

Surprised Again - New Documentation about Raoul Wallenberg's Cellmate Surfaces

The recent publication of two statements written for Soviet interrogators by Willy Rödel, Raoul Wallenberg's cellmate in Soviet captivity, are the clearest sign yet that Russian archives still contain critically important documents in the Wallenberg case.

*** Russian authorities are believed to have intentionally withheld at least fifty-seven pages from Rode's file**

*** The missing documentation most likely contains important information about Raoul Wallenberg**

Since the beginning of the Swedish-Russian Working Group in 1991, researchers have tried to obtain as much information as possible about Raoul Wallenberg's fellow prisoners during his time in Soviet captivity. Over the years, the Russian side provided a number of documents about Willy Rödel, Wallenberg's long-term cellmate in Moscow Lefortovo prison from 1945-1947. However, we were never allowed to see these papers in the original, nor were we allowed to examine the file from which they had supposedly originated. Officials of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB, successor of the KGB) also routinely insisted that no records of Rödel's interrogations had been preserved.

Therefore, we were enormously surprised when we came across a new book with a very long title, "Secrets of the Third Reich Diplomacy: German Diplomats, Leaders of Foreign Military Missions, Military Policemen and Police Attaches in Soviet Captivity. Documents from Investigation Files. 1944-1955", just published in Russian as part of a series of publications by Aleksander Yakovlev Foundation (Moscow). It contains full texts of interrogation protocols of and statements written by a number of German diplomats captured by the Soviets at the end of WWII, including two statements from none other than Oberführer SA Willy Rödel ! The included documents were selected, compiled, and commented on by two FSB archivists, Dr. Vasilii Khristoforov and Vladimir Makarov. In fact, Lt. General Khristoforov heads the FSB Directorate of Registration and Archival Collections to which all FSB archives belong, including the FSB Central Archive from which we received answers to our research questions in the Wallenberg case, while Makarov is a researcher at this archive.

The two statements by Willy Rödel date from December 26, 1944 and January 14, 1945, respectively, before Rödel shared a cell with Raoul Wallenberg. Rödel, a former Political Adviser to the German Ambassador Manfred von Killinger in Bucharest, became Wallenberg's cellmate in March 1945, mostly in Lefortovo Prison, one of three Moscow state security investigation facilities. The two men were held together at least until about March 1947, when both were transferred (separately) to Lubyanka Prison.

In the now released statement made in January 1945, Rödel describes the activities of Sturmbannführer SS Gustav Richter, Police Attaché at the German Embassy, Bucharest and a German consultant of the Romanian government on the so-called "Jewish question". This is an interesting fact, since Soviet investigators placed Raoul Wallenberg in Richter's cell in Lubyanka Prison, shortly after his arrival in Soviet captivity in February of 1945. While it does not have any bearing on our current discussion, the mere existence of Rödel's statements in the FSB archives is more than noteworthy.

Khristoforov and Makarov indicate that the originals of Rödel's two statements are kept in file PF-9653 at the FSB Central Archive. It appears that this file was also the source for materials that were presented to the Swedish Working Group back in April 1993, when Russian officials turned over a set of documents about Willy Rödel.

The documentation offered by Mr. Khristoforov's predecessor, Konstantin Vinogradov, included Rödel's prisoner card, an envelope containing personal items, such as his passport, a full copy of his death certificate and an autopsy report. The documents indicate that Rödel was held in Lubyanka Prison until October 1947, when he suddenly died of a heart failure (which is extremely suspicious) during a transfer to the Krasnogorsk Camp for POWs in the Moscow suburbs.

Mr. Vinogradov firmly stressed that there were no other papers available about Willy Rödel. He added that the source for the few pages he had presented was a so-called "operative correspondence" file, containing communications between prison officials and security organs about imprisoned foreign diplomats. According to Vinogradov, this particular collection consists of 549 pages and includes information about one or two other cases, such as the highly sensitive one of Istvan Bethlen, the former Hungarian Prime Minister who had been arrested in 1945 and died a year later in Soviet captivity.

The copies we received in 1993 from this file showed no page numbers. In 2009, the FSB explained that the pages concerning Willy Rödel were numbered 543-548. Rödel's case was apparently the last one in the collection, with the envelope bearing the number "549". Rödel's newly released statements carry the page numbers 477-484 (with a one-page gap in between). With the 1993 release covering only pages 543-549, that leaves fifty seven pages that researchers have not seen!

If the early statements made by Willy Rödel in Soviet imprisonment survived even though Russian officials have told us adamantly for two decades that they did not, we cannot help but wonder if Rödel's interrogations dating from the time he was held together with Raoul Wallenberg also continue to exist. Perhaps then this is the real reason why we have not been allowed to review the fifty-seven still secret pages in this material?

It is not the only point about which Russian officials have been less than truthful. FSB archivists have also repeatedly stated that no personal or investigation file was ever created for Willy Rödel. A document we found in the investigation file of the German

military diplomat General Alfred Gerstenberg, which carries a handwritten notation dating from June 14, 194[6] "The original of the handwritten testimony is kept in Rödel's file", proves that this statement too is incorrect. In fact, it appears that a large part of that file has been preserved, with full knowledge of the Russian archival personnel.

When we requested to review Willy Rödel's materials in the so-called "operative correspondence file" in 1993, we were not allowed to do so. The sudden surfacing of the new papers is definitely of great importance. It confirms our previously stated belief that additional documentation is indeed available and has been intentionally withheld by the Russian authorities.

As we discovered in late 2009, this has been the case with other key files, such as the interrogation registers of Lubyanka prison for July 23, 1947. Despite twenty years of repeated requests, researchers had never been given the full list of prisoners who had been called for questioning on that particular day because apparently they all had knowledge of Wallenberg's presence in the Soviet Union. We found out only two years ago that the line-up had included Willy Rödel and a "Prisoner Nr. 7" who Russian officials now suddenly indicated was with "great likelihood" Raoul Wallenberg. The obvious question is: Why was this information not made available to us back in 1991?!

The best possible answer is that the information was most likely withheld because it would have raised doubts about Soviet era claims that Wallenberg had died of a heart attack in prison six days earlier, on July 17, 1947. At the very least it appears that Russian officials were keen to avoid any information that would distract from that scenario.

The "Introduction" to the new book signed by Khristoforov and Makarov suggests that the authors had access to additional materials about Rödel, including detailed information about his personal life and career. Most probably, the authors took this information from other withheld documents kept in the same "operative" collection. The overall evidence, unfortunately, points to a systematic effort to deflect serious inquiries and to mislead researchers.

The last time we formally requested a full and direct review of the "operative correspondence file" presented by Mr. Vinogradov was in 2010. Our request was, as always, denied. Now we will definitely ask for it again and for other documentation to which we have been consistently refused access. The overall evidence, unfortunately, points to a systematic effort to deflect serious inquiries and to mislead researchers.

If large parts of Willy Rödel's file survive, one has to wonder if similar records may not also have been preserved for other figures closely associated with the Wallenberg case, such as Wallenberg's chauffeur, Vilmos Langfelder, who was arrested together with him in January 1945; Langfelder's cellmate, Sandor Katona, for whom supposedly no records survive; and finally for Raoul Wallenberg himself, whose personal and investigative files were supposedly completely destroyed. At this point, we really cannot believe in mere reassurances any longer. A comprehensive review of all documentation

contained in the Russian intelligence archives relevant to the Raoul Wallenberg case is urgently required.

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