

Sweden's Betrayal of Raoul Wallenberg  
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**It is now 70 years since Raoul Wallenberg was taken prisoner by the Soviet military in Budapest at the end of the Second World War. By the time he was apprehended, he had managed to save thousands of Hungarian Jews from the Holocaust, with the help of Swedish protective papers, daring, and courage.**

**Author and Wallenberg-biographer Ingrid Carlberg describes his last few hours as a free man as well as the morass of Soviet lies and shocking Swedish betrayals that followed.**

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He returns on the morning of 17 January 1945. Four days have gone by since the Red army reached eastern Budapest and his car is under escort by three Soviet officers on a motorcycle. They park outside his most recent residence, the magnificent villa that houses the International Red Cross.

Raoul Wallenberg steps out of the car.

He is in excellent spirits and engages in his usual witty banter. Those who encounter him during this quick stop on Benczur street assume that his conversations with the leaders of the Soviet forces east of the City Park must have gone well.

He is not driving the car himself. At the wheel on this particular day, as on so many others, is Wallenberg's driver and translator, the engineer Vilmos Langfelder. Langfelder is one of the thousands of Jews who has been saved from the Nazis with the help of Wallenberg's Swedish "schutzspass" or protective passports. He is one of the many who in gratitude have volunteered to assist in the Swedish rescue operation. He is 32 years old and therefore the same age as his Swedish employer.

The bitter winter has a firm grip on wartime Budapest, the streets are icy and treacherous. For now things have gone well, but Raoul Wallenberg is preparing for a longer journey. He has only returned in order to collect his belongings.

He tells his Red Cross colleagues that the Soviet military have been cooperative. They have promised to bring him to their highest commanding officer, general Malinovsky who is in the city of Debrecen in eastern Hungary.

The Red Cross staff recognize one of the officers in the escort, a major Demchenko, from a dinner the past Saturday night. That was when the Red Army finally reached the City Park and began the liberation of Budapest, on 13 January. It was then, when the first Soviet soldiers came running along Benczur street, that Wallenberg

introduced himself and asked to speak with the person in charge. That turned out to be major Demchenko.

They recalled how pleasant Demchenko had been and how respectfully he treated the Swedish diplomat. That evening they shared a meal together. Wallenberg and Demchenko each held a short, courteous speech.

The following day they left for the Soviet camp.

This initial friendliness appears to have continued. Perhaps it can be explained by the fact that Sweden's ambassador to Moscow had recently written to the Soviet Foreign Ministry and asked them to extend their protection to the Swedish diplomats who were still in Budapest. For the Red Army's headquarters in Moscow had immediately telegraphed this order to their troops. As a precaution, it spelled out the names of the ten Swedes who were to be protected.

The list naturally included deputy secretary Raoul Wallenberg. A soothing telegram in reply was already on its way back to Sweden from Moscow: *your Wallenberg has been found and taken into custody.*

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He had arrived in Budapest half a year earlier, on 9 July. A series of factors led to Raoul Wallenberg's hasty selection for the assignment with the impressive diplomatic title: deputy secretary at the Swedish Embassy. In a way, it was rather remarkable. The thirty-two-year-old Raoul Wallenberg was neither a diplomat nor experienced aid worker. He was a businessman in the grocery import industry.

The initiative for the rescue mission of the Hungarian Jews came from the American government. During the spring, German troops had marched into Hungary and, in a final act of chilling evil, enacted the most extensive mass deportation of the Second World War. In seven weeks over 400 000 Hungarian Jews were transported to Auschwitz, the vast majority directly to the gas chambers.

The situation was precarious and this spring of 1944 the American government was finally stirred from its paralysis regarding the unfolding Holocaust. Now the United States formed the War Refugee Board. In the case of Hungary, the US wanted to act quickly but as a warring nation had limited options. Could the neutral country of Sweden contemplate unofficial cooperation on a rescue mission? If the Americans were to foot the bill, could Sweden, who had diplomats in place, send additional personnel in order to administer such an operation? And if so, who should be selected?

Clearly the fact that Raoul Wallenberg had been employed at a Swedish-Hungarian import company and that he had been to Budapest several times was significant. But

the most decisive factor in his selection for the assignment was probably due to the fact that his employer had offices located in the same building as the American Embassy in Stockholm.

Whatever the reasons, he did not hesitate.

At first the intention was that Raoul Wallenberg should only stay for two months, build up the structure for the rescue operation and then leave again. For a long time things looked to turn out this way, especially after the Hungarian regent Miklós Horthy managed to halt the mass deportations shortly before Wallenberg's arrival. But hell returned. After the October coup, when the Hungarian Nazis (the Arrow Cross) assumed power, Raoul Wallenberg shelved all plans for his departure. A bloody terror-filled anarchy broke out in Budapest. The deportations resumed and people were indiscriminately executed in the streets.

The last few dark months leading up to January were a bitter struggle for Wallenberg and the 350 staff who by the end were part of his extensive organization. By that point the Wallenberg mission had long since outgrown the Swedish Embassy and spilled into a separate annex with its own offices. But the collaboration with Ambassador Ivan Danielsson and his deputy Per Anger had continued to work well.

Tens of thousands of Jews were still cohabiting relatively well in the separate "international ghetto" that the diplomats of the neutral countries had negotiated. These Jews escaped the starvation of the central ghetto and the protective papers of the neutral nations still presented them with a certain amount of protection on the streets. But the questions persisted: could they manage to hold out until the Red Army, the USA's allied partner to the east, arrived? Why was liberation taking so long?

Raoul Wallenberg was not the only neutral diplomat who longed for the Russians. When the Red Army finally within reach, Wallenberg asked some of his coworkers to develop a plan, in part to save the increasingly vulnerable central ghetto in Budapest and in part to reconstruct Hungary after the war. He intended to present it to the Soviet military leaders as soon as the first troops arrived.

He planned to suggest a cooperative effort.

During Christmas of 1944, armed Arrow Cross men plundered the Swedish Embassy in a dramatic attack. After this all contact with Sweden was lost. Per Anger, Ivan Danielsson and the other staff were forced to flee and remained in hiding in various cellars in the palace area. Only Raoul Wallenberg still dared to move about the city. He was cut off from the outside world and lacked all opportunity to judge the current political situation correctly.

Perhaps his eagerness to collaborate would have been lessened somewhat had he been better informed of the growing coldness between the Soviet Union and the United States. With the end of the war in sight, Joseph Stalin had started to allow his conspiracy theories run rampant. He increasingly expressed disdain for the United States and Great Britain and suspected his Western Allies of going behind his back to negotiate a separate armistice with Germany. In the Kremlin, the War Refugee Board, that newly founded American organization that was supplying funds to Wallenberg, was nothing more than a cover for such deceptive initiatives. The Wallenberg operation's American connection was therefore not quite the trump card that the Swedish diplomats appeared to have believed.

For the past few weeks, Soviet foreign affairs leaders had also begun to reformulate their politics toward Sweden. Now the time had come to punish that supposedly neutral country for its German-friendly policies, the Kremlin reasoned. Suddenly the Swedish Ambassador in Moscow, Staffan Söderblom, was met with coldness and irritation at his meetings with the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The tone became much less cordial and, coincidence or not, on 17 January 1945 the Soviet union shocked Sweden by declining a proposal for a new trade agreement which the Swedes had believed was simply a matter of formality.

Something had changed.

At the same time, the Red Army's reassuring message regarding Raoul Wallenberg was slowly making its way to Sweden. On Tuesday, 16 January, Deputy Foreign Minister Dekanozov forwarded the official message to the Swedish Ambassador Staffan Söderblom: your Raoul Wallenberg has been found and taken into custody by the Red Army.

On Thursday an official from the Swedish Foreign Ministry called Raoul's mother, Maj von Dardel, to relay the encouraging message. Then the matter appears to have been filed away. In their haste, no one at the Foreign Ministry appears to have thought about following up and asking the Russians more precisely for Wallenberg's whereabouts and when he could be expected home.

They assumed that Raoul Wallenberg was safe. In the corridors at the Foreign Ministry there was far more concern about the other Swedish diplomats from whom one had not heard anything since the days before Christmas Eve.

And so it was that Deputy Foreign Minister Dekanozov never received a response about Raoul Wallenberg from the Swedes. This was their first significant diplomatic mistake, but it would be far from the last.

### **Budapest 17 January, 1945**

He remains at the Red Cross offices for a while. It is still morning in Budapest. Perhaps Raoul Wallenberg is thinking about how he was right to have gathered his

things and moved over here to eastern Pest, in order to make contact more quickly with the Russians. Now he fetches his backpack and three bags. He is also going to pick up a briefcase with money that he has left in the hands of the International Red Cross.

In the car he has hidden a considerable amount of gold and jewels that anxious Hungarians have deposited into his safe keeping. It appears that he was asked to bring the valuables to Sweden in order to save them from the well-known plundering actions by the Russians.

The Soviet officers are waiting outside when Raoul Wallenberg comes down the stairs with his luggage. On the street, Wallenberg meets his friend László Petö, one of the Hungarian Jews he has known from before the war. They exchange a few words about the welcome news that the international ghetto was liberated the day before. Wallenberg suggests to Petö that he should accompany him to Debrecen. He wants his friend to assist in the work of aiding those in the large central ghetto.

Raoul proudly points to the three officers and the motorcycle with its sidecar. "They have been commanded here on my account. I don't know if it is in order to protect me or to guard me. I do not know if I am their guest or their prisoner."

László Petö takes this as one of Wallenberg's usual humorously ironic comments. Of course he is their guest. Surely Wallenberg would not have asked him to accompany him to Debrecen if he had suspected that he was being held as a prisoner?

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The reassuring Wallenberg telegram on its way to Sweden almost crossed paths with another important telegram going in the other direction, from Moscow to the Red Army in Budapest. It was a counter-order dated Wednesday 17 January 1945, signed by deputy defense minister Bulganin and probably sent later that same day: "Raoul WALLEMBERG who was encountered on Benczur street in Budapest's eastern part shall, in accordance with directives from the counter-espionage SMERSH, be arrested and sent to Moscow."

From Soviet documents it has later become clear that the counter-orders about the arrest were not completed until two days later, on 19 January. How this took place has not been established but there are indications that Wallenberg and his driver Langfelder thereafter spent a few days in a temporary military prison. According to available information they were reassured that this was not a matter of an arrest but a case of "protective custody."

The transport to Moscow began on 25 January 1945. According to what Wallenberg and Langfelder later told their fellow inmates, their military escorts again reassured them that they were not under arrest. They were placed in a first class compartment on the train through Romania and were allowed to disembark in the city of Iasi in

order to eat dinner at a local restaurant. Raoul Wallenberg spent the rest of the journey working on a "spy novel."

It was not until 6 February that they arrived to the infamous Lubyanka prison. There they must have felt some anxiety. They were ordered to undress, give up their possessions and were thereafter led to separate cells.

The Swedish diplomat was registered in the Soviet prison system as "war prisoner" Raoul Gustaf Wallenberg. He was called a "diplomatic observer" in the prison register, not, as was customary, as "diplomatic official", a detail that indicated Soviet doubts about his person. But the field titled "name of crime" was left empty and it does not appear that any fingerprints were taken.

Raoul Wallenberg's fellow inmate, the Nazi Gustav Richter, would later testify that the Swede had hardly set foot inside their shared cell when he began to work on a written protest. He recalled that the Swede had stressed that he was a diplomat and that he demanded to be put in touch with the Swedish Embassy in Moscow.

When Richter was interviewed by the Swedish Foreign Ministry some ten years later he told them that Wallenberg exercised every day, that they played chess and talked about life, also that Wallenberg despite everything was in relatively good spirits. Everything was a misunderstanding and would soon be sorted out.

But sometimes he would come close to a breaking point. Richter told them about a day when Wallenberg worried about what his family would say when they learned that he was in prison.

"I tried to reassure him that (...) given the circumstances this would not be a cause for shame," Gustav Richter told the Foreign Ministry official.

According to the Russian security service archivists, no reports from any of Raoul Wallenberg's interrogations in Moscow prisons are still in existence. Such documents would never have been made public under any circumstances. The only thing we know for sure is when he was interrogated (a total of five times in a span of two and a half years) and for how long. Since no charges were ever brought and no trial was ever held, the real reasons for the arrest remain unknown.

But the prisoners would tell each other what they had been subjected to. After Wallenberg's first interrogation, the night of 8 February 1945, he returned to his cell, pale in the face and talked about a terrible interrogator who had accused him of spying. The interrogator had also emphasized that Raoul was already known to them since he belonged to a "capitalist family." Vilmos Langfelder, for his part, was also told that he was suspected of spying, "for the Americans – or possibly the British."

Two weeks later a report from the counter-espionage agency SMERSH arrived from Budapest to Moscow. A Colonel at SMERSH had gathered "compromising information" about activities at the Swedish Embassy. In the imaginative report distorted facts were piled one on top of the other and a distorted image of the Wallenberg operation emerged as an extensive cooperation with "fascists" and "counter-revolutionary elements".

Raoul Wallenberg found himself in a dramatically vulnerable position. He was in urgent need of swift and decisive action from the Swedish Foreign Ministry. By all accounts he himself believed that this would soon occur but as yet no one still had even inquired about him.

It was only in 1952 that Sweden for the first time issued a formal demand for Raoul Wallenberg's return.

### **Budapest, 17 January, 1945**

Before the departure for Debrecen Raoul Wallenberg wants to visit the now liberated international ghetto. It is located in an area next to the eastern edge of the Danube, by the Margareta island. He wants to see his coworkers at the offices of the Swedish rescue mission on Tátra street.

László Petö jumps into the car with Langfelder and Wallenberg. They leave the Red Cross offices, closely followed by the Soviet escort. Even this time the officers choose to wait out on the street, but they are beginning to grow impatient and their tone grows sharper. They tell Wallenberg that he has at most half an hour before they need to leave.

At the office, Raoul Wallenberg expresses his great joy over the fact that the International ghetto has been liberated and that the majority of the Hungarian Jews for whom he has been responsible have thereby been saved. But since he is in a hurry he says to his coworkers that they will have to tell him more about how it happened when he returns from Debrecen. He says that he will likely be gone for at least a week.

Raoul Wallenberg encourages his staff to continue their work according to their best judgment and asks them if they need money. Before he leaves, he gives the cashier 100 000 Hungarian pengö and is given a receipt.

László Petö is convinced that Raoul Wallenberg is a guest of the Soviet officers, not their prisoner. How else could one explain that the officers let him out of their sight for an entire half an hour. If Wallenberg had felt threatened he had more than enough opportunity to flee through the back door of the office.

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In mid February 1945 most officials at the Swedish Foreign Ministry believed that Raoul Wallenberg was still in Hungary. Perhaps this was why the legendary Madame Kollontai, the Soviet Ambassador to Sweden, made a discrete attempt to convey the truth. She invited the Foreign Minister Christian Günther's wife Ingrid for tea and asked her to tell her husband that Wallenberg was in the Soviet Union, that he was alive and being well treated and that "it was better for him if the Swedish government did not make a fuss about this matter." Unfortunately Günther never forwarded this information to the rest of his colleagues.

The Soviet position in the Wallenberg case can, in one important regard, be divided into two phases. The first ended here, after only a month, and was characterized by official Soviet information that was unexpectedly close to the truth. The second period would last for seventy years and be characterized by something quite the opposite of truth, that is, various forms of disinformation campaigns.

To try to understand the Swedish diplomatic failure in the Raoul Wallenberg case, one can't disregard this matter. In the Soviet Union, lies were par for the course and a frequently used political instrument. Few were so poorly prepared to handle this as Swedish diplomats and politicians, schooled as they were in trusting others, especially elite creatures such as diplomats and politicians.

The turning point came in February-March 1945. The new "truth" was disseminated along informal networks, apportioned out in contexts in which it was difficult to trace the source. In Soviet controlled radio channels and small talk at diplomatic receptions rumors that Raoul Wallenberg was not in Soviet custody began to be systematically spread. It was said that he had died in Hungary in the tumult of January - perhaps in an accident, a robbery or in a bombing raid.

Unfortunately the new disinformation quickly took hold at the Swedish Foreign Ministry. Already by spring 1945 there was widespread conviction that Raoul Wallenberg was no longer alive. When the Swedish Budapest diplomats came home to Stockholm in mid April, Wallenberg was the only one missing. This became for many an unofficial confirmation of the rumor's veracity. Sweden's Ambassador in Moscow, Staffan Söderblom, was so sure of this that he only a week or so later referred to the accident theory at a formal meeting at the Soviet Foreign Ministry.

Among the Budapest Swedes it was only Per Anger who stubbornly held fast to the theory that his colleague was imprisoned in Moscow.

One Tuesday toward the end of May, Raoul Wallenberg was transported in a shaky prison truck from Lubyanka to the infamous Lefortovo prison. He would remain there for almost two years and make contact with new inmates who would all puzzle over how it came to pass that a diplomat from a neutral country found himself as a prisoner of war in one of the most forbidding Soviet detention facilities.

## **Budapest, 17 January, 1945**

The Soviet officers who are waiting by their motorcycle on Tátra street, have started to lose their patience. Time is up. Nonetheless Raoul Wallenberg insists on popping over to the Swedish hospital a few doors down. He is the one who has built up the small infirmary in the international ghetto, obtained medicines, and recruited physicians among the protected Hungarian Jews.

The Swedish hospital has saved many lives. The extensive food supply deliveries of the Wallenberg operation saved even more.

The visit at the hospital does not take long. The officers's annoyance stresses Raoul Wallenberg. On his way back to the car he slips and falls on the icy sidewalk.

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After the end of the war Sweden gained a new Social Democratic Foreign Minister, Östen Undén, who was appointed in July 1945, and who would remain at his post for a long time. At the top of his peacetime foreign policy agenda he placed the need to improve Sweden's relations with the Soviet Union. This position was in order to at any price attempt to reduce any diplomatic irritations between the two nations.

The missing Raoul Wallenberg was clearly such a potential irritation. Behind closed doors it could sound something like this in the corridors of the Foreign Ministry: why make trouble with the Russians and unnecessarily complicate relations when all indications pointed to Wallenberg regrettably having perished in Hungary?

It was this anxious Swedish attitude that laid the groundwork for the incomparable Swedish betrayal, for the monumental diplomatic failure, in the Raoul Wallenberg case.

During the first few years one can nonetheless identify a couple of instances where the story could have taken another turn. Doors were slightly opened, almost overly clear signals were made, but unfortunately there were very few in the Swedish government offices that could interpret the Soviet play correctly. And the fact that the principle-driven Östen Undén regarded the exchange of prisoners as immoral trade in human life did not of course improve the situation.

In hindsight it is very clear that the diplomatic pirouettes of the Soviet Union toward the end of 1945 was nothing more than an attempt to open the door on an exchange of prisoners. Similar diplomatic negotiations were namely going on between the Soviet Union and Switzerland, involving two Swiss diplomats who had been arrested under circumstances similar to Wallenberg's.

The Swiss diplomats were freed in January 1946, in exchange for several Soviet citizens who were imprisoned in Switzerland. In contrast, the Swedish-Soviet dance came to an abrupt end on the day after Christmas in 1945.

The Swedish Ambassador Staffan Söderblom then went to the Foreign Ministry in Moscow. When he took up the Wallenberg case, he reminded his interlocutor about the wartime situation in Budapest, repeated his theory about an accident and forwarded a "personal desire." He said that it "would be beneficial" if the Swedish Embassy could now receive an answer "along these lines, that is to say, that Wallenberg has died. This is primarily of importance for his mother who still nurtures hope that her son is alive and who now expends her strength and health on fruitless investigations."

But Raoul Wallenberg was still alive and stamping the cold out of his feet in a dim prison cell only a few kilometers away.

The next big chance came in the spring of 1946, when the Soviet Union again altered their political stance toward Sweden. Their calculated coldness was felt not to have had the desired effect. It now only risked driving Sweden into the arms of the western powers, or so one reasoned at the Soviet Foreign Ministry. In the spring of 1946, the Soviet tone instead became unexpectedly friendly. This pleased Östen Undén, and reassured him about the likely success of a cordial Swedish approach.

The changing climate of course presented new possibilities. Unfortunately it was never taken advantage of in order to exert pressure in the Raoul Wallenberg case, not even in June when the outgoing Swedish Ambassador surprisingly enough received an audience with Joseph Stalin himself.

After a host of introductory pleasantries, Staffan Söderblom explained to Stalin that he only had a single matter to discuss: Wallenberg. Söderblom expressed his desire for an official confirmation from Stalin that the Russians had taken all possible steps in order to search for the Swedish diplomat.

"I am personally convinced that Wallenberg has fallen victim to an accident or an assailant," Söderblom said.

The meeting was over after five minutes. The brief exchange was dutifully transcribed and sent to the Swedish Foreign Minister in Stockholm. Östen Undén was given every opportunity to step in but does not appear to have had any objection to what he received.

Later it emerged that Stalin and his officials had set aside an entire hour for the meeting with Söderblom.

A final opportunity to get Raoul Wallenberg back home alive appeared around the beginning of 1947, after a revelatory book had garnered a great deal of attention

from the media in Sweden and put pressure on the government to bring the Wallenberg case to a resolution. At long last the Swedish inquiries were made more forcefully.

Today we know that these inquiries had an effect. Wallenberg's imprisonment was now discussed on repeated occasions at the highest Soviet levels and the Foreign Minister Molotov was carefully prepared for a meeting that the Swedish Ambassador had set early in the new year. Shortly thereafter Raoul Wallenberg was moved from Lefortovo, back to Lubyanka prison.

But the meeting never took place. Moscow could breathe easy. The current Swedish Ambassador was on his way home and thereafter the post would remain unfilled for several months.

It wouldn't be until August 1947 that the first official Soviet statement was presented to Sweden: *Raoul Wallenberg is not in Soviet territory and he is not known to us.*

It was, of course, a so-called political lie.

### **Budapest 17 January, 1945**

Raoul Wallenberg is on his way from the international ghetto, with the Soviet officers close by on their motorcycle. Vilmos Langfelder is driving and he says that he has spoken with the officers. He has asked how long they think it will take until the western part of the city, Buda, is liberated. "Not many days," was their answer.

László Pető hesitates. He has promised Wallenberg to accompany him to Debrecen, but his parents are hidden in Buda. If liberation is so close he would like to stay and find out what has happened to them.

He explains his situation and asks Raoul Wallenberg to forgive him.

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For almost five years the official position was that Sweden would be satisfied with the Soviet lie from August 1947. It pained Raoul Wallenberg's family, his mother, stepfather and half-siblings. They had never believed it, but had been urged by the Swedish Foreign Ministry to keep their doubts to themselves. They were told that any statements made to the media could interfere with the quiet diplomacy that was said to be taking place in the wings.

But in the fall of 1951 even the Foreign Ministry began to vacillate. The first prisoners-of-war had been let out of the Soviet Union and a freed Italian diplomat, Claudio de Mohr, now testified that he had had contact with the Swede Raoul Wallenberg in Lefortovo prison.

Claudio de Mohr's detailed account finally convinced even Foreign Minister Östen Undén and in February 1952 Sweden for the first time formally demanded the return of Raoul Wallenberg. When the Soviet reply was the same old lie, Sweden shocked the Soviet Union by repeating their demand.

These Swedish actions were seen as a hostile provocation in Moscow, especially as they coincided with a significant spy situation in which several Swedes had been exposed as Soviet agents. In June 1952 the Soviet deputy Foreign Minister at last lost his poise. At a meeting in Moscow he lost his temper with the Swedish Ambassador for his nagging about Wallenberg and accused the Swedish government for destroying Swedish-Soviet relations. In the heat of the moment he said that the Soviet Union for their part had complete documentation of a Swedish spy case that they were also in a position to expose.

Three days later a Swedish military plane, en DC3, was shot down over the Baltic.

After Stalin's death in 1953 the Soviet dams finally started to burst. The first crack was the freeing of thousands of German prisoners-of-war in the fall of 1955. Suddenly a number of detailed witness accounts turned up detailing encounters with Raoul Wallenberg in various Soviet prisons. I April 1956, at a visit to Moscow, Prime Minister Tage Erlander presented the Soviet Union's new leader Nikita Khrushchev with a thick file of evidence.

The lie from 1947 was exposed and Moscow was forced to work on fabricating a new one. According to later KGB-testimony, officials were now given the order to come up with a different version, one that would "serve as a half-truth."

Fascinatingly enough this process is documented in internal accounts from the Soviet Foreign Ministry (MID) made public at the beginning of the nineties. The first suggestion that emerged was that the Soviet Union should now acknowledge the arrest, blame it on Stalin's terror state and claim that Wallenberg died in the prison infirmary in Lefortovo in July 1947. Officials were put to work to dig in the hospital archives in order to try to find a reasonable cause of death. The first suggestion was pneumonia.

But in 1957 the Soviet Union's new answer to Sweden would sound very different. To this day, it stands as the official Russian account of the case: Raoul Wallenberg died a natural death in his cell in Lubyanka prison on 17 July 1947. Cause of death: heart attack. A handwritten "death certificate" from the head of the infirmary, Smoltsov, was attached.

Today this account is more disputed than ever. The reasons for this include an interrogation that according to prison records was held with an anonymized "prisoner number 7" in Lubyanka on 22 and 23 July 1947. Recently, the head of the

Russian security service archives has established that this prisoner “with great likelihood” was Raoul Wallenberg (who was held in cell number 7).

Not even in Stalin’s Soviet Union were interrogations conducted with the dead.

### **Budapest 17 January, 1945**

It is Wednesday the 17th of January 1945 and on the journey east from the international ghetto in Budapest, Vilmos Langfelder is now driving past Heroes’ Square, the monument that acts as the gateway to the City Park in Budapest. László Petö is still in the car. Raoul Wallenberg says that he has heard that they will stop at the small town of Gödöllö north-east of Budapest before they continue east. But first they will drop off László Petö.

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The invitation from the KGB arrived in the midst of the glasnost frenzy in 1989 and took Raoul Wallenberg’s half-siblings, Nina Lagergren and Guy von Dardel, completely by surprise. After all of the strange developments over the past few decades, all of their disappointed hopes, they were suddenly being summoned to a meeting in Moscow with the KGB to discuss their brother’s case. Had the day of truth finally arrived?

The siblings had not yet managed to heal after the latest Swedish campaign of 1979. At that time a new, seemingly reliable witness had turned up, someone who claimed to have encountered Raoul personally during the fifties and to know of people who had seen him at a considerably later date.

At that time, in 1979, the new information struck the nation like a bomb. For the first time in fourteen years, Sweden again turned to the Soviet Union and formally demanded a new Wallenberg investigation. The family’s hopes were again ignited for a countless time only to end in new emphatic Soviet denials. This was more than Raoul’s parents, 87 and 93 years of age, could bear. In February 1979, Maj and Fredrik von Dardel took their own lives.

Unfortunately, the new witness testimony turned out to be false. What no one knew at that time was that it was presented to the Swedish Foreign Ministry in a covert CIA-operation with the purpose of provoking the Soviet Union during the deep-freeze of the cold war.

Fortunately the American involvement was more deeply committed than this. When they left for Moscow that day in October 1989, the siblings knew that it was thanks to the American government that their half-brother had received the international recognition that he so well deserved. Raoul Wallenberg was now an American honorary citizen, the first such after Winston Churchill.

Nina Lagergren and Guy von Dardel's meeting with the KGB took place in a palatial residence. The reason for the invitation would soon become clear. The KGB-general they were to meet had been instructed to put an end to the 44 years of diplomatic tension by once and for all convincing the family that Wallenberg was dead. During the meeting, the KGB General stood up from the table and brought out a wooden box that he placed on the table and proceeded to open. The contents were a shock.

Among many other things, the box contained Raoul Wallenberg's diplomatic passport, his telephone book and his calendar.

A piece of paper and a pen were placed in front of the siblings. They were urged to confirm the receipt of the objects and thereby also their brother's death.

They accepted his possessions but refused to sign the document.

### **Budapest 17 January, 1945**

It is Wednesday the 17th of January 1945 and Vilmos Langfelder slows down at the corner of Benczur street in Budapest. The motorcycle escort follows suit. They are only stopping momentarily in order to drop off Raoul Wallenberg's friend.

Later László Petö would describe the final moments like this: "We took a very fond farewell of each other and I wished him all the best for what under those circumstances could be quite a precarious journey. Then the car disappeared from view."

*Ingrid Carlberg is a writer and journalist. For her book "Det står ett rum här och väntar på dig... Berättelsen om Raoul Wallenberg" ("There is a room here waiting for you . . . the story of Raoul Wallenberg" Norstedts, 2012) she was awarded the August Prize in 2012 and the Axel Hirsch prize in 2013 by the Swedish Academy. A translation of her Raoul Wallenberg biography will be published in Great Britain and the United States later this year.*

### **SIDEBAR**

#### **FACTS: the Wallenberg operation**

Raoul Wallenberg arrived to the Swedish Embassy (legation) in Budapest on 9 July 1944. He took over the administration of Swedish protective measures for Hungarian Jews with a Swedish connection. In concert with this, he created a rescue operation, in large part financed by American funds: "the Swedish legation's humanitarian division" In the end, the Wallenberg operation had 350 employees and several offices around Budapest. At least 10 000 Hungarian Jews have the Wallenberg operation to thank for their lives.

Wallenberg was not alone. Other neutral diplomats worked in a similar way. In total around 100 000 of Budapest's approximately 200 000 Jews. The Hungarian countryside, however, was emptied of its Jewish population. Before the war there were around 800 000 Jews in Hungary.

Raoul Wallenberg is an honorary citizen of the USA, Canada, Israel and Hungary. In 2013 he also became the first honorary citizen of Australia.

On 9 July 2014 Raoul Wallenberg received the highest civilian honor of the American Congress, The Congressional Gold Medal, in recognition of his heroic work during the Holocaust.

### **Facts: Raoul Wallenberg**

Born on 4 August 1912.

Son of Raoul Oscar Wallenberg, who died before the birth of his son. Raoul Wallenberg senior was the grandson of André Oscar Wallenberg, founder of the SE-bank, and cousin of the brothers Jacob and Marcus Wallenberg who led the family enterprise during the war years.

His mother Maj was a widow when Raoul was born. She married Fredrik von Dardel in 1918. The couple had two children, Guy (1919) and Nina (1921).

Raoul Wallenberg received a bachelor's degree in architecture from the College of Architecture at the University of Michigan (1935).

In 1941 he was employed as the "director of international affairs" at the Mid-European Trading Company (Mellaneuropeiska Handelsaktiebolaget) that imported food supplies primarily from Hungary.

In the summer of 1944 he was appointed deputy secretary at the Swedish legation in Budapest, with the assignment to administer a rescue operation for the Hungarian Jews.

### **Facts: the other players**

#### **Vilmos Langfelder**

Raoul Wallenberg's driver and interpreter in the last few months in Budapest, an engineer from a well-to-do Hungarian Jewish family. He was later claimed to have perished in a Soviet prison on 2 March 1948.

#### **László Pető**

Son of one of the leaders of the Jewish Council in Budapest, Ernő Pető. Raoul Wallenberg and László Pető had met as teenagers during studies in France. In Budapest in 1944 they met again.

#### **Staffan Söderblom**

Sweden's Ambassador to Moscow 1944–1946. Söderblom was the son of Arch Bishop Nathan Söderblom and head of the political division of the Swedish Foreign Ministry during the war.

#### **Östen Undén**

Prime Minister of Sweden 1945–1962, often regarded as the foremost practitioner of Swedish neutrality politics. Undén was a professor of civil law.

#### **Tage Erlander**

Elected as the new social democratic party leader after Per Albin Hansson's sudden death in October 1946. He was then also appointed Prime Minister, a post he retained for 23 years.

### **Joseph Stalin**

The highest leader of the Soviet Union from 1924 to his death in March 1953. Selected as "Man of the year 1942" in *Time Magazine*, after his successful eastern offensive against Hitler. His popularity decreased with time.

### **Nikita Khrushchev**

The highest leader of the Soviet Union 1953–1964.

### **Facts: After Budapest**

13 January 1945 Raoul Wallenberg willingly seeks contact with the Red Army.

16 January 1945 The Soviet Foreign Ministry informs Sweden that the Red Army has encountered the Swedish diplomat and taken him into protective custody.

17 January 1945 Raoul Wallenberg is seen in freedom in Budapest for the last time.

19 January 1945 Wallenberg is arrested. The order is signed on 17 January 1945 by Bulganin, the deputy minister of defense, in Moscow.

6 February 1945 Raoul Wallenberg and driver Vilmos Langfelder arrive at Lubyanka prison in Moscow.

29 May 1945 Wallenberg is moved to Lefortovo prison.

15 June 1946 Sweden's Ambassador Staffan Söderblom receives an audience with Joseph Stalin.

13 November 1946 Wallenberg case is presented as a matter for the Swedish parliament for the first time.

1 March 1947 Wallenberg is moved back to Lubyanka prison.

18 August 1947 the first formal statement from the Soviet Union: Wallenberg is not in the Soviet Union and is not known to us.

11 December 1951 Convincing testimony from prisoner-of-war who has had contact with Raoul Wallenberg in Lefortovo.

11 February 1952 Sweden's first formal demand for Raoul Wallenberg's return from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union denies.

Easter 1956 Tage Erlander travels to Moscow with convincing evidence that Wallenberg has been imprisoned in the Soviet Union.

6 February 1957 the second formal statement from the Soviet Union: Raoul Wallenberg died a natural death in his cell in Lubyanka on 17 July 1947.

25 February 1961 Professor Nanna Svartz meets a colleague in Moscow who tells her that Wallenberg is in a Soviet mental institution. Erlander writes to Khrushchev but the Soviets deny the allegations. The matter lasts for four years.

3 January 1979 New information surfaces that Wallenberg has been seen alive as late as 1975. The first written inquiry to the Soviet Union in the Wallenberg case in fourteen years. The Soviet Union denies all allegations.

5 October 1981 Raoul Wallenberg is named an honorary citizen of the United States.

16 October 1989 KGB receives Nina Lagergren and Guy von Dardel in Moscow. They receive their brother's belongings.

September 1991 A Swedish-Russian working group begins a collaborative investigation about Wallenberg's fate.

12 January 2001 The Swedish-Russian working group presents two final reports. The Russians claim that Wallenberg died on 17 July 1947, most likely by execution. The Swedes maintain that the evidence is insufficient and that one cannot rule out the possibility that he is still alive.

5 September 2013 Barack Obama, president of the United States, visits Sweden. He promises Nina Lagergren to do everything in his power to bring clarity to Raoul Wallenberg's fate.