

■ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies

**Documenting Life
and Destruction**
Holocaust Sources
in Context

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DOCUMENTING LIFE AND DESTRUCTION

HOLOCAUST SOURCES IN CONTEXT

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THE HOLOCAUST IN HUNGARY

Evolution of a Genocide

Zoltán Vági, László Csősz, and Gábor Kádár

Foreword by Randolph L. Braham

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[. . .] We were living in Újvidék. One morning, we woke up realizing we were not allowed to leave the street and that we were surrounded by soldiers and machine guns. We were living on the edge of the town and did not know what was going on downtown. Soldiers checked our identification papers and told us that we should not walk around in the streets, and also that if we did not heed them when they ordered us to stop, they would have to shoot. Saturday morning the raid was over. One of my neighbors came out and told me that the entire town was covered in blood. I did not know what had happened to my parents and set out for town. I was horribly afraid that I would not find them alive. Along the way, there were bloody corpses lying on the road. I rang at my parents', and it was only when I heard my father's footsteps that my horrible fear dissipated. Many people we knew were executed. They sat on the cold pavement for 48 hours and then they were thrown into the Danube. Lots of our relatives died then. In some cases, a child disappeared and the parents survived, in others, the parents disappeared and a child was the only one left. The rabbi was also taken to the banks of the Danube, along the way, they kept beating him with a rifle butt. Suddenly an order came in that the killings had to stop. This is how the survivors escaped. Many had nervous breakdowns, many were driven insane. The famous Újvidék pogrom lasted three days.⁵⁷

On January 22, the military leadership ordered the operation to stop. But the massacre did not end until 9 p.m. the next day. The announcement published by the town's military command did acknowledge that looting had taken

56. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 1:217–18; HJA, DEGOB Protocols, no. 2740.

57. In 1944 Julia Korb was deported to Auschwitz. She was liberated in Torgau.

place and that innocent people had been murdered, but it suggested that combatting the alleged rebels justified all of these actions.

News of the mass murder reached Budapest immediately through reports by local government leaders and eyewitness accounts. The authorities received numerous petitions from Jews desperately searching for relatives who had been staying in Újvidék.⁵⁸ Several members of the left-wing opposition and the parliamentary representative of the Serbian minority strongly protested as soon as the first news arrived, but for a long time no attempt was made to investigate the incident.⁵⁹ It was delayed until the course of the war took a turn in 1943. As the government began preliminary peace explorations without the Nazis' knowledge, it simultaneously strove to improve its international reputation and therefore launched investigations regarding the massacre. Regent Horthy first had the investigations stopped on August 13, 1943. Then on October 11, he ordered courts-martial for three army officers and twelve gendarme officers. Proceedings were also initiated against two hundred lower-ranking soldiers and gendarmes.⁶⁰ In January 1944 the verdicts came in, but the four main perpetrators fled to Germany to escape accountability. (They returned to Hungary as high-ranking SS officers following the March 1944 German occupation.⁶¹) The defendants remaining in Hungary received ten- to fifteen-year prison sentences. The government began to issue financial compensation to relatives of the victims, but in a rather typical turn of events, Jews could not receive compensation even when their claims were acknowledged as just.⁶² Various estimates exist for the number of victims. According to statistics prepared by the army, 3,340 people were shot to death. Among them were 2,550 Serbs and 743 Jews. During

58. Petitions by relatives of those who disappeared during the raid in the Southern Province, HNA K149, item 1942-1, file 6279; Ervin Hollós, *Rendőrség, csendőrség, VKF 2* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1971), 305–6.

59. See Member of Parliament Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky's memorandum of February 4, 1942, in Karsai, *A budai vártól a gyepűig*, 116–19.

60. Enikő A. Sajti and György Markó, "Ismeretlen dokumentum az 1942. januári délvidéki razzia résztvevőinek peréről. (1943 december 14–1944 január 14)," *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, no. 5 (1985): 426–56.

61. Lieutenant General Ferenc Feketealmay-Czeydner went on to attain the highest rank that a foreigner ever reached in the SS, becoming an *SS-Obergruppenführer*. Colonel of the General Staff József Grassy became an *SS-Gruppenführer* and commander of the SS Division Hunyadi recruited in Hungary. Gendarme Captain Márton Zöldi joined the Gestapo. Following the German occupation, the convicts were retried and acquitted.

62. For details about the raid in the Southern Province and its consequences, see Enikő A. Sajti, *Délvidék 1941–1944*, 152–68, 174–88.

the raid 1,238 women, elderly people, and children were reportedly killed.⁶³ Jewish and Serbian sources recorded more victims.