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7 Apr. 80

Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

Berlingske Tidende, Copenhagen, 9 March 1980

WALLENBERG HEARING IN STOCKHOLM IN MAY

Among the many foreign witnesses summoned to the coming Wallenberg Hearing in Stockholm on 2 and 3 May there is a Dane, the ex-Communist and author Hogens Carlsson, who during four years' stay in Soviet prisons and prison camps heard testimony about the vanished Swedish diplomat. During the war Hogens Carlsson fought in a Communist resistance group. He applied for a visa to the Soviet Union several times through the years after 1945, but was turned down. In youthful zeal he travelled to Finland in September 1950 and sneaked illegally across the Finnish-Russian border. He wanted to see with his own eyes how conditions were in the "promised socialist society" that he had heard so much about during his youth. Carlsson, who knew his Karl Marx, Lenin, and Hegel by heart, tried in vain to persuade the Soviet authorities that he was a Communist and not a spy. But nobody wanted to listen to him. The sentence was 28 years' prison for illegal border crossing - and espionage. Carlsson served four years before he was released by Malenkov's amnesty after Stalin's death on 5 May 1953. Sick and broken down by scurvy and undernourishment after several years in the northernmost Siberian prison camps, Hogens Carlsson came to West Berlin on the afternoon of 3 November 1953, alive, but totally bereft of his youthful illusions about Communism and the Soviet society. Here Hogens Carlsson tells Berlingske Tidende about his stay in Soviet prisons and meeting prisoners in Moscow's Butyrka Prison who had been in contact with the vanished Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg.

ON THE TRACKS OF WALLENBERG

When the Soviet troops swarmed in over Hungary in the winter of 1945, thousands of people disappeared. Soviet NKVD cadres which followed on the heels of the Red Army's vanguard had prepared lists of suspect persons. The most notorious corps under NKVD was SMERSH (the initials mean "Death to the Spies"), who was the most active. The chief of SMERSH was General V. S. Abakumov, who was later executed together with the chief of NKVD, Lavrentiy Beria, in 1953.

In order to be able to work in Budapest, the Swedish emissary, Raoul Wallenberg, and his chauffeur, Wilmo Langfelder, had contacted the Soviet Supreme Command. On his last day in Budapest, 17 January 1945, Wallenberg told friends and acquaintances that he was going to Debrechen outside Budapest and meet Marshal Malinowski in his headquarters.

Wallenberg and Langfelder never reached Debrechen. Wallenberg later told co-prisoners in Butyrka Prison that the Red Army's soldiers had been understanding, but that they did not have the authority to issue documents to him so he could continue his humanitarian relief work. Only the NKVD could do that. At that time the NKVD arrested everybody who came close to the orders, "If only you have the man, you can probably find a law according to which he can be sentenced."

Both Wallenberg and Langfelder were arrested, and after having been confined to a basement in a local headquarters, they were sent by train through Romania and ended up in the Lubyanka Prison in Moscow in the latter part of January. Here Wallenberg's and Langfelder's ways parted.

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The NKVD's Norms

When you are going to evaluate the Russians' behavior, you must know a little about the Communist way of thinking and terminology. They do not acknowledge Western humanistic and ethical norms, but view matters in a purely materialistic way. In other words, the NKVD assumes that Wallenberg's activities have been inspired by political or economic motives. The fact that Wallenberg also was a Red Cross emissary did not improve matters any, and the additional fact that he at the same time had good connections with both the police and politicians in Hungary was in the eyes of the NKVD nothing less than incriminating.

Through a freak of chance I myself was whirled into an inferno of events which almost cost me my life several times. Like all the former generals, officers, and diplomats whom the NKVD had arrested in Eastern Europe, I too was brought to Moscow. Here we ended up in either the notorious NKVD (later renamed KGB) headquarters or were brought to a camp in Krasnogorsk outside Moscow. The NKVD's first sorting started here. Foreign prisoners, and among them of course Raoul Wallenberg too, were informed that they would be treated according to international rules and law. But that was a promise that the NKVD had never intended to fulfill. It was a bitter awakening when we finally understood that.

Wallenberg in Moscow

We know from the German Attache Gustaf Richter that Wallenberg arrived in Moscow on 31 January 1945 and was locked up in Lyubyanka Prison. It was in cell No. 123 that he met Gustaf Richter. The prisoners lived totally isolated from the rest of the world in so-called "political isolators."

The two first prisoners I met in cell No. 304 in Butyrka Prison, Zoltan Rivo and Wilhelm Bergemann, were in their seventh year of imprisonment. This was in 1950. They had no idea that World War II had ended nor that Eastern Europe now consisted of communist countries. They did not even know that Mao Tse Tung had seized power in China on 1 October 1949. The meeting with the two men in the "isolator" was shocking, to put it mildly. I felt as if I were buried alive. Both looked like mummies, grayish-white skin and undernourished. Zoltan Rivo was a language professor and came from Budapest. Wilhelm Bergemann said that he had been a German passport inspector in Bukarest. Rivo was in his thirties, Bergemann 65. They had been arrested by the NKVD in 1944. Rivo told me that both he and Bergemann had been in Lefortovo Prison in Moscow until 1 April 1949.

Communication Through Wall Tapping

It is known from official Swedish documents and white books about Wallenberg that he left Lyubyanka Prison in mid-May 1945 and then was transferred to Lefortovo Prison, where Bergemann communicated with him through wall tapping. They did not learn much though. The tapping system was complicated and time-consuming and exceedingly dangerous. If you were caught, the whole cell was punished by being placed in deep, ice-cold basement cells under the prison dressed only in underwear for periods lasting from five to twenty-five days. The bread rations were reduced to 300 grams daily, and the prisoner got half a liter of warm soup every third day only. I myself have been placed in these underground iceboxes twice and know that incarceration here of starving and weak prisoners was tantamount to a death sentence.

According to Rivo, conditions in Lefortovo Prison were terrible during the years right after the war. The daily rations consisted of approximately 450 grams pasty bread, nine grams of sugar, and half a liter of soup that filled the cell with a nauseating stench. The foreigners died like flies, even so fast that the NKVD did not always get around to interrogating them. Some of them were transferred to Butyrski Prison where there was a so-called hospital section. The everlasting nightly interrogations tapped the prisoners' strength. In addition there was the poor food and lack of sleep which broke down the prisoner's mental health and made him sluggish and indifferent to his surroundings. And it was exactly this condition of the prisoner that the interrogators aimed at.

False Death Announcement

Raoul Wallenberg, who belonged to a well-to-do Swedish family, is the person who was caused the NKVD and the Soviet government most trouble. During the years after his disappearance one note followed the other one between Stockholm and Moscow. At first the Russians denied any knowledge of Wallenberg, but were later forced by the many statements of evidence to admit that he was in the Soviet Union. It was said that he was "under protection and was well." On 6 February 1957 the Swedes received a memorandum from Gromyko with an announcement that they had found a handwritten document in the file section for hospitalized prisoners in Lubyanka Prison that showed that Wallenberg had died from a heart attack on 17 July 1947. Only few believed Gromyko's announcement since there was testimony from released prisoners that Wallenberg had been seen alive after that time. The notorious General V. S. Abakumov was officially blamed for all the incorrect information to Sweden. There was a new flood of testimony when amnestied prisoners returned from the Soviet Union during the years of 1953-1955 after Stalin's death.

Got Preferential Treatment

Zoltan Rivo mentioned to me that Wallenberg was accused by the NKVD of espionage in Hungary, which may very well have been connected with his work to rescue the Jews in Budapest. The NKVD was very anti-Semitic in 1944, which in a way is ironic when you consider that the Soviet State Security Service (GPU, MVD, NKVD, and KGB) has had no less than six chiefs of Jewish descent during the years.

Zoltan Rivo had shared a cell with Wallenberg around New Year 1951. The Swede had been getting preferential treatment then, meaning that he received cigarettes, got better food, and had the right to rest a couple of hours every day. Wallenberg said that he had been subjected to tough interrogations, but otherwise he seemed to be fairly well. Rivo did not mention Wallenberg's name, but called him a Swedish diplomat. One day the Swede was brought from the cell to a bathroom where he was shaved with a knife and dressed in a new suit. Such a thing was definitely not common in Butyrki. The next day he was sent away.

In 1950 I myself knew nothing about the Wallenberg case which I didn't hear about until I got out of "Gulag." After my return home, I realized that "the Swedish diplomat" could only be Wallenberg, and I was interviewed by the Swedish press. My co-prisoner,

Wilhelm Bergemann, with whom I parted on 15 April 1951 when I was led to a prison camp, also gave me information. I know nothing about Zoltan Rivo's fate. We were separated from each other on 25 April 1951. He was in a miserable condition then, and I fear that he did not manage to survive the amnesty on 27 March 1953.

In Vladimir Prison

Wallenberg's tracks lead from Moscow to the prison in Vladimir, 350 kilometers east of Moscow. Foreign prisoners who have returned relate that Wallenberg had been hospitalized in the prison's sick ward. A German named Mulle came to the prison in the spring of 1956, and here he met a Georgian named Gogeridze. This man told Mulle that Wallenberg was in a special sick ward. He did not know whether he was sick or just isolated. An Austrian confirmed Gogeridze's report later. Around January-February 1955 the Austrian was placed in a sick ward, and after an operation he met Wallenberg who said that he had been strictly isolated in Vladimir Prison for years. It is known from white books and testimony that the same has happened to a number of the prisoners who have shared cells with Wallenberg and his chauffeur Wilmo Langfelder during the years. When the political officer in Vladimir discovered that the Austrian had shared a cell with Wallenberg, he got furious. The Austrian was immediately moved to another cell and threatened to keep silent about his co-prisoner. Wallenberg had, however, managed to relate his sad fate during the brief time they were together, and this seems to be the last concrete testimony that is known.

Summoned to Khrushchev

Later evidence is based on such vaguer information and is mixed with false testimony by people who have been revealed later to be KGB agents. I am afraid that Wallenberg's long odyssey through prisons, "isolators," and prison camps finally has ended with confinement to a mental institution. On 27 January 1961 the Swedish Professor Hanna Svartz had a conversation with a Russian colleague in Moscow. The Russian scientist admitted then that he knew Wallenberg, who was alive but in a very poor condition in a mental hospital. However, this statement was later denied, but under circumstances that shake the denial more than the information about Wallenberg. The Russian professor was summoned to Khrushchev who had been informed of his statement to Hanna Svartz by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After his conversation with Khrushchev, the Russian professor retracted his words and said that he knew nothing about Wallenberg.

Witnesses have been summoned from both Europe and other places to the international hearing about Raoul Wallenberg, which will start in "Folkets Hus" (the People's House) in Stockholm on 2 May this year. As long as there is just a spark of hope that Raoul Wallenberg is alive, people in the West must support the efforts to rescue the person who valued humanitarianism more than anything else - even his own life.