

From the exhibition

Hungary in the Second World War

When Hitler, in December of 1940, approved plans for attacking the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa), this meant that Hungary had no choice. Yugoslavia, under German pressure, joined the Nazi allies, but the government that signed that agreement was then deposed by a putsch. The Germans immediately wanted to move into Yugoslavia, but Prime Minister Pál Teleki had signed a "Treaty of Eternal Friendship" with that country. Nonetheless, on the night of April 3, 1941, he chose suicide rather than break the treaty, and his successor had no such scruples to deal with: Hungarian troops took part in the occupation of Yugoslavia. Hungary's entry into hostilities was "justified" by the "Soviet" bombing of Kassa – this later turned out to have been a mere provocation. Because Hungarian forces moved into the Soviet Union with the Germans, Hungary soon found itself in a military conflict not only with the USSR but with England and the United States as well. During this time, a new Jewish Law was passed – a race-based one this time. Furthermore, the Hungarian Army, in "answer" to partisan actions, killed nearly four thousand people in the Újvidék region. It was only under Prime Minister Miklós Kállay, who sought to keep a greater distance from the Germans, that the guilty parties were brought before a military tribunal.

After the Battle of Stalingrad, the Hungarian Army was nearing its end, with the Second Army, dispatched to the front, suffering a huge defeat in Voronyezh. On September 9, 1943, the Allies presented a preliminary plan for a cease-fire agreement in which they demanded that Hungary break with the Germans and withdraw its troops from the Soviet Union. The Germans, catching wind of these plans, occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944, appointing Döme Sztójay, loyal to the Germans, Prime Minister and arresting the leading opposition politicians. This was the beginning of intense persecution of Hungarian Jews: a series of Jewish regulations was passed; they were forced into ghettos. Later, in May and June, all Jews except those in Budapest were deported to concentration camps outside the country's borders.

On July 6, Miklós Horthy, responding to strong international protest, and with the evidence of Auschwitz register books in his possession, stopped these deportations.

The German occupation, though, had other consequences. Not only were the troops not brought home, but the First Army was also sent into action, resulting in even greater casualties. August 29, 1944 was the date when the Lakatos administration formulated the goal of exiting the war. This was all in vain though, as the Germans were informed of everything – and at the end of September, the Soviets crossed Hungary's Trianon border. On October 11, Hungary signed the preliminary armistice with the Soviets, and on the 15th of that month, Miklós Horthy announced he was exiting the war. The Germans, in response, captured Horthy's son, occupied strategic points in Budapest, and compelled the Regent to appoint Ferenc Szálasi as Prime Minister.

Szálasi immediately ordered a complete mobilization and launched into an enormous campaign of terror. Arrow-Cross units shot mass numbers of Jews into the Danube. The leaders of the most important organization of the weak Hungarian resistance (the Liberation Council of the Hungarian National Uprising) were arrested, and most of them executed.

The victorious Soviets, still on the march, carried out three waves of attacks in the Carpathian Basin: in Transylvania in September of 1944; then in Southern Transdanubia in November, down to a line with Lake Balaton, as well as the region lying between the Danube and Tisza rivers. By Christmas of 1944, they had encircled Budapest as well.

The city's German command refused the call to surrender; the third wave of Soviet attacks took place after the occupation of Budapest, a response to the Germans who used great military force in an attempt to recapture the Danube line and secure the oilfields around Zala. The Soviets' counterattack was successful: the territory of Hungary was liberated by April 4. More than 40% of the country's national wealth was destroyed, hundreds of thousands of Hungarian Jews were killed, and hundreds of thousands of others died senselessly, both on the front and as civilians. Hungary's tragedy was not merely being on the losing side once again, but that the revisionist obsession took such hold in circles of power that they were capable of fighting on the Nazi side, sacrificing Hungarian Jewry and the lives of several thousand of the country's soldiers, then found themselves, at the end of it all, unable to exit a losing battle. Hungary's war losses number some 8-900,000, of which a large number (600,000) were Hungary's Jews.

Újpest in the II World War

World War II as in all the countries that were involved in it, made radical changes in the life of Hungary as well.

The laws against the Jewish community (established between 1938 and 1941) effected both the capital and the countryside, and in Budapest there were some places where the population contained more Jewish people than at other places. One of them was Újpest. Though important jobs and social establishments were wound up by prohibiting Jews from work, between 1941 and 1943 – when Hungary did not know the real horrors of the war – to be in alliance with the Germans had seemed to carry positive consequences, such as increased the economy, no unemployment.

The turning point was after the lose of the II Hungarian Army on the eastern battle front between 1942 and 1943 when people of Hungary started to see the real seriousness of the war. On the 19th of March, 1944 the Germans finally took over the country, which, though completely disarranged the life of Budapest, was unexpectedly easy and fast: there were no meaningful resistance.

The new government treated the case of eliminating Jewish people from the society as its main problem. The deportation of Jews from the suburb had been continued for a couple of days after Horthy Miklós denied the action on the July of 1944 by international demand. The supply of food products of the population was totally controlled by the governments according to the radical social situation. They used tickets called „purchase books” and tried to limit the consumption as a solution to the public supply. It caused a big division in the society as they made differences between how many tickets can children, elders, people with illness and hard physical workers get.

As the war was going forward, around the end of 1944, the situation in Budapest became harder and all the fortified lines around the city became important. One of them involved Újpest as its main point. But even they tried their bests on the 16th of October 1944 the Hungarian nationalist party called „Nyilasok” took over the government from the inside in an alliance with the Germans – though they couldn't stay in power for a long time.

They built up a new military system based army, which gave 190 000 Hungarian soldiers to the German forces, and if had needed, would have handed them all the male population between 10 and 70 years old. The young ones were called „Leventék”. There were people like them in Újpest who from the 1st of November 1944 were used in the military as workers on the fortified lines and as security for some factories in southern Budapest. From every establishment like the „Leventék” some people made it to a higher form of military service which were used in more important action of the government.

Some student banches that were against the government were working on their way and Görgey battalions and planned to start revolution in Budapest. These battalions had units in Újpest too.

During these actions the forces of the Sovjet Union were heading to Budapest destroying the resistance and by Christmas of 1944 they reached Újpest. It was daytime, and the city was preparing to the night and did not expect anything unusual, than the first Sovjet tanks rolled into the city frightened everyone, destroyed buildings and caused surprise. The Sovjet Army was coming so on the 9th of January the Germans evacuated Újpest. One day later Újpest fell. By the end of the month the whole city fell, and for the people of Újpest the war came to an end.

The national property of Újpest suffer a lot between 1944 and 1945. There were several bomb attacks and the bridge of Újpest was almost destroyed too by an American bomb attack. When the German army moved out of the country thex exploded the whole bridge which after the war was rebuilt using some parts that remain useable from the bridge. 4 people died in the reconstruction, whose names are saved on a memorial board .

Raoul Wallenberg

Raoul Wallenberg was born in Lidingö (near Stockholm, Sweden) on 4th August 1912. His father, Raoul Oscar Wallenberg died of cancer three month before his son was born.

In 1931, Wallenberg went to study architecture in the United States at the University of Michigan. In college, he learned to speak English, German and French.

When he finished the University, he returned to Sweden, but he was unable to find a job as an architect.

Between 1935 and 1936, he was employed in a minor position at a branch office of the Holland Bank in Haifa. He returned to Sweden in 1936 and got a job with the help of his uncle, Jacob Wallenberg, at the Central European Trading Company, a trading company with only five employees. The firm was owned by Kálmán Lauer, a Hungarian Jewish emigré. When the outbreak of war barred Lauer from certain areas of Europe, Wallenberg travelled as his representative. Within a year, Wallenberg was a joint owner and the international director of the company.

Inspired by the tale of the Scarlet Pimpernel, he worked to save the lives of Hungarian Jews in the later stages of World War II by issuing them protective passports from the Swedish embassy. These documents indentified the bearers as Swedish nationals awaiting repatriation. It is impossible to determine exactly how many Jews were rescued by his actions, but Yad Vashem credits him with saving 15.000 lives.

On March 8, 1945, the Soviet-controlled Hungarian radio announced that Raoul Wallenberg had been murdered on his way to Debrecen, probably by Hungarian Nazis or Gestapo agents.

This created a certain passiveness with the Swedish government. Foreign Minister Östen Undén and Sweden's ambassador in the Soviet Union presumed that Wallenberg was dead. In most places, however, the radio message wasn't taken seriously.

In World War II

(A student in KKG writes about his great-grandfather)

At the beginning of World War II my great-grandfather agreed with Germany. He believed that Germany would win. He was a correspondent in the war and he was very ambitious. His aim was the „perfect report”. He was too honest and he couldn't lie.

He went to the first line and wanted to see everything with his own eyes. The Hungarian government sent a lot of clothes and food to the Hungarian soldiers but the German soldiers stole these things. Everybody who was in the first line with him died he was the only one who survived. He became a prisoner and he suddenly realised that Germany couldn't win the war. He had a lot of time to think. He realised if Hitler won the war Hungary would lose.

When he left Hungary he was 67 kilos. He caught spotted disease. This illness was the most dangerous one in the prison. Many of the people died because of it. He lost weight, he was 32 kilos. The major in Makó got my great-grandfather's name gravated on the heroes' monument of the city.

However my great-grandfather was alive. Only his wife couldn't believe that he had died. And what happened after that is unbelievable. My great-grandfather returned home on Christmas Eve in 1947. After that he became a journalist and he wrote his book which is based on his life experience.

I'm very proud of being his great-grandson, and I'm happy because I met him personally when I was a little boy.

His name is still on the heroes' monument in Makó. If you go there you can see with your own eyes.

Mihály Babits

(pronounced: Mihaai Babich)

Mihály Babits (November 26, 1883 in Szekszárd- August 4, 1941 in Budapest) was a Hungarian poet, writer and translator.

He studied at the University of Budapest from 1901 to 1905, where he met Dezső Kosztolányi and Gyula Juhász. He worked to become a teacher and taught at schools in Baja (1905-1906), Szeged (1906-1908) Fogaras (1908-1911), Újpest (1911), and Budapest (1912-1918).

His reputation for his poems in the literary life started in 1908.

He made a trip in Italy in the same year, which made him interested in Dante; he made several other trips in the subsequent years. This experience led him to translate Dante's The Divine Comedy (Hell, 1913, Purgatory, 1920, and Paradise, 1923).

Briefly after the revolution in 1918, became a professor of world literature and modern Hungarian literature at University of Budapest, but was soon removed for his pacifism after the revolutionary government fell.

In 1911, he became permanent contributor of Nyugat.

In 1921 married Ilona Tanner, who later published poetry under the name Sophie Török.

In 1923, he moved to Esztergom. In 1927, he became a member of the Kisfaludy Társaság (Kisfaludy Society) and in the same year he was made the curator of Baumgarten Prize.

He became the editor in chief of Nyugat in 1929 (until 1933 along with Zsigmond Móricz) and held this respectable position until his death.

In 1937, he was diagnosed as having cancer of the larynx.

Work

He is most well-known for lyric poetry influenced by Classical and English forms. He also wrote essays and did many translations from English, French, German, Greek, Italian, and Latin.

Interview with Alajos Paulus

- Pesti László, Pesti... I don't remember his first name. In distress the Nyilas Party gave instructions to people that they had to join the forces – they had just graduated, they were called: Leventék. Then they were collected and taken to Germany. They had to do 5-year military service. After that it was clear that Hungary would lose the war. Pesti – unfortunately I don't know his first name – organised a Red Cross rescue party. First it was organised to help the other parties in case something happened. Secondly to help people avoid joining the army. We got valid identity cards, armbands and we stood in the school in Lőrincz Street, and if something had happened there, we would have collected the casualties, given them first-aid and taken them into hospital. Ujpest fell without a fight.

- *Which direction did they come from?*

- They came from Dunakeszi and the guards – Hungarian and German – collected people throughout the area.

One night the Nyilas Party came to our house, they searched the house. I was taken to the Ferenci barrack with my parents, after a few days I was sacked.

They said first, „we will check up everything and we have the right to collecting and search the houses.” After that we were put on lorries, taken here and there before the Margit Bridge

was blown up. And I can remember we were very afraid and I wanted some of the bridges to be exploded because we did not know what was coming.

The two people sitting next to me were my mother and my father. We were taken to Redeczki barrack we were questioned about who we had worked with and where.

To tell you the truth we had to clean the floor and slot, but we were never hit.

In 1956 I was a secretary of an organisation which was against the Kadar cabinet. As I was a secretary my house was searched again. I was taken to Kistarcsa and then to another place. It did not take a few days it took five months. I am one of the people whose houses were totally searched and who were taken to prison.

The truth is that the war could have been finished in an easier way. In my opinion it led to an unfair ending of the war.

It was not only Trianon where the Germans were let down, it happened in Versailles too.

Everything was in a mess so Hitler had to come who said that he would make order and help them.

In my opinion if that unfair peace treaty had not happened – which followed World War I – Hitler could not have seized control.

Hungary was in a difficult situation, it was deprived 2/3 of its territory, it lost most of its population, they were treated badly, and everybody was concerned about the mentality of the revision trying to solve the problem peacefully.

Then we got to the arbitration of Vienna, where Germany and Italy annexed a part of Felvidek to Hungary, with the implicit acknowledgement of the Western Powers. And then came the Second Judgement of Vienna, where a part of Erdely were annexed.

In 1945-1946 a peace treaty was forced, that Bohemia got a chance to drive out every German from the country. It happened just like the deportation of the Hungarians from Felvidek. The Behes decree said that all the Hungarians were war-criminals.

Education, usage of the Hungarian language, health service and a lot of rights were withdrawn. Above all a lot of Hungarians were captured in the middle of the night and they had half an hour to leave their homes and pack a 50-kilo bag in Felvidek.

They had to leave the furniture and animal in their houses. They were taken to tracks and were driven to Czeh Basin to work on farms. They were selected, according to physical condition. It was similar to a slave market.

I had Jew classmates with whom we lived in peace. One day, men from the Nyilas Party came, and they were taken away.

-How many students were in your class?

-Two classes were together, so the number of the students was high. At the beginning there were 40 students, in class 5th there were 30 students. When we graduated, I had only 20 classmates.

-When did you take the final exam?

-In 1944.

-So after World War II.

-Yes. Not in this building, this was a field-hospital. I graduated in the Fa- es Femipari High School.

-Was this school already a field-hospital in 1944?

-Yes it was already a hospital. We went to this girls' school, to Kanizsa High School.

-Did it become a hospital because of the war?

-Yes, for the wounded. We finished school in this girls' school with girls by turns, we studied in the evening, they got the afternoons.

-How many students went to that school?

-About 30.

-And how many classes were there?

-I don't know exactly, girls and boys were separated.

Mrs. Brachmann's diary (Her remembrance)

Interview with Árpád Sunyál

How old were you during World War II?

The War lasted 6 years I was a soldier for 4 years from the age of 21 to 25.

Where did you live?

When I was 21 years old I was sent to Transylvania as a soldier, I returned home(Pest)4 years later.During this time I was in Paks and Dunapataj.When I was 24 years old I participated in a battle in Paks.There I was captured by the Russians.It lasted only 4 days.I participated only in one battle,in Transdanubia.

What was your duty as a soldier?

At first I was a ganner, later I became a mortar, so I could fire faster, and cannons were too complicated. After the rout of Sztálingräd I predicted the victory over the Germans. Because of this statement I was nearly punished. I said that I didn't wish it but it would happen.

What were the conditions? Food, accomodation etc?

We lived in barracks and sometimes in houses at families, in Transylvania and Transdanubia. When we set off to Paks I saw that at Balaton there were serious reinforcements (here was one

of the German protective line).When Paks fell I said that I wouldn't fight any more because it would be favourable only for the Germans.At that time Hungary was lost,for the Germans.

Did you keep in touch with your family?

I didn't keep in touch with them during the siege of Paks when the Russians signed up,but later we succeeded to do it again.

Have you ever seen,that the Jews were dragged away?

I met some Jewish captives in Paks.They were digging trenches in the same place where we were.Once I saw that the Jews were pursued into wagons.It was horrible.There were a lot of people from Budapest among them I know that only few people arrived home,maybe 7 or 8 people survived the Holocaust.When I was in Russian captivity I was treated well.We stayed with families.

Was it the imprisonment at families?

Yes,they chose somebody,who was responsible for the others.If one of these people escaped he would be responsible for it.Of course,nobody escaped.Later at Dunapataj we managed to escape.I was in captivity for 4 days.Fortunately,during this time nothing special happened.Paks and ist neighbourhood was a good wine-growing region.A lot of Russian soldiers got drunk and then got into a trouble.One day before of imprisonment the commander said that we would fight.By that time the Russians had already surrounded the city.The people who didn't want to fight had to stand aside.Then I said that there were only 50 of us,so it was impossible to protect the city,it would demont hundreds and hundreds people to protect it.So,we were captured.I saw when the Russians escarted the prisoners through the city.I saw unbelievable amount of cannons and mortars,so we weren't able to fight against them.

Otherwise,I hate it being a soldier,but I had to do it.I was demobilized as a sergeant.

I went home from Paks to Pest on 10th April 1945 when my father told me that it was safe.Some people were taken to „malenkij robot“ from Paks.

What happened in Paks?

Between 5th in 1944 and April 1945 we stayed in Paks and Dunapataj.If somebody wasn't a local inhabitant,he had to apply,otherwise his hoot would be punished too.So we were commuting between Paks and Dunapataj across the Danube.

I was in Dunapataj when 2 young men from Budapest tried to find some food and other things.I asked them about Angyalföld where we lived.They said that it hadn't been bombed,there weren't any problems.I asked them to take a letter to my

parents. So, they gave it to my parents. Next time when they came to Paks, my father joined them. We were very happy when we met again. My younger brother was a soldier, too. They wanted to take him to Germany. The Russian cannons and the carriage which was carrying their clothes and all of their things turned back to Budapest at Tatabánya. My brother was running after it because all of his things were there. He climbed up and came back to Budapest. But there was a bridge which they didn't dare to go over because they were afraid. So, they went to Margaret Island by boat, from there they went to Budapest by another boat. At Christmas he arrived home. My father was so happy that he began to cry.

And what did you do during the socialism?

I was an official worker. I was fired because I was against the union of the social democrat and the communist parties. I didn't have another choice than to learn and get a trade. When I was a welder, I wasn't interested in politics.

Was there anybody in your family who was taken away or punished?

One of my father's cousins was taken to the 60th of Andrassy Avenue because he hid relative (who was a Hungarian Nazi). He saw that a bishop was so assaulted that he was able to go back to his cell just on all fours. Finally, he got away. At that time the people who were members of the Arrow Cross Party before became the most enthusiastic communists. There were a lot of them.

Interview with Aunt Gizi

At 10 o'clock in the morning the American planes were coming and at 8 o'clock in the evening Soviet planes were coming as well. At that time we liked rainy weather. If it was raining, they weren't able to come. It was a very good thing for us. So how to tell... there were more and more attacks so the school was closed. It was very dangerous and scary so the Hungarian government decided that children under the age 14 were taken to the country. That is where we spent our summer until 18 September. After that we came home.

One of our neighbours told us that it was really good that we had not come home, because earlier a bomb had exploded so the explosion had caused a big damage. Once we went to the cellar there was a very big noise. I was with my mum downstairs. When the alert was over she told me she would go upstairs. The sun was shining. In our neighbourhood in Vaci Street there was a

big factory and it had been destroyed, while we were downstairs. My father told us not to stay here because it was very dangerous. We were in a building with a lot of people. Some of them went out to smoke.

Once somebody was knocking at the door, and said everything was over. So we let them in. A grandmother showed up with her grandchildren. This district had been almost totally destroyed. After that the alert was over. The cellar door was open. I loved playing with dools so I had a favourite one but it had been destroyed as well. Only a few things survived the bomb attack. One of my classmates who lived near Pest stepped on a mine and he died.

I could only eat bread in March 1945. We went to Kondoros . It took a week to get there. The conditions were inhuman. We had a relative who was an interpreter at the Russian headquarters. He was from Transylvania and he could give us some bread because he could hide some bread in his pocket.

And then we did not think about what he had in his pocket. There could be a handkerchief or some lice as well. We did not mind it, we accepted everything with a smile.

There was no water in the taps. The main tap was at the station. So we went there to fetch some water. Some people were rolling barrels. It was clear that these barrels were from the army. The trains were stuck in the mud and people robbed the trains.

The Russian soldiers were walking around. We gave them water. We had to taste it first. They did not hurt anybody. My little dog was killed. One day we were in the cellar and three Russian soldiers came and my grandfather went up and they tortured him. Two of them came down and one of them stayed with my grandfather. The one who came down searched the cellar. They wanted to find something valuable. And finally they did not find anything. One of them said „let's go!“ We thought everything would be good if it ended well. Fortunately they left the cellar.