, as a broadcaster on the Hungarian Service of the BBC. After the war he stayed on in England as a refugee, but some of his relatives had remained in Hungary and held high positions during the Stalin era. His brother Rezső was a highranking Communist official in Hungary's Tungstram Incandescent

Lamp Factory, a major industrial complex. (Rezső's activities have since been described in some detail by the Hungarian Physicist Zoltán Bay in his book *Life Is Stronger*, 178-181.) George Tarján, who was said to be in constant contact with his relatives in Hungary, held views obviously in sympathy with the USSR, which during the war, while Russia was an ally, was perfectly acceptable. However, after the war, when the Soviet Union became a menace to the Western world, Leslie believed that the BBC needed people who were able to think objectively and were aware of the danger of Communism. George Tarján had many gifts and would have no doubt made a fine career in many other positions, but he was the wrong person to control BBC broadcasts to Central and Eastern Europe during the Cold War.

XX

Epilogue

At the end of 1947 and the beginning of 1948 most of the non-Communist Hungarian government functionaries resigned and many fled the country, or if they were serving abroad, failed to return. Among these was Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy, Ambassador to the United States Aladár Szegedy-Maszák, the head of the Freedom party Dezső Sulyok, the Head of the Hungarian Independence party Zoltán Pfeiffer, and many others. By the end of 1948 passports were no longer available except for reliable Communists. The rest of the population was forced to travel on foot, without papers and make their way across the frontier through marshes, lakes and barbed wire fences, dodging watch towers and guards with orders to shoot

Leslie's father had died during the war, and his mother and sister now lived together in Budapest. After Leslie resigned and declared his intention not to return, he waited anxiously for news of his family, while his mother worried about her son's well-being. In one letter she wrote that she had heard of severe food shortages in England and wanted to send us food to help us out. Louis stayed for a while in our apartment in Alma Street, but a year or so after our departure he went to live with some relatives in the country. We thought it was safer for him to live out of sight in a small village. He was happy there and sent Dalma long letters, trying to keep in touch with his daughter and continue her education. Some of his letters were lively lectures on Hungarian literature, history and folklore.

They inspired Dalma as she battled to make the grade in school and help me at home.

Through 1949 and 1950 bad news came daily from Hungary; a never ending progression of arrests, trials and convictions. The features of a free society were abolished one step at a time, by a technique which came to be known as “salami tactics.” Communist Party Secretary Mátyás Rákosi was liquidating Hungary’s social structure and institutions as you would consume a stick of salami — one thin slice at a time. By the end of 1949 he had sliced off all the non-Communist parties, most private enterprise, Catholic schools and organizations, and imprisoned hundreds of key opposition figures including Cardinal Mindszenty. He had even sliced off László Rajk, the former Communist Minister of the Interior, who was put on trial and executed in October of 1949 because of his friendship with Tito who had by then fallen out with Stalin.

As Hungary was slowly dying, we had to go on living our lives in England. Dalma had to go to school every day and deal with the small joys and crises of school life. We had to make a living and drink tea with well-meaning English friends who pleasantly asked when we were planning to go back to Hungary for a holiday. Sometimes I felt like a person who is forced to make small talk at a garden party while her family is drowning in a nearby pond.

In June, 1951 Dalma was taking her college entrance exams when we heard of the order to deport undesirable citizens from Budapest. Soon there were stories of thousands of families forced to leave their homes. A lorry would pull up in front of the house at dawn. The police would wake the family and tell them to pack one suitcase for each person, which was all they were allowed to carry. They would then be taken to live with designated peasant families in the country where they were more or less welcome, depending on the good will of their hosts. Their flats and belongings were confiscated and given to party functionaries and other “reliable” people. Every day we approached our mailbox with apprehension.

Then one day Leslie got a letter from a little unknown village called Pécel. The letter was from his sister. "Dear Laci, this is our new address. Our hosts here are very kind and helpful Love, Kató." Soon afterwards Dalma got a letter from her godmother Charlotte: 'We are now living in this spacious summer camp in the hills of Buda It's nice now, but it will be a little chilly in winter. Our bathroom has a dozen washbasins. It would be nice if we could exchange a few of them for a bathtub:' They were luckier than Leslie's family.

In September Dalma started her studies at Westfield College, reading English. In October she got a letter from her godmother Charlotte: "Louise [Louis] has been taken to the hospital. We are not allowed to visit him, but they are keeping him busy." That was about all we would know of Louis' imprisonment until 1956. Dalma felt she would never see her father again. She numbed her feelings as she buried herself in her studies, but what was she to say when she had tea with her professors and someone asked her casually, 'What does your father do for a living?' Would she be able to explain her personal grief and the tragedy of her country while nibbling a cucumber sandwich?

Leslie continued to write his talks and editorials, chipping away at the Communist monolith with his razor sharp pen. I continued to type the bad news day and night On the 5th March, 1953, I was on night duty when the news of Stalin's death came in over the wire service. With my heart in my mouth I typed the announcement All the East European Sections were buzzing with speculation and excitement Leaving Bush House, I rode home on the underground. When I got off at Holland Park Station, the sun was shining, the birds were singing, and I walked on air. Arriving home, I roused Leslie from his sleep and told him the most sensational news of the century and of our refugee life. 'Wait and see," he mumbled sleepily. "The acid test is yet to come."

After Stalin's death we could not resist hoping for great changes not only in Russian-occupied countries, but also in the thinking of

the West When those changes did not come, our disappointment was profound. Hungary's Mátyás Rákosi, together with other Communist officials, went to Stalin's funeral and stood guard at Stalin's bier. Stalin's body was displayed along with Lenin's in the Kremlin. Rákosi returned home to declare by law the "immortality" of Stalin.

But despite the outward show, business was not as usual behind the Iron Curtain. Moscow was not pleased with Rákosi's ruthless methods of running the country, and in May, 1953, he was summoned to appear before the Moscow Presidium together with his two henchmen Ernő Gerő and Mihály Farkas, and two other Communist leaders, Imre Nagy and István Dobi. At the meeting of the Presidium he was severely reprimanded for his mismanagement of Hungary's economy and sent back to Hungary with specific instructions on how to set things right. Although he was allowed to continue as Party Secretary, he was instructed to relinquish the Premiership to Imre Nagy. Nagy was to placate the peasants by stopping the forced collectivization and giving them the option to withdraw from the collective farms; he was to placate consumers by allowing the production of more consumer goods; he was also instructed to go easy on the police terror. Nagy came back and did as he was told to the delight of the population. Some of the peasants, on learning that collectivization was no longer compulsory, broke up the *koilkhozes* without even taking time to gather in the harvest. In the next few months many political prisoners were freed (alas, not our kinfolk!).

By the end of 1954 we were beginning to hope again. True, Imre Nagy was a Communist, but at least he was a Hungarian and an honest man. Then on 19th February, 1955, it was announced that Imre Nagy was suffering from an "illness." We knew enough about Communist terminology to interpret the announcement. The physical illness of a Communist statesman was never announced in public. Even death was concealed as long as possible. His "illness" was announced only when he was about to be disgraced and

eliminated. Imre Nagy was not only removed as Prime Minister, but also expelled from the Political and Central Committees of the Party and deprived of all party functions. It seemed that Rákosi was back in power and it was business as usual once more. But once again, appearances were deceiving. Rákosi's opponents would not be silenced. Members of the Writers' Union and the Petöfi Circle raised their voices against him. Even Communist intellectuals were outraged by his ruthless methods of repression. Soon Moscow got the message and without further ado removed Rákosi from his position as First Secretary of the Party. But jubilation was premature: his replacement was Ernö Gerö, who was generally regarded as Rákosi's clone. Gerö tried to maintain the hard line, only to meet violent indignation from all sides. In 1956, the movement for reorganization, which had started as an internal process within the Communist Party, erupted into a spontaneous revolution against tyranny that involved the whole nation. Imre Nagy the Communist was swept along with the popular uprising and became its leader and eventually its martyr.

Events in Hungary became front page news in London papers. Heartsick and awestruck, we read how the student demonstration in front of the Budapest Radio building on 23rd October turned into a bloody fight when the AVH security police opened fire on the crowd. Then the Hungarian army refused to fight the crowd and turned weapons over to the demonstrators. Heavy fighting was reported in Budapest as the rebels captured factories and engaged Soviet troops. The children fought along with the adults, attacking and burning Soviet tanks with Molotov cocktails. The British public responded with admiration and sincere sympathy. Our people were making heroic demands for freedom, and bleeding for it

The Communist government called them hooligans and gave them an ultimatum to stop fighting. But the Communists ran out of deadlines and the "hooligans" started to organize. By 27th October they had formed a new government under the leadership of Imre

Nagy. Workers' councils formulated demands for a free country: the withdrawal of Soviet troops, a call for free elections, a free press, the right to free assembly and to worship, the dissolution of the security police, withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, to name only a few. Free radio stations sprang up like mushrooms all over the country, broadcasting these demands. Imre Nagy responded by announcing the abolition of the one party system, forming a coalition government, and starting negotiations for the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

We were delirious with hope. Dalma received a letter from her father who had been set free by the freedom fighters. "For the first time in many years," he wrote, "I can once more be proud of being a Hungarian."

Our euphoria over the successes of the Revolution was soon tempered by anxiety over events in Suez. On 29th October, 1956, Anglo-French-Israeli forces invaded Egypt. Within a few days of the start of the Revolution, Hungary had to share the front page with the Suez Crisis. The Soviet Union which at first was ready to retreat in the face of Hungarian determination and world disapproval, now saw its chance to recoup and launch an attack on Hungary. As the Russian tanks were rumbling into Budapest, Imre Nagy made his last, passionate appeal to the West to save Hungary. It would take another 35 years for Hungary to shake off the Communist yoke, and help would come not from the west, but from the east, and from Hungary herself.

On 4th November, 1956, we knew there was no hope. Russian army units rolled into Hungary in overwhelming numbers. In the midst of bitter fighting, a radio station in Szolnok announced the formation of a new government: the new Premier was János Kádár, the man who would eventually preside over the bitter crushing of the Revolution, the imprisonment of thousands and executions of hundreds. The night before the Russian invasion Pál Maléter, the heroic leader of the army's freedom fight, had been arrested while

negotiating with Soviet military leaders. Imre Nagy, along with other Hungarian leaders, took refuge in the Yugoslav embassy. According to one account, Kádár, who had previously been summoned to Moscow and had received his instructions from Khrushchev, now sent a reassuring message to Nagy: if Nagy will leave the Embassy for discussions, his safety will be guaranteed. Nagy and his companions agreed to participate in the discussions. A bus was waiting for them, and as soon as they stepped out of the Embassy, they were all arrested by the Russians. Nagy was taken to Rumania and later executed. The Suez invasion was well under way, and Khrushchev, no longer fearing Western intervention, felt free to crush the Hungarian Revolution.

The events from 23rd October to the 4th November were momentous and created the most stir in the world at the time, but in the long run, it was what happened after the Russian invasion that made a real impact on the subsequent history of Hungary, Eastern Europe and the free world. The Revolution did not end on November 4th, 1956. Resistance continued for the next three months and beyond. Outbreaks of street fighting continued until the end of December. Freedom radio stations continued to operate in various undisclosed parts of the country. Most large firms had revolutionary councils which continued to meet and ply the government with demands for freedom. On 4th December Hungarian women held a demonstration mourning their dead and were fired upon by Soviet forces. The workers' councils in the heavy industries continued to press their demands and refused to go back to work. On 12th December they started a general strike. The Kádár government made daily announcements alternately conciliating and threatening those who resisted, but the demonstrations and strikes continued.

Nevertheless, Kádár was determined to restore totalitarian order and proceeded to start punishing the offenders. It was in November that the great exodus began. With the frontiers still unguarded, thousands fled to Austria, where they waited in makeshift refugee

camps to find a country which would take them. In all, it is estimated that about 200,000 people fled from Hungary after the Revolution. They were escaping from severe reprisals. The Kádár Government Radio made daily announcements of arrests and convictions of "counterrevolutionaries." At the end of 1957, the Public Prosecutor announced that since December, 1956, 3,012 persons had been convicted for counterrevolutionary crimes (Facts about Hungary, 279). The nations of the West were most generous in accepting the Hungarian refugees, and most of them settled down and became useful members of their host countries, while Hungary lost the talents of hundreds of thousands of her citizens.

The British public welcomed the refugees. Everyone we met was anxious to offer some form of assistance. Schoolchildren were proud to have Hungarian friends and collected donations for the refugees. Starting in November, 1956 we haunted the refugee centers in London, looking for ways to help. Once I went down to one of the centres in the country where the refugees had just arrived. Most had nothing but what they could carry. They were still dressed as they had been when they had scrambled across the border, in tattered boots and torn clothes. Many had no papers and knew no English, and it was my job to interpret for them. I noticed a few men wearing kneelength boots which bore an uncanny resemblance to those worn by members of the AVH, the Hungarian secret police. Several members of the AVH had fled the country when the Revolution seemed to be successful. They were fleeing from the wrath of the people. Once they realized that the Communists were victorious, they went back to Hungary.

The Hungarian Section of the BBC was also busy interviewing refugees to learn details about the uprising. Some of the people interviewed became very uneasy when they learned that George Tarján was in charge of the Hungarian Department. While they knew nothing about him personally, they knew that his brother Rezső was a Party functionary masquerading as an engineer first at the

Tungstram Incandescent Lamp Factory and later at the Táki Research Institute. When told that George had repudiated his Communist brother, they were not much reassured. As one of them put it, “In Communist Hungary you could be put in gaol, or lose your job, home and possessions and be deported simply for having relatives in politically sensitive jobs abroad. How could Rezső Tarján stay in such a responsible position while it was known that his brother worked for the BBC? The Communists must have had a reason for letting Rezső work for them in spite of his relative in London.”

It is of interest to note that in 1962, some six years after the Hungarian Revolution, Journalist Stephen Preston, in an interview with George Tarján, asked Tarján a similar question: Knowing that his brother Rezső and sister-in law Emma are both “longstanding and outstanding” Communists, and that their daughter Judith is married to a close relative of General Vilmos Garamvölgyi, Deputy Minister of the Interior and Head of the National Police Office in the Hungarian People’s Republic, does George Tarján not find it difficult to discharge his duties and does he not fear that the proper discharge of those duties might result in harm to his relatives? Tarján did not directly answer the question, but he expressed his confidence that his brother Rezső was acting in the best interests of Hungary. It would have been hardly a reassuring answer to the refugees of 1956.

Veress told his Bush House superiors about the fears of the refugees concerning Tarján. They listened to him but did nothing. Veress then turned to some of his high-ranking Foreign Office mentors. At first they were shocked to learn about the situation, but after a while Veress was told not to make waves. In spite of his disagreement with Tarján for political reasons, Leslie felt that Tarján was really a victim of his Communist family in Hungary. In other words, Leslie felt that Tarján was not a spy; just the wrong person in the wrong place.

One day we received word that Leslie's uncle, General Dánoki Veress, was coming to London. Like thousands of other political prisoners, he too had been freed by the Freedom Fighters. He hoped for a while that the Revolution would succeed, but when the Russian Army moved in, he decided that nine years in a Communist prison had been enough. He did not want to serve any more time in that "educational institution." We welcomed him and he stayed at our house for several weeks until he found a place to live. He was worn thin from his imprisonment, but his eyes were full of life. His military training had made him tough and ready to accept discomforts. He was one of the few people I knew who had no objections to British weather. He smiled readily and was delighted to find a family after so many years of privation. One weekend Dalma came home from Epsom where she was teaching English in a grammar school. Uncle Louis took to her right away, and when Dalma said that she would like to learn to ride, he offered to teach her. They went off to Hampstead Heath, where on a couple of rented horses he taught her to ride like a Hussar.

Dalma's father did not leave Hungary, but we did hear news of him from two of his friends who visited us one day. That was when we learned that he had been convicted of subversive activities and espionage and sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment. Part of the evidence against him was his "correspondence with foreign countries." To keep Dalma aware of her Hungarian heritage, he had written her long letters about Hungary's ancient and modern culture. We also learned that during his interrogation he had been severely beaten on the head, so much so that he had partially lost his hearing. He had served only five of the twelve years and was not at all sure of being able to stay out of prison, but he was determined to stay in Hungary, even if he had to go back to gaol. Eventually the Secret Police were indirectly responsible for his death. In 1974 his hearing had deteriorated to the point where he could not hear an oncoming tram as he was crossing the street

He was struck and died of his injuries.

In the years following the Revolution, we gradually learned to live with the bitter truth that there was no getting rid of Communism in Hungary. Life there returned to its seemingly hopeless monotony. Once again people had to live in daily conflict with the system. Louis did not have to go back to prison, thanks to a brave doctor friend who checked him into the hospital for treatment of his bad knee, which conveniently started acting up when it was apparent that the secret police were looking for former prisoners. One day a couple of uniformed guards appeared at Louis' bedside intending to take him, but the doctor refused to let his patient go. It was a large ward, and soon everyone was looking to see what the noise was all about 'The police are trying to take a sick man to gaol!' they repeated to each other indignantly. The police did not want any more trouble with the people, and left, embarrassed. The episode points up the real significance of the Hungarian Revolution. The people were defeated, the Russian army was in charge, yet the Government realized that the Hungarian people could be pushed only so far. Kádár knew that once he had finished his bloody work of punishing the participants in the Revolution, he had to come up with concessions to make life tolerable for the people.

Louis did not come to England, but in 1958 he did send a young friend to see us, a Hungarian mathematician, Lajos Takács, who came to a mathematical congress in Scotland. He met Dalma and the two of them seemed to be made for each other. They were married in April, 1959, and a few months later left to settle in the United States.

I was glad to know that my daughter was happy. Leslie, on the other hand, was increasingly unhappy with his work at the BBC. When the Hungarian uprising was over, the general outrage against Communism diminished, and the policy of appeasement seemed to some the more attractive course. In the BBC, appeasement prevailed, and Leslie found the atmosphere totally incompatible with his

passionate anti-Communist views. In Government circles too, there seemed to be a struggle between hawks and doves. When he explained the situation at the BBC to his mentor in the Foreign Office, the latter was at first outraged, but later advised him again not to make a fuss. Leslie was not a man of compromises: since he felt unable to work in a manner consistent with his principles, he handed in his resignation. Later, a friend at the War Office told him that he should have consulted them before resigning.

In the years that followed we paid the price for what many thought was Leslie's rash act. He tried to get another full-time position, but he had two marks against him: one was his uncompromising philosophy, and the other was his age. At 51, no one wanted to hire him. One of the places where he sought employment was Radio Free Europe, where he was rejected for a curious reason. Confidentially he was told by a friend that his wartime association with Britain had made him suspect with the Americans, who were afraid of conflicting loyalties on his part. We had some hard times and some good times in the coming years, but he never gave up his principles; he never compromised his views on the evil of Communism. Many years later, when the Central and East European section of Bush House came under new management, interest in Leslie's diplomatic mission was revived, and he was interviewed several times on the Hungarian Service about his wartime activities.

Leslie did not live to see the fall of Communism. The country he had tried so hard to save is now free and battling with new challenges. After 45 years of Russian Communist occupation, freedom came not from the West, but from the East, not by war, but by peace, not so much by the actions of Western leaders, as by the economic failure of the Communist system, and, above all, by the determination of the people of Eastern Europe. The Hungarians were the first to open the way to freedom by taking down the barbed wire fences on their frontier and helping

thousands of East Germans and others to flee to the West through Hungary. Then the Berlin Wall came down and the people of the other East European countries joined in the miraculous destruction of the Communist system. Hungary is now facing new challenges. Having escaped the rocks of fascism and the whirlpool of Communism, she is now learning to navigate on the choppy seas of capitalism.

This book is the story not of triumph but of survival — the survival of a small nation against overwhelming odds. By the Treaty of Versailles, Hungary was maimed. The anguish of losing two thirds of the country's territory was aggravated by the desperate economic hardships that resulted from the loss. Hungary's appeals for justice, for revision of the cruel Treaty of Trianon, were largely ignored by Western leaders who allowed Hitler to benefit from Hungary's plight by promising redress in return for a military alliance.

In spite of economic hardship and the menacing vicinity of the German war machine, Hungary struggled throughout World War II to keep her independence and succeeded in this effort until she was occupied by Germany in March, 1944. By holding Nazi Germany at bay, Hungary saved many lives: hundreds of thousands of Jews and other refugees from Nazi-occupied territories as well as escaped Allied prisoners of war and SOE men dropped behind enemy lines survived in the safety of Hungary.

The Allies in their monumental struggle against Nazi Germany were highly interested to learn in 1943 that Hungary had a proposal for surrendering to British or American forces. But Hungary's willingness and even Winston Churchill's enthusiasm were not enough to change the strategy of the Allies. In order to take advantage of Hungary's surrender offer as negotiated by the Hungarian Prime Minister's emissary, Leslie Veress, British and American forces would have had to advance into Central Europe through the Balkans — a plan violently opposed by the Soviet Union and somewhat less violently by Roosevelt, who was anxious not to

offend the Soviet ally. Without Allied forces in the vicinity, it was not realistic to expect Hungary to fight the German army which it took the Allies six years to defeat

Hungary's plan to save her national independence did not succeed. The many reasons for the failure are examined in this book. Hungary is not alone in post-Communist Europe and the former USSR to be proud of her national identity. Freed from the yoke of Communism, the many ethnic groups of the former Communist empire are now free to achieve their national goals. This search for identity causes unavoidable struggles and suffering. For many years the map of Europe may look like a jigsaw puzzle made up of constantly changing amoebas as different nations try to find their true borders. At times it may seem that the warring ethnic groups have nothing in common. Yet the words of John Donne are still true today: no man — or nation — is an island. Economically we are all dependent on each other for survival. Time will be needed to find true solutions. As the Superpowers are learning to respect the national identity of small nations, so the many ethnic groups will eventually have to learn to respect each other's cultural heritage while building economic co-operation.

Of course, human nature will never tolerate a totally peaceful world, but our chance of success is better today than after Versailles, better than after the Second World War. We are now free of the disastrous results of those two wars. If we can find a solution to territorial conflicts without killing each other, we have a chance for peace. This is our only chance: you cannot cultivate your garden with a sword.

Notes

Chapter V

1. Nicholas Kállay, Hungarian Premier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954) 181. In a note Kállay emphasizes that while he admired Szentgyörgyi as a scientist, he was not convinced of Szentgyörgyi's skills as a politician and most definitely did not send him to Istanbul as his official representative.

Chapter VI

1. Cited from Hungarian translation in Gyula Juhász, Magyar-brit Titkos Tárgyalások 1943-ban, (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1978) 91. (Item 9, February 14, 1943, 34504/C 1421) The items included in this collection are translated into Hungarian and are communications to or from the British Foreign Office. They are presently housed at the Public Record office, London, Foreign office Section.
2. English text quoted by Veress. Hungarian translation in Juhász, Magyar-brit 86-87. (Item 6/b, February 11, 1943, 34504/c 1421).
3. Quoted by Veress. Hungarian translation in Juhász, Magyar-brit 97-99. (Item 13/a, February 26, 1943, 34447/C 2652).
4. Cited from Juhász, Magyar-brit 100. (Item 14, March 10, 1943, Washington 259, Moscow 117).
5. Cited from Hungarian translation in Juhász, Magyar-brit 115. (Item 20 C 3885/3885/21)

Chapter VII

1. Complete text in Foreign Relations, 1943, Vol 1. 740.00119 European War 1939, Telegrams 1348, 1358, pp. 485-486.
2. English translation of excerpts from Ribbentrop's dossier are included in Kállay, Hungarian Premier 180-183. The complete German text may be found in Allianz Hitler-Horthy-Mussolini Dokumente zur ungarischen Aussenpolitik 1933-1944 346-350. (Einleit. und Forbereit. d. Akten z. Druck. Magda Adám, Gyula Juhász, Lajos Kerekes.) Budapest, 1966.

Chapter IX

1. In Horthy's Memoir there is no record of this top secret conversation.
2. Cited from Juhász, Magyar-brit 189. (Item 45, August 20, 1943, 261 WELFARE, 34450/C 9732).
3. Cited from Juhász, Magyar-brit 225. (Item 51, Telegram 855, 34450/C 10164).

Chapter X

1. Cited from Hungarian translation in Juhász, Magyar-brit 258-260.(Item 74/b, September 27, 1943, Lisbon, 34451/C 11673).
2. Lisbon, November 4, 1943, #96/fön/1943 KA. útján. The text of this telegram is in the archives of the Hoover Institution, Stamford University, among the documents of the Hungarian Embassy at Lisbon. These and other documents from Lisbon are included in the collection of the Madrid Embassy.
3. Cited from Hungarian translation in Juhász, Magyar-brit 276- 278. (Items 86/a and 86/b, October 27, 1943, 34452/C 12989).

Notes 369

4. Cited from Hungarian translation in Juhász, Magyar-brit 271. (Item 82, London, October 15, 1943,34498/C 12035).
5. Cited from Hungarian translation in Juhász, Magyar-brit 299-300.(Item 96/b, November 26, 1943,34453/C 15277).
6. Cited from Hungarian translation in Juhász, Magyar-brit 291-292.(Item 95/a, December 8, 1943, HMT/HU/5094; 34453/C14513).

Chapter XI

1. Cited from "Peace-feelers from Axis Nations," Foreign Relations, 1943, vol I 503. (Washington, November 18, 1943, Aide-memoire, Department of State to the British Embassy 740.00019).

2. Quoted from "Peace-feelers from Axis Nations," Foreign Relations, 1943, vol. I 508-509. (The Ambassador to the Greek Government in Exile to the Secretary of State, Cairo, December 6 1943, 740.00119 EW 1939/2012 1/4)

Chapter XII

1. Cited from Hungarian translation in Juhász, Magyar-brit 301-303. (Item 97/a, London, February 8, 1944, 39252/c 1313.

Chapter XV

1. For a full account and documentation, see Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 249-250.

Documents Cited

NOTE: Parenthetical documentation (Doc 0) in the text refers to the following documents. Unless otherwise indicated, the originals of these documents are on file at the Public Record Office, London.

1. **Suicide note of Paul Teleki 3rd April, 1941 (Photocopy found among Veress' papers)**
2. **Minutes of Hungarian Cabinet meeting. 23rd June, 1941 (SUBJECT: BREAKING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH USSR)**
 - a. **Text of István Bárczy's original minutes.**
 - b. **Text of Bárdossy's "edited" version.**
3. **Minutes of Hungarian Cabinet meeting. 26th June, 1941 (SUBJECT: DECLARATION OF WAR ON USSR)**
 - a. **Text of István Bárczy's original minutes.**
 - b. **Bárdossy's "edited" version.**
4. **Minutes of Hungarian Cabinet Meeting. 11th December, 1941 (SUBJECT: BREAKING DIPLOMATIC TIES WITH USA)**
 - a. **Text of István Bárczy's minutes.**
 - b. **Text of Bárdossy's "edited" version.**

NOTE: carbon copies of Items 2, 3, and 4 are in the possession of Laura-Louise Veress. They had been given to Leslie Veress by Alexander de Hollan, a Hungarian career diplomat at the Hungarian Embassy in Paris. After the Communist takeover in Hungary, Hollan resigned and passed these materials to Veress for safekeeping.

5. "Declaration of War" — a BBC broadcast in Hungarian by C. A. Macartney (Translated)
7th December, 1941
(Copy in possession of Laura-Louise Veress)
6. British Embassy to Department of State.
Washington, 6th April, 1943.
Aide Memoire on Peace-Feelers from Axis Nations.
740.00119 European War 1939/1446
7. From Molotov to Foreign Secretary
7th June, 1943
FO 371/34449
8. Anthony Eden to H.M.. Chargé d' affaires, Washington
(SUBJECT: COMMENTS ON MOLOTOV'S VIEWS)
7th August, 1943
FO 371/34495/8617
9. Private Cypher to London: Summary of British policy
7th June, 1943
WO 202/358 9100 G1311
10. Policy towards Hungary and other minor Axis satellites.
Hanson, Roberts, etc.
14th June, 16th June, 17th June, 1943

C 66841558
FO 371/34495/8617

11. War Cabinet, Joint Planning Staff.
Peace Overtures from Hungary: Report by the Joint Planning Staff.
22nd August, 1943
IP. (43) 293 (FINAL)
CAB 79/63/HP002
12. Vice Chiefs of Staff, London to Chief of Imperial General Staff attending 'Quadrant' Conference in Quebec. (As summarised by Foreign office in brief for Moscow Conference)
August 23, 1943
Concrete 507
13. Annex I; Appendix; Annex II. Peace Overtures from Hungary.
Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee.
22nd August, 1942
W.I.C.(43) 349(0) Final. Pp. 282-287.
CAB 79/63/HP 00269
14. Cypher from Foreign Office to Washington No. 5676, London No. 1178.
August 25th, 1943.
FO 954/11 HN 03144
15. Minutes of meeting at Foreign Office. In attendance: Sir Orme Sargent, Sir Bruce Lockhart, Mr. Strang, Mr. Allen,

et al.
August 25th, 1943
FO 371/34495/8617

374 Clear The Line

16. Foreign Office 5911 to Washington; 1347 to Moscow
3rd September, 1943.
(ABRIDGED COPY)

17. Sir Archibald Clark Kerr, Moscow to Foreign Office.
7th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: MOLOTOV'S REACTION TO MESSAGE
FOR VERESS)
No. 905
FO 371 34495

18. Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary.
Most secret and personal.
Most Secret Cypher Telegram. Most Immediate
— Clear the Line.
From: Quadrant
To: War Cabinet Office
7th September, 1943
Welfare No.639

TOO 070321Z; TOR 070420Z
FO 371/3445 1/8353

19. Hungarian Peace Feelers.
Signed Roberts.
7th September, 1943.
FO 371/34451/8353

20. Foreign Secretary to Prime Minister.
Most Secret Cypher Telegram. Most Immediate.
From: Air Ministry To: Quadrant
7th September, 1943.
SUBJECT: EDEN'S REPLY TO CHURCHILL
Concrete No. 780

Documents Cited 375

TOO 072255Z TOD 072350Z
FO 371 34451 8353

21. Foreign Secretary for Prime Minister
Most Immediate; Most Secret and Personal
 - a. Draft by Frank Roberts, initialled by Eden.
 - b. Text of 7th September, 1943 telegram (SUBJECT: MESSAGE FOR VERESS)No: 781 Concrete
FO 371 34451 8353

22. Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary.
Most Secret Cypher Telegram
(SUBJECT: REPLY TO 781,780 MODIFICATION "AT A
SUITABLE MOMENT")
From: Quadrant To: Air Ministry
8th September, 1943
Welfare 666
TOO 081809Z TOR 081950Z
FO 371 34451 8353
23. Cipher Telegram from Istanbul
Received 8th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: "VERES NOW IN ISTANBUL")
FO 371 34451 9353
24. Anthony Eden to British Ambassador in Moscow, Sir A.C.
Kerr.
9th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: EXPLANATION OF BRITISH REPLY TO
VERESS)
Telegram No. 1295
FO 371 34451
- 376 Clear The Line
25. Telegram sent by SOE to H. M. Ambassador, Angora, at
present in Istanbul

9th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: DRAFT OF REPLY TO VERESS AS
AMENDED BY CHURCHILL)
No. 1282
FO 371 34451 8353

26. From Foreign Secretary for Prime Minister
From: Air Ministry To: Quadrant.
9th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: REPLY TO WELFARE 666. AMENDED
MESSAGE TO BE DEL VERED TODAY.)
Concrete 805
TOO 091127Z TOD 091135Z
FO 371 34451 8353

27. Letter from Lieutenant Colonel Perkins, SOE to Frank
Roberts at the Foreign Office.
9th September, 1943.
HBP/HU/4340
C 10576
FO 371 34451 8353

28. Copy of Most immediate Telegram to Istanbul, repeated
Cairo.
9th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: HUNGARIAN SURRENDER TERMS)
FO 371 34451 8353

29. Private Cipher to London
9th September, 1943.
B 1/1094
WO 202 360 X/11 09773

30. SOE Telegram to SOE Istanbul
9th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: ZP /FOREIGN SECRETARY/'S MESSAGE
FOR VERESS WILL BE DESPATCHED TO YOU
BEFORE NOON TODAY.)
"ZP CONSIDER IT DESIRABLE FOR YP /Knatchbull -
Hugessen, H . M Ambassador in Angora/TO DELIVER
MESSAGE.")
Registry No . 34451/CI 076/10408/155/8

31. Outward Telegram from D.O. to Governments of Canada,
Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.
10th September, 1943.
D. No. 640
C 10576
FO 371 34451 8353

32. Letter from Perkins to Roberts.
10th September, 1943.
HBP/HU/4342
FO 371 34451 8353.

33. Telegram from British Ambassador in Istanbul to Sir A.
Cadogan.
10th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: MEETING WITH VERESS ON NIGHT OF
SEPT.9TH/SEPT.10th 0TH)
1742.
FO 371 34451 8353

34. Private cipher to London, repeat Istanbul
No date.
(SUBJECT: DH 18 CONSIDERS VERESS A "DUBIOUS
PERSON".)

378 Clear The Line

1093
WO 202 360 XII 09773

35. From Washington to Foreign Office
September 154 1943.
(SUBJECT: WASHINGTON AGREES WITH BRITISH
REPLY.)
No. 4144.
FO 371 34451 8353
36. Private cipher to London.
18th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: DH 18 PLANS SABOTAGE IN HUNGARY.)
B4/1228
WO 202 360 X/11 09773
37. Sir A. Clark Kerr, From Moscow to Foreign Office
20th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: RUSSIAN REACTION TO MESSAGE TO
VERESS)
Telegram No. 982

C 10869/155/G
FO 371 34451 8353

38. Brief by Roberts for Moscow talks: Hungary.
22nd September, 1943.
pp. 103-107 .
C 11414
FO 371 34451 8353
39. From British Legation in Stockholm to F.K. Roberts in
Foreign Office.
28th September, 1943.

Documents Cited 379

(SUBJECT: ENCLOSING COPY OF MINUTE OF
HINKS'
CONVERSATION WITH HUNGARIAN JOURNALIST
GELLERT)
C1386
FO 371 34451 8353

40. From Perkins to Roberts.
30th September, 1943.
(SUBJECT: RECEPTION OF VERESS' CREDENTIALS)
HBP/HU/4771 C11325
FO 371 34451 8353

41. SOE Cipher from Istanbul
29th September, 1943.
No. 933
(SUBJECT: REPORT OF VERESS' MESSAGE)
FO 371 34451 9353

42. Perkins, Roberts, Harrison, Allen—Minutes of discussion
(SUBJECT: VERESS' CREDENTIALS)
Received October 1, 1943.
CI 1325/G
FO 371 34451 8351

43. Allen, Roberts, Harrison, Cadogan—Minutes of discussion
(SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH GELLÉRT)
28th September to 3rd October, 1943.
CI 1386/G
FO 371 34451 8353

44. Sir A. Cadogan to Sir R. Campbell, Lisbon. September,
1943, signed October 3.
(SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF SURRENDER TERMS,

380 Clear The Line

AUTHORIZING LISBON TO RECEVE CREDENTIALS)
No.C/1 1325/155/G
FO 371 34451 8353

45. Eden to Ambassadors to Moscow and Washington.
5th October?

(SUBJECT: CREDENTIALS FOR LISBON)
C 11325/155/G
FO 371 34451 8353

46. Roberts to Perkins
6th October, 1943
(SUBJECT: LISBON AUTHORIZED FOR
CREDENTIALS)
Draft and letter.
No. C 11325/155/G

47. From D.O. to Governments of Canada, Australia,
New Zealand, and South Africa.
6th October, 1943.
(SUBJECT: VERESS RETURNED TO BUDAPEST)
WF222/13 C11325 D. No.745
FO 371 34451 8353

48. To Savanna 75
11th October, 1943.
(SUBJECT: "SURRENDER GROUP WILL NOT PLAY
AT SABOTAGE SO LONG AS NEGOTIATING WITH
F.O. BUT WILL KEEP VURES /SIC E/ BAIT
DANGLING CARROT WISE.")
WO 202/140

49. Air Attack on the Balkans. Report by the Joint Planning
Staff.
15th October, 1942

JP (43) 346 (Final) pp. 135-136 and Annex.
CAB 79 66 HP 00501

50. Relation of Overlord to Mediterranean. Minute by the Prime Minister.
19th October, 1944.
COS (43) 639 (0) D. 178/3

51. Cipher message to London.
27th October, 1943.
(SUBJECT: "IF HUNGARIANS WISH TO COLLABORATE US THEY CANNOT ADVANCE EXCUSES FOR FIGHTING OUR ALLIES.")
2578 Folio No. 6548
WO 202 360 HM? 09773

52. Istanbul to London. (SOE to Perkins)
14th November, 1943.
(SUBJECT: "HUNGARIAN TROOPS ENTERED VIROVITICA AFTER PARTISANS HAD EVACUATED . . . VIOLATED PROMISE..")
No. 3033 Folio 9454
WO 202 361 HM 09891.

53. To London No.91 Rptd Cairo 178 From Istanbul
18th November, 1943
(SUBJECT: MESSAGE FROM MH 1: "HUNGARIAN GOVT. CANNOT PROMOTE SUCH SABOTAGE AS WOULD DESTROY PUBLIC ORDER.")
WO 202/360 X II 09773

54. To London from BI

26th September, 1943

382 Clear The Line

(SUBJECT: PARTISAN WITHDRAWAL FROM
VIROVITICA)
WO 202/361

55. Minutes of Sextant Conference, Cairo
22nd November, and 4th December, 1943.
COS (Sextant)
56. Minutes of Tehran Conference, First Plenary Meeting held at
Soviet Embassy, 28th November, 1943.
57. From Mideast to Air Ministry Rptd. Freedom.
23rd November, 1943.
(SUBJECT: "WE RECOMMEND BOMBING OF
BUDAPEST.")
IZ 4516 TOO 231810 TOB 240530Z OC/348
PREM 3 226 7881
58. From H.F.H.Q. (Allied Forces Headquarters, Italy) to
ETOUSA
November 25, 1943.
(SUBJECT: AIR ATTACK ON BUDAPEST APPROVED.
"LEAFLETS INDISPENSABLE TO OPERATION")
U.S. 1219 Ref. No. 5674

59. Memo by Harrison; Comments by Roberts, Cadogan and Eden.
17th December, 1943.
(SUBJECT: "A RULING IS REQUIRED ON OUR HANDLING OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT.")
C639
FO 371 39251 7881

Documents Cited 383

60. Minutes of discussion by D. Allen, F. Roberts, O.G. Sargent.
Marginal notes by Anthony Eden.
23rd, 26th, 27th and 28th December, 1943.
(SUBJECT: HUNGARY WILL ACCEPT SOE MISSION; EDEN "PREFERS TO DROP IT.")
Pp 44-45.
FO 311 39251 7881
61. Threlfall to Roberts.
31st December, 1943.
(SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF VERESS' DESCRIPTION OF HUNGARIAN SITUATION)
HMT/HU/5193 C136
FO 371 39251
62. TRIBE for AIDE; Following from D/H 72 and A/H 6

31? December, 1943.
(SUBJECT: BASIC CAUSES OF RECENT EVENTS /in
Hungary/)
WO 202 361

63. From Foreign Office to Resident Minister Algiers.
9th February, 1944.
(SUBJECT: HUNGARY NOW UNDER
MEDITERRANEAN COMMAND)
No. 242 FO 371 39252 8617
64. Roberts to Wakins
16th February, 1944.
Letter and Report: Hungary-General; Contacts with the
Hungarian Government; Hungary's Frontiers.
C 2125
FO 371 39252 8617
- 384 Clear The Line
65. Threlfall to Roberts.
18th February, 1944.
(SUBJECT: "VERESS IS COMING TO ISTANBUL IN
THE NEAR FUTURE.")
FO 371 39252
66. Notes on discussions on Political Aspects of the Bombing of
Budapest. Allen, Harrison, Roberts, Eden.
18th-22nd February, 1944, C 2743

Notes on preparation for Veress' visit. Allen, Roberts,
Harrison, A. Noble.
C 2450/10/G
FO 371 39252 8617

67. Threlfall to Roberts.
3rd March, 1944.
(SUBJECT: ACCOUNT OF MEETING BETWEEN
VERESS AND BRITISH REPRESENTATIVE IN
ISTANBUL)
HMT/HU 5571 C2948
FO 371 39252
68. Discussion of Hungarian wish to surrender to Russians.
Threlfall, Roberts, Allen, Harrison.
4th March, 1944.
C 2948/G 78
FO 371 39252 8617
69. Peace Moves by Hungarian Government. Copy of a letter
dated 13th March, 1944 from Foreign Office to the
Secretary.
C.O.S. (44) 252(0)
FO 371 39252 8617

Documents Cited 385

70. Annex. Hungarian Peace Moves. Copy of a letter dated 15th

March, 1944 from the Chiefs of Staff to the Foreign Office.
(SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO HUNGARIAN OFFER)
FO 371 39252 8617

71. Eden to Prime Minister.
17th March, 1944.
(SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF PARACHUTE MISSION;
21/3 CANCELLATION ON ACCOUNT OF GERMAN
INVASION)
PM /44/168
PREM 3 226 7881

72. Reports of imminent German invasion of Hungary.
20th March, 1944.
(SUBJECT: BOMBING OF BUDAPEST ON HOLD FOR
PRESENT)
No 139. 140. PREM 3 226 7881

73. Letter to Roberts.
23rd March, 1944.
(SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF VERESS' ACCOUNT OF
DISCUSSIONS OF SURRENDER IN HUNGARY)
HMT/HU/5694
FO 371 39252

74. Cipher message to London from B. 4.
26th March, 1944.
(SUBJECT: SITUATION IN HUNGARY AFTER
GERMAN INVASION)
No.2687/8/9

386 Clear The Line

75. Roberts to Captain Guy Liddell.
29th March, 1944.
(SUBJECT: COMMENTS ON RÉVAI)
C 3732/10/G
FO 371 39252 8617

76. Chiefs of Staff, 1944. 103rd Meeting.
29th March, 1944.
(SUBJECT: NEGOTIATIONS WITH RUMANIA)
CAB 79/72

77. Jean Hamilton to Resident Minister in Cairo.
30th March, 1944.
(SUBJECT: SUMMARY OF INTELLIGENCE REPORT
ON GERMAN INVASION) C 3731/10/G
FO 371 39252 8617

78. To London from Force 133
4th April, 1944.
(SUBJECT: ARMISTICE TALKS WITH RUMANIA)
Ref. No. G/B3/2975

79. Foreign Office to British Embassy to Yugoslavia.
13th April, 1944.
(SUBJECT: PROPAGANDA TO HUNGARY)
No 236

80. AFHQ to British Chiefs of Staff.
16th April, 1944.
(SUBJECT: DECEPTION PLANS: ZEPPELIN)
CAB122/1252

Documents Cited 387

81. Deception Plan Zeppelin, 1944. Brigadier H. Redman
Fieldmarshall Dill.
25th April, 1944.
CAB122/1252
82. To Resident Minister, Cairo.
20th April, 1944.
(SUBJECT: SITUATION IN HUNGARY)
No. 1345
FO 371 39252
83. Report by Laszlo Veress. Appendix A.
10th June
(Copy supplied by Foreign and Commonwealth Office SOE
Adviser)
84. Philip Broad, Office of the Representative at Barn of the
Minister Resident at Allied Force Headquarters to Principal
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
15th July, 1944.

(SUBJECT: COMMENTS ON REPORT BY VERESS)

No. 66

FO 391 39264 8668

85. Reactions to Report of Veress.
15th-26th July, 1944.
Notes by Allen, Macartmey
C 9566
FO 371 39264 8668
86. Veesenmayer to Foreign Minister. Secret Telegram.
22nd July, 1944, Budapest.
(SUBJECT: PROPOSED DEAL WITH JEWS)

388 Clear The Line

No. 2055 (Copy of German text found among papers of Veress)

87. Report from Bari on Hungarian situation to Foreign Secretary, Harold MacMillan, Philip Broad, Field Marshall Maitland Wilson
22nd August, 1944. (Copy in Veress' collection)
88. Chiefs of Staff (Octagon) 4th Meeting
8th September, 1944
CAB 80/88

89. Chiefs of Staff (Octagon) 7th Meeting Enclosure to Annex I.
Note by the Prime Minister
10th September, 1944
90. Memorandum of an Interview with Admiral Horthy.
Research Department, Foreign Office
24th July, 1945. (Copy in Veress' collection)
91. Michael Williams to K. Helm
15th April, 1947
(SUBJECT: CONVERSATIONS WITH VERESS ABOUT
COMMUNIST RULE IN HUNGARY)
R 5260
FO 371 67173 127905
92. K. Helm, British political Mission, Budapest to M.S.
Williams, Foreign Office, London.
2nd May, 1947.
(SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO VERESS' COMMENTS ON
BRITISH POLICY TOWARDS HUNGARY)

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93. Henry Threlfall to Laura Veress. Letter. February 23, 1984.

(In Veress' collection)

94. John Coates to Laura Veress. Letter.
15th March, 1988; (In Veress' collection)
95. John Coates to Laura Veress. Letter.
4th April, 1988. (In Veress' collection)
96. John Coates to Laura Veress. Letter.
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Clear The Line 394

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Bibliography 395

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396 Clear The Line

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398 Clear The Line

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Index

ALLEN, W.D., First Secretary, Central Department, British Foreign Office, 189,195
ANTONESCU, ION, Rumanian Minister of Foreign Affairs. (Pro-German), 107,109,264, 183-184,198
BAJCSI-ZSILINSZKI,ENDRE,
Leader of Smallholder Party, 123,206,209
BARCZA, G., Former Hungarian Minister to the Court of St James, 121
BÁRDOSSY, LASZLO, Prime Minister, 1941-42, 52-56
BARRATT, REGINALD, RAF
Warrant Officer on secret mission to Budapest, 229-230
BETHLEN, ISTVAN, Count, Hungarian Prime Minister 1921-31 (Conservative views), 204,223,236
BÖHM, VILMOS, Hungarian translator at British Press Office in Stockholm, 84, 104,105
BOKOR, PÉTER, Hungarian journalist, 104
BOUGHEY, E.P.F., Lieutenant Colonel, SOE. Parachute mission to Hungary 1944, 228,229
CADOGAN, ALEXANDER, Sir,
British Under-Secretary of State, 89,163
CAMPBELL, R. Sir, British Ambassador in Lisbon, 89, 163
CHURCHILL, WINSTON, S. Sir, British Prime Minister.
Mediterranean strategy, 77, 111, 174,267.
Quebec Quadrant Conference, August, 1943, 124, 135 if.
Potsdam, 322.
Teheran Conference, November, 1943, 175-178.
Fulton speech, 325
COATES, JOHN, Captain. Parachute mission. 272-274
CSATAY, L. General, Hungarian Defence Minister, 1944, 133,200-201, 268
DAVIDSON, F.H.N., Major General, Director of Military Intelligence, British War Office
DUKE, Florimond, Colonel.

Parachute mission, 196-198 ECKHARDT, TIBOR, Head of Revision League, 164-166
EDEN, ANTHONY, Sir, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 139 ff., 163, 181, 196
EICHMANN, ADOLF, 227
FARAGHO, GABOR, General, Chief of Hungarian Gendarmerie, negotiated armistice in 1944, 271
GELLERT, ANDOR, representative of Revision League in Berlin, 81, 84
GERO, ERNO, Communist party chief, 356
GHICZY, JENO, Deputy Foreign Minister, later Foreign Minister 1942-43, 81, 155-156, 200-201, 205
GÖMBÖS, GYULA, right-wing Prime Minister 1932, 31
HALIFAX, Viscount, British Ambassador in Washington, 91
HARRISON, GEOFFREY, Sir, First Secretary, British Foreign Office, later Ambassador in Moscow, 379, 382
HEYDRICH, REINHARD, Gestapo leader assassinated by members of Czech underground, causing massacre of Lidice, 76,
HITLER, ADOLF, 108. Invasion of Hungary, 199 ff., 209 ff.
HLATKY, ANDRAS, Director of Hungarian Radio in 1944, 206
HORTHY, MIKLOS (NICHOLAS), Regent of Hungary, 18, 34, 199-201, 209 ff., 227, 275-277
HORTHY, MIKLOS (NICHOLAS), JR., son of Regent. Kidnapped by Gestapo, 276
HOWIE, CHARLES, Colonel. Secret mission to Budapest, September, 1943, 230. Mission to Allies to discuss Horthy's surrender offer, September 23, 1944, 269-270
IMREDEY, BELA, Prime Minister, 1938-39, 34, 37, 110, 223
JAGOW, J., von, German Minister (ambassador) in Hungary, 1944, 200
KADAR, GYULA (JULIUS), Head of Intelligence Department in Kállay cabinet, 121, 208, 223
KADAR JANOS, Hungarian Prime Minister following the suppression of the 1956 Revolution, 121, 358-360
KALLAY, MIKLOS (NICHOLAS), Hungarian Prime Minister, March 1942-March 1944. 56, 70 ff., 82, 85 ff., 95, 101-

102, 120, 127, 155, 203, 209 ff., 224-225, 290
KALTENBRUNNER, E., Nazi Security Chief, successor to
Heydrich, 122
KE RE S Z T ES - FISCHER, FERENC, Minister of the Interior,
1942, 81, 156, 223
KAROLYI, MIHALY, "The red count," leader of Party of
Independence: opened way for Communist takeover in 1919, 105
KERR, A.C., Sir, British Ambassador to Moscow, 91, 375
KETHLY, ANNA, Social Democratic Party leader, 123
KOVACS, BELA, Secretary General of Smallholder Party in 1947,
333
KNATCHBULL-HUGESSEN, Sir HUGH, British Ambassador to
Turkey, 147-150
LAKATOS, GEZA, Hungarian Prime Minister appointed on August
29, 1944 to replace pro-German Sztójay, 268
LÖCKHART, BRUCE, Head of British Political Warfare Ministry,
65, 90
MACARTNEY, CA, British historian, expert on Hungary. Broad-
casts to Hungary, 63-64, 254
MALETER, PAL, Hungarian military leader who joined the
Revolution in 1956, 358
MANIU, Rumania's Opposition leader, 124, 184, 264
MICHAEL, King of Rumania, 265
MIHAILOVIC, DRAZA, Yugoslav military leader, opponent of
Tito, 111
MIKLOS BELA, Hungarian Prime Minister, 1945, 321
MOLOTOV, V., Soviet Foreign Minister, 175
NADAY, ISTVAN, General, Mission to Allies, 1944, 269
NAGY, IMRE, 293. Hungarian
Prime Minister in 1953, 356-
357. Head of revolutionary
government in 1956, 357-359
NOBLE, ANDREW, Sir, later Ambassador in the Hague, 384
O'MALLEY, OWEN ST. CLAIR,
British Minister in Budapest; later British Ambassador to the Polish
refugee government in Stockholm, 84
PALFFY, General, 335
PALOCZI HORVATH, ADAM
(1760-1820), poet and collector of folk songs, 3

PALOCZI HORVATH, GEORGE

(Bobby) alias GEORGE

HOWARD, left-wing sympathiser working for British Intelligence. (No relation to Louis Pálóczi Horváth), 82, 96

PALOCZI HORVATH, LAJOS

(Louis), writer, publicist, worked for monitoring service of the Hungarian radio. Laura Veress' first husband and father of their daughter Dalma. 16-17, 298299, 301-305, 323, 355, 362

PARADI, JENŐ, 220-221

PERKINS, H.R., Lieutenant Colonel, Head of SOE Central European Section from June 1943, 166

PETER, GABOR, Communist Security Chief, 335

PEYER, ROLY, Social Democratic Party leader, 123

RAJK, LASZLO, Party Secretary of illegal Communist Party, September, 1944, 272. Executed in 1949, 354

RAKOSI, MATYAS, Secretary General of Hungarian Communist Party from 1948, 117, 134, 342, 354-357

ROBERTS, FRANK, Sir, Head of Central Department, British Foreign Office . Later Ambassador to Moscow and Bonn, 195, 178-180, 382

RUPERT, RAPHAEL, 229 **SAXE-COBURG, PHILIPPE**

JOSIAH, Prince, 288 ff.

SETON-WATSON, HUGH, Major, Oxford scholar, East European expert, 232, 256

SOMOGYI, MIKLOS, (Nicholas) labour leader, later president of National Trade Union Organization, 291, 299, 321-323

STALIN, JOSIF. Teheran Conference, November, 1943, 175-178. Death, 355

STERNDALE -BENNETT, British Councillor of Legation in Istanbul, 129-130

SZEGEDY-MASZAK, ALADAR,

Head of Hungarian Foreign Ministry Political Department, 81, 84, 128, 223

SZENTGYÖRGYI, ALBERT, Nobel prizewinner scientist, 84-85

SZENTMIKLOSSY, ANDOR, Head of Political Department of Hungarian Foreign Ministry, later Deputy Foreign Minister, 81, 223

SZOMBATHELYI, FERENC, Chief of Staff of Hungarian

Army, 86, 101, 120, 200-201, 212

403

SZTOJAY, DOME, Prime Minister, March 23, 1944, 209, 223, 227

TAKACS, LAJOS, mathematician, 363

TARJAN, GEORGE, Head of Hungarian and later also of Polish, Finnish, Czech and Slovak sections of BBC, 350-351, 360

TARJAN, REZSŐ, high-ranking Communist official in Hungary, brother of George Tarján, 350-351

TELEKI, GEZA, Count, Son of Prime Minister Paul Teleki, 271

TELEKI, PAL (Paul), Prime Minister in 1920 and 1939-41, 47-51

THRELFALL, HENRY, Colonel, Head of SOE Hungarian section, 171, 182, 195, 249-251

TILDY, ZOLTAN, leader of Smallholder Party, Hungarian President, 1946-48, 123, 327

TITO, MARSHALL, Yugoslav Communist leader, 111-114

TYLER, ROYALL, Financial Adviser to League of Nations, 121

UJVARI, DEZSO, Hungarian Consul-General in Istanbul, May, 1943, 110, 129, 148

ULLEIN-REVICZKY, ANTAL, Head of Press Department, 81, 86, 128, 166, 224

VEESENMAYER, EDMUND, German Minister and Reich Plenipotentiary in Hungary in 1944, 133, 205, 209, 223-224, 276

VERES, PÉTER, peasant leader, 291-292, 322

VERESS, LAJOS DALNOKI (Louis Veress de Dálnok), General, Commander of Hungary's Second Army in World War II, 27-28, 216, 237, 286, 329

VERESS, LASZLO DALNOKI (Leslie Veress de Dálnok), diplomat, 5-7, 17. Veress' "formula" for negotiating with Allies, 81, 86, 91ff., Mission to Lisbon, January, 1943, 91ff. Mission to Istanbul, March, 1943, 95. Mission to Istanbul, August, 1943, 128-152. Mission to Istanbul, February, 1944, 193-194. Escape to Bari, 236 ff. Return to Budapest, 327 ff.

VÖRNLE, JANOS, Hungarian Ambassador in Ankara. (Rightwing sympathizer), 110, 225

WALLENBERG, RAOUL, First Secretary of Swedish Legation in Budapest in July, 1944, 258-259

WODIANER, ANDOR, Hungarian Ambassador in Lisbon, 93, 163-64, 225

YOVANOVICH, ARSO, General, Croatian partisan leader, 242-244