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## **The Secret of Cell Number Seven**

### ***The Mysterious Fate of An "Extremely Important Prisoner"***

**(translated from the Russian by the author)**

Dr. Vadim J. Birstein

In January 1944, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States, organized the War Refugee Board in an effort to save Jews and other Nazi victims in Europe. A special case was Hungary, where a large community of surviving Jews was located. After the German occupation of Hungary on March 15, 1944, only foreigners from neutral countries could undertake humanitarian work. Through international diplomatic negotiations, it was decided to open a special section at the Swedish Legation in Budapest. Raoul Wallenberg, a young man who had had no previous involvement in politics or in diplomacy, was appointed head of this section. On July 19, 1944, this thirty-one year old Swede came to Budapest with one goal: to prevent the extermination of the Jews in Hungary.

A special Section, C, was organized at the Swedish Legation for Wallenberg and his colleagues. At the same time, Section B, representing Soviet interests, was created. It consisted of a Belgian citizen (and a former Russian count), Michael Tolstoy-Kutuzov, and a half-German, half-Ukrainian, Hermann Grosheim-Krysko, who was born near the city of Rostov-on-Don in Southern Russia and who worked at the legation under the pseudonym Heinrich Tomsen. His official job was to interview Soviet prisoners-of-war (POWs).

The work of Section C would not have been possible without the help of a number of people who courageously fought against the German and Hungarian Nazis. Their network included the Swiss diplomat, Carl Lutz; Papal Nuncio Angelo Rotta; people who worked for the Red Cross; some representatives of the Government of Admiral Miklos Horthy; Hungarian aristocrats; and the Jewish underground in Budapest. Along with Wallenberg and his assistants, they saved thousands of lives.

### **Disappearance**

On January 17, 1945, Raoul Wallenberg was seen in Budapest for the last time, with his driver, Vilmos Langfelder, in the company of two Soviet soldiers. What happened to Wallenberg and Langfelder after this date is shrouded in mystery. A day *before* Wallenberg's actual disappearance, on January 16, Vladimir Dekanozov, Soviet Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, informed the Swedish Embassy in Moscow that Raoul Wallenberg was found and he was being kept in Soviet custody. A month later, Raoul's mother, Maj von Dardel, received a note from the Soviet Ambassador in Stockholm, Aleksandra Kollontai, that stated that Raoul was

in Russia. Soon after this, Wallenberg “disappeared” without explanation or a trace. A rumor was circulated that bandits killed him near Budapest. Count Tolstoy actively promoted this rumor.

After Budapest was occupied by Soviet troops, the Swedish Legation was vandalized and robbed. The diplomats were taken to Moscow. Only two months after the occupation of Budapest and three months after Wallenberg’s disappearance, the Swedish diplomats were returned to Stockholm. During this time, Count Tolstoy, who was never arrested, worked at the Soviet administration in Budapest. (Later he lived in Ireland, where he died in 1980). As for Grosheim-Krysko, alias Tomsen, we now know that on February 8, 1945, he was arrested by Soviet military counterintelligence, SMERSH (an acronym from the Russian words “Death to spies”). However, he was not sentenced by the OSO (the Special Council of the State Security Ministry, MGB, that convicted arrestees charged with committing political crimes, including espionage), until January 12, 1952. Grosheim-Krysko was given a 25-year sentence in Vladimir Prison, of which he served only six months. In his last letter to Vladimir Prison authorities, he mentioned that his sentence was a mistake because he had always been an admirer of the Soviet Union. In July of 1953, Grosheim-Krysko was repatriated to Eastern Germany (later he lived in Western Germany). Eventually, he appeared in Sweden where he contacted Raoul Wallenberg’s family, possibly to find out how much they knew about the Wallenberg case.

On July 15, 1946, Joseph Stalin, the Soviet dictator, gave an audience to the Swedish Ambassador, Staffan Soederblom. It was an exception to protocol because usually Stalin did not meet with ambassadors from neutral countries. The Ambassador described Wallenberg’s mission and his disappearance. Unaccountably, he expressed his own personal opinion that Wallenberg had been a victim of bandits near Budapest. Stalin answered that the situation with Wallenberg would be cleared up. From this moment until 1957, Soviet officials held to the story that Wallenberg “had never been in the Soviet Union and we do not know who he is” (from Vyshinsky Note dated August 18, 1947). In fact, at the moment of Soederblom’s conversation with Stalin, Wallenberg was in Cell 203 of Lefortovo Prison, fifteen minutes away from the Kremlin. The Swedish government thus lost a critical opportunity to save him.

### **A New Soviet Version**

On February 6, 1957, Andrei Gromyko, at the time Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, presented a memorandum to Swedish diplomats. This note (known as the *Gromyko Memorandum*) was written after Nikita Khrushchev (Stalin’s successor) promised the Swedish Prime Minister, Tag Ehrlander, “to clear up the matter” of the Wallenberg case. The Memorandum declared that the search through “every page” of archival materials produced only one document related to Raoul Wallenberg, the Smoltsov report to the MGB Minister, Viktor Abakumov. In the 1940s, Aleksandr Smoltsov headed the Medical Department of Lubyanka Prison. The report stated that “the prisoner, Walenberg, whom you know, died tonight --probably, from a heart attack.” It should be noted that the name Wallenberg is spelled with one “l” while in the other official documents it was always spelled with two “l’s” [However, writing the name Wallenberg with one “l” was typical not only Smoltsov, but for other poorly educated MGB officers—V. B., 2005]. Below the main text there was an additional note: “The Minister has been informed. It was ordered to cremate [the body] without autopsy. 17/VII [July 17, 1947]. Smoltsov.” The

Gromyko Memorandum added that because Smoltsov died in 1953 and Abakumov was executed a year later, no additional information could be found.

Prior to this, evidence appeared in Western countries that Wallenberg and Langfelder had been seen in prisons and labor camps inside the USSR. In 1946, the Swedish journalist, Edward af Sandeberg, was the first to write about Wallenberg being present in the Soviet Union. Sandeberg was arrested in Berlin in 1945, then for a year he was kept as a POW near Moscow before finally being repatriated to Sweden. Sandeberg mentioned a German, Erhard Hille, who ten years later gave a detailed testimony to the Swedish authorities about Wallenberg's imprisonment. From 1956 on, many repatriated foreigners described Wallenberg and his driver in Moscow prisons in 1945-47. Until the 1980s, many stories—mostly not credible—appeared about Wallenberg's imprisonment in Vladimir Prison (the most secret Soviet prison for convicted political prisoners) and many Soviet labor camps.

On June 2, 1989, Yuri Kashlev, a Soviet diplomat and head of the Soviet delegation at the Paris Conference on Humanitarian Problems, announced that “Wallenberg was killed (executed) in 1947 and those who eliminated him, were, after this, killed themselves.”

On October 15, 1989, Wallenberg's family—Dr. Guy von Dardel and Nina Lagergren, Raoul's half-brother and half-sister—along with Ambassador Per Anger and Sonya Sonnenfeld, Chair and Secretary of the Swedish Wallenberg Association, came to Moscow on the invitation of Soviet authorities. Before Wallenberg's arrival in Budapest, Per Anger, at the time Secretary of the Swedish Legation, had begun to hand out Swedish Schutz-passes to the Jews.

The KGB representatives showed them the original of the Smoltsov report and a box with Raoul Wallenberg's possessions at the time of his arrest. This included his diplomatic passport; an ID, a diary; a golden cigarette case and money in old dollars and Hungarian pengos. Also, Wallenberg's registration card from Lubyanka Prison was shown. After some hesitation caused by the guests' refusal to sign a receipt, the head of the KGB Central Archive, Major General Fokin, gave the box and a copy of the prisoner card to Raoul's relatives. He said that Raoul's belongings were accidentally found in a bag in KGB storage, just before the family's arrival. To all later requests to see the person who had found the bag, the response was “it is not expedient.” The Swedish guests were also permitted to go to Vladimir Prison, where they were shown registration cards of a few foreign prisoners who had given testimonies about Wallenberg after they had been repatriated.

### **Archives**

Finally, on August 28, 1990, the Joint Soviet-International Commission to Establish the Fate and Whereabouts of Raoul Wallenberg that was formed and headed by Dr. Guy von Dardel, arrived in Vladimir. The Commission was completely independent: the Soviet accepted the condition that the Swedes should pick the Commission's members, including the author of the present article, by themselves.

We could not find any trace of Wallenberg's presence in Vladimir Prison. However, we studied registration cards of many witnesses who had testified in the West about Wallenberg. Our main

achievement was that we started to understand the details of the prison office work of the time. It became clear to us that it would have been difficult to find the Wallenberg belongings that had been handed over to his relatives all in one place. The “bag” story looked suspicious. To find all the items, one needed to look through Wallenberg’s Personal File, take out some of the items (such as the passport) and then, using receipts for valuables in the file, find the money and the cigarette case in storage. The registration prisoner card should have been taken from the file of cards of Lubyanka prisoners. The card was written for “the POW Raoul Gustav Wallenberg” “who arrived on February 6, 1945, from the city of Budapest, for the disposal of the GUKR SMERSH [military counterintelligence].” Do all these details mean that, despite Soviet claims, Wallenberg’s Personal File still existed in 1989?

Due to the agreement between Professor Guy von Dardel and Vadim Bakatin (at the time, USSR Interior Minister), the historian Arsenii Roginsky and I were allowed to work at the Special Archive, which is now called the Central State Archive of the Council of Ministers [currently, it is a part of the Russian Military Archive—V. B., 2006]. There, we studied Personal Files of a number of Wallenberg’s and Langfelder’s cell-mates, although not of Wilhelm Roedel or Schauer-Schliter. [We were told that these two files did not exist which later appeared to be untrue.] After we found two documents that mentioned Wallenberg and one with Langfelder’s name, and pointed to the type of archival materials that might contain then answer to the mystery of their disappearance, our work at the archive was terminated by the KGB.

We did not find a lot of new information. But we did confirm almost everything that the witnesses said in 1956-61. The accuracy of their testimonies was amazing. They remembered details of their movements through the cells of Lubyanskaya, Lefortovo, and Vladimir prisons almost perfectly.

### **In Moscow Prisons**

On February 6, 1945, Wallenberg was put in Cell 121 or 123 of Lubyanka Prison. Gustav Richter, the former Police Attaché of the German Legation in Bucharest and SS-Sturmbannfuehrer, and an Austrian, Willi Schauer, a former Corporal, were in this cell when Wallenberg arrived. Schliter was the real name of the Austrian. He was provided with the alias “Schauer” on the order of Lt. Colonel Nikolai Burashnikov, deputy head of the 2nd Department of SMERSH, just before Richter was put in the cell. [To put stool pigeons under alias names in a cell with other prisoners was one of the main tools of Soviet secret services to obtain information about prisoners—V. B., 2006].

In March of 1945, Wallenberg was transferred to another cell where there were two cell-mates: Willi Roedel, former Adjutant of the German Ambassador and head of the Information Department of the German Legation in Bucharest, SA-Brigadefuehrer (Wallenberg shared a cell with Roedel for the two next years), and Jan Loyda, a German soldier of Czech extraction. Langfelder had been kept in this cell before Wallenberg. Then Langfelder had been transferred to Lefortovo Prison, where he was put in Cell 105. Hille, whom I have already mentioned, had also previously been in Cell 105. Later various people shared this cell with Langfelder: Ernst Huber, former officer of the Abwehr (German military intelligence and counterintelligence); Alfred Gerstenberg, former German Military Attaché in Romania and earlier, a representative of the

German Reichswehr in Moscow; a Finnish soldier, Eiro Pelkonen; a German Colonel, Horst Kitschmann, the former Military Attaché in Finland (and, possibly, in Sweden); Rear Admiral Ernst Krafft; and, finally, German Lieutenant General Reiner Stahel, the former head of the “Sonderstab Stahel” attached to the German High Command. Both Krafft and Stahel died in imprisonment. At the end of 1945, Langfelder was transferred to an unknown destination. [According to the information the KGB released later, on July 23, 1947, Langfelder was transferred to Lubyanka Prison—V. B., 2006].

In the meantime, in April or May of 1945 [in fact, on May 30, 1945—V. B., 2006], Wallenberg and Roedel were transferred to Lefortovo Prison, where they were put in Cell 203. They stayed there until February 24, 1947, when Colonel Sergei Kartashov, head of the 4th Department of the 3rd MGB Main Directorate (military counterintelligence) wrote the following order: “I request that you bring the POWs ROEDEL Willi and WALLENBERG Raoul, who are kept in Cell 203 of Lefortovo Prison, to Lubyanka Prison, where they should be put in Cell 7 and provided with officer rations.” Then the archival trace of Wallenberg disappears.

[At the end of 1991, the KGB released information that on February 26, 1947, only Roedel was transferred to Lubyanka, while Wallenberg was transferred on March 1, 1947. Shortly after this, on March 11, 1947, Aleksandr Kuzmishin, head of the Investigation Section of the 4th Department, interrogated Wallenberg from 2:15 to 4:00 pm—V. B., 2006].

### **A Mysterious Interrogation**

In July of 1947, apparently something extraordinary happened to Wallenberg. During the evening of July 22, all prisoners (that were then still kept in Moscow prisons), who had ever been Wallenberg’s and Langfelder’s cell-mates, were taken one after another for interrogation. It is known from the recollections of witnesses that the interrogators asked each cell-mate what he knew about Wallenberg and Langfelder. However, the main goal of the interrogations was to prohibit any further talk about these two persons among prisoners.

After the interrogation, each of the cell-mates was put into either a “box” (a very small cell) or a normal cell, where he was kept in solitary confinement for a long time. This incarceration was so intolerable that Pelkonen tried to commit suicide. Here is the report of Major Yeremin, deputy commandant of Lefortovo Prison, to A. Boyarsky, head of the MGB Prison Department:

*I report to you that on August 14, 1947, at 2:25 pm, prisoner Pelkonen, E. D., who was kept in Box 4 of Lefortovo Prison of the MGB and listed under the jurisdiction of the 4th Department of the 3rd MGB Main Directorate, suddenly stood up from his bed, on which he was calmly laying. He came up to the window, jumped up on the window-sill and then tried to commit suicide by jumping down on his back and hitting his head against the cement floor. As a result, he had three superficial injuries on his head. He was provided with medical help.*

—From Pelkonen’s Personal File

According to some information, Pelkonen refused to talk about Wallenberg until his death.

### What Did Happen in July of 1947?

One can only guess what happened to Wallenberg at that time and if, in fact, he was killed on July 17, 1947. Could the MGB hide a prisoner? Yes, for instance, in Sukhanovo Prison with its infamous torture chambers. As we found out in archival documents, foreigners, including Pelkonen, were put in this prison. From Sukhanovo, a prisoner could be sent anywhere. [However, usually prisoners were returned to Lubyanka or Lefortovo—V. B., 2006].

In Vladimir Prison a convict could also be kept in total isolation. There was also a practice of keeping prisoners under numbers instead of names or under an alias. For instance, Stalin's son Vasili, who was convicted after Stalin's death, even in the mid-1950s was kept in Vladimir Prison under the name of *Vasiliev*. Therefore, there were ways to pretend that a prisoner had "disappeared."

### Some More Mysteries

Even if it becomes known what really happened to Wallenberg in 1947, the main questions about his arrest will remain. Why was he arrested? What did he know that SMERSH/MGB was so interested in? Was he needed for the future, for instance, for a show trial like those that were organized from Moscow in the countries of Eastern Europe in the late 1940s-1950s? I have little hope that we will be able to find out the truth.

Many details in the Wallenberg mystery remain to be investigated. Why, for instance, were Wallenberg's cell-mates professional German policemen and intelligence men, such as Richter, Roedel, and the informant Schauer? The following quotations provide evidence of Wallenberg's importance:

*I, deputy head of a section of the Investigation Department of the 2nd Main Directorate of the MGB of the USSR, Major SOLOVOV, having considered the materials of the Investigation Case No. 5062 on the accusation against RICHTER Gustav . . . HAVE DETERMINED [that]*

*The investigation of the case has established that RICHTER, while being a member of the criminal Fascist Party, SS-units and holding leading positions within the SD organs, headed punitive measures against anti-Fascists, as well as actively worked in intelligence . . .*

*Taking the aforesaid into consideration and the fact that RICHTER was connected to an especially important prisoner [Wallenberg? —V. B.], I HAVE DECIDED [that]*

*RICHTER Gustav, as an especially dangerous German war criminal, after conviction should be sent to a MGB Special Prison to serve his punishment, where he should be kept in strict isolation from the other prisoners. . .*

—From Richter's Personal File (emphasis added)

*. . . During the investigation GROSHEIM-KRYSKO testified that, while having been a German businessman in Hungary in 1941-1944, he was a middle-man who*

*supplied the German Army with food and participated in mobilization of the Hungarian economical resources for the war, and in this way he assisted the realization of the military-political plans of Germany against the Soviet Union. Taking the aforesaid into consideration and the fact that GROSHEIM-KRYSKO was connected to an especially important prisoner [Wallenberg? —V. B.], . . . GROSHEIM-KRYSKO German Genrikh [this way the name was written in the original—V. B.], as an especially dangerous German war criminal, after conviction should be sent to a MGB Special Prison . . .*

—From Grosheim-Krysko's Personal File (emphasis added)

Is it possible that Wallenberg was the “especially important prisoner”? This phrase is present in the documents of only two persons, Grosheim-Krysko, who knew Wallenberg in Budapest, and Richter, Wallenberg's cell-mate in Lubyanka Prison. It was not used in the documents of significant cell-mates of Langfelder whose files we studied.

Another telling fact was found in the case of Jan Loyda. Like Grosheim-Krysko, while being kept in Vladimir Prison, he protested that he did not understand why he was imprisoned. In 1953, in a letter to the prison authorities Loyda expressed his fear of receiving his twenty-five year sentence because of his prior association with Wallenberg (and Roedel).

### **Who Might Know the Secret of Wallenberg's Fate?**

Clearly the authors of the official MGB documents in the above-mentioned files of Richter and Grosheim-Krysko knew what they were doing. The investigator Boris Solovov, who wrote and signed the decision in Richter's file, interrogated Richter from September 1944 until January 1952. During this period, Boris Alekseevich Solovov made a prominent career within the MGB, rising in rank from Lieutenant to Major and finally occupying the position of the head of the 5th Section of the Investigation Department of the 2nd MGB Main Directorate (counterintelligence). Additionally, along with his long-time colleague, Pavel Grishaev, Solovov participated in interrogations of witnesses at the Nuremberg Trail.

Solovov's signature is also on documents in Grosheim-Krysko's file. Solovov also interrogated Hille, Huber, Kitschmann, and Stahel, who were Langfelder's cell-mates. In 1951, Major Solovov wrote decisions to transfer Kitschmann, Hille, Pelkonen, and Huber after conviction to Vladimir Prison [which at the time had the name Special Vladimir Prison]. I have no doubt that Solovov remembers who the “especially important prisoner” was and how the prisoners whose fates he sealed by writing the “decisions” were connected.

Today, Solovov lives in Moscow. He is retired. In early 1991, he refused to speak to any Soviet or foreign journalist (saying that in order to divulge his secrets, he must have the permission of the KGB authorities). But, Boris Alekseevich, will you add something to the official KGB version and tell us the secret of Raoul Wallenberg's fate and where Vilmos Langfelder disappeared to?

*A Comment (written in 2006)*

Before this article was published in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, on the request of Professor Guy von Dardel (Raoul Wallenberg's half-brother) and in his presence, I phoned to Boris Solovov from the Swedish Embassy in Moscow. He picked up the phone and I asked him about Wallenberg. Using typical threatening tone of a security officer, he told me he would not talk about Wallenberg unless ordered to do so by his superiors. Solovov refused to clarify who should give him the order, General Secretary of the Communist Party Mikhail Gorbachev or KGB Chairman Vladimir Kryuchkov. Later I, along with a Czech journalist, tried to visit Solovov in his apartment, but his daughter refused to open the door.

In 1992, Boris Solovov testified in front of the Russian part of the Russian-Swedish Working Group for Determining the Fate of Raoul Wallenberg (this group was formed by the Soviet/Russian and Swedish officials at the end of 1991). A transcript of Solovov's testimony has never been released to the public.

Later Solovov answered the questions of the Swedish part of the Working Group. According to the published Swedish report *Raoul Wallenberg. Reports of the Swedish-Russian Working Group* (Stockholm: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2000), Solovov stated the following about July 1947 (p. 122):

*. . . He [Solovov] first heard about Raoul Wallenberg some time in 1947. . . This was when Kuleshov, head of [a] section under Kartashov, drew up a list and diagram indicating the prisoners who had been Raoul Wallenberg's cellmates. Every detail of their cell numbers, etc. was noted on the diagram. . .*

*At that time the case was creating quite a stir. Kuleshov gave the above-mentioned informant [Solovov] a parcel and told him to take it personally to Gertsovsky, the head of MGB archives. A handwritten note on the parcel said, 'Contains material relating to detainee No. 7. Not to be opened without permission from the head of MGB.' The parcel contained some papers and personal documents (but not [the] personal file) relating to Raoul Wallenberg. The informant [Solovov] knew that 'detainee No. 7' referred to Raoul Wallenberg.*

In my opinion, this statement has no credibility. *First*, Solovov incorrectly identified the head of the section where he worked in 1947. Nikolai Kuleshov never headed a section in Kartashov's department. In 1943-46, he headed a section in the 4th SMERSH Department, while Sergei Kartashov headed the 2nd SMERSH Department. In May 1946, Kuleshov was appointed deputy head of 6th (Investigation) Department of the 3rd MGB Main Directorate (former SMERSH), while Kartashov continued to head his department, which was renamed the 4th Department of this directorate.

In Kartashov's 4th Department of the 3rd MGB Main Directorate, Aleksandr Kuzmishin, and not Kuleshov, headed the 2nd Section. If Solovov, in fact, was involved in the Wallenberg case, at



the time he belonged to Kuzmishin's section of Kartashov's department, and not to Kuleshov's department. According to documents in the personal files of prisoners, in fact, Kuzmishin's deputy at the time, Major Abram Waindorf, supervised the investigation of important prisoners. Accordingly, Major Waindorf should have been present at the interrogations on July 22/23, 1947, and, possibly, translated the interrogations.

Therefore, in his testimony to the Swedes, Solovov obviously mixed up the name Kuzmishin or Kartashov with Kuleshov. He worked with Kuleshov much later, in November 1948-September 1950, when both were members of the MGB Department for Investigation of Especially Important Cases.

*Second.* The situation with the parcel as described by Solovov was not how the filing in Gertsovsky's department was done. And even if the parcel was filed in this unusual way, where is the receipt for the parcel? According to the MGB rules, a receipt was written whenever belongings were put into storage. Additionally, how did Solovov know the content of a sealed parcel? Regrettably, the Swedish members of the Working Group did not ask Solovov any of these questions.

*Third.* I suspect that "detainee No. 7" appeared in Solovov's memory and his later statement due to my article given above. There is not even any proof that Wallenberg was put in Cell No. 7 in Lubyanka in March of 1947, since he was not transferred along with Roedel as Kartashov ordered. Even the authors of the Swedish report stated that "we know that he [Wallenberg] was not held as a numbered prisoner but under his name" (p. 122). Therefore, Solovov's statement looks like his own invention.

Unfortunately, according to the published information, the Swedish group did not ask Solovov whom he meant under the "*especially important prisoner.*" I have no doubt Solovov remembered whom he meant. He not only wrote this phrase, but, following the MGB procedure, also presented the case of Gustav Richter at the OSO meeting on January 19, 1952.

By neglecting to ask Solovov who the "*especially important prisoner*" was, the Swedish group lost an important opportunity that will not come again.