Documenting Life and Destruction
Holocaust Sources in Context

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DOCUMENTING LIFE AND DESTRUCTION
HOLOCAUST SOURCES IN CONTEXT

This groundbreaking series provides a new perspective on history using first-hand accounts of the lives of those who suffered through the Holocaust, those who perpetrated it, and those who witnessed it as bystanders. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies presents a wide range of documents from different archival holdings, expanding knowledge about the lives and fates of Holocaust victims and making these resources broadly available to the general public and scholarly communities for the first time.

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Documenting Life and Destruction
Holocaust Sources in Context

THE HOLOCAUST
IN HUNGARY
Evolution of a Genocide

Zoltán Vági, László Csősz, and Gábor Kádár

Foreword by Randolph L. Braham

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Some victims were killed in front of their houses, in the open street. Others were herded to execution grounds set up at six locations across town. Victims had to stand in line on the banks of the frozen Danube in the extreme cold until they were shot in the back of the neck. Their bodies were thrown into a hole cut into the ice with explosives. Document 2-8 presents the recollections of events of a woman who was twenty-one years old at the time.

DOCUMENT 2-8: Testimony of Julia Kolb about the Újvidék massacre (1945), USHMMA RG 39.013M (HJA, DEGOB Protocols, no. 761).

[... ] 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.

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

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. 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. 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. 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.) 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. 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

61. Lieutenant General Ferenc Feketehalmy-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.
the raid 1,238 women, elderly people, and children were reportedly killed.\textsuperscript{63} Jewish and Serbian sources recorded more victims.

**LABOR SERVICE**

Following Nazi Germany’s example of ignoring the provisions of the peace treaties drawn up at the conclusion of World War I, Hungary began reorganizing its own army in the late 1930s. As part of this initiative, the Act on National Defense (Act II of 1939) introduced a general system of compulsory military service.\textsuperscript{64} A number of the act’s stipulations affected Jews. Articles 87 through 94 instituted a national defense labor requirement. Article 230 stated that all males holding Hungarian citizenship or residing in Hungary (Jews and non-Jews alike) who were over twenty-one and had been deemed permanently unfit for armed military service could be required to perform labor service for a maximum of three months.\textsuperscript{65} The national superintendent of the Public Interest Labor Service System headed the Labor Service organization, which operated as part of the Ministry of Defense. Provisions, equipment, and treatment of labor servicemen were initially the same as for soldiers. The Labor Service was thus not discriminatory at its inception. However, it did create the legal framework for the gradual introduction of anti-Jewish (and antiminority) restrictions.

Citing the Second “Jewish Law,” which barred state employment for Jews, the Ministry of Defense ordered that Jews could not become officers or non-commissioned officers. Jews deemed fit for armed service had to be divided proportionately into the different military branches, while those deemed unfit had to be organized into separate units. In neither case were Jews allowed to serve in positions requiring special responsibilities (and carrying a lesser risk of death), such as those in the signal corps, as messengers, or in administrative posts.\textsuperscript{66} At the same time, increasing numbers of Jews were forced into unarmed units, and from the spring of 1941 onward, Jews lost their right to carry arms.\textsuperscript{67} 

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 159–60.

\textsuperscript{64} Act II of 1939. Miklós Degré and Alajos Várady-Brenner, eds., \textit{Magyar Törvénytár. 1939. évi törvényzékok} (Budapest: Franklin, 1940), 6–128.

\textsuperscript{65} Paragraph 5 of Article 5 stipulated that under certain circumstances and on a strictly voluntary basis, girls and women could also join the Labor Service. However, until the \textbf{Arrow Cross} takeover in October 1944, Jewish women were not drafted.


\textsuperscript{67} Prime Minister’s Decree no. 2870/1941, April 19, 1941.